

Newsletter - April 1979

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REMINISCENCES OF READING

Music Teachers of Reading

Mandoline lessons at sixpence a time! This was the price the Reading children paid for the fun and tuition they had in the early 1900's in a large front room of an Oxford Road house. For this small fee, composition instruction was included. Mr. Papworth, the benevolent gentleman who started the enterprise, sold mandolines for £3.10s.0d., allowing his pupils to pay 1s.6d. a week for these splendid instruments which boasted 'The Viennese College of Music' on their labels. Sadly for the twenty children in this class, Mr. Papworth disappeared from Reading before his course of lessons was over and never claimed the balance of mandoline payments. So a number of children were the proud, if guilty, possessors of very cheap instruments! Strangely, as recently as 1963 Geoff Tomline, whose story this is, discovered a fellow 'Papworth' pupil at Aldermaston. They both still have their mandolines.

Mandolines, however, continued to flourish under the tuition of a Miss Ada Dean of Waylen Street. The Viennese Mandoline Band for boys and girls was her special pride. (Vienna was all the rage at the time). They often performed for charity, the girls dressed in Austrian national costume and all the instruments decorated with coloured ribbons. On one occasion the band was invited to play at the Mitford Hall at Three Mile Cross. It was a starless, midwinter night and the children travelled by covered carriages, each one drawn by two horses. The journey started at the Lodge Hotel in King's Road, which was one of the old coaching inns between Bath and London. It must have seemed just like a moment out of Mary Russell Mitford's pages to hear the clip-clop of the horses' hoofs and the clanking of the iron-rimmed wheels on the gravelled Berkshire roads.

The brief training on the mandoline led Geoff Tomline to pursue the study of the violin, brings us to the story of Rosa Hood's impact on the musical life of Reading. She died in 1970 at the age of ninety, after a long career, not only of teaching, but of public performances too, her first one being at the age of nine. She came to Reading in 1909 and started her professional career then. In 1910 the Reading Dairy Company asked her to arrange a trio for their cafe. This she did, and they performed for eleven years. Rosa Hood also played with a small group for Reading University dances and joined the University Orchestra as a violinist. During the First World War she gave regular concerts in local hospitals. Altogether, she gave well over three hundred concerts in Reading and the surrounding villages for charity.

Music Teachers of Reading (continued)

This energetic musician was also a passionate anti-vivisectionist and animal lover. She was first Secretary and finally Treasurer of the Reading Anti-Vivisection Society and helped to raise hundreds of pounds for the cause.

Pianist, cellist, violinist and contralto singer - there seemed to be no limit to her ability in all these branches of music and nothing pleased Rosa Hood more than to launch young people into a lifetime of music-making. Many of her pupils were very successful, and proof of their teacher's loving dedication.
