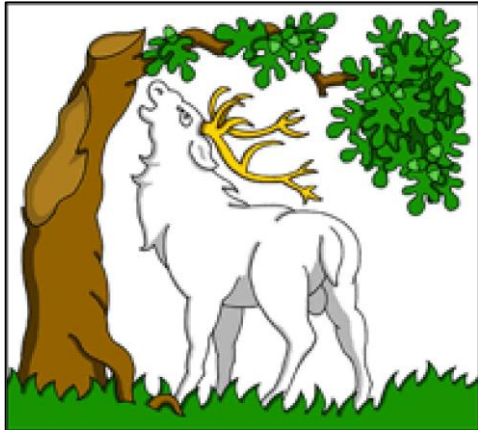


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Berkshire Local History Association



**Newsletter No 143
September 2025**

Berkshire Local History Association Newsletter

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Next Newsletter:

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Content for the newsletter should be sent to newsletter@blha.org.uk

We welcome contributions from member societies and institutions covering their activities over the previous four months.

We also welcome queries, articles, book reviews and notice of special events that are open to the public. These can come from anywhere or anyone provided they have relevance to the history and heritage of the Royal County of Berkshire, including those areas that were previously part of the county.

When providing material, please focus on the content rather than the format.

Cover picture: River Thames at Goring Lock (Jo Alexander-Jones)

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Chairman's Corner

I hope that the high temperatures have not prevented you from enjoying things this summer. Some of the plants in my garden are obviously enjoying the warmth, and flowering more profusely than ever, but for some of us humans, it's made it harder to get motivated and get on with things.

In June, some members decided to miss the local history walk around Little Marlow, led by Ann Smith, on account of the heat. It was a pity - those who went, enjoyed the walk.

June was also the month when the Berkshire Family History Society marked their 50th anniversary by holding a special day at Wokefield Place, with a wide variety of talks on the subject of 'The Victorians.' Such was the number of talks that guests could choose from a long list and book their places in advance, and of course many of the talks were of interest to Berkshire local historians. Several of our members went along, and over lunch there was the chance to look round the stalls set up by various societies from around the county. Margaret Simons kindly looked after the BLHA stand.

In October, the stand will be set up again, this time at Marcham, where the Marcham Society will be celebrating their 30th anniversary. Many of our members will remember the AGM at Marcham, where we were so well looked after, and where the Society had arranged for us to visit interesting sites around the village which were not open to the general public.

Hopefully, having a presence at this kind of event will bring in new members, and of course it's always good to meet people with interests similar to your own, and find out what they've been up to.

Our AGM this year, on a Thursday in April rather than a Saturday in March, took place at The Reading Biscuit Factory Cinema. Following the formal part of the meeting we were able to enjoy a programme of archive movie films, shot in various parts of the county, from the 1920s to the 1960s. This had been put together by the Wessex Film and Sound Archive from films in their collection. Before the show, we heard something of the story of The Reading Biscuit Factory. Many of us had never visited it before, and it offers something more than the usual cinema chains. Then we heard a little about the Film and Sound Archive. My job was to give a running commentary for the silent films, so that the audience knew what they were looking at. After the show, several of us stayed behind at The Biscuit Factory to enjoy lunch together. Later in the day, the films were shown again to the general public. We moved to a bigger auditorium, and every seat was filled. Everyone seemed to enjoy the films, and I felt very grateful to the many people who had made the show possible.

Next year's AGM will be different again. We're going back to a Saturday in March – 28 March. There will be the space for member societies to set up their stalls, and we'll be at Hedgerley, north of Slough. Though Hedgerley is in Buckinghamshire, we won't be "trespassing" because the county doesn't have a local history association like ours. The Hedgerley Historical Society will be celebrating its 50th anniversary next year, and will be publishing a book on the history of the village. A glance at their programme for this year lists over 20 talks and visits – it's a very active Society.

After the AGM we'll have a talk about the local area, with a lunch laid on. In the afternoon we'll be heading over to Langley, for a visit to the Kedermister Library. We'll need to use cars to get to Hedgerley and on to Langley, so car sharing would be a good idea.

Langley has been in Berkshire since 1974. For many, it's the railway station that comes after Slough, an area of industrial estates with lots of aircraft overhead, and not immediately attractive. But at its heart there's an old pub, old almshouses by the churchyard, and a medieval church. Attached to the church is a library, containing mainly theological books, many of them in Latin, for perusal by clergymen from all over the area. It was set up by the local landowner, Sir John Kedermister, at some time before 1631. The library still has a window, a fireplace, original bookshelves, and most of its books. The rarest of them are safe in the British Library. The book that most people will remember is the "Pharmacopolium," a book of 17th century medicines, cures and remedies. The whole room is highly decorated: it's a spectacular survival, not widely known about.

We'll send out more details nearer the time, but I hope you'll make a note of the date, and be able to join us next year.

David Cliffe, Chairman BLHA

A word from the Editor

I can remember the time when a visit to a museum meant peering in to dusty boxes and trying to read faded labels. So while out this summer I was delighted to visit [Wallingford Museum](#), housed in a beautiful old building which is worth the visit itself, and full of stories of the lives of those living in what was then part of Berkshire. In our county and surroundings we have a wealth of local museums, and I wanted to highlight a few of this autumn's features - West Berkshire Museum in Newbury is running another of its '[Talking History](#)' programme with topics including 'Jane Austen in Berkshire' and 'The Magnificent Lady Craven of Benham Park'. At [Reading Museum](#) there are two exhibitions running; 'Reading's DIGITAL Revolution' and 'Rotary in the

Thames Valley' and the Vale & Downland Museum has an exhibition called 'Wantage Tramway – The Story of a Bucolic Roadside Steam Tramway.'

Having already mentioned Jane Austen, I was pleased to be invited to the unveiling of the plaque to commemorate Jane's time at school in Reading (1785/6). It was a nice sunny day, chosen to coincide with Waterfest, and there were speeches from the Mayor and other dignitaries and then one of the Abbey School pupils read a poem she had written having been inspired by Jane's work. With the 'formal' stuff done we were allowed in the Gateway building to enjoy cakes and drinks. While munching away I saw a lady hovering by the door and went to speak to her. She had come all the way from Mexico to visit places associated with Jane Austen and had by luck chosen Reading on this day; we invited her to join us and make it an international event. While the celebratory opening was the culmination of all of the work by Reading Council, Reading Museum and the Reading Civic Society, I had previously seen all of the work that went in to the design, mounting and funding of a plaque sited on a Scheduled Ancient Monument, and I hope that I am never asked to manage such a complicated project – hats off to all involved!



Notices and Articles

The future of Reading Library's Local Studies Collection

Katie Amos (Reading Library, Local Studies Lead)

You may or may not be aware that in Spring 2026 Reading Library will be moving from its current location at Abbey Square to the Civic Offices on Bridge Street. This is for a variety of reasons, some financial, some practical, but it has been made possible by the council winning a bid with the previous government's Levelling Up Fund (LUF), alongside another project - to extend the Hexagon to include a second, 200-300 seat venue.

To make this a reality, the internal layout of the Civic Offices has been reconfigured, and they are also currently undergoing building works to extend the front of the building and cover the previous courtyard area. Once complete, there will be a new Civic Centre incorporating a new central library provision and improved registrars and customer provision. The new set up will include a children's library and fiction section on the ground floor, along with a study/exhibition/events area, and the reference and Local Studies Library on the first floor. Sadly, our friends at the Berkshire Family History Society will no longer be able to share the space with us and are investigating new locations to keep their very popular society running.

