



The History of Reading Society

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July 1982

Dear Member,

The advancement of Jean DEBNEY to the Chairmanship of the Society means that the mantle of the Editorship of the Newsletter has passed to me. In order to expedite this an editorial sub-committee consisting of Jean, Mr. Bert RIVERS and myself has been formed to collect and collate material. Thanks are also due to Derek HUMPHRIES who does the photocopying and to Peter SOUTHERTON who undertakes the onerous task of distributing the finished product. If you can help him out with this latter task by taking copies for members who live near to you please ask him for their copies (not only are you helping Peter you are also saving the Society the postage).

Nigel DENTON

MEET THE REST OF THE COMMITTEE (in alphabetical order - the two new members)

Nigel DENTON has lived in Reading long enough to have driven along Broad Street (in the days before it became restricted to buses and disabled drivers). He is almost a founder member inasmuch as he could not attend the inaugural meeting. He is employed as a computer systems analyst for the County Council at Shinfield Park. He says that trying to understand some computer documentation (and very often clerical procedures) is a research topic in itself. On the historical front he lists his interests as visiting places and railways.

Joan MASON moved to Woodley some thirty years ago and joined the society last year with her husband, Bill. They have two sons and a daughter with four grand children who inevitably take up a lot of her time. Joan works as a Faculty Secretary in the Social Services Department at Bulmershe College of Higher Education. Her list of activities is formidable ranging from sketching and amateur photography to exploring the countryside far and near on foot and by car. She is also interested in the customs of the River Thames, the Royal Family and heraldry.

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Janet CLARK wrote to thank members for the card and gift token which we sent after the birth of Charles in March. Both Janet and Charles are well and we look forward to seeing Janet at meetings again soon.

OUR TELEVISION PERSONALITY

One of our oldest members, Mr. Fred PADLEY, recently made his debut on television when he was interviewed about his memories of the Reading Branch of the WEA (Workers Educational Association) which his father joined soon after its foundation in 1904 and with which Fred has been associated since 1908. He reports on his visit to the London television studios to record the interview:

"Early in April I received a phone call quite out of the blue from Thames Television asking if I would give a short interview for their ten minute magazine programme 'Help' shown on Monday evenings. They wanted someone who knew about the early days of the WEA and what it offers to everyone in the 1980's. Through a mutual acquaintance in Oxford they learnt that my father had joined the Reading branch which is the oldest in the country, and that I was still active in the movement. Their research worker spent the afternoon with me at home looking at my archives and photographs and talking about my memories of the Association. As a result of this visit it was arranged to record an interview with me on the 26th of the month.

On the appointed day, my sister and I set off at 9.15 a.m. in a car sent specially for us and we arrived at the London studio at 10.45. After a cup of coffee, the presenter of my programme recorded her introduction for my interview - and then my turn came. It was a case of trying to pack as much information as possible into the allotted three minutes. The producer was quite satisfied with what and how I had spoken, but Miss Gee, the presenter, thought that if she rephrased the questions, I might get more into my replies. So a second recording was made which satisfied everyone.

Soon after lunch the car for our return arrived and we had a more leisurely return to Reading. We were informed that they were so satisfied with the interview it would go out that evening at 6.25, so unfortunately, I was unable to tell many folks who might be interested that it was being broadcast.

In all, it was an enjoyable experience. I was very impressed by the friendliness of the people at the studio, the thoroughness of their preparation, and the way they looked after me so that I had no 'butterflies' when I was being interviewed.

FOR YOUR BOOKSHELF

REDDING 1540-1640 - A Portrait of a Community by Joan DILS and her students

It has been said that if you see a local history book buy it as it will probably go out of print. Thus it is particularly pleasing to be able to report that this work first published in December 1980 has recently been reprinted.

By studying a wealth of source material it has been possible to present a very full picture of what Reading was like in the century from the Dissolution of the Abbey leading up to the Civil War. Every aspect of life is covered from the obvious births, deaths and marriages (gleaned from the registers of the three parish churches which are fairly complete) to the ever-present need to earn a living. On a slightly different front there is a chapter on leisure.

