

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

Chairman	Hon Secretary & Programme Organiser	Hon Treasurer & Membership	Editor
David Cliffe 1 Priest Hill Caversham READING RG4 7RZ 0118 948 3354	Vicki Chesterman 7 Norman Road Caversham READING RG4 5JN Tel: 0118 947 3443	John Starr	John Dearing 27 Sherman Road READING RG1 2PJ Tel: 0118 958 0377

Spring 2015

No 39

SUMMER OUTINGS

On **Wednesday** 17th June the History of Reading Society members are invited to a guided tour around Reading Synagogue, Goldsmid Road, Reading RG1 7YB. The tour party is to congregate at the entrance to the Sir Herman Gollancz Hall in Clifton Street at **7.15pm**, ready for the tour to commence at **7.30pm**. There is a door bell and someone will be available to let you in. Due to security issues surrounding our communal building we would request that people do not bring large bags with them or they need to be prepared for a search.

The synagogue is located just off the Oxford Road, behind the former Rileys snooker club (now the LifeSpring Church). Parking is available at Q car park in Chatham Street (the multi-storey car park), which is a 5 minute walk away from the synagogue.

On **Wednesday** 15th July the History of Reading Society members are invited to a visit to Reading Blue Coat School, Holme Park, Sonning Lane, Sonning RG4 6SU. The tour party is to congregate at the main entrance to School House at **7.15pm**, ready for the tour to commence at **7.30pm**. Parking is available in the main school car park.

Members are invited to book their places at either (or both) visits at the May meeting or by contacting Vicki Chesterman on 0118 9473443 or

Places are limited to **30 per visit** and there is a **£1 per person charge for the outings, preferably paid upon booking.**

THOUGHTS FROM THE CHAIR

Family matters in my home town of Macclesfield, Cheshire, have kept me away from Reading for some weeks. It has been an interesting time, away from the usual routine, and I feel it has helped put my life into perspective. And it allowed me to make an all-to-rare visit to a meeting of the Macclesfield Historical Society.

This Society was founded in 1967, when I was still a student – the History of Reading Society was founded in 1975. Back in 1967 in Macclesfield, students got in free, and I used to sit near the front, with a notebook and pencil in hand. Some of the speakers were a bit taken aback by this, and I had to explain that I was just very interested in what they were about to say. Nowadays, when I've been giving the talk, and have seen someone scribbling, I have offered to e-mail my notes to them, to save them the bother, but at the time that would not have been possible.

In April this year, about 40 people attended the meeting – an A.G.M., followed by a talk on "Cheshire's Deserted Village." Since the population of Macclesfield is about 40,000, and that of greater Reading 250,000, you might have thought that the HoRS would have had 250 people at its A.G.M., but things don't work quite like that!

The A.G.M. was brief, and informal to say the least – some might have said it was a bit of a shambles. I noted that they had no new committee members standing for election. Another committee on which I serve, that of the Reading and District Natural History Society, has a rule that after a mere three years, a committee member stands down. They don't seem to have any problem in attracting new committee members, and in my case, after I had stood down for a few years, I was asked if I would re-join the committee, and was pleased to do so.

If the A.G.M. at Macclesfield was a shambles, the talk that followed was a ramble. There was a lot of good information, but it went on until 9.10. I thought that in Reading, the audience would have gone home by that time! There followed ten minutes of questions, and then we retired to another room for coffee and biscuits, leaving the building at 9.45.

It is always interesting to see how other societies do things. It was the Macclesfield Society that gave me the idea of producing a calendar, and it was the Reading Natural History Society that gave me the idea of holding a book sale. Both seem to have worked well for the HoRS – not that money-raising is a primary function, but the extra income will enable us to do more things, and maybe different things, in pursuing our objectives. Thanks are due to the committee members who have helped in various ways – including transporting heavy books and doing the actual selling.

