

## *The History of Reading Society*

The object of this Society is to cultivate interest in and to encourage research into the history of Reading.

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WINTER 1984.

Dear Members,

The Committee takes this opportunity to wish Members and friends the compliments of the Season and a very Happy New Year.

We hope to start the New Year in good form with our annual party, arranged this year in conjunction with the Berks Archaeological Society. This year's theme - 'The Roaring Twenties'. Come in appropriate costume if you can. Whatever you wear, be it flapper dresses and cloche hats for the ladies and Oxford bags and boaters for the men, or 1980's jersey and jeans, we can promise you a jolly good evening's entertainment. Our Secretary, Sue Read, has tickets for you all (and for your friends, too) at only £2 per head.

We have a varied program of talks arranged for the coming months with some evening 'walkabouts' in early Summer. Particulars of these and of the Summer outing will be circulated in the near future.

Yours sincerely,

Mary Southerton

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RECENT MEETINGSTHE LIFE AND WORK OF P.O. COLLIER

The Autumn Season of meetings opened on the 20th September with Dave Collin's account of the life and work of Phillip Osbourne Collier, for over 60 years a press and commercial photographer and publisher of picture postcards.

An amateur local historian, Dave Collins noticed that a large number of local postcard views published over a lengthy period of time originated from a common source. He set out to track down the photographer and discovered to his surprise that the gentleman concerned was still listed in the telephone directory. Sadly, Mr Collier had passed away a few years previously. A prolific photographer, Mr Collier had left behind a wealth of glass negatives, a unique and precious record of Reading over the past half century. Through the kindness of his family this treasure is now in the safe keeping of the Museum of English Rural Life, Whiteknights, as a source of reference material for all who care to make use of it. It is hoped, too, that his cameras and darkroom equipment will also be preserved as a permanent memorial to him.

ROYAL BERKSHIRE AND BATTLE HOSPITALS.

The history of the two hospitals was recalled with the aid of many early photographs in Dr A.M. Barr's lecture in October. The town's polluted water supplies and noisome cesspits in former times led to widespread disease. The only medical care for the poor was provided by the Reading Dispensary which was founded in 1802 to supply medicine and medical advice. When local surgeon, George May, in 1830 proposed the founding of a voluntary hospital for in-patients, he met much opposition and became discouraged. Fortunately, the idea continued to be actively pursued by Richard Oliver who won support throughout the county from prominent people and even persuaded King William IV to bestow royal patronage.

In a competition attracting over 50 entries, architect William Briant's plans were chosen and the Bath stone building was erected in London Road on a site donated by Lord and Lady Sidmouth of Erleigh Court. The project was further assisted by public subscriptions including an endowment of £4,000 from Richard Benyon de Beauvoir of Englefield. The King died before his intended laying of the foundation stone but the formal opening of the hospital in May, 1839, was accomplished with great civic pomp and ceremony. Shortly afterwards, Richard Oliver was injured in a traffic accident and died in the hospital that he had done so much to establish. In 1841 a landslide at Sonning Cutting led to the Great Western Railway's first major accident involving eight fatalities and seventeen injured victims, all of whom were treated in the new building. The GWR subsequently made a donation of £100 in recognition. The original structure still exists and, with wings added in 1861 and others at right-angles and end pavilions (1881-2), forms the nucleus of the complex which today occupies the whole of the site.

Battle Hospital has a very different history. Built in the 1860's as a workhouse, it included an infirmary where the advanced nursing principles of Florence Nightingale were put into practice from the outset. In 1915, it was designated Reading War Hospital No.1 accommodating wounded servicemen. In 1930, the workhouse side was abolished and the Board of Guardians disbanded. Since that time Battle Hospital has served as a general hospital.

Reading will have good reason to be proud of both its hospitals when the 150th anniversary of the R.B.H. is celebrated in 1989.

