

The History of Reading Society



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

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THOUGHTS FROM THE CHAIR

Our two summer visits were both well supported, and greatly enjoyed. In June we had a town centre local history walk, “Not Just the 3 Bs: 1100 Years of Reading’s History.” Joy Pibworth led the way – report follows this item. Then in July, something different again – a boat trip on the Kennet, from the town centre to Fobney Lock, via the High Bridge, The Oracle and County Lock, and including the diversion along the old course of the river by the sites of the gasworks, the biscuit factory, the gaol and the abbey. We were very fortunate with the weather, for each of the four two-hour trips we made. My enduring memory came at the end of one of the trips, when someone made the remark, “Oh, I don’t want to get up – I’ve enjoyed it so much.” As a result of the trips, I’ve been asked to give a talk to the Kennet and Avon Canal Trust – their crews who were running the trips wanted to know what I was saying in the running commentary as we went along.

Another of the summer’s events was the celebrations to mark the 75th anniversary of the opening of the Berkshire Record Office, and the adoption of its new name, The Royal Berkshire Archives. On Thursday, August 10th, Mark Stevens, the County Archivist, gave a short speech, and a birthday cake was cut and shared among staff, customers and friends. It was on August 10th 1948 that his predecessor, Felix Hull, took up his post as the first County Archivist. The archives were at first in the cellars under the old County Police Station, Shire Hall and Assize Courts in Reading. They moved out to the new Shire Hall at Shinfield Park in 1981, only to have to move once again in 2000, to the present building at the top of Castle Hill. It’s now funded jointly by the six Berkshire unitary authorities.

The change of title reflects the changing use made of record offices. The records of local authorities, courts of law, churches, etc., are still there, of course, but so are the documents from all kinds of unofficial sources – such as landowners, businesses and local clubs and societies. I suppose that by now we’re used to The Public Record Office being The National Archives, and we’ll get used to the BRO being the Royal Berkshire Archives. Hopefully, not to be confused with The Royal Archives in Windsor Castle!



Members enjoying their boat trip on the Kennet, July 2023. Photo: M. Summers

At the time of writing, there's no definite news yet on the ownership of Reading Gaol and the uses to which the building will be put. In view of the fact that the Borough Council is going to spend millions upgrading The Hexagon, and creating a new Central Library, will they really want to run the old gaol as an arts hub if given the opportunity?

Plans for the new library, to contain the extensive local studies collection, are only a little clearer than they were when I mentioned the subject in the last newsletter. I visited the exhibition in the "old" (1985) Central Library, and looked at the drawings, the floor plans and the model, on August 3, when it was advertised that someone would be there to answer questions. It was useful having someone on hand who could explain that the model was of only part of the complex of buildings and point out which side of the model fronted Bridge Street, and which side Fobney Street. The existing buildings will be extended, and there will be one entrance for both the Civic Offices and the new Central Library. Quite what was going where didn't seem to have been decided – the air-conditioned storage area, the map cabinets and map table, the area with subdued lighting for looking at microforms, etc. When I asked about the local studies area, I was assured that the "Reading Collection" would all be there. When I asked about the rest of the Berkshire material, which is at least as important, it became obvious that I was asking the wrong person. From talking to the Library staff I gather that a lot still has to be worked out, but it's obvious that the floor space for the new library as a whole will be less than at present. Part of the cost of the library and the Hexagon upgrading will be met from the government's "Levelling Up" Fund, and the government funding has to be spent by early 2015. I just hope that there will be enough space for the whole of the local studies collection, and that none of it will be dispersed. And I hope that when the new building opens, there will be enough members of staff to look after and exploit the collection, but I'm not over optimistic!

Mentioning the subject to people in the local pub, they can't understand why Reading needs a new Central Library at all, or why the government has granted some of the necessary funding as part of a "levelling up" project. The feeling is that there must be many other towns in greater need of "levelling up"!

As I sit here on a warm day in early September, the Heritage Open Days will be starting soon. Some of them require advance booking – for very understandable reasons. I hope you managed to get a place for whatever it was that took your interest – the tour of Foxhill House, or the gardens at Hillside House, or maybe the chance to visit the Royal Berkshire Hospital and to hear about its history, and the problems now facing it. The number and variety of venues in Reading is impressive.

