

# 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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## THOUGHTS FROM THE CHAIR

At present there is, quite rightly, a lot of interest in the area around the decommissioned Reading Gaol and the ruins of Reading Abbey. There is the rare opportunity to redevelop the whole area, and several organisations have on-going "projects." There's the Reading Abbey Revealed Project and the Hidden Abbey Project, involving the use of ground-penetrating radar in the Forbury Gardens, the grounds of St. James's Church and School, and the Gaol itself. There have been headlines in national newspapers such as "Kings and Car Parks: is Reading the new Leicester?" I'm not expecting the discovery of a richly-decorated sarcophagus containing the mortal remains of King Henry Beauclerk, bearing in mind that the ground where the high altar stood, in front of which the king was buried, must have been disturbed several times over the centuries.

Then we have famous actors coming to read Oscar Wilde's *De Profundis* in the prison chapel on Sundays in September and October. This was announced on the national news on July 21, and a week later, tickets for all of the readings were sold out, according to the Reading Arts and Artangel websites. The readings take four hours, with one interval of fifteen minutes, no refreshments, but there are toilets.

Over the same period, there will also be an exhibition in the old prison cells, "Inside and Out: Artists and Writers in Reading Prison." To see this, you will need to book and pay for a timed ticket, which you can do using the Reading Arts website. A lot of people must be very busy putting the exhibition together.

These events are part of Reading's Year of Culture 2016, and the first phase of Reading International, a new three-year arts initiative led by the University of Reading.

There will be another chance to see the Abbey Quarter as part of the Heritage Open Days, which run this year between September 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>. The tours are on the Friday and Saturday, and need to be booked in advance. The full programme can be

seen on the Heritage Open Days website, and there are some new places opening this time.

Away from the noise of rolling band-wagons, things at the History of Reading Society move at a more leisurely pace. The summer visits have now been and gone, both of them well attended and blessed by fine weather. The visit to the Museum of Berkshire Aviation was an eye-opener for me, and for others. Even if you're not interested in aeroplanes, there is a lot of local history represented here. It was interesting to learn about what had happened on that site, and I was surprised to see photographs of people I used to know who had worked there. I should especially like to thank Ken Fostekew, who showed us round. We were there for rather longer than I had expected!

St. Peter's Church in Caversham also did us proud in July, with talks and tours of the building, inside and out. I hadn't realised that the reason the church had a wooden bell-tower was that the masonry tower and spire were demolished by cannon-fire during the Civil War. The present flint tower wasn't built until 1878. This is rather similar to the fate of Caversham Bridge. The Reading end of the bridge was blown up by one side or the other in the Civil War, to be replaced by a timber section which lasted until the construction of the iron bridge in 1868-69.



**St Peter's Church, Interior, photo JBD.**

The Society's "Old Reading" calendar for 2017 will feature commercial art – in other words, old advertisements for Reading firms, some of which are still in business. Some of them are colourful, and after the passage of a century of so, some are humorous. The calendar is being produced in conjunction with Reading Borough Libraries – the adverts come from their collection of local ephemera – and with their help, we are expecting to sell more copies of the calendar than ever.

I still have to work out the economics of producing digital copies of documents which are important for the study of Reading's history, but which are not at present easily accessible. The idea is to sell copies on CD, so that the Society gets most or all of its investment back in time. The Libraries and Berkshire Record Office are in favour, and between them and our committee, we have decided that the place to start is the "Goad" insurance plans of Reading, which begin in the 1890s. I won't rhapsodise too

much on them here – suffice it to say that they show the commercial and industrial parts of central Reading in great detail. Whether or not the project is feasible from the point of view of the cost, these maps would make a very good subject for one of our illustrated evening talks.

I hope that you enjoy the rest of the summer, and that we shall meet again in September for the start of the indoor meetings. We begin on the 21<sup>st</sup> September with a talk by Paul Joyce on “How the Railway Came to Reading.” I know that Paul has done a great deal of research on the subject, and has uncovered a lot of facts that will give us a new slant on just what happened, and how things were. This will, of course, tie in with Reading Museum’s “On Track” exhibition, which I can also recommend.

