



The History of Reading Society

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May 1984

TWO WALKABOUT MEETINGS

Thursday 14 June

Reading Churches - A Walkabout led by Mr. Godwin ARNOLD
meet at St. Giles Church at 7.30 p.m.

Thursday 5 July

Reading Trees - Rooted in the Past
A Tree Walk in Central Reading
led by Miss Catherine OLVER
meet at the Abbey Gateway at 7.00 p.m.

FRIENDS OF READING ABBEY

It is proposed to form a group of Friends of Reading Abbey with the aim of ensuring that the remains such as there are do not deteriorate any further. The inaugural meeting has been arranged for Friday 25 May at 7.30 p.m. in the Abbey Gateway Room and anyone interested is invited to attend.

TRIP ON THE KENNET AND AVON CANAL - Friday 15 June

An evening trip on the Kennet and Avon Canal with our friends from the Berkshire Industrial Archaeological Group has been organised for Friday 15 June departing from Reading County Lock at 7.00 p.m. For further details please telephone Graeme NAISH on 872166.

VISIT TO LACOCK - Sunday 15 July

The Society is organising a coach trip to Lacock on Sunday 15 July. Besides being an exceptionally beautiful village there are also the Fox Talbot Museum (with its Reading connections) and Lacock Abbey. For further details please telephone Peter SOUTHERTON on 56867.

WEST READING FESTIVAL - Saturday 19 May to Sunday 3 June

Throughout the Festival there will be an exhibition on Old Reading and Prisoners' Art at St. Mark's Church, Cranbury Road, open from 10.30 a.m. to 5.30 p.m.

On Wednesday 30 May at 8 p.m. Daphne PHILLIPS and David CLIFFE will talk on Old Reading.

SUMMER IS ICUMEN IN!

The Committee extend their best wishes for an enjoyable summer to all members and friends.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING - Thursday 22 March 1984

At this year's Annual General Meeting two of our long-serving Committee members had to stand down after serving five years (as stated in our Constitution).

David QUARTERMAINE was a founder member of the Society and one of the first Committee members. Subsequently he was Treasurer for a number of years before becoming Chairman last year. He will continue to be active for the Society and looks forward to members taking advantage of the bookstall.

Peter SOUTHERTON was also a founder member of the Society and its first Chairman until 1979 since which time he has been an active Committee member. In addition to his Reading Chronology he has also agreed to take over the Newsletter as well as providing a projector for meetings.

Also retiring from the Committee after three years was Derek HUMPHRIES who has been a very capable Minute Secretary and for the past year has been the artist of our striking set of posters which function he has agreed to continue.

The Society is grateful for all they have done and welcomes their continuing support.

In their place Mary SOUTHERTON was elected Chairman and we welcomed to the Committee Amyas CRUMP and Elspet NAISH.

MEET THE NEW COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Amyas CRUMP aged 26 originally came from Wellington in Somerset and moved east two years ago following his career with Western Fuels having previously worked at the Reading and Taunton depots. He has been an active member of the Great Western Society since 1968 and was Secretary of the Taunton Group at the minimum permitted age of 16. Recently he has joined the Reading Group Committee. In 1976 he was one of the first to stumble upon the Broad Gauge Railway at Burlescombe which is now being reconstructed at Didcot Railway Centre. Amyas' other interests include parachuting, the Young National Trust, Old Reading, his house in Granby Gardens and writing THE book on the Culm Valley Light Railway.

Elspet NAISH who came to Reading from Southport in 1978 is a teacher at Abbey School. Having read History at Glasgow University she has been a teacher for the past fourteen years. Prior to coming to Reading she taught at Merchant Taylor's School, Crosby. She is married to Graeme, an engineer and former Naval Officer, and they have four grown-up children. Of the twenty six moves that they have made Reading is the place in which they have stayed the longest! They are both active members of the Berkshire Industrial Archaeological Group of which Graeme is Chairman. Elspet has agreed to become our Minute Secretary.