The Society's talks at the Abbey Baptist Church begin on September 20th, with further meetings in October and November, to be followed by talks via Zoom during the winter. The programme of talks and trips for 2024 is almost complete, and they, too, will be as varied as ever.

David Cliffe, Chairman

3BS WALK SUMMARY

Our walk began at St Mary's Butts, home of the Minster Church and once the site of a nunnery in the 9th century and the centre of the Anglo-Saxon settlement, before moving on to St Giles, and then the Quaker Friends Meeting House where we were shown the graves of eminent Quaker families. The site of the factory where Huntley Bourne and Stevens made biscuit tins was nearby. Moving into London St we saw the building owned in the 18th century by Dr Addison who tended humanely to the indescribable sufferings of George III. His son Lord Sidmouth is remembered mostly for donating land for the RBH in the 1830s. Finally, in the Buttermarket we looked at the architectural works of the twentieth century.

On our walk round we encountered some of the philanthropists who donated generously to the life of the town: Mrs Zinzan, Dr Valpy, Isaac Harrinson, Dr Hurry, John Kendrick.

Joy Pibworth

1816 THE YEAR WITHOUT A SUMMER.

Sumer is icumen in, composed in Reading in the thirteenth century could have seemed a very cruel and ironic piece of music to the people of Reading in 1816. For Reading, like the rest of the world was experiencing most unseasonal weather for which there was no obvious cause. In fact it was not until the 20th century that scientists understood the cause of the devastating meteorological changes which had come about.

The apocalyptic eruption of the volcano of Mount Tambora on the (now) Indonesian island of Sumbawa in April 1815 was the most powerful volcanic eruption in recorded human history. Its thunderous noise was heard 1,600 miles away. The ash from the eruption dispersed around the world and lowered global temperatures by a significant 1% approximately, triggering extreme weather conditions, causing harvests to fail and disease, misery and civil war to ensue worldwide for years. Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, previously an East India Company employee and later statesman and founder of modern Singapore, experienced the eruption from Java and asked other diplomatic staff to report what they had experienced. His wife recorded some when writing his biography.

“From Island of Sambawa.

“The first explosions were heard on this Island in the evening of the 5th of April, they were noticed in every quarter, and continued at intervals until the following day. The noise

was, in the first instance, almost universally attributed to distant cannon; so much so, that a detachment of troops were marched from Djocjocarta (sic), in the expectation that a neighbouring post was attacked...On the evening of the 10th the explosions became very loud; one in particular shook the town, and they were excessively quick, resembling a heavy cannonade... At about seven p.m., of the 11th, the tide being about ebb, a rush of water from the bay occasioned the river to rise four feet and it subsided again in about four minutes...

“EXTRACT OF A LETTER FROM BANYUWANGI:

“On the morning of the 3rd of April, ashes began to fall like fine snow; and in the course of the day they were half-an-inch deep on the ground. From that time till the 11th the air was constantly impregnated with them to such a degree, that it was unpleasant to stir out of doors. On the morning of the 11th, the opposite shore of Bali was completely obscured in a dense cloud, which gradually approached the Java shore...By one pm, candles were necessary; by four, P.M., it was pitch-dark; and so it continued until two o'clock of the afternoon of the 12th, ashes continuing to fall abundantly: they were eight inches in depth at this time.”

Source: *Memoir of the life and public services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles by Sophia Raffles (John Murray, 1830)*

It was calculated that perhaps 100,000 people died in that region because of the eruption and its repercussions. The magnitude of it naturally had dramatic effects on the worldwide climate and weather for a long time, and the year 1816 was subsequently christened the Year without a summer. Across Europe and America and the rest of the world the ash and aerosol ejected into the atmosphere reflected the sunlight, cooled temperatures and disrupted the usual weather systems of the planet.

According to the *Windsor and Eton Express* of 21st July 1816 the weather had been “unseasonable almost everywhere” and it went on to describe the conditions reported in June on the Eastern Seaboard of America- including snow, frost and icicles. Another report submitted by two gentlemen travelling by sea to Calcutta, a mere 2,000 miles away from Mt Tambora in October 1815 spoke of seeing what seemed to be a vast quantity of seaweed, but on closer observation turned out to be a “layer of volcanic matter”, probably pumice stone (pieces eight inches in diameter were recorded) which took two days to traverse.

