



The History of Reading Society

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MEET THE MEMBERS (or some of the,)

Joan DILLS has recently been elected as an Honorary Member by the Committee. She was a founder member of the Society and its first Secretary becoming Chairman in 1979 which position she held until 1981. She was born of good working class stock (most of whom were potters and iron workers) in the town that produced Josiah WEDGWOOD, Arnold BENNETT and Stanley MATTHEWS. While reading History at Birmingham University during the fifties she developed a love for Gilbert and Sullivan, choral singing and Ray. After teaching in schools as far apart as Nigeria and Stoke-on-Trent she married Ray in the sixties (it had been a long courtship). She began to teach adults and developed a keen interest in local history after the birth of Ruth in 1970 and Rachel in 1972. Moving to Reading in 1976 she went into adult education at Reading University and with the help of students in 1980 produced the book "Redding 1540-1640". Her current researches include the history of sixteenth century Newbury and Abingdon, nineteenth century Wokingham as well as the history of epidemics in Berkshire. Her hobbies are family, house and garden in that order.

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A WATERWAYS MUSEUM FOR READING?

There is a distinct possibility that a new extension may be opened to Reading Museum next year to coincide with its centenary. The present Museum was opened in the summer of 1883 and has not been extended since 1900. The new section will be housed, if given the go-ahead, in a building vacated by the Transportation Department near to Blake's Lock and would feature the local waterways - an important aspect of Reading being situated as it were on the confluence of the Thames and Kennet. It would also show some of the larger items that it is not possible to display in the present restricted space.

We will endeavour to keep you informed about this exciting development.

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COFFEE AT MEETINGS

No doubt members appreciate the coffee served at meetings. Grateful thanks are due to Mary SOUTHERTON, ably assisted by Peter, for its provision. If any members would like to help out with this she will not be in the least bit offended. Do have a word with her if you would like to volunteer to serve coffee at a future meeting.

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SEASON'S GREETINGS

The committee wish members and friends a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

RECENT MEETINGS - contributed by Mr. Bert RIVERS

Portrait of a School - Peter SOUTHERTON, Thursday 23 September 1982

On 23 September one of our founder members, Peter SOUTHERTON, opened our new session with an illustrated talk on Newtown School.

Peter commenced his talk with a brief resume of the history of education in Reading from the probable existence of some form of school within the Abbey from shortly after 1121 until the passing of the Education Act of 1870.

Newtown School was opened on 16 August 1875 with 56 children. One month later the numbers had risen to 122 and by October there were 163. The numbers had reached over one thousand by 1881 and by the time the school had been open for ten years there were 1500 pupils. At this time the school was run by the joint Reading and Earley School Board. The pressure on accomodation was later relieved by the opening of Redlands School.

Peter's talk was amply illustrated with slides of schools, personalities and extracts from various documents and as so often happens the proceedings were enhanced by the personal reminiscences of members.

Reading Dispensary Trust - William DEAR, Thursday 16 October 1982

Mr. William DEAR, the Clerk to the Trustees, traced the history of the Dispensary from its founding.

The population of Reading in 1801 was 9,742. The Dispensary was opened on 2 November 1802 for the medical treatment of the industrious poor.

The first president was Lord Braybrooke and premises were obtained in Chain Lane. The names of many local worthies appear in the lists of early subscribers. These people were allowed to issue so many letters per year entitling persons to treatment.

In 1870 a providence scheme was introduced by which for a subscription of one penny per week treatment was guaranteed. Reading thus became the first town in the country to operate both a free service and a providence scheme alongside each other.

Dentistry and midwifery services were introduced in 1874. Persons living within a seven mile radius of the Borough were entitled to treatment from 1877 (and this still applies today). In the same year the original premises were remodelled and new brnaches were opened in East Reading and Caversham.

By 1890 the providence scheme had 16,000 members producing an annual income of £2,300.

The Old Age Pensions Act came in 1908 followed in 1911 by the National Insurance Act, at which stage it became the Reading Dispensary Trust - last functioning as as Dispensary in 1912. The inauguration of the Borough of Reading Medical and Dental Society meant that the Dispensary now paid for treatment rather than providing it. Grants were made to local nursing associations and the the like - in 1914 help was given to Belgian refugees. Grants were also made at this time for surgical appliances, artificial limbs, Turkish baths (!) and spectacles.

