

# 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

<b>Hon Secretary</b> Peter Russell 5 Wilmington Close Woodley READING RG5 4LR Tel: 0118 961 8559	<b>Chair &amp; Newsletter Editor</b> John Dearing 27 Sherman Road READING RG1 2PJ Tel: 0118 958 0377	<b>Programme Organiser</b> Eddy Hooper
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Winter 2006

## EDITORIAL

We are now into 2006 and there are a number of interesting anniversaries connected with Reading. One has already passed – on 23 January 1806 the death occurred of the Prime Minister, William Pitt. With a break of three years he had served his country as first Minister since 1783 – for 20 of the 46 years of his life. The connection with Reading, as mentioned in Adam Sowan's edition of **The Stranger in Reading**, is that two weeks before his death he stayed the night at the Crown Inn.

On 9 April in the same year was born at Portsea Isambard Kingdom Brunel, whose Great Western Railway can be said to have "put Reading on the map", transforming it from a fairly sleepy country town to a thriving centre of industry and commerce. (That is not denigrate the Kennet and Avon Canal, which could probably be said to have kick-started the process!)

250 years earlier, in July 1556, Reading's Protestant martyr, Julius Palmer, was burnt at the stake, aged 24. He had been master at Reading School and was arrested at one of the town's inns that has long disappeared, the Cardinal's Hat. His trial and martyrdom, however, took place in Newbury.

## NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

To be held at the Abbey Baptist church, Reading at 7.30 pm on Wednesday, 15 March 2006.

### AGENDA

1. Welcome and apologies.
2. Approval of Minutes of 2005 AGM
3. Matters Arising.
4. Chairman's Report and Review
5. Treasurer's report
6. Election of Officers and Committee for 2006/7.

Present Officers	Willing to stand again	Present Committee	Willing to stand again
Chairman John Dearing**	✓	Noreen Hooper	✓
Secretary Peter Russell	✓	John Whitehead [Publicity]	✓
Treasurer John Starr	✓	Vicki Chesterman	✓
Present Committee		Bent Weber [Technical Support]	✓
Eddie Hooper [Programme Organiser]	✓	Sidney Gold	✓

\*\* Also Newsletter Editor.

**Although all officers and committee members have indicated that they are prepared to continue for the forthcoming year, the Chairman and Secretary have both indicated that they would be happy to relinquish these posts, should volunteers be forthcoming.**

7. To elect an independent examiner of accounts
8. Any Other Business – Data Protection Acts

**The AGM**, will be followed by **Billingbear**, a talk by **Margaret Railton**.

### RECENTLY PUBLISHED

A number of local books have been published over the past few months, which may be of interest to members, so we are quoting the ISBN of each, together with details of price and publisher and where each can be obtained, should they be of interest to you.

The problem, of course, is that Reading is very scant on bookshops – AND we are told that one of the three in the town centre is going over ENTIRELY to sci-fi – and all of them have trade terms which usually preclude local books being sold because the discounts demanded are high.

Members may care to note that there is a small privately-owned bookshop, **WordPlay Books & Toys**, at **18 Prospect Street, Caversham**, who are very obliging and will order books for you, often with next-day delivery to them. (Tel: 0118 – 948 – 4000 for easy reference).

Otherwise you should be able to obtain copies of the first 3 books from the RISC Bookshop at 35-39 London Street (Tel: 956 – 9800 or Reading Museum, Reading Travel and Visitor Centre in St Mary's Church House at the end of Chain Street (alongside John Lewis) or W H Smith's and perhaps other town bookshops.

**The Stranger in Reading, by John Man (ISBN 1 – 901677 – 44 – 3) published by Two Rivers Press at £12.00. Softbound, approx 200 x 220mm, 132 pages.**

This is the rarely available and prohibitively expensive original book of 1809 which has now been reprinted to reach a wide modern audience at the suggestion of local researcher Adam Sowan.

