

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

Hon. Secretary

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SPRING 1996

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

As you will see in this issue of the History of Reading Society newsletter, there is a formal notice from our Secretary, Peter Russell, convening the Annual General Meeting next month on 14 March.

You may have noticed that three out of the six members of the Committee are not prepared to re-submit themselves for re-election. While thanking all three for their generous help over the years, the Committee is going to miss them - the Committee is only just large enough with the three officers and its six members to ensure the Society functions well.

So in advance of the AGM, I should like to invite help from you, our members. We - your Committee - hope that by the AGM up to three have offered to fill these vacancies on the Committee.

The posts are not onerous - we meet four or five times a year in comfortable surroundings and other than one of our number volunteering to act as Editor of this Newsletter, there is little to do between meetings. So here's hoping that we shall see new faces at our next Committee meeting.

Bent C Weber, Chair of the Society.

TRANSPORT TO AND FROM MEETINGS

Your Committee have become increasingly concerned that members are finding it difficult to come to our meetings.

As a solution, your Committee would ask that anyone having transport difficulties get in touch with a member of the Committee. We would then see whether a lift can be arranged: it may not always be possible but the Committee would like to be as helpful as we can in this respect. This we hope will help members and at the same time keep up attendance at our meetings. Equally we hope that those with transport will respond and help us meet requests. All you have to do is to pick up the phone.

Bent C Weber, Chair of the Society

THE CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE FOR MUSEUMS IN BERKSHIRE

We have been approached by John Chapman, Treasurer to the Committee and a member of this Society inviting both the Society and its individual members to consider membership of the Committee.

The Committee is an umbrella organisation for all Berkshire's museums and for a small annual fee of £20.00 for Full Membership, £4.00 for Associate Members and £1.00 for Subscribers it produces a very well worthwhile Berkshire Museums Newsletter three or four times a year. This also provides publicity for the various historical societies, including The History of Reading Society. Peter Russell, our Secretary has a current copy.

If you would like to join and/or would like further information, John Chapman would be pleased to help you:

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Notice is hereby given that the Annual General Meeting of the History of Reading Society will be held in the Abbey Room of the Central Library at 7.30 PM on Thursday 14 March 1996.

The following customary business will be transacted:

1. Welcome and apologies
2. Approval of Minutes of 1995 A G M
3. Matters arising
4. Chairman's report and review
5. Treasurer's report
6. The election of the Committee for 1996/97

Present Officers

Chairman	Bent Weber •
Secretary	Peter Russell •
Treasurer	Bob Hutchinson•

Present Committee

Francis Goodridge •
 Mollie Harris
 Ron Harris
 Elizabeth Hodgson
 Joan Hutchinson (Programme Organiser)"
 Margaret Russell •

- Willing to stand again.

Further nominations for any of the above posts may be made either in writing, addressed to the Secretary, seven days before the meeting or from the **floor** at the meeting subject to the nominee agreeing to stand and having the support of a proposer and seconder.

7. To elect an auditor: *currently* Graeme Naish (*willing to stand again*).
8. Any other business - *Data Protection Act*

The A G M will be followed by a talk to be given by Daniele Bloch-Rive on her study of Newtown (her thesis, written in French, on a *comparative study of Newtown & a part of Nancy, Eastern France* has been deposited in Reading Central Library)

Peter Russell, Secretary History of Reading Society,

CORAM'S CHILDREN CAME TO BERKSHIRE

By Gillan Clark

The Thomas Coram Foundling Hospital opened in 1741 in London to receive a limited number of children whose parents could not keep them. In 1756 it was required by the government to take every child who was offered to it or left at its doors. In the next four years it took some 15000 children and for a further eight years it supported the survivors until they were old enough to be apprenticed. From the outset the hospital placed the children it accepted, all being very young, with rural wet nurses for the first five or so years of their lives, returning them after that to London for education and for placement in apprenticeships. Between 1741 and 1760 about 1400 of Coram's children were placed with about 600 Berkshire women, some staying on till 1768.

This system, although practical and economic, left the children a long way from London and from authority; its successful function depended entirely on the presence of a network of voluntary workers (the inspectors), who were the hospital's representatives. The Inspectors found suitable wet nurses in the area where they lived and the hospital then sent an appropriate number of foundlings out into the country. They then supervised the nurses on behalf of the hospital in the social and medical care of the children, and carried out all the duties that this entailed.

