

The History of Reading Society



The object of the Society is to cultivate interest in and to encourage research into the history of the town of Reading

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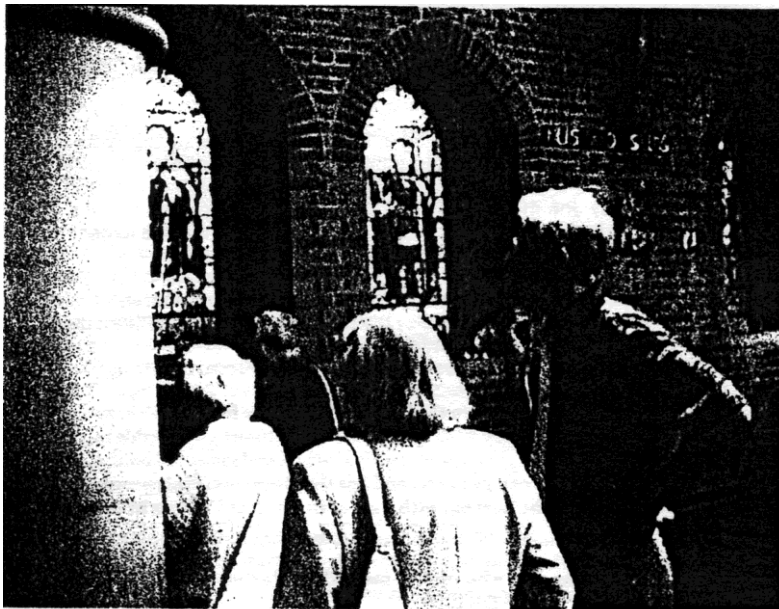
Programme

Organiser

Eddy Hooper

Late autumn 2002

A Happy and Blessed Christmas and a Prosperous New Year to all our readers



In July 2002, members visited St Luke's Church, Erelgh Road with its fine collection of late Victorian glass designed by C. E. Kempe. [Photo: Eddy Hooper.]

WOODYER AND CHRISTCHURCH

Our first meeting of the current year concerned the work in Berkshire and elsewhere of the Victorian "gentleman architect", Henry Woodyer. By a coincidence, a copy of Ditchfield's "Ecclesiastical History of Reading" (1883) has come into the possession of the Editor, containing the following near-contemporary description of Christchurch, Whitley, a Woodyer church which we shall visit next year. The author was also the Curate of Whitley and evidently knew his subject well.

"The church, of which the architect is Henry Woodyer, Esq. of Grafham, near Guildford, is designed to hold 700 persons, and in plan consists of nave, 80 feet, by 27 feet 6 inches: chancel, 40 feet by 19 feet: north and south aisles, 12 feet wide; a chapel on the south side of the chancel, and an organ chamber and choir vestry on the north side; at the north-west angle is a tower, surmounted by a stone spire, 150 feet in height. The style adopted is middle pointed, the materials being brick, faced with grey rusticated pennant stone, and the dressings of Bath stone. Internally the walls are plastered in rough stucco. There is a somewhat marked clerestory, forming on the inside a continuous series of cusped arches, the entire length of the nave, and externally of plate tracery between and connecting the whole line of windows. The nave arcade consists of six bays, with cylindrical piers, each pier being surmounted by eight Forest of Dean stone shafts, and terminating under richly carved canopies, which compose the capitals to the main piers.

"The chancel arch is lofty, its upper portion is filled with light open reticulated tracery, supported on a cusped sub-arch; the work is beautifully executed in chalk: this treatment, though not common, is not without ancient authority, and in effect veils and gives length to the chancel, usually obtained by a high screen: in this case there is a low screen of stone tracery below."

Ditchfield also tells us that at that time the parish contained a population of 4,133 inhabitants. The foundation stone was laid by Bishop "Soapy Sam" Wilberforce, son of the great reformer, on 7 July 1861 and consecrated for worship just over a year later.