**Abattoirs Road to Zinzan Street, by Adam Sowan (ISBN 1 – 901677 – 36 – 2) published by Two Rivers Press at £8.95. Softbound, approx 200 x 200mm, 96 pages.**

A much enlarged and updated version of the author's plain 'Abattoirs to Zinzan' published in 2000, it is a useful guide to explaining the origin of many of the street names to be found in Reading and its suburbs.

**Battle Workhouse and Hospital 1867 – 2005, by Margaret Railton and Marshall Barr (ISBN 0 – 9539417 – 1 – X) published by Berkshire Medical Heritage Centre at £15.99. Hardbound with dust jacket, approx. 160 x 240mm, 420 pages.**

A concise history of the recently-closed hospital premises, the authors are already well known for their superb documentation of the 150 year history of the Royal Berkshire Hospital in 1989 and other books published since then on local hospitals. And it is all part of the aim to make the Heritage Centre with its small museum at the RBH a fully-fledged self-funding centre of excellence.

**Glory Days: Reading Transport, by Colin Morris (ISBN 0 – 7110 – 3068 – 5) published by Ian Allan Publishing at £16.99. Casebound in full colour, approx. 245 x 190mm, 96 pages.**

A nicely produced history of our local municipal transport undertaking, there is an interesting spread of maps and photographs, some of the more recent ones in full colour, tracing the tramway, trolleybus and motorbus eras. Particularly contains the best account to date of horse tram history. Certainly currently available in W.H.Smiths, it is also available post paid at £16.99 BUT BY POST ONLY, PLEASE, from British Trolleybus Society, 57, Sutcliffe Avenue, Earley, Reading. Purchase this way will help the continued preservation of Reading trolleybuses at the working trolleybus museum at Sandtoft.

**A History of the Thames Side Promenade Miniature Railways, by Peter Scott (ISBN 1 902368 20 7) published by the author at £5.00. Spiral bound, A4 portrait, 80 pages.**

This is a useful record of something those of us brought up in Reading 50-60 years ago might remember 'down on the Prom'. This

little booklet lets us into other secrets, too. The railway's owner had others at Reading-by-the Sea (Hayling Island) and Southsea! And there was once another miniature line in Prospect Park. The book is not widely available. Best to visit Mr. Scott's website at <http://web.ukonline.co.uk/pe.scott>

**Three Flag Hoist – A History of Sea Scouts in Reading, by V.T. Rolfe (ISBN not recorded) published by the author at £14.00 post paid. Softbound, 150 x 210mm, 204 pages.** Again nice to see that someone has researched and privately published something which might easily have been ignored. Scouting is 100 years old in 2007. Both 1<sup>st</sup> Reading and 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading were established in May 1909 and became Sea Scout Troups. Do support this venture if you can, as Mr. Rolfe needs to sell all the books that were printed. Scouting makes men out of boys – not louts! Not generally available in bookshops, so it is necessary to order direct from 4 Oldfield Close, Earley, Reading RG6 1HP

John Whitehead

Editorial Comment. Good news potentially is that Tim Waterstone is trying to buy the bookchain back for the second time – perhaps they will then become more supportive of local interest books once again.

**Please note** that the order of the talks shown on the programme leaflet for 19 April and 17 May has been reversed, with **Donald Beaumont** speaking on Greys Court on the former date and **Manfred Brod** on the Civil War period on the latter. In addition the date of the visit to Greys Court is incorrect. This will take place on **Wednesday 14 June. Further details of this and the visit to the Berkshire Records Office will appear in the next edition.**

The unveiling of the plaque commemorating **Jane Austen's** schooling in Reading will take place on Tuesday 28 March between 10 and 10.30 close to the Abbey Gateway, where Jane and her sister, Cassandra, received their only education outside the family circle between 1785-6. Mrs Goddard's school in *Emma* is considered by some authorities to be based on this experience.

**Members are reminded that subscriptions are now due, indeed overdue. The current rates are Single, £11, couple £17.50, Senior citizens and students, £9, couple £14.50.**

New members may wish to know of our parking scheme which works out considerably cheaper than using the Borough facilities and is very much nearer as well as being more secure. Please ask Eddy Hooper for details.