

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

From my chair this morning it's a rather gloomy day, and I'm reminded of Thomas Hood's poem, "November" – the one that begins:

No sun, no moon!

No morn, no noon.

I can hardly see Balmore Walk from my window, the first uprising of the Chilterns above Caversham, because of the mist.

I hope that by now you'll have seen our programme for 2025 and renewed your subscription. The subjects are as varied as ever, and in January, for one of our 'Zoom' sessions, we're trying something new – a photo quiz. Over the years the Society has been given a number of valuable photographic collections, and this will give you the chance to see some of the more interesting pictures. The two visits in June and July will certainly be very different – Reading Football Club and the Church of the Most Holy Trinity! And, by chance, our September talk by Thomas Macey will take place on the 150th anniversary of the opening of Jackson's store, to the day!

The presentation of archive movie films from Berkshire will hopefully be repeated in April. The first time round, the show was sold out a month beforehand. A number of the films were shot in Reading itself, and include what I think must be the only moving pictures of trams running along Broad Street and Oxford Road.

If you were at our September meeting, you may remember that I asked if anyone was interested in helping to run the Society next year, since two of the committee members wish to stand down at the AGM in March. Societies like ours depend on people willing to take jobs on and get things done, because they believe that the Society is worth supporting. I know of a number of similar societies which have had to close down, because they couldn't find the necessary volunteers. I have to say that the response we received on that night has made me cautiously optimistic. 'Watch this space,' as they say.

Earlier this year, I spent much time sorting out the local history books left to us by Sidney Gold, who had done so much for the Society over the last 40-odd years. I listed everything, and the lists were sent out to the Central Library and the Royal Berkshire Archives, to see if there were items which filled gaps in their collections. Most were not required, and sat in boxes in my spare

bedroom, until we began selling the books at our May meeting. I'm happy to say that there have been three sales so far, and a good proportion of the items have sold, but there are several hundred still to be offered for sale. When in-person meetings re-start in March, there will be the opportunity to see some different books.

Another good money-spinner for the Society has been the book about the town's pubs and breweries, *Abbot Cook to Zero Degrees*. We published the book three years ago, and of the 500 copies, only about ten remain unsold. A second edition is under consideration. The money returning to the Society keeps subscriptions low, and will enable us to take on other projects, for the benefit of members, and anyone else interested in Reading's history. A small sub-committee has been set up to consider what else might be worth publishing. We have newly-researched work, older but unpublished work, and books worthy of republication under consideration.

Finally, while thinking about books, perhaps I may be forgiven for mentioning my own new publication, *A Reading Scrapbook*. It has been commissioned and published by Two Rivers Press, and is based on the collections of printed ephemera in the Department of Typography at the University and in Reading Central Library. The University's collection has items from many different places but some good Reading examples and is used for teaching purposes: the Library's collection was something that I managed to put together while I was in paid employment there. I've taken 'ephemera' to mean pieces of paper and card which were intended to be used for a limited period – sometimes only once. They can be large posters, or small tickets, and the 150 examples chosen for the book include a tract giving news of the Siege of Reading in the Civil War, the timetable of the Great Western Railway when it reached the town in 1840, a toll ticket from the Whitley Turnpike Gate, a programme from the Pendragon Theatre, and a handbill for the Alleycat Club in Great Knollys Street. Copies are now in the shops.

I hope you enjoy this newsletter. I have to say, of late we've had several interesting articles based on solid original research which deserve to be more widely read. In the last edition, the article about the laundry in Liverpool Road was noted in the May edition of *Local History News*, the newsletter of the British Association for Local History, to which our society is affiliated. Congratulations to all concerned!

David Cliffe, Chairman

TWENTY YEARS AGO:

From the Christmas/ New Year 2004/5 edition of the Newsletter –

From William Darter's Reminiscences of Reading

During the incumbency of the late Dr Wise, it was customary on New Year's Eve for the ringers of St. Lawrence's parish to ring a few peals of changes and leave the bells on their stays, and a short time before midnight to return...

GLUED TO THEIR SEATS?

