

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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ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE HISTORY OF READING SOCIETY

At our AGM Dr John Starr formally retired as Treasurer but he has kindly offered to continue doing the books while a successor is sought. Any offers from members will be very welcome!

On **Wednesday** 20th June the History of Reading Society members are invited to visit Greyfriars Church, Friar Street, Reading RG1 1EH. The tour party is to congregate at the main entrance to the Church 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) or Chatham Street car park (£3.50 for 2 hours).

On **Thursday** 26th July the History of Reading Society members are invited to visit the Museum of English Rural Life, Redlands Road, Reading RG1 5EX. The group is to congregate at the main entrance to the Museum at **7.15pm**, ready for our groups visit to commence at **7.30pm**. We have arranged for three parking spaces on site for those with mobility problems. There is on-street parking available (pay at meter, 2 hour time limit) or in the Royal Berkshire Hospital (multi-storey car park on Craven Road or London Road car park (£1.50 per hour)).

Members are invited to book their places at the May 16th meetings, or by email to. Places are limited to **30**. **There is a £2 per person charge per outing, payable upon booking.**

THOUGHTS FROM THE CHAIR

Between January and April, some money has flowed into our coffers as a result of fund-raising on the part of some of our committee members and friends. The "Riverside Reading" calendars, and the Christmas cards brought in around £70. Then at our April meeting, the book sale was even more successful, bringing in a further £118. Thanks are due to everyone who helped, and I feel I must mention particularly Sidney Gold, Sean Duggan, John and Rosemary Whitehead, Sylvia Clarke, and Vicki Chesterman. And, as

usual, special thanks must also go to Steve Hodge, the caretaker at Abbey Baptist Church, who has always been so helpful at the book sales, nor must I forget those kind people who brought in the books for us to sell.

The money will be used to keep subscriptions low, and will enable us to undertake further publishing projects: we have an "A-Z of Reading Pubs" in preparation, and have another book about a journey by tram across the town in mind.

Please remember that we have some of the books about Reading Cinemas, "Picture Palace to Penny Plunge," still in stock. I'll be bringing copies to meetings until we have sold out, and if you're thinking of buying a copy (£12), please buy it at a meeting, so that the Society can get its outlay back.

And while thinking of finances, I hope I may be forgiven by reminding you that the Society still needs a Treasurer. Ideally, this should be a member of the Society, who comes to some of our meetings. Both our Examiner of Accounts and our outgoing Treasurer assure me that the job is not onerous, and you don't need a qualification in accountancy to take it on. You just need to be numerate!

I was sorry to have missed the talk by Raymond Simonds in April, but had decided to take a holiday then. It was a welcome change, doing something completely different in a different part of the world, and I probably needed it. At the time of writing, there is the May meeting, about Greyfriars Church, still to come. It will be followed by the visit to the church on June 20th. The new "Pevsner" describes it as "the best-preserved English Franciscan church," even though at some stage it lost its east end. The other summer visit is to the Museum of English Rural Life, on Thursday July 26.

I hope you will enjoy the visits, and the summer holidays. Your committee has started work on the programme for 2019!

David Cliffe

IF YOU MISSED IT

Here follow reports by Sean Duggan on the talks given to the Society during the first four months of 2018.

The subject of the January talk was the 'History of Katesgrove'. The speaker was Evelyn Williams who has lived in the area for almost twenty years. Evelyn has done much research into the area's history, particularly its industry, and was a founder member and is a regular contributor to the Whitley Pump the local news website for Katesgrove.

The modern spelling of Katesgrove has several antecedents: Cadeles Grove, Catsgrove, Cattlegrove and Cattell's Grove. The area developed around the old Reading to Winchester Road (modern Southampton Street) and is today a rich urban pudding of narrow streets lined mostly with Victorian terrace houses, many with ornate polychrome brickwork, and its skyline still dominated by the spire of St. Giles's Church.

Evelyn showed slides of some of the earliest maps of the area: on the John Speed map of 1611 a prominent landmark was Katesgrove House. One of its residents, French exile Count Charles Jean d'Hector, participated in the unsuccessful military campaign to restore the monarchy in France after the revolution. The house was sold for £1,000 in 1873 then demolished to make way for Katesgrove School. We were shown an early view of the area the panorama sketched by Samuel Buck in 1734: looking north from Bob's Mount it depicts men digging the clay used in brick making, also, the river Kennet is clearly visible winding its way through the landscape.