You may also remember some months back that there was a public consultation about the new library, and one of the results of that was the amount of support there was for the Local Studies section, which was gratifying, as you might imagine! As a result, the new library will have a significantly larger selection of local studies material in comparison with other libraries; someone commented in one of the early meetings that our local studies space was bigger than Birmingham's – one of the country's largest public libraries, which gives you some idea of how much it is valued. There will be further consultation in 2025.

So, on the face of it, very little will appear to have changed in the new library for those wishing to use the Local Studies services, we will be taking the current public-facing book stock with us, along with the local papers on microfilm (plus equipment to use them), the street directories, Reading estate catalogues and phone books. However, the biggest change will be in the stock we currently keep in the staff-only areas. There will not be the room to transfer these to Bridge Street, however plans are already underway to relocate much of the stock to council owned secure and controlled storage on Bennett Road. This will not be publicly accessible, but a bit like the way the British Library operates with some of its off-site stock, you will be able to request to see items but will need to order ahead. The finer details on how this will work are not yet in place, but there is lots of hard work going on behind the scenes to make sure most of the stock will find a safe home there.

At present, we hold books and other items on locations and topics across the county, but in future will be concentrating on Reading and its suburbs, which will make best use of our budget and space.

There will inevitably be some changes, and a small amount of stock will be shed. At the moment, this is just stock for which we hold multiple copies - useful though the 1976 Kelly's Directory for Reading is, having ten copies in storage is not the best use of space!

The biggest challenge are the items we keep in the strongroom. These items are of special significance/rarity/conservation needs and are kept in a temperature-controlled environment, with minimal handling. As yet, the future location of all this stock is undecided, but we are working with our friends and colleagues in various other institutions, such as the Royal Berkshire Archives to find a suitable solution to storing these items so that they remain accessible to researchers in the future, even if that isn't within the library walls.

I said at the beginning of this article that the plan is to re-open in Spring 2026 - this will depend of course on how the building work goes, and as anyone who has ever watched a DIY/renovation TV programme, or built their own

extension knows, these things sometimes don't go to plan. So, do bear with us, and if you see us running round with tape-measures and muttering calculations about meterage under our breath, do be kind - moving house (or a library) is one of the most stressful things you can do!

An update from the County Archivist

A Greenham Common project

Recent visitors may have noticed that we are now proud owners of a device that allows you to tap a card to donate. Any funds we receive go into our purchase fund, which we use to save archives up for sale.

We are also accepting donations for a Greenham Common project. Over the last decade, we have been given some hugely important collections for the Women's Peace Camp that surrounded the air base and was an international focus for protest. We have also received collections from campaign groups working to restore the Common after the air base was closed. There is a large amount of material, and it will be a substantial piece of work to make sense of it. But well worth it, as this is a globally-known part of Berkshire's 20th century history. We look forward to discovering more about it. You can see more on our funding page on The Good Exchange at [Curating the Archives of Protest at Greenham Common](#).

Building work update

Recent visitors might also have noticed contractors have begun to work on our extension. Building work will continue until the end of December 2026. At times it will be noisy and, throughout construction, there will be limited parking onsite. We have parking restrictions in place and visitors need to display a permit. But we hope you think the disruption is worth it for the end result, which is safe storage for many more of Berkshire's archives.

Exhibitions

Our summer exhibition, 'Our River Thames', has been very popular. It was an updated version of the virtual feature we put on during the pandemic, [Where Smooth Waters Glide – 250 years of caring for the River Thames](#).

In September, it will be replaced by a smaller exhibition focussing on Jacksons, the Reading department store. That month sees the 150th anniversary of the company's founding, as Edward Jackson and Sons Ltd. We hold various collections for Jacksons, some of which will be on display together with items cared for by Thomas Macey, Jacksons' historian.

Some light reading

Our annual report for 2024/25 is now online - [2024-2025.docx](#).

West Berkshire Heritage Forum succession planning

Anthony Pick is the current chair of the West Berkshire Heritage Forum and he has decided to step down after many years of service. The Forum is inviting applications for his replacement.

The role is subject to annual re-election, but it is hoped that any new candidate would serve for five years at least. The formal elements of the role involve chairing the Heritage Forum Committee, chairing the AGM, and (subject to a formal vote) chairing the Local Listing Selection Panel.

If you are interested please contact either Anthony or the Forum secretary Sue Ellis via the [Contact Form](#) or on 0118 9712428.

The Great Fire of Windsor

David Lewis

In the history of English urban fires, the Great Fire of London (1666), responsible for the destruction of over 13,000 properties, has come to dominate public memory, to the exclusion of all others. In fact, such fires, although on a smaller scale, were a commonplace occurrence in many English towns. Between 1600-99 there were over 112 urban fires that destroyed more than ten dwellings, and in the same period, 26 towns had more than two such fires. Blandford in Dorset had five major town fires between 1579-1775, and Honiton in Devon six between 1679 and 1797.

The cause of this destruction is perhaps obvious, the use of flammable construction material - essentially timber, the close packing of dwellings and the use of open fires for heating and cooking. And the result is still with us today. It is notable that the architectural style at the core of many English towns is Georgian, reflecting the switch in construction materials from timber to less flammable brick.

Fire was an ever-present danger when timber-framed structures predominated, and no less so in Windsor, where in 1681 a major fire wiped out a substantial part of its High Street, a contiguous row of properties valued at over £5,000. Here, the losses included the town's largest inn, with its substantial gatehouse, The George, memorialised in the street name, George Street and now the entrance to the town's central station. Also lost was its smaller neighbour, The Garter Inn, famous from Shakespeare's play 'The Merry Wives of Windsor'. This was Windsor's only major town fire in the early modern period, and it is probably fair to say that Berkshire in general was less afflicted in this way than most other counties. There were also town fires, in Abingdon (1659), Newbury (1697 and 1698) and Hungerford (1660 and 1668),

but very few in comparison with those noted in London, Middlesex and Southwark in Surrey (in areas we would now consider to be within the capital), where there were 11 major fires, excluding the Great Fire, in the 17th century.

Information about the Windsor fire, although inflicting a major economic shock on the town, is strangely scarce. It is not referenced in any of the town's histories and most would not know that it happened. Tighe and Davis noted in their antiquarian history of 1858, 'The Annals of Windsor', that information about this fire is almost non-existent. It is only obliquely referenced in the town accounts of 1682, with the note "to John Parker for 3 kildekins of beer (432 pints) the night the fire was, and omitted in the last years accounts £1 1s." Judging by the amount of beer consumed this fire required quite a few (thirsty) fire fighters, and moreover, it seems to have had an adverse effect on their memory! Tighe and Davis, however, missed reference to an important consequence of the fire, included in the earlier 1681 accounts, namely that the town had purchased a fire engine, a new-fangled invention of the time. This was installed at The Bell, a town centre inn, on the site now occupied by the Castle Hotel. The 'engine' consisted of a large timber tub or barrel, a water reservoir with a hand pump, the tub being replenished with buckets of water, as the fire was quelled.



A seventeenth century fire engine, of the type purchased for Windsor in 1681

Initially, the Windsor engine was installed on a 'plank', confirming that it was of the type carried by hand, but shortly afterward a further entry in the accounts notes the purchase of axles and wheels, at a cost of £1 8s. The engine had been (grudgingly) up-graded to make it more readily mobile, probably much as in the illustration above, and presumably after some heated debate within the town corporation, because finances were tight. Public luxuries of this type could scarcely be afforded. Town receipts in 1658 were just £206, compared with pre-Civil War receipts of £275 in 1636, although an improvement on the receipts of 1640, which had dipped to just over £123. It must have been apparent to the town's fathers that trying to put out a substantial fire with their

existing leather fire buckets, the purchase of which is noted in an earlier set of town accounts, was simply ineffective.

