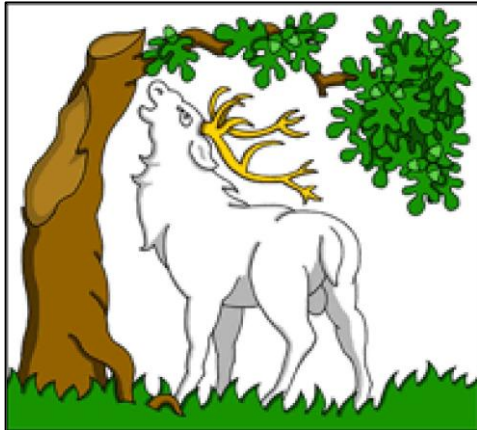


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# Berkshire Local History Association



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January 2026

# **Berkshire Local History Association Newsletter**

Editor: Jo Alexander-Jones

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## **Next Newsletter:**

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Content for the newsletter should be sent to [newsletter@blha.org.uk](mailto: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: John Mullaney and his Reading Abbey Model 2025 (Jo Alexander-Jones)*

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## Chairman's Corner

Since I last wrote, I went to the launch of the latest publication of the Berkshire Record Society in September, "Early Reading Quaker Controversy in Reading: The Minute Books of the Two Reading Monthly Meetings, 1668-1716," edited by Chris Skidmore. The talk was enjoyable, and David Lewis, our Treasurer, made the coffee for us.

Then in October, two of our committee members, Ann Smith and Margaret Simons, set up the Association's stall in the village hall at Marcham, near Abingdon, where the local history society was celebrating its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Many members will doubtless remember the hospitality we were shown when we held our AGM there in 2023. The 2025 event was well organised and well attended, and it's always good to make our presence felt across the county. Thanks are due to Ann and Margaret.

The "Building Schools for Berkshire" project, which was held back by the pandemic, is now making steady progress. The aim is to produce a volume for the Berkshire Record Society on the building of schools brought about by the 1870 Education Act, and our Association is happy to support it. Joan Dils and I help in the running of it.

Joan and I are also members of the Standing Conference on Archives, which usually meets at the Royal Berkshire Archives (RBA) twice a year. The membership comprises representatives of the six Berkshire Unitary Authorities which pay for the RBA, and the users of the service, which is where we come in. The Church of England, which owns many of the records, the Family History Society and the University also send representatives. As usual, the main news is that the RBA building is in the process of being extended, so that there will be sufficient storage space for many years to come. Work is proceeding, hence the new arrangements for car parking. A new subject cropped up at our last meeting in November: if the organisation of local government changes, and West Berkshire becomes part of a Mayoral Strategic Authority along with a part of South Oxfordshire, how will this affect the funding of the RBA?

There are also informal meetings between the RBA, Reading Central Library which holds the largest collection of printed books and illustrations on the history of the county, and me representing the local history societies. One of the main topics there is the move of the Central Library to new premises – with less on-site storage space. Already, many of the items which had to be kept "behind the scenes" for security reasons are now in an off-site store, and will be inaccessible for several months.

For a local history walk for 2026, the committee has in mind a visit to Whiteknights Park on the edge of Reading Borough and Wokingham Borough, to mark the centenary of the University of Reading. There's a lot to see – fine buildings, a lake, and a botanical garden. More information is included later on.

The 2026 AGM will be at Hedgerley in Buckinghamshire, to be followed by a visit to the church and 17<sup>th</sup> century Kedermister Library at Langley, near Slough, now in Berkshire. More information and a booking form will be provided when this newsletter is distributed. We will have Julian Hunt on hand, to give us a talk about Hedgerley, and he is also the leading authority on the library. I hope you can join us – I've been twice before to the library, and it's such an unexpected survival, I feel it should be better known.

The date for the Berkshire Heritage Fair has now been set for Saturday 18 July 2026. This is held online, and enquirers from this country and around the world can ask questions of many Berkshire organisations – local societies, libraries and archives. The BLHA will play its part.

So, we have things to look back on, and things to which we can look forward. Who knows what else 2026 may bring? As always I'd like to thank the committee members who keep the society going. As I write, we are planning to meet for a pre-Christmas meal. This is because, since our meetings are held via Zoom these days, we like to meet up occasionally in person – it's a meeting of friends – and we pay for the meal ourselves, of course! By the time you read this, Christmas will be well and truly over, but I hope I can still wish all our members a Happy New Year.

*David Cliffe, Chairman BLHA*

## **A Word from the Editor**

I spent a lovely time with John Mullaney in autumn, when he and his wife Lindsay, invited me to their home to see his model of Reading Abbey. John has kindly written an article for us and hopefully his model will be being displayed in various location during 2026 for us all to see.

As always it has been a pleasure to read the articles you have sent in for this edition and I look forward to more as the year progresses.

## **Notices and Articles**

### **A Walk for Members**

2026 sees 100 years since the University of Reading obtained its charter and

as part of the celebration we will be offering a walk around Whiteknights on Saturday 27 June starting at 10:30 am. It will be led by Jonathan Brown, Margaret Simons and Ann Smith, who are all experts in their own areas of our county's history. The walk should last around two hours. Further details will be forthcoming, but for now don't forget to mark the date in your diary.

### **Berkshire Heritage Fair**

The third online Berkshire Heritage Fair will take place on Saturday 18 July, and will comprise two sessions at 10 - 12 a.m. and 2 - 3 p.m. It will be held on 'Zoom' and hosted jointly by us and the Berkshire Family History Society. The aim is to attract people from anywhere in the world who are interested in the historic county of Berkshire. They may be involved in research, want to ask specific questions or offer materials of interest. Please save the date.