J.G. Gafford

### READING'S BRICK TERRACES

The advertised speaker for the November meeting being unable to attend, his place was taken at very short notice by Mr Ken Major, architect, molinologist and long standing friend of this Society. His profusely illustrated account of Reading's brick built terraces caused us to pause for a moment to consider a feature of this town which we tend to take for granted and pass by without a second glance. Commencing with the handsome stone clad buildings of the Eldon estate, thence via the attractive Queen's Road crescent to the more humble dwellings of East Reading, Ken pointed out the various features which serve to give the terraces their individuality within the townscape. He drew our attention not only to the manner in which the various buildings had been constructed but also to the materials employed with particular reference to the brickwork with its variety of pattern and colour - in many instances a tribute to the bricklayer's art. Another feature to which our attention was drawn was the variety of plaques and decorative detail in local terra cotta.

Ken Major's message was that our local terraces, far from being dull and unimaginative, are part of our local heritage and as such deserve to be protected from the horrors inflicted upon them by the well meaning D.I.Y. enthusiast with his artificial stone cladding, aluminium doors and plastic window frames.

### VISIT TO LACOCK, WILTS.

This year's Summer Outing, on Sunday 15th July, took the form of a visit to Lacock; a visit with a difference Lacock being not merely a Stately Home or a Country Park but a whole village with many and varied attractions.

The House originated in an Abbey, founded in 1232 by Ela, Countess of Salisbury. Converted to a country house after 1539 it retains medieval Cloisters and Chapter House to which were added a 16th Century octagon tower, stable yard and brewery. In 1754 a Gothic gateway was built and the Great Hall added.

In addition to the splendid furnishings and extensive views over the grounds, the house contains mementoes of the Talbot family. William Fox Talbot (1800-1877) invented photography here. The Museum, situated in a former barn outside the Abbey Gateway, contains much of his apparatus and many early photographs. These relics are of special interest to visitors from Reading as Fox Talbot worked at 55, Baker Street, Reading in 1844/5.

The greater part of Lacock Village has since 1944 been in the ownership of the National Trust and has thus been preserved from any unfortunate developments. The 15th Century Tithe Barn, the Church of St. Cyriac and the many ancient inns all repay inspection.

An added bonus, two Medieval Mystery Plays were performed in the Courtyard during the afternoon. In all a most rewarding day.

Bert Rivers.

FUTURE VISITS. Your suggestions for visits and outings during Summer, 1985, would be much appreciated.

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BEFORE THE ACORN

It may be remembered that in May, 1983, I delivered a talk entitled 'An Acorn - the early days of Whitley Park School and surrounding area.' In that talk I dealt with the period from 1900 when Samuel Palmer sold the land to Arthur Newbury. I have since traced the early history of Whitley Park.

The hamlet of WITELEIA- otherwise WHYTEL(12th c) or WHYTEL (13th c) or WHYTELEYE (14th c) in the Parish of St. Giles belonged to Reading Abbey until the dissolution. The nucleus of this came from a grant by Peter de Cobham in the 12th Century. Whitley's value with tithes in 1539 was £26.16.4. The Manor with the park was granted in 1548 to Edward, Duke of Somerset, only to be forfeited to the Crown in 1552 and then leased to Sir Francis Englefield. Families involved in later transactions include the Knollys, the Earl of Banbury, Whitmore and Vachel. It seems that the same families owned most parts of Reading! In 1816 it was owned by a Miss Jennings. In 1843 it was held by the Allison Bros of London; Richard Attenborough (!) in 1876, then William Palmer and after him - and this is where we came in - Samuel Palmer.

At the southern end of Whitley Street was Conduit Close where a spring provided water for Reading Abbey. Was this really necessary with so much water much nearer to hand?

To the east of Whitley is said to have been Gallows Common where several executions are reputed to have taken place. Can any Member tell me just where the Common was located?

Tony Mansfield.



From the READING MERCURY - Monday, 6th January, 1835.