Although a formal detailed record of the 1681 fire and its damage might appear a strange omission from the town's books, this is not uncommon. For most towns, information about their fires is only found in subsidiary records such as church wardens' accounts, journals or even perhaps, private letters. A full account of causes, losses and replacement costs are, in most cases, only known from instances where an Act of Parliament was required to initiate rebuilding.

The silver lining to the Windsor fire episode was the prompt it gave to an initiative to regenerate the town centre, in 1681 still much the same arrangement as it was in the 14th century. Having lost much of its High Street, the Corporation decided on an extensive redevelopment plan, to mirror the Crown's refurbishment of the castle under Hugh May, following the Restoration of King Charles II. The town was to be modernised in line with the fashionable interior redesign of the castle, although one problem caveated this plan, the town's lack of money.

Not to be deterred, the central area of the town, next to its market place was cleared of existing structures, this included the pulling down of Windsor's 14th century canopied town cross, known as Saddler's Cross, to make way for a proposed huge water fountain and a public water supply. Infrastructure that was to be fed from the River Thames, and facing it, across a type of piazza, a new town hall, designed in the Italian Renaissance Palladian style.

Predictably, the money did run out – or in fact, wasn't there in the first place - and although the pipes for the water fountain came as far as the Dean's cloister in the college of St. George, and the new town hall was mostly built - although only following repeated and desperate requests for public subscription - the rest of the redevelopment ambition was abandoned.

Out of this, only the town hall completed in 1691 survives to the present day, although strangely and inaccurately renamed in the early 20th century as The Guildhall. Windsor's medieval merchant guild ceased to exist after the town's incorporation in 1461, so the idea that this building had anything to do with the town's medieval past, is a fiction.

A footnote to this story concerns the supposed involvement of Sir Christopher Wren, as the putative architect of Windsor's second, 17th century, town hall - a replacement for its first (genuine) guildhall built in around 1360, but set in a different location, facing the castle gates.

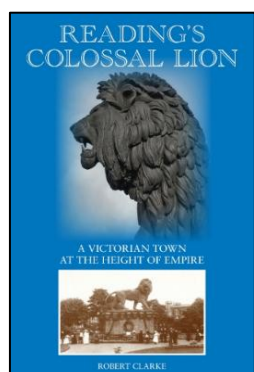
Windsor's principal record book in the seventeenth century – called the Hall

Book – notes on a single line, “that [and then an ink blob] Wren discussed something with the Corporation”, an entry so faded that it is scarcely legible now. This something is so brief that it certainly could not have concerned the construction of a new town hall, but more probably the Corporation’s bold intention to redesign the town centre, bearing in mind that Wren had proposed his own redevelopment plan for London, following the Great Fire. Town guide books have since perpetuated the myth, without evidence, that Wren had a hand in designing Windsor’s guildhall, but as with so much other ‘history’ in these works, the historical sources could helpfully shed some light.

The Windsor fire of 1681 led to the setting out of the town’s central area as it is known today, and deserves to be better known, despite the shortcomings of the town’s 17th century record keeping.

Book Reviews

Our chair, David Cliffe, has been busy reading this summer and has provided us with a review of two recently published local books.



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

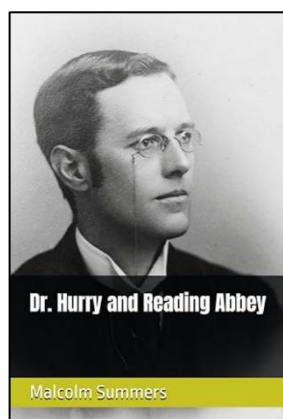
Do not set too much store by the title of this book: it contains much interesting material about life in Reading that hasn’t already been written about. It doesn’t start in 1837 and end in 1901. There is a perceptive introductory chapter about Reading in earlier centuries, and an equally good chapter 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 66th (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 ceremonies 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.



Summers, Malcolm. “Dr. Hurry and Reading Abbey.” Tilehurst, Reading: Downs Way Publishing, 2025. £12. Available from [Amazon](#) or by post from the author (malsummers@aol.com).

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, and 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 the 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.

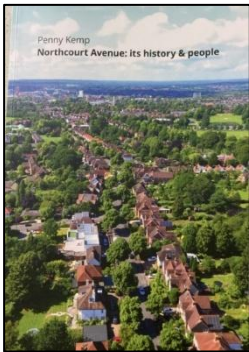
For open-air pursuits he was active in the Reading Natural History Society, and when he moved to a house on Southcote Road, he had a large garden in which he grew unusual and tropical plants, and plants which were a source of food and medicine. Members of the public were regularly invited to come and 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?

New local books

In addition to David's excellent reviews of new local books we also have news of a few new local publications.



Northcourt Avenue: its History and People by Penny Kemp (2nd edition)

The first edition of this local history was published by the local residents' association, NARA, in 1996. It sold out quickly and as further reminiscences were prompted and changes made with the building of several new houses and the development of Stansfield Close there is now a second edition.

The growth of this suburban street fringed by its characteristic lime trees parallels the history of 20th and 21st century Reading. It chronicles the impact of the growing use of the motor car, the move from homes with a staff of servants for the prosperous businessmen and retailers of the town, the semi-detached chalet bungalows and houses of the 1920s and the infilling and replacement of houses with irreparable subsidence with 21st century homes.

The book looks at the architects and builders responsible for the Arts and Crafts style houses and the characteristic styles of the pre-first world and inter war period when most of the houses were built. Reference is made to the outstanding academics, artists, inventors and sportsmen who at one time or another lived in the road.

Illustrations by local artists, some of national renown such as Robert Gillmor, who live or have lived in the avenue have been retained. Photographs taken in the avenue include a young Peter May holding a cricket bat and Margaret Thatcher attending a christening.

It is in A4 format, runs to 84 pages and has been designed by a final year student at the Typography Department of the University of Reading. A grant from the University Vice-Chancellor assisted with printing costs.

If you are interested in obtaining a copy, price £15, contact Penny Kemp on pjkick13@gmail.com

How the Good News came to Reading by John Dearing

This book 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 300 pages, the book comes with a cover price of £13.50 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 or ring 0118 9580377.

BALH Local History Awards 2025



At their recent AGM, the British Association for Local History (BALH) honoured Dr Hugh Pihlens with their annual award for 'Outstanding Individual Contribution'. An award intended to publicly honour local historians who have made an 'outstanding and significant voluntary contribution' to local history.

Dr Pihlens was recognised for his outstanding labours for our local history in Hungerford and surrounding area over the last 46 years. In 1979 Hugh founded the Hungerford Historical Association (HHA), chairing it on a number of occasions, and has worked tirelessly in creating this thriving local resource, currently with around 200 members.

In 2009, Hugh started to develop an online resource of local historical information that has grown in to a 1700 page '[Virtual Museum](#)' accessed over 30,000 times a year by people all over the world. Hugh dedicates countless hours to maintaining and adding to the Virtual Museum as archivist, whilst also managing the HHA website.

Can you help Newbury Building Society celebrate 170 years?

This November, Newbury Building Society is proudly starting to celebrate its 170th anniversary, having served the local community since 1856. As part of their celebrations, they are hoping to uncover more about their history. If you have any historical information, documents, photographs, or stories relating to the Society, they would love to hear from you!

Please get in touch if you can help to bring the Society's past to life: marketing@newbury.co.uk

Society Contributions

Berkshire Family History Society

We remain on track to move location by the end of 2025, but as I write this update we have not yet signed the lease on our hoped-for new premises. Fingers crossed the legalities will be completed soon. In the meantime, our research zone remains open for visitors as usual, but we would recommend checking our website for updates before planning any visit, just in case.