How was Reading affected?

Perusing the short memoir ‘Seventy Years Ago in Reading’ (published anonymously in the 1880s) gives a fascinating glimpse of the effects on the town. At the end of August 1815 dry weather had allowed the harvest to be safely gathered in, but by mid -September the lack of rain was causing problems- the dry weather was now more of a drought. Springs were nearly dry, cattle needed to be fed hay because the pastures had dried up, turnips were withering in the ground, and trees were shedding their leaves a good two months early. By the end of the month there had been rain, to the relief of all farmers, resulting in falling prices for bread, meat products and tea “which a modern Englishman cannot do without”. However in spite of the abundant harvest the number of those without work or food merely increased. The weather conditions were severely affecting an economy already damaged by the long war against Napoleon.

By the early months of 1816 Reading was noting remarkably cold temperatures- exceptional frost so severe that meat froze solid and could hardly be cut and water even by the fireside froze in its containers.

Over the Easter weekend in April very heavy snow fell, a sharp frost was felt and the ground was as hard as in the bleak mid- winter, with NNE winds and more snowstorms. A little later in the month the first rains since the previous August fell- the dryness of the air had

prevented even grass from growing. Lack of pasture had led to cattle being culled causing a reduction in the price of meat, leather products generally and shoes in particular. Only a few weeks later a layer of ice formed overnight in the town. Skilled tradesmen without employment amongst others were digging gravel in the Forbury for one shilling a day, when bread was selling for 2/2 (2 shillings 2 pence) for a gallon loaf (approximately 8 lbs/ 4 kgs in weight), not a great deal for a large family. By June there had been hardly a night without a frost, yet in July there was not one day without rain, causing flooded meadows by the Kennet and Loddon. Getting crops to grow was increasingly difficult.

By mid-August there had been some dry but cold days, yet by 5th September the writer was reporting that there had been a frost every day for the previous two weeks, but that morning an inch thick coating of frost was followed by snow, hail and rain. (As an aside in the Berkshire Hills in Massachusetts at the end of August a similar degree of frost prevailed according to *Scientific American*, March 2013.) At the end of September three successive nights passed without frost, but in October the same pattern of unseasonable weather recommenced and overnight 2 inches of rain fell, flooding houses previously considered safe. Many crops were still growing, but labourers were unable to harvest the oats and beans and barley in the flooded fields. In November the mayor, principal inhabitants and parish officers of Reading decided on a subscription and a house to house collection to relieve the distress of the poor. This raised £500 which, it was decided would have to be earned by those in most need. Of the ninety households applying for help, 70 men were already employed on repairing roads through the Forbury, for which they would receive nine shillings a week. The writer calculated that a couple with four children would need to spend 8/3 (eight shillings and three pence) on bread, leaving them with 9d (nine pence) to pay for rent and everything else. "This is charity!" was his caustic comment. And still the weather had cruel tricks to play: more thunderstorms, heavy rain, a waggon overturned, horses killed, and eighty valuable ewes drowned. Nevertheless the changeable weather was allowing spring flowers to blossom in some sheltered parts of the town whilst in others meat was freezing in the butchers' shops. The distress of the poor was acute and for those with nothing but the clothes on their backs even the pawnbrokers shop, that "great addition" was of no use. Many were surviving on a sparing diet of bread and vegetables, and occasionally a "pennyworth of bullock's liver".

The author of the memoir was outraged during the Year without a Summer at the sight of men pulling waggons "like beasts" to earn some money, and women and children dying from starvation in the streets and the so-called charity to the most wretched townfolk. He ascribed all this misery to "the corruption of the government, the prodigality of the Prince (Prince Regent, the future George IV) and to the immense standing army." If only they could have known the role played by the eruption of Mount Tambora could it have lessened their sufferings?

Joy Pibworth

Quotations from *Reading Seventy Years Ago*. By Anon. Discovered and published 1887.

JOHN DORAN (1807–1878)

In a previous Newsletter (Number 58, May 2022), I wrote an outline of the life of Reading's first historian, Rev. Charles Coates. I thought that I would revisit the theme and explore the life of another of those early chroniclers – John Doran, whose *History and Antiquities of the Town and Borough of Reading in Berkshire* first appeared in March 1835.

