

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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Winter 2017

No 44

NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Society's 40th AGM will take place on Wednesday 15th March 2017.

AGENDA

1. Welcome and Apologies.
2. Approval of Minutes of 2016 AGM.
3. Matters Arising.
4. Chairman's Report and Review.
5. Treasurer's Report
6. Election of Officers and Committee for 2017/18.

Present Officers	
Chairman	David Cliffe ☒
Vice Chairman	John Dearing [also News Editor] ☒
Secretary	Vicki Chesterman [also Programme Organiser] ☒
Treasurer	John Starr ☒
Present Committee	
Sean Duggan [Archives and Publicity] ☒	
Joy Pibworth [Minutes Secretary] ☒	
Sidney Gold ☒	
John Whitehead ☒	

☒ Prepared to stand again. Any other nominations for these posts with names of proposers and seconders should be submitted to the Secretary, prior to the meeting.

7. To elect an Independent Examiner of Accounts.
8. Any Other Business

THOUGHTS FROM THE CHAIR

By now, I hope that you will have hung up your History of Reading Society calendar on the wall, and seen the 2017 programme, which is as usual very varied. Looking at the programmes of local history societies in other towns, it is obvious that many of them include more general history talks. Here in Reading, we manage to put together a programme that deals just with the history of the town and its immediate locality. In some measure this must be due to Reading's geographical location and historical importance. After our talks, I'm often surprised when I think

of all that has happened here in the past, sometimes very close to where we have been sitting in the Abbey Baptist Church. And we are fortunate that there are so many good people around who are keen to tell us what they have discovered, and we're grateful to them.

Last year's Heritage Open Days were well publicised, and I made a couple of visits. The first was to the Blake's Lock Pumping Station, where an art exhibition was being held in the turbine house. It was a long time since I had been there, and I had forgotten the surprising view from the turbine house, looking down stream. When the leaves are on the trees growing on either hand, you think you are in the middle of the countryside, but a walk along Kenavon Way or Kennet Side soon shows that you are not. Afterwards, my brother and I enjoyed a glass of beer, sitting in the sunshine by the weir outside, courtesy of the Bel and the Dragon Restaurant.



Catacombs in Holy Trinity Church – D Cliffe

My other visit was to Holy Trinity Church, in Oxford Road. It dates from 1825-7, when this part of Oxford Road, near the end of Russell Street, was a very well-to-do area, as the large three-storey houses attest. At the time, it was fashionable to deposit the bodies of deceased loved ones in catacombs. The church was built on brick arches, on ground which falls away from the road, giving lots of space below the floor. There are no bones or skulls to be seen – the bodies were sealed in brick compartments built between the arches, with inscriptions on stones facing the aisles. This custom did not last for very long: whether this was as a result of an Act of Parliament, an edict from the Church of England, local byelaws, or changing fashion I haven't yet discovered. Under Holy Trinity, many of the spaces are unoccupied. In past years I have been told that it was not safe to go down there, but in 2016, a visit to the catacombs was offered, and I jumped at the chance. There are steep steps to go down, and the lighting is not very good, but for me, that made the visit even more "atmospheric." The church may be a suitable venue for one of our summer visits. Having no wish to take over the whole newsletter, I'd better not mention the various treasures and curiosities in the church itself.

For me, the end of 2016 brought a deluge of local history material from local historians. Someone was clearing out a garage, and was trying to get rid of several hundred glass lantern sides, and a load of photographic prints and brass-rubbings from Berkshire churches. It turned out

that some of them had belonged to Llewellyn Treacher of Twyford, with photographs of the Twyford, Ruscombe and Wargrave areas, and lots of pictures of chalk pits and prehistoric flint implements, dating from the 1890s. The rest of them had belonged to F. M. Underhill, who was very much involved in the Berkshire Archaeological Society in the 1950s and 60s. Some of the photographs show the interiors of rooms in the Reading University Extension College – the forerunner of the University of Reading, and a few of them were obviously taken from the cockpits of bomber aircraft over German cities in the Second World War. And others were photographs of his family holidays. The Berkshire Record Office is currently cataloguing its Underhill collection, and now has this additional material. I'm hoping that the Museum of English Rural Life, which already has a large collection of photographs by Mr. Treacher, will collect the rest of the material in the near future.