Any queries, please email Ann Smith [membership@blha.org.uk](mailto:membership@blha.org.uk)

### **Reading Abbey Model**

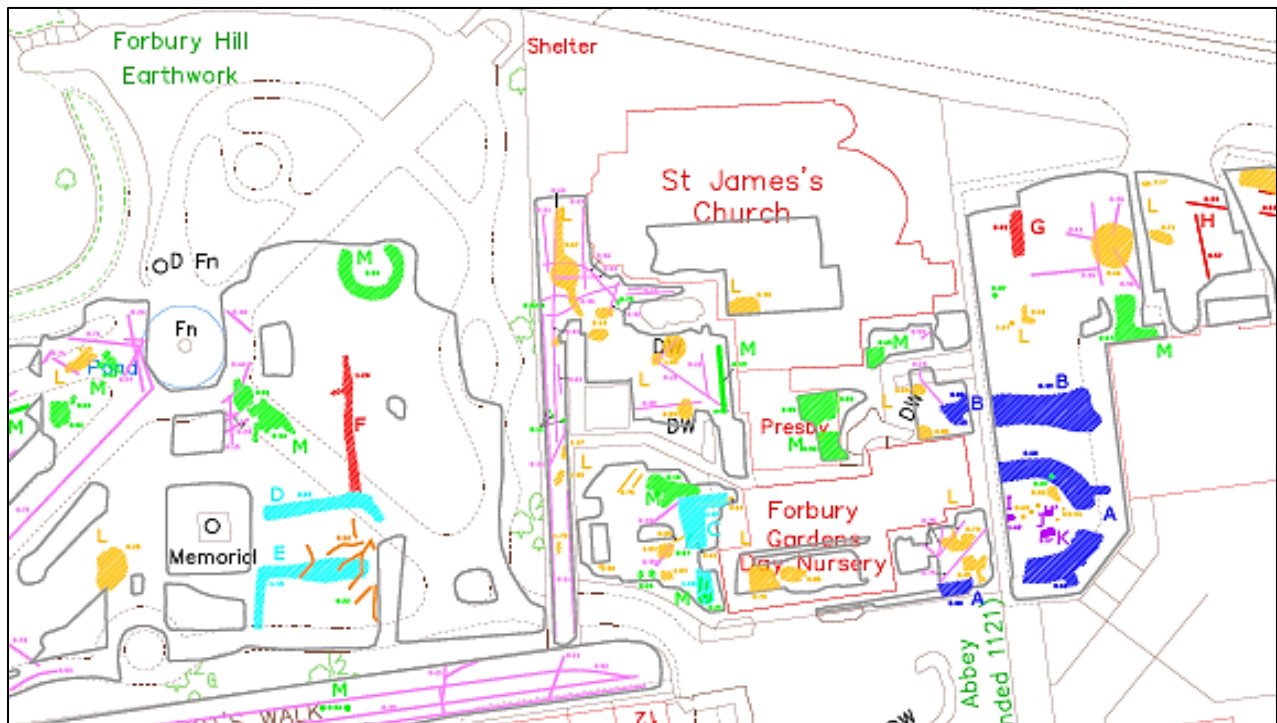
*John Mullaney*

The abbey ruins next to the Forbury are something of an enigma. They appear as a jumble of flint walls, giving little sense of the mighty abbey that once stood on the site. For those of us who have spent many years poring over old maps, sketches and even grainy photos, the shamble of stones conjures up images of lofty walls and architectural beauty. Words cannot convey the grandeur that was Reading Abbey. Paintings and drawings are magnificent. But do they stun the viewer with a gasp, a drawing-in of breath? So, I thought that a model, based on as precise measurements as possible, might excite the senses. Though it is a mere one hundredth in size of the real building, still, the most common reaction to the model has been a feeling of wonder and even awe. And we should not forget that this was the purpose of the abbey church. It was a representation of the New Jerusalem, of the might of God, of the place of each one of us in the face of infinity.

The model is intended to give an impression of what the abbey looked like and how it changed over the centuries. Though not an exact replica of Reading Abbey, the measurements are accurate, using a ratio of 1 centimetre to 1 metre, to ensure that the proportions reflect the original building as closely as possible.

All the features are ones found in buildings contemporary to the abbey, depending on the architectural periods represented. These include Lombard bands, trefoil and quatrefoil window tracery, bell-tower louvres, leaded and scalloped tiled roofing, oculus windows, door tympana, clasping buttresses and a trumeau.

The plan is based on the standing remains, archaeological evidence from excavations dating from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to the present, including the 2016 Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) survey (top map below), and Englefield's observations and drawings made in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century (as reproduced in Coates 'Antiquities of Reading' 1802) (bottom map below).



The Forbury Hill is to the top left

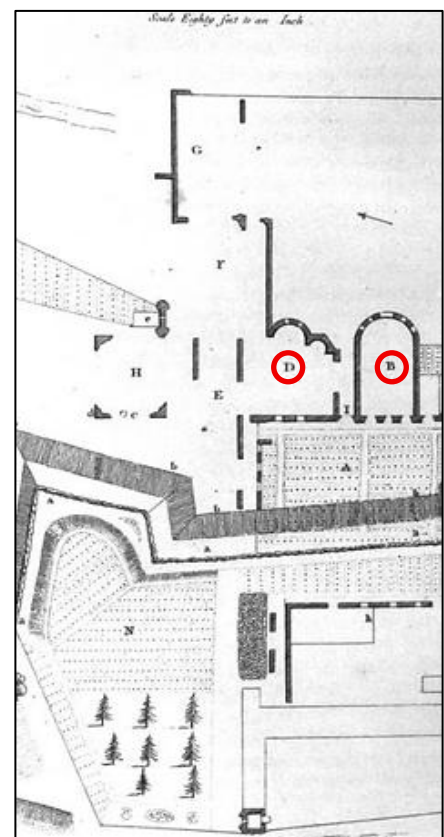
GPR blue and purple areas show below-ground abbey remains

Abbey remains – thin lines

D = South transept

B = Chapter House

Civil war trench – thick line



The surviving worked stone from the abbey proved especially informative

when reconstructing architectural elements such as the window tracery.