Between the wars grants continued to be made to the large numbers of people still not covered by National Insurance. In 1942 help was afforded to the wives of Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen.

The Beveridge Report of 1942 recommended free medical treatment for everyone. Since the introduction of the National Health Service on 5 July 1948 the work has continued aiding the sick, handicapped and disabled.

After the sale of the original premises to Heelas for their redevelopment in 1973 the headquarters were moved to the former East Reading branch in Wokingham Road.

The income is now between £25,000 and £30,000 per annum and last year grants were made to 326 individuals and organisations such as the James Butcher Housing Association, the Sue Ryder Trust and the St. John Ambulance Brigade.

Mr. DEAR brought along a number of Record Books, Instruments, Photographs and other exhibits.

RECENT MEETINGS (continued)

Transport for Reading Borough 1879-1982 - Michael DARE, Thursday 18 November 1982

The speaker at this meeting was Mr. Michael DARE a founder member of the British Trolleybus Society.

In 1879 the Corporation took over the service of the horse drawn tramcars run by a private company between Brock Barracks and Cemetery Junction. This continued until 1903 when thirty four four-wheeled electric tramcars were purchased. A depot and power station were built in Mill Lane and the service extended from Grovelands to a point in the Wokingham Road (on what is still known as the main line). New routes were added going to London Road, Erleigh Road, Bath Road and from Whitley to Caversham Bridge. A year later six bogie trams were added. During the 1914-1918 war women were recruited as drivers and conductresses. The vehicles and track deteriorated badly and had to be relaid.

Reading always has open-topped trams owing to the three low bridges which crossed the routes (Reading West Station, Vastern Road and Caversham Road). In 1919 motor-buses were introduced, at first from Tilehurst (The Plough) to Caversham Heights. Other routes were quickly added to cover developments in outlying districts. In 1929 came the first top-covered buses (although they were still lower than the standard height).

In the 1930's trackless trams - trolleybuses - were introduced, Erleigh Road having been used as a training route. Some confusion was caused at first as the drivers now had to steer them! The main line was converted in 1938 and extended to the Bear Inn with turning circles being provided at the termini. The last tramcar left the Pond House on 20 May 1939.

Later that year came the Second World War, the black-out and fear of invasion. Many terminus names were altered to confuse an invading enemy. Women reappeared as conductresses and inspectors and, despite war-time conditions, a new Norcot-Kentwood Junction was made.

Much reconstruction and purchase of new and second hand vehicles followed. Later, owing to the ageing of the trolleybuses and spares for the vehicles and overhead wiring being unobtainable the trolleybuses were finally withdrawn from service on 2 November 1968.

In 1971 the first one man operated double-deck buses were introduced and more recently there has been the taking over of the Woodley services and the introduction of the London services.

An interesting coincidence of dates was that of the White Hart Hotel at the corner of St. Mary Butts and Oxford Road. This was built in 1903, the year of the first electric tram, and demolished in 1968, the year of the last trolleybus.

A series of slides of trancars, trolleybuses and many makes of motor buses completed a most interesting evening. Although no Reading tramcars were preserved intact no less that fourteen Reading buses have been preserved in various locations - principally the Society's museum at Doncaster.

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BROCK'S MONUMENT - by Mr. Bert RIVERS

Visiting Canada recently and being driven through Queenston Heights Park en route to Niagara Falls my attention was drawn to a Nelson's Column type of Monument to General Sir Isaac Brock described in "Exploring Ontario" as "the best hero Canadians have gained from the War of 1812, though his strategic sense is rather suspect".

The Dictionary of National Biography says that Major General Sir Isaac Brock joined the 8th Battalion of Foot and transferred to the 49th Battalion of Foot in 1791. As this Battalion subsequently became the 1st Battalion Royal Berkshire Regiment this, no doubt accounts for the name of our local barracks.

BEHIND THE SCENES AT THE MUSEUM OF ENGLISH RURAL LIFE - Saturday 30 October 1982

It is often said with a great deal of truth that when you live in a town you never get around to looking at many of its treasures. This is undoubtedly the case with the Museum of English Rural Life in Whiteknights - not least of all because it is not in the town centre.