David Cliffe, Chairman

## OVER IN HENLEY....

Notice has been received of a new book published in May on the **Henley Union Workhouse: The Story of Townlands** by Valerie Alasia and published by Brewin Books. Retailing at £14.95 with 222 pages and 49 monochrome illustrations it is the fruit of many years’ research.

## QUOITS

Looking through some old Street Directories of Reading, for general information, I noticed reference to Reading Quoits Clubs – and especially, of their success in competitions with other towns. Was this an aspect of Reading’s past, that had been overlooked, an achievement which should have been honoured - or at least held in respect to recent times?

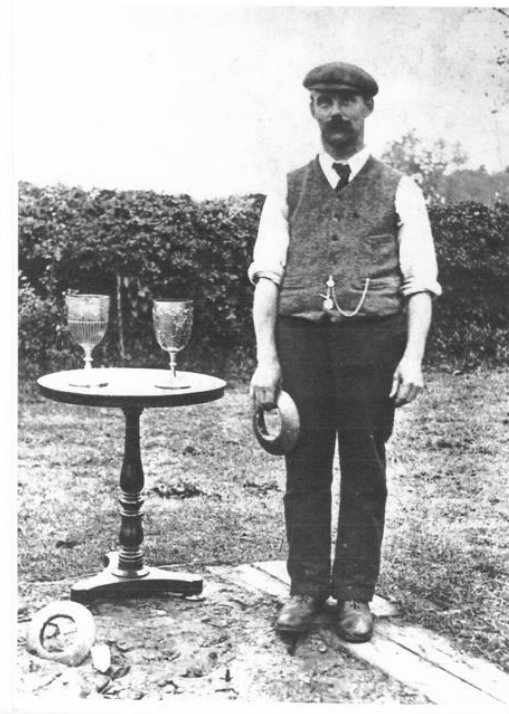
It seems that the game was popular in England, from the late 1880’s until c.1920, but restricted to some areas. Apart from Reading, it was especially popular in Northumberland, and around mining villages such as Bellingham and Leek. Probably considerable offence could (still) be caused by omitting other places where the game was popular?

It was usually played in pubs, probably in a room behind the bar – where a long area was marked out, with a row of upright spikes (stone) set in soft clay at the end. Players (men only) had a set of iron rings – 2 of 12 pounds in Northumberland - eleven pounds of nine inches diameter in Suffolk - and other variations. In any case, heavy, and potentially dangerous to bystanders. Records of the Reading pitch have not become available, so far. The game has also been recorded in U.S.A.

Records of a similar game have been found B.C. – or possibly it was connected with the more familiar discus thrower.

In 1361, King Edward II outlawed the game, as it was so popular, and 'good' citizens should be practising more warlike activities. Nevertheless, it survived and spread into taverns and pubs, acquiring Official Rules, and developing into local Leagues, and Championships.

In Reading, between 1889 -1920 several Clubs existed and details from 1890’s onwards, may be found in the Directories. The clubs included Reading United, East Reading, R. & District Quoits Players Assoc., Caversham Q.C., R. Town Q.C., and Rose & Thistle.



**From Reading Libraries Collection.**



**From the collection of Amoret Tanner**

There was a Ground at Baker St – H.Q. at the Eagle Hotel, and one at the British Workman in Abbey Street. Other sites included the Club Room at Central Hotel, Friar St., H.Q. at Marquis of Granby, London Road; also a Play Ground on Moss Island, where Reading United Quoits Club had its H.Q., a private Play Ground adjoining the Clappers Boathouse, Thames Side (1900) and a H.Q. at the Albion Tavern, Alfred Street.

All Clubs seem to have had several Officers, and a list of the members include many (still) well-known names – Palmer, Sutton, McIlroy, Earthy, Eighteen, - among them.

Even more impressive is the "success record". B. United were Holders of Berks, Bucks, Hants, Oxon Senior Cup in 1893- 4-5-6-7-8 and 1900, 1,2,3,-5. The Town Q.C. were Winners & holders of the 4 Counties Challenge Cup, and the Keyser Challenge Bowl 1899-1900.

The last record of the Clubs I have so far found is 1912, (and certainly none appear during 1914-18).

It is possible that the popularity of the Game fell with the rise of Darts – the National Darts Assoc. was founded in London in 1924 – a game requiring no fixed equipment, and less space – and a different kind of physical skill.