The elevations are far more speculative. They are based on the standing remains, on 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century drawings (including Englefield's survey), early photographs, and comparisons with other similar churches/cathedrals.

There were two principal building periods (1 and 2 below).

### 1. The Romanesque style 1121 +



Romanesque west end



Romanesque east end

This is characterised by massive masonry, thick walls and rounded arches. The church had a central tower. Almost certainly, it would have been capped with a pyramidal 'spire', as shown on the model. We also know from the early 13<sup>th</sup> century Annals of Reading Abbey (12 March 1208) that there was a central tower. The annals record that a whirlwind swept through the whole church and that lightning struck the tower (only one tower mentioned) - fire then spread through the whole church.

The Tower's height of c.48 m (48 cm on the model) is based upon the dimensions of the plan and on the average for similar contemporary towers. The surviving remains and footings suggest that the building followed certain rules of proportion. This is not surprising. Most architectural historians now agree that Romanesque churches followed principles of proportion. Among these, the golden ratio was an important element in the design process.

This can be seen at Reading in several surviving elements such as:

- a) the Chancel's ratio to the Transepts
- b) the Chancel's ratio to the likely total length of the church (96 m), as indicated by the GPR and other archaeological sources mentioned above
- c) the ratio of 1:2:1 of the Side Aisles to the Central Aisle

This theory is supported by the fact that the builders of Reading Abbey came

from the Cluniac mother house of Cluny in Burgundy which, as Viollet-le-Duc demonstrated, was built following mathematical rules of proportion.

Henry I was a major (if not the major) benefactor of the building of Cluny III and he had asked that these monks should come to Reading to build his new abbey. They were joined by other Cluniac monks from the Priory of Lewes.

## 2. The Decorated Gothic period 1315 +

This architectural style is characterised by pointed arches, elaborate stonework and intricate window stone tracery supporting elaborate leaded stained-glass windows. In 1315 a Lady Chapel was added in this style at the east end. This was at the same time as the Lady Chapel at Chichester was built.

Chichester originally had a rounded Romanesque apse which was removed to build its Lady Chapel. The model is based on what we see at Chichester, where the rounded Romanesque apse was removed. It is of course possible that Reading's Lady Chapel was added to the original apse.

Note the pointed windows and intricate window tracery.



A tall spire may have been added at the same time as the Lady Chapel or maybe at a later period.

## 3. Decorated and/or Perpendicular periods?

Far more speculative is the existence, style and height of a tall spire on the central tower. We do not know if a tall spire was ever built or if so, when. The pyramidal spire may have been replaced with a tall spire when the Lady Chapel was added in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Alternatively, it may have been modified or added later in the Perpendicular period.

What we do know is that after the abbey's dissolution in 1539, a detailed inventory was made of the disposal of the building materials: from the lead to the stonework. The inventory mentions a 'spere steple', which would indicate that a tall spire steeple had replaced the pyramidal spire. The inventory mentions everything from the 'comen jakes of the dorter', to tiles, choir stalls, lead and stonework (*Berkshire Archaeological Journal* vol 39 no 2).

The model's tall spire is a mix of Decorated/Perpendicular styles. What we do not know is its height.

#### 4. Western Towers and Narthex

The west terminus of the building is far less certain, particularly as the GPR showed no traces of footings. Nevertheless, the model has two western towers flanking a narthex. These are loosely based upon York Minster. The overall length of the Romanesque church was about 96 m, the Chancel 48 m, the Transepts c.18 m, the Nave c. 48 m (to match the Chancel), width of the Nave 12 m. width of the Side Aisles 6 m each. These measurements are approximations as the internal and external widths vary. This is due to varying factors, most importantly the differing thicknesses of the flint inner core and of the ashlar blocks, both external and internal.



The overall length of the church after the addition of the Lady Chapel was c. 130 m. If Western Towers were added, then the length would have been about 140 m.

For comparison, Westminster Abbey is 161.5 m, Winchester 170 m Gloucester 130 m, York 160 m.

#### Comment

The model is a representation of architectural styles and changes. The church itself was viewed by its builders as a 'holy place' representing heaven on earth. As the Foundation Charter says, its primary purpose was as a place of prayer for the salvation of King Henry's soul and the souls of all his antecedents and successors.

The architecture of the Romanesque church was integral to this purpose and the belief system that underpinned it. Mathematical laws, specifically those of proportion, were seen as sharing the Divine attributes of being universally true, immutable and infinite in time and space.

As such, it was believed that by following these laws heaven was brought to earth. This can be summed up in the prayer used to dedicate a new church in medieval times.

*Locus iste a Deo factus est,  
inaestimabile sacramentum,  
irreprehensibilis est.*

This place was built by God,  
It is infinitely sacred,  
Here there is no wickedness.

## **News from the Royal Berkshire Archives**

*Rosie Everitt, Archivist*

A large proportion of Berkshire's parish registers were digitised by Ancestry in 2024/2025. We are now pleased to share that these are expected to be made available to subscribers later this year. Visitors to the Royal Berkshire Archives can access Ancestry for free on the search room computers.

There has been an exciting discovery at the archives. A poem which was previously thought to be written by John Berkeley Monck, owner of Coley Park, in 1811 has now been reattributed to famed local literary figure, Mary Russell Mitford. The poem is headed 'To Master Monck of Coley Park, on his Birthday, with a nosegay of woodbine' (document reference: D/EZ220/1). Mitford was a good friend of the Monck family and it has been discovered that a revised edition of the poem was published in a magazine in 1832. We give our thanks to local historians, Margaret Ounsley and Malcolm Summers, for decoding this mystery. Read the full story on the Royal Berkshire Archives [blog](#).