Talking of St Lawrence's, the outcome of the church's latest re-ordering will be eagerly awaited. We understand that in future the ministry will be largely targeted at young people. We very much hope that they do not have a similar experience to those who attended the re-opening ceremony and dedication following an earlier restoration of the church.

"There was one marked defect in the arrangements at which considerable annoyance was manifested. We allude to the condition of the seats, the staining of which (we understand) was not completed many hours before the service commenced. The result was that many of the ladies had their handsome dresses injured by the quantity of oil absorbed from the seats. It would have been by far the wisest course, if time did not permit of the staining of the seats, simply to have left them in a rough and unvarnished state, by which the annoyance now so generally complained of would have been avoided."

Quoted from the Reading Mercury of 16 May 1868 and contributed by Mr Sidney Gold who comments that the 1867/8 restoration of St Lawrence's was undertaken by the Reading architect, Mr Joseph Morris.

READING SOCRATIC SOCIETY 1894–1899

Late nineteenth century Reading was blessed with an abundance of opportunities for the town's people to broaden their education. In January 1894, for example, there were at least sixteen lectures open to the public on a wide variety of topics. Four of these were provided by the University Extension College: Physical Geography by H. J. Mackinder; two lectures in W. M. Childs' series on English History; and the Rev. W. Hudson Shaw on Florence. In addition, there were three lectures on Walt Whitman by Rev. D. Amos of the Unitarian Church, two meetings of the Reading Literary and Scientific Society (with lectures on Honeydew and on Rousseau), one on Reading Abbey (under the auspices of the Pleasant Sunday Afternoon Society), three about travel (London, the USA and Scandinavia), a talk on 'How John Bull spends his wealth', a Reading Temperance Society lecture on the medical uses of alcohol, and a Parents' National Educational Union (Reading Branch) meeting to consider 'Children's Food: its influence on mind and body'.

It seems, however, that there was always room for more. In that month, the following short editorial comment appeared in the Reading Observer:

The Reading Socratic Society.

This is the title of a new Society just recently formed with the object of promoting intellectual culture by the reading and discussion of papers... It is not proposed to confine the papers and discussions to subjects of an academical nature, but to deal with a variety of social topics of living interest and themes which are more or less tabooed by other literary societies. No subject that tends towards the elevation of mankind, or professes to do so, will be outside the scope of the Society's inquiry. Theological dogmas and party politics will alone be excluded.

The first president of the new Society was Octavius Albert Shrubsole, F.G.S. and as president he gave its very first lecture, which took place at the Athenaeum Lecture Hall on Friar Street on Tuesday 6 February 1894. His topic was "Continent Building", illustrated by diagrams and rock specimens.

The Society held about twelve 'ordinary meetings' a year. Sadly, not every meeting was reported in the local press, and the Society's minute books seem not to have survived. To date, I have been able to track down details of 28 of their approximately 75 meetings before the Society became defunct at the end of 1899, at the end of its sixth year:

Date		Location	Speaker	Topic
1894				
Tue	6 February	Athenaeum Lecture Room	Mr. O. A. Shrubsole F.G.S.	<i>Continent Building</i>
Wed	11 April		Rev. D. Amos	<i>The Emancipation of Women</i>
Tue	8 May	Athenaeum Lecture Room	Mr. G. R. Smith	<i>Pauperism and the Poor Law</i>
Wed	18 July	Summer Excursion to Caesar's Camp		
Tue	20 November		Dr. F. W. Stansfield M.B., C.H.B.	<i>The Philosophy of Punishment</i>
1895				
Tue	15 January	New Lecture Hall, Cross Street	Rev. Charles Voysey, B.A.	<i>Cremation</i>
Tue	19 February	Old Town Hall	Mr. W. H. Shrubsole F.G.S. F.R.M.S.	<i>Curious Dwellers on our Shores [in conjunction with Reading Natural History Society]</i>
Tue	19 March	Athenaeum Lecture Room	Mrs. W. E. Staniford	<i>The Social and Political Emancipation of Women</i>

