



The History of Reading Society

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& Newsletter:
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Treasurer:
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April 1982

Dear Member,

The Society is entering its fifth year with some new faces among the Officers and Committee. At the AGM held on Thursday, 25th March last the following Officers were elected:

Chairman - Jean DEBNEY
Secretary - Sue READ
Treasurer - David QUARTERMAINE

Clinton & Jo ELLIS, Derek HUMPHRIES and Peter SOUTHERTON were re-elected to the Committee and we also welcome Nigel DENTON and Joan MASON. We would like to place on record our thanks and appreciation to all those who stood for election - we had eight nominations for six vacancies: congratulations to those who made it and sorry to those who were not quite so lucky this time.

The Treasurer's Report was adopted unanimously. A Copy was circulated to all members with the last Newsletter - if you have not received your copy, please let us know.

The Chairman's Report: 'As you are aware, no Chairman was elected at the last AGM and this situation continued until January of this year when I agreed to fill the position. It is therefore fair to say that the Society has in many ways marked time this year.' Jean DEBNEY then went on to thank Joan DILS for her help and assistance in organising most of the programme until November, & Peter SOUTHERTON and his team for entertaining members at Christmas with readings and slides on the theme of 'Visitors to Reading'. She thanked Janet CLARK for her hard work on the Committee and in organising the Society's project of indexing the Berkshire Chronicle, and regretfully accepted her resignation for the time being from these activities as she was expecting a baby.

After a resumé of last year's programme, Jean concluded by thanking the other Officers and Members of the Committee for all the time and effort they had put into the running of the Society for the past twelve months.

As there was no other business, the AGM was completed in what was probably a record time - and we were able to have a five-minute break before our speaker of the evening at 8 pm.

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SUBSCRIPTIONS for 1982-3 are now due - if you have not already paid please send your sub. to David QUARTERMAINE (address above) -
Single: £2; Family: £3; Senior Citizen: £1; Fulltime Student: £1.

MORE OF THE COMMITTEE

SUE READ is an archeologist with interests that range from the Roman to the Victorian period. After working for a while at the Museum of Mankind in London, she moved to Reading Museum. In her spare time she likes to try her hand at some of the old handicrafts, such as spinning. Last year she entertained the Society with a lecture about Roman Silchester; and she has also edited a book of photographs - 'Berkshire in Camera' - which was published last Christmas. Sue joined the Society soon after its inauguration and was elected to the Committee last year. Since last September she has been acting as Meetings Secretary and has now agreed to fill the office of Hon. Sec. this year - thanks Sue.

PETER SOUTHERTON is a Probation Officer attached to the Crown Court in Reading, and he and his wife Mary have lived in the town for 20 years. Their only daughter was married last summer. Peter was a member of the Founding Committee for the Society and was elected its first Chairman, until ill-health forced him to resign. He has served continuously on the Committee and is always ready with ideas and support on every occasion. He is very interested in the history of crime and punishment in Berkshire and has had several articles published in the local press and in Berkshire Life. He is the author of a book about Reading Gaol: 'The Story of a Prison' (pub in 1975 and now alas out of print). He obtained the background for this book during a 3-year stint in the prison - as an employee of course! He is at present working on a Chronology of Reading and the history of the agrarian riots in Berkshire.

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CONGRATULATIONS to Andrew & Janet CLARK on the birth of their son, Charles Alexander, who weighed in at 7lb 4oz at the Royal Berkshire Hospital on Saturday, 20 March 1982. We hope that 4-year-old Susannah is pleased with her new brother.

We sent a congratulatory card to Andrew and Janet which was signed by most of those present at the AGM, together with a Boots Gift Voucher to buy something for baby Charles.

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RECENT MEETINGS

ARCHITECTURE IN READING - Michael THOMAS - Thurs 14 Jan 1982.

Only 16 members managed to struggle through the deep snow and freezing conditions to attend this meeting, and those who made it were rewarded with a very enlightening talk illustrated with slides about the conservation of Reading's old buildings. Mary's hot cups of coffee were especially welcome at this chilly meeting.

DISCOVERING THE PAST - Alf ISON - Thurs 11 Feb 1982.

This was a very interesting and informative talk about the different sources that can be used to find out more about past events and people. Using some clever transparencies on an overhead projector, Mr ISON showed us some of the documents that might be found in an imaginary 'Oxo-box' of papers deposited at the County Record Office: these ranged from old photos, a school log book, electoral register, census returns, etc. During the coffee break he was snowed under with members asking him questions.

FIRE BRIGADES OF READING - Nigel CROMPTON - Thurs 25 March 1982.

This talk followed the AGM and so Mr CROMPTON was able to address a slightly larger audience than usual: more than 50 members and their guests were present. He gave a well-constructed talk about the chron-

ology of fires and fire fighting in Reading, starting with the visit by the Danes in 1006, through to the Second World War. We heard how Tudor Reading was taxed in order to purchase 4 ladders, buckets, chains and hooks to fight fires, and that 19th Century policemen had to also double as firemen. He showed us slides of Huntley & Palmers own fire brigade - all records of which have now been destroyed - and maps indicating the position of Fire Stations past and present.

At the end of the evening, Nigel CROMPTON accepted free membership of our Society for a year as a token of appreciation for an entertaining evening.