A little later, I received a second consignment, mainly of photographs and postcards of the Reading area, collected by Gerry Westall. I was sad to hear that he had passed away – but honoured to be asked to sort through his collection, and save what was worth saving. Gerry was very much involved with researching material held in the archive of the Museum of English Rural Life, as a volunteer. The images which are not already in the Central Library's collection will be catalogued, and made available for viewing on the library website – and I have made a start, but it will take some months.

I've also promised to help the Berkshire Industrial Archaeology Group sort their collection of 35mm slides, so 2017 will be busy, but I hope to get through everything in due course.

It appears that the cost of digitising the Reading insurance maps is greater than we anticipated. They are a wonderful but rather under-used source of information on what went on in central Reading between the 1890s and the 1950s, showing what buildings were constructed of, what they were being used for, and what was stored in them. Because complete sets of copies are so rare, libraries and record offices have to keep them in secure storage, but once digitised, we hope to make copies much more available, on CD, and possibly on websites as well. We shall be investigating other sources of funding. We have not given up!

There has been a particularly fine crop of pre-Christmas new local history titles. Traditionally the Chairman reads out the details of new publications at the beginnings of our meetings, and I wonder if it would be worth posting them on our website, for the benefit of those who couldn't be at a particular meeting. I'm grateful to Sidney Gold for collecting these details. One of the highlights of the year must be the new book on Reading Abbey by Prof. Ron Baxter. Then published locally we have had books by Katie Amos on the Mansion House, Mike Cooper on war-time bombing, and John Mullaney on the Abbey Stone. And then the Central Library has published a series of booklets, which include Mike Cooper on Southcote, Mike Cooper on Tilehurst, Ann Smith on shops in Reading, Ann Smith again on Reading in the 1970s, plus "Around Reading in 99 (or so) Facts."

In the pipe-line, I know that there are books on Chiltern Queens buses and Smith's Luxury Coaches to come, from John Whitehead and Paul Lacey respectively. The book on Reading Cinemas is virtually ready, and we hope to have it published by Two Rivers Press on behalf of our Society. Publication is likely to be in September. So there really does seem to be a healthy amount of local history research and publication going on!

David Cliffe

In case you didn't know, the book on Cinemas is authored by our Chairman!

IF YOU MISSED IT

Here follow reports on the talks given to the Society during the Autumn of 2016.

'How the Railway Came to Reading' was the subject of the September talk. The speaker was Paul Joyce, the chairman of the Reading Transport Group, a society founded in 1974 that hosts public meetings in Caversham on the subject of transport.

The first serious idea for a railway service at Reading came from some Bristol merchants who in 1832 wanted to link their city with London; they were only interested in transporting goods, not passengers.

In 1833 the Great Western Railway engaged the engineer, Isambard Kingdom Brunel, to survey a possible route. The original scheme was for the line to terminate in south London at Surrey Docks; had this plan been executed the line would have passed through Whitley with a branch line to Reading. Finally, the route chosen would pass through the centre of Reading to terminate at Paddington, then on the edge of London.

There was much local opposition to the proposed railway: the Kennet & Avon Canal Company, stagecoach operators and coaching inns all feared a loss of business; also, local landowners, among them the 1st. Duke of Wellington, had concerns about the intrusion of the railway.

The new railway would face many engineering challenges along its route. A deep two mile cutting through a hill at Sonning was excavated to avoid a steep gradient; the use of high explosives to blast through the hill cost the lives of many navvies. The railway arrived at Reading in 1840 and the first passenger service to London departed at 6am on March 30th; the duration of the journey was one hour and five minutes.

The layout of the first station building was highly inefficient: it had only one platform for trains travelling in both directions; to share it caused much confusion and many accidents but astonishingly it was not improved until the 1890s!

The railways around Reading continued to expand: in the late 1840s the Great Western opened lines to Basingstoke and the south coast and west towards Newbury and the West Country. In 1849 the South Eastern Railway built a line to link Reading with Kent and Surrey via Redhill. A signalling works and goods yard were built behind Caversham Road.