In some areas the sport has survived – or been re-established. An Open Competition was held in Bellingham, Northumberland, in 1965; it is still played in other parts of the North (where it is said to be still popular in mining communities) and in Suffolk.

However, at a recent (2015) festival in Reading, in Forbury Gardens, I saw two small boys throwing rings at a wooden board, about 4 ft. wide, with fixed sticks at the end ... Perhaps it is time to reclaim the titles won so regularly in Reading in the nineteenth century.

Diana Mackarill

*We are most grateful to Diana for allowing us to publish this fascinating piece of research.*



## IF YOU MISSED IT ....

*Here follow reports on the talks given to the Society during the Spring and early Summer 2016.*

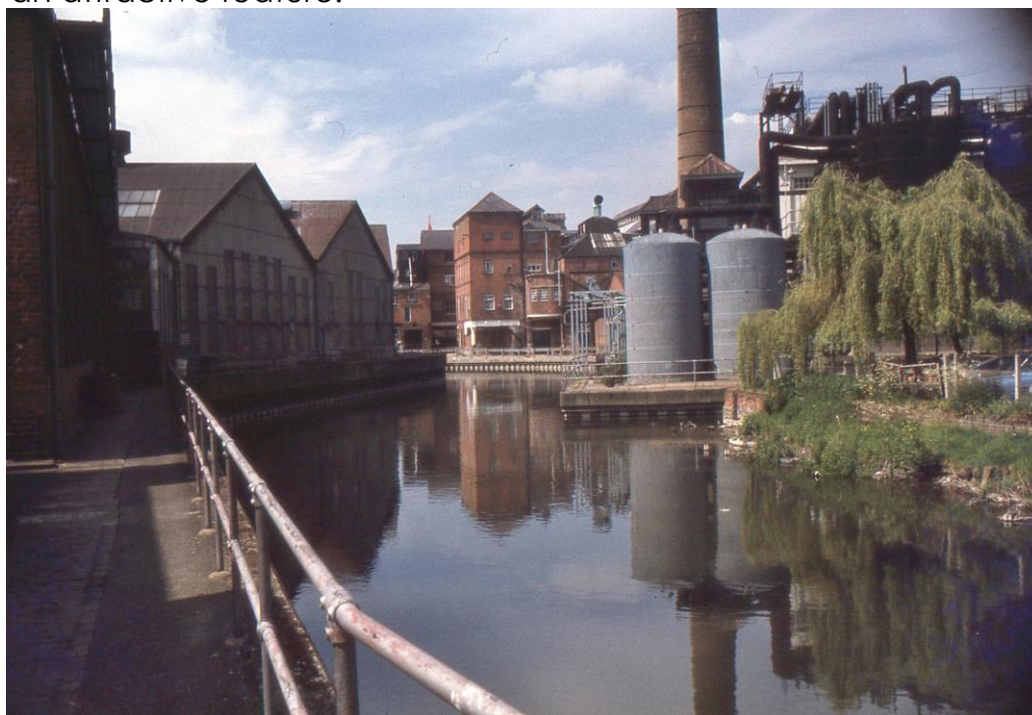
**Derek Buckler His Cars and Karts** was the subject of the April talk, the speaker was David Montgomery. David has been a Buckler owner since 1971, he lives in Sandhurst not far from the Buckler Company's old Crowthorne works and is the editor of the quarterly journal devoted to the brand, *the Bucklering*.

Derek Buckler established the Buckler Car Company at 67, Caversham Road, Reading in 1939 as a precision engineering business. In 1947 Derek made his first motor car, registration number DDP 201, based on this model he produced his first production racing cars using Ford running parts. They were called the Mark V because Derek didn't want people to think it was his first car.

The cars were unusual in that they featured the lightweight and ridged space frame chassis to which the owner could add a wide range of components; cars could be supplied with a works body or one of the owner's choice. In 1950 the Mark VI model was launched: it had a longer wheelbase and four seats and was available for the export market only. By the end of the 1940s the company had outgrown its Reading premises, so it bought Welco Farm Implements at Crowthorne and used its premises for motor car production; model development and marketing would continue at Reading.