Unlike Coates, Doran was not a native of Reading. He was born to Irish parents in London on 11 March 1807. Doran attended the Royal School, Margaret Street, off Cavendish

Square in London, run by John Matheson, a well-known educator. Doran was an adept scholar. When aged 12, he was presented with a silver medal at the school 'For being first in French, geography and elocution'. His academic career did not stretch to university, however, as he lost both parents while in his early teens, casting him on to his own resources.

When just aged 16, Doran gained the appointment of tutor to Lord Glenlyon's eight-year-old son, George Murray, with whom he subsequently travelled abroad for five years. Hopefully, Doran was still in London on the night of Thursday 8 April 1824 to see his own melodramatic play *Justice, or the Venetian Jew* produced at the Surrey Theatre, with Henry Kemble playing Shylock.

Seeking a source of income, Doran began to contribute articles to magazines. Several pieces that he wrote while in Paris with Murray were printed in the *Literary Chronicle* in 1828. He produced many translations of literary works from French, German, Italian and Latin for the *Bath Chronicle* from 1830.

Having returned from the continent with George Murray, Doran became tutor to a succession of other noble sons. It is unclear what brought him to Reading in the early 1830s, but he met and married, on 3 July 1834 at St Mary's Church, Emma Mary Harrington Gilbert. Emma was the daughter of Richard Gilbert, Esquire, RN, and his wife Catherine Mann Rathbone.

This was the period when he was working on his history of Reading, which was published in March 1835. The 5-shilling foolscap octavo first edition of *The History and Antiquities of the Town and Borough of Reading in Berkshire with some notices of the most considerable places in the same County* was published by Samuel Reader of No. 7 High Street, Reading, and nowhere mentions the author's name. In the 'Advertisement' on its early pages it is the publisher who seems to have taken the initiative to provide this new history, with the writer being called 'the compiler'. In December of the same year a similarly anonymous, and smaller (4 inch by 6½ inch) and cheaper (3 shillings) edition, was produced – one of which is in my possession. It seems that it was not until an 1838 edition (published by Edmund Yorke, No. 7 High Street, Reading) that J. Doran Esq. was named within the book as its author.

The author's name was known, however, before he became acknowledged on the book's spine, and the book was soon referred to as 'Doran's *History and Antiquities of the Town and Borough of Reading*'. While not attaining the stature of Coates's 1802 *History*, Doran has much that is independent of both Coates and Man (1816). Doran is well rooted in his sources, while there are times when one wonders where Man has got his information from. I do not mean to disparage Man's *History*, which personally I find the most readable of the three. The delight is that we have three early nineteenth century versions of our town's history, that can be compared, contrasted, and enjoyed.

Meanwhile what of John Doran? From 1837 the Dorans lived on the continent. Sources differ whether the award of an LL.D. (Doctor of Laws) by the University of Marburg in Prussia was of an honorary nature, or whether Doran sat for the degree, but it is certain that he returned to England as Dr Doran LL.D.

In 1841 Doran became the editor of the *Church and State Gazette*, a post he held for the next 11 years. This brought him £100 per annum, and no doubt some welcome financial stability. He later joined the staff of *The Athenaeum*. During the 1840s the Doran family became established at 4 Pembroke Place, Kensington. They had a daughter (Florence, born 1843) and two sons (John, born and died in October 1847, and Alban, born 1849). In the 1851 census, Doran is described as a 'Fundholder'.

Then, in the 1850s, he suddenly became a prolific and popular author, producing some twenty more books before his death in 1878. There are many themes to his writing, although

biography, the theatre and history predominate. His most successful book combined all three of those themes.

In 1852 he completed a memoir of Marie Thérèse Charlotte, Duchess of Angoulême, that had been started by Isabella Romer and left incomplete at her death. This was published as *Filia Dolorosa*. This was followed, in the same year, by a new edition of *Anthbon's text of the Anabasis of Xenophon*, which Doran edited. Then, published in January 1854, Doran produced an 80-page *Life of the Rev Edward Young* which prefaced an edition of that author's *Night Thoughts on Life, Death and Immortality*.