From 24 March to 26 June, we will have a new exhibition, 'Fallen: The Clewer House of Mercy 1848-1954'. This will tell the story of the House of Mercy and the Community of St John Baptist. It was established in Clewer in 1852 as an Anglican Religious Community for women, initially to run the House of Mercy established in Clewer in 1849 to rescue 'fallen women'. Over time, works undertaken by the Community expanded to include Houses of Mercy in other parts of the country. Their aims also included the education and training of orphans and other children, the care of the sick, and mission work at home and abroad. Please see our [website](#) for updates on the exhibition.

Building contractors are expected to be onsite at the Royal Berkshire Archives from early March as work on the extension continues. Please note that there will be a piling rig on the premises until the end of June. Visitors are advised to continue to park along the west wall of the building.

## Book Reviews

*David Cliffe*

Ford, David Nash. Central Reading Pub Histories, 1423-1939. Wokingham: Nash Ford Publications, 2025. 2 vols., £50.00.

It was in 2021 that the History of Reading Society published a book on Reading pubs and breweries, *Abbot Cook to Zero Degrees*. David Nash Ford generously delayed the publication of this much larger compendium, which allowed the 500 copies of the *Abbot Cook* book to sell out. So why, if you already have the *Abbot Cook* book, would you possibly want this two-volume set? And how on earth does David Nash Ford manage to fill the 741 A4-sized pages? I have to admit that I delayed buying the two volumes until I'd seen a copy in Reading Central Library. And that was it – I purchased the two volumes the next day!

By Central Reading Pub Histories the author means just that – the 300 or so pubs which were in the three parishes of the old borough, and not the residential suburbs beyond. The time period is from 1423 – the first mention of the George Inn in surviving documents – and the end of the period is the outbreak of war in 1939. Nevertheless, we are told what happened to the buildings after that, up to the present day.

One of the book's great strengths is the almost 400 photographs, drawings, maps and plans. They are a good size with enough contrast. (I find that many local history books reproduce photographs as though they were being economical with the black ink.) The whole book is excellently printed. The source of the pictures is given, and a variety of collections have been used. Of course they include the collections of the Central Library, the Museum and the Royal Berkshire Archives, as well as collections in private hands. A large proportion of them are attributed to "NFPL" – the Nash Ford Picture Library. I can't help wondering how the author came by them – it must be a fantastically valuable collection. Many of the illustrations are totally new to me, and don't seem to have been published in anything recently. Just looking at the first few pages of the first volume, there are illustrations of *The Ancient Forester*, *The Angel Tap*, *The Bedford Arms*, *The Bell*, *The Boar's Head* (in Broad Street), *The Castle*, *The Catherine Wheel*, etc. As an added bonus there are many illustrations of publicans and innkeepers, and of the token coinage issued by earlier landlords.

Then there are the maps and plans. The street maps towards the end of volume 2 are well done and clear, but throughout the text are also large-scale plans of particular areas showing particular buildings. Taking the plan of the Bear Hotel in Bridge Street as an example, we can see the site of the Old

Golden Bear, the Brewers Arms, the Bear Tap, the Bear Hotel itself, the various courts, yards and passageways, Sowden's Brewery, Simonds' Brewery, Rickford and Hawkins' Brewery, and the course of the Grey's Lock Stream, which ran partly under ground. This is magic for dedicated local historians!

Out of interest, I looked at the differences between the entries for the Upper Ship Hotel in Duke Street, between the two books. In the "Abbot Cook" volume there are two pages with one illustration. In the new book there are eleven pages with eight illustrations. Both accounts are good and accurate – it's all a matter of how much detail you want. In the newer work, the history of the hotel is traced back further. We hear of customers in 1784 paying to view an "electrostatic globe" some 24 feet in circumference, floating in the air, from the windows of the hotel's "Great Room." We are told that the overhanging building on the other side of the street meant that in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, only one vehicle at a time could pass along the street. One 19<sup>th</sup> century landlord applied to fix a "daylight reflector" to the building to direct more sunlight into the hotel. We hear of Titus Hunt, the boot-boy, a well-known character for many years. There's a tremendous amount of detail about landlords, and what they had done before and afterwards, and there is much information about stage-coaches. There are the exploits of Jorgens Jorgensen, who stayed there as a prisoner-of-war on parole around 1810, and of others who visited or stayed.

The second volume ends with several appendices, which include a list of breweries, their owners over the years, and what happened to the premises afterwards. I have already found the index to be useful, with personal names and subjects. If you wanted to find out about the game of quoits, carnation feasts or coroners' inquests in pubs, it will serve your purposes well.

If the book has a fault, it is that we are not told where the various pieces of information are recorded, in footnotes or endnotes. Perhaps this can be forgiven – had the author chosen to do so, the two books would have been even heavier and more expensive.

This is probably not the kind of work which you would want to read from cover to cover. It's a work of reference, and within its self-imposed limits, it is unlikely ever to be surpassed. It is also highly entertaining, shedding light on many aspects of life in the town. I find it hard to imagine how one man can have put it together in one lifetime!

Summers, Malcolm. History of the Reading Dispensary Trust. Tilehurst, Reading: Downsway Publishing 2025.

Those familiar with Reading town centre before 1979 will probably remember

the stone building belonging to the Dispensary in Chain Street, the narrow pedestrian street running by the side of the Heelas department store. There were many protests when the announcement came that the old building was to be demolished, and the site taken over by an extension to the department store. There were vague promises about incorporating the stone façade into the side of the department store. Then the John Lewis Partnership, owners of the store, offered the façade to anyone who would erect it somewhere. And then the building disappeared, despite being “listed.” A pity, since it was a curiosity from an earlier age.