The company's prolific success declined during the 1950s as competitors began to produce similar racing cars, so a new market was developed to make racing go-karts with the first model developed by Jack Barlow launched in 1958. Poor health forced Derek Buckler to sell the business in 1962 for £6,500; he died in March 1964 and the new owners closed the business the following year. Today a plaque marks the site of the Crowthorne premises.

**A Town on Two Rivers** was the subject of the May talk. The speaker was David Cliffe, the Society's chairman. Today the two principal rivers that flow through Reading, the Kennet and the Thames, are used by most residents and visitors as a leisure facility and considered an attractive feature.



**Simonds Brewery from the Kennet, photo taken in 1982 by the late Norman Wicks.**

David mentioned archaeological evidence of people moving through the part of the Thames Valley that is now Reading. He showed a map of the 1947 floods, and explained why the town is where it is, and how, until the middle of the nineteenth century, the rivers were an important part of its economy: they were a highway for the movement of goods, many industries and wharves were located along their river banks, they also gave the town its supply of piped water, and when mains drainage was introduced, the Kennet gave it the means of pumping the waste water to the treatment works.

The first mention of Reading is to be found in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for the year 870 when the Danes had established a fort at the confluence of the two rivers; the site was chosen because it could easily be defended and was part of their strategy to conquer the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Wessex.

In medieval times Reading's main river was the Kennet, the Thames was some distance from the edge of the town. Along the banks of the river Kennet were many wharves that served the tanning, leather working and dyeing industries. In addition, there were flour mills and fulling mills. St. Giles Mill survived into the twentieth century. Today most of this area is occupied by the Oracle Shopping Centre.

Downstream from the town in 1121 King Henry I founded a Cluniac (later Benedictine) Abbey on the site of today's Prison. Apart from the abbey church there were many ancillary buildings including a flour mill part of which survives next to the Holy Brook. Recently archeologists discovered a slaughterhouse and wharves nearby.

In 1810 the Kennet and Avon Canal was completed; the town could bring in goods from the Bristol Docks, Bath stone and coal via the Somerset Coal Canal. Reading became an important inland port serving London and the West Country. The town could now export its produce to the large London market as well as importing items previously unavailable: exotic food and drink and chinaware for example. The Canal's importance would soon diminish with the arrival of the railways in the 1840s.

Reading had a long tradition of boat-buildings. Photographs were shown of Talbot's boat building sheds by Caversham Bridge, of Maynard's pleasure steamer "Queen of the Thames" nearing completion, and of Moss's and Cawston's boat-yards at Caversham.

During the nineteenth century gasworks were built along the Kennet at Minster Street and at Blake's Lock, nearby the sprawling Huntley & Palmers biscuit factory was established. Simonds Brewery had its premises opposite County Lock on the Kennet, and at Katesgrove, was the Reading Iron Works.

During the twentieth century Caversham Bridge was re-built and a new bridge erected across the Thames at Christchurch Meadows. Many of the industries along Reading's rivers would disappear during this period; they were replaced with flats and offices. Happily, the canal has revived again with the growth in pleasure boating and in 2015 a new footbridge across the Thames at Christchurch Meadows was opened.

Sean Duggan

In July, the Society's members visited **St. Peter's Church, Caversham**. The tour started in the churchyard and our guide was Richard Havelock, assistant parish treasurer. Richard told us that the church dates from 1162; the land was given by Walter Giffard, third Earl of Buckingham who gave the church to Notley Abbey, Buckinghamshire which he had founded. The churchyard has many ancient headstones; unfortunately, the inscriptions on many have eroded over time. The most prominent monument is an obelisk erected by the Crawshay family who were the builders of Caversham Park.



**Crawshay Memorial Tombstone, photo JBD.**

Inside the church, Mike Eggleton assisted by churchwarden Nigel Smith explained that the church was damaged in the siege of Reading during the Civil Wars of the 1640s; Parliamentary forces bombarded Caversham to prevent King Charles I's army from crossing the Thames.



**Society members at St Peter's Church, photo Chris Widdows**

Today's church was mostly rebuilt in the 1870s; the wooden bell tower was replaced with one built of stone and the south aisle was added. Some work survives from before the Victorian restoration: the Norman arch in the south porch and the hand carved stonework in the north chapel being of particular interest. The early-Norman font was rescued from the Old Rectory (Caversham Court) in the nineteenth century and probably came from an earlier church.

