

# 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 weather has bucked up in recent weeks and it is now at least possible to hope for fine weather when we desert temporarily the shelter of the Abbey Baptist Church and move into the open air. Here are details of the two trips we have planned for this summer.

On **Wednesday** 19<sup>th</sup> June the Society is holding a guided tour for members around Reading, led by our member, Joy Pibworth. The tour party is to congregate at the main doors of St Mary's Minster Church in the Butts at **7.15pm**, ready for the tour to commence at **7.30pm**. Parking is available in the Broad Street Mall at a cost of £3.50 or, provided that you intend to drop in for a drink afterwards, at The Sun pub in Castle Street, where the tour will finish. Members are invited to book their place by contacting Vicki Chesterman on:  
or by registering their interest on the booking form that will be available at the May meeting. Places are limited.

On **Saturday** 20<sup>th</sup> July (Note, not Wednesday, as usual), we are holding an outing for members to the University of Reading's London Road Campus. There will be a tour of the campus and entry to some key buildings (including the Museum of English Rural Life). The tour party is to congregate at the main entrance in London Road at **2pm**, ready for the tour to commence at **2.15pm**. There is parking available in the White Gates car park (off Crown Street), or in Acacia Road (off Redland Road by the Museum of English Rural Life).

Members are again invited to book their place by contacting Vicki Chesterman as above or by registering your interest on the booking form at the May meeting. Places are limited to **30**. **There is a £2 fee per person attending.**

The editor has also been advised that the Society now has a presence on the internet! The History of Reading Society has a Facebook page, where you can keep up to date with forthcoming meetings, relevant news articles and news of the latest books on Reading. You can find us at:

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/History-of-Reading-Society/430007430397323?ref=ts&fref=ts>.

Coming later this year will be a Society website, where you will also be able to check the forthcoming programme, contact us with queries, re-read old newsletters, find links to relevant organisations and societies, and find a bibliography of books on Reading and its surroundings. The 21<sup>st</sup> century beckons!

## **THOUGHTS FROM THE CHAIR**

I'm pleased to be able to report that the bid of Reading Central Library to the Heritage Lottery Fund was successful. Our Society sent a letter of support, which hopefully helped their case, and now we will have to get to work. (I say "we" because I seem to have been "roped in" as a member of the project management board!) The main purpose of the project is to digitise Reading newspapers and directories for the years before, during and after the First World War, and so make the records available, free of charge, on the library's website. The aim is to complete this by the time of the centenary of the outbreak of war in 1914.

Continuing with public library and volunteering matters, my work on the local illustrations goes on apace. The Society was able to let the library have an interesting set of images from the Aldridge family, who ran a leather and grindery business in Oxford Road. This was a different family from the one running Aldridge's leather and bag shop in Friar Street, which is still going strong. As so often happens, the main object of interest in the photographs for us today is not always the reason for the photograph being taken. There are photographs to show the shop – but the horse-trams and electric trams in Oxford Road are rather more interesting to us today.

Then only last week, the library was lent a valuable set of photographs of Wellsted's department store in Broad Street. Some showed the shop in its (literally) palmy days in the 1930s – the restaurant had a glass dome over it, and there were potted palms between the tables. Then there was a set which must have been taken for insurance purposes, shortly after the buildings were damaged by bombing in 1943. And finally, another set to show the store when it had been put back in order. The difference between the classical detailing of the pillars and plaster work before the war, and the post-war "contemporary" look, is striking.

To return to our Society, the book sale held last month raised £50. This seems a good way of getting rid of books you don't want, and at the same time may be a way of finding something you'd like to read, at a very low price. It helps keep the subscriptions down, and it makes for a lively meeting, so we'll probably do something similar next year. I managed to find a couple of items, nothing to do with Reading, but containing information about the part of the country I came from, which I was pleased to have. I should like to thank everyone who brought in their books for the sale.