During my absence, our committee has decided to produce a calendar for 2016, and I'm told that the last book sale was the most successful ever. I hope that you managed to find something worth reading there. At the book sale before that, I'd picked up a copy of the W. G. Hoskins classic, "The Making of the English Landscape," for 50p. I notice that its previous owner was our President, Mrs. Joan Dils. There was a good five hours' worth of reading there, which filled up the time on my train journeys to and from Macclesfield most pleasantly.

I hope to get back to cataloguing the old local history pictures in the Central Library at some time during May, and will report back on anything particularly interesting that comes along in due course. In the meantime, enjoy the summer, and our trips to the Reading Synagogue and the Reading Blue Coat School – I hope to see you there!

David Cliffe

[Ed. I have to confess that when I was a student I made notes during the Lectures mainly in order to prevent myself nodding off!]



In March St Laurence's church was the scene of the BLHA AGM AND Symposium in honour of Joan Dils. [Photo: JD]

JUST IN CASE YOU MISSED THEM....

Here are reports of two of our recent talks.

The History of Tilehurst was the subject of the Society's first talk of 2015. The speaker was Mike Cooper; Mike is a well-known public speaker on local and military history, also, he has published a history of the Armour Road area of Tilehurst where he has lived for 50 years.

Mike said there are few written accounts about the village before the eighteenth century; even the compilers of the *Domesday Book* overlooked it. The first mention of *Tilehurst* was in 1289 in a charter by the Bishop of Salisbury granting monies to the abbot of Reading abbey.

Sitting on a ridge above the River Thames to the north and the Bath Road to the south contributed to the village's isolation and slow development; unusually the village centre is some distance from its parish church (St. Michael). For the first 700 years its economy developed around local agriculture and it wasn't until the late nineteenth century, with the arrival of the railways and Reading's westward expansion, that new manufacturing industries developed, particularly bricks and pottery.

The modern spelling of Tilehurst has several antecedents: Tigelhurst, Tylehurst and Telhurst, the present spelling dates from the mid-eighteenth century. Many eminent local families have owned land in the area, particularly after the forfeiture of abbey lands in 1539; the Englefields, Vanlores, Zinzans, Kendricks and Blagraves to name but a few.

In modern times the village was absorbed into Reading Borough with St. George's parish in 1894 followed by Tilehurst village in 1911. Improvements in its infrastructure came with mains water supply in 1894, the first street lights appeared in 1903 and a public library opened in 1932. Many

housing estates both private and council were built, particularly in the post-war period. Today, Tilehurst is mainly a residential suburb of Reading with a growing population of 14,000.

The Royal Abbey at Reading was the subject of the March talk. The speaker was Emeritus Professor Brian Kemp who lectures at University of Reading on Medieval Studies and is president of the Friends of Reading Abbey.

The Abbey at Reading was founded by King Henry I in 1121 for the salvation of his soul and those of his family. On his death in 1135, Henry was buried there before the High Altar.

King Henry invited monks of the Benedictine Order of Cluny in France to form a community in Reading, this act acknowledging his Norman- French ancestry. The Order was held in high regard for its care of the poor and for encouraging art.

King Stephen paid a visit in 1140 on his way to Wallingford Castle and during the following year Empress Matilda, King Henry I's daughter, was received with great honour.

In 1164, during the reign of King Henry II, the building of the abbey was completed and in the presence of the King and noblemen the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Beckett, presided at the consecration service to dedicate the abbey to St. Mary and St. John the Evangelist. King Henry gave much land and many religious relics to the Abbey.

In 1359, during the reign of King Edward III, his son, John of Gaunt married Blanche of Lancaster at the Abbey; their son, King Henry IV, was the first Lancastrian King of England. During the reign of King Henry VI parliament was forced to meet at the Abbey because of outbreaks of plague in London.

In 1520, during the reign of King Henry VIII, the Abbey's thirty-first and final abbot, Hugh Cook Faringdon, was elected; in 1539 he would be executed for treason for refusing to accept the King as the Supreme Head of the Church of England. This year the Abbey was closed on the King's order and thus began a period of deterioration as its treasures and fabric were plundered by the Crown and townsfolk.