The Society's 50th birthday conference 'The Victorians' was held at Wokefield Place on 7th June. It was a hugely enjoyable day with excellent speakers led by Professor Kate Williams, and we were very well looked after by the venue. A lunchtime fair was supported by a number of local heritage organisations to whom we owe a massive thanks.

Our events programme is as busy as ever with a great variety of events, subjects and locations. We have commemorated the 80th anniversaries of both VE and VJ Day with events, both of which were well attended. We have also helped a number of individuals with their Second World War related research, some with some very exciting findings, including one story which featured on Radio Berkshire in June. Quarter Four's programme includes the usual visits and walks, but our other events are all on Zoom, due to our anticipated relocation during this period.

Catherine Sampson, Chairman

Berkshire Industrial Archaeology Group

Summer is a quiet time for us, but there was a very enjoyable visit to Didcot Railway Centre in June with one of our members taking the lead on showing us around the trains and displays, and allowing us privileged access in to the archives. We also managed another instalment in the walks along the Kennet & Avon canal; this time the part from Bedwyn to Hungerford where we learned about the transport history of this particular stretch.

Jo Alexander-Jones, Secretary

Hedgerley Historical Society

Long-standing mudlarker, Jason Sandy, gave an excellent presentation to our Society in late 2024. Almost seventy members and visitors were enthralled by Jason's talk and the artefacts he brought along.

So well received was his talk that a follow-up event was arranged. So it was

that 18 Society members together with contingents from Germany and the USA gathered beneath the northern abutment to the (no longer wobbly) Millennium Bridge in the shadow of St. Paul's Cathedral on a sunny Saturday morning during the first week in May. The mutual objective of the enthusiastic group was to take a part in the activity known as 'Mudlarking' i.e. scavenging the tidal foreshore for items of historical interest.



Mudlarking on the River Thames is regulated by the Port of London Authority and only those who possess a valid permit are allowed to scrape, dig or metal detect on the shore and then only in certain places. Accordingly, we were accompanied by Jason Sandy and a fellow licensed mudlarker; Christine. Following our briefing, we descended the steps to the shore at low tide and were set loose to search on the surface for an hour. Artefacts varying from 16th century Tudor pottery fragments to a 21st century 'Boris bike' were found, although objects dating from Roman times can also be discovered. Among the most numerous items to be seen were fragments of pottery, animal bones, pieces of broken clay roof tiles (many thought to be from the Great Fire in 1666) and bits of broken clay pipes.

The Thames Clippers were a useful aid to the newly initiated treasure hunters, their wash conveying new items to the gravelly shore as they traversed the tideway. An opportunity to view all of the findings was provided before we departed, leaving the items on the shore to be taken by the incoming tide, after a very enjoyable and interesting event.

If any other groups would like to arrange a Mudlark Walk then group bookings can be organised through the [Thames Explorer Trust's website](#) or by phoning 020 8742-0057.

John Lovelock, Secretary

The History of Reading Society

"Jane's First Christmas" was the title of the talk for our April meeting, presented by Joy Pibworth, from the Jane Austen Society (and the History of Reading Society). We didn't know quite what to expect, but it soon became apparent that this was to be a delve into contemporary documents which showed how people lived, worked, celebrated and died around Christmas 1775. Jane had been born on 16 December 1775, at Steventon in north Hampshire. Extracts from contemporary documents were exhibited, many of them from the 'Reading Mercury' which claimed to cover events in Hampshire,

and from the 'Hampshire Chronicle,' published in Winchester.

Newspapers were expensive at the time, and the Austen family of Steventon Rectory received their papers second-hand, sent on by post. Jane was the second daughter: there were already six sons. Jane's birth was not recorded in either of the local papers.

The weather was unusually harsh, with temperatures of minus 18 degrees Fahrenheit recorded at nearby Selborne, snow drifts up to 13 feet, and snow lying on the ground until March. Jane was baptised privately at home, presumably by her father, and later in the church. Road transport almost came to a standstill, and at one of the Reading markets, only one waggon was able to get through. The food supply broke down, and St. Laurence's Church in Reading was giving food to the poor.

Much appeared in the local papers about the American Revolutionary War. The winter weather was bad right across the Atlantic. The sea crossing which usually took four weeks now took 10 weeks, people were starving, and 14 vessels were lost at sea. Subscriptions in support of the families at home whose menfolk were serving in the army in North America were collected at the inns, to which many of the wealthier Reading citizens contributed.

At home, we heard the sad story of Sarah Reynolds of Reading, who was hanged at Tyburn for the murder of her illegitimate child. The father had refused to marry or support her, and she was at her wits' end. After the execution, her body was handed over to the surgeon for dissection.

For better-off citizens there were winter amusements: shooting matches and frost fairs on the frozen Thames, though a cricket match on skates ended in tragedy when the ice broke and people were drowned.

Since this was Christmas, the local paper revealed details of how it was celebrated – by people with a modicum of wealth. Apparently small gifts were given on St. Nicholas' Day (6 December). The papers advertised items which might make suitable gifts. Twelfth Night parties were no longer being held, because they had become too boisterous. They had involved the baking of 'Twelfth Cakes' and the drinking of orange wine, which had to mature for a year. The dried fruit for the cake, and the oranges for the wine, would have been affordable only for the better-off. Recipes appeared in a book owned by the Austen family.

The talk was greatly enjoyed. It contained many illustrations of how life was lived 250 years ago, how different it was, and in some ways how similar to the present day.

In May, the last talk before the summer break came from David Sanchez

Nicolas, from Thames Valley Archaeological Services. His title was 'Tiles for the Abbey' – the archaeological investigation of a site in Silver Street, just south of Reading town centre, which took place in 2019. Two adjacent plots were investigated, prior to redevelopment, but to date, only one of them had been developed.

The remains of two kilns had been investigated. Evidence of them had survived because when they were in use, most of the structures were under ground. There may, of course, have been additional kilns and ancillary structures which have left remains under neighbouring buildings. The kilns came as a surprise to the archaeologists, who had been expecting to find evidence of the ramparts built round the town in the Civil War, which are shown on old maps. No such traces were found.

Finds from the area and scientific testing of the brickwork showed that the kilns had been built around 1260, and had last been fired around 1320. Discarded tiles from the site were compared with medieval tiles from other places, and their execution and design were the same as tiles which had been used to pave the cloisters at Reading Abbey. One similar tile had been found in London, but the tiles did not correspond with those in Greyfriars Church, Reading. It had not so far been possible to prove that the tilery had belonged to the Abbey.

Of similar date to the kilns were the well, which would have been necessary to make the tiles, and a blacksmith's forge. There were no remains suggesting that people had lived on the site.

The archaeologists had been surprised not to find the ramparts, and surprised to find the remains of the tilery. They were also surprised to find that after the abandonment of the tilery, the site had been levelled and houses built on it. The built-up area of Reading was not thought to have extended so far south until later. Another surprise for the archaeologists was that the houses were those of fairly affluent people, evidenced by the remains of food waste, pins used to fasten clothing, and an iron dagger. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the Silver Street area had been notorious for overpopulation, slum housing, drunkenness, lawlessness, and poverty.

The talk, which might have been dry and dull, was anything but, and gave some interesting insights into what had happened in this part of the town in the Middle Ages and after.

David Cliffe, Chairman

Hungerford Historical Association

Sarah Somerville came to talk about her experiences as a guide and archivist at various stately homes in April. Sarah's enthusiasm for her work is evidenced by the wide variety of her achievements, from creating a comprehensive guide book and audio guide to Shaw House, moonlighting as a guide at Blenheim Palace in her spare time and coping with visitors from all over the world at the height of the Downton Abbey craze.

