

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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EDITORIAL

A new year will soon be upon us and one which as ever will contain anniversaries of the births and deaths of the famous and infamous. There will be at least one with a Reading connection for one of the town's longest-serving MPs, Ian Mikardo, came into the world on 9th July 1908. Of Russian Jewish parentage he was brought up in Portsmouth but in the Labour landslide of 1945 he was elected MP for Reading with a majority of 6,390 over his National (Tory in disguise) rival, Mr. W. E. C. McIlroy. The future Labour Prime Minister, James Callaghan, was a rival for the Labour nomination.

Mikardo subsequently became a well-known politician on the left wing of the governing party. The political map changed several times with Reading splitting into two seats for a while and then reuniting but Mikardo remained an MP until he lost his seat to Peter Emery in the Conservative landslide of 1959 by a margin of 3,942 votes.

Out of parliament for 5 years, Ian Mikardo returned as MP for Poplar in 1964 and remained an MP for East London until his retirement in

1987. Although he never held ministerial office, he served as Chairman of the Select Committee on Nationalized Industries from 1966 to 1970 and was Chairman of the Labour Party from 1970-71. Within Parliament, he was known as the Commons' bookmaker, who was willing to take bets on all manner of political events.

He died in 1993. Whether he was famous or infamous probably depends on your political perspective!

A cartoon by the celebrated political cartoonist, Vicky, shows Harold Wilson, Aneurin Bevan, Michael Foot and Ian Mikardo pelting stones at Herbert Morrison, Clement Attlee and Hugh Gaitskell in July, 1951, probably a comment on the issue of prescription charges which were introduced in Gaitskell's budget to pay for the Korean War and led to Bevan and Wilson both resigning from the cabinet. [This cartoon can be seen on the website www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/TUmikardo.htm]

Finally a very Happy Christmas and New Year to all our readers!

NEW BOOKS FOR CHRISTMAS!

Celebrating its centenary in 2008 will be the Park United Reformed Church. The original buildings were erected in Palmer Park Avenue as the Park Institute in 1908 and these buildings were used both as a church and for communal ventures. It was not until 1923 when more funds were available that the buildings now facing Wokingham Road were added, thus forming a separate church. The original buildings were designed by Ravenscroft Son and Morris and the latter by William Rickards Morris independently. It started out as Park Congregational Church but after the union with the Presbyterian Church in 1972 it became known as Park United Reformed Church.

A new book has just been published in advance of this event. There is no written text, but instead a very extensive array of newspaper cuttings and photographs has been stylishly arranged. The editors have been extremely fortunate to gather together a massive collection of photos, about 450 in all, which tell the story of the founding, additions and activities during the last ten decades.

Those connected to the church and those interested in local history and churches in general will find this book an excellent record and a welcome addition to the ever growing story of Reading.

The spiral bound book is available from the church at the incredibly low price of £5 for 100 A4 pages.

Slightly more expensive at £7.95 for 110 pages but worth every penny is "London Street Described" written and compiled by members of the London Street Research Group and edited by Jim Smart, a member of our Society. The book takes us up and down London Street, listing every building that existed during the 19th century, indicating its use or uses and where it survives its current status and giving the variant street numbers. The proprietors of the various shops, inns and other commercial establishments from 1800 to 1900 are also listed. The result is an excellent source book for students of Victorian Reading and the text is illustrated by numerous line-drawings of the buildings by Daphne Fido.

Sidney Gold and John Dearing

ON WEDNESDAY, 12 DECEMBER, Caversham Library will be having a special Open Day, open to all, in celebration of its 100th birthday. There will be refreshments, musical entertainment by local schools, and an exhibition with David Cliffe's new book on Reading's Libraries *Roots & Branches* on sale. During the afternoon the Mayor of Reading will be present to see the exhibition and cut the celebratory cake while after many years of darkness the Library's clock will once again be lit after restoration.

A NEW, SIMPLE MEMBERSHIP FEE STRUCTURE FROM 1 JANUARY 2008!

For several years the Society has been suffering a drop in Membership – NOT we are assured because of any lack of quality in the Society's programme of talks, but rather 'natural wastage', accessibility etc. The result is that we have 66 Members each paying an average Membership Fee of about £8.50.

Members agreed to a review of subscriptions at the 2007 AGM, should the finances require it, and over the past year we have seen increased costs of postage, speakers' fees and other items. In order to break even in 2008 we need to increase fees but we propose to do this on the basis of a ONE-FEE structure. Each member, irrespective of whether he or she is retired or not, couple or not, will be asked for **£9**. That actually means that half of us will pay the SAME or LESS than in 2007!

Intending New Members coming to Meetings up to the end of 2007 will have been asked for £1 per meeting, until 1st January 2008 when the new fee structure starts. Visitors attending one meeting will, as before, be asked for the Visitor Rate of £2. We think this Structure will be far more practical, even-handed AND will make our finances SO MUCH EASIER for all!

John Starr, Treasurer and the Committee

THE ROYAL BERKSHIRE HOSPITAL

Our first meeting of 2008 [on 16 Jan] will be on the subject of the history of the Royal Berkshire and Battle Hospitals, when we shall welcome Dr. Marshall Barr as our speaker. Members will recall that Dr Barr was to have spoken to us during the previous session but was unable to fulfil the engagement.

The following words appeared on a brass plate that was prepared for the laying of the foundation stone of the older building. In the event the ceremony was twice delayed, on the second occasion by the King's death and was finally abandoned, although the new Queen, Victoria, graciously extended her patronage to the new hospital. The rather eccentric punctuation adopted by the manufacturer of the plate has been retained.

**THE FOUNDATION
OF THE ROYAL
BNRKSHIRE HOSPITAL,
WAS LAID
ON
SATURDAY
THE 13TH. OF MAY, IN THE
YEAR OF OUR LORD, 1837.
AND IN THE 7TH. YEAR, OF THE
REIGN OF HIS MAJESTY,
KING WILLIAM, THE 4TH.
UNDER WHOSE PATRONAGE,
AND THAT OF HIS ROYAL-CONSORT,
QUEEN ADELAIDE;
THIS INSTITUTION IS FOUNDED.**