Mr F. KNIGHTON begs to return his most grateful thanks to those Parents who have entrusted to him the education of their Sons, and who have honoured him with their kind recommendation, and assures them, that no efforts on his part will be wanting to facilitate the progress of his Pupils in their various studies - while their health, morals and comforts, shall be objects of his unceasing solicitude.

Terms -	Per Annum
For Board and Instruction in Writing, Arithmetic, Book-Keeping, Geography, Use of Globes, etc. ....	18 Guineas
Books, and every extra included at .....	20 Guineas

Day Pupils - 12s per quarter  
Ditto, including Books 15s ditto

The most respectable references given, and specimens of improvement shewn at the Academy - 142 Friar Street, Reading.

(contributed by Jean Debney)

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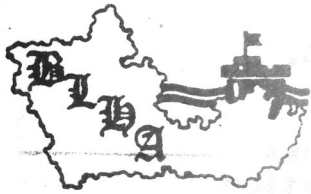
#### THE CHRISTMAS FEAST 1722

(From the Memorandums of John Watts - Mayor)

On Christmas day it was usual to invite the Aldermen and Burgesses to go to Church in the afternoon with the Mayor, and from thence to go to his house and there spend the evening. There was used to be a very plentiful cold Supper for them, and the clergy and some other gentlemen of the Town were invited to the same. But I thinking that in consideration there was a Sacrament that day, it would be more proper to make the Feast on New Year's day, and instead of a cold supper to entertain them and their wives at the Council Chamber with a handsome hot Dinner. I asked the advice of some of my brethren who concurred with me in that opinion, and New Year's day I had in the Council Chamber a very good Dinner being attended by the clergy and some gentlemen, besides the Aldermen and Burgesses, though but a few of their wives were present. The Bill of Fare was as follows:

A Venison Pasty; a Hamb and Chickens; a Sir Loyne of Beef; a Leg of Veal and Bacon; two dishes of Mince Pies; a large dish of Tarts and Puffs; Cold Tong; Stirurgeon and Pickles

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## Berkshire Local

### History Association

Founded in 1976 to encourage local history research and interest in both old and new Berkshire, the Berkshire Local History Association played a major part in the setting up of the History of Reading Society. We are indeed a Corporate Member of that body and Members of the H.R.S. are welcome at Association meetings. They include the AGM, an evening meeting in March at the Friends Meeting House, Church Street, Reading, a Day Meeting and Exhibition one Saturday in early Summer and one or two Informal Meetings in different parts of the county. Of the latter, the first of 1985, "Local History and Maps", will take place in the new Reading Public Library, the first meeting to take place in the newly opened premises. Further details will be circulated shortly.

Individual Membership of the Association is a modest £2 per annum. Members will receive three copies annually of the Association's newsletter free of charge and will be able to order copies of occasional publications and the journal, 'Berkshire Old and New', post free. Members will also have access to the Association's list of speakers, its collection of Berkshire Directories (1784-1939) and to the Research and Special Interest File.

For further particulars and membership application forms please see Peter Southerton.

#### SOME FORTHCOMING ONE-DAY SATURDAY SCHOOLS.

##### Sources for the history of the Berkshire countryside.

Museum of English Rural Life, Whiteknights. 9th February.  
Tutor: Dr Sadie Ward. 9.30 am - 5.30 pm £3.85

This course is intended to show how some of the collections at the Institute of Agricultural History may be used to illustrate aspects of Berkshire rural life.

##### Reading Abbey Waterfront

University, London Road. 16th March 9.30am - 5pm £3.85

The latest reports of this important excavation with the results of various specialist studies.

##### The Civil War around Reading

Abbey Gateway. 13th April 9.30am - 5pm £3.85

An account of the dramatic story of the siege of Reading in 1643, the military actions in and around the town, local and national personalities involved and military equipment used.

Tutors: Staff of the Reading Museum and Art Gallery

Application forms and further particulars may be obtained from the Extramural Office, Room G13, School of Education, The University, London Road, Reading. (Tel: 875234 ext 230)