Many must have assumed that the Reading Dispensary Trust, like its building, was something that had had its day – but not a bit of it! This latest book from Malcolm Summers shows that this is not the case at all. It now operates from a modest building in Wokingham Road, on the corner of Eastern Avenue, now nicknamed “The Nutshell.” The book shows, in great detail, how the work of the Trust has changed in the years since its foundation, in 1802, to meet contemporary needs, in its 204 pages.

In the beginning, of course, it was a charity which dispensed medicine to poor people who couldn’t afford to pay for it. Honorary physicians and surgeons were engaged to examine patients, and there was a paid apothecary. It was open for one hour a day, six days a week, and patients couldn’t just arrive and expect to be seen. They had to have recommendations from wealthier citizens who had subscribed to the institution.

Over time, the demand for services increased. The two rented rooms occupied by the Dispensary were insufficient, and it moved to a building in Chain Street which had been a school. Dentists and midwives were engaged, and rooms were fitted out as hospital wards. By 1836, 1,000 patients a year were being treated. In the 1840s it was decided to raise the money, demolish the decrepit old building, and build a new building on the same site. This is the building that is still remembered.

The rather complex relationship between the Dispensary and the Royal Berkshire Hospital is described. At first it was thought that the work of the Dispensary would go to the new hospital, but the legality of the merger was called into question, and in 1839 the Court of Chancery became involved, and the merger could not go ahead.

A new system of funding was embarked on in the 1860s – a “provident” system whereby the “industrious poor” who could afford to pay 1d. a week could receive treatment at the Dispensary, with no need for a letter of recommendation. The scheme became popular, and by 1897, almost 17,000 were taking advantage of it. This represented more than a quarter of the

town's population. An "Erleigh" Branch on Wokingham Road was opened – now the present offices of the organisation, and for a brief period there was a West Reading Branch in Oxford Road.

The National Insurance Act of 1911 brought further changes. Another complex relationship grew up between the Dispensary and the Reading Medical Society which provided the "panel" of doctors required by the Act.

The arrival of the National Health Service in 1948 meant that there was no longer any reason to pay a penny a week. The Dispensary was able to make grants to other charitable institutions and to individuals to help them pay for necessary things which the N.H.S. didn't cover. Another chapter opened in 1993, when the Dispensary became a registered charitable trust, with new powers.

At the end of the book come appendices listing the names of those associated with the Dispensary. The lists contain many well-known Reading names. There are end-notes giving sources of information, with most of the records being in the Royal Berkshire Archives, and there is a copious index of names and subjects. Reading the book gives a picture of social change over the last two centuries and more, and the effects of various government schemes on the lives of ordinary people, as well as on the Reading Dispensary. The minor squabbles among the medical establishment are occasionally amusing – especially the question of taking on a "lady doctor" in 1901. I can thoroughly recommend this book.

## **Newbury Museum**

If you're looking for a good day out, the Museum runs heritage-focussed course and events. In January an eight-week course on "[Civil War Century: the Newbury area in the 17<sup>th</sup> century](#)" will start and February sees a talk on our county's [Portable Antiquities database](#) as it reaches over 10,000 finds. The talk will be given by Dr. Phil Smither, Berkshire's Finds Liaison Officer. Details of similar events can be found on the [Museum's website](#).

## **Jim Smart**

The sad news arrived, just as we were going to press, of the death of Jim Smart, one of our oldest members. He was 96! It was he and his wife Pat who were responsible for our present Chairman, David Cliffe, getting involved with the BLHA in the first place. At present, Pat is at home in Earley, with carers calling several times a day. Jim's funeral will be at the Easthampstead Park Crematorium on the afternoon of January 22. If you are a friend of Pat and Jim and would like to attend, you'll be welcome, and you can get further information from David – e-mail address [davidcliffe438@btinternet.com](mailto:davidcliffe438@btinternet.com).

# **Society Contributions**

## **Berkshire Family History Society**

We have now closed The Centre for Heritage and Family History on the second floor of Reading Central Library, in anticipation of our planned move which we hope will finally complete soon. In the meantime, we continue to offer advice to researchers on a booked appointment basis by Zoom as part of an extensive events programme.

As soon as we have moved and settled down into our new premises, we will reopen our Research Centre facility and offer a series of tours to help people understand how we can help researchers.

After a quarter's sabbatical, prompted by the move, our face-to-face talks programme restarts from January at its new venue at the Abbey Baptist Church on Abbey Square, Reading. Our walks programme now takes us much further across the county, and occasionally just outside of it, with tours of churches featuring highly during quarter one.

Society volunteers will be present at the East Surrey Family History Society's Virtual Fair on Saturday 24 January, offering advice on family history research in Berkshire in our own virtual "room". It's free to attend, but must be pre-booked, and do come and say hello if you go. Find out more on their website.

*Catherine Sampson, Chairman*

## **Berkshire Industrial Archaeology Group**

Continuing our 2025 walks theme, we held another well-attended trip along the Kennet & Avon canal, this time from the Kennet mouth through to Caversham Bridge. Back in the warm we had a talk from David Cliffe on Reading's silk industry – one of the lesser-known of the town's industries but well researched by David and full of interesting information. The talk was ended with a lively question and answer session that ran in to the time for tea and biscuits!

November saw Laurence Walters talk to us on "Railways in the Vale" covering branch lines that were in Berkshire prior to the 1972 Local Government Act. We finished in December with Phil Burrell-Wood speaking on Newbury breweries, a fitting topic as we entered the season of merriment.

*Jo Alexander-Jones, Secretary*

## Hedgerley Historical Society

The Society was founded by an amazing community-minded resident, Harry Kirby, who was born in West Hartlepool, County Durham, in 1917. In the mid-1930s Harry moved to Slough with his widowed mother and elder brother Arthur and they both found employment on the Slough Trading Estate. By 1939 they were living on the Manor Park Estate in Slough that was built to accommodate workers on Slough Estates. In February 1940 Harry married Kathleen Fursland at St Paul's church in Slough and was called up 11 days later, serving in the Royal Engineers in Egypt after 18 months training at railway workshops in Hampshire and London. After the war Harry and Kathleen bought a caravan and pitched it at Mr. Pusey's farm in East Burnham. This was their home for over six years before they moved in 1952 with their three young sons to Hedgerley. Eton Rural District Council allocated the family a new council house on Hedgerley Hill.



