

HISTORY OF READING SOCIETY

Newsletter - February 1979

Dear Member,

As this is the first Newsletter for 1979, we hope that the new year has started well for you, and your projects on the history of Reading are making good progress. We also hope that you have enjoyed the Society's events so far and will find plenty to interest you in the coming season.

The Committee

Dates for your diary:-

Saturday, 24 February at 10.00 a.m.

Two members of the staff of the Central Library will be showing a small party round (limited to twenty persons, so please let us know in good time if you are interested in coming). Those who have volunteered to help with indexing the newspapers should attend if possible so that they can receive some guidance on methods to be used.

Tuesday, 27 March at 7.30 p.m. in The Art Gallery

The Annual General Meeting and Lawrence Cameron on 'Reading Waterways'. There is an abundance of literature on the A.G.M. on separate sheets!

Tuesday, 10 April at 8.00 p.m. in St. Mary's Centre, The Butts

This will be a Members' Evening. Members are invited to contribute ten-minute talks on a Reading topic of their choice. This was a great success on 10 January, when three members gave us very interesting accounts of their own special studies. But please let us know in advance. We want to avoid the alternative of a solo - or a hundred and one participants!

The rest of the season will be in the hands of your new committee and a full programme will be issued to all members.

APPEALS

Would anyone who has any information on the history of Kidmore End during the past two hundred years, and in particular any details concerning the last house in the village, called Cold Norton, please contact [redacted]

If any of our members have studied the churches of Reading, they have possibly come across St. Edmund's Chapel. The undersigned would like to hear from you with any information you might have on this chapel.

Please send us reports and articles at any time for our Newsletter. We are always pleased to hear from members.

Enquiries to: Dennis and Sheila Parish
Joint Secretaries

[redacted]
Reading.

Telephone: [redacted] (daytime)
[redacted] (evenings)

REMINISCENCES OF READING

'Floods', declares Geoff Tomline of Curzon Street, have been the rule, rather than the exception, in Reading. Remembering vividly his boyhood in the early 1900's, he recalls the seriousness of the floods then that caused his father to close his cycle business at the junction of Great Knollys Street and Bedford Road. Addison Road, Meadow Road and Cardiff Road were all surrounded with flood water, which rose about three feet over the meadows. Numerous streams drained across the meadow from Scours Lane eastward. Many of these streams have now disappeared under buildings and their whereabouts are somewhat of a mystery. Young Geoff and his friends would put coloured liquid in the water at Addison Road and had great fun tracing the course of these streams.

One day, in about 1913, in their home at 36 Swansea Road, Geoff's mother, being of a rather nervous disposition, complained to his father that she could hear a dull bang at intervals. Suspecting that it came from under the ground, he lifted a floor board. Water could be seen about a foot below! There was a regatta on at the Thames Promade and the starting gun had echoed to Number 36! Worse was to come. A Mr. Harle, motor-body builder, had his yard about thirty feet behind the Tomline home. Flood water came up through his drain during the night and ruined three Wellstead car bodies. Although they were on a trestle, the water had damaged beyond hope all the three-ply bodywork. Mr. Harle was obliged to dismiss his two workmen.

When he moved to Addison Road, Geoff Tomline was frequently woken up at night by the noise of surging water hitting the iron sheeting surrounding the meadows as the flood gates at Oxford were opened.

In the summer, Reading children used to celebrate the floods on homemade rafts afloat on the meadows. In the winter they could expect frozen flooded meadows to provide them with free ice-skating.

The Council eventually took steps to reduce the annual risk of flooding. They removed two islands above Caversham Bridge. (Many old photographs show eel nets - or 'bucks' - attached to the islands.) They also greatly enlarged Caversham weir.

Many of us may have forgotten the floods of 1973, but this would be impossible for Geoff Tomline and the people who live in the roads near him. Only a few yards from his house in Curzon Street (not far from Battle Hospital, in Oxford Road) is a stone plaque on the garden wall of 11 Beresford Road, on the corner of Catherine Street. This little plaque commemorates this particularly bad year in our flood history.