1984/1985 PROGRAMME

The programme for the 1984/1985 season will be in the next Newsletter. However, we are able to give the provisional dates for our indoor programme:

1984	Thursday	20 September
	Thursday	18 October
	Thursday	15 November
	Thursday	13 December
1985	Thursday	24 January
	Thursday	21 February
	Thursday	21 March
	Thursday	18 April
	Thursday	16 May

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

CAPITALS IN CAPITAL

Although the Bayeux Tapestry replica from Reading Art Gallery is not featured in the exhibition "English Romanesque Art 1066-1200" at the Hayward Gallery in London various pieces of masonry from Reading Abbey are including a dozen of the famous capitals from the cloisters. The exhibition continues until 8 July.

RECENT MEETINGS

A Victorian Evening - Thursday 5 January 1984

This meeting held jointly with our friends from the Berkshire Archaeological Society took place in the Small Town Hall which was tastefully decorated for the occasion by David QUARTERMAINE and Peter SOUTHERTON.

A sumptuous buffet supper was provided, largely to the recipes of the famous Mrs. Beeton, with explanatory labels. The repast included elderflower wine, coconut and Jerusalem soups, pheasant, chicken, various meats with assorted salads, and sweets and desserts of infinite variety.

Afterwards Mr. Frank TERRY with Mrs. Freda CLARK accompanied by Mrs. Marion HOLMES on the piano gave a programme of Victorian songs and duets which ranged from Strauss (Die Fledermaus) and Gilbert and Sullivan (Patience) to "Come into the Garden, Maud" and they concluded by leading us in a number of well-known old-fashioned choruses.

There was also a small exhibition of Victoriana and many members helped to set the scene by donning Victorian costume for the evening.

After a recitation of a Victorian poem by Daphne BAKER a vote of thanks was proposed by Graeme NAISH.

Bert RIVERS

An Evening of Tiles at Reading Museum - Thursday 19 January 1984

Members enjoyed the luxury of three speakers on this subject, the first being Leslie CRAM who covered the Roman period. The production of fire-clayed facts dates from earliest time and the Egyptians were probably the first to use it as a building material. Our Roman conquerors favoured tiles rather than bricks and introduced them into Britain to be used in hypocausts to form floor supports and to provide heating flues within the walls, as a bonding string course and as a covering for their roofs of a type still common in Italy to this day.

Tiles had to be made wherever natural clay and plentiful wood fuel could be obtained and as near to the building site as possible. The clay was first weathered for several months under cover to drive off surplus moisture and it was during this stage that it recorded the impressed marks of animals' feet which tell us much of the environment of those times. The tracks of dogs, chickens, wild birds, lambs and kids, fox, deer and badger have all been identified; even the print of a Roman sandal has survived, made permanent by the subsequent firing.

When the Romans left there appears to have been no more tile-making until the Middle Ages and here Sue READ picked up the story. They were then used for flooring, originally in palaces and cathedrals but later in houses and parish churches. Floor tiles, made of red clay, bore designs in white clay, either inlaid into a cut design or laid on the surface and impressed. After drying, glazing and firing the colours changed to the yellow on brown with which we are familiar, although both grey and green tiles are also known. Manufacture was carried out in permanent centres but travelling tile-makers with design blocks were often employed. Designs, either for individual tiles or groups of four, were of floral, leaf or heraldic subjects as well as depicting wild or mythical animals. Curiously, religious themes are almost unknown. The fashion ceased at the Renaissance until the nineteenth century when factory-made and rather-too-perfect copies of the old designs appeared to support the nationwide church building and restoration work.