Following 33 years working as a Technical Manager for Powell Duffryn Heating Ltd in Camberley, Harry worked as a consultant engineer teaching at Slough College. In his spare time Harry volunteered in many ways as a cub and scout leader, Bucks Civil Protection, Parish and District Councillor, Choir Master and founder of Hedgerley Football Club. In 1976 Harry founded Hedgerley Historical Society (HHS) and the inaugural meeting was held in Hedgerley Memorial Hall on Wednesday 24 February 1976 and HHS have met on the third Wednesday for 50 years.

The early meetings had a formal agenda whilst the Society arranged an archaeological dig at the Knights Templar preceptory site (an enclosed monastic precinct within a moat) in Hedgerley Green and began to research and document the history of

this South Bucks village. This culminated in the publication of two paperbacks

in 1980 and 1982 that were consolidated into a revised hardback edition in 2007. Nineteen years on the book has been revised by noted Bucks local historian Julian Hunt and edited by HHS President Michael Rice. This book will be launched at our annual Harry Kirby Memorial Lecture on the 18 March and copies will be available for sale at the BLHA AGM on 28 March when HHS look forward to welcoming BLHA members to Hedgerley.

A number of special events are being planned to mark our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary including an anniversary lunch at The Bull Hotel in Gerrards Cross, a BBQ at our village pub, The White Horse, and a return visit by Philippa Langley who presented an amazing talk to HHS members in November 2013 on the discovery of the remains of Richard III in a Leicester Council car park. Since then, Ms. Langley has been working on the Princes in the Tower project.



*John Lovelock, Secretary*

### **The History of Reading Society**

Over the summer, members enjoyed two evening visits. At the football stadium we were shown round the buildings, and saw items connected with the long history of Reading Football Club. The other visit was to Holy Trinity Church, where we could admire the sumptuous church furnishings, and visit the catacombs below the church.

Our evening talks recommenced in September, with what must have been the best-attended meeting the Society has ever held. The great attraction was Thomas Macey, and his talk on the history of Jackson's department store. Thomas last gave us a talk on the subject in 2013, since when interest in Jackson's had obviously increased. By happy coincidence, our meeting was held on 17 September, and Edward Jackson had started in business on High Street on 17 September 1875 at 2 p.m., 150 years before. The shop closed in December 2013.

Our speaker had worked for Jackson's, and had been able to collect documents, ephemera and pieces of memorabilia concerning the history of the shop, a few of which he had brought to show us. He had also published a history of the business. Mr. Macey is a natural entertainer. There were many humorous anecdotes and laughs along the way, but the facts were always there.

Mr. Jackson's business was a great success, and when the nearby crossroads of High Street, King Street, Duke Street and Kings Road was modified to ease

the passage of horse traffic and trams, he was able to build a new shop. Later he expanded the buildings along Kings Road and High Street, opening a ladies' wear department and a shoe shop, and bought the shop opposite as his household department. For a time there were branches in neighbouring towns and villages.

Many among the audience had memories of the shop, and many of them recalled having their school uniforms bought there. Another well-remembered feature was the Lamson Pneumatic Tube system, connecting the shop counters with the central cashier's desk, whereby small canisters containing bills, cash and receipts were whizzed along using compressed air. The buildings still stand, used for other purposes, and for many people, the corner of High Street and Kings Road is still "Jackson's Corner."

October brought a talk from Duncan Mackay, "The Hill Family and the Reading Connection." We heard of several idealistic family members who influenced society, the best known of whom was Octavia Hill (1838 - 1912), the eighth daughter of James Hill and his third wife, Caroline. James was a wealthy land-owning miller and corn merchant in Wisbech, Cambridgeshire, who was twice widowed. In the 1840s his health deteriorated, for a time he was mentally ill, and his wealth was diminished. He sold up in Cambridgeshire, and moved to rural Finchley, then on the outskirts of London.

The Hill children built up a wide circle of friends. Octavia herself worked as secretary to John Ruskin. She became interested in art, education, improving housing for the London poor, and preventing commons and open spaces in the countryside and within towns and cities from being built on, and open for everyone to enjoy. Her personality and determination enabled her to accomplish things, by persuading wealthy individuals to fund projects. It was in 1893, while helping run the Commons Preservation Society, that she suggested changing its name to something that sounded more inclusive – the Commons and Gardens Trust. Sir Robert Hunter, the solicitor of the society, thought the National Trust would be even better, and so that organisation was founded.

Many among the Reading audience were probably more interested in Octavia's half-brother, Arthur Hill (1829 - 1909). From being a railway clerk, he came to work for the railway builder, Sir Morton Peto. This was the time of the "railway mania," and Arthur came to see that there were fortunes to be made in the moving and selling of coal. He bought the business of a Reading coal merchant, who ran, as a sideline, an agency which booked passages overseas for would-be emigrants. He took on both sides of the business, and succeeded.

He, too, was someone who worked for the public good – as a councillor, an alderman, and three times as Mayor of Reading. Among his achievements were helping to secure half-day closing for shop workers, to improve public library provision, to build a mains drainage system, and to buy the Bayeux Tapestry replica for the Museum. His good work continued after his death: in 1909 his executors gave Hill's Meadow in Caversham to the borough (though it was not until 1928 that it was officially opened to the public), and in 1911 his son-in-law, Dr. J. B. Hurry, presented the Arthur Hill Memorial Baths.

