

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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Summer2004

A NEW SEASON

With this issue of the Newsletter you should also receive your programme for the new "season". To further whet your appetites for what looks to be a very interesting series of talks, some notes on the Autumn term follow.

Sept. 15. "Cardinal Newman's School -A History of the Oratory School" - A (Tony) Tinkel. Archivist - Oratory School. This is a subject I confess to knowing almost nothing about. I know plenty about Cardinal Newman who famously was a founder of the Oxford Movement and Vicar of St Mary's, Oxford. After vainly attempting to reconcile his Catholic beliefs with the distinctively Protestant 39 Articles of the Church of England, Newman went over to Rome in 1845. The School is one of the fruits of this famous conversion. See also article below, reproduced with permission from the school's website. Newman was also a significant writer on theology and education (if a few of our politicians were to read his "Idea of a University" perhaps Higher Education would not be in the appalling mess that it is now) and composed the poem "Dream of Gerontius" that was to become the libretto of Elgar's great oratorio.

Oct. 20. "19thC Architecture and Decoration In Local Churches" - Sue Branfoot. Sue last spoke to us on the subject of the 19th century architect, Henry Woodyer and we shall look forward to further insights into the ecclesiastical architecture of Reading in this address.

Nov. 17 " Reading: People and Places - 1000 years of history in the town" - Matthew Williams. Senior Curator, Reading Museum. A big subject about which I shall not say any more.

Dec. 15. "Holidays and holiness in late medieval Reading: the evidence of St. Laurence Churchwardens' Accounts" - Joan Dils - President's Address. It is always a great pleasure to welcome our President. Some of these Accounts were published in the 19th Century in a fascinating book compiled by Charles Kerry who was then the Curate of St. Laurence's. A brief extract for the year 1501-2 will suffice:

Item received of the May play called Robin Hood on the fair day six shillings.

Item paid to the minstrels at the choosing of Robin Hood six pence.

Item paid to William Stayner for 200 liveries [said to be badges, ribbons and other tokens worn by the performers] eight pence.

Item paid for 200 liveries and 100 pins against May Day six pence.

[Six shillings is probably equivalent to about £80 in today's currency.]

A LOCAL OLYMPIAN -

John Pius Boland (Oratory School 1881-90, School Captain 1890)

It is little realised in Oratorian circles that an Old Boy gained two gold medals - for tennis - at the first Olympiad of the modern era in Athens in 1896. Now that the Olympic Games are returning to Athens in 2004, it would seem appropriate to recall John Boland's achievement.

In February 1895, John Boland, then an undergraduate at Christ Church, Oxford, saw a notice in the lobby of the Oxford Union, advertising the revival of the Olympic Games in the Greek capital. Boland, an outstanding sportsman, who had played cricket for Oxford, was interested and helped the author of the notice - a Greek undergraduate at Balliol College, Constantine Mano by name - to arouse interest among university athletes in this new international venture.

During the Easter vacation of 1896, Boland travelled to Athens to see the Games. Constantine Mano was deeply involved in their organisation and administration. While he was in Athens, Boland decided to take part in the Games, most probably on the suggestion of Mano. His participation might also be due, in part, to the fact that a fellow Oxford student - Friedrich Thraun, an Austrian - had lost his partner in the tennis doubles through illness; Boland joined Thraun in the tennis doubles to replace the sick partner and he entered the singles as well. He proceeded to win the singles and also, with Thraun as his partner, the doubles. Since he had come to the Games as a visitor, unprepared to take an active part, John Boland either had to borrow or buy a tennis racket, tennis shoes and other necessary tennis equipment. In his autobiography Boland writes that Constantine Mano made things go successfully for his entry in the singles and doubles, which he modestly commented "I was lucky to win."

Years later he gave the credit for his Olympic success to that other notable O.S. athlete - Father Edward Pereira (Head Master 1911-1921, 1921-29, O.S. 1876-86) - "But it was in lawn tennis that I was so fortunate to have his coaching. It was my last year at school, reading for the London B.A. There was one half-hour in the week when I was given free time whilst the other boys were in class. Then it was that Edward played singles with me, coached me, and laid the foundation which was so useful for my game when, later, I played lawn tennis for Ireland in the first Olympic Games at Athens in 1896." (School Magazine No 97 page 18).

John Boland went on to become a lawyer and a politician. He was a K.C., was elected M.P. for South Kerry and acted as Chief Whip in Parliament for the Irish Nationalist Party. He was involved in the setting up of the National University of Ireland. He lost his seat to Sinn Fein in the election of 1918 and withdrew from politics. In 1926 he became Secretary of the Catholic Truth Society, retiring from the office in 1947. He died on St Patrick's Day, 1958 at the age of 87 years.

BITS AND PIECES

Immediately before the launch of our Autumn programme Reading's **Heritage Weekend** [10 – 13 Sept] will take place with many buildings open to the public*. For the third year in a row St Mary's, Castle Street, will be including a themed exhibition, which this year, following Bibles in 2002 and Prayer Books in 2003 will feature Hymn Books. [* a leaflet giving details of those in the Reading area is available at libraries, the Tourist Information Centre (TIC) &c)

An appeal for help Earlier this year I was invited by a local history publisher, Tempus Books (also, as it happens, the publishers of our recent speaker, David Downes' explorations of the history of Reading FC) to compile a history of Reading pubs in photographs. There seemed to be a view that occupying the Chair of this society and being the former Chairman of the Reading branch of the Campaign for Real Ale I was uniquely qualified to undertake this task! Unfortunately that it is to pass over the fact that I am fairly incompetent in the technical aspects of photography but I am glad to say I have recruited a helper who should bridge that particular gap.

I would be interested to hear from any members who may have suitable photographs for inclusion. I am looking in particular for pictures that have a human interest to them and illustrate the pub in its social setting, rather than architectural studies. However, any material submitted will be gratefully received and considered for inclusion.

Photographs should as far as possible be original black and white prints or negatives rather than colour photographs and copies. Any stories or personal recollections that go with the photographs will also be welcome.

If you feel you can help please communicate with me in person at a meeting.

Courses: Joan Dils, our President, is tutoring the following Saturday Schools for the WEA at the Crescent Centre in Earley which may be of interest to members:-

How to Read Old Handwriting (1550-1750) - 2 mornings: 30 Oct & 13 Nov 2004 A practical course for beginners on documents most frequently used by family & local historians such as wills, deeds and parish & church records.

Tudor & Stuart Gentry Families In Berkshire - on 19 Mar 2005, with Sheila Ephraim, they will explore the family life & public life of Berkshire gentlemen who were magistrates, politicians, country house builders, ambassadors & combatants in the Civil War. Some were Catholic recusants.

Further details are available from Pax Payton Smart

Any help members can give with refreshments at our meetings would be much appreciated. Even help at one meeting a year would be welcome and it will take up at most half-an-hour of your time!