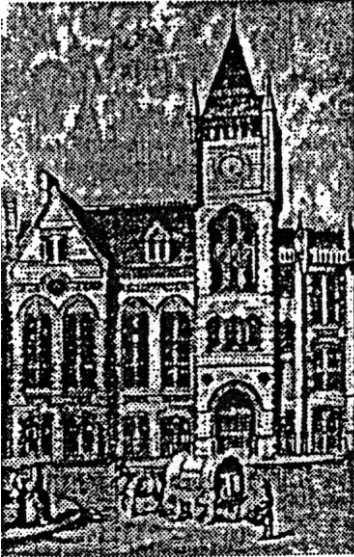
The story of this enterprise is in the letters they wrote to the governing body of the hospital.* In Berkshire about 35 men and women wrote (some for up to 15 years) about distribution of clothing supplied by the hospital, provision and use of medicines, illness and deaths, arranging transport and funerals, payment of wages and the eventual return to London of the survivors. It seems that this is the earliest example of

women of gentry class working outside the home in this way for an organisation and being recognised by it as acting on equal terms with men. It is however the human, almost incidental, dimension which provides the greatest impact. That the clergy of Sonning and Twyford, clergy wives and tradesmen in Reading, and ladies of the manor in White Waltham and Abingdon had the ability and commitment to supervise a work force of nurses and a "case load" of as many as 80 children at one time is astonishing. That many of them, particularly John Collet of Newbury, George Talbot of Burghfield and Juliana Dodd of Swallowfield, had great understanding of the poverty of the nurses is even more so. The charity, the children and the nurses, well outside the previous experience of the inspectors, became matters of genuine concern to them. They found themselves attacking any attempt to defraud the charity, being distressed at infant deaths, supporting nurses through unpleasant treatments when they inadvertently caught syphilis from infected foundlings, even apprenticing favourite children into their own households.

Most of the nurses initially took the children for the money they could earn, but many ended up by caring so much for them that the thought of parting was painful. They endured wage reductions and paid for schooling at times when provisions were very dear rather than let the hard-pressed hospital take the children back. When the time came for the final parting, it caused great distress and many nurses and their husbands offered to keep the children on almost any terms. Elizabeth Grout of Wokingham said that her love and affection to her foundling was as though he had been her own natural born son and that to part with him would be as to part with her life, and she would be uneasy all the days of her life if he was taken from her. Some children were apprenticed with the nurse family and other found suitable local places but they were the minority. Most families were not of sufficient status to offer adequate terms. It was of course the inspectors who had to take the children from their foster mothers in such sad circumstances.



The University of Reading
Department of Extended
Education



The Town Hall Lectures
Architecture in **and around**
Reading

23 January-19 March
(alternate Tuesdays at 7.30 pm)

MEMBERS MAY BE INTERESTED IN THESE LECTURES

Reading Brick: Thomas Holloway, his pills, sanatorium, college and picture collection.

Thomas Holloway made his fortune by selling his patent medicines and gambling on the Stock Exchange. He set about spending this wealth by commissioning one of the most expensive mental asylums ever built and a college for the education of women, the latter being endowed with a unique picture collection.

*Dr John Elliott Royal Holloway:
University of London*

dale 5 March 1996

The Making of Modern Gothic:
Alfred Waterhouse and the Gothic
revival in the nineteenth century.

Alfred Waterhouse the architect of Reading Town Hall is an appropriate subject for the last lecture in our series. Dr Cunningham is the acknowledged expert on Waterhouse and in this lecture he will set this important Victorian Architect in context.

*Dr Colin Cunningham
Head of History of
Art Open University*

19 March 1996

After 1760 the hospital had insufficient funds to take further children for some years and so by 1768 Coram's children, other than those apprenticed, had left Berkshire and returned to London. By this time five inspectors, including Mrs Colton, Mr Marsham of Reading and Mr Talbot, had died and some had moved from the area, but Dr Collet and Mrs Dodd, among others, having served for over ten years, continued their responsibilities to the last. The hospital continued by providing residential care for numbers of children and eventually me the present-day Thomas Coram Foundation for Children.

- G. Clark (ed) 'Correspondence of the Founding Hospital Inspectors in Berkshire 1757-68, Berkshire Record Society Vol. 1 1994

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Members subscriptions for 1996, became due on 1st. January. If you would like to renew your subscription the Hon. Treasurer would be pleased to hear from you. The rates are £8.25 for a single member (£5.50 if retired or a student), £11.00 for a couple (£8.25 if retired).