In November, our President, Joan Dils, gave a talk entitled "Voices of Reading: Aspects of Life in the Long Eighteenth Century." This had, she said, been "cobbled together" from diaries, letters, newspaper reports and court records, illustrating the lives of people from different strata in society. The examples were often unexpected and sometimes amusing.

From the diaries of Edward Belson we learned of the tribulations of the Quaker community. He was a distiller of non-alcoholic drinks in Sun Lane, of "the middling sort." He married in the meeting-house at Oare, near Newbury, where his wife had worshipped. They had ten children, eight of whom survived infancy. They had to contend with smallpox, measles, and other illnesses and minor injuries. Towards the end, when his wife's health was deteriorating, they had one of their children looked after by a wet nurse in her home for over two years – for which they had to pay. Money seems always to have been a great concern. Prices are quoted for all kinds of things - a cup of coffee in a Reading coffee house (one penny), the clothes and shoes he bought in readiness for his marriage, presents and a love token for his wife, and a length of dress material bought by his wife. He comments wryly: "exceeding chargeable is married life."

Then from the old County Gaol, when it was in Castle Street, there were "The Confessions of Ambrose Strong," who had been convicted of the murder of "Farmer Blagrove," and was sentenced to death by hanging in 1718. He was 23 years old. He had intended to rob his victim, but not to kill him. He was not well educated, and his words were probably taken down by a reporter.

From there we moved up the social ladder to the gentry, who lived in or near Reading, and moved into town to socialise at certain times of year. Among those mentioned were Robert Lee of Binfield, John Loveday of Caversham, Robert Merrick of Reading, and William Trumball of Easthampstead. The diaries of Caroline Lybbe-Powys of Hardwick had been particularly useful in shedding light on the social scene. The idea of Reading as being an affluent and fashionable town came as something of a surprise to some in the audience – though never as fashionable as Bath, of course. Reading had coffee houses, there was an obelisk lit by lamps in the Market Place, there

was a new Town Hall, and the High Bridge had recently been rebuilt in stone. The assizes, the assemblies, the fairs and the races all brought people into the town. Between October and May, there were monthly assemblies (with music and dancing) in the Town Hall, near the nights of the full moon. The racing was on Bulmershe Heath, when prizes for the winners could be as much a £50 – a colossal sum for those days. In the evenings, there were balls in the Town Hall. These occasions were a time for seeing and being seen, for dressing in your finery, for civilised conversation, for amusements and for match-making, and they also brought a great deal of money into the town.

At the end of the talk we looked at the other side of the coin. There was the sad case of a group of migrants from Scotland who had come to work in a factory in St. Laurence's Parish. The factory closed, people found themselves out of work, and applied to the overseers of the poor for relief. The Scots were told that they must apply in their own parishes, in Scotland, and there was probably nothing for it but to walk back on foot.

Anti-social behaviour was nothing new: the wardens of St. Mary's Church paid out for lamps in the churchyard to discourage "acts of gross immorality, common swearers and fornicators."

The talk was greatly enjoyed, and I was reminded of the advertising slogan of the "News of the World," the former Sunday paper, which ran: "All human life is there."

*David Cliffe, Chairman*

## **Hungerford Historical Association**

Our new season of lectures kicked off to a splendid start with Major General Peter Williams' talk on "Rudolf Hess: A Most Curious Life and Death". Peter served three tours of duty in Berlin during the 1970s and 1980s and during his second tour he was a stand-in interpreter for the British governor at Spandau Prison, where Hitler's former deputy, Rudolf Hess, had been the sole occupant for several decades. Peter's knowledge and personal insight made for a fascinating evening.

November saw Alison Galvin-Wright Chair of The Merchant's House Trust in Marlborough give an interesting and informative talk on the history of the building from 1650 to the present day. The Merchant's House is a Grade II listed building on the High Street. It has been restored with contemporary 17<sup>th</sup> century artifacts and the garden, designed by Jeffery Galvin-Wright, was named Wiltshire Garden of the Year in 2009.

*Dr Caroline Ness, Chairman*

## Longworth and District History Society

2025 has been a busy year with nine talks and two trips. We started with an interesting talk by Liz Woolley telling us about the development of Oxford city by the work of builders and businessmen during Victorian times. The next talk followed the branch line from Oxford to Fairford with Trevor Jackson. We learned about King Henry VIII and his connections with Hinton Waldrist from Paul Whitton, one of our local historians. Robert Evans gave us the illustrated history of our local footpaths, followed by Gillian Cane describing the life and style of the Mitford sisters.

Our summer outing was a guided walk around the next-door village of Buckland by some of our members who live there. It was so interesting that we only got half-way round before arriving at the pub, so we have to go again next year to finish it off!

During July we visited the Botley War Graves with Dick Richards, a volunteer from the British Legion. He will come and give us a talk later this year about the Unknown Warrior. In September, Marie-Louise Kerr brought us "Oxfordshire on Canvas", showing us many lovely local views. Then in October we had Andrew Long's "Naming of Oxfordshire Pubs", followed in November by Stephen Wass and "The Peculiar History of Fishponds and Fishing in Oxfordshire and around". Bill King is bringing "The Magic and Mystery of Glen Miller" to our Christmas meeting.

Our members are a good support to the Society, and we look forward to another successful year.