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THE MAIWAND LION - FORBURY GARDENS

Dominating the Forbury Gardens in Reading is the massive cast-iron statue of a lion erected in 1886 as a memorial to the 328 officers and men of the "66th" Berkshire Regiment who fell at the Battle of Maiwand on 27 July 1880. The sculptor was George Blackall SIMMONDS, who, in 1884, had exhibited 'A life-sized sketch at the zoo - a model of a lion to be erected at Reading ...' A copy of the design apparently still exists in a catalogue of the Royal Academy of Arts. Unfortunately the artist did not realise, and no-one pointed it out to him, that no real-life lion ever walked in the two-legs forwards, two-legs backward position which he depicted.

The statue measures 31' from nose to tail and weighs 16 tons; it was cast in nine pieces by Henry Young & Co, engineers, ironfounders and makers of girders, at the Eccleston Iron Works, Pimlico at the cost of a mere £900. Through its layers of protective leaden-silver paint, the expert can still detect a faint chequer-work of joint lines visible on the body and flanks where the moulders formed the individual draw-backs in the loose-piece moulding operation.

(From: Foundry Trade Journal; Nov. 1981)

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THE SIMEON MEMORIAL - THE MARKET PLACE

by Peter SOUTHERTON.

Formerly the central feature of the Market Place, this Memorial has gradually become lost amid a jumble of assorted structures. Although it was formerly intended to be illuminated in perpetuity, the lanterns were extinguished many years ago. Over the years there have sprung up at its foot an assortment of cabmen's shelters, car park attendant's cabins and the superstructure of a public convenience. Indeed, I recently overheard a local person refer to this as probably the ventilation shaft to the premises below! Cannot representations be made to the Town Council for this rare link with Reading's past to be brought into greater prominence.

Members may be interested in a reference to this structure which appeared in the 'Reading Standard' of 1st April 1911.

'The Simeon Obelisk'

Erected in 1804 to the design of Sir John SOANE to the memory of Edward SIMEON.

On the sides of the memorial three events of importance in the history of Reading and Newbury are denoted. On the plinth, the Grecian key represents Europe, the fluted column, Africa, and the pineapple, Asia. There are also depicted the arms of Reading and the arms of Edward Simeon who left money to light the little lamps around it.

The events portrayed are the martyrdom of Julius Palmer, first master of the school at Reading; charged with heresy and tried with two other

Protestants, John Gwin and Thomas Askew, burnt in Newbury on 10 July 1556 because Reading did not want the smell of burning men in the town. One faggot stands for each martyr and the three axes signify the beheading of the last Abbott of Reading Abbey and two priests on 15 Nov 1539.

Editors Note: Following restoration work, the portrait of Edward SIMEON was on view in Reading Museum last summer. SIMEON was born in the Forbury - probably in the house formerly on the site now occupied by the Prudential Assurance Offices, and his principal legacy to the town is the 'Obelisk' for which he financed the construction, maintenance and running costs.

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FOR YOUR BOOKSHELF - 'A VILLAGE IN THE TOWN'

This study by F.C. PADLEY, of a conservation area within Reading, has just been published in a revised form. The area bounded by Watlington Street, Queen's Road, Eldon Road and London Road, contains many important buildings and has been the home of a number of interesting people. Mr Padley's booklet is published by the Reading Branch of the W.E.A; it first appeared in 1972 and sold out several reprints. The revised edition contains more material and photographs and costs £1.40. Mr Padley is a member of our Society and copies of his book may be purchased at meetings.

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FUTURE MEETINGS - Held on Thursday at 7.30 pm in the Abbey Gateway, unless otherwise stated.

- 20 May 1982 - 'PROJECT PURLEY' - Jean DEBNEY
- 10 June 1982 - READING WALKABOUT - led by Ken MAJOR
Meet 7.30 pm at Abbey Gateway.
- 22 July 1982 - VISIT TO WHITEKNIGHTS PARK - led by Gordon ROWLEY and Ronald RUTHERFORD.
Meet 7 pm at Abbey Gateway if you need transport - car owners can you please go by the Gateway if you have a spare seat - or meet 7.30 pm. at Pepper Lane Gate, Reading University.

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DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Sat 26 June 1982 - 10 am to 5.30 pm at Bulmershe College:
SUMMER MEETING of the Berkshire Local History Association (of which we are associate members). There will be an exhibition entitled 'Town and County Crafts and Trades' - More details later.

INTRODUCTION TO LOCAL HISTORY - Summer Term, 28 Apr to 30 June 1982 at the University, London Road - Wednesday evenings: 7.30 to 9.30 pm. This is a course led by Joan DILS which will be an introductory study of the methods and techniques of local history together with some basic social and economic history themes relevant to local studies.
Fee: £7.60 (OAPs £3.80)

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THE ABBEY GATEWAY - The Surveyor has drawn the attention of the Committee to the state of the Abbey Gateway which he reports to be in a dangerous condition from several large cracks in the wall, and loose stones hanging from the arch. The Committee have directed the Clerk to draw the attention of Colonel Blgrave and Mr Weedon's representatives, who are the joint proprietors of the gateway, to the state thereof, which he has since done.

From: BERKSHIRE CHRONICLE - 9 Sept 1854.

(Don't worry, it's been repaired since then!!)

THE COMMITTEE