In March 1854 his *Table Traits, and Something on Them* was published, and dedicated to one of his erstwhile pupils, now Henry, Earl of Harewood. The *Morning Post* reviewed the book at length, writing:

Of all the Englishmen who have wetted their pens in the noble cause of gastronomy, Dr. Doran is beyond comparison the wittiest, the most fanciful, and the most erudite. His book, unique in design, and perfectly unsurpassed in execution, affords a striking illustration of the power of genius to dignify, elevate, and ennoble the most familiar subjects. It is not to be imagined by anyone who has not read the work what an amount of legendary lore, what a fund of ingenious anecdote, what rich resources of classic allusion and mythological allegory he has brought to the illustration of so trite and common-place a matter as the preparation of human food. His book is rich in learning as in fancy, and at the first chapter throws a chain of interest around the reader which suffers no relaxation till the conclusion of the last.

His next few books were:

Habits and Men (October 1854)

Lives of the Queens of the House of Hanover (March 1855)

Knights and their Days (January 1856)

Monarchs retired from Business (November 1856)

The History of Court Fools (November 1857)

The Bentley Ballads (Ed.) (November 1857)

New Pictures and Old Panellings (October 1858)

The Last Journals of Horace Walpole (Ed.) (December 1858)

Lives of the Princes of Wales (January 1860)

A Memoir of Queen Adelaide (November 1860)

Their Majesties' Servants (November 1863)

This last-named work has as its subtitle: *Annals of the English Stage, from Thomas Betterton to Edmund Kean – Actors, Authors, Audiences*. This (apart from in Reading, where his *History* will always be the reason Doran's name is known) was his best-selling and best remembered book, not least because of its numerous illustrations, including this of Dr Doran from the frontispiece.

To complete his list of works:

Saints and Sinners or in the Church and about it (May 1868)

The Collector (Ed.) (June 1868)

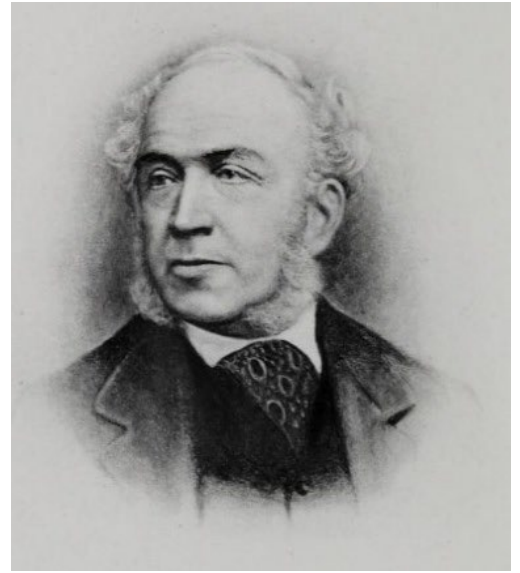
A Lady of the Last Century (Mrs Elizabeth Montagu) (March 1873)

Mann and Manners at the Court of Florence 1740–1786 (January 1876)

London in the Jacobite Times (November 1877)

Memories of our Great Town (March 1878)

In and about Drury Lane (October 1881)

