

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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Late Spring 2004

The summer will soon be upon us and with it our meetings move into the open air. The first of these, on 16 June, is a **Walk Around the Top of Whitley**, led by Daphne Barnes-Philips, author of "The Top of Whitley". We meet at Christ Church, Christchurch Road at 7.30 pm. The church, which we visited last year, is near to the top of Kendrick Road and street parking is available in Glebe Road, Vicarage Road, Christchurch Gardens and also the public car park in Whitley Street, next to the Wellington Arms, where the walk will conclude. Places are limited to 30 and already we are near that number. Please, therefore, contact Eddie Hooper soon if you wish to go and also if you have booked and cannot now come would you please also let him know, in the event that we have a waiting list!

For the **visit to Silchester** on 21 July, we meet at the car park (Map Reference OS Sheet 175 636.629) which is five minutes' walk from the excavations at **7.00 pm..** (*Please note that you must park in this public car park as parking along the driveway to the excavation is strictly forbidden.*) Two alternative routes are suggested, as delineated below.

FROM THE A4 (from Reading towards Newbury): At traffic lights at the Horncastle turn left towards **Burghfield**. Continue through Burghfield and Burghfield Common. On leaving **Burghfield Common** turn right and then almost immediately left onto the road to **Mortimer** and Silchester. Continue towards **Mortimer West End**. At angled junction turn right. (Left turn is signposted to Mortimer, right turn sign is missing). After about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile take left turning (Church Lane) which has a sign to the **Roman Town** at the junction. Follow this road for about one mile to a T-junction, turn left into Wall Lane and follow this road for a few hundred yards until you reach the Car Park for the Roman Site which is on the right-hand side of the road.

FROM THE M4: Turn off at Junction 11- At the Junction 11 roundabout, take the exit for the **A33** - At the next roundabout, take the 3rd exit onto **MereOak Lane** through **Three Mile Cross-** Continue onto **Bloomfieldhatch Lane**, through **Grazeley-** Bear right onto **Lambwood Hill-** Continue straight onto **Bloomfieldhatch Lane-** Bear right onto **Cross Lane**, over the railway lines- Follow the road round to the left towards **Stratfield Mortimer-**

At the mini-roundabout, go straight onto **The Street** and past the Fox & Horn pub - Continue straight onto **Victoria Road**- About 1 mile after the Fox & Horn pub, turn left down **West End Road**. - Go straight for nearly 1.5miles- Then turn left down **Church Road** and follow it down through **Mortimer West End**- After 1 mile, bear left onto **Wall Lane** and follow the road round- **PUBLIC PARKING** is on the right.

THE BAYEUX TAPESTRY

As we are all aware the Bayeux Tapestry depicts the most famous event in our history, the Battle of Hastings in 1066. The original is kept in the Archbishop's old palace at Bayeux in Normandy and is attributed to Matilda, wife of William the Conqueror and the ladies of her court. It is on linen, 230 feet long by 20 inches wide, and represents events in the lives of Edward the Confessor, Harold and William.

The facsimile was worked by 35 ladies from Leek in Staffordshire in 1885-6 whose names are embroidered on it. It was bought by Alderman Hill in 1895 and presented to the museum of Reading where it has been kept ever since, apart from going out on loan occasionally to other museums. More recently it has been cut into sections for ease of display.

According to Andrew Bridgeford, a historian writing in the Times a short while ago, the tapestry may be a subversive piece of anti-Norman propaganda made in Canterbury, rather than an account of William's triumph in 1066. His research suggests that it "was probably designed by an Anglo-Saxon artist and made by English needleworkers."

"Woven into the story is a sly celebration of Count Eustace the 2nd of Boulogne, a French rival to William for the English crown, who joined the invasion. His prominence shows English sympathy for Eustace, who within a year of the invasion led an ill-fated rebellion at Dover Castle.

"The tapestry was a secret memorial to him as much as to the military might of the victorious Normans," concluded Mr Bridgeford. "The style of the tapestries has led historians to conclude that its master artist was working in Canterbury."

So now, readers, you must decide for yourselves, which version you prefer to believe!

Norman Wicks

SOME RECENT TALKS

In February, David Downes gave a very entertaining talk on the history of Reading Football Club. This covered the story of the club from its formation in 1871 to the present day, concentrating on highlights such as the move to Elm Park in 1896, the change to professionalism at the same time, the Division 3 (South) Championship of 1926, The World War 2 years, his own involvement which began as a young supporter in the late 1940's, the hum-drum decades of the 1950's and 1960's, the promotions and relegations of the 1970's, the Simod Cup victory of 1988 and, more recently, the move to the Madejski Stadium. Since February, Reading has failed to get into the play-offs for the Premiership but no less an

authority than Sven-Goren Eriksson is tipping them as promotion prospects in the 2004-5 season. Maybe some more history will be written next year!