David Cliffe

### **FROM THE READING MERCURY 2nd July 1869**

CAVERSHAM BRIDGE – A curious incident occurred at this bridge on the afternoon of Monday last. About four o'clock, a brewer's cart, laden with several beer barrels full and empty, belonging to Messrs. Allaway and Coldicut, of Caversham-road, was preparing to cross the river in the ferry-boat provided by Messrs. Shaw, Headland and Co., the contractors, when, just as the horse, had stepped upon the fore-part of the boat, the latter, not having been fastened, shot out into the river, throwing both horse, cart and barrels into the water. The harness was speedily cut, so as to save the horse, and after some considerable delay, all were got out, with the exception of a cask full of ale, which sank before it could be got out. The labourers at work on the bridge were speedily on the spot, and every assistance was given. Efforts were made on Tuesday to recover the missing barrel, but they were unavailing. Since last week further accommodation for foot passengers crossing the river has been afforded, two smaller boats now plying in addition to the larger punt. – A Correspondent writes that on Friday week he had occasion to cross the river from Caversham, with a friend, and being pressed for time was conveyed in one of Mr Piper's boats. On reaching the Berkshire side, their landing was violently opposed and a toll demanded. He asks, if "such conduct is to be tolerated, or even legal?"

Kindly contributed by Mr John Whitehead.

Ed: *Three weeks later the new bridge opened on 24<sup>th</sup> July and doubtless alleviated some of these inconveniences.*

### **ST LAURENCE DRINKING FOUNTAIN**

On 28 July 1860 the Berkshire Chronicle reporting the events of the previous day mentioned that a drinking fountain was presented to the town by Thomas Rogers, Clerk to the Local Board of Health and affixed to the south wall of St Laurence Church. The Drinking Fountain Movement had originated in London a few years earlier to supply clean drinking water for the public and provision was also made at the base for troughs for dogs, the idea caught on and Reading soon had its own. The fountain was very tasteful and handsome and was to a design by Poulton and Woodman, architects of Reading. It is made of Mansfield stone with a marble shaft under the basin and two small marble columns. Carved with crockets surrounding the main structure and aquatic plants and water lilies on the interior by Messrs. Wheeler Bros. a carving of a stag is the crest of the Rogers family. The inscriptions

“clean water supplied free by the Public Water Works Co. erected July 1860” and “fear of the Lord is a fountain of life” have long eroded away.

More elaborate fountains appeared later in Reading with one in the Forbury Gardens in 1861 and the Jubilee fountain in St Mary’s Butts.

Sidney Gold

Ed: *This is one of Sidney’s “days” that didn’t make the final text of “Reading Book of days”.*

### **THE MARQUIS OF GRANBY**

The Marquis of Granby is or at least was one of the most popular pub names in England after those referring to the royal family and associated animals. The Marquis or Marquess in question was Lieutenant-general John Manners (721-70), son and heir of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Duke of Rutland and Marquess was thus a courtesy title. He died before his father and thus never attained to the dukedom. He is said to have been very popular with his troops and to have assisted many of them financially to acquire inns after their discharge from the army, his benevolence being rewarded by naming them after him.

Our **Marquis of Granby**, 120 London Road had been named the Gallows Tavern and renamed after the general in 1763. At one time it had a signboard bearing this date showing the “noble and gallant Marquis standing beside a highly prancing charger”. Its location was originally rural and remained so well into the 19c when the Wokingham Road was known as Windsor Forest Road.

In 1786 a lady innkeeper opened a “warm and commodious” theatre at the inn and put on performances of Shakespeare and Sheridan. It became quite an attraction with the well-to-do but these thespian delights came to an end when local felons burgled the inn and made off with the theatrical costumes and props. Sporting events were held at Whitsun and the tea gardens were popular.

In the 1950s it is said to have been visited by Errol Flynn during a “drinking spree”. Then owners, Whitbread, renamed it Hattons for a while in the 1980s but it reverted to something like its original name in 1989 as the Granby Tavern. As such it became a popular venue for the gay community. There have been rumours of a further change of status in the offing – watch some other space!

John Dearing

### **BTS READING AFTERNOON TOUR ON SATURDAY, 5<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2013**

THE BRITISH TROLLEYBUS SOCIETY (founded in Reading) is organising an afternoon guided tour around Reading and environs on Saturday, 5<sup>th</sup> October 2013, which will

commence and finish in the town centre. It is proposed to use the Society's 1935-vintage former Reading Corporation motorbus and a modern *Greenwave* gas-powered bus and HoRS officials will be acting as the guides. Space permitting, interested History Society members and their guests are cordially invited also to take part – with an optional tea at modest cost at the tour's conclusion. Further details from Maria Teresa Molner on: or phone:



**The Granby in its heyday**