

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

Welcome back from the holidays! I hope this will reach you before Wednesday 19th September when we resume our series of talks with Margaret Simons on the subject of Mary Russell Mitford, possibly Reading's most distinguished authoress but not perhaps read as widely as she deserves. No doubt Margaret will encourage us in that direction.

THOUGHTS FROM THE CHAIR

Early September is the time for Heritage Open Days. In France they do the same kind of thing, at the same time of year, and call them the Jours de Patrimoine. I have fond memories of visiting French churches, and listening to organ music, in Paris and in the countryside, in years gone by. Of the Heritage Open Day visits I made in Reading, I suppose my favourite must be to the cinema in

Friar Street, built as the Central Cinema in 1921. As well as seeing the projection box, we stepped onto the sprung maple dance floor, and went upstairs to the kitchens where the bread and cakes were baked for the tea dances. People there fondly remembered how things had been – the band was on the platform over there, and there were potted palms there and there, and so on. A tea dance cost something like 1s. 8d.

My birthday usually falls on one of these days, and this year will be no exception. It's a birthday which I share with John Dearing, with one of my favourite composers, Antonin Dvorak, with my paternal grandfather, whom I never knew because he was killed in the First World War, and with the Blessed Virgin Mary. On Saturday September 8 this year, there will be

the "launch" of no fewer than three books on the history of Reading, in Waterstone's Broad Street bookshop. They are the second edition of *Broad Street Chapel and the Origins of Dissent in Reading* by Geoff Sawers, *Believing in Reading: Our Places of Worship* by Adam Sowan, and *Newtown Reading: a Photographic Journey in Reading, 1974* by Terry Allsop. The publishers are Two Rivers Press, who have given us many good things in the past. I hope to be there.

Another Reading publication which has just come my way is *Reformation, Revolution and Rebirth: the Story of the Return of Catholicism to Reading and the Founding of St. James' Parish*, by John and Lindsay Mullaney. It contains a great deal of information which has never before been published, and is obviously the result of many hours' research among original documents, in this country and in France. It contains the reproduction of a drawing which may well represent the Chapel of the Resurrection, which is believed to have been on the site of the Rising Sun pub on Forbury Road.

I have been especially pleased to see the publication of the "Newtown" and "Catholic Reading" books: the authors have been kind enough to say in their introductions that they were encouraged to venture into print by the local history study days I ran in 2009 and 2011.

I'm now about to enter on my second year of "retirement" and

over the first year have managed to make some impression on the backlog of "loose" illustrations in the Central Library's collection. Around 2,000 images have been catalogued: I'm sorry that the scanning doesn't keep pace with the cataloguing, but some progress has been made there as well. Among the batches catalogued have been the photographs of the Tilehurst Potteries, and S. & E. Collier's Grovelands Brick and Tile Works, by J. Kenneth Major. During the summer, I've been working on pictures of South Oxfordshire, which has given me the impetus to do some walking in that area, in between the showers.

Both of the summer visits made by our Society were most enjoyable, and fully subscribed. I was impressed by the generosity of our hosts on both occasions. The project on Reading mills, being embarked on by The Mills Archive Trust, seemed to me very worthwhile, and I have obtained permission to let them use images from the Central Library's collection for the project. The Museum of English Rural Life are already partners in the project, so between us, we should be able to work towards the best possible result.

David Cliffe

Ed: On the Mullaney's book Sidney Gold adds: "Part 4 of the book deals with Pugin and his design for the Church, along with careful description of the architectural details."

This reminds us to record, before it is too late, that among the plethora of anniversaries this year is the bi-centenary of the birth of Augustus Welby Pugin (1812-52) who not only designed many of the churches built for the Roman Catholic community during the early Victorian era but also by his architectural writings established Gothic as the prevailing style for Christian architecture across the ecclesiastical spectrum for the rest of the century and into the 20th.