Date		Location	Speaker	Topic
Tue	21 May	Athenaeum Lecture Room		
Tue	5 November	Athenaeum Lecture Room	Prof. Louis Ruoff	<i>Education in Germany</i>
Tue	3 December	Athenaeum Lecture Room	Mr. B. F. Tee	<i>The Art of Conversation</i>
1896				
Tue	5 March	Athenaeum Lecture Room	Mr. B. Jordan Smith A.R.C.S.	<i>Planetary Evolution</i>
Tue	11 April	Athenaeum Lecture Room	Mr. H. H. Jones	<i>The Rise of the Dutch Republic</i>
Tue	17 November	Athenaeum Lecture Room	Mr. H. Child M.R.C.S.	<i>Socialism – the Case Against</i>
Tue	24 November	New Lecture Hall, Cross Street		
1897				
Tue	19 January	Athenaeum Lecture Room	Rev. J. Fallows M.A.	<i>Dr. Johnson</i>
Tue	16 February	New Lecture Hall, Cross Street	Mr. W. H. Shrubsole F.G.S. F.R.M.S.	<i>Reading a Million Years Ago</i>
1898				
Thu	10 March	Bridge Street Assembly Rooms	Rev. W. J. Jupp	<i>Plato's Republic</i>
Wed	16 March	Bridge Street Assembly Rooms	Mr. H. D. Barkas	<i>Art: Lines, tones and colours</i>
Wed	13 April	Bridge Street Assembly Rooms	Mr. B. J. Smith	<i>Chemistry of Common Life</i>
Tue	4 October	British Workman, Abbey Square	Dr. F. W. Stansfield M.B., C.H.B.	<i>Instinct and Reason</i>
Tue	15 November	British Workman, Abbey Square	Mrs. Cameron	<i>Is Gentry Becoming a Fetish</i>
1899				
Tue	17 January	Old Abbey Restaurant	Mr. J. Slyfield	<i>Evolution [65th meeting]</i>
Tue	14 February		Mr. H. M. Wallis, J.P.	<i>The Migration of Birds</i>
			Mrs. Bailey	<i>People who enjoy bad health</i>
Tue	7 March		Mr. Harrison Jones	<i>The Roman Empire in the East</i>
Tue	21 March		Mr. R. T. Timberg	<i>Physical Education</i>
	April	British Workman, Abbey Square	Mr. Rawlings	<i>Art</i>
Tue	7 November	Old Abbey Restaurant	Rev. E. S. Lang-Buckland	<i>From London to Johannesburg</i>

The Society was organised by an elected set of officers (president, treasurer and secretary) and a number of committee members. Unfortunately, only one annual meeting was reported in the local press, and so a full list of all those involved cannot be recreated. There may have been vice presidents, as that was the case in similar organisations at the time, but if so none gained a mention. Below is given the list of those who were elected to office by the Socratic Society:

Year	President	Hon. Treasurer	Hon. Secretary	Other Committee Members
1894-5	Mr. O. A. Shrubsole F.G.S.	Mr. G. R. Smith	Mr B. F. Tee	
1895-6	Mr. O. A. Shrubsole F.G.S.	Mr. G. R. Smith	Mr B. F. Tee	Mr. Stanley Hayward, Dr. F. W. Stansfield, Rev. D. Amos
1896-7	Mr. O. A. Shrubsole F.G.S.	Mr. G. R. Smith	Mr. J. E. La Touche Aston	

Year	President	Hon. Treasurer	Hon. Secretary	Other Committee Members
1897-8	Dr. F. W. Stansfield M.B., CH.B.	Mr. G. R. Smith	Mr. J. E. La Touche Aston	
1898-9	Dr. F. W. Stansfield M.B., CH.B.	Mr. G. R. Smith	Mr. J. E. La Touche Aston	
1899	Professor Louis Ruoff	Mr. G. R. Smith	Mr. J. E. La Touche Aston	

The President of the Society was generally the one ‘in the chair’ at meetings, dealing with the election of new members, introducing the lecturer and presiding over the ensuing discussion. However, on occasion, the Society was honoured by the presence of leading men of the town to preside. Reading’s M.P., George W. Palmer, presided in January 1895 for the lecture on cremation. This was the first of the Society’s lectures to be advertised in advance:

**THE REV. CHARLES VOYSEY, B.A., WILL LECTURE ON
“CREMATION.”**
AT THE NEW LECTURE HALL, CROSS STREET,
(at the rear of the New Liberal Club),
At eight o’clock, at a Meeting of the READING SOCRATIC SOCIETY.
Chair to be taken by GEO. W. PALMER, ESQ., M.P.
The attendance of all persons interested in the subject is invited.