Bert RIVERS

RECENT MEETINGS (continued)

Meanwhile, on the continent, there had developed a process of coating earthenware with tin oxide and lead glaze, making a white basis for painting the pictures. Eric STANFORD now showed some of the many examples of wall tiles from the Museum collection of what has come to be called Delft although much of it was made in London, Bristol and Liverpool from the 16th to the 18th century. The painting, using cobalt oxide (blue) or manganese oxide (purple) had to be done very quickly without alteration and the slight variations and spontaneity of design enhances its interest. Although mostly religious subjects were depicted almost anything, except abstract designs, may be found. Manufacture of these pottery tiles came to an end in England around 1800 but Dutch tiles continued to be imported. Improved processes such as the introduction of Leeds Creamware and transfer printing later produced pictorial tiles of a high standard. Examples of these in whole sets representing rural scenes have been removed recently from the walls of a former dairy in London Street and after restoration will eventually be on display in Reading Museum.

James GAFFORD

Instant History - Just Add Water! - Thursday 23 February 1984

Under this intriguing title, Mike HALL described the wide scope of his work as Archaeologist to the Thames Water Authority. In an area of 5,000 square miles stretching from Banbury to Basingstoke and Maidstone to Marlborough, the Authority's boreholes, pipelaying and construction work inevitably disturb the sites of ancient monuments and the speaker demonstrated by slides how these are identified, excavated and preserved. For example, the Wessex downlands are rich in Bronze and Iron Age earthworks and the Darent Valley around Lullingstone contains no less than four Roman villas.

The River Thames itself, thanks often to the co-operation of sub-aqua clubs, has yielded countless interesting finds, many of which have been entrusted to the care of Reading Museum. From more recent times, the archives of the former Thames Conservancy contain an extensive library of books about the river as well as a number of documents and plans, the work of such eminent engineers as BRINDLEY, RENNIE and BRUNEL.

The recent discoveries at the Abbey Waterfront site on the Kennet remind us, concluded Mr. HALL, of the historic importance of river transport and that similar interesting lost wharves in the Thames Valley are waiting to be unearthed.

James GAFFORD

Members' Evening - Thursday 22 March 1984

Following the Annual General Meeting (which is reported elsewhere) a Members' Evening was held.

First, Peter SOUTHERTON gave details of a Chronology of Events in Reading from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle up to the present time which he is compiling - thus expanding and updating Gilpin's Chronology covering the period 1066-1893.

Second, Sue READ shewed slides from the Reading Museum collection relating to the bakery businesses of Huggin's, Crown Street and Alder's, Friar Street which have recently been closed down. Sue shewed a number of interesting photographs of nineteenth century ovens, machinery, utensils etc. which have been kept and which it is hoped to re-constitute in the new Blake's Lock Museum.

Finally, Mary SOUTHERTON spoke of her work in compiling a list of photographers studios in Reading (she has already obtained 113 names) and collecting examples of their various styles of photograph.

All in all an interesting and well varied trio of talks. Both Mary and Peter will be pleased of any items of information or photographs which members may be able to give or loan to them.

Bert RIVERS

RECENT MEETINGS (continued)

The Work of the Archivist and the Reading Borough Records - Thursday 12 April

The speaker for this meeting was Mr. Adam GREEN, the County Archivist, who gave us a racy and informative talk.

Among the almost superhuman qualities he listed as requisites for the job were long arms like a gorilla and a height of seven feet to enable one to handle large bundles of documents and to reach high shelves. In addition to this a knowledge of heraldry, seals, ancient writing, conservation of documents, the law of real property and the Latin language also contributed.

After dealing with the above qualities Mr. GREEN dealt with the Monastic Records, Charters, Reading Corporation Diaries and the like. The earliest document is a Rent Roll of 1297. We were also shown the Parchment Charter of Edward III dated 1344 and bearing the Great Seal of England. Mr. GREEN also showed a number of slides of the Old Records Office in Abbey Street and the new premises at Shire Hall - with 15,000 feet of shelving. There were also fascinating slides of the cleaning, renovation, re-binding and conservation of the archives which is going on in the more commodious surroundings at Shire Hall.

