

The History of Reading Society

Newsletter - November 1979

- * Congratulations to our members who made such valuable and interesting contributions to The Evening Post's special St. Mary's Millenium Supplement on 16 October: Dr. Cecil Slade, Joan Dils, Peter Southerton, Dennis Parish, Dermot O'Rourke, George Churchill, Janet Clark and Nancy Saunders.

- * Offers needed please for ten-minute topics. 6 December is our next Members' Evening. It is also an Elizabethan evening with a Christmas flavour (especially the refreshments). With this in mind, perhaps you can steer your researches in a seasonable direction and tell us all about it - for ten minutes. (If we are flooded with offers, don't despair - there will be another opportunity to hear your story on 10 April). We should also like to know if anyone can contribute in any other way to this event.

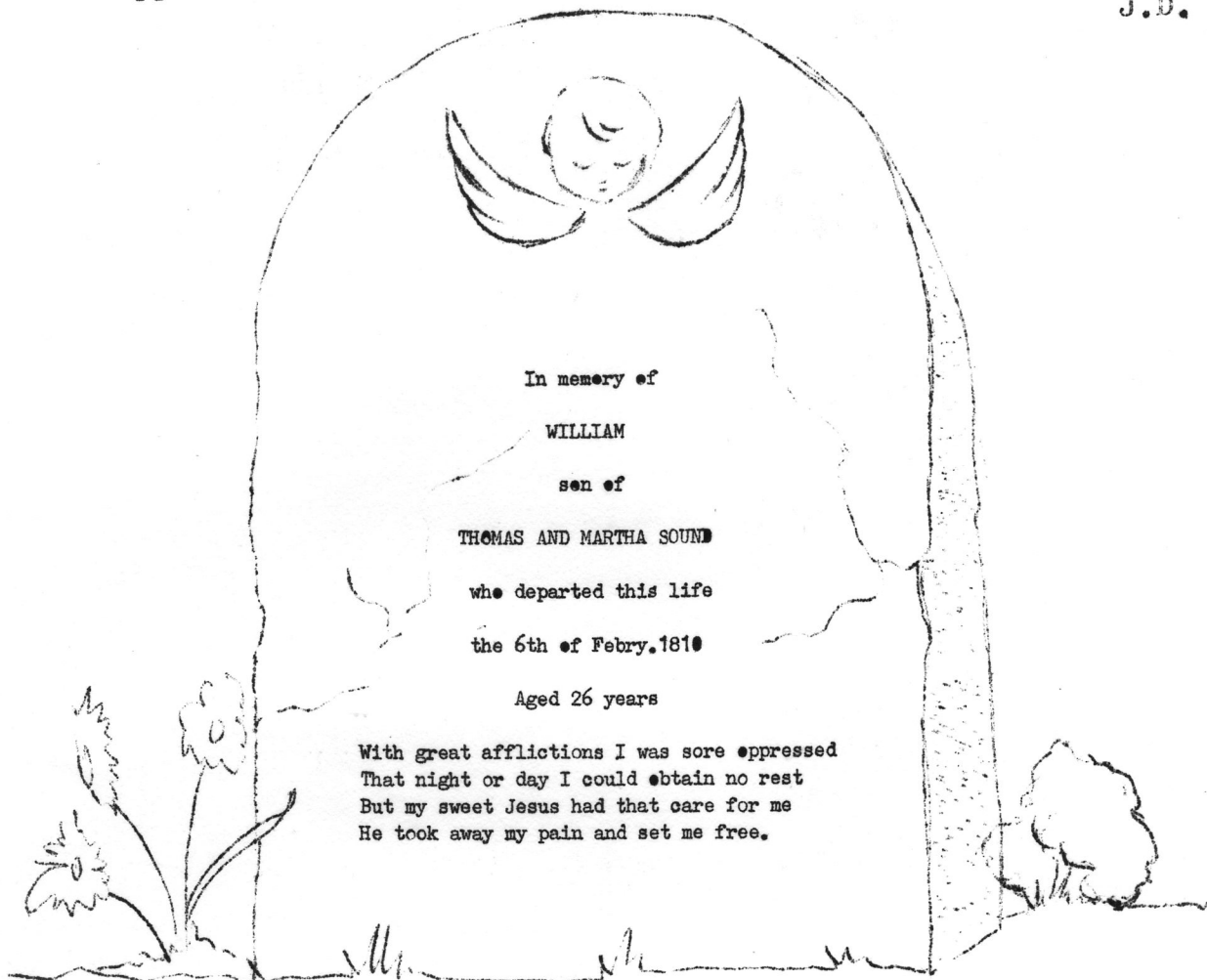
- * Help is still needed on the St. Mary's graveyard recording project.

