



The History of Reading Society

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MEETINGS 1983/1984

29 September 1983

Reading at the Beginning of the 18th Century
Dr. C.F. SLADE - President of the Society

20 October 1983

The History of the Berkshire Discharged Prisoners
Aid Society
Peter SOUTHERTON

17 November 1983

The Work of the Museum of English Rural Life -
with Berkshire in View
Roy BRIGDEN - Curator of the Museum of English
Rural Life

5 January 1984

A Victorian Evening - a social occasion to be held
jointly with the Berkshire Archaeological Society in
the Small Town Hall
Period musical entertainment, food and drink

19 January 1984

An Evening of Tiles in Reading Museum -
Roman, Medieval, Delft and Victorian
Leslie CRAM, Sue READ and Eric STANFORD

23 February 1984

Instant History, Just Add Water!
Mike HALL - Archaeologist for Thames Water

22 March 1984

Annual General Meeting and Members Evening

12 April 1984

The Work of the Archivist and the Reading Borough Records
Adam GREEN - The County Archivist for Berkshire

17 May 1984

The Great Western Railway - Calling at Reading along
the line
Matthew TURNER

All the above meetings are held in the Abbey Gateway, Reading at 7.30 p.m., with the exception of the Victorian Evening on 5 January in the Small Town Hall and the Tile Evening on 19 January in Reading Museum.

September 1983

MEET THE NEW COMMITTEE MEMBERS

James GAFFORD who is married with two grown up children came to Reading from London in 1936 moving to Caversham in 1960. He is now retired from being an insurance branch office manager and was President of the Reading Insurance Institute from 1959 to 1960. He was appointed a Justice of the Peace in 1957 and has just retired from the Bench of which he was Chairman from 1979 to 1981. Since 1952 he has been Treasurer of the Berkshire Archaeological Society and has been Treasurer of the Berkshire Archaeological Trust since its foundation in 1974. From 1964 to 1978 he was Chairman of the Watlington House Management Committee. In between all these activities he has also found the time to pursue his interests which he lists as history, travel and photography.

Tony MANSFIELD who works for the Midland Bank was born in King's Road moving to Whitley Wood where he still lives in 1934. His considerable knowledge of the area he was able to put to good effect when giving his recent talk to the Society in May. Since leaving the Army in 1948 he has studied art at Reading Technical College, Reading University and Shiplake College and has exhibited in the City of London and at various local shows. He was a member of the Royal County Operatic Society which performed at the Palace Theatre in Reading. Among his numerous interests are the local rivers and woods.

Mary SOUTHERTON who has faithfully supplied the coffee at meetings is, of course, married to Peter. She came to Reading with Peter in 1962 and now teaches at the Newtown Special Unit. Apart from helping Peter with his research into the history of crime and punishment in Berkshire she is also investigating the history of Broad Street and is interested in the photographers in the town. Among her various hobbies are spinning and photography.

THANKS

Once again thanks to Fred PADLEY who showed another party of members around the Cole Library at the University on Thursday 28 April. It is sixty nine years since he first joined the staff of the then University College. Now he works part-time cataloguing the collection in the Cole Library. Among the many treasures in the collection is a zoological book printed in the late fifteenth century with doodles - so there is nothing new under the sun!

CHRISTMAS/NEW YEAR MEETING

Our Christmas/New Year's meeting on 5 January is this year to be a Victorian Evening in the Small Town Hall. We are holding this jointly with the Berkshire Archaeological Society and including an appropriate celebration of the centenary of Reading Museum.

Period Music and Song is being provided by guest artists. Food and drink will again catch a period flavour, and if it is possible "dress" with a Victorian feel.

Tickets costing £2 will be available at forthcoming meetings or at the Reading Museum Office, Blagrove Street, Reading.

Help - with food for the festivity would be greatly appreciated. Money will be reimbursed for ingredients. Please contact Sue READ, Reading Museum (tel. 55911 ext. 2199) or 15 South Street, Caversham (tel. 476018)

If necessary, transport to and from this event can be arranged - please contact David QUARTERMAINE (tel. (37) 3059) or Nigel DENTON (tel. 585576).

NEXT NEWSLETTER

It is intended to publish the next Newsletter for the Christmas/New Year meeting. Articles for inclusion should be sent to the Editor by Saturday 17 December.

The Editor and Committee genuinely desire to include more contributions from members. If you know of any event that may be of interest or manage to attend one do let us know.