Chris Widdows



## MORING'S READING SWEETS

One of the hazards of being the chairman of a local history organisation is that you tend to receive e-mail requests for information. People's faith in the Internet to answer some of their enquiries is almost touching: the message often contains the words "Internet" and "Google." Sometimes I pass the enquirer on to someone else, but at other times, where the question is about Reading and I'm fairly certain the answer can be found in the Central Library without it taking up too much time, I undertake the research.

On this occasion, the enquirer owned a sweet tin – one with a glass window in the lid, meant for display purposes on the counter of a shop. The words round the window said: "Moring's Pure Reading Sweets," and on the side of the tin: "Absolutely Pure – Therefore Best." He wanted to know a bit about the firm, and how old the tin might have been.





I thought that I ought to be able to find Moring's in the old street directories, and so it proved. The earliest directory to list Frank E. Moring describes him as a wholesale confectioner and grocers' sundriesman, at No. 20 Caversham Road. It is dated 1895. By the time the 1902 directory was compiled, Frank Moring had moved to No. 16 in Caversham Road, and had extended his range of activities. He was now a "manufacturing confectioner, wholesale dealer in grocers' and chemists' sundries, stationery, haberdashery and toys." Both of the shops were in the same row, formerly the premises of the Reading Industrial Co-operative Society. Moring's continued at No. 16, always as manufacturing confectioners, but from 1940 onwards as wholesale tobacconists as well. The latest directory in which the firm appears is the one for 1958.

Does anyone remember the Moring family, or their sweets? Was the firm taken over, or did it just close, maybe following the death of Mr. Moring? If anyone has any memories or knowledge of Morings, please get in touch so I can pass the information on to my enquirer.

David Cliffe.

### Where is this?



This photograph (attached) of a house somewhere in Berkshire was bought recently by Society member Michael Curling, who would like to know where it is or was. The only clue is on the reverse side of the photo: it was produced by Sydney Victor White of Castle Street, Reading. Anyone know the answer??

## RELIGION IN READING 1851

1851 is probably most often remembered as the date of the Great Exhibition that took place in the Crystal Palace, a high Victorian celebration of the greatness of the British Empire, a time when the world map was mainly coloured red. However, it was also the date of the first and only national census of religious activity and as a result we have as complete a picture as possible of the state of Christianity in Reading at the mid-century. The following table setting out the results of the census as they affected Reading, both the town within its then boundaries, together with those areas later assumed into modern Reading, along with some of those forming part of the Greater Reading conurbation but outside the present boundary. In the table Old Dissent is a term widely

used to denote the various denominations that arose during 1550-1700, including Baptists, Independents/ Congregationalists, Presbyterians and Quakers, while New Dissent denotes those that arose from the Evangelical revival and later movements, notably the various forms of Methodism.

No.	Denomination	Church	Adult Attendance		
			A.M.	P.M.	Eve.
READING AS IN 1851					
1	Church of England	St Mary's Parish Church	700	0	900
1	Church of England	St Mary's Chapel	666	0	825
1	Church of England	Trinity Chapel	600	0	600
1	Church of England	St Lawrence's Parish Church	1200	1000	0
1	Church of England	St John's	500	450	0
1	Church of England	Chapel of Royal Berks Hospital	0	0	55
1	Church of England	St Giles Parish Church	700	0	750
7			4366	1450	3130
1	Old Dissent	Castle Street Independent	520	0	460
1	Old Dissent	Broad Street Chapel	403	308	341
1	Old Dissent	Kings Road Baptist	320	120	600
1	Old Dissent	Strict Baptist	50	0	0
1	Old Dissent	Trinity Independent	300	0	300
1	Old Dissent	Friends	80	0	58
1	Old Dissent	Baptist (St Giles)	110	30	130
7			1783	458	1889
1	New Dissent	Salem Primitive Methodist	220	0	590
1	New Dissent	Latter Day Saints	8	16	31
1	New Dissent	Bethel Wesleyan Methodist	30	0	45
1	New Dissent	Christian Brethren	30	0	40
1	New Dissent	Wesleyan Methodist (St Giles)	210	60	247
1	New Dissent	Wesleyan Spring Gardens	0	18	15
6			498	94	968
1	Roman Catholic	St James RC	220	0	140
21	Sub-total		6867	2002	6127
AREAS FORMING MODERN "GREATER READING"					
1	Church of England	Caversham Parish Church	260	210	0
1	Church of England	Mapledurham Parish Church	120	45	0
1	Church of England	Shinfield Parish Church	160	111	0
1	Church of England	St Andrew's Parish Church, Sonning	235	229	0
1	Church of England	St Peter's Chapel, Earley	90	100	80
1	Church of England	Theale Parish Church	200	350	0
1	Church of England	Tilehurst Parish Church	250	180	0
			1315	1225	80
1	Old Dissent	Binfield Heath Congregational	0	40	50
1	Old Dissent	Caversham Independent	0	0	60
1	Old Dissent	Chaise Heath Independent	0	0	27
1	Old Dissent	Sonning Congregationalist	0	0	30
1	Old Dissent	Tilehurst Independent	24	0	46
			24	40	213
1	New Dissent	Bethesda Countess of Huntingdon, Tilehurst	59	127	0
1	New Dissent	Shinfield Primitive Methodist	0	0	40
1	New Dissent	Woodley Primitive Methodist	36	0	45
			95	127	85
15			1434	1392	378

