

# 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

The Society reconvenes on **Wednesday 21 September** after the summer break with a talk by **Misia Nicpon** on the **Polish in Reading**. This follows our two eventful outings, the first to Wokingham on a slightly drizzly night in June, and the second, in July, to Reading Transport's facilities in Great Knollys Street. Here we were royally welcomed by Chief Executive, James Freeman and his colleagues and later treated to a ride round Reading in a vintage bus. This no doubt surprised some of the folk it passed in the streets but that was nothing to the surprise that some members had afterwards when they found £70 parking fines affixed to their windscreens. These have been rescinded through the good offices of RT but if you were affected and have not so far been

informed of your reprieve, please let us know!

## Sidney Gold writes:-

**This is our School** is a history of the British School in Southampton Street, Reading by Daphne Barnes-Phillips written to celebrate 200 years of its foundation. It tells the story from its beginnings, using the teaching methods of Joseph Lancaster, through overcoming of initial difficulties to its closure in 1907 with the building of George Palmer School as its immediate successor. Fortunately the original school buildings still survive.

Daphne Barnes-Phillips has delved deeply into the details of the staff and pupils and had cleverly told the story through the eyes of seven individuals closely associated with its development. The story is further enhanced by details of a school

reunion in 1923 when many old scholars recorded their personal experiences.

An unusual and interesting way to write a history. There are 208 pages and many illustrations in this softback. It retails at £9.95 from specialised bookshops or directly from the Corridor Press 19 Portland Avenue, Exmouth, Devon EX8 2BS, [corridorpress@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:corridorpress@yahoo.co.uk) Tel: Tel: 01395 – 263494. (Ed: Daphne will also be signing copies at Waterstones on 10 September during the Heritage Weekend.)

**John Starr writes:-**

**HANNAH MARY GRACE STARR (1885-1966) - from tram-driver's daughter to Queen Anne's School Pupil**

**Hannah** was born in 1885 in Linton, Cambs to Henry and Grace Starr; Henry was my great grandfather, John Starr's nephew. The Census for 1871 gives **Hannah's father, Henry**, as the 9 year old illegitimate son of the unfortunate Mary Ann Starr (his twin Sarah had died in 1875, aged 3).

1881 and Henry, 19, is a stableman, living as a boarder at 31 Brewer St (the ground floor of which is, in 2011, a 'sex shop'!). **Grace Bishop**, his wife to be, is a parlour maid to three spinster sisters in 4, Nottingham Place. There is a 7 year age difference.

By 1891 Henry 29 and 36 year old Grace are now living at 27 Castle Buildings, adjacent to Henry's uncles John and William! So no doubt my great grandfather, John

and brother William, both draymen, were instrumental in getting Henry appointed as a drayman and accommodation in the (Stag) brewery flats!

Henry Starr	29	drayman
Grace	36	wife
Hannah Mary	5	daughter
James	3	son

However, by 1901 Henry is a tram driver, living at 12 Fullerton Rd., Wandsworth:

Henry Starr	39	tram driver
Grace	46	
Hannah Mary		<b>not present</b>
James	12	
Frank	4	

Hannah appears in the 1901 census returns as a 15 year old **pupil at Queen Anne's School, Caversham** – the recipient of a **Bursary from the Grey Coat Hospital Foundation, Westminster**, where she and her brothers were born. (The Headmistress is Miss Amelia Holmes, aged 40).

The 1911 Census has the family living at 51 Tonsley Place, Wandsworth, SW:

Henry Starr	49	*traverser- man, tramway - Wandsworth
Grace	56	
Hannah Mary	25	<b>Post Office Clerk</b>
James	22	Telegraphist
Frank	14	School Lab Assistant.

*\*The 'traverser' was an electrically operated 'table' that allowed a tram to be moved laterally from the tramway onto another line or into a shed.*

Soon after, in 1915, Henry died, aged 53. Perhaps Hannah had returned to nurse him and taken up a temporary P O Clerk job? She never married.

Hannah died on 27<sup>th</sup> January 1966 at 9 Victoria Road, Bognor. The death certificate cites Hannah's address as Ingleby Lodge, 24, Upper Bognor Road (now a Residential Home); it would seem that Hannah was in the Victoria Road 'Residential Home' in her latter months!