The area attracted a diverse range of industries: in the 1830s the Philbrick family established a tannery in Katesgrove Lane; it processed animal skins for the leather trade; an unpleasant concomitant was the foul smell it produced. Nearby was the Reading Iron Works active from 1818; today some of the cast-iron lamp standards it made survive

around Reading. Many brickworks were established in the area; Rose Kiln Lane is a reminder of the trade. Katesgrove's last brickworks, at Elgar Road, closed in the 1950s.

Until quite recently Katesgrove abounded with public houses: the Tanners' Arms in Orchard Street, the Red Cow in Crown Street, the Kennet Arms in Pell Street and the Greyhound in Silver Street to name but a few. During 1877, in opposition to the proliferation of ale houses in the area, St. Giles Parish Church opened the Rising Sun Temperance House at Silver Street. For an annual fee members had the use of a library and reading-room, could play billiards and, most important, could partake of non-intoxicating refreshments. Recently, after a long period of neglect, a group of volunteers rescued the building from the blight of vandalism and today it is a thriving arts centre. (Ed: *And also, for better or worse, has a licence for sale of alcoholic beverages!*)

The subject of the February talk was the History of the Abbey Baptist Church, Reading. The speakers were members of the congregation.

The talk began with a brief history of the Baptists in England.

The Baptist church emerged in the religious reforms which swept through Europe in the sixteenth century in the wake of the proclamations of the German monk Martin Luther. Luther and his followers believed the Roman Catholic Church had become corrupt and its theology debased through the worship of saints and other religious images and which they considered to be forbidden in the Ten Commandments, instead they wanted a form of worship that would focus on the scriptures contained in the Bible.

In about 1640 it is thought that a small group of Baptists, or Anabaptists as they were then known, established their first place of worship in Reading at a rented house in Pigney Lane near Castle Street. They had no minister to lead them and little money to support themselves.



Baptists at this time were still persecuted by the established church and were known in derision as dissenters. The Reading born Archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud, would dispatch his spies to raid places where dissenters were thought to worship: behind the house in Pigney Lane a wooden bridge was thrown across the Holy Brook to enable a swift escape during a raid.

In 1678 John Rance was elected their first minister and in 1686 they acquired the freehold of a building in Church Street off London Street, it comprised: a meeting house, accommodation for the minister and a burial ground. A notable event in its history occurred in 1688 when shortly before his death the writer and puritan preacher John Bunyan delivered his penultimate sermon there.

King's Road Baptist Church

At the start of the eighteenth century the congregation had swelled to 38 gentlemen and 66 ladies, and so a new meeting house was opened at Hosier's Lane (today's Hosier Street) on Easter Day 1752 and Thomas Whitewood was its first minister. The lease on this building was due to expire in 1834 so a site for another new church was purchased at King's Road, Reading in 1832 for £310 and John James Cooper, a local architect, designed the building.

The new church could accommodate over 900 worshippers and benefited from gas lighting, later, a Sunday school was added. At King's Road the Baptist ministry in Reading would reach its zenith; daughter-churches were established elsewhere in Reading: Wycliffe Church at Cemetery Junction; at Carey Street and the Anderson Memorial at Amhurst Road to name but a few. At Wokingham the Baptist burial ground was established where people could be buried side by side regardless of gender or social status.

Among the King's Road congregation of note were Edward Phillip Collier the brick manufacturer and Edward Jackson founder of the Jackson's department store; Jackson would become the first Baptist mayor of Reading. In 1980 the congregation moved to a new building across the Holy Brook and the old church was demolished in 1983. Today the church is shared with Baptists from Ghana, Portugal and Sri Lanka.

The subject of the March talk was Coley and Coley Park: An Historical Introduction. The speakers were Katie Amos and Mike Cooper who are the co-authors of a recent book about Coley's history.

The origin for Coley's name is Anglo-Saxon it meaning 'charcoal clearing'. The earliest mention of Coley (or Colleia) is written in the records of Reading Abbey for the year 1130, however, traces of human settlement have been traced back even earlier to the Roman occupation of Britain: Roman coins and Anglo-Saxon pottery were discovered along the Holy Brook.

The early history of Coley is closely bound up with the Vachells; they were the pre-eminent family for over 400 years. John Vachell purchased land there in 1309 and erected a house, Coley Park, on the banks of the Holy Brook. Today, all that remains of the house is the stable block and dovecote, later to become Coley Park Farm, and now converted to housing. Another remnant of their era are the almshouses in Castle Street.