The Mayor of Reading (Owen Ridley) presided at the following meeting, which was a joint venture with the Reading Natural History Society, on ‘Curious Dwellers on our Shores’, where (according to the advert) ‘many interesting forms of Life will be described in a popular manner, with numerous lime-light illustrations’. An entrance fee was charged for this lecture (Front seats 6d., otherwise 2d.), but that was possibly to cover the extra expense of hiring the Old Town Hall for the event. Owen Ridley, by then Deputy Mayor, returned to the chair at a similar meeting the following year at a talk with the excellent title of ‘Reading a Million Years Ago’.

In the newspaper reports other members of the Society are occasionally mentioned as taking part in the discussions that followed the lectures. The following list is a compilation of all those said to be present and taking part on at least one occasion. Many of the names would have been familiar to late nineteenth century Reading residents and appear in the newspaper reports of other meetings in the town.

Rev. D. Amos	Mrs. A. Bailey	Mr. H. D. Barkas
Mr. G. Biddings	Dr. Cameron	Mr. Eustace
Mrs. Eustace	Mlle. Fremery	Rev. J. J. Goadby
Mr. Gosling	Mr. Stanley Hayward	Mr. H. H. Jones
Mrs. H. H. Jones	Mr. J. E. La Touche Aston	Mr. Nicholson
Miss Perry	Prof. Louis Ruoff	Mr. J. H. Sawfell
Mr. C. G. Shaw	Mrs. C. G. Shaw	Mr. O. A. Shrubsole
Mrs. O. A. Shrubsole	Mr. T. Simmons	Mr. J. Slyfield
Miss F. Smith	Mr. G. R. Smith	Mrs. G. R. Smith
Mr. W. E. Staniford	Mrs. W. E. Staniford	Dr. F. W. Stansfield
Mrs. F. W. Stansfield	Mr. Bertie F. Tee	Mr. Villesid
Rev. A. E. Voysey	Rev. Charles Voysey	Mr. A. Watson
Mr. G. H. Wilson		

The final report of a meeting of the Socratic Society was that of 7 November 1899, which was held at the Old Abbey Restaurant. It was entitled ‘From London to Johannesburg’. Nothing in the report, which opened with the words ‘There was a good attendance of members of the

Reading Socratic Society', suggested that the Society was about to fold. In the absence of minute books, accounts, or any other documentation, it is impossible to know exactly at what date the Society dissolved, or the reason why. The most likely reason, however, would have been financial, with the possibility that the Society's expenditure was outrunning its income.

I conclude this short article with some further information about the three presidents of the Society.

President of the Reading Socratic Society 1894–7: Mr Octavius Albert Shrubsole, F.G.S. (1839–1926)

Shrubsole was born in Faversham, Kent, in late 1839, son of a Shoemaker, turned Pawnbroker & Custom House Agent. He became a bank clerk for the London & County Banking Company, first in Essex, and then from the early 1870s in Reading. He was a keen cricketer, playing for the Reading Banks XI and then the Reading Felix Cricket Club.

His main interest in life was geology, a field in which he achieved remarkable success, becoming a Fellow of the Geological Society. He contributed geological and palaeontological articles for several leading journals (for example: *On the Plateau Gravel south of Reading* in the Journal of the Geological Society (1893); *On certain less familiar forms of Palaeolithic flint implements from the gravel at Reading* in the Journal of the Anthropological Institute (1884)). He wrote a lengthy article on *Education in Hungary* for the Parents Review (1906), the journal of the Parents National Educational Union, which had a thriving branch in Reading from the 1890s. He regularly gave lectures and demonstrations to a variety of societies, as well as the occasional poetry reading (he was a fan of Tennyson, in particular).