In May, local history enthusiast John Dymond came to explain to us why the village of Snap, situated west of Aldbourne, Wiltshire, became abandoned by 1913. Snap is a late 19th century spelling; it has been variously spelled Snape, Snapp or Snappe; all meaning 'spring or boggy place' – it is an apt name. It was first mentioned in 1268 and John took us through to 1913 using primary sources including original maps and archival documents which made for an absorbing evening.

Dr Caroline Ness, Chairman

The Marcham Society

In September we are issuing our latest publication 'Coral Rag 13', named after the Corallian Limestone under our village. Then on 18 and 19 October we will host an exhibition entitled 'Marcham Uncovered' at the Marcham Centre as part of the celebration of our 30 years. The exhibition will look at Marcham's archaeology, geology and riverscape, and have a focus on local history, village life, natural history and our expected future growth. There will be accompanying activities such as astronomy sessions and quizzes.

A recent talk to the Society gives a flavour of Marcham during the Civil War which is shared here. This 17th century conflict is often called the 'English' Civil War but in reality there were also opposing Royalist and Parliamentary forces further afield in Wales, Ireland and Scotland. The armies ranged far and wide; there were battles in Cornwall and in Yorkshire as well as on the Welsh and Scottish borders. However, this talk concentrated on the counties of Berkshire and Oxfordshire and particularly on the village of Marcham where in 1644 fighting was particularly intense for a short period of the war.

There were many reasons for the Civil War, including economics, politics and religion, but principally it centred round one character and his royal power, Charles the First. There was a growing challenge to his 'divine right to rule' especially when Charles demanded Parliament grant him money for foreign wars through extra taxation.

When Parliament refused his wishes, conflict ensued and by 1642 the

Kingdom was truly divided between those loyal to the King (mostly the old aristocracy and landowners), and those supporting Parliament (this included the wealthy merchants and guilds of London). But the divide was never as simple, with families split and people often changing sides.

When the King abandoned London he first 'raised his standard' in Nottingham, summoning military aid for his cause and then he made his capital in Oxford. In London, Parliament was able to raise its own regiments of City Bands - but the armies on either side never amounted to more than fifteen thousand men.

In the first phase of the Civil War from 1642 to the capture and imprisonment of the King, there were indecisive battles and significant victories all over the country and many of these took place in Oxfordshire and old Berkshire, which were two of the most wealthy and prosperous counties.

With the King in Oxford, north of the Thames, the river formed a natural line of defence and his engineers were soon fortifying the city against attack. In the city the King resided in Christ Church and Queen Henrietta Maria in Merton and other houses had to be found for his Court, the troops, the armoury and the royal mint - the influx of so many people had the support of the university and colleges but it also had a detrimental effect on the lives of the ordinary citizens.

The curve of the Thames in North Berkshire (now sometimes called 'Occupied Berkshire') is a natural arena for intensive fighting and for a short while Marcham was in the centre of this theatre of war. At this time it was a small village within the Royalist catchment, with Faringdon to the west and Abingdon to the east - both towns loyal to the King, as were many of the titled owners of local estates and manor houses. This included the Piggott family who had been in Marcham since 1597 - they also had a large property in Hatford next to the Church where the family are now buried. The Piggotts were an old family with a coat of arms, educated at Oxford and were barristers in the Middle Temple in London.

From the Protestation Returns in 1641/2 we know that Alban Piggott and his son Francis were in Marcham. The returns for the village give 113 names of adult males and we can estimate that the population of Marcham might have been about 300-400 inhabitants at the time. The village's fortunes were soon to change as in 1642 the Parliamentary forces under the Earl of Essex and Sir William Waller advanced from London to challenge the King's forces in middle England.

There were three significant moments in May, August and November 1642 where Marcham was mentioned in surviving correspondence and reported in the propaganda of the pamphleteers.

The first is related in a diary by Richard Coe, an ordinary soldier of the Tower Hamlets brigade who describes the advance of more than 1,000 soldiers under Sir William Waller. At the same time a much larger force under the Earl of Essex had taken Reading and was about to take Abingdon. He writes that there were so many of Essex's soldiers already occupying Abingdon, that on Sunday and Monday Sir William, his cavalry and foot soldiers had to bivouac at Marcham. One has to imagine the effect of so many soldiers suddenly camping in a small community.

Once captured it was important that Abingdon was held by the Parliamentary forces as it was an important crossing point of the Thames. Once Essex and Waller had moved on in pursuit of the King who had secretly escaped from Oxford, Major General Richard Browne was given command of Abingdon's defences and, as Faringdon was still in Royalist hands, Marcham was to become an important outpost as well as a target for foraging parties from Oxford. In his report to Parliament, he reports that he quartered 600 men there under the command of Colonel Ayloffe and Lieutenant Colonel Sadler – both cavalry officers. Again, the residents of Marcham were outnumbered and would be required to feed and house the soldiers. Among the officers was a Captain Titus, soon to become famous – on both sides of the conflict.

The most significant event took place on 18 November and we have evidence from both sides – letters from Major General Browne tell of the skirmish that took place in Marcham with the loss of men and horses but the most detailed account was published as propaganda by Mercurius Aulicus, a Royalist newsletter printed in Oxford. It tells of an attack by forces under the famous Sir Thomas Lunsford who decided to raid the rebels in Marcham with his horsemen under Colonel Knightley and Captain Trallop. The details of the ensuing battle around the Piggott's House are clear – including the password given and the captives taken. One can imagine the action and it is also possible through surviving records to follow the subsequent careers of the officers on both sides and how they survived through to the end of the Civil War. There is little record of local inhabitants and how they survived in these difficult times.

Evidence of the conflict in Marcham is scarce, though musket balls and pistol shot have been found in the rectory garden and elsewhere. A silver half-crown dated to 1644 was found in the village and date stones on houses give us an idea of buildings that might have been there – especially the corner of the tithe barn which was clearly restored in 1646 – perhaps damaged in this royalist raid?

In the bigger picture, Oxfordshire and Berkshire which had been two of the wealthier and more populous counties of England, clearly suffered as a result

of intensive conflict around Oxford. Because of the lack of administration for this period, the records of births and deaths for Marcham are missing but it is estimated that the local population dropped significantly through food shortage, violence and, most importantly, disease. We do know that Abingdon and Oxford were both struck by plague due to overcrowding and lack of sanitation.

After a further skirmish at Besselsleigh Manor in the December, the conflict around Marcham and Abingdon continued well into 1645 until the Parliamentary victory of Naseby, the surrender of Oxford in May 1646 and then the final capture of the King.

Simon Blackmore, Membership Secretary

Project Purley

About eighty Project Purley members, members of the community and guests attended Project Purley's VE 80 event in The Barn on 5 May. The afternoon comprised of an exhibition on Purley during the war, a talk in two halves by local historian, Mike Cooper, on why Germany lost the war in 1945, tea and cake and during refreshments, live music from the period played on the keyboard. We were delighted to be joined by some very special guests including our MP Olivia Bailey. She clearly enjoyed the occasion as the very next day she raised a point in the Houses of Commons about the fantastic work of local community groups across the county who were organising VE 80 events, including Project Purley, whose event she had attended the previous day. We even got recorded in the Hansard transcript for the day. A first for the Society and something very different for the archive.