The book arose out of adult education courses run jointly by the WEA and the University between 1977 and 1980 and contains contributions from several members of the Society.

(Published by the School of Education, University of Reading. 60pp with a number of line maps, charts and drawings. Obtainable, price £1, from Jean DEBNEY, 8 Huckleberry Close, Purley, Reading (plus 20p postage and packing) or Society meetings).

A FORTUNATE ENCOUNTER

On leaving St. Laurence's Church recently, after practicing the organ, I spoke to a lady visitor. She told me she was on a first visit from New Zealand, one of her objectives being to photograph the statue of one of her ancestors, Dr. Valpy.

I was able to show her an entry in the Visitor's Book:-

'18-1-82. Rupert Valpy, 233, Cranmer Court, London, S.W.3. My ancestors had much to do with this church 1780-1836.

The lady said she had no knowledge of any members of the family in England and asked if she might copy down the address.

Have I sponsored a family reunion?

Bert RIVERS

RECENT MEETINGS

MEMBERS EVENING - Thursday 22 April

Three members gave talks at this meeting. First, Mr. Fred PADLEY presented a paper describing the growth of working class housing in Reading from the 1860's to the turn of the present century. In his exhaustive study he covered the whole of the town from the recently redeveloped Orts Road area right over to the Oxford Road. **Second**, Jean DEBNEY gave an amusing and informative talk about the origins of surnames which fall into four major categories:

occupation

font

place

nickname

She then gave the origins and possible derivations of the surnames of members. To conclude the evening Sue READ showed some interesting magic lantern slides of Old Reading originally taken at about the turn of the century and now part of the museum's collection. These principally covered the centre of the town between Duke Street and West Street. Many of the older members were readily able to identify long since disappeared buildings.

PURLEY VILLAGE - Thursday 20 May

At this meeting we were pleased to be able to welcome members of Project Purley which has recently been formed into a society.

Jean DEBNEY gave a history of the village from early times. Normally, historians are inclined to confine themselves to the Lords of the Manor when conducting their researches whereas she was more interested in the ordinary members of the community. Using the parish records she has constructed an extensive index to most of the families that lived in the village and she presented sketch histories of two or three families and their trials and tribulations.

John TITTERTON's interest lay in the heraldic field. He outlined how he had been able to **identify** the coats of arms on the memorials in the parish church and to construct some partial family trees by this method. The Liebenrood family (from which Liebenrood Road derives its name) used to live in the village. They came from Germany where they had their own coat of arms - which appear on one of the memorials. At one stage an adopted nephew changed his name from Ziegenbein in order to inherit the family wealth.

John CHAPMAN gave an account of the continuing archaeological survey being carried out in the parish churchyard prior to the building of an extension. Because of the shortage of funds and time this was being carried out by enthusiastic amateurs rather than professionals. As might be expected in a churchyard several skeletons had been unearthed - some of them surprisingly close to the surface. Although the present church is of Norman origin several of the burials had proved to be Anglo-Saxon when the practice was to "cushion" the head with flints.

READING WALKABOUT - led by Ken. MAJOR

As is usually the case during the summer months we took advantage of the lighter evenings to have a meeting out of doors.

Ken MAJOR led a party of about two dozen members and friends on a tour of the town centre. When the time is taken to look there is an amazing wealth of ancient buildings. Our route started at the Abbey Gateway (largely a Victorian reconstruction), past the remains of the Abbey mill which are the subject of a Preservation Order and thus survive the encroachment of new buildings. In King's Road there are a number of interesting shop fronts. Because of repairs we were able to see an exposed timber-framed building in King Street. Mr. Major said that he was convinced that a lot of the buildings in the town centre were originally timber-framed and that cladding had been added later.

After investigating Yield Hall Lane we went along Minster Street. The new building alongside the back of the redeveloped Debenhams with its steeply-pitched roof and small window is in what Mr. Major termed the "neo-vernacular" style. Although there have been a number of additions Corbys Restaurant is a notable example of a timber-framed building.

Castle Street is also of much interest to the more discerning visitor. We returned via the Civic Centre area (about which little was said except that "the fountain outside is what makes it work!") through the Butts and into Friar Street.