RECENT MEETINGS

The Forlorn Hope - 158 Castle Hill, Fortress to Family Home - Thursday 21 April

The speaker at this meeting was Mr. Eric STANFORD, from the Art Gallery who took as his subject his home in Castle Street.

A series of slides commenced with a map, from the Bodleian Library, of the Civil War Defences with a rampart marked "The Forlorn Hope" at the top of Castle Hill. Number 158 is part of a seventeenth century building now divided into four houses - numbers 154-160.

In 1664 the building was known as The King's Arms the proprietor being Henry BODE and a token bearing his name and date was found underneath some floor boards. By 1761 it had become The New Inn and in a drawing of 1796-1800 it was called Reading House. At this time the building was requisitioned for the accomodation of French Catholic emigree priests who had been expelled from France by the Revolution. A picture shows the garden specially laid out with beds shewing the name of George III and so on. By 1802 it had reverted to The King's Arms and in 1804 it was bought by the Jesse family. In 1817 it became Castle Hill House a young ladies' school being run by Miss JESSE. This may account for some Girl's names scratched on window panes.

Other slides shewed interior fittings of the house and artefacts found, which included a collection of seventeenth to nineteenth century clay pies found with the Bode token. There was also an amusing bundle of accounts, handbills and advertisements for balls etc. which were found in the attic along with some quaint references to "Accomodation for the Nobility, Gentlemen, Ladies and others" (!)

All in all a fascinating account of the acquisition of an old building which had been much neglected resulting in the finding of so much interesting material.

Bert RIVERS

An Acorn - Early Days of Whitley Park School and its Area - Thursday 19 May 1983

It has been said that history ended yesterday. Certainly the events described by Tony MANSFIELD to fellow members of the Society took place in the life time of many of them. His talk covered the thirty seven years from 1929 when meadows in the possession of the Newbery family first began to be transformed into Reading's Whitley Wood Housing Estate.

The school, nowadays hidden behind houses in the Basingstoke Road but still surrounded by playing fields and mature trees, was opened in 1934 with James PIPER as its first headmaster. He initiated a log-book which was continued by his sudcessor, Reginald LUXTON, and extracts from this report provided the meeting with a graphic account of the daily life of the school.

Of special interest were the wartime entries of the reception of evacuees from London, interruptions by air-raid warnings and enforced 'half-holidays' in wintry weather. Meanwhile, closeby on the other side of the Basingstoke Road, hush-hush 'shadow' factories (now forming part of Gillette's premises) were producing aircraft cameras and propaganda leaflets destined to be scattered over Hitler's Germany.

Mr. MANSFIELD concluded his talk with slides of the nearby Kennet, scene of many boyhood adventures, and reminiscences of muffin men, onion-sellers, a blind street-singer and other characters who enlivened the Whitley neighbourhood of fifty years ago.

James GAFFORD

RECENT MEETINGS (continued)

Reading Walkabout - Thursday 9 June 1983

In spite of this co-inciding with the General Election about twenty members and friends joined this year's walkabout led by Ken MAJOR. His aim was to show what can be seen by anyone who takes the time to look.

This year he considered east Reading. From various view points and "en passant" he discussed the framing and cladding of recently built office blocks and the pre-fabricated construction of the new King's House, mid-Victorian industrial buildings, varied styles of decorative brick-work (in the Newtown and Redlands areas) and the use in the time of William IV and early Victoria of Bath Stone in the Eldon Road and Royal Berkshire Hospital area.

The route covered portions of the River Kennet and the Kennet and Avon Canal with lock-cottages and weirs and the site of the proposed Waterways Museum.

Among interesting and amusing comments were the introduction of an "Islamic" influence on the corner of the former Granby cinema - to heighten the illusion of entering another world - and the contrast, on High Bridge between the Victorian brickwork on the Lower Ship Hotel and the neo-vernacular Abbey National Building Society offices on the opposite side of the road.

Bert RIVERS

Cruise into the Past - Sunday 24 July 1983

Every drop of the Thames, it has been said, is liquid history and appropriately the Society's July outing to Mapledurham commenced at Caversham Bridge, the site of Essex's Civil War assault on Reading, 340 years before. Members boarded 'Caversham Lady' on a fine afternoon to cruise upstream over a stretch of river which even Jerome K. JEROME, who has nothing favourable to say for our Town, admits was "very lovely".

Half-an-hour later we tied up in the jungle surroundings of a little jetty and made our several ways to the varied attractions of the ancient village which still contrives to preserve a sense of rural remoteness. There was much to interest the historian, the photographer and the industrial archaeologist within its bounds and an afternoon was scarcely long enough to do more than whet the appetite for future exploration.