In 1643, during the siege of Reading in the English Civil Wars, substantial defences



were erected along the banks of the Holy Brook and at Bath Road; fragments are thought to remain in some of the back gardens around Field Road. The conflagration would result in the destruction of Coley Park; the house was not rebuilt until the early 1800s by John Berkeley Monck at a site on higher ground.

In the nineteenth century chalk mines, brick works, a jam factory and a railway goods yard were among the new industries that would

Coley Park House

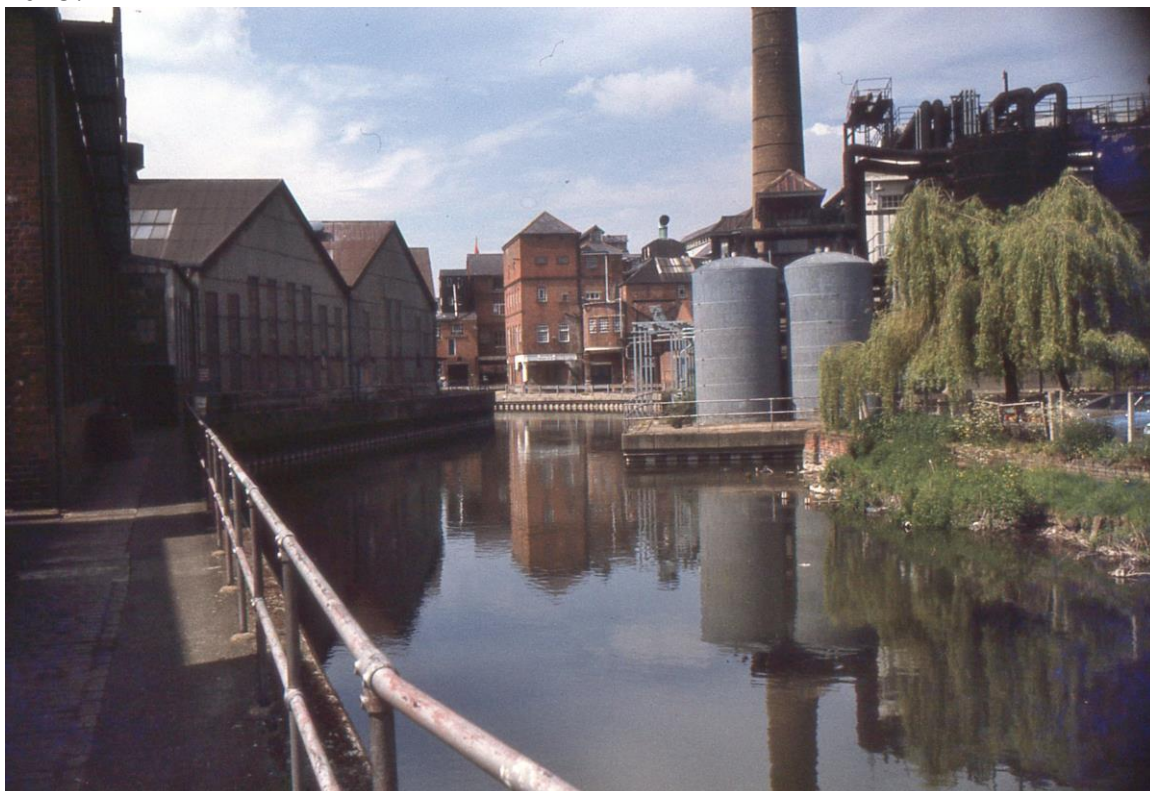
end the dominance of agriculture over the local economy. By the 1880s the population had grown to 4,000 and many were crammed into the slum housing known as 'courts'; these tottering structures would blight Coley well into the next century.

In the twentieth century urban growth would eclipse that of the previous century; eventually new housing would encircle Coley Park House. In 1955 Reading Borough Council bought most of the parkland around the house for £11,514 and by the late 1960s it was mostly built-up. A prominent landmark would be the three blocks of 14 storey flats erected at Wensley Road in 1961; at the time the weekly rent for a three bedroom flat was two pounds, two shillings and two pence.

The subject of the April talk was the Simonds family of Reading. The speaker was Raymond Simonds whose father, Duncan, was the last family member to be a director at Simonds Brewery. Raymond was born at Pangbourne and completed his formal education at Bradfield College and later forged a career in the hospitality business.