Poignantly, we were also joined by some of the descendants and relatives of those from Purley who had served or died, whose stories were told on boards around the room. A nephew and great niece of Edward Reed came. He was taken as a prisoner of war when Singapore fell to the Japanese and died on the notorious Thai-Burma railway. The daughters of Ernest Beswick of Beech Road also joined us, travelling up from Kent and Hampshire for the occasion. Ernest moved to Purley to work for the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries in Reading and died in the People's Pantry bombings on 10 February 1943. Eight members of the Stevens family came, three generations, the youngest just eleven. Patrick Stevens was in the RAF and ended up as a prisoner of war of the Germans at Stalag Luft III, the camp from where the 'great escape' happened. He was part of the team who organised the tunnelling but wasn't one who attempted to escape on the night in question. Other boards told of the home front in Purley, of rationing, the various war work, including the making of parts for spitfires at Purley Garage, the growth of the River Estate,

evacuees, and the continual fund raising which went on. Alongside the display boards, we also had tables of memorabilia which proved to be of great interest and provoked memories with some present.

In June, the Society once again hosted the Rain or Shine Theatre Company, this time their production was 'The Rivals' whose comic characters include the formidable Mrs Malaprop. It was another lovely evening, and the leaving collection is being donated to The Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

Our July visit took us to Douai Abbey where we were given an informative tour by Brother Aiden, before finishing with refreshments in the guest refectory.

Our talks resume in September with an evening dedicated to the 80th anniversary of VJ Day. We will begin with a fish and chips supper before Dr Richard Marks gives a talk on the Burma-Siam Railway in the Second World War. We will once again be displaying exhibition boards on Purley during the Second World War and some poignant research by members and guests on their own family experiences in the Far East during the war and afterwards.

Catherine Sampson

Twyford & Ruscombe Local History Society

We started the year with a talk on the Twyford's new library. We were given something of the background of Edward Polehampton and his enduring legacy that gave the village the old Polehampton Boys School, which is the site of our new library now based within the old Polehampton Boys School. Its new location is a distinct improvement from its previous temporary location. Unfortunately, there wasn't space to include our archive store so housing this is a major headache for the committee.

Following the talk last autumn on the Caversham Court Gardens which are listed in the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens and of Special historic interest, a follow-up visit was arranged. It was thoroughly enjoyed by those who were able to attend. The visit included a tour of the charming situation and its ancient trees, and a look at two additional features – the adjacent St. Peter's Church and the nearby St. Annes well, famed in the Middle Ages for its miraculous properties.

Another successful visit was arranged to Marble Hill House and Garden, Twickenham, on 8 May. We had a group of thirty and the weather was perfect for having tours of the house and gardens, with a break for lunch between the tours. As it was VE Day Audrey Curtis created a special quiz for us to do on the coach on the way home. James, our chairman, called out the questions and it was a lively time. It was a very good day out and enjoyed by all.

The second talk of a different kind was on the early emergence of medical practises when barbers not only cut hair and shaved beards, but also performed surgeries, amputations and bloodletting. This talk included plenty of gory detail and was a history lesson on medical practice through the ages, including many references to the NHS.

We also enjoyed a talk by a Wargrave inhabitant on the Hidden History of Wargrave Hall. It followed the history of the property starting with the construction in 1770, its first owner John Matthews and of his colourful descendants, until it was eventually acquired by the wealthy Fuller-Maitland family before its sale to Edward Goulding in 1922. His political connections led to Wargrave Hall becoming the location of important discussions between leading politicians of the day, including Winston Churchill. Topics discussed included the means of government during WW1, and in 1922, the establishment of the Republic of Ireland. A photograph of the visitor's book was shown featuring signatures of eminent political visitors. Before the meeting there was an auction of an attractive watercolour of the building.

Bearing in mind that 2025 is the 80th anniversary of the end of the WW2, we enjoyed an inspiring and poignant talk on use of the railways in Belgium and northern France during this war; where the narrow-gauge railways got men and material to the front line through the infamous mud, and the wounded back to England. A large collection of photographs and other images was used. The slides touched on the treatment and recovery of the wounded, and the unsanitary nature of the journey and the state of medicine at the time. In the aftermath of the war, the focus was on the repatriation of the troops and the dispersion of surplus equipment, with trains reverting to peacetime railways, and an ambulance becoming a vehicle for the advertising of eggs. Social history also had a place in the aftermath; women had found a place in the workforce. Medical practise had evolved often through having to deal with such a vast number of deaths. We also learned of a new focus on the remembrance of the dead and the role of Reading as a focus of distribution.

Last year, we had a talk on the Stratfield Saye estate: this year we followed this up with a talk on the life of the first Duke of Wellington. He served his sovereign in the army fighting in India and in the Peninsular War in Portugal and Spain, where he developed his tactical skills, and then by defeating Napoleon at Waterloo. He eventually purchased Stratfield Saye with a bounty awarded to him by the government and extensively modified it with innovative mod cons. His wife, Kitty Pakenham died at Strathfield Saye of cholera, and her grave can be visited at the church on the estate. Unfortunately, although the Duke held a number of political positions he was not so successful in these, but he was awarded a state funeral attended by Queen Victoria. The

Queen's view was that "he was the GREATEST man this country ever produced, and the most devoted and loyal subject, and the staunchest supporter the Crown ever had".

ON another occasion we enjoyed a lovely summer lunch at Hennerton Golf Club in Wargrave, which has beautiful views across Oxfordshire including towards the former home of Beatle George Harrison.

Our quarterly journal continues its success, and a major technical achievement has been to complete the digitation of the text of all volumes so that it is now searchable.

We are looking forward to the remainder of the year with talks on the Littlecote Roman Villas, the Changing Face of Reading, the History of Folk Music and our Christmas party – A Festive History.

Pamela Graddon, Hon. Secretary

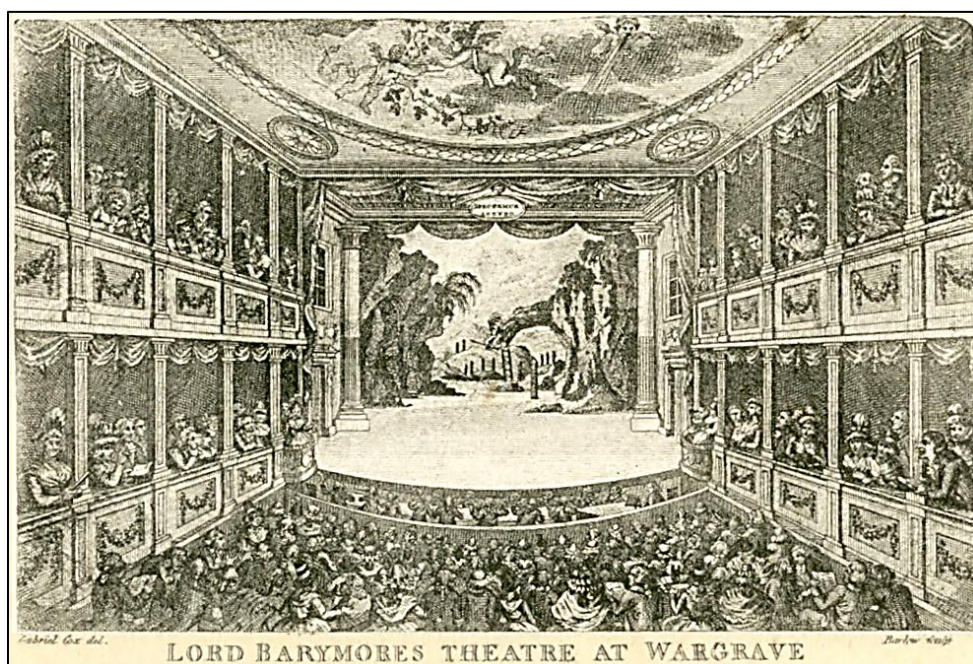
Wargrave Local History Society

Reading Library's local history studies specialist, Katie Amos, made a return visit to Wargrave Local History Society for the May meeting, with a selection of pictures from the library's collection of over 20,000 photographs from across Berkshire. She began by showing how those interested can search the collection, by using the [Reading Library website](#), then click the 'Full catalogue' button, select 'Local illustrations' from the drop-down list, type the subject in the 'Search' space, and a list of images will be shown below – larger versions can be seen by using the 'View full image' button.