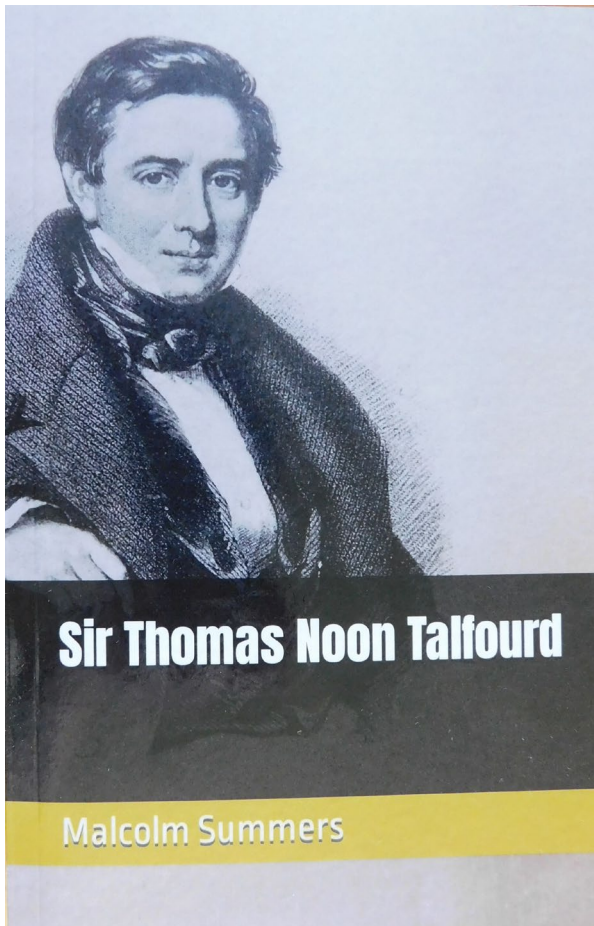


The last two named were anthologies of articles previously published in magazines. Doran dropped off *Memories of our Great Town* at the publishers in person just three weeks before he died.

From 1873 to his death, Doran was editor of *Notes & Queries*, a journal that began in 1849 and continues to the present day. He was possibly made FSA, a Fellow of the Society of Antiquities, at some stage, but I have been unable to confirm the occasion.

John Doran died of pneumonia after four days of illness, aged 70, on 25 January 1878 and was buried at Kensal Green Cemetery. The *Daily News* wrote that ‘the hand of death has removed from our midst one of the most pleasing and accomplished of English writers’.

Malcolm Summers



Sir Thomas Noon Talfourd by Malcolm Summers, published by Downs Way Publishing ISBN: 9780992751555

This new book by our Treasurer fills an important gap in Reading’s local history. Talfourd is one of those characters one had heard of but knew little about and my curiosity to know more was further kindled in 2016 when I visited the courts in Stafford where he died of apoplexy while addressing the jury. When I learnt that Malcolm was writing a biography of Talfourd my desire to know more increased and I was eager to acquire the book when it was finally published this summer. It is the first full-length biography of the man who was three times MP for Reading, a successful dramatist, friend of Dickens, Thackeray, Miss Mitford and other literary figures, an able advocate and ultimately a much-respected judge. He was also a good family man and devoted husband who seems to have been universally respected and liked and to have had none of the moral failings that occasionally afflicted such friends as Dickens, unless a fondness for good food and wine be so regarded!

And yet how many citizens of Reading today have heard of him? Those who live in Talfourd Avenue perhaps and at one time those who raised a glass in the Talfourd Arms but that hostelry has long since been wiped from the map. His plays, especially *Ion*, enjoyed frequent performances in his lifetime but have long since ceased to be performed. This seems to be the general fate of poetic drama after the golden age of Shakespeare, Marlowe and Ben Jonson. The plays of his contemporaries including Coleridge, Browning, Tennyson, Miss Mitford and many others are equally forgotten and even those of the revival of the poetic drama by T S Eliot, Charles Williams and Christopher Fry in 20th century are rarely performed in the 21st. This leads me to wonder whether some enterprising drama group might have a go with *Ion* -perhaps in the Abbey ruins? Maybe not...

A tremendous amount of research has gone into the production of the book – and there are nearly 900 end-notes to prove it! Malcolm Summers has skilfully woven the fruits of his reading into an easy-flowing narrative that holds the reader's interest throughout. There are, of course, many quotations from Talfourd's writings and speeches and one in particular struck a strong note of empathy with me: on Christmas Eve 1853, "Talfourd and Lady Talfourd [went] to midnight communion – 'not sufficiently exciting to justify the hour' was Talfourd's judgement." My sentiments entirely but I daresay there will be some readers who differ!

Members and guests will have an opportunity to hear more about Talfourd on October 18th when his biographer will address the Society – and copies of *Sir Thomas Noon Talfourd* will be on sale at a special price.

Also coincidentally received by the Editor is a short biography of Thomas Davis who pastored the Hosier Street Baptist over the same period that Talfourd's grandfather looked after the Broad Street Independents. Hosier Street was, of course, the ancestor Abbey Baptist Church, where the Society meets.