Paul showed the members a selection of some of the 800 images of the local railways in his collection and told us stories about the many people who worked on the railway that he had met over the years.

In recent times the station has been rebuilt, first in the late 1980s with the new ticket hall and Brunel Shopping Arcade and in 2012 with the rebuilding of the platforms and footbridge to handle the growth in passenger traffic in the 21st. century.

The subject of the October talk was '**A Decade of Change: Reading in the 1970s**'. The speaker was Ann Smith, a retired librarian who worked in the local studies department at Reading Central Library.

Ann began her talk by showing images of eminent public figures of the decade such as the prime ministers: Ted Heath, Harold Wilson, James Callaghan and Margaret Thatcher; and icons of popular culture such as the pop music group Abba, the winners of the 1974 Eurovision song contest. After previous failed attempts Britain would finally join the European Economic Community (EEC), the EU's predecessor, in 1973.

The start of the decade would see a comprehensive rebuilding of much of the town centre to create a new shopping and civic quarter: the Butts Shopping Centre and street market, curiously renamed Broad Street Mall in the 1990s; the Civic Offices, a new home for the borough council; the Hexagon Theatre; a new Police Station and Magistrates' Courts in Castle Street, and flanking them, the first stage of the Inner Distribution Road (IDR).

In 1971 the borough's population was 132,939 compared with today's 155,698. People and commerce were drawn to the town by the extension of the M4 motorway between Maidenhead and Bristol, and the A329M to Bracknell. In 1976 the Inter-City high speed train service to London Paddington was introduced.

New housing estates to accommodate the growing population were built at Caversham Park, at Orts Road in east Reading and at Dee Road in Tilehurst. Ann showed the meeting slides of the typical family homes where a family were gathered round the television set in a room with vibrantly patterned walls, furniture and carpets.

During the 1970s the trades that had driven Reading's economic growth in the previous 100 years would leave the town altogether including: biscuit manufacture at Huntley & Palmer; Sutton's Seeds; brick manufacture at Collier's in Tilehurst. The Simond's brewery at Bridge Street would relocate to Whitley Wood. These industries would be replaced by employment in information technology, insurance and distribution services.

1971 saw the launch of the Reading Festival, a venue for Rock music which continues to thrive. In 1974 the BBC chose a local family, the Wilkins, to appear in a television programme to document their daily lives. In 1976 the cost of the average semi-detached house was £12,000!

The subject of the November talk was **Allen W. Seaby: Art and Nature**. The speaker was Martin Andrews who is a lecturer in the Department of Typography & Graphic Communication at the University of Reading and President of the Reading Guild of Artists. Martin co-authored a study of Seaby's life with the artist's grandson, Robert Gillmor, in 2014 to coincide with an exhibition at the Reading Art Gallery.

Allen William Seaby, artist and ornithologist, was born in London in 1867 to Augustin and Louisa Seaby, his father was a carpenter and cabinet maker. Allen Seaby is best known today for the set of paintings of birds that illustrated *The British Bird Book* first published in 1910; it was the first ornithological book to include pictures of the birds' eggs.

Seaby qualified as a primary school teacher in 1888; later that year he moved to Reading where he obtained a post as a teacher at Reading Central Boys' School in Katesgrove. He enrolled for evening classes at the Reading School of Art, then at Valpy Street; his tutor there was Dawson Barkas, a notable watercolour artist. When it became part of Reading University College at London Road in 1895 Seaby enrolled on a fine art course there and graduated with first class honours. In 1899 he joined the staff and, eventually, in 1911 he succeeded Walter Crane as the head of Reading School of Art.

Seaby became highly proficient in the genre of Japanese woodcut printing; he learned the art from Walter Crane's assistant at University College, Frank Morley Fletcher, who had introduced the technique from Japan. It is an ancient craft where an image is drawn onto thin paper which is then glued face down onto a plank of, usually, Cherry wood, an incision would be made along each drawing line and then the wood chiselled along these lines. The block was coloured using an ink brush. Martin showed the members many of Seaby's prints that employed this process.

Seaby took an active role in all aspects of University life and was made Professor of Fine Art in 1920. In collaboration with William Smallcombe, curator of Reading Museum & Art Gallery, he established the Reading Guild of Artists in 1930; Seaby became its first President and was a life long exhibitor at its annual exhibitions. The Guild continues to thrive today.