Bert RIVERS

READING ABBEY WATERFRONT

On Saturday 4 February together with members of the Berkshire Archaeological Society and Friends of the Museum we were given a conducted tour of the dig then in progress at the Reading Abbey Waterfront. The invitation was so successful that some seventy-five persons attended making rather a large party for the confined site. However, Peter FASHAM (from the Wessex Archaeological Committee) and Leslie CRAM battled manfully with the noise of the pumping engines. The latter had to run continuously as the site is below the level of the Kennet.

The first excavation shows the 18th century stone wall with a timber construction running south from the wall. The series of water-fronts in the second trench dated from about 1800; the late 18th century; 1717-1734 - all of post and plank construction - and the medieval water-front of about 1300 of oak posts with planks behind. The foundations of a contemporary building (perhaps a warehouse?) can be seen near to Abbey Street.

Many hundreds of horn-cores have been found and the remains of several large wooden tubs "in-situ" give rise to the suggestion that these were used to soak of the horn covering from the core the former then being used for spoons, knives and other implements. In the site museum were exhibited clay-pipes; portions of bottles; fruit stones and seeds; early tiles; and various carved stones from the abbey buildings which have been recovered.

Bert RIVERS

FROM THE TREASURER

During the past year the Committee has agreed to make an ex-gratia payment to any speaker who is not a member of the Society or speaking as a representative of another Society in which case the payment will be made to that Society.

Because of the healthy state of the the Society's finances it was decided by the Annual General Meeting that subscription rates for the year to 31 March 1985 will remain unchanged:

Single Membership	£3.00
Family Membership	£4.00
Senior Citizens & Students	£1.50

If you have not already paid your subscription there should be a completed application form with this Newsletter.

Last year saw the centenary of the Berkshire branch of the Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society and thus the first annual meeting was held in 1884. A full report was carried in the edition of the Berkshire Chronicle dated Saturday 12 April of which extracts are reproduced below. The complete article occupied a full column of small print - a corresponding account today even if printed would be exceptional at more than a few sentences.

"The first annual meeting of the Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society was held at the Assize Courts on Monday afternoon. The following gentlemen were present:- Mr. G.C. Cherry (in the chair), Captain Cobham, Major Thoyts, Colonel Gray, Mr. T.L. Goodlake, Mr. W.B. Monck, Mr. F. Wilder and the Rev. M.T. Friend (honorary secretary)."

The Rev. M.T. Friend read the report:-

"This society was formed March 3rd., 1883, and was duly certified (under Statute 25 and 26 Vic. c. 44) at the Court of Quarter Sessions of the county held on April 2 1883, under the hand of its chairman Mr. Richard Benyon. The object of the society, as stated in a circular published at the time, is generally, to investigate the necessities of deserving prisoners, and to do something to befriend them on their discharge and to promote their return to honest industry. The result for the year just ended is that forty five prisoners cases have been taken in hand and provided for as follows:- one emigrated; eight sent to sea; nine sent by rails to other destinations; two sent to penitentiary homes; one temporarily assisted with food, one temporarily assisted with food and sent by rail; four temporarily assisted with food; four temporarily assisted with food and sent by rail; three temporarily assisted with board and lodging and money; two temporarily assisted with board and lodging and food and sent by rail; five provided with tools or stock; one provided with stock and money; *money, board and lodging; one assisted with money, clothes and railway fare, and board and oodging. Besides the above cases of prisoners discharged from the Reading Prison, three convicts belonging to the County have been received by the society from Portland Prison, their gratuities amounting to £14 7s 7d, have been expended for them. The advantage of the society's aid is that the convict hereby obtains a much larger sum from the Government than if he simply took his discharge from prison without being transferred to such a society, and the Government obtains the best security that the money shall be properly utilised.

"The society has an agent in Reading, who has rendered occasional useful assistance in making inquiries and providing board and lodging where wanted. This part of the work is very important, and capable of extension as the society's funds increase.