His work can be found in Reading not only at St James', designed uncharacteristically in the Norman or Romanesque style but also in the Anglican Holy Trinity where his chancel screen from St Chad's Cathedral, Birmingham, was re-erected after a post-Vatican 2 clearout. (Rumour has it they'd like it back!)

JACK TAYLOR

The latest book from the hand of Daphne Barnes Phillips entitled "Taylor- Made Jackpot" tells the story of Jack Taylor who requested her to write his story, she being a cousin of his late wife Barbara, and so the story told with genealogical detail unfolds.

Jack is a true Reading boy having been born in Surrey Road in 1927. The book follows his early days as a pupil of George Palmer School to helping his father as a back-street bookie to his undoubted success as the boss of 24 betting shops throughout Reading and district.

Jack and Barbara's love of all animals led them to own horses and greyhounds, which had some success at the racecourse, and

were able to roam free at their extensive home and grounds at Chalkhouse Green, where he has resided for over 40 years.

This easy to read book should appeal to the family historian, animal lovers and those who enjoy the journey of an entrepreneur.

The book is available at Waterstone's, Reading at £12.95 in softback with 160 pages and illustrated with colour and black and white photos. Alternatively, contact:

corridorpress@yahoo.co.uk

Sidney Gold

H. E. JORDAN

The death occurred on 17th May 2012, less than a week prior to his 96th birthday, of Herbert Edgar Jordan. Born and resident in Reading all his life, he was not actually a member of History of Reading Society but should be particularly remembered in our town for his dedication to recording the history of the development of its passenger transport system, starting well before interest in any local social history became commonplace.

His father had come to Reading in 1905, becoming first a tramway conductor then a motorman before the trolleybuses took over. Edgar, brought up in Connaught Road, soon became interested in the daily routine of the Corporation Tramways and grew to know everyone connected with the undertaking - from the tramways manager, Mr. Calder, downwards! In fact, at age 4, 'Young Tim', as

Edgar was known, had become mascot of a very successful Tramways football team!

Educated at Wilson School, by the time he started work, not with Tramways but in the Borough Treasurer's Office, Edgar was recording daily details of what he saw. He witnessed and sampled the inauguration of the trolleybuses in 1936 and the final demise of his much-loved trams in May 1939, which included a sneak 'turn on the handles' on the last tram (No.14) to run in from London Road.

After his father retired in 1947, latterly as a trolleybus driver, then an inspector, and for his own interest originally, Edgar set about writing up his father's reminiscences, aided by his own diary notes and the chance discovery of a complete printed set of Tramways Committee minutes. Ten years later, this became the basis of "*The Tramways of Reading*" (re-published in 1990), followed by "*Reading Tramways*" in 1996. He amassed an extensive collection of Reading tram photographs and postcards.

Meanwhile, in 1961 he was a founder member of the Reading Transport Society (later the British Trolleybus Society), becoming their original treasurer and monthly news-sheet typist, remaining a loyal member for the rest of his life and contributing several well-researched articles for the Society's journal. Another part of his Corporation Transport treatise became the basis of "*The*

Trolleybuses of Reading" (published in 1966) and the Transport Department secured his services to produce the "*Farewell to the Trolleybus*" brochure in 1968. He also contributed to their 75th Anniversary brochure in 1976 and to the local press on many occasions. He freely made available to others a great deal of the local bus, tram and trolleybus knowledge he had gathered but was always keen to learn something new as occasion arose.

Edgar, always a quiet unassuming man, was also, for much of his life, a railway enthusiast, particularly steam, and, again, kept notes of his observations. Failing sight hindered him latterly but he was very proud of the fact that in more recent years he had managed to conclude his long-held ambition to travel over all available British Rail passenger and freight metals! He was also at one time a keen railway modeller and he loved his cats.

His much-loved wife, Lilian, sadly died many years ago. 'Pop' is survived by two sons and an extended family which includes both grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

John Whitehead

ANY OLD BOOKS?

We hope to have another Book Sale soon. If you have any that are surplus to requirement and likely to interest other members please bring them in!