Katie then delighted the audience with a selection of pictures from both the 'old' and 'new' Berkshire. Many showed aspects of the Reading area no longer to be seen, such as riverside wharves or the mass departure of workers from the Huntley & Palmers biscuit factory, or the children's reading room (1910) and the bindery - with a table raised on wooden blocks to a convenient working height! (1956) at Battle library. Views also show many businesses that no longer exist - from Philips Ironmongery shop on the north side of Broad Street in the 1870s to C&A Modes in Friar Street in 1978.

One of the specific topics looked back at the VE Day celebrations of 80 years earlier – the formal declaration, the street parties, and even an advert headed 'Victory has come, the Huns are beaten' - telling people they could buy Brooke Bond Dividend tea for their parties! The other particular theme of Katie's presentation was images related to Wargrave, from an engraving of Barrymore's theatre which opened in 1791 but only lasted for a few years, to

pictures of the village in the 20th century – many taken from old picture postcards.



Katie showed many other illustrations, covering events such as Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee celebrations in Wallingford in 1897 or Mayor McIlroy driving the last Reading tramcar on 20 May 1939, or street scenes, there being just one car in Sonning High Street in 1910!

In June, Geoff Wood gave a presentation about Marlow between the Civil War and the Napoleonic Wars. When the Civil War ended in 1651, Marlow's population of under 3000 found that life had been transformed. King Charles I had been executed, there was a different form of government, with draconian laws controlling personal behaviour, whilst religious practice now followed the Presbyterian model. During the war the major skirmishes locally were around High Wycombe and Henley, but the forces of both sides needed provisions, so looting and minor assaults occurred throughout the area. The major local families had mostly 'kept their heads down', so their mansions were largely undamaged, and landowners retained their manorial powers with several generations, notably of the Borlase family, serving as MPs for Great Marlow. With the changes in religious ideas, a non-conformist chapel opened in 1640, and by the 1690s so many attended that sometimes the preacher addressed them outside in Quoiting Square.

Marlow's existence was based on business. The millers were all-powerful, controlling the locks and weirs, and therefore the passage of boats. The main goods taken up to London were timber, corn flour and flax oil, and from the 1700s items made locally, such as bone lace – for which Marlow became renowned. Lace making had begun in the late 17th century as a cottage

industry, but home workers could not compete with machinery introduced in the 1800s. Another local industry was thimble making, using the river's water power at Marlow mill to make 2 million thimbles annually during the mid-18th century. Geoff added that if anyone found a body in the river they were rewarded for its recovery – 2d if taken to the Buckinghamshire side, but 4d on the Berkshire side! Apart from the river, the main way to transport goods was by pack horse, mules or donkeys. The 1706 Turnpike Act set up specialist Trusts to maintain the roads, leading to more people travelling, and thus the need for inns, taverns and alehouses to provide them with refreshment – and in turn the formation of the Thomas Wethered brewery in 1758. Geoff also showed how the Georgians developed the town's housing, the local poor were provided for, and the founding of a school by William Borlase in 1624.

On a warm, sunny and dry, but not too hot, day in July members visited the Rural Life Museum at Tilford in Surrey. Henry and Madge Jackson had the idea to create a museum when they realised that once familiar objects that were part of everyday country life were going out of use and being thrown away. They started collecting examples from across the area, and in 1973 opened what was then called the Old Kiln Museum. Subsequently, a charitable trust was set up to provide for the museum's future, and Henry bequeathed the property and his collection to the trust when he died in 2004.

As might be expected, there are many farming implements and tools associated with the crafts and trades to be found in a rural community, but the collection also includes buildings and other large items that might be found in a rural landscape. The buildings are used to display some of the smaller items that might have been found in them in times past, as well as being exhibits themselves. The first of the buildings to be re-sited at the museum was a 'pre-fab'. These were pre-fabricated buildings (hence the name) erected just after World War 2 to cope with a housing crisis. Relating to the same era is a model of the Tweedsmuir Camp hut occupied by a Polish family living on a military site near Hindhead. Other forms of shelter for people include a gypsy caravan, a shepherd's hut, a living van used as temporary accommodation at a work site and an early caravan for towing behind a car built in 1922 of plywood on a wooden frame.

Buildings that were a feature of a rural life, such as a non-conformist chapel from the village of Eashing, a village hall from Lindford, and a cricket pavilion originally used in Godalming, have all been rebuilt within the museum grounds. From the nearby village of Bourne there is a schoolroom constructed of corrugated iron on a timber frame from 1902. Inside this building are not only the high teacher's desk and traditional pupil's desks with ink-wells, but

also a long laboratory bench, complete with a Bunsen burner and sinks for science classes.



Working life in the countryside of course included farming. There is a granary building raised on stone supports to keep vermin away from the grain, and several examples of machinery used to convert the grain into flour. Displays include workshops for many country crafts, such as a cobbler's shop, carpenter's shop, a wheelwright, a blacksmith and a typical rural wood yard equipped with period machinery. There are farm implements of all shapes and sizes. Other areas feature horse-drawn waggons and carts, a cycle shop, a narrow-gauge railway line, and the 'Dennis Collection' of heritage vehicles made by Dennis Bros of Guildford. There is much more to see than can be mentioned here! The [Rural Life Museum](#), which is a charitable trust, is open daily until the end of September, and then at weekends.

In August, a smaller group was able to make an informal visit to Hall Place, at Burchetts Green, known to many as the home of the Berkshire College of Agriculture (BCA). Our guides were Simon Polley and Janet Robertson, who had given a presentation at our November 2024 meeting. We were able to visit the Grade 1 listed mansion, as well as the agricultural areas (some of the livestock sensibly sheltering in the shade!) and the BCA zoo, which has a wide variety of animals, from otters and short tailed meerkats to a (noisy) laughing kookaburra and a colony of blue poison dart frogs!

For more detailed reports about these meetings, or for more information about the society, visit the [website](#).

Peter Delaney

History Societies

Where Societies have websites, clicking on their name will give access

Aldermaston History Group

Chris Boott: Kennet, Church Rd, Aldermaston RG7 4LR (blha@aldermastonhistory.uk)

Berkshire Archaeology Society

Andrew Hutt (chair@berksarch.co.uk)

Berkshire Archaeological Research Group

Dr Roger Sym: 197 Halls Rd, Reading RG30 4PT – 0118 9427703

(roger@psrltd.demon.co.uk)

Berkshire Family History Society

Centre for Heritage and Family History, Central Library, Abbey Square, Reading RG1 3BQ – 0118 9509553 (secretary@berksfhs.org)

Berkshire Gardens Trust

Fiona Hope: 23 St James Close, Pangbourne RG8 7AP fiona.hope@btinternet.com

Berkshire Historic Churches Trust

John Pritchard (secretary@berkschurchestrust.org.uk)

Berkshire Industrial Archaeology Group

Jo Alexander-Jones (secretary@biag.org.uk)

Berkshire Record Society

Margaret Simons: 80 Reeds Ave, Earley, Reading RG6 5SR

(margaretsimons@hotmail.co.uk)

Blewbury Local History Group

Audrey Long: Spring Cottage, Church Rd, Blewbury, OX11 9PY – 01235 850427

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Burnham Historians

Mary Bentley: 38 Conway Rd, Taplow, Maidenhead SL6 0LD – 01628 665932

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East Garston Local History Society