The charge for non-members attending our meetings is £1.00

RUFUS ISAACS MARQUESS OF READING

By Norman Wicks

The Isaacs family came to Britain from central Europe in the 1690's and settled in Chelmsford. Their descendants moved to London in the early 19th century where they traded as fruit importers, as M. Isaacs and Sons Ltd. One of them, Henry Aaron Isaacs, born in 1830 became Lord Mayor of London.

Rufus Daniel Isaacs was born at St. Mary Axe on 10th October 1860 within the sound of Bow Bells. From age five he was educated at Brussels for two years and then attended the Anglo-Jewish school in

Regents Park and at 13 years old he was at the University College School in Gower Street, leaving just before his 14th birthday, his education being then considered at an end.

So after six months in Hanover learning German, he entered the family fruit import business, which at that time was established in Eastcheap. Rufus disliked the routine office work and wanted to try a life at sea, so he and his father travelled to Cardiff where Rufus joined the ship Blair Athol as one of the crew at ten shillings a month, refusing to be apprenticed in case he didn't like it. His first voyage lasted 12 months and, disillusioned he returned to the offices of M. Isaacs and Sons. But still not pleased with this humdrum existence, entered the Stock Exchange first as a clerk and later as a full member. But by 1884 after only four years, he was hammered with debts of £8000.

So at 24 years old he decided to read for the Bar and was called as a junior in 1887 and only three weeks later he married Alice Cohen at the West London Synagogue.

After only ten years as a junior he applied for and obtained silk and was finally able to settle his Stock Exchange debts including interest. He achieved sufficient fame in the profession of law that the wig and gown which he wore was accepted after his death by the London Museum.

He had a circle of friends of the Liberal persuasion with whom he engaged in debates at Hampstead, and so when George William Palmer, Liberal MP for Reading applied for the Chiltern Hundreds in 1904 owing to his increasing deafness, Rufus was invited to contest the seat. He and Alice established themselves at the Lodge Hotel (now demolished) at the junction of Queens Road and Kings Road, and he was successful in winning the seat.

He took his seat on 9th August introduced by Mr Herbert Gladstone (later Viscount) and Mr Charles Rose of Hardwick House near Mapledurham, member for Newmarket (later Sir Charles). Rufus Isaacs KC served as Reading's member for nine years and settled here in the constituency at Foxhill, which

Alfred Waterhouse, architect, had had built for himself in the grounds of Whiteknights Park.

pictures of the . Proceedings.

Isaacs was appointed Solicitor General in 1910 and received the accustomed knighthood, being the first person to receive one from King George V. As it was obligatory upon any MP accepting an office of profit under the Crown to resign his seat and seek re-election, he had to stand again in 1910 when he was returned unopposed. After only seven months as Solicitor General he became Attorney General, and after pleading a case for the King against a libeller in 1911, was awarded the honour of Knight Commander of the Royal Victorian Order. He was also appointed Privy Councillor in the coronation honours list.

In 1913 Asquith appointed him Lord Chief Justice and he was created a Baron in the New Year's honours list and took the title of Lord Reading of Erleigh, a decision warmly welcomed in the borough.

He was made Viceroy of India in 1921, a position he held until 1926. His statue by Charles Sargeant Jagger showing him in his robes as Privy Councillor, stood with statues of other Viceroys in an avenue leading to Government House in New Delhi. Returning to Britain he served as Foreign Secretary in the first National Government in 1931 and in the same year married his second wife Stella, Alice having died the year before.

Rufus, Lord Reading, died in 1935 aged 75 after a lifetime of public service. His widow, Stella, had served on his staff in India and helped him with his work. Now she founded the Women's Voluntary Service in 1938 (now WRVS) and for this received a life peerage in 1958 being the first woman to achieve this honour.

The Viceroys' statues were put into storage in the 1960's and this prompted Stella, the Dowager Marchioness to apply to the Indian Government for the return of her late husband's statue to Reading and in 1969 it arrived here packed in two crates. Nineteen sites in Reading were considered and finally the King George V memorial garden in Eldon Square was chosen. The statue, having been erected was unveiled on 8 July 1971 by Lord Reading, grandson of Rufus, Stella having died shortly before. Present at the ceremony were three grandchildren, eight great grandchildren, and the town's Mayor, Alderman William Badnall and Mrs Margaret Sage, chairman of the parks committee, and the present writer who was able to take a few