The newly-restored mill drew many of us by the sound of its undershot water-wheel and we climbed about amidst the clattering machinery trying to discover how power was distributed through the confusion of wheels and spindles to operate sack-hoist and mill-stone. Although one felt that the primitive-seeming cords and cogs might have been inspired by Heath ROBINSON, there was no doubt that the resultant stone-ground flour we bought was a tribute to their successful working.

The Lister's Hospital almshouses of 1629 drew some of us while others visited St. Margaret's twelfth century parish church with its Norman font and rare Catholic family aisle. But the main object of the outing was Mapledurham House which dominates everything around it. The estate, owned by the Blount family since 1490, is today occupied by their descendants, the Eystons. Much of the original Manor House of Mapledurham Gurney, partly twelfth century, survives and forms an annex of the great diamond-patterned brick mansion which dates from the year of the Armada. It turns its back to the village and the sharp-eyed observer notices the reflected glint of oyster shells on a little gable, once a sign of a safe house to Catholics in time of persecution.

The house looks east over spacious parkland, fine specimen trees, notably a gingko, a vast chestnut and two Judas trees add dignity to the lawns and the entrance porch is flanked by two magnolia grandiflora. Inside, the rooms and their furnishings and paintings are in keeping; an adequate description would fill a book (and does, available to visitors, at the door). Particularly, one recalls the quaint carved and painted animal heads displayed on the walls around the hall and the charming chapel on the Gothick style of Strawberry Hill.

RECENT MEETINGS - Cruise into the Past (continued)

This Twickenham reminder naturally leads to the literary association of the House. Alexander POPE first met Martha BLOUNT here in 1707 and maintained a lifelong friendship with her and her sister. A few of the poet's books are still preserved in the library.

But 'Caversham Lady' called us back to the waterside, to the voles and crested grebes and to Reading. A vote of thanks to our organiser, Peter SOUTHERTON, was acclaimed by all and we went ashore, well content.

James GAFFORD

READING ABBEY STABLES

The recent excavations on the site of the Reading Abbey Stables have made some exciting discoveries. There is evidence that this area was farmed in the tenth or eleventh century before the Abbey was built. Examination of animal bones, seeds and pollen will give further details of agricultural practices of this period nearby the town. Remains of the building on the site belonging to the Abbey complex were uncovered giving the date for its construction in the late twelfth century. An unexpected discovery was the waterfront revetments belonging to the Mediaeval Holy Brook channel adjacent to this building. This can be fitted into the sequence of Mediaeval waterfronts excavated in 1981.

Sue READ

READING'S PHOTOGRAPHERS

There is a long history of photography in Reading. Fox TALBOT, a pioneer of the art, had his Photographic Establishment in Baker Street from 1844 until 1847. As early as 1853 we find Alfred BARKER, 'daguerrotype artist' working at 93, Castle Street. He was followed over the years by a large number of portrait photographers, some of whom were in business for but a short time, others who appear to have flourished. Indeed, two or three firms who were operating in the town during the last century are still in being.

I am looking into the history of photography in the town and would appreciate your help. To the present I have been able to trace some fifty local photographers and have samples of the work of thirty four of them. I need more information however. Has any member any family portraits bearing the name of the photographer or his studio? If so, I would very much like to have sight of them. Has any member any connection with any of them? Have you at any time worked for a local photographer or have you any personal recollections of going to have your photo taken? If so, I would be glad to hear from you.

Mary SOUTHERTON

WOODLEY

During the first week of May Woodley Scouts were enterprising enough to mount an exhibition at their scout hut on South Lake Crescent. This covered the history of Woodley from the earliest days until the recent past. Half the material came from that used by Frances LLOYD for her book (reviewed on page 8) and the rest was collected by the scouts themselves. One important feature of Woodley was the aerodrome and the Miles Aircraft Factory. It was here that the first working ball-point pen (the original "biro"), the first photocopier and the first automatic pilot were developed. Today all of these things are taken for granted.

THE ART OF THE BOOK

As part of the Reading Festival there was a small exhibition in the University Library on five centuries of the decoration and embellishment of books. The various features which hardly get noticed nowadays were covered showing the development of the title page, bindings and jackets. At one time the title page was all important and often very ornate. Today the emphasis is on the cover or jacket (rarely indicative of the content!). A series of jackets designed for the novels of Iris MURDOCH formed one of the displays.