"The sources of the society's income are: (i) donations, (ii) subscriptions, (iii) grants from the Government made by the Commissioners of Prisons, (proportionate to the population of the prison in comparison with other prisons, but never exceeding the annual subscriptions raised by the society), and finally, (iv) the yearly dividends of Elizabeth Dean's Charity for bringing forward for the county gaol, which by the Charity Commission has been entrusted to the visiting Justices of the Reading Prison for the time being, to be by them devoted to the use of the Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society in connection with this prison.

"Annual subscribers of at least 5s become members of the Society. The subscriptions and other receipts during the year have amounted to £85 10s, and the expenditure to £66 5s 7d leaving a balance at the bank of £19 4s 5d.

"The question of affording aid to discharged prisoners had been brought into prominence since 1877, when the gaols were transferred from the county to her Majesty's Government. Before 1877 they were enabled to give some assistance to prisoners on their discharge, but since that time they had had difficulty in getting money for the purpose.

"The Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society for Berkshire had been established, and its object was to aid prisoners after their discharge from prison, by securing suitable lodgings for such as may be selected, furnishing temporary maintenance in case of need to individuals seeking employment, assisting them in obtaining work, or in returning to their homes and exercising a friendly supervision over them. When they had decided to form the society he was glad to say that the appeal made to the public of Berkshire had been liberally responded to and the committee were thankful to those who had in any way contributed to help forward the work of the society. For some time the authorities had very little to aid prisoners with, the annuity from Elizabeth Dean's Charity, left during the time of the old gaol, being the principle source of revenue. He believed that was for the purpose of warming the cells of female prisoners. Afterwards a fund was started by the chaplain of the gaol aiding the county magistrate, in order that a small sum might be given when it was thought advisable to prisoners on their discharge.

"The great difficulty in dealing with prisoners was to know what to do with them on their discharge. They were rather more fortunate with the female prisoners than the male prisoners, as there was a home established where they were received, and their present chaplain had done a good deal to keep it going; but they had no machinery at all to provide the requirements of the man. He hoped that the funds would soon be raised so that they might soon be enabled to open a place for the reception of male prisoners, and they might be maintained during the time it takes to correspond with their friends, or so as to enable them to make the necessary arrangements for the welfare of the prisoners when they leave the prison. If they had some such home, temporary employment in the garden or something of the kind might be found practicable. The work had been carried on successfully, but it had involved a good deal of labour, especially to the honorary secretary, the chaplain. The thanks of **all were** due to the chaplain for the way in which he had worked up the society. Of course, the committee had helped him as much as possible, but his experience had been of much assistance in bringing the society to its present position."

The home for female prisoners was in Castle Street. Shortly, after the above account appeared a home for male prisoners was opened in Gosbrook Terrace. along the lines envisaged. **Two years later it was transferred to larger premises in Bedford Road.**

* This phrase is copied as it appeared and is clearly a misprint - because the stated total of forty five is arrived at by omitting it!

Peter SOUTHERTON gave us a talk on the history of the Society last October of which he gives an adequate account in his booklet "An ever present Help". This is available at meetings price £1 and the author will be pleased to sign copies. All profits from sales go to the Society.

FOR YOUR BOOKSHELF

The Great Road to Bath by Daphne PHILLIPS

With motorways, by-passes and faster travel it is less easy to notice particular roads these days and this is particularly true of the road from London to Bath which passes through Reading. While the book does not contain many references to our town it does give an insight of the various aspects of travel by road in the past with the history of turnpikes, coaches, highwaymen, inns and the carrying of mail. It was of course the building of the Great Western Railway that led to the demise of the Bath Road as a busy thoroughfare though in a sense things have gone full circle as railways have declined in favour of today's fairly characterless roads.

(Published by Countryside Books at £4.95, 188pp with photographs)

READING'S OWN POLICE

(continued) ONE HUNDRED YEARS

Reading's professional police force came into being in February, 1836, replacing the old and inefficient system of Watchmen appointed by the local Commissioners for Paving. The newly established Force comprised thirty four men of whom two were designated Inspectors and two Sergeants. Their uniform was a long buttoned and belted tunic of blue melton with top hat and boots 'with a new design of fastening which obviates the threading of laces through eyelets'. Each man was equipped with a lamp, a rattle with which to summon aid and a staff for self-protection. The pay was two shillings a day, a not unattractive wage for the period.