Hare in Snow by Allen Seaby, c. 1923

During his lifetime, Seaby published 25 of his own books; his first, *Nelson's Blackboard Drawing*, appeared in 1904. One of his last books was on the subject of ponies, particularly rare breeds, for Puffin Books in 1949; he and his family often enjoyed holidays in the New Forest to see the animals. He contributed many articles and illustrations to other authors' books. He died in 1953.

Sean Duggan

Unfortunately we are not able to include a report of Mrs. Joan Dils' presidential lecture on the Reformation in Reading – readers can be assured, though, that it was as ever excellent value for money!

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

We shall once again be holding a **Book Sale** at our April meeting, on Wednesday the 19th. For it to be a success depends largely on donations coming from our members. We would appreciate books preferably on local history or books that you consider of interest to members of a Local History Society but please do not donate any fictional material. This year will also include a good selection of postcards. Please bring books along to the meetings and give them either to David Cliffe, this year's organiser, or Sidney Gold for storage.

On **Wednesday** 21st June Society members are invited to a visit to the Reading Minster of St Mary the Virgin, St Marys Butts, Reading RG1 2HX. The tour party is to congregate at the main entrance to the Minster at **7.15pm**, ready for the tour to commence at **7.30pm**. Parking is available in the Broad Street Mall (£3.50 from 6pm-8am).

On **Wednesday** 19th July members are invited to a tour of the Berkshire Medical Museum at the Royal Berkshire Hospital, Reading. The tour party is to congregate at the main steps of the old hospital building (on London Road) at **7.15pm**, ready for the tour to commence at **7.30pm**. There is parking onsite (£1.50 per hour or part hour).

Members are invited to book their places for these outings at the March or May meetings. Places are limited to **30** for each visit. **There is a £2 per person charge for each of these outings, payable upon booking. If unable to book in person, please contact Vicki Chesterman at email shown on Page 1.**

READINGS... AND REDDINGS THAT WERE READINGS - by Charles J. Adams III

We have in the dim and distant past published information about Reading, Pennsylvania and its links with Reading, England, but we are now indebted to Mr Adams, who hails from the former township/ city for information about some of the numerous other Readings across the pond. If only for its international influence, surely it is high time Reading received city status, accorded to it by Mr Adams!

If Reading, UK, is the "mother city" of Reading, PA, then the British city has several grandchildren from its old colonial offspring. After Reading, UK, begat Reading, PA, Reading, PA begat several other Readings. There are several towns, townships, and cities named "Reading" scattered across the United States (and one in Jamaica, in St. James Parish, just around the bend from Montego Bay). And, several have interesting etymologic origins.

Let's get those "Reddings" out of the way first.

Redding, Maine, has virtually fallen off the face of the Vacation State. Named after early settlers John and George Redding, there was a post office by that name in Oxford County, from 1899 to 1942. A stark reminder of its existence is the Redding Cemetery on another remnant, Redding Road. In an article titled "The Passing of Redding" in *The New England Quarterly*, June, 1947, Keith Huntress wrote, "Reading is not a town...a name standing for a small group of houses built around a crossroads." By that time, Redding was a ghost town.

Redding, California was settled by a man called Reading but named in 1880 after another man named Redding. Originally "Reading," after pioneer Pierson B. Reading, the settlement was officially dubbed "Redding" after the railroad came to town. This referred to Southern Pacific Railroad executive Benjamin B. Redding. This name was chosen by the railroad, over and above the residents' objections.

Redding, Connecticut was also, originally, Reading. It was named after either Reading, Berkshire, England, or John Read, a prominent local landowner, clergyman and lawyer. Whatever the root of the name might have been, townsfolk chose to spell their place "Redding" so as not to be mistakenly pronounced as "Reading," as in ...a book.

The "**Reading**" of **Massachusetts** pre-dates the "Reading" of Pennsylvania by more than a century. Named by some of its first settlers after Reading (UK), Reading (MA) was incorporated in 1644, 58 years before Thomas and 62 years before Richard Penn—the founders of Reading, Pennsylvania, were even born.