In Friar Street it was possible to see the different styles of the various decades of the present century from Woolworth and the two former Burton shops which at the first floor level look like cinemas (thirties) to Boots on the north side which with the full length windows on the upper floors and Festival of Britain railings is straight fifties.

Our last port of call was the Market Place where we could see the obvious improvement to the area surrounding the Simeon Memorial mentioned in the last Newsletter. As the area has now been cleared of traffic signs and cars the Memorial is fully visible.

THE COLE LIBRARY

On Monday 10 May about a dozen members were privileged to be able to visit the University Library in a party led by Fred PADLEY.

Of particular interest were the five smaller libraries which have been bequeathed to, or deposited with, the University and are separately lodged in the Library Building.

These include the libraries of Sir Frank Stenton, former Vice-Chancellor and Professor of Mediaeval History and Lady Stenton who was a Lecturer, and Professor F.L. Cole, former Professor of Zoology. The former library is especially rich in Anglo-Saxon History and the latter in Physiology and allied subjects.

Although the subjects of many of the books are of limited interest there are a number of late fifteenth and early sixteenth century volumes which are fascinating examples of early printing, illustrations and bindings. Among the seventeenth, eighteenth and early nineteenth century books with very elaborate decorated covers is one which is thought to have come from the Royal Library of France or to be a gift from one of the French Kings.

As usual our host's amusing commentary added to the enjoyment of the evening.

BERKSHIRE LOCAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION - SUMMER MEETING

Saturday 26 June at Bulmershe College, Earley

The theme of this meeting was "Town and Country Crafts and Trades" and was attended by about fifty people; rather sadly there were only two representatives from the History of Reading Society. Several of the local societies who attended the meeting produced some very interesting exhibitions which ranged from the brickworks in Twyford, Maidenhead and Mortimer, to sawyers in Aldworth and agriculturalists in Wantage.

The speakers for the day included Dr. E.J. COLLINS (from MERL) on 'The coppice and underwood trades in Berkshire since 1750', John ECCLES on 'Agriculture in Berkshire - crafts and skills past and present' and last but not least, Joan DILLS who spoke about 'Urban crafts in Berkshire 1540-1640'.

Altogether it was a most entertaining and informative day with plenty to see and hear, and I especially enjoyed the opportunity to renew acquaintances with fellow local historians.

Next meeting - Saturday 30 October 1982 - 'Behind the scenes at the Museum of English Rural Life' at Reading University.

Jean DEBNEY

AN EXHIBITION - 'Cleere Kennet, stately Thames'

Open 10 July - 4 September 1982 at Reading Museum

This exhibition organised by Sue READ is well worth seeing.

ACCOUCHEMENT OF THE PRINCESS OF WALES

WINDSOR. FRIDAY NIGHT - Her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales was confined of a healthy Prince at two minutes before nine p.m. Her Royal Highness and the infant Prince are doing perfectly well.

(signed) E.H. Sieveking, M.D.,
Henry Brown, M.D.

From: BERKSHIRE CHRONICLE - Saturday 9 January 1864.

The Thanksgiving Prayer for the safe delivery of the Princess of Wales, and for the birth of the infant Prince, was read in all the churches of this town on Sunday last.

From: BERKSHIRE CHRONICLE - Saturday 23 January 1864

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO

It is just one hundred years since the "New" Town Hall was opened. The Berkshire Chronicle for Saturday 3 June 1882 reported:

"The ceremony of opening a new Town Hall for Reading took place on Wednesday. A laudable effort was made to make the ceremony interesting, and the attempt was fairly successful. The chief part in the ceremony was taken by Mr. WALTER who has taken a great interest in the new building and was able to give most valuable counsel to the Building Committee whilst the work was being carried out. In recognition of his services he was asked to open the new hall - that is to say, to make the first long speech which has ever been delivered within the walls of the building. Mr. WALTER discharged that duty very well. He made a sensible but not too exhilarating a speech."