For its autumn meeting the Berkshire Local History Association (to which the Society is affiliated) organised a day seminar there attended by about fifty people including six of our members.

The Museum was founded in 1951 and at first collected almost anything relating to agriculture until the mid sixties. By this stage there were others in the field and it was decided to be more selective.

The Museum also houses the Institute of Agricultural History which is primarily an archive for all aspects of the subject.

In various sessions conducted by members of the staff we were given a glimpse of the different collections. Trade catalogues have been accumulated from over two thousand agricultural firms ranging from single items to several tons of paper from Suttons Seeds.

The size of the photograph collection is almost incomprehensible - there are at least three hundred thousand glass negatives as well as several hundred thousand prints.

Another interesting aspect was seeing how museum items - which range from small hand tools to farm wagons - are preserved.

The Museum and Institute are, of course, part of the University of Reading but they do also provide a service for schools. The Museum is open from Tuesday to Saturday (admission free) and well worth a visit for its own sake. The Institute Library and the other services are also available to the public.

Next time you read a book about the countryside or visit rural exhibitions the initials M.E.R.L. should surely take on an added significance.

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THE ROYAL BERKSHIRE REGIMENT

Many of you will recall a talk last year about the Royal Berkshire Regiment - their battles and exploits. The Royal Berkshire Regiment has now been amalgamated with the Wiltshire Regiment to form "The Duke of Edinburgh's Royal Regiment" with their headquarters in what is intriguingly called "The Wardrobe" in the Cathedral Close at Salisbury. The two regimental museums have also been merged and are in the same building. Unofficially open since the summer of 1981, the Duke of Edinburgh (as Colonel-in-Chief) performed the official opening on 29 July 1982.

The main item of interest to Reading folk is the display about the Battle of Maiwand (27 July 1880) commemorated by the Forbury Lion; this includes an information bar so that visitors can view the scene of the battle and listen to an account of it. A party of the 66th Regiment of Foot (Berkshire) was almost wholly wiped out apart from eleven men who, completely surrounded by thousands of Ghazis, inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy until they finally fell. The mongrel dog "Bobbie" who was with them is also on display.

It has been suggested that the Society arrange an outing to Salisbury next Spring to include a visit to the Regimental Museum if there is sufficient interest among members to book a coach. Please let Sue READ know if you are interested.

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BERKSHIRE FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY

The seemingly indefatigable Cliff and Jean DEBNEY were involved in organising a successful Open Day for the Berkshire Family History Society during October. To facilitate the indexing of the 1851 Census for Berkshire a computer is being used.

Next year the Society is organising its Annual General Meeting with a one day conference on family history at Bulnershe College.

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO - miscellaneous intelligences from the Berkshire Chronicle 1882

Reading Dispensary - Saturday 11 November 1882

Following our October meeting when we heard that the Reading Dispensary received donations from the well-to-do and others a report of a Coroner's inquest on the death of a visiting commercial traveller concluded:

"The Jury gave their fees to the Reading Dispensary."

Tramcar Accident - Saturday 11 November 1882

Relating to our November meeting:

"A slight accident occurred to one of the tramway cars on Sunday evening. Some workmen had been engaged in laying new sewers close to the tram line in the Oxford Road, and one of the cars unfortunately left the line and got into the trench which it is said was not properly shored up. The car was thrown over on one side. Several passengers were in the car, but when taken out, it was found that none were injured and that the car was not damaged."

Royal Berkshire Hospital - Saturday 2 December 1882

"A present of twelve brace of pheasant has been received from the Rev. H. Golding -Palmer, of Holme Park, for the use of the patients."

Reports such as the above were a not infrequent occurrence!

Reading Literary and Scientific Society - Saturday 2 December 1882

There is a report of a meeting held at the Lodge Hotel on 22 November at which Dr. Stevens read a paper on "Some of the Principal Punishments in the Middle Ages". This was illustrated with sketches of various items such as the brank* in Reading Gaol and other delights such as stocks, pillories and ducking-stools. During the discussions that followed the reading of the paper:

"Several of the gentlemen present expressed their experiences regarding some peculiarities in these implements, and some differences in their applications."

Perhaps the most important part of our meetings is the ensuing discussion...!?

*A brank was an implement used (according to the Encyclopaedia Britannica) for the punishment of scolding women. It consisted of an iron hoop that fitted over the head with a flat projecting piece that held the tongue down.