In April, Bent Weber's second pot-pourri from the Peter Southerton Slide Collection contained the following tribute to Peter's part in the history of our society: "Peter Southerton was one of the founding members - with his wife, Mary - of the Society in the 1970s and was the first Chair from 1977 (then members of the Committee were then constrained to a 3 year term of office). He then served in various capacities until he and Mary left in 1991 for Cheltenham.

"To me - equally one of the early members of the Society - Peter was a most unassuming person but steeped in the history of this town. I recall him on several conducted walkabouts round the town in then much quieter streets often at weekends or on summer evenings avidly making verbal notes into a small Dictaphone to write up later. He was the author of several books on Reading, particularly two of Reading in Old Photographs. He also had considerable professional interest in one aspect of the town's history. He worked in The Probation Service and thus had first hand knowledge of its past and current penal establishments. He delved deeply into the history of the succession of jails that Reading has had and their whereabouts."

Bent also recorded the Society's gratitude to Mary Southerton for presenting the collection to the Society and those who saw this selection and its predecessor will be pleased to know that there is at least one more selection to come.

ON THE TRAIL OF A CHURCH FOUNDING FAMILY

I experienced a little bit of serendipity on my recent holiday in Devon. I attended a Sunday morning service at a church in Exeter dedicated to St Michael and All Angels. This is located just outside the city centre on the road out to the main station, St David's and is in fact a daughter church to the striking St David's Church, which gives its name to the station. As I prepared to leave my eye caught one of the stained glass windows which was inscribed Cecil John Valpy French, Vicar 1894-1914. And that got me wondering.

Peter William French was a chemist and druggist in Reading's Market Place, who in 1798 was one of a group of former parishioners of St Giles who, dissatisfied with their new Vicar, founded a new chapel in Castle Street, which is now generally known as St Mary's, Castle Street. Peter was a zealous evangelical who also founded a chapel at Peppard in the same year, to bring the gospel to one of the "godless Villages" surrounding Reading. However, when the chapel in Castle Street was admitted into the Church of England in 1836 Peter was one of those who dissented and crossed the street to form a new independent chapel (now the Litten Tree pub). He was thus associated with the foundation of at least three churches in this area.

His son, also Peter (1800-78), married a daughter of Dr Richard Valpy, the celebrated Headmaster of Reading School, and despite his father's nonconformist leanings entered the Anglican ministry and was Vicar of Burton-on-Trent from 1824-71. His son (1825-91) was christened Thomas Valpy, was educated at Reading School, and followed his father into the ministry, later becoming the first Bishop of Lahore from 1877 to 1887. He died, a martyr in Muscat, in a perhaps rather foolhardy effort (humanly speaking) to bring the Christian message to the Moslems of that country.

Thus far my knowledge until 9 May. Making enquiries after the service I discovered that Cyril Valpy French had been the Vicar responsible for the rebuilding of St David's and that he had died comparatively young, presumably in 1914. That suggested that he was quite probably a son of Thomas Valpy French and that he had inherited the church-building enthusiasm of his great-grandfather. I was subsequently able to purchase a book on the rebuilding of St David's, one of the late great flowerings of the Gothic Revival, from which I learnt that Cyril Valpy French was 38 at the time of his presentation to the benefice, having previously been Vicar of Escot, near Ottery St Mary. He is described as having "no academic ability but he was a very capable administrator and a man of tireless energy." The parish had been talking about rebuilding their church (ironically perhaps a church in the classical style of not dissimilar design to St Mary's, Castle Street) for some ten years but fund-raising efforts to date had been derisory. French's arrival changed all that and the tireless energy (which perhaps also owed a little to the Valpy genes!) was well-channelled into the rebuilding project.

Final confirmation that Cyril was Thomas Valpy's son was obtained at Reading Library which has useful registers of alumni of the two older universities, our quarry having been a Cambridge man. From this I learnt that he was born in Agra, India on 22 May 1855 and died on 28 April 1914. Interestingly, a younger brother, Basil Peter William, perpetuated his great-grandfather's names and was Cyril's curate for two years before going out to India as a missionary in his grandfather's footsteps. However, unlike Thomas he went with the SPG (high church) as opposed to the CMS (evangelical), - JD

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS

Subscriptions for the year became due on 1 January. Regrettably so late in the year, there are quite a number of renewal subscriptions still outstanding.

Those who have yet to renew their membership will find a red cross in the box alongside this paragraph.



If so, please would you let the Treasurer, John Starr, have your cheque (made out to the History of Reading Society) as soon as possible. Otherwise this will be the last mailing you receive as your membership will have lapsed.

John Starr's address is:-

Dr. John Starr, Hon Treasurer, History of Reading Society