Later in the report there is a reference to the actual building:

"The new buildings are not handsome except in the sense in which some people use that word to describe that which is large. Externally the new buildings are pleasing. They caricature in an amusing way the architectural genius of Mr. WATERHOUSE. Internally the new TOWN HALL is a quite too utterly 'squat' building. But though it is not pretty to look at it is very handsomely and completely fitted up. It is, too, a building in which a very large number of persons will be able to hear and see perfectly all that is said or done upon the stage or platform. As this has proved to be the case the lack of beauty (that is to say inanimate beauty) or proportion in the room will soon cease to attract notice, and the fact of having a large and comfortable hall, with fair acoustic qualities will be an endearing advantage to the town. The new public library, the laboratories, and the museum will also have their attraction, and will be amongst the subsidiary advantages that will arise from the opening of the new public buildings in Reading."

A separate report in the same issue reports that on the same evening the Reading Philharmonic Society gave a performance of Handel's "Messiah". This was done with 71 sopranos, 64 altos, 41 tenors, 57 basses, 43 instrumentalists. The Patron, Prince Leopold, was unable to attend the performance.

Mr. John Walter who opened the New Town Hall was the Member for the Berkshire Division. He lived from 1818 to 1894 and was the grandson of the founder of "The Times". He himself was for a time the proprietor.

The architect of the New Town Hall was Alfred Waterhouse who lived from 1830 to 1905. He was a notable architect of his day who also designed the Natural History Museum.

The Town Hall cost between £50,000 and £60,000 and was constructed by Mr. Sainson of Brighton. As you have probably read there are plans to refurbish part of it one hundred years later for a mere three million pounds.

A REQUEST - Ranikhet Camp

Mr. A.H. SPRING is interested in R(H)ANIKHET CAMP, Tilehurst and would welcome any information which you might have on:

- (i) date of origin (Second World War?)
- (ii) composition (temporary or permanent buildings or simply huts?)
- (iii) who was trained there (Polish or U.S. regiments?)
- (iv) when it closed down

If you are able to help please contact Mr. Spring at [REDACTED] or give him a ring on [REDACTED]

The stated object of the Society is to collect and diffuse information on and to foster interest in the History of Reading. If you are undertaking any research do let the committee know. There is always the opportunity to present your findings at a Members Evening. Should you be willing to do this do let Sue know.

FUTURE MEETINGS

- 23 September 1982 Portrait of a School, Newtown Reading - Peter SOUTHERTON
- 21 October 1982 Reading Dispensary Trust - William DEAR
- 18 November 1982 Transport for Reading Borough 1879-1982 - Michael DARE
- 16 December 1982 Christmas Social Evening -
"Literary Gems of Nineteenth Century Reading"

All meetings commence at 7.30 p.m. in the Abbey Gateway Room.

FORTHCOMING COURSES

Among the many courses available in and around the Reading area in 1982-1983 there are several in Local and Family History that might be of interest to members:

- Death and Disease in Berkshire 1540-1710
- The Old Poor Law 1601-1834: its History and its Documents
- The Village in the Age of Enclosure
- Oral History (one-day school)
- How to Read Local Archives (one-day school)
- Sources for the History of Education (one-day school)
- Brush up your Mediaeval Latin (one-day school)
- ** Sources and Techniques in Local History (three-year part-time certificate course)
- Old Caversham: Old Berkshire: An Introduction to Local History
- Genealogy - Trace your Family Tree

For further details see local press publications in August and leaflets in local libraries etc.

FORBURY DITCH. This dangerous nuisance has again been the scene of an accident, but fortunately not a serious one. On Wed. morning as a servant was leading a horse and gig, by some mischance the horse fell into the ditch, drawing the chase after him. They were soon extricated without material damage.

From: BERKSHIRE CHRONICLE - Saturday 10 October 1846.

NEXT NEWSLETTER It is intended to publish the next Newsletter during September. Material for inclusion should be sent to the Editor: Nigel DENTON, 12 Maria Court, Southcote Road, Reading, RG3 2AS by Saturday 4 September (Tel. 585576).

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The Committee wishes everyone a pleasant and profitable summer and looks forward to meeting you all again during the autumn.