In Reading, however, his name was known as a leading intellectual in several spheres. He was a founder member of the Redlands, which later became the Reading, Literary and Scientific Society in 1878. He served as its president for the years 1881–1883 and 1898–1900. He was also a founder member of the Reading Natural History Society in 1881, serving as Vice President from 1885. As we have seen above, he was a founder member and first president of the Reading Socratic Society, in 1894. Amazingly, Shrubsole was founder member of a fourth Reading society: the Reading and District Vegetarian Society. After initial attempts to start this society in 1888, it was in 1895 that it was finally formed, with Shrubsole as its first president, a role in which he served at least until 1898. He joined the Reading and District Rose Society in its first year (1903) and became a committee member at its first annual meeting. He was a keen grower of roses, and often won prizes at the Society's shows.

Shrubsole acted for many years from the 1890s as Honorary Curator of the Prehistoric Archaeological Section of Reading Museum, which became by the early 1900s the Geology and pre-historic Archaeology department.

Shrubsole was very active in Reading Unitarian Church, which was situated in London Road, on the corner with Denmark Road. He was joined by his brother-in-law, the Rev. Robert Rodolph Suffield, who became minister there in 1879. Shrubsole and Suffield had married sisters Grace and Madeline, respectively.

Octavius and Grace Shrubsole's marriage had taken place in November 1881. They then took up residence in Craven Road, Reading, remaining there for the rest of their lives. They had one daughter, Edith Grace. Octavius Shrubsole died on 11 October 1926, aged 86, following an accident. His widow died a few months later, on 1 April 1927.

**President of the Reading Socratic Society 1897–9:
Dr Frederic Wilson Stansfield, M.D., Ch.B., D.P.H., F.L.S. (1854–1937)**

Stansfield was born in Todmorden, Yorkshire, in May 1854. His first job was as assistant to his father, who was a successful Nurseryman and Gardener. In 1878 he married Jane Lee in Todmorden, and they moved in 1881 to Sale, Cheshire, where Stansfield set up on his own as a Nurseryman. By the mid-1880s they had three children, and, bravely, Stansfield changed career, becoming a student at the University of Manchester Faculty of Medicine. He qualified as a doctor in 1889, and the family moved to Derby, where Stansfield took up his first practice.

Stansfield was a pteridologist, which meant that he was an expert on ferns and related plants. In 1891, he became the founding President of the Northern British Pteridological Society, which then became the British Pteridological Society in August 1892. Stansfield remained the President until 1897, and then was President again in 1902–4, and in 1907–8. For many years Stansfield was the editor of the “British Fern Gazette”, the Pteridological Society’s newsletter.

In 1893 the family moved to Reading, where he became a leading member of various societies. He was the President of the Socratic Society from 1897–9, President of the Reading Natural History Society 1899–1904, 1906–7, and 1917–19, President of the Reading Literary and Scientific Society from 1906–8, and President of the Reading Pathological Society from 1926–28. He was also a committee member of the Reading Cycling Club.

Stansfield was for many years the Public Vaccinator for Reading, and the District Medical Officer under the Board of Guardians for St Mary’s parish. He was a keen Conservative and held the office of Chairman of the Battle Ward Conservative and Unionist Association. He was also a prominent member of the Reading Unitarian Church, London Road.

Stansfield died at his long-time home of 120 Oxford Road on 28 February 1937, aged 82. His wife had pre-deceased him by ten years.

**President of the Reading Socratic Society, 1899:
Professor Louis Ruoff (1825–1907)**

Louis Ruoff was named Ludwig Ruoff at his baptism in November 1825, in Welzheim, now in Baden-Würtemberg in southeast Germany, the seventh child of Carl Fridrich Ruoff and Catharina Stroh. He studied at the University of Paris before moving to England. Having lived first for a while in Manchester, he was recorded as lodging at 3 Zinzan Street, Reading, in the 1861 census, where he is described as a Professor of Languages. He remained in Reading until his death, becoming a well-known and popular tutor in French and his native German. He became a naturalized British subject.

In December 1866, 41-year-old Louis married 29-year-old Rosa Fox, and over the next fourteen years had three daughters and four sons. Having lived at first at 5 Baker Street after their marriage, the Ruoffs moved to the spacious Bainton House, 46 Russell Street, in 1876. This property had twelve rooms, a large garden and an orchard. This remained the family home until the early 1920s.

Ruoff was a hardy soul, being an all-the-year-round outdoor bather until his later years. As well as being a member of the short-lived Reading Socratic Society, he was also an active member of the Reading Literary and Scientific Society.

Ruoff died aged 81, having been confined to his bed for some months, on New Year’s Day, 1907. Rosa died in 1927, aged 91, at her son George’s home in Chard.

JANE AUSTEN & MARTHA SHERWOOD – 250 YEARS OLD



Plaque Commemorating Jane's schooling in Reading

Jane Austen was certainly the first great female novelist in English and to the minds of many including the Editor she remains the greatest. Her nearest rival is George Eliot but somehow, I never quite took to her – and then there are the Brontes too. There are others well worth reading but on a lower level of achievement, our own Mary Russell Mitford (not quite a novelist), that prolific pair of 'sensation novelists', Mrs Braddon and Mrs Henry Wood, together with Mrs Elizabeth Gaskell. Among 20th century

women writers, I especially admire Iris Murdoch, Mary Renault and Olivia Manning - not to mention of course the numerous 'queens of crime' who have enriched the shelves of detective fiction – Agatha Christie, Margery Allingham, Patricia Wentworth, P D James, Ruth Rendell and my latest discovery, Anne Cleeves. Jane will be 250 years old on 16th December next year and though Reading had no part in her birth we can claim to have played a vital part in her education, as the above plaque on a wall adjacent to the Abbey Gateway reminds us.

Reading Museum are putting on a series of events in connection with the anniversary including guided visits to the Gateway schoolroom and local media have already latched onto the story. It is claimed that the description of Mrs Goddard's school in *Emma* (my personal favourite) owes something to the Reading school: 'a real old fashioned boarding school, where a reasonable quantity of accomplishments were sold at a reasonable price, and where girls might be sent to be out of the way and scramble themselves into a little education, without any danger of coming back prodigies.'

Martha Sherwood

Another writer with Reading connections has a 250th birthday in 2025 – Martha Sherwood née Butt (right) - who also attended the Abbey Gateway School. Mrs Sherwood included an account of her schooling in her memoirs and from these I have quoted in the following extract from my eagerly awaited (I hope!) book, *How the Good News came to Reading*.

We may conclude this chapter with a reference to Reading's most celebrated school for girls, albeit not one



of specific Christian origin¹. This was the La Tournelle and St Quentin Boarding School, also known as the Abbey Gateway School, best known as the establishment where Jane Austen received her only formal education. This flourished from pre-1760 until 1794. Its principal interest in relation to our subject was that its pupils also included Martha Butt, later better known as Mrs Sherwood (1775-1851), a celebrated writer of children's literature with a strong evangelical influence. She attended the school from 1791-3, starting about five years after Jane Austen's departure.

The school had been founded by a Mrs Mapleton, assisted by Mrs Spencer, with the latter in sole charge from 1769-87. On her death in that year her assistant, Sarah Hackett, otherwise known by the more pedagogic name of La Tournelle, took over, joined in 1790 by Mrs St. Quentin, née Pitts, wife of the French teacher. These ladies sold up in 1794, moving to London where they continued to be involved in the education of girls. However, the purchaser, a Mrs Jesse, was also a schoolma'am and ran her own establishment on the premises till 1804 when she moved it to Castle Hill.

In her memoirs, Mrs Sherwood has provided a very vivid and sometimes amusing picture of life at the La Tournelle and St Quentin Boarding School:

It was late on a Sunday evening that we reached Reading and it was at a very late hour that I was taken across to the school. The person who received me was Mrs Latournelle; the school was not yet met, Mr and Mrs St Quentin were in London, and I was the first pupil who had appeared after the holidays. Mrs Latournelle was a person of the old school, a stout woman, hardly under seventy, but very active, although she had a cork leg; how she had lost its predecessor she never told. She was only fit for giving out clothes for the wash, making tea, ordering dinner, and in fact doing the work of a housekeeper...

I found in addition to Mrs Latournelle, who was making tea almost by firelight, three teachers of whose existence I had not even dreamed... Miss Holt was a little, simpering English woman, very like a second-rate milliner of these days; she taught spelling and needlework. Miss Bourne was a dashing, slovenly, rather handsome French girl, and ran away with some low man a few months afterwards. Miss Trelishaw was, I think, a Swiss.

In later life, Mrs Sherwood wrote many books on improving subjects, which included *The History of Little Henry and his Bearer* (1814), *Stories Explanatory of the Church Catechism* (1817), *The History of the Fairchild Family* (1818) and *Scripture Prints, with Explanations in the Form of Familiar Dialogues* (1831). It is reasonable to suppose that these found their way into the hands of many of Reading's 19th century schoolchildren.

The History of Reading Society will be playing its part in the celebrations of Jane Austen 250 with a talk by our own Joy Pibworth at our April meeting entitled *Jane Austen's First Christmas*.

John Dearing

¹ Note, though, that both Jane Austen and Martha Sherwood were daughters of the clergy and thus it may be assumed that the school was deemed to be eminently suitable for the education of Christian girls. In addition, Sherwood's father, Rev George Butt, was a friend of Dr Valpy and in all likelihood sent his daughter to the Gateway School on his advice; Valpy's daughter, Carteret 'Carty' Valpy, was also a pupil at the school. Martha's cousin, Thomas Butt, was a pupil at Reading School.

RIPPLES FROM ACROSS THE POND

Longstanding members of the Society will perhaps remember that some 20 years ago we had some contacts with Reading's namesake town in the US state of Pennsylvania, named after onetime Reading resident, William Penn. Perhaps readers noticed that Reading, PA, was mentioned in reports of the recent presidential election:

Harris goes door-knocking in Pennsylvania night before election (*Daily Telegraph*)

Kamala Harris joined campaigners in Pennsylvania on Monday night in a last-ditch effort to encourage voters to the polls in the key battleground state.

The vice president stopped off in a residential village in Reading where she was filmed warmly greeting a couple, who she hugged and shook hands with on the door.

'I just wanted to come by and say, 'I hope to earn your vote," Harris said.

'Voted already,' the woman responded. [For Harris, to judge from the accompanying video.]

Harris posted the video on X, writing: 'Took some time today to hear from voters in Pennsylvania and ask for their support. There's still time to join us on the doors.'

However, the eventually successful candidate, Donald Trump, was not to be outdone, for as the *Reading Chronicle* reported: 'Trump held an afternoon 'Get Out The Vote' rally at the Santander Arena in Penn Street, Reading, Pennsylvania.'

We can but wish our American cousins well over the next four years.

A NOTE FROM THE TREASURER

2025 Subscriptions are due from 1 January. Many thanks to all those who have already paid their subscriptions. Membership remains at £9 for the year. Since our January and February meetings are on Zoom, and only available to members, please note that if you wish to join those meetings you will need to have paid your subscription before any Zoom meeting you wish to attend. Members who have set up annual bank transfers may need to move the payment date if it is currently set to be later than the Zoom meeting dates.

You can pay by:

- bank transfer - our bank details are unaltered from last year, but please email historyofreadingsociety@yahoo.com if you need to know them. Please always put your name as reference for the payment.
- cheque - by post to me (my address is at the top of this Newsletter).
- cash - if at an 'in-person' meeting of the Society.

Because of bank fees on cheques and cash, bank transfer is the best method, where possible. Thank you.

Malcolm Summers

Members are likewise reminded that the AGM of the Society will be on **Wednesday 19th of March** and, of course, to stand for election or vote at the meeting you will also need to have renewed your subscription by then!