Free Library Reading Room - Saturday 30 December 1882

The Town Hall was opened in 1882 and also housed the newly formed lending library and museum. In view of our forthcoming visit to the Reference Library in January 1883:

"We draw the attention of the public to an advertisement in our advertising column, stating that the reading room will be opened on Monday next, supplied with the current magazines, periodicals and reviews; separate accommodation being provided for females. The room is light and lofty and will seat between a hundred and a hundred and fifty persons. It will be open from 9.30 a.m. and 10 p.m. The library will not be opened for a few weeks as, the arrangements are not yet completed. In the meantime persons desiring to become borrowers from the library should make applications for the forms to be filled up to entitle them to receive the books. Burgesses will be entitled to borrow books on their own guarantee. All other persons will require the guarantee of a burgess. Persons who are neither residents or ratepayers in the borough may borrow books by paying a subscription. The newsroom continues to be well attended."

It is amusing to note that a report on 4 November noted that an assistant librarian has been appointed at 6s per week whereas the porter had been appointed at 17s per week.

FOR YOUR BOOKSHELF

Reading Past and Present by Daphne PHILLIPS

Following her widely acclaimed book "The Story of Reading" published in 1980, Daphne PHILLIPS has now provided the text for a collection of photographs and prints of the town. The photographs and prints are arranged in pairs - the first dating from the nineteenth to the early twentieth century and the second being the same scene taken in 1982 by Irene HEATH.

(Published by Countryside Books and the Reading Chronicle at £3.50 with 62pp. Obtainable at meetings, from bookshops or from Jean DEBNEY - add 40p for postage and packing).

An ABC of Secretary Hand by Alf ISON

An amusing and informative picture book to help you to learn to read old documents and parish registers. Several facsimile documents to practice your new skills with and a reference page to keep beside you whilst interpreting other material.

(Published privately at £1 - A5 size with 38pp. Obtainable at meetings or from Jean DEBNEY - add 20p for postage).

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FUTURE MEETINGS

20 January 1983 Visit and Guided Tour of Reading Reference Library - David CLIFFE

17 February 1983 The Young National Trust

17 March 1983 Annual General Meeting and Members Evening

21 April 1983 "The Forlorn Hope - Fortress to Family Home" - Eric STANFORD

Apart from the Library visit all meetings begin at 7.30 p.m. in the Abbey Gateway Room.

Details of the summer meetings have yet to be finalised. It is hoped to organise a walkabout and a boat trip on the canal.

You will see that the Annual General Meeting is to be followed by a Members Evening. If you have a subject of local interest and you would be prepared to give a brief talk on it please let Sue READ know. It is very likely that you might have a related interest that is not strictly about Reading - this is an opportunity to tell us about it!

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COURSES

If you did not get around to enrolling on any courses during the autumn. A few more start in the New Year - see Jean DEBNEY or Sue READ. Their own courses are:

Trace Your Family Tree - Jean DEBNEY

Mondays, 1.30-3.30, Montague House, Wokingham - 12 weeks from 10 January 1983
(continuation - beginners welcome, fee £13, O.A.P. £4.35)

Tuesdays, 7.30-9.30, Emmbrook School, Wokingham - 12 weeks from 11 January 1983
(continuation - beginners welcome, fee £13, O.A.P. £4.35)

Fridays, 1.15-3.15, Woodley Hill House, Earley - 6 weeks from 28 January 1983
(beginners, fee £9, O.A.P. £3.00)

Roman Life at Silchester - Sue READ

Tuesdays, 7.30-9.30, Reading Museum - 5 weeks from 11 January 1983

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NEXT NEWSLETTER

The next Newsletter will be published during February. Any material should be sent to the Editor; Nigel DENTON, 12 Maria Court, Southcote Road, Reading by Saturday 29 January 1983.

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CHRISTMAS AT THE WORKHOUSE - from the Berkshire Chronicle, Saturday 30 December 1882

"The usual Christmas entertainment was given to the inmates of the workhouse on Christmas Day, the fare being roast beef and plum pudding, a pint of ale for each adult; oranges were also distributed, and half an ounce of tobacco was given to each man and some snuff to each of the women; sweets and cakes being provided for the children."