Sources: Berkshire and Oxfordshire Record Society editions of the census material by Kate Tiller.

The results from the areas forming the Oxford Diocese (i.e. Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire) are of particular interest because the Bishop of Oxford, Samuel Wilberforce, took a very strong line opposing the whole idea of a religious census. He was convinced that the Nonconformists, of whose scruples he clearly had a very low opinion, would use it in an effort to bump up their numbers in order to make them look good, when compared with those of the Established Church. He instructed his clergy to do all they could to prevent co-operation with the census. As a result, we find a number of returns where minimum information is given, returns filled in by the parish registrar instead of the incumbent and conversely returns that are quite substantial in their content, indicating implicitly and sometimes explicitly that the clergyman concerned thought the Bishop was

in the wrong. Thus in Reading the return for St Mary's Parish Church is a brief one of three lines, signed by Frederick West, Registrar and Master of the Coley Workhouse, but is followed by a 17-line epic on St Mary's Chapel, Castle Street, signed by the Minister, Charles Joseph Goodhart.

In fact there is very little evidence that the Nonconformists were any less honest than the Anglicans in their submissions. Both complain about the bad weather on census day preventing more from being present. So how do the results pan out? If we take Reading, as then constituted, total attendance, including no doubt some who attended more than one service, came to 14,996, just over two-thirds of the town's population of 22, 175. Of these, 60% attended Church of England places of worship, 27.5% chapels of old dissent, 10.4% those of new dissent and 2.4% the RC Church of St James. In the rural areas around Reading, the Established Church appears much stronger with nearly 82% attending, compared with less than 8% for old dissent and 9.6% for new dissent. Among the latter it is particularly notable that the Primitive Methodists are strong, a phenomenon that is repeated in other parts of Berkshire.

Whatever Wilberforce may have said of the census there is little doubt too that he took notice of the results across the diocese and locally in Reading. The remainder of his episcopate is characterised by a great period of church building and restoration to cater for the needs of the expanding population, to ensure that if folk attended the dissenting chapels it was out of choice rather than necessity. During this period in Reading we see:

1854	St Michael's, Tilehurst, reconstruction.
1857	St Peter's, Caversham, new vestry.
1861-2	Christ Church commenced.
1862-3	Greyfriars restored as a place of worship.
1863	St Peter's, Earley, enlarged.
1863-4	Restoration and extensions, St Mary the Virgin.
1865	All Saints, Downshire Square, commenced.
1867-8.	St Laurence restored.

John Dearing

#### **AN EASIER WAY TO RENEW MEMBERSHIP FROM JANUARY 2017**

You may find it easier and more convenient to set up a Standing Order for your Annual membership due **in January 2017**. The details your bank will need to process this are as follows:

Current Membership: £9 single, £18 couple

Cash and Cheque will, of course, still be accepted by your Treasurer.

So far 21 Members have used a Standing Order for paying their 2016 Subscription.

However, please ensure that Subs for 2017 are paid with a Standing Order starting in 2017 NOT 2016 (and contain your name as a reference)!

John Starr, Treasurer