WAR AND WAR'S ALARMS

*An extract from **A History of the Sun Inn** by Ian Hamblin and John Dearing - work currently still in (slow) progress.*

As the largest town in Berkshire Reading must have been a natural recruiting ground for the country's armed forces down the centuries. When John Howard, the penal reformer, visited the old Reading County Gaol in 1779, he found no fewer than 19 men who had been pressed into the Royal Navy, outnumbering by one the more normal population of felons and debtors. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Sun Inn next door also played its part in keeping the forces of the King supplied with fighting men.

This was especially the case during the Napoleonic Wars (1793-1815). Fortunately at this time of national crisis it was not always necessary to employ the somewhat dubious methods used by the press gangs; subtle persuasion could be just as effective. Around 1807 the Sun was the scene of a recruitment drive by Lord Paget's Hussars, whose recruitment poster read as follows:

'The Honors and Comforts attached to the life of a Hussar are innumerable; he has everything that he can possibly wish for found him, without any trouble to himself. He is comfortably and most handsomely clothed and mounted on the finest Blood Horses England can produce, and has the pleasure of dining every day upon all the luxuries of the Season, with a set of the jolliest Fellows in the World.

**Fine Fellows of good Character, who wish to make their Fortune, may receive
A LARGE BOUNTY**

**Enter Immediately into free Quarters and liberal Pay, and be treated at all
times as gentlemen,**

**By Applying to Captain Duckinfield
Or Serjeant Hough, at the Sign of the Sun, Reading.
GOD SAVE THE KING**

**N.B. The Hussars are not allowed to ride their Horses hunting more than once
a Week, except when in the Neighbourhood of His Majesty's
Stag Hounds.**

No mention of going off to fight Boney in the Peninsular War: the author would undoubtedly have had a promising career with Saatchl and Saatchl. had he been born two hundred years later!

The poster has been dated fairly accurately to 1807, since this was the year that the former 7th Light Dragoons were renamed the 7th (Queen's Own) Hussars. Captain Duckenfield, named in the poster, had been commissioned Cornet (2nd Lieutenant) on 8 October 1801, rising to Lieutenant on 2 June 1806 and Captain on 20 November 1806. The regiment subsequently took part in the Coruna campaign under Sir John Moore, whose death inspired one of the best known war poems of this period, "The Burial of Sir John Moore at Coruna" by Charles Wolfe. Sadly it is recorded that Captain Duckenfield drowned in 1809 when the troop transport *Despatch* sank off the Lizard in Cornwall. Perhaps too some of the fine fellows recruited at the Sun went to Davy Jones' Locker with him.

It's quite likely that the Sun was also used during the Napoleonic Wars as a billet for troops. The Reading Mercury reported on 3 May 1800 on a bill being discussed in House of Commons Committee "to give relief to Innkeepers billeting soldiers." Mr Willam Windham, who then held the office of Secretary for War under William Pitt, had "suggested that in cases where the subsistence already paid amounted to seven pence halfpenny, his intention was to raise it by three-pence, and make it ten-pence halfpenny; and where they at present received ten-pence to raise it six-pence, and make it one shilling and four-pence. Resolutions to this effect were carried, together with one imposing a penalty on Innkeepers refusing to receive such subsistence money."

BORN IN READING

It is quite unusual (perhaps fortunately, readers might feel) for politicians to reach the age of 100, but one who did was born in Reading on the 12th day of February 1898. He died two days after meriting his telegram in 1998. He was Edgar Louis Granville who was Liberal MP for Eye in Suffolk from 1929 to 1951.

Granville spent part of his childhood in Australia and enlisted in the Australian Light Horse at the outbreak of the Great War, serving at Gallipoli and in Egypt and France. Thereafter he settled back in his native country, becoming a director of businesses involved in pharmaceuticals and rearmaments. His victory in the 1929 election came against the trend of public opinion towards the Conservatives on the one side and the Labour party on the other. Nevertheless, he continued to hold onto his seat against the odds. Part of his success was due to his employing two secretaries to write letters to all those getting married in the constituency, offering them the Member's best wishes.