I had been led to believe that Hannah went to Bognor to teach. However, on the certificate, Hannah's occupation is given as 'Civil **Servant, Retired**'. So it seems she may have remained in the Post Office and **NOT** become a teacher! Why Bognor, though? A clue here is that Frank, her brother, the Informant, lived nearby at 10 Ancton Way, Middleton-on-Sea. The 1911 census has him, aged 22, as a School Laboratory Assistant. So perhaps **he** became a teacher in the Bognor area?? After her parents' death it may be assumed that Hannah moved to be near her brother and family. *No doubt, though, her Queen Anne's experience would have lifted her from the surely more mundane life likely to be her fate as a Wandsworth tram driver's daughter.*

An uncanny thought: in 1946, 1951 and 1952 I went to Bognor on family holidays. **Hannah** would have been about 65. So perhaps we passed each other many times as we 'promenaded' on the way

to the beach, the Pier or Hotham Park, close to Ingleby Lodge!

## **SOME BITS AND PIECES**

### **Coley Mission Outing**

**Paul Lacey**, well known as the historian of the Thames Valley bus company, is trying to trace "a good print" of a photograph taken on the occasion of the Coley Mission outing to Portsmouth and Southsea which took place on Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1919. It shows 129 members posing in front of the transport facilities which comprised an open charabanc, a roofed charabus and two saloon buses. If you can help please contact Paul on or email:.

### **Books for Sale**

The Society has been given a collection of local history books by relatives of the late **Martyn Allies**, a Freeman of the Borough. We hope to hold a book sale at our October meeting. If any members have other history books that they might wish to dispose of, we would be happy to add those to the stock.

### **Archives Galore**

We have also received the late **Norman Wicks'** papers concerned with the Society. As Norman was a founder-member they go back to our earliest days in the late 70s and make fascinating reading. An inaugural meeting was held at the old library in February 1978 and Norman was one of 54 people who paid £1 to "join up". The first talk was given by Peter Southerton in May on "Cages, Gaols and Prisons" and was appropriately given at St Mary's Chapel, Castle

Street, which was built on the site of the former gaol.

### **Caversham 100**

**Caversham** is continuing to celebrate its 100 years within the borough of Reading. There is an impressive series of events, too numerous to list here but including various exhibitions at St John's Church in late September, at Caversham Library and "The Picture Framer" during October and at Reading Museum from November into the New Year. Our member, **Margaret Simons** is giving a talk on "Caversham - a century" on 9 November at 7 pm and on the following Saturday there will be a WEA Study Day on Caversham's Heritage, also coordinated by Margaret.

### **366 Days**

Society members have joined together to form a group to produce the **Reading Book of Days**. For each day of the year this will describe one or more events taking place in or otherwise connected with Reading. If any others (not necessarily confined to members) would like to become involved, there is still room on board the ship!

### **New Project**

**Reading Historypin** is a new project based at the Museum that collects residents' memories and stories of their local community and shares them on a website as follows: [www.historypin.com](http://www.historypin.com). This is part of a nationwide effort but the Reading project will go live with an Exhibition at Reading Museum and Town Hall to be launched on September 13<sup>th</sup>.

### **Happy Retirement!**

We would like to extend our best wishes to our Chairman, **David Cliffe**, who has just retired as Local Studies Librarian at Reading Central Library, after 42 years service. He will now have more time to continue his interest in local history in Reading and in his home area of Macclesfield, where in both towns his expert knowledge is keenly sought. Being retired does not mean being idle!

### **BLHA**

#### **David Cliffe writes:-**

Our Society has been affiliated to the Berkshire Local History Association (BLHA) for many years, and we have been making the latest edition of their newsletter available to our members at meetings at the door, in hard copy, and will continue to do so.

Now, as members of the History of Reading Society, you can access the latest newsletter via the BLHA web site – [www.blha.org.uk](http://www.blha.org.uk) You are prompted on the web site to complete a short registration form before this can happen.

The next edition is due out in September – it contains news from local history societies, libraries and archives; notices of meetings, study courses, study days, visits and exhibitions; book reviews; and short articles and requests for information. It is county-wide in scope, covering the present-day county, and those parts of Oxfordshire which used to be in Berkshire.