*Pam Woodward*

## The Marcham Society

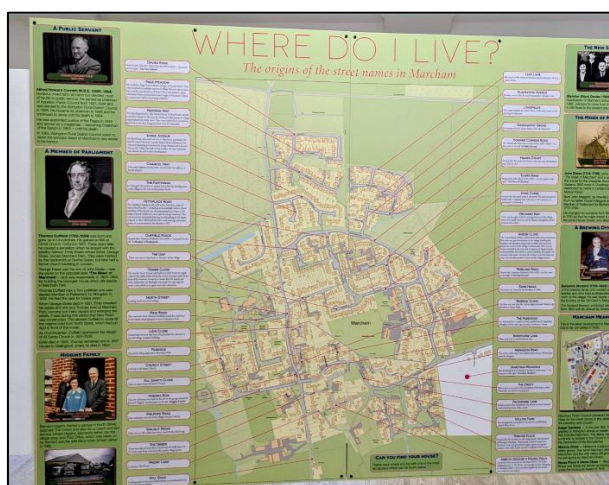


Over the weekend of 18 - 19 October 2025, the Marcham Society celebrated its first 30 years with "Marcham Uncovered", an impressive exhibition encompassing the past, the present and the future of our village and its surrounding area. Held in the new village hall, the 500 visitors enjoyed a walk through our fascinating history presented on well-prepared information panels, through photographs and ancient objects and then the modern world of telescopes and virtual reality.

In Geology visitors learnt about the local fossils including the Ammonite which is the emblem of our Society. In Archaeology there was a comprehensive explanation of the excavations of the Roman site on Trendles Field with a model of the Temple created by pupils from Marcham Primary School.

Pottery, bone and coins were on display as well as finds from all eras found in the recent test pits in the village. More recent history from Domesday to the Civil War was explored as well as detailed maps of the enclosures showing the changing shape of the village through time. A central display showed the modern layout of the village explaining the origin of the street names.

Looking forward, the Parish Council exhibited plans for village improvements and larger projects too, such as the local reservoir, proposed by Thames Water. Very much in the modern world with the latest in telescopic wizardry, the Astronomy group showed what can be seen in the night sky over Marcham. Meanwhile a virtual reality demonstration allowed visitors the experience of roaming the village without leaving the exhibition.



Our Society was pleased to welcome committee members from BLHA and other prominent local societies; the whole event showed how much interest there is in local history throughout Oxfordshire and Berkshire. While enjoying refreshments in the Hub, there was the opportunity to appreciate an evocative, scrolling display of photographs from Marcham's past and present. More details and photographs of the event can be seen [here](#).

*Simon Blackmore, Membership Secretary*

## **Oxfordshire Family History Society**

At Oxfordshire Family History Society (OFHS) we continue to expand our Big Oxfordshire Names Database (BOND) with more monumental inscription, Parish Register transcripts and now Quarter Session records. Also surnames drawn from a multitude of different publications which have been scoured looking for name rich data. Our earliest records available to search date to 950 and offer insights to lives and places. Many of these sources reference what were Berkshire parishes. For example, Culham St Paul & College Chapel has been documented and illustrated with monuments and headstones. Please do check out the [What is BOND and what you can find](#)

[in it?](#) page of the OFHS website.

You may also be interested to know that OFHS advisors hold free, one-to-one family history advice sessions at both Abingdon and Didcot libraries and you are welcome to come along with any family history queries. Our advisors cover Oxfordshire, Berkshire or any other county as well as being able to help with queries relating to overseas and specialist areas such as military. We will always try to get you sources to check out! We can be found in Abingdon on the fourth Saturday of the month between 11:00 and 14:00 and in Didcot on the fourth Tuesday of the month between 13:30 and 16:30. These sessions should be booked with the library staff. Other sessions are also available around Oxfordshire - all listed on the [website](#).

*Angie Trueman, OFHS Publicity Co-ordinator and Webmaster*

## **Project Purley**

Our autumn talks programme covered a variety of topics, some very specific to Purley and others of much wider interest.

Having marked the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of VE Day in May, in September our monthly meeting was turned over to commemorating the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of VJ Day. The Barn was packed as we began the evening with a fish and chips supper, especially chosen as fish and chips were one of the few foods not rationed during the war. Members were joined by a good number of visitors and like our VE Day anniversary event, some specially invited guests.

Lining the walls and alcoves of The Barn was a small exhibition of display boards on Purley in the Second World War, many of which had been previously on show in May, but with two extra tables this time round. These displayed the story and memorabilia of two “fathers”, one who served in Singapore and Japan between 1945 and 1947, and the other who was a POW of the Japanese on the island of Java.

We finished with a thought-provoking talk by Dr. Richard Marks on the Siam-Burma Railway, which also highlighted the extreme and often over-shadowed cruelty shown to the Indian, Tamil and local Thai forced workers. It was especially moving as one of our former residents died as a POW at the railway's Kanyu number 1 Camp, in 1943. Poignantly, Edward's medals were displayed for the evening in front of his photograph, brought along for the occasion by his nephew.

Caroline Piller was our speaker in October about horse dealing in the Reading area. Horse dealing was an extremely important trade in town and country, and Caroline described how the well-known horse dealers went about their

business. The businesses included the Eighteen family (more recently better known as fishmongers), Targetts on London Road and Tompkins on Friar Street and we saw photographs and engravings of their sometimes-extensive premises. The last of the dealers and best known was Oliver Dixon who was brought over from Ireland as a young boy, trained in the business, and eventually set up on his own at Mockbeggar Farm in Earley. He was extremely well known with the great and good flocking to his door, and a patronage which included royalty. Having survived the First World War, when many of Reading's other horse-dealers were forced to close, sadly Dixon was forced to give up his business in the Second World War. Whilst little remains of his buildings nowadays, the extent of his business can still be traced on modern maps.

Member Gordon Adams brought us back to Purley with his talk in November on the Thames and the railway through Purley. Richly illustrated, Gordon's talk explored the importance of commercial traffic on the Thames until the railways came along and leisure usage took over as the predominant activity. This was the cue to the second part of the talk – the railway, which additionally showed how our nearest station at Tilehurst, has changed and continues to change over the years.

December brought our Christmas party, with a cold fork buffet provided by external caterers, a quiz and raffle. This is always a relaxed evening which gives everyone the chance to socialise over good food and drink.

Looking ahead, our talks programme is in place until the summer and we are currently finalising plans for our summer activities which this year includes a BBQ. We have a fair amount of work needed to complete more digitisