

# *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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Summer/Autumn 2025 <http://historyofreadingsociety.org.uk>

No 66

## **THOUGHTS FROM THE CHAIR**

The visits to the Football Club and Holy Trinity Church in June and July were well attended and greatly enjoyed, and our next event will be the talk on the history of Jackson's department store by Thomas Macey on September 17th. Jackson's opened 150 years ago and closed in 2013 – and as I sit at my desk today, I happen to be wearing a good, comfortable pair of trousers that I bought there. I hope you've booked your place if you're interested. Because of the large number of people we're expecting, this is the only talk where we've asked people to book ahead, letting members know well in advance before advertising the talk to the public. At the time of writing, there are still places left – just send a message to [historyofreadingsociety@yahoo.com](mailto:historyofreadingsociety@yahoo.com). In this way, everyone should be able to find a seat!

We won't be having a sale of second-hand local history books at this meeting, but we will be having sales in October and November. Most of these books were left to the Society by Sidney Gold, who helped found it and run it over many years.

An interesting book has recently come my way – *Reading's Colossal Lion: a Victorian Town at the Height of Empire*, by Robert Clarke. It isn't just about the Maiwand Memorial – there are plenty of fascinating insights into the development of Reading, and how it was run. See review below.

A further new book is by Malcolm Summers, who until the last AGM was our Treasurer – *Dr. Hurry and Reading Abbey*. Back in April 2023, when our advertised speaker failed to turn up with no notice having been given, Malcolm stepped in and saved the day with a talk on Dr. Hurry. I'd known a bit about him before, through having read his books about the abbey, and from having researched the history of the Reading Natural History Society, of which he had been a prominent member. But there are many more aspects to his life than those, and I looked forward to reading the book – again see below.

The next volume from the Berkshire Record Society is due at any time now, *Early Reading Quaker Records*.

In October we can expect a new book from Caroline Piller, who organises our programme of speakers and visits – *Statues and Sculptures in Reading Town Centre*.

Also expected in October, Mike Brown of the Brewery History Society is publishing a book on the history of brewing in Berkshire. It will be interesting to see what he has to say about the

Reading brewers, and to compare it with what appears in the book on Reading pubs and breweries which was published by our Society in 2021. I know that John Dearing is still collecting information, as it comes in, on old Reading pubs and breweries, with the object of one day publishing a second edition. There is just one copy of the first edition left unsold, of the 500 we had printed.

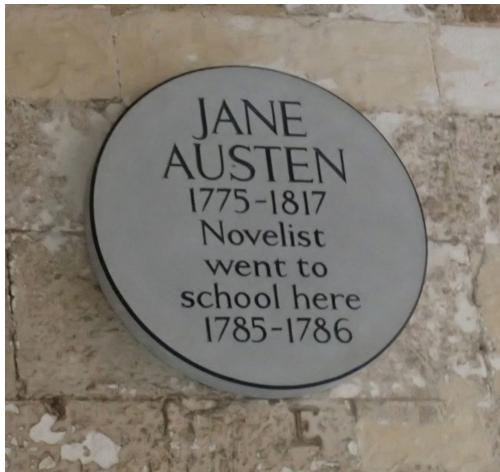
So, in the second half of the year, we have much to look forward to. Looking a little further into the future, John Dearing has been working on Sidney Gold's unpublished history of the Reading School of Art. The text was among the papers he left to the Society. And I have been researching and finding photographs for the memoirs of W. E. Woodeson – whilst access to the local studies collection in the Central Library is possible, and before things start disappearing in readiness for the move to the new building next year. Do any of our members know about Mr. Woodeson, or did they know him personally? He is proving elusive. He doesn't seem to have been mentioned in the local papers, and he never seems to have married, but continued to live in the old family home in Foundry Street (which once ran between Orchard Street and Katesgrove Lane) until he died in 1971. Please get in touch if you have information.

In the meantime, I hope you enjoy the rest of the summer and look forward to the start of the talks at the Abbey Baptist Church in September. Work on the programme of talks and visits for 2026 is well under way, and as usual looks varied and interesting.

David Cliffe, Chairman

### UNVEILING THE PLAQUE

A notable event in the 250th anniversary celebrations of Jane Austen's birth was the 'unveiling' of the new plaque celebrating her schooling in the Abbey Gateway School run by one Sarah Hackett aka Madame de la Tournelle. Among all the great and good a number of HRS committee members were permitted to mingle and our Austen expert, Joy Pibworth was also present for the Jane Austen Society. The new plaque is in a much more prominent place than the old one. I couldn't help wondering what Jane would have made of two of the speakers. First there was the Deputy *Lord* Lieutenant of Berkshire, who was a *lady* and then the Head teacher (not mistress, note!) of the present Abbey school for *Girls* – who is a chap! I think he may even have been termed *Headmaster!* Both spoke very well and one of the current students at the Abbey School read a poem she had written in honour of Jane. – Ed.



The New Plaque Photo: Ed



Group Photo: Caroline Piller

## NEW BOOKS

### Book Review

Clarke, Robert. *Reading's Colossal Lion: a Victorian Town at the Height of Empire*. Oxford: Holywell Press, 2025. £15.

Do not set too much store by the title of this book: it contains much interesting material about life in Reading that hasn't already been written about. It doesn't start in 1837 and end in 1901. There is a perceptive introductory chapter about Reading in earlier centuries, and an equally good chapter on what has happened to the town afterwards. Topics are always put in a geographical and national context, with much about the development of transport, what was happening elsewhere, and what was extraordinary about Reading.

The information you would expect to be there is of course there. We have the formation of the 66<sup>th</sup> (Berkshire) Regiment, the history of the Afghan Wars, what happened at the Battle of Maiwand in 1880, and public attitudes to the tragedy in Reading and in the country as a whole. Fund-raising for the memorial, opening and commemorative ceremonies are described, as is the career of George Simonds, the sculptor of the *Colossal Lion*.

But the book contains so much more. The economic growth of the town and the resulting growth in population are covered, together with the influence of the major employers on the town council and the town as a whole – especially the Simonds, Suttons and Palmers. The differences of opinion between the four local papers also become apparent.

The scope and depth of the research and reading which must have gone into the book are impressive, and yet it is anything but dry and dusty. One topic leads on logically and effortlessly to the next. The note on the back cover tells us that in retirement the author studied history at Oxford, and that the book is drawn from his postgraduate research into the Victorian Empire. This may explain the extraordinary depth of knowledge. The text is a pleasure to read, and the book can be recommended to anyone with an interest in 19th-century England and Reading in particular.

To give an idea of the varied delights to be found in its pages, perhaps I might mention three which have pleased me. (1) In the 1840s, the failure of J. and J. Baylis, the silk throwing and weaving firm was due at least in part to 'the effective enforcement of the laws limiting child labour.' (2) In the 1870s the impetus for the building of a museum in Reading was the bequest by Horatio Bland of Burghfield of his private museum, on condition that the collection was displayed in the town. Otherwise, it was to go to Oxford. (3) Following the Battle of Maiwand, the Royal Berkshire Regiment staged re-enactments, and William McGonagall, the Scottish 'poet and tragedian,' wrote *The Last Berkshire Eleven* in doggerel. One of the verses appears in the book.

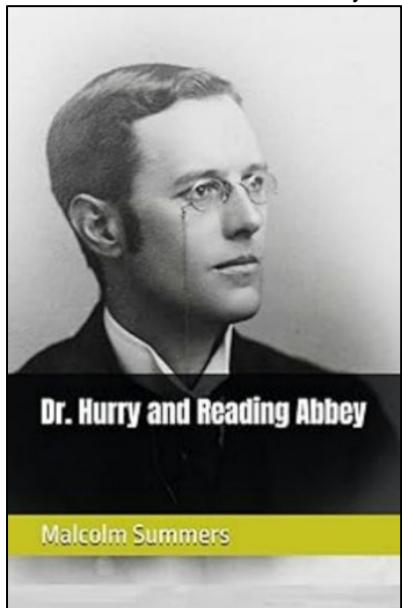
David Cliffe

Ed: *Like nearly everything else these days McGonagall's tribute to the Berkshires can be read online at: [www.poetry.com/poem/41921/the-last-berkshire-eleven](http://www.poetry.com/poem/41921/the-last-berkshire-eleven).*

## Book Review

Summers, Malcolm. *Dr. Hurry and Reading Abbey*. Tilehurst, Reading: Downs Way Publishing, 2025. £12.

The extraordinary name of Jamieson Boyd Hurry will probably be recognised by



anyone interested in the history of Reading between 1885 and 1926, the years he lived in the town. He was an eminent medical practitioner, who was also interested in all manner of different subjects, and who wrote extensively about them. A memoir of his life was published in his book on the woad plant, which was published posthumously in 1930. The present book gives a much fuller account of the life of one of the town's most eminent citizens.

Dr. Hurry took an active part in the running of the Reading Pathological Society and read papers at its meetings; he also published papers on medical subjects in *The Lancet* and *The Practitioner*, which won him national acclaim. He was a Christian, interested in improving the lives of others through medicine and education, writing a number of books on 'vicious circles.' Here, he looked at the causes and effects

of illness, poverty, drunkenness and crime, and at ways of breaking the circle. He proposed a system of 'district nursing' to help poor people in Reading. The Queen Victoria Institute for Nursing the Sick Poor of Reading opened in 1897, though not quite as Dr. Hurry had envisaged it.

He is mainly remembered now in connection with Reading Abbey – recording the history, conserving the remains, and in his own day for giving popular free guided tours of the ruins. His magnum opus on the history of the Abbey was published in 1901. His generosity knew no bounds – he paid for the memorial tablets in the Chapter House, for the memorial cross to King Henry I, founder of the abbey, and for carvings on the Abbey Gateway. At the time of its restoration, there hadn't been enough money to re-cut the various bits of sculpture. He presented Reading corporation with ten large oil paintings showing events in the history of the Abbey, and he was involved in the historical pageant of 1920 and the events to mark the octocentenary of the abbey the following year. Over the Thames, he contributed to funds to build a new well-head over St. Anne's Well in Caversham.

In support of education, he played a part in running the Reading Branch of the Parents' National Educational Union, he campaigned for public libraries in Oxford Road Reading and in Caversham and presented a gymnasium to the Reading University College.

For open-air pursuits he was active in the Reading Natural History Society, and when he moved to a house on Southcote Road, he had a large garden in which he grew unusual and tropical plants, and plants which were a source of food and medicine. Members of the public were regularly invited to come and view the gardens, free of charge. He was also instrumental in persuading the corporation to buy Prospect Park and to open it to the public.

The number of committees on which he served and the amount of money he must have spent for the public good were phenomenal. What appears above is just a summary.

In its 158 pages, this book has copious detail, and tells you about his family life, and about other notable Reading people and families. It is fully indexed – a great advantage in a book so full of detail. The endnotes reveal the many diverse sources of information which have been used. The book will inform and delight its readers and is a fitting tribute to a great man. I can't help wondering what other worthy citizens of Reading there might be to form the subject of a similar book. The author has already published a book on Sir Thomas Noon Talfourd. Maybe Arthur Hill, whose meadow can still be enjoyed, though his swimming baths are now a thing of the past, and whose daughter became Dr. Hurry's wife?

David Cliffe.

A further note from Malcolm Summers:

*Dr. Hurry and Reading Abbey* has 131 pages, plus endnotes and an index. It costs £12 and is currently available from Amazon ([Dr. Hurry and Reading Abbey](#)) and by post from the author (email [malsummer@aol.com](mailto:malsummer@aol.com)).

The author is a member of the History of Reading Society and is a Friend of Reading Abbey. He has written several other local history books, including *Signs of the Times* (Two Rivers Press), a biography of *Sir Thomas Noon Talfourd*, and three books on aspects of the history of Greyfriars Church, most recently *Greyfriars, Reading: From Prison to Parish Church* (Berkshire Record Society volume 31). He has given local history talks to a number of interested groups. He is a retired maths teacher and deputy head.

The Hurry book is being followed up by a further volume from Malcolm's pen relating to Reading's medical history, *History of the Reading Dispensary Trust*, also available via the same outlets.

## And more

Further local history books are also in the offing. The much-delayed *How the Good News came to Reading* by John Dearing traces the history of Christianity in the Reading area from the last years of the Roman Empire, through the origins of the present town in the Saxon era, the foundation of its Abbey under King Henry I, the upheavals of the Reformation and Civil War, the impact of the Evangelical Revival, and the challenge represented by the massive increase in its population in the wake of the Industrial Revolution. In the course of this story we meet many who are or should be household names including John Bunyan, John Wesley, Charles Simeon and Jane Austen, as well as others with a more local reputation – schoolmaster Julins Palmer, a forger called Jonathan Britain, shoemaker Richard Clarke and a duet of singing curates!

With approx. 300 pages the book comes with a cover price of £13.50 via Amazon but will be available from the author at a discount. For further information and to secure a copy please contact John at [john@jbdearing.co.uk](mailto:john@jbdearing.co.uk) or ring 0118 9580377.

Mike Brown's book on Berkshire breweries will be launched appropriately at a brewery but - alas! - not in Reading but at the Windsor and Eton Brewery in Windsor. The Quaker Records have been prepared for publication by Chris Skidmore, a one-time member of the Friends in Reading, but now resident in Yorkshire. And, finally, as noted in

the Chair's thoughts: *Statues and Sculptures in Reading Town Centre* by Caroline Piller is also eagerly awaited.

**FROM: THE CHRONICLES OF MUCKLEDALE BY THOMAS BEATTIE  
(1736 - 1827)**

I stayed at Millholm some time this summer, 1756, without meeting with anything worthy of notice. My father, when in the South Country, had travelled in Berkshire and there were two wholesale linen drapers lived in Reading with whom he kept a constant correspondence. It was agreed I should go up to them and assist in the counting house at times and see the country in that quarter. Accordingly, I set off about Lammas, mounted upon a little grey Scots Galloway, in the company of one William Brown, another lad called Robson, and two girls who were going to some friends they had in that country. As there were five of us in company and the weather fine and the roads dry, we had a very agreeable journey to the South and, as we were not limited as to time, we had the pleasure of seeing all the large towns upon the western London road, which road we followed until we turned off for Oxford. I admired Oxford most of all the towns I had seen. We at last arrived at Reading and were civilly received by our friends. The two Gentlemen that I went to stay with were Lamb and Routledge, Linen Drapers, both originally from the border of England, adjacent to our country; there was besides like a little colony of Borderers and their descendants settled there. I soon found that I was in a different world, as I thought, from anything I had ever seen [as] all was here stir and bustle; trade and business engrossed their chief attention. In the time that could be spared from eating and drinking, learning or mental improvement were little attended to and little regarded. We were so regular in our movements that when I gave a journal of one day, it will suffice for the whole of the time I stayed there, unless when we went to visit some neighbours, which frequently happened.

We got up in the morning early. The first thing we did was we got a pint of warm puree, a sort of Bitter Ale and woods boiled in it; this was a sort of laxative and reckoned wholesome. I then went to the counting house and wrote till breakfast then returned and was employed till dinner. Then we went all to a public house and got a full draught of fine strong beer. After dinner we then returned [to] business for some time and as soon as it began to approach the evening we went to a public Room and did not leave it until eleven o'clock, sometimes later, when we came home and went to bed, a little flustered, seldom drunk, and this was our constant routine from day to day. After I was a little habituated to this mode of life I began to turn lusty and inclined to turn fat, a thing I never all my life had the smallest appearance of, either before or after. But then I found a sort of dullness and stupidity about me which I never perceived before and after I returned to Scotland and was settled in my former sober and plain diet, I found so great an alteration in myself that I have been ever since fully convinced that during all the time I was in England, which was above one half year, I had never been perfectly sober the whole time. The middle ranks of people in the large towns in the South country are certainly more dull and heavy than the same class in Scotland which I ascribe, in great measure, to their diet and mode of life. It is certain they have less education than the same class in Scotland, but their mode of living is

by no means calculated to keep the understanding unclouded and serene and their ordinary conversations are such that it is not surprising that they should have neither taste nor value for Literary acquirements. They plod on in their own business, upon their skill and knowledge of it only. They value themselves and they are not disposed to esteem any man, whatever his other attainments may be, if he does not understand what, to them, appears to be the main thing needful.

When I went to these Publick Rooms I found a great concourse of people divided into many companys, each company with a little table before them and their own liquor, and some of them, for the most part, ordered something for supper, some seldom ordered anything but drank for all. Their drink was mostly malt liquor, but they had different sorts of very fine strong Ale and Beer and porter; some drank one thing, some another and some mixed them. Every man almost had his tobacco pipe in his mouth and we were just in an atmosphere of tobacco smoke. I never learned to smoke but soon I accustomed so that I found no sort of inconveniency from their smoking. Our principal topics of conversation were trade, agriculture, horse racing and eating. This last subject I was surprised at and thought it would certainly soon be exhausted. I found, however, I had been mistaken; the different dishes, different methods of dressing, different tastes, what one liked and another liked, afforded a field of long and ample discussion and when any man had been so fortunate as to dine much to his mind he, with a joyful heart and countenance, communicated the glad tidings to his friends, who did not fail to congratulate him upon his good fortune and I always observed they spoke with more pleasure and relish upon that subject than upon any other. As I was little acquainted with any of these subjects I made but a sorry figure at these meetings and altho I wished to have done some service to the Gentlemen in their Compting house I was so slow that I could do very little. Whenever the Gentlemen went to visit any of their neighbours I went along with them and here I was introduced to several free, forward, hearty girls but alas there was no Miss Oliphants among them. To me the difference seemed immense. I was never a polite man, I was always rather awkward and backwards in company, yet still I could distinguish between a woman of sense and education and those that had very little pretensions to either.

There lived in Reading at this time an old acquaintance of my Father's, Mr Thomas White. This man, by success in trade and a fortune he acquired by marriage, had amassed a great fortune; he had his carriage, his Livery servant and lived in all the style of barbarous magnificence. When you went into his house you were struck with an appearance of grandeur; when you came to converse with him there was a great falling off, as he had risen from obscurity – he held not even the common education of the lowest orders in Scotland. His conversations centred principally upon himself; his own actions and acquisitions seemed to him to be the only subjects worthy of his regard. He was constantly the hero of all his stories and, as he had no talent even for these stories, his narratives were slow, dull, heavy and disgusting. I thought it ridiculous to see such a man dressed like a nobleman (for he dressed in higher state than any Gentleman in that neighbourhood) and living in such splendour. He had a daughter, Miss Sally White, about 17 years of age. As she came several times to Mr Routledge's where I stayed, Mr Routledge advised me to make up to Miss White; it would make my fortune, but I heard him with great indifference. The daughter

had just as far attractions in my eye as the father and during the time that I was in England I had no connection with [the] female world, neither lawful nor criminal.

I went about to most places within about fifty miles round and saw most places in that quarter. I went and saw Winchester and viewed the Cathedral, South Hampton, Gosport and Portsmouth. As it was in time of war [i.e. the Seven Years War, which began in 1756] Portsmouth was all alive and the concourse of shipping, the Docks, Military and Naval Stores, the Cannon, Bombs, Mortars, Pitch works and Building and equipping the Men of War, were to me entertaining objects. I afterwards went to London and was there some time but there I saw nothing very surprising but the crowds of well dressed whores that parades the streets in the evening.

... About the latter end of March, 1757, I bought a little stout brown mare and set forward for Scotland in company with one John Calvert, who was coming to near Longtown, and came to Millholm about the beginning of April that year, viz. 1757, and was kindly welcomed by my parents who would now not hear of my leaving them again, neither for education nor business, but I must just stay at home and become a Stock Farmer.

[Ed: *The Chronicles of Muckledale* can be found on The Regional Ethnology of Scotland Project: <https://www.regionalethnologyscotland.llc.ed.ac.uk> We are grateful to the RESP for their kind permission to reproduce this extract and to Mr David Cook for bringing it to our attention.]

## TWENTY YEARS AGO

In view of the hot weather this summer, the following data from the Summer 2005 edition of the Newsletter seemed rather to 'choose itself.' It is taken from **NOTABLE WEATHER IN THE READING AREA** by Dr John Starr. John also included 'Notable Storms, Rainfall and Floods and Cold Spells' in his survey.

### Notable Hot Spells

1893: No rain from beginning of March until 16th May. Greatest spring drought of the 19th century.

1897: After a gloomy, wet start the 21st June Queen Victoria was blessed with brilliant sunshine for her Jubilee.

1906: The fine summer ended in a late heat wave. 35°C was recorded at Maidenhead.

1911: Six days above 32°C (90°F) with 36°C (97°F) in Wokingham. Death rate soared, particularly among London children. One of the great hot summers.

1933: 200 hours of sunshine above average for many south-eastern areas.

Notable for an all-night thunderstorm over Reading.

1947: Warmest August on record, averaging 27°C (81F). Particularly amazing after the 'Winter of Discontent'.

1952: Particularly hot in early July.

1976: Heat wave was the longest for 130 years; our warmest summer equal with 1826 in a Central England Temperature series stretching back to 1659. Record 35.9°C reached a Cheltenham on 3rd July. The drought was aggravated by the dry conditions in 1975.

1990: Second warmest in 300 years.

1998: Warmest year in 20th century; probably warmest year in 1000 years.

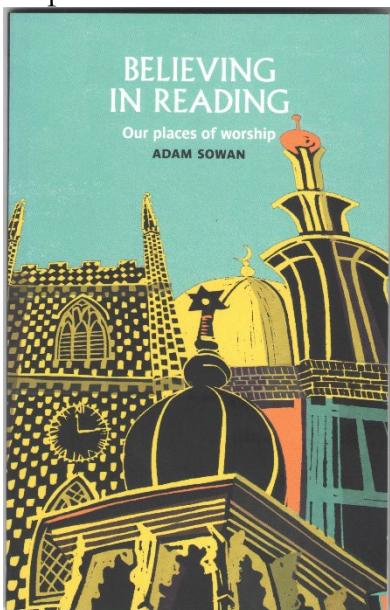
2003: Exceptional August 10-day heat wave was confined to southeast England. It established a new maximum record of 38.5°C at Faversham (Wokingham, 36.9°C). Over 2,000 heat deaths recorded. This heat wave was eclipsed by the 15-day spell (June/July) of 1976.

## ADAM SOWAN

Reading lost one of its most prolific local historians with the death in June of Adam Sowan, aged 82. He was a former member of the History of Reading Society.

I first met Adam in Waterstones' bookshop in Broad Street at an event promoting his new book, *Abattoirs to Zinzan*, detailing the stories behind Reading's street names. Many years later this gave me the idea for the title of one of my books, *Abbot Cook to Zerodegrees*, co-written with David Cliffe and Evelyn Williams, and similarly detailing the stories of Reading's pubs and breweries.

I wasn't just there, though, to secure a copy of Adam's book but to give a talk in my own right on the genesis of my earlier book, *The Church that Would not Die*. I was rather surprised to be invited as it had been on sale for seven years by then!



Adam kindly cited that book in several of his own publications and in *Believing in Reading* he enjoyed a bit of a joke at my expense by describing St Mary's Castle Street as 'the church that would not accept women priests!' I similarly cited him in some of my own works and *Believing in Reading* appears in the bibliography of my imminent publication, *How the Good News came to Reading*. However, I earnt a well-deserved slap on the wrist from Adam when listing *Abattoirs* in the bibliography of *Reading Pubs* as published by the Three Rivers Press – I obviously had the Holybrook in mind! Happily, my book sold well enough to go to a reprint in which the error was corrected.

Adam was also one of the doughty cohort of historians who responded to my appeal for help in compiling the *Reading Book of Days*. Adam's submissions reflected his many interests but the one I remember most was his brilliant entry for September 4th: '1752: On this day, as on all the days from 3rd to 13th September, nothing happened in Reading or anywhere else in England. These days simply did not exist, thanks to the change from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar.'

The last time I recall seeing Adam was when I met him walking up my street (Sherman Road in Katesgrove) and discovered that he was researching a new book on Reading's bricks and brickwork - alas his last. He will be much missed by family and friends but his tremendous contribution to the history of Reading will also be long remembered.

John Dearing

## JOHN BLAGRAVE (Died 1611) – THE COMPLETE MATHEMATICIAN



One of the most interesting church memorials in Reading is on the south wall of St. Laurence's Church, erected in memory of John Blagrave who died in August 1611. Blagrave, a famous mathematician of his day, is holding a quadrant in his left hand and his right hand rests on a sphere. He is surrounded by five women – sometimes said to be the origin of the Reading shield of five maidens' heads – who are each holding one of the five Platonic solids. These are the only possible regular polyhedra: tetrahedron, cube, octahedron, dodecahedron, and icosahedron. Beneath the memorial is the inscription reproduced at the conclusion of this article.

John's father, also John, had inherited his stepfather William Grey's considerable fortune, which consisted of a great deal of Reading's property and the house and grounds at Bulmershe Court. John senior died in 1597, and his oldest son, Anthony Blagrave, inherited the family wealth. Anthony subsequently bought Southcote Manor, leasing Southcote Lodge to his brother John, who lived there until his death.

John Blagrave's birth date is not known. He is believed to have attended the Free School at Reading, that is to say Reading School, located in the old Hospitium building by St. Laurence's church. It is thought that he attended St. John's College, Oxford, for a while, but he does not seem to have graduated. He married a widow named Dorothy\*, who had a daughter named Jane from her previous marriage. John and Dorothy had no children themselves.

On his memorial, John Blagrave is described in Latin as 'Totus Mathematicus,' or the Complete Mathematician. He wrote four mathematical treatises. The first, '*The Mathematical Jewel*', was published in 1585. The full title of the book was:

### THE MATHEMATICAL JEWEL,

Shewing the making, and most excellent use of a singular Instrument so called:  
in that it performeth with wonderful Dexteritie, whatsoever is to be done,  
either by Quadrant, Ship, Circle, Cylinder, Ring, Dyall, Horoscope, Astrolabe,  
Sphere, Globe, or any such like heretofore Devised

The Jewel was therefore an instrument that achieved in itself all that several other separate instruments could do. The book that John Blagrave produced was a step-by-step guide to enable the reader to build the Jewel, and then to operate it.

His second book, published in 1590, had the more obscure title:

*Baculum Familiare, Catholicon sive Generale.*  
**A BOOKE OF THE Making and use of a Staffe,**  
newly invented By the Author,  
called the *Familiar Staffe*.

This book describes various trigonometrical and land surveying techniques by using a standard sized staff. For example, it sets out how you can use it to calculate the height of a tower by taking measurements at some distance away, thus enabling you to know how long a ladder you would need to scale the wall. The text is full of situations from the battlefield – where to set your artillery, or finding how far an enemy army was away, even at a distance of several miles.

John Blagrave's third book, published in 1596, was everything you needed to know, and more, about the astrolabe. It was entitled:

*Astrolabium Uranicum Generale.*  
**A Necessary and Pleasant solace and recreation for Navigators**  
in their long Journeying, Containing the use of an Instrument or general Astrolabe:  
Newly devised for them by the Author,  
To bring them skilfully acquainted with all the Planets, Starres, and  
Constellations of the Heavens...

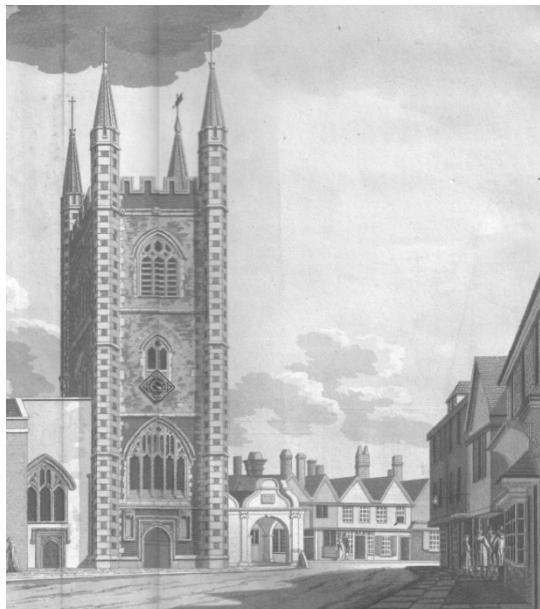
As the description stated, this was a new design of an astrolabe, capable of measurements and results beyond those of the usual instrument. It could, for example, be used to find out what the date was by taking a measurement at noon. It claimed to provide a simpler way to find the time by using the stars than with the normal astrolabe.

His final book, *The Art of Dyalling*, was published in 1609. This was the first book to describe all you needed to know to set up a sundial, whether horizontally, vertically or at some other angle. It covers all the theory needed to understand how to make the dial, and to set it correctly.

By his will, John Blagrave set up several charitable gifts, covering the three parishes of Reading. However, his main bequest was of money for the Corporation to buy up some property at Market Place 'between the Pump and the Cage' and, by knocking it down, to open up a more spacious area, and to 'build a very fair walk under the south side of St. Laurence's church, ten foot broad at least and in length from the church porch to the west

end of the belfry.' This, the famous Blagrave's Piazza, or more prosaically, Church Walk, was built in 1619. The end section was made into a lock-up cell, called The Hole, and the town's pillory and stocks were kept under its arches too. Over time not only did the piazza deteriorate through wear and tear, it also suffered in reputation, as a place of assignation for nefarious doings, not least as what we would now term the town's 'red-light' district. It was knocked down in May 1865.

The drawing, which shows the piazza to the right of St. Laurence's tower, is by Charles Tomkins in 1802. On the front of the piazza was an inscription stone, which said:



*Johannes Blagravius, generosus, mathesiosque, encomiis celeberrimus, libras c ad ambulacrum  
hoc extruendum dedit, quod opus major burgensesque (piae beneficia hujus inter caetera  
memoriae ergo) Perficiendum curarunt,*

*Feb. 1, 1619.*

*Reparatum & adornatum Anno. 1680.*

Loosely translated, this is: 'John Blagrave, a nobleman, renowned for his mathematical accomplishments, gave £100 for the construction of this porch, to be completed for the benefit of the Mayor and townspeople (therefore of pious benefit to his memory). They have taken care to accomplish it. Feb 1, 1619. Repaired and decorated in the year 1680.'

The family name of Blagrave is, of course, memorialised in the town by Blagrave Street, which was built in 1871 by widening and paving part of the old Vastern Lane.

JOHANNES BLAGRAVVS  
TOTVS MATHEMATICICVS CVM  
MATRE SEPVLTVS

HERE LYES HIS CORPES WHICH LIVING HAD A SPIRIT  
WHEREIN ALL WORTHY KNOWLEDGE DID INHERIT  
BY WHICH WITH ZEALE OUR GOD HE DID ADORE  
LEFT FOR MAIDSERVANTS AND TO FEED THE POORE  
HIS VERTVOVS MOTHER CAME OF WORTHIE RACE  
A HVNGERFORD AND BVRIED NEERE THIS PLACE  
WHEN GOD SENT DEATH THEIR LIVES TO CALL  
THEY LIVED BELOVED AND DIED BEWAYLD OF ALL  
DESEASSED THE IXTH OF AVGVST  
ANNO DOMINI MDCXI

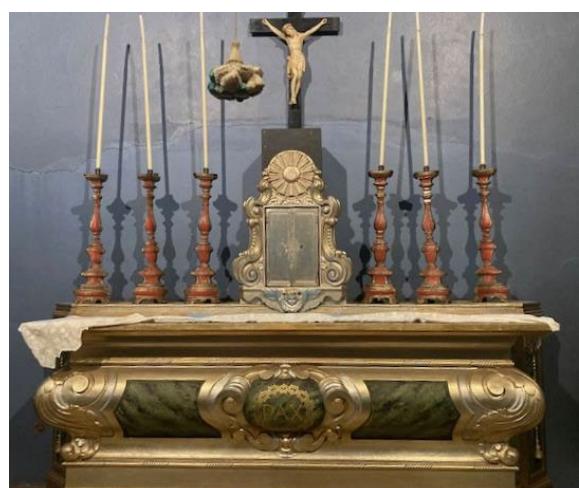
\* It is generally written that John Blagrave's wife's name is unknown, but she is named in his will (The National Archives, PROB11/118)