The Police Station in these early days was in Friar Street at the former office of the Watch. The Force seems to have embarked upon its activities with a vigour foreign to its predecessor with the result that there were frequent complaints from local inhabitants concerning the noise made by drunks arrested and brought to the Station House at all hours of the night.

In the initial stages, the everyday administration of the Force was undertaken by the Watch Committee. It soon became apparent that this could be better undertaken by an experienced officer and in 1839 Henry Houlton, a former Sergeant of the Metropolitan Police was appointed Chief Inspector. Mr. Houlton was in fact the first of a long line of Chief Constables, each of whom was to make a significant contribution to the life of the town.

The arrival in 1840 of the Great Western Railway brought about rapid and considerable changes to the area. First there came the army of construction workers, a rough and volatile body who for the duration of their stay in the neighbourhood put the citizens of the town in fear of life and property. With the opening of the line, Reading, formerly a quiet market town dependent for communication and commerce upon the canal, the carrier and the mail coach, began steadily to grow in population, commerce and, inevitably in incidence of crime. Naturally, the demands upon the Police Force were to increase in proportion.

To facilitate the detection of crime the Watch Committee in 1857 authorised the purchase of a plain suit for one of the Constables. Thus the C.I.D. was born. A few years later the strength of the Detective Force had trebled. The increase in manpower and work necessitated a move to more commodious premises. These were provided by the opening in 1862 of a new Police Station and Coroner's Court in London Street adjacent to High Bridge. This building still stands and has recently been refurbished.

By the closing years of Victoria's reign, the Reading Borough Police was well established in the affection of the citizens of the town and was operating quite efficiently. The Chief Constable's annual reports show that developments in forensic science were kept under review and incorporated whenever possible. Photography, fingerprinting and improved communication were considered as important. A telephone was installed in the Chief Constable's house as early as 1897.

The strength of the Force was severely depleted upon the outbreak of war in 1914, some twenty Constables being reservists were immediately called to the colours while a further thirty enlisted voluntarily.

During the years between the two World Wars the force continued to develop to meet the challenge of the times. The buildings at High Bridge having become too small, a new Police Station was established in the former University buildings (but recently demolished) in Valpy Street. Despite financial stringencies imposed by the Corporation, the mounted branch was augmented in 1924 by a motor car (used mainly, it seems, for ceremonial purposes) and in 1928 by two motor cycles for mobile patrol duties. An improvement in Police efficiency was also brought about by the installation of a number of direct telephone lines linking Police boxes in various parts of the town directly with the headquarters in Valpy Street. In addition to its primary task of combatting crime, the Force was obliged during the inter-war years to cope with ever-increasing traffic congestion and the problems of the motor car.

READING'S OWN POLICE (continued)

The difficulties created through depletion of staff upon the outbreak of the war in 1939 were mitigated to some extents through the creation of the auxiliary Police War Reserve. The Force had nevertheless to cope with serious difficulties and shortages of all kinds. Providentially, Reading was spared from more than the passing attention of enemy aircraft but one Constable unfortunately was killed in February, 1943, when one lone German plane dropped a stick of bombs causing much damage and loss of life in the town centre.

The cessation of hostilities saw the Force sadly short of manpower. Gradually the situation improved and as the economic situation improved so came further advances in equipment and organisation. A notable advance was the installation of radio equipment in patrol vehicles and the provision of personal radio sets to officers on the beat.

The end of the Reading Borough Police as an independent body was foreshadowed by the announcement of the Home Secretary in 1966 of a countrywide scheme to amalgamate existing Police forces into larger and administratively more efficient units. Despite strong objections on the grounds that the Borough Police Force was more than competent to deal with the unique problems of traffic and crime the merger went ahead and in April, 1968, after one hundred and thirty two years of service the local force lost its identity to become a division of the Thames Valley Police.