After 1931, Granville supported the National Government but unlike the National Liberals who became increasingly absorbed into the Conservatives, he sat as a Liberal national and after the war become more sympathetic to the new Labour government. Finally defeated in the 1951 election. which returned Churchill to power, Granville joined Labour in 1952 and twice unsuccessfully contested his old seat for his new party, losing by 889 votes in 1955 and by 2,484 in the Macmillan landslide year of 1959. His personal vote must have been significant, for in 1964 when the electorate at large swung towards Labour, his successor as candidate for Eye failed by 5,426 votes.

Granville was made a life peer by the new Labour Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, in 1967 but after some years deserted the Labour benches to become a cross-bencher, that is an independent peer of no fixed political persuasion.

We are pleased to announce that Mr Peter J. Trout has very kindly consented to be co-opted onto the Committee as our new Hon. Treasurer. We are very grateful to him for toking on this work.

May we also remind members that subscriptions are due from 1st January and that the following new rates apply: Full Single Subscription £10 (couples £13); reduced subscription (students and senior citizens) £7 (couples £10). Visitor fees will remain at £2 per meeting. This is the first increase for some years and is necessary because of increase in room hire charges, as well as a tendency for speakers to command higher fees.

FOR YOUR DIARY - Indoor meetings

2002

December 19th "Elizabethan Reading" **Presidential Address.** For our pre-Christmas meeting we are delighted to welcome back our new President. Mrs Joan Dils. There will doubtless also be a mince-pie or two to feed the inner man.

2003

January 16th. "Harmony and Disorder in a Tudor Parish - The Swallowfield Articles." We continue the Tudor theme with this talk by Prof. Ralph Houlbrooke.

February 20th. "Robert Gibbings: artist, author and adventurer." Martin Andrews. Gibbings was lecturer in Book Production at Reading University from 1936 to 1942, during which time he wrote and illustrated "Sweet Thames Run Softly".

March 20th. **AGM**, followed by "Another Pot Pourri of Reading: Bent Weber presents a further selection of slides from the Peter Southerton slide collection".

April 10th. "The History of Heelas and the John Lewis Partnership." Cheryl Diben. Heelas or John Lewis has been part of the geography of Reading for 150 years.

May 15th "Turnpike Roads around Reading" As usual we include a transport theme in our varied programme. On this occasion, Alan Rosevear is the speaker.

The suggested extra visit to the Medical Museum at the Royal Berkshire Hospital has so far only attracted nine members, which we do not feel is sufficiently "quorate" to go ahead. If you are still interested but haven't made yourself known please let Eddy Hooper know. Otherwise we recommend that members make their own arrangements for a visit. To remind you: the Old Laundry Medical Museum at the Royal Berkshire Hospital is open on the first Sunday of every month from 2.30 pm until 4.30 pm, Admission is free.

Speedy delivery of your History of Reading Newsletter - with photos in colour too - can be had if you have internet / email access via your computer. Why not sign up to have your newsletter by email and join many others who have? Please contact Committee Member (Technical Support) Bent Weber by email to:-

We also wish to remind all readers that the Committee would appreciate any help members can give with the catering at our meetings. Even one meeting a year would be welcome - and it will take up at most half-an-hour of your time!

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THESE NEWSLETTERS, however long, would be most welcome from you - our readers. While it is pleasing to have some white space between articles, we should like to avoid having too much. So here is an opportunity for budding authors and contributors - don't be shy. The Editor will always be pleased to give you help and guidance.

Equally you do not have to have a computer or be able to send emails: as long as the manuscript is readable, that's all we ask. So why not let us have your article / memories of Reading or a report of any research that you may be undertaking on aspects of Reading's history.

The next issue of the Newsletter is expected early in the Spring 2003 - so contributions before the end of January would be welcome.