Malcolm Summers

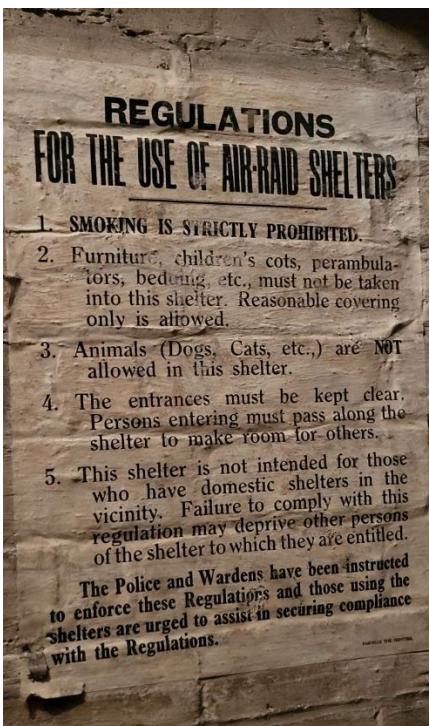
## HOLY TRINITY MEMORIES



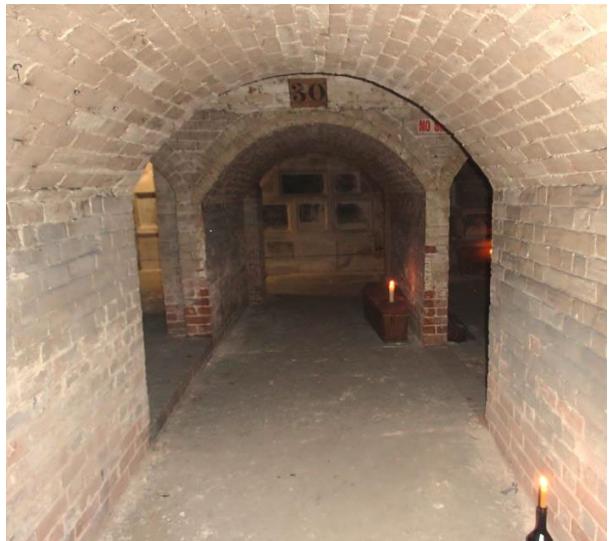
Nave and Organ Loft Photo: Ed



Lady Chapel Altar (acquired from Nashdom Abbey) Photo: Caroline Piller



**Left: Is the War  
Really Over?**  
**Photo: Caroline  
Piller**



**Right: Down in the  
Catacombs Photo:  
Ed**

## DUCK TAIL-PIECE

During the preparation of the *Reading Book of Days*, I decided it would be a nice idea to include my mother, a distinguished resident of Reading from 1980-2005 and what better than the story of the cygnet she spotted sheltering in the front garden, which hit the headlines in October 1981. So I was delighted to see the story of the family of ducks that managed to nest in the construction site of the extensions to the Civic Offices in Bridge Street. The happy ending, after a brief delay to the construction work, saw the parents and their new offspring escorted to the Kennet just as my mum's cygnet was helped across Pell Street and down to the same river over forty years ago. And that would be a delightful story if ever anyone wanted to write another *Reading Book of Days* - I am sure too that Mr and Mrs Duck would agree that Morgan Sindall deserve an award under the Considerate Constructors Scheme!

Talking of which, I have just discovered an important omission from the *Book of Days*. We included a number of cricketers and other sportsmen born in the town and there were also some notable football stories from the pen of Nigel Sutcliffe. As some readers will be aware I am an avid follower of a certain football club on the south coast and wanting to see who Bournemouth would be playing in the first matches of the new season I turned to the internet and this eventually got me on to the Wikipedia potted history of the club, from which I somehow discovered that one **Freddie Cox** was born in Reading in 1920.

As a boy Frederick James Arthur Cox played for the St George's Lads Club – presumably a team from the Church Lads Brigade unit associated with St George's, Tilehurst. If so, he must have lived quite near Elm Park football ground and perhaps watched Reading play as well! Such were his talents that he was recruited by 2nd Division Tottenham Hotspur (Spurs), playing initially for their 'nursery team' Northfleet United from 1936-8 and making his Spurs debut in 1938. The following year, the outbreak of the

Second World War led to a cessation of normal life and Freddie joined the RAF, gaining a DFC as a fighter pilot. It seems that, like that more famous future coach, Matt Busby, he occasionally turned out for Reading in such matches as took place, when available, and also for Swindon. Back in Civvies he continued to play for Spurs till 1949 when he joined 1st Division Arsenal. He stayed there till 1953 and then concluded his playing career at West Bromwich Albion. He altogether scored 25 goals in 182 appearances for the Spurs, Gunners and Baggies, retiring in 1954.

He began his coaching career with West Brom and then in 1956 moved to Bournemouth in the Third Division South. In that season the Cherries had their best ever FA Cup run (equalled in 2024/5) when they reached the sixth round or quarter-finals. To get there they defeated two top teams, Wolves away and Freddie Cox's old team, Spurs at home. Perhaps inevitably they finally succumbed at home to the famous Busby babes of Manchester United.

Cox was less successful when he moved to First Division Portsmouth, who were promptly relegated to the Second Division and later to the Third. Not surprisingly he was sacked and spent some years out of the game, setting up a newsagents' business in Bournemouth. He then rejoined Bournemouth as manager in 1965, staying for five years. He achieved some success but the team was then relegated to the Fourth Division and Freddie once again received the order of the boot. I was told that on one occasion he had a shouting match with an opinionated local councillor, a building contractor called Alban Adams, telling Adams that he was a very little man with a very little mind, which I fear was not very far from the truth!

Cox then returned to selling newspapers but sadly died in 1973 at the early age of 52.

And finally, apologies to Jo Alexander-Jones that her article on the Southampton Street newsagents in Newsletter 65 appeared to be anonymous. And don't forget contributions from members are always welcome – don't leave it all to the committee! If possible please help the poor old Editor by submitting contributions as word documents in Garamond font, using single inverted commas except where 'nested' inside other inverted commas. Ideally titles of books should be displayed in italics rather than within inverted commas and please avoid superscript for ordinal numbers i.e. 12th not 12<sup>th</sup>.

John Dearing