Reading, Michigan is a city (population 1,078 with one blinking yellow traffic light) in Hillsdale County. It is most curious to folks in all other Readings in that those 1,078 folks pronounced their hometown "REED-ing." It is also home to Reading High School. The town was founded in 1840 as Basswood Corners, owing to the stands of basswood trees there. In 1869, the settlement grew as a stop on the Fort Wayne, Jackson & Saginaw Railroad, and "was renamed to Reading, after the well-known town in Pennsylvania" in 1873. In the late 19th century, two newspapers were published in the town under the names "The Reading Telephone" and the "The Reading Hustler." Among its most notable residents, past and present, was Sile (Silas) Doty, a convicted murderer who was also described as a "robber, horse thief, highwayman, counterfeiter, and criminal gang leader" and "the most noted thief and daring burglar of his time." He died in Reading on March 13, 1876.

Reading, Ohio has always been Reading. What's more, according to the city's historical records, it is named after the legacy of Harvey (or Harry) Redinbo, who was reportedly from Reading, Pennsylvania. According to the Buckeye State city's historical records, Redinbo purchased land in the area in 1797, and the settlement was named after his hometown.

Reading is again represented a bit north from the above-referenced Cincinnati suburb of Reading. In the 1883 *History of Fairfield and Perry Counties, Ohio* we learn that Peter Overmyer settled there in 1802 and established a village that became known as Overmeyertown. Later, it was re-named, and remains, **New Reading**, in Reading Township. The book unequivocally says of Reading Township, "It derived its name from Reading, Pennsylvania."

But wait, there's yet another **Reading** in Ohio. Or, at least, there was. About an hour west from Pittsburgh, is **Columbiana County**, Ohio, with its own little – very little – Reading. In fact, in the *History of Columbiana County, Ohio and Representative Citizens*, William B. McCord said that Reading was a "small and practically extinct hamlet situated midway between North Georgetown and Homeworth." He noted that it was laid out in 1840 and that it "was expected by some that this would be the center of trade for the township. The hamlet never extended beyond the limits of its original 40 acres."

The "city" of **Reading, Kansas**, (population 231) is in **Lyon County**. Another railroad town, this one was founded along the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe. It was formed in 1870 and is said to have been named after McMann & Co., a Reading, PA-based firm that owned the land upon which the village was laid out. According to a town history, "A town company for Reading was organized with James Fagan as president of it. A town site of 60 acres was laid off and called Reading, in honor of Reading, Pennsylvania." In the 1883 *History of the State of Kansas*, William G. Cutler described Reading as "a pleasant little village of 50 inhabitants... located on rolling prairie, fifteen miles northeast of Emporia."

Author Laura M. French clarified the PA-KS Reading connection in her 1929 *History of Emporia and Lyon County, Kansas*. It was, as Berks County historians would have surmised, not a "McMann," but the "McManus" company that sunk its roots in the soil of the Sunflower State.

Much of the land upon which Reading was established was on the Sac and Fox Indian Reservation. According to French, "Records show that, on June 15, 1867, the United States Government deeded to John McManus, a government Indian agent, a tract or tracts of land of 132,310.95 acres, in consideration of his securing certain promises and a treaty from the Indians. Portions of this land were sold to Seyfert, McManus & Company, of Brooklyn, New York, a corporation. This land later was sold to the Reading (Pennsylvania) Iron Works, also a corporation, which was the owner in 1870, when the Santa Fe, pushing through Kansas, wished to establish a station at a convenient distance between Osage City and Emporia.

"The Reading Town Company—the new town was named for the Pennsylvania city of that name - consisted of John McManus, president, representing the Iron Works, and Edwin Wilder, of

Topeka, treasurer of the Santa Fe Railway Company, secretary. The Reading Iron Works sold to the Santa Fe a half section of land on which to establish its station, and all of section 3 to the Reading Town Company. McManus, who was a civil engineer, a graduate of an Irish university and an extremely able man, was the active member of the Town Company. He and James Fagan platted the town site tract. McManus also was agent for the Reading Iron Works. Incorporation papers for the town of Reading were filed for record March 19, 1872.