Peter SOUTHERTON

INFORMAL EVENING WITH PROJECT PURLEY

Recently, the Berkshire Local History Association (to which the Society is affiliated) decided to have some "informal evenings" to give members and affiliated societies the chance to meet one another. The first of these was held in the Memorial Hall at Purley on Friday 17 February. Unfortunately the Society was under-represented because the the Annual General Meeting of the Friends of Reading Museum and Art Gallery.

Purley is an ancient parish although most of the residents have only moved there recently into the modern housing estates. For about the last four years various people have been researching the history of the village although Project Purley was only formally constituted two years ago. The title Project Purley may seem a little strange - it derives from the fact that unlike most societies such as our own there is no formal lecture programme as such but a series of groups that undertake specific projects. These range from parish records and heraldry to natural history. The last of these is not perhaps the most obvious activity for a local history group but is flourishing. Arising out of a discussion on this point at the evening was the suggestion that the Association might perhaps consider having a session dedicated to the dating of hedgerows in the form of a Day School.

The evening concluded with the Chairman, **Jean DEBNEY**, describing the activities of the various groups and John TITTERTON explaining how his heraldry group had been able to disprove one or two popular legends about Purley's past.

NEXT NEWSLETTER

This will be my last Newsletter for the moment as the time has come to take a break. I would like to place on record my thanks to Messrs. RIVERS and GAFFORD for their lively accounts of meetings. Peter SOUTHERTON has agreed to take on the Editorship and would be grateful to receive contributions for future editions which should be sent to him at 25 Barnwood Close. It is expected that the next edition will appear in the late summer.

Nigel DENTON

SHINFIELD

One of the unfortunate effects of road development is that it can split a town or village asunder and for this reason it is all too easy to forget that the parish of Shinfield which at its northern end touches the Reading Borough boundary does have an older part to the south of the M4 motorway. Ironically, it is probably better known internationally than Reading because of the National Institute for Research in Dairying and the European Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting as well as the all-important (to local historian's at least) County Record Office. It is, however, an ancient parish and is mentioned in Domesday Book. St. Mary's church was founded originally by William Fitz OSBERN, an important companion of William the Conqueror, who was lord of Breteuil, Seneschal of Normandy and Earl of Hereford. His son forfeited the estates due to a rebellion in 1074 and it reverted to the King. Although the present church was built later the advowson (right to present to the benefice) after passing through various hands has remained with the Dean and Chapter of Hereford from 1269 until the present day. In connection with an Easter Flower Festival held in St. Mary's church over the Esster Weekend Shinfield and District Local History Society held an exhibition showing the history of the parish in the village hall.

SCOUT REUNION

I attended the 3rd Reading (St. Peter's Caversham) Scout Group 75th anniversary celebrations on Saturday 5 May. There were ten ex-scouts of the early 1920's present some of whom I hadn't seen since pre-war days.

The afternoon began with a short service conducted the the Rev. D. Spears, former curate of St. Peter's and now Vicar of St. Matthew's, Southcote. Then there was a general 'get-together' and reminiscences and memorabilia such as photographs, programmes and old press reports.

The re-union was also the occasion of the publication of a booklet giving a brief history of the group founded in 1909 and active until the 1930's. It was re-founded in 1950 and is going strong today. The book was written by Audrey ASQUITH, wife of Peter ASQUITH the present group leader. It is of 32 pages and can be bought from Caversham Bookshop price £1.75 or at Society meetings.

Norman WICKS

ADVERT - contributed by Jean DEBNEY

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Depot for Brodie's Pectoral Tablets.

from: BERKSHIRE CHRONICLE, Friday 31 May 1851.

AN IMPORTANT ENQUIRY

If a historian is considered to be a bookworm, is an archaeologist an earthworm and a surveyor a tapeworm?