St. Luke's church in Erleigh Road has just been celebrating its centenary. On 6 June, the actual anniversary of the consecration, there was a special service led by the Bishop of Oxford. As part of the celebrations there was an exhibition showing something of the history of the area and the church. This was principally the work of Janet CLARK.

The first church here was the 'Iron Church' built in 1878 on the site of what is now 27,29 and 31 Erleigh Road. The cost was a mere £967 19s and 0d which was mostly the gift of Mr. Henry Bilson BLANDY, a church warden of St. Giles and the Mayor of Reading.

The Berkshire Chronicle of Saturday 9 June 1883 gave a very full account of the consecration service:

"St. Luke's Church, a red brick building, erected on the Redlands Estate, in the parish of St. Giles, Reading was opened on Wednesday by the Lord Bishop of the Diocese. When the estate began to be built upon and it was seen that there would be a large population, the spiritual needs of which must be provided for, an iron church was erected, and service has been held in it up to the present time. It was soon found that the small iron church was inadequate, and the present structure was commenced in April last year. The foundation stone was laid by the Bishop of Oxford on June 27 following, and the church was finished a fortnight before the contract time had expired. The contract price for the church and fittings was £6,627 and other expenses amounted to £750, making a total of £7,577. Grants of £200 from the Incorporated Church Building Society and £450 from the Diocesan Church Building Society were received, but the remainder of the cost was raised by subscription. Mr. and Mrs. BLANDY were the largest subscribers, a sum of £1,500 being put down to them, but it is an open secret that other sums were generously placed at the disposal of the Building Committee by Mr. and Mrs. BLANDY. Among the donors of £100 and upwards appear the names of Mr. BENYON, Messrs. SIMMONDS, the Rev. C.F.J. BOURKE, Mr. G. PALMER, M.P., Mr. S. PALMER, Mr. G. MAY and the Misses HOLMES.

"The church consists of a nave and two aisles, and a chancel, the end of the chancel being a dodecagonal apse. The building is constructed of red brick, relieved with grey, Doulting stone being used for weatherings and buttresses, sills, copings etc. There is no tower or spire, but a bell turret. The church is entered by a western galilee porch, running across the entire width of the nave and aisles. The nave is separated from the north and south aisles by arcades of arches each supported upon Cornish Down stone columns, and the spandrils are filled in with yellow malms. There is a north transept, with organ chamber over, and a south transept, over which is the singing gallery. The chancel is fitted with choir seats, sedilia, piscina and credence shelf; there are the choir and clergy vestries, fitted with presses, &c. The chancel is handsomely paved with Godwin's 'Ancient make' tiles, and all the gangways are laid with Edwards' Ruabon tiles. This portion of the work was carried out by Messrs. Walmsley and Co., of Reading. The seats throughout are made of selected pitch pine, and are varnished. The pulpit is of a wainscoat oak, richly carved, and it stands upon a boldly carved base of Doulting stone. The font, which is in form octagonal, is constructed of Doulting stone, the sides of the bowl being enriched with quatrefoil panels, supported on a central shaft and four Cornish granite columns. The main roof is constructed on the hammer beam principle, and is noteworthy for being entirely formed and put together without the use of a single bolt or piece of iron, the whole being secured together with stout oak pins; the knees and wall pieces rest on Doulting stone corbels. The chancel roof is similarly framed, but without hammer beams, the thrust being thrown onto corbels considerably below the plate level by wall pieces and ribs, which form and arch beneath the collar.

"The church is ventilated by thirty two casements fitted to the aisle and clerestory windows, those of the latter being opened with a continuous apparatus. Ventilation is provided by means of several upright flues constructed in the brickwork under the aisle windows and communicating outside at the base, and closed inside with a brass valve fitted to the window seats. The small organ was provided by Walker of Francis-Street, Tottenham Court-road, and the tapestry hangings in the chancel are fitted by Mr. HOLMES, of St. Mary's Butts, Reading. The enriched needlework was executed by and under the direction of the Misses BOURKE. Mr. St. AUBYN (of London) was the architect, Mr. BOTTRILL (of Reading) the builder and Mr. Robert WILLIAMS, the clerk of the works. The building is well adapted for its purpose and has been well carried out."

It would be rare indeed nowadays to get such a full description of a new building in a local paper. However, it is not quite correct on one small detail as the foundation stone (which may be seen on the wall in Donnington Road) was laid by Mr. BLANDY although the Bishop of Oxford took the service.

The consecration service was held at 11 a.m. on the Wednesday morning with the Bishop taking as his text for the sermon Leviticus 20:26. The service which concluded with an administration of Holy Communion was followed by a public luncheon in the Victoria Hall.