Sean Duggan

AN ARCHITECTURAL MYSTERY TOUR



[Photo: JD]

In this issue I am going to present you with a little architectural mystery. Here is a photograph taken in Norwich in January of the Greek Orthodox Church. It is dedicated to “Mary the Mother of God”. The question is: what is its connection with Reading?

The answer lies in the architect, Herbert G. Ibberson. Some readers will I am sure have immediately spotted that his surname suggests a connection with one of 19th century Reading’s longest serving clergymen, George Ibberson Tubbs (1812-93), whose 36 years at St Mary’s Castle Street led to it being nicknamed “Tubbses”. Ibberson was born in Kings Lynn in 1866 on February 23rd, the son of Charles Ibberson, who seems to have been a grocer in the town. The Revd George Tubbs is understood to have been a relative of Charles Ibberson through his mother whose maiden name was Mary Ibberson. One of Tubbs’ sons, Cyril Bazett Tubbs (born 1859), was an architect, best known for designing the new London Necropolis Railway station in 1900. This was a separate but adjacent station to Waterloo, serving the famous Brookwood cemetery. From 1880 to 1886 he was in partnership with another young Reading architect, George William Webb (1853-1936), who had lived at 119 Castle Street from his boyhood. The firm’s varied architectural work from this period included the encaustic floor tiles in the chancel at Tubbses, a reception room at the Masonic Hall, Reading, stables, billiard room and laundry at the Roebuck Hotel, Tilehurst and a vicarage in Froxfield, Wiltshire.

It was to this firm with its offices at 1 Blagrove Street that the young Herbert Ibberson was articled in 1882. He stayed for three years and during this period he studied at the Reading School of Art. He later worked in the offices of a number of architects including John Sedding, a major church architect in the later 19th century, before setting up his own practice in London in 1892. He also established an office at Hunstanton in Norfolk near his birthplace, where he designed a number of domestic dwellings in the then fashionable Arts and Crafts style.

Ibberson died in 1935 and the church in Norwich, bearing the foundation date of 1934, must have been one of his last works. It was a commission not from the Greek Orthodox Church but from the Christian Science Movement, which it served until 1999. At the time of its conversion to Orthodoxy it was the rallying point for a Chapels Society tour of the city of Norwich in which I participated and on my most recent visit I decided to take a photograph with a view to wrapping an article around it – and here it is! Another church designed by Ibberson was Chorleywood Free (Baptist) Church (1905).

The author is indebted to Sidney Gold's Dictionary of Architects at Reading as well as various websites for the information contained in this article.

John Dearing

BOOKS AND THINGS

At our Book sale during the April meeting, the Society made £86.20 together with a further £46 in pre-sales making a total of £132.20p. Thank you to Vice-Chairman, Sidney Gold and others who worked hard to make the event a success and to all those members who both donated and bought the books.

Meanwhile the flow of new books about the history of Reading seems to continue unabated. Cricket fans may like to take note of a book due to be published in late May, *Inside the Boundary* by Geoff Wellstead, which tells the story of 26 first class cricketers born within the Reading town boundary. Payment is by cheque only please for £12 direct from the author including postage and package: Mr. Geoff Wellstead, 3 Beatty Close, Caldy, Wirral. CH 48 2 JT. Tel 0151 625 6470.

Our Secretary, Vicki Chesterman, reports that society membership now stands at 99 paid and 3 honorary members, making the highest membership total for 10 years. We are obviously doing something right but of course we are always pleased to receive suggestions of topics and speakers for our programme of talks!

Richard Bennett, Chairman of the Trooper Potts Memorial Fund, wrote to thank us for inviting his team and for the Society's donation plus individual members' donations.

The Editor welcomes contributions to the Newsletter, ideally submitted electronically to: gpwild@btconnect.com, otherwise to the address above or of course by hand at our meetings.