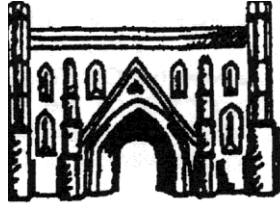


# *The History of Reading Society*



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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**Christmas 2005**

## **EDITORIAL**

Firstly a happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year to all our readers - If you get this newsletter before the date, we especially look forward to the opportunity of expressing these sentiments more tangibly at the 14 December meeting when it is anticipated that mince pies will be served with the hot beverages. Also on that date we welcome our President, Joan Dils, back to talk about the history of Caversham during the Victorian and subsequent period to 1941. Those with long memories will remember that probably more than ten years ago Joan led us on a historical tour of Caversham.

Members are also reminded that annual subscriptions are due on 1<sup>st</sup> January - please make it your New Year resolution to pay up promptly!! The new rates will be £11 for single people, £17.50 for a couple, with concessionary rates of £9 and £14.50 for senior citizen and student singles/ couples.

**Please also note a slight change to the published programme. The speakers at the APRIL and MAY meetings will now change places with Donald Beaumont taking the 19 April slot and Manfred Brod speaking on 17 May.**

## THE DOCTOR

I recently acquired a copy of *Belford Regis*, a book by the author of *Our Village*, Mary Russell Mitford. Although by no means as well known, it provides a series of snapshot of Reading town in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, in the same way that *Our Village* does for Three-Mile Cross. With a view to our February talk on the history of Reading School, I thought that Mitford's description of the headmaster of the school at Belford Regis, a thinly disguised version of Dr Richard Valpy, would be of interest to readers.

"His person had an importance and stateliness which answered to the popular notion of a schoolmaster, and certainly contributed to the influence of his manner over his pupils. So most undoubtedly did his fine countenance. It must have been a real punishment to have disturbed the serenity of those pale placid features, or the sweetness of that benevolent smile.

"Benevolence was, after all, his prime characteristic. Full of knowledge, of wisdom, and of learning, an admirable schoolmaster [here a footnote refers to the quotation from Pindar, "He teacheth best who knoweth best], and exemplary in every relation of life, his singular kindness of heart was his most distinguishing quality. Nothing could ever warp his candour - that candour which is so often the wisest justice, or stifle his charity; and his pardon followed so immediately an offence, or an injury, that people began to think that there was no great merit in such placability - that it was an affair of temperament, and that he forgave because he could not help forgiving - just as another man might have resented. His school was of course an unspeakable advantage to the town; but of all the benefits which he daily conferred upon his neighbours, his friends, his pupils, and his family, by very far the greatest was his example."

## A PLEBEIAN GARDENER

**Sidney Gold**, who recently addressed us on the subject of Reading's sculptures and public monuments, has unearthed a fascinating entry in the 1851 census concerning the Ellis family who lived in Oxford Road. In the interest of readability the information is tabulated in a vertical rather than horizontal fashion, as in the actual census record.

Sidney suggests that the clue to this very odd entry lies in Henry's identity as a member of the Chartist movement. Possibly as a Chartist he had strong opinions on the impending census and the new questions being asked, no doubt assuming it was obvious his children were sons and daughters and that they could only be boys or girls - why ask such silly questions? - as we might put it in the face of prying officialdom.

C.

Name and Surname	Henry F Ellis	Ann Ellis	Mary Ellis	Ann Ellis	Henry Ellis	John Ellis	Chs Ellis	Thos Ellis	Edw Ellis	F
Relation to Head of Familv	Head	Fruitful wife	"Olive branches round the table"							
Condition	Married	Safe enouah	I believe my daughters are girls & presume my sons are boys							
Age	38	39	15	13	11	9	7	3	Four months	
Rank Profession or Occupation	Plebeian Gardener & Chartist	Household & Maternal Carer	Parents Housemaid	Parents Housemaid	Much Work & Little Pay	Helps Brother and plays with the other	Goes to school as he goes"	Stops at home, plays with baby	Nursed tenderly	
Where born	City of Chimney Pots	Berks Ufton	Berks Reading							
Whether blind or deaf and dumb	Can hear the church bells talk tolerably & wears spec's when "day light grows dim"									

Although extended across the page (down the page In the original) the final entry may be assumed to refer to Henry Ellis himself.

Does anybody else have alternative suggestions as to why such wisecracks should appear In the enumerator's book?

## TAILPIECES

Talking of Reading authoresses a plaque commemorating Jane Austen's childhood association with the town is expected to be unveiled shortly. Jane was educated in Reading in 1785-6 and the plaque will be located near the Abbey Gateway, - where the original Abbey School (unconnected with the current school of that name) was located.

Waterstone's and possibly other bookshops currently have on sale a Reading Quiz Book - one of a series it would appear, emanating from the Francis Frith Collection.

An old friend of the Editor's has produced a very attractive booklet for the South Gloucestershire Council entitled Nonconformist Trail, providing a handy guide to chapels in that area and how to find them. With a mind to our recent talk on the Abbey Baptist Church history, it would be nice if something could be done for this area - perhaps a case for collaboration between Reading and Newbury? Compared with the numerous volumes written about England's loveliest parish churches, the Nonconformist heritage is comparatively neglected.

**Pour memoire** - help with serving refreshments after the meetings is always appreciated - volunteers need! Another potential New Year's Resolution for someone??

Since our society does not take History of Reading as the strait-jacket that it might be and occasionally crosses over the bounds into other districts and even counties I unashamedly fill up my space with these lines by Leslie Thomas - not the Virgin Soldiers chap but a pseudonym used by the late John Arlott for some of his lighter moments. The name comprises his first two Christian names, the ones which he generally chose not to use! .

Of Basingstoke in Hampshire  
The claims to fame are small -  
A derelict canal  
And a cream and green town hall.

At each week-end the 'locals'  
Line the Market Square,  
And as the traffic passes,  
They stand and stand and stare.