Originally, the church was in the parish of St. Giles becoming an independent parish in 1912 when the first Vicar was appointed - the Rev. Francis HOWARD. To this day the Vicar of St. Giles is the Patron of the Living that is he presents the incumbent to the Bishop.

COURSES

As usual there are a number of evening courses starting in the autumn which may be of interest to members. There are also some One Day Schools on Saturdays:

- 22 October Church and Steeple, Univessity, London Road, 0930-1700
- 29 October Daily Life at Roman Silchester, Abbey Gateway, 0930-1700
- 5 November Archaeology in Wessex 1983, University, London Road, 1100-1730
- 12 November Heraldry, Easthampstead Park, 0930-1630
- 26 November Industrial Archaeology around Reading, University, London Road, 0930-1700
- 26 November The Great Estate in Berkshire 1600 to the Present Day, Museum of English Rural Life, 1000-1700
- 3 December Regional Building Materials, University, London Road, 0930-1700

Further details from Sue READ or Nigel DENTON

AN INTERESTING OBITUARY

At Eastbourne, suddenly, while at work in his garden, Mr. John PENDRILL, aged 70 years, who had for many years received the annual bounty granted by Parliament to the heirs male of the family of the Pendrills, by whom King Charles was preserved on the memorable occasion of his secreting himself in an oak tree. The bounty which continues while a male heir is in existence now falls to the son of the deceased, a clerk at the Gloucester Hotel at Brighton.

from: The Berkshire Chronicle, Saturday 1 December 1827.

contributed by Gill TIFT

SUBSCRIPTIONS

A number of members still have not paid their subscriptions for 1983-84. If you are one of these you should receive a form with this Newsletter.

FOR YOUR DIARY

Berkshire Local History Association

For their autumn meeting the Berkshire Local History Association are organising a visit to the Archives at Eton College on Saturday 22 October. The visit will last from 1030-1230 and will cost £1. Further details from Mrs. J. HUNTER, [REDACTED] but note that the party is restricted to twenty persons.

Trolleybuses

Many members will no doubt remember the talk given by Michael DARE last November on Reading's trams and trolleybuses. Fifteen years after their disappearance from Reading the British Trolleybus Society are staging an exhibition about Reading's trolleybuses at the Hexagon from 22 October to 12 November. If the sponsorship money can be raised they intend to bring an ex-Reading trolleybus down from their museum at Sandtoft near to Doncaster.

"Steam on the Great Western"

On Friday 28 October John HUNTLEY is presenting his film show of Great Western steam at the Reading Film Theatre, Palmer Building, Reading University starting at 7.30 p.m. This will be a slightly different programme to the one shown earlier this year at the Hexagon and will include rare film of Reading station in 1941. This event is being held by the Great Western Society and admission is by ticket only (£1.50 - send s.a.e. to Colin BARTON, [REDACTED])

Women in Reading

This is the title of an exhibition to be staged at the Centre for the Unemployed, East Street, during the third week in November and will cover the subject from the nineteenth century until the present day.

FOR YOUR BOOKSHELF

Woodley in the Nineteenth Century by Frances LLOYD

Woodley may be thought by many to be a very modern area as it is very easy to overlook nearby communities when living in the centre of Reading. The first use of the name Woodley appears to be in the eighteenth century. Later it was used in the title of the Liberty of Woodley and Sandford within the Parish of Sonning. At the start of the nineteenth century there were two principal manors - Holme Park in the Palmer family and Bullmarshe in the Wheble family. By sources such as vestry books, enclosure and tithe maps Mrs. LLOYD has been able to trace the history of the area showing that it is very much a place in its own right rather than a mere adjunct of Reading or Sonning.

(Published by Berkshire County Libraries and recently re-printed at £2. 92pp with reproductions of old photographs and several maps. Additionally, they have published a map of Woodley Park in 1796 at 20p).

An Ever Present Help by Peter SOUTHERTON

Never the most popular of causes the Berkshire Discharged Prisoners Aid Society exists to give help and support to local felons on their discharge from Reading Gaol. From the early days the Society has a "half-way" house in the town with a wood yard and later on they had a market garden. The Society has always relied on a mixture of grants and donations and inevitably its fortunes have varied over the years. In this brief history the author traces its role over the last century. (Published by the Berkshire Discharged Prisoners Aid Society to celebrate its centenary. 36pp - £1. Proceeds from the sale of this booklet will go to further the work of the Society. The author will be pleased to sign copies at our October meeting).