'In this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes'. Could it be the inevitability of our last end which attracts so many of us to churchyards? Not with the History of Reading Society. On many sunny Sunday afternoons this summer a small group of members could be seen busily employed in St. Mary's Churchyard, not musing on human mortality but trying to decipher the inscriptions on the tombstones in order to record them systematically before the area is 'landscaped' in the near future.

The inscriptions provide a commentary on the social history of part of Reading in the late 18th and early 19th century. Once the work of recording is complete there will be ample evidence to spark off a study of life in the town nearly two hundred years ago.

More helpers would be welcome so we can finish before the winter comes. Perhaps one inscription might whet your appetites:

J.D.



* A glorious, sunny summer evening, a quiet river, a boat and a glass of gin and tonic! Who could ask for more? Well, the members who assembled for a trip along the Kennet by narrow boat also hoped to discover a little more about Reading, and they were not disappointed.

We began by 'shooting' High Bridge, getting a glimpse of Reading's 'backs' from an unusual angle. Then round gas works island, by Blake's lock, past the steaming vats of Courage's brewery and out into the country.

On the way we passed Elgar Road which is better known to us for its fine decorated-brick frontages. But the back gardens were a revelation - sunny patios, kitchen gardens; beautiful floral displays were everywhere.

The bar did a roaring trade : - (mainly in Coke and crisps!) as we slid noisily but gently up to Fobney where the lock proved a fascination, especially to the children. We were able to view the Water Works at leisure while expert commentary helped to interpret the buildings.

Disaster struck when the boat tried to turn round at Southcote. It stuck fast! Only after several attempts, with the passengers moving from one side to the other to alter the weight, did we finally begin the trip home - very late.

It was certainly an unforgettable evening. Many thanks to Peter Southerton and the intrepid crew who made it all possible.

J.D.

* Extraordinary Meeting: 20 September 1979

This was held in order to vote on an amendment to Item 4 of the Constitution. The members voted unanimously that this item should now read 'The affairs of the Society shall be managed by a Committee comprising: Chairman, Honorary Secretary, Honorary Treasurer and at least three other members.

The main attraction of the evening, however, was a talk by Dr. Christopher Durston on Berkshire in the Civil War, in which he vividly described the events which led up to this period of disruption and suffering, and of the ways in which Reading was involved.

* Thursday, 10 April 1980 will be a Members' Evening. The theme will be 'Houses of Reading'. We should be pleased to hear if any members could offer to contribute a ten-minute talk.

* The Oysters of Reading

'The greatest natural curiosity in the neighbourhood of Reading is the stratum of sea sand in Kate's Grove Lane, about twenty yards below the level of Bob's Mount. This stratum of sand contains great number of oyster shells and fishes' teeth, the latter being very small and sharply pointed. The shells when taken out of the ground are perfect in appearance, but if collected for preservation, they should be carefully exposed for some time to the heat of a slow fire, without which precaution they are liable to crumble to pieces, but by following it they may be preserved for many years. These celebrated fossil oysters are found with both their valves or shells connected, as though they had never been opened, but they are so brittle that the least violence will separate them. Many, however, are found quite entire, and some double oysters have been dug out with all their valves united. They lie through a circumference of five or six acres of ground, in beds of green sand, upon a foundation of hard rocky chalk.'

J. Doran: History of Reading.

The Oysters of Reading (continued)

Benjamin Child is best known in local history for having been held to marriage at the tip of a duelling sword by his wife to be, Frances Kendrick. Apparently he had an insatiable appetite for oysters which he ordered by the barrel full to be delivered to his home at Calcot House. In one of the rooms he had racks built to hold the barrels which were full of oyster shells.

The Environs of Reading - ed. J.G. Robertson
Tylehurst Described - Terry Babbage.

High up on the South, or rear wall of Mapledurham House, nestling between two tall chimneys is a solitary gable window. Immediately above the window is a decoration of oyster shells which glisten in the sun. It is considered that this decoration may have been a sign of refuge to Catholics during the recusant period of the 16th and 17th centuries.

Mapledurham House - Richard Williams.

If you have discovered a story to tell, not necessarily a 'fishy tale', please **share it** with other members through the medium of our Newsletters.

Enquiries to: Dennis and Sheila Parish,
Joint Secretaries,
[REDACTED]
Reading.

Telephone: [REDACTED]