JD

On the Third Anniversary of Lockdown

In that warm spring, like poor caged Ferdinand,
Bison of Bristol Zoo, a piteous beast,
We paced our little paddocks, locked in fear.
And now, in this cold spring, free once again
To roam at large, we'd sooner stop indoors,
Huddled for warmth, while north winds rage without.

Anon, 2023

READING.—The following curious anecdote is extracted from a topographical account of this ancient and interesting town, which appears in the *Monthly Magazine* for May:—‘In consequence of some alterations made in St. Giles’s churchyard, several large flat tomb-stones became superfluous articles, since the persons over whom they had been placed had sunk into the narrow house at so distant a period, that no friend lived to insist on the dead retaining the little privilege of that sculptured *Hic jacet*, which duty and affection had constructed to their memory. It happened, that the church-warden for the time being was a baker, and he looked with a longing eye on these nice, flat, polished stones; for his oven wanted fresh bottoming. Whether he went into church or came out of church, it was all the same; he never passed the flat, polished stones, but he thought of the bottom of his oven. In a bold hour he winked at parochial duty, removed the tablets, and gratified his heart by placing them in that fiery place which he thought sacred from every eye except his own. But the stones, though very nicely polished by the wear of years, yet retained some marks of their former destination, and these cherished traces they very naturally imparted to the bottom crust of the baker’s bread. The novel impress was first discovered by an elderly lady, in the faintly marked outlines of a death’s-head and crossed-bones. Her terror at what she conceived so appalling an omen may be readily conceived, but she was too much shocked to communicate her portentous discovery. A loaf of the same batch was calculated for more general examination, for the word *Resurgam* stood imprinted on it in large, though not bold letters. The amazed purchaser necessarily forbore to touch a morsel of that bread which seemed to hint at the possibility of not sitting quietly on his stomach, and shewed his purchase with trepidation to an ingenious neighbour. This intelligent person conceived it to be a piece of waggery in the baker, who took that covert way of expressing his wish that the article in which he dealt might rise in price. He mentioned it as such to all the parish; but the general inquiry that took place speedily led to a detection of the discreditable fact.

From the *Windsor and Eton Express*, 5th May 1816

The Monthly Magazine was published between 1796 and 1843 with literary and political topics discussed, contributors included Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Wm Blake, Charles Lamb and the earliest works by Dickens, which would become Sketches by Boz.

Contributed by Joy Pibworth. (Note by Editor: *All the contributing authors bar Blake were associates of Thomas Noon Talfourd.*)

READING'S FIRST ROYAL CHARTER

This year marks the 750th anniversary of Reading's first royal charter, granted by King Henry III in 1253. This followed a period of tension between the townsmen and the officers of the Abbot, which even spilled over, into violence with men from the abbey being set upon and beaten up. The Abbot brought a case to the king's court where the leaders of the town were summoned to explain "why armed, they repelled the abbot's bailiffs in Reading...and why day and night in the said town they have lain in wait for the abbot's bailiffs and servants." The burgesses countered these charges by claiming that they had rights of self-government going back long before the foundation of the abbey some 130 years earlier. However, they were unable to furnish documentary evidence of these rights, allegedly granted by King Edward the Confessor and the upshot was that the King ordered the Sheriff of Berkshire to see that the abbot's rights were upheld.

That appeared to be the end of the story but – money talks. The King was perennially short of ready money and was apparently swayed by a gift of £100 from the well-heeled leaders of the town with the result that on 5 July a Royal Charter was granted, giving the "burgesses of Reading in the gild merchant there" the right to buy and sell throughout the land without paying any tolls or dues.

The story is told in its context by many Reading historians and most recently in some detail by our late President, Dr Cecil Slade, in "The Town of Reading and its Abbey." In order to commemorate the event, the Berkshire Record Office has mounted a Charter 750 Exhibition at its premises at 9 Coley Avenue in which documents of importance to the town will be on display till 13 September. Unfortunately the 1253 charter no longer survives but that of 1344 will be on display, along with the magnificently illustrated charters of Henry VIII, James I and Charles I, early deeds and account rolls and the 17th Century register of freemen. Also on display will be objects from Reading Museum and civic silver and other items normally kept in the Mayor's Parlour.

[Ed: *This was shown as Issue No 3 of the Newsletter but this numbering commenced with the current editorship so that there have been far more than 61 editions.*]