

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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Summer 2006

EDITORIAL

As I write the 2005/6 programme has just been completed and I have the new programme before me. All being well, you should receive your programme card with this edition of the Society's Newsletter.

The 2006/7 season kicks off with a very topical talk by Anne Jessel on Swimming Baths in Reading, for there can be few if any of our readers that are not aware of the controversy concerning the old baths in the King's Meadow, the Council's ardent desire to pull them down, frustrated, as in the case of the British School a few years back, by a successful campaign to get them listed by English Heritage. Let us hope that there will be funds found to restore the Baths rather than that they should still be standing derelict in six years' time, as has been the fate so far of the British School.

In October your Chairman will be making one of his rare appearances at the speaker's podium. This will be an unusual meeting in that the subject is the hymn-writers who have had connections with Reading, either through birth or ministerial calling and there will be an opportunity to *sing* some of the hymns, most of which will be well-known. The term hymn-writers will encompass not only the people who wrote the words but also two

composers with Reading connections, Henry John Gauntlett and Gustav Holst.

The Committee is aware that some members have had difficulty with hearing speakers recently. This has been caused by problems with the sound system at the Abbey Baptist Church, which we understand should be sorted out by the time we resume. In addition, there have been adverse comments over the content and delivery of some talks during the 2005/6 season. We have it in mind to produce a set of guidelines that may help our speakers to communicate effectively.

A SUMMER QUIZ

How well do you know the history of Reading?

1. What was the name of the restaurant that was hit by a German bomber in February 1943?
2. Who was the Scottish international, later famous as a football manager, that played for Reading Football Club during the Second World War?
3. In what year is the earliest known reference to Reading in English history?
4. In which diocese was Reading situated until 1836?
5. Which Archbishop of Canterbury was born in Reading in 1573?
6. What was the purpose of the original Oracle, opened in 1628?
7. What was the name of the pipe-smoking Labour MP who represented Reading in Parliament from 1845 to 1959?
8. Who led a detachment of Royalist musketeers in a charge on Caversham Bridge in April 1643?
9. Whereabouts in 1954 were Reading's Slipper Baths opened?
10. What momentous and erroneous announcement was made by the architect, Joseph Morris at No 3 Craven Road in 1902?
11. Of which school were the martyr, Julins Palmer, and Dr Richard Valpy both headmaster?
12. In what famous book and by whom, published in 1889, do the following words appear? - "We came in sight of Reading about eleven. The river is dirty and dismal here. One does not linger in the neighbourhood of Reading."
13. By what name is Prisoner C.3.3. better known?
14. What is the poet J. Mosdell celebrating in the following lines? -
"And O! what machinery working within,
In seeming confusion that puzzles the mind;
How it rattles and hums, its rollers and drums
And slow trav'ling ovens that evermore wind."
15. Which England cricket captain was born in Reading on New Year's Eve 1929?

Reading Central Library

Recently, a self-service microform scanner has been acquired, and an A3/A4 printer, which sit by the microfilm cabinets and microform readers. It will deal with film and fiche, which gives better prints than our old film printer, you can do your own printing there and then, rather than wait, and the prints are cheaper. "Serviced" printing by the staff is still available, now used mainly by people who can't get into the library to do it for themselves. The machine has proved popular – some enthusiastic customers have spent £50 and more at one sitting. The charge for self-service printing is 50p for an A4 sheet, and £1 for an A3 sheet.

For some time now, members of Public Libraries have had free Internet access to *The Times Digital Archive* - I mention it because it's not as widely used as it might be, and it can be so useful for local historians. The Library has paid the subscription on behalf of its members, as have some other library authorities. Members can use the service not only in libraries, but anywhere where they have Internet access. From the welcome page of the Library website – www.readinglibraries.org.uk - you click on the "links" button and then scroll down until you find *Times Digital Archive*. Then you'll need to tap in the barcode from your library card.

It's indexed pretty fully, and will take you directly to the article you want – with the option to look at the whole page if you wish. The kinds of thing that you can find include obituary notices, notices of marriage, bankruptcy notices, advertisements for local firms, and, advertisements of business premises to let. Not long ago I used it to see if there was anything on the silk industry in Reading, and found a couple of articles from 1818 and 1823.

Of course, if you're researching anything to do with the town of Reading, you'll probably find articles with the word "reading" in them as well as what you actually want. The coverage is for 200 years – from 1785 to 1985 – and you can limit your search to photographs. The Digital Archive has already given me several hours of pleasure,

David Cliffe, Local Studies Manager

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Odds and Ends

On 19th July sixteen members of the Society were guests of the Berkshire Record Office for a couple of hours and received some valuable insights into the work of that organisation. There were a number of fascinating

exhibits on view including a log book dating from the early years of the Second World War kept by the Chief ARP Warden. Unlike the chap down at Warmington-on-Sea our man did not seem to be waging his own private battle against the local Home Guard unit! There were, nevertheless, some fascinating snippets. On one occasion he received an instruction from regional headquarters to find out who had made a trunk call from the ARP Post and extract payment. On the following page we find that the culprit was identified and payment of one shilling (5p) extracted from him.

An organisation associated with the BRO that deserves to be better known among our members is the Berkshire record Society. This was established in 1993 with a view to publishing scholarly editions of important Berkshire documents held in the record office and elsewhere. Those published to date include records of the workhouses, foundling hospital, poor law administration and nonconformist meeting houses, together with our late President, Dr Cecil Slade's magisterial transcript and translation of the Reading Gild Accounts from the late Middle Ages. Membership costs £14.50 per annum and entitles one to copies of the society publications which are aimed to appear at annual intervals, although there has been some slippage with Volume Eleven currently in the offing.

A number of websites of possible interest to readers have recently come to my attention. One is www.historicdirectories.org, which provides access to copies of Kelly's and other trade directories dating mainly from the 19th and early 20th centuries. Those covering Reading and Berkshire include: Slater's Directory of Berks, Cornwall, Devon etc, 1852-53, Webster's Reading Directory, 1874, Slater's Directory of Berkshire, 1852 Kelly's Berkshire Directory, 1848, Berkshire Commercial Directory, 1833, Harrod & Co.'s Directory of Beds, Bucks, etc 1876 Pigot & Co.'s Directory of Berks, Bucks etc, 1844. [Part 1: Berks to Glos], and Kelly's Directory of Reading, 1914.

Another is www.a2a.org.uk, which is a database containing catalogues of **archives** held across England and dating from the 900s to the present.

Happy hunting or should it be surfing!

A number of memberships have recently been cancelled because of failure to pay the current subscription. We do not like having to do this but we are obliged to because it is our members' subscriptions that funds the various services that we provide to them – we do not have a hidden crock of gold! We shall, of course, be delighted to reinstate any lapsed members who may wish to rejoin.

Answers to Quiz

1. The People's Pantry. 2. Sir Matt Busby. 3. 871. "In this year the [Danish] army came into Wessex to Reading" (Anglo-Saxon Chronicle). 4. The Salisbury diocese. 5. William Laud. 6. A workhouse. 7. Ian Mikardo. 8. Prince Rupert. 9. Jesse Terrace. 10. That "Jesus Christ has come again and is upon the earth." 11. Reading School. 12. "Three men in a Boat" by Jerome Klapka Jerome. 13. Oscar Wilde. 14. "Huntley and Palmer' s Great Biscuit Manufactory". 15. Peter May.