The Simonds family's connections to Reading and Berkshire can be traced back many centuries through the extensive family tree; its members came from around Britain and Europe. A notable early figure was William Simonds (c1488-1547) who was twice mayor of Windsor in 1529 and 1542. Later, his reputation was ruined when he was found guilty of perjury for the evidence he gave at the trial of four men accused of heresy: they were all found guilty and sentenced to death. Subsequently, they were all posthumously pardoned by King Henry VIII and William died a pauper a few years later.

An eminent figure in the family's history was William Blackall Simonds (1762-1843) who soon after he married at the age of 22 inherited his father's small brewing business at Broad Street, Reading. He was ambitious and expanded the business; during the 1790s he established the sprawling brewery at Bridge Street: the site, shrewdly chosen, had access to the many wharves along the River Kennet and included 'The Bear' coaching inn which faced Bridge Street a thoroughfare used by stagecoaches. William commissioned the celebrated architect Sir John Soane to design a house for the family within the brewery site.



By the 1830s the brewery was producing 15,000 barrels a year and had 30 pubs around Reading. A major coup was to obtain the contract to supply beer to the Military Academy at Sandhurst. William, never one to keep all his eggs in one basket,

The Brewery (now defunct) in 1982

later ventured into banking and established, in partnership with his cousins John and Charles, the J & C Simonds Bank with premises at King Street, Reading; the business merged with Barclays Bank in 1913.

The year 1843 saw the birth of George Blackall Simonds: before absorbing himself in the brewing business and eventually becoming the chairman, he had established a successful career as a sculptor. Around Reading he left a rich legacy: the Maiwand War Memorial (the lion on the plinth) at Forbury Gardens, the Queen Victoria statue in Friar Street and the George Palmer statue now at Palmer Park to name but a few.

At the time of the brewery's merger with Courage Brewery in the 1960s the business was valued at £9,800,000 and owned 1,200 pubs, later the brewery was rebuilt at Worton Grange south of Reading; it closed in 2010. Today, the site at Bridge Street is mostly occupied by the Oracle Shopping Centre: a reminder of the former brewery is commemorated in the information board at Kennet Side erected by the Reading Civic Society and Simonds family in 2009.

BOOK SALE



One of the unusual items in the book sale, snapped up by the undersigned, was a Baptism certificate dating from the early 20th century. As depicted it records that Muriel Dorothy Pullen of Edgehill Street, Katesgrove, was baptised at St Giles Church on December 2nd 1903. The rite was evidently administered by the Revd W S Mahony, a curate, but the certificate is signed off by the then Vicar, Revd Robert W. Carew Hunt (1903-11). Investigations have revealed that Muriel was later the stepmother of our own Sidney Gold and lived to a great age, until 2002. I intend to donate the item to St Giles' archives.

John Dearing

TONY CORLEY

I have recently been told of the death of Tony (Thomas Anthony Buchanan) Corley, the economic historian. Hopefully we shall be able to find someone to write us a fuller obituary for a future issue. He ended his career at the University of Reading as a Senior Lecturer at the International Business History Centre.

As well as papers published in academic journals, he published books on the Burmah Oil Company, Beecham's, the makers of the pills, and, of course, Huntley and Palmers, the biscuit makers. But besides these, he wrote many shorter histories of Berkshire and Reading enterprises, published in the *Berkshire Archaeological Journal*. These include *The Old Breweries of Berkshire, 1741-1984*; *Simonds Brewery of Reading, 1760-1960*; *A Small Berkshire Enterprise: J. Dymore Brown and Son [brewers at Reading] 1831-1944*; *The Earliest Reading Bank: Marsh, Deane and Company, 1788-1815*; *The Celebrated Reading Sauce: Charles Cocks and Company Ltd., 1789-1962*; *Barrett, Exall and Andrewes' Ironworks at Reading*; *Huntley, Boorne and Stevens and Tin Box Manufacturing in Berkshire, 1832-1985*; and three articles about Martin Hope Sutton, of the Sutton's Seeds firm in Reading, who lived 1815-1901.

He also wrote an article on Jane Austen's time at school in Reading, and a booklet for Courage's brewery in Reading, *The Road to Worton Grange*.

All of these can be seen in the local history collection at Reading Central Library, and represent a considerable achievement in themselves. Local historians and industrial archaeologists will be grateful to him for many years to come.

David Cliffe