Karen Pryer: Church Cottage, Front St, East Garston, Hungerford RG17 7HJ

(karen@pryer.com)

East Ilsley Local History Society

Eric Saxton: School House, Church Hill, East Ilsley RG20 7LP

(info@eastilsleyhistory.com)

Eton Wick History Group

Sue Evans: (sueevanswindsor@tiscali.co.uk)

Friends of Windsor and Royal Borough Museum

Len Nash: 27 Bourne Avenue, Windsor SL4 3JP

Goring Gap Local History Society

Janet Hurst: 6 Nun's Acre, Goring on Thames, Reading RG8 9BE – 01491 871022

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Hanney History Group

P J Taylor: Walnut Cottage, Ebbs Lane, E. Hanney OX12 0HL – 07776 842413

Hedgerley Historical Society

John Lovelock: 13 Coppice Way, Hedgerley SL2 3YL – 01753 647187

(jdlovelock@btinternet.com)

History of Reading Society

Vicki Chesterman: 7 Norman Rd, Caversham, Reading RG4 5JN – 07776 340923
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Hungerford Historical Association

David Small: 01672 870467 (david@dagsmall.co.uk)

Hurley History Society

David Burfitt: Nutwood, Mill Lane, Hurley SL6 5ND - 01628 823503
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Longworth and District History Society

Pam Woodward: 22 Cherrytree Close, Southmoor, Abingdon OX13 5BE – 01865 820500 (prwoodward@btinternet.com)

Maidenhead Archaeological and Historical Society

Paul Seddon: 1 Vine Cottage, Stubbings Lane, Maidenhead SL6 6QN
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Marcham Society

Peter Blackmore: 2 Walnut Mews, Mill Rd, Marcham OX13 6NZ – 01865 391275
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Middle Thames Archaeological & Historical Society

David Kneller: 15 Vine Rd, Stoke Poges SL2 4DW - 07950 139309
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Mortimer Local History Group

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Newbury District Field Club

Bob Bosley: 7 Baxendales, Newbury RG14 7SA (bobbosley@outlook.com)

Oxfordshire Family History Society

Charles Whitehead: c/o Oxfordshire History Centre, St Luke's Church, Temple Rd OX4 2HT (secretary@ofhs.uk)

Project Purley

Catherine Sampson: 32 Waterside Drive, Purley on Thames RG8 8AQ – 0118 9422255 (chairman@project-purley.net)

Shinfield and District Local History Society

Catherine Glover: Suvikuja, Basingstoke Rd, Spencers Wood RG7 1TB – 07762 251686 (Catherine_e_m_glover@icloud.com)

Sonning & Sonning Eye History Society

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Stanford in the Vale & District Local History Society

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Swallowfield Local History Society

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Tadley and District History Society

Carol Stevens: 5 Church St, Pamber Heath, Tadley RG26 3DP
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Thatcham Historical Society

Susan Ellis: Open View, New Road Hill, Midgham RG7 5RY
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Theale Local History Society

Graham Reeves: 52 Parkers Corner, Englefield, Reading RG7 5JR
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Twyford & Ruscombe Local History Society

Pamela Graddon (pamela.graddon@gradients.co.uk)

Wargrave Local History Society

Peter Delaney: 6 East View Close, Wargrave RG10 8BJ – 0118 9403121
(secretary@wargravehistory.org.uk)

Windsor Local History Group

Anne Taylor: Canon Cottage, Bishops Farm Close, Oakley Green, Windsor SL4 5UN
(taylorad22@btinternet.com)

Archives, Libraries and Museums

Abingdon Library

The Charter, Abingdon OX14 3LY – 01235 520374

Allen County Public Library

Genealogy, PO Box 2270, Fort Wayne, Indiana, USA – 001 468 012270

Ascot Local Studies Library

High St, Ascot SL5 7JF – 01344 630140

Bracknell Library Local Studies

Town Square, Bracknell RG12 1BH – 01344 423149

Eton College Library

Eton College, Windsor SL4 6DB – 01753 370590

Guildhall Library

Aldermanbury, London EC2V 7HH – 0207 3321868

Hungerford Virtual Museum**Maidenhead Local Studies Library**

St Ives Rd, Maidenhead SL6 1QU – 01628 796968

Maidenhead Heritage Centre

18 Park St, Maidenhead SL6 1SL – 01628 780555

Mills Archive

Watlington House, Watlington St, Reading RG1 4RJ - 0118 9502052

Museum of Berkshire Aviation

Mohawk Way, Reading RG5 4UE – 0118 9448089

Museum of English Rural Life

The University of Reading, Redlands Rd, Reading RG1 5EX - 0118 3788669

Newbury Library

The Wharf, Newbury RG14 5AU – 01635 519900

Oxfordshire County Council Library Services

County Hall, New Road, Oxford OX1 1ND

Oxfordshire History Centre

St Luke's Church, Temple Rd, Oxford OX4 2HT

Reading Central Library

Abbey Square, Reading RG1 3BQ – 0118 9015965

Reading Museum

Town Hall, Blagrove Street, Reading, RG1 1QH – 0118 9373400

River & Rowing Museum

Mill Meadows, Henley on Thames, RG9 1BF – 01491 415600

Royal Berkshire Archives

9 Coley Avenue, Reading RG1 6AF – 0118 901 5132

Slough Library Local Studies

Slough Library, The Curve, William St, Slough SL1 1XY - 01753 875533

Slough Museum

The Curve, William St, Slough SL1 1XY – 01753 875533

St George's Chapel Archives & Chapter Library

The Vicar's Hall Undercroft, Windsor Castle, Windsor SL4 1NJ – 01753 848725

University of Reading Library

Pepper Lane, Whiteknights, Reading RG6 6EB – 0118 3788770

Wallingford Museum

52 High Street, Wallingford, OX10 0DB - 01491 835065

West Berkshire Museum

The Wharf, Newbury RG14 4AU – 01635 519562

Windsor & Royal Borough Museum

The Guildhall, Windsor, SL4 1LR – 01628 685686

Windsor Local Studies Library

Bachelors Acre, Windsor SL4 1ER 01753 743940

Wokingham Local Studies Library

Carnival Hub, Wellington Road, Wokingham, RG40 2AF – 0118 781368

Berkshire Local History Association

Registered Charity 1097355

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The Association promotes the history and heritage of the Royal County of Berkshire, covering both the areas of Berkshire before and after the 1974 review of local government. We are a registered charity – those wishing to donate or leave a legacy to enhance the work of the group should contact the Treasurer.

We work with a variety of organisations to protect and document the heritage of Berkshire. We are always happy to publicise events and details of libraries, museums and archives, even if they are not members, as we understand the pressures of local government finance and the desire of our members to visit.

What we do

- Publish an annual Journal (Berkshire Old and New) with detailed articles on Berkshire's past
- Produce a Newsletter three times a year. Members can opt for a hard copy by post or an electronic version by email (see below)
- Maintain an informative [website](#)
- Hold an Annual General Meeting in spring, with the formal meeting being followed by a variety of activities - talks, walks and visits
- Organise seminars, workshops, day trips and day schools with eminent speakers, and visits to archives or places of interest, usually with privileged access to material
- Award grants and prizes, with the purpose of helping and encouraging local history research and publication. Details are on the website

Membership

There are three classes of membership:

Individual	Individuals and couples living at the same address
Family	Families living at the same address
Corporate	Local history societies and institutions, such as libraries, archives and museums

2025 membership rates:

	Newsletter Delivery		No of Copies	
	Electronic	Hard Copy	Journal	Newsletter
Individual	£ 9.00	£12.00	1	1
Family	£ 9.00	£12.00	1	1
Corporate	£18.00	£20.00	2	3