"Records also show that name of Seyfert, McManus & Company, a corporation was, January 14, 1878, by legal process in Berks County, Pennsylvania, changed to the Reading Iron Works, also a corporation, and no doubt an amalgamation. All this probably leads to the belief by some persons that Reading was founded by the Reading Iron Works.

"Reading was incorporated as a city of the third class September 1, 1890."

Reading Township is in **Livingston County, Illinois**, which wraps around the small city of Pontiac. In a somewhat vague reference in the 1878 *History of Livingston County, Illinois*, (W.M. Le Baron Jr. & Co., Chicago) it was noted that the first settlers of Reading Township were from "the Keystone State."

Reading, New York is a town of about 1,800 people located in Schuyler County, along Seneca Lake, one of the Finger Lakes. It encompasses a portion of the village of Watkins Glen.

Reading, Vermont (pop. 666) was chartered in 1761 and named after Reading, MA.



Reading, Minnesota, is in **Nobles County**, the extreme SW corner of the state, closer to Sioux Falls, SD. Although it is also a town that grew along a rail line, the Badger State Reading was named after H.H. Read, a landowner who sold his farm to the Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Northern in 1899. It's still possible to "Take a Ride on the Reading" in the Minnesota—aboard one of the motor coaches of the Reading Bus Lines, an 18-vehicle fleet based there. The only thing is...you'd be taking a Ride on the REED-ing, as that's the way the town pronounces its name.

MORE ABOUT MORING'S

In the last issue, we showed a picture of a tin which had once contained sweets made by Frank Moring, of Caversham Road, Reading, and were asking whether anyone knew about the business or the family.

In response to the request came a reply from Katie Amos, who works with the local studies collection in the Central Library. Katie is expert in searching online databases. She has been able to show that Frank Moring came from London, where he married Elizabeth Chilton in 1885. They had two children, Lillie Blanche Moring and Frank Chilton Moring, in 1887 and 1892 respectively. At the time, Frank senior was working for a life assurance company.

Why the family moved into the confectionery business in Reading is not known. By 1901, Frank's niece, Dora Merton, was working in the business, and the family was living over the shop. By 1911, they had moved to a house called "Pearlville" in Priory Avenue, Caversham, where they employed a maid, Minnie Halcoop. Mrs. Moring's aunt, Mary Ann Goodman, was staying with them. Dora Merton had been joined by Lillie Moring in the business, and young Frank was a commercial traveller – in what we don't know, but it may well have been confectionery.

Eventually, young Frank took over the business. The family went up in the world, and were living in Woodcote Road, Caversham. The firm was dealing in wholesale grocers' and chemists'

sundries, haberdashery, hardware and tobacco, as well as being a manufacturer of sugar confectionery. Young Frank married Irene Jackson, but they do not appear to have had children. His sister Lillie married Arthur Nutt in 1914, and they had a son, Patrick, who by 1939 was a commercial traveller in confectionery, probably for the family firm.

Quite why the business came to an end around 1958 is not known. Frank the younger lived on until 1980, and his wife, Mary, until 1982. Patrick Nutt died in 1994.

Katie also found an advertisement for Moring's in an online edition of the "Berkshire Chronicle" from December 1908. "From all parts of Reading and the country," it says, "hundreds of retail dealers send orders, and the showrooms reveal the enormous energy which is being put into the Christmas confectionery and toy trades. If manufacturers have provided a more novel and better article, Mr. Moring has secured it." The article goes on to mention various Christmas novelty toys and sweets, with sweet-tins in the shape of ships, coal-scuttles and chickens that laid eggs. In its heyday, it must have been an impressive establishment.



Caversham Road, Reading

By chance, a few weeks after publication, I was sent this photograph, which shows Moring's shop, to the left of "The Clifton" public house. This was the part of Caversham Road just down from Greyfriars School – today land beside the ramp leading from Caversham Road to the roundabout where Friar Street, Cheapside and Chatham Street meet.

SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 2017

Thanks to the 76 members who have already paid the £9 pp Membership due on 1st January. As at 5th January, only six of the 20 standing orders, paid in 2016 had turned up in the HSBC account! If you think you might be one of the 14 you may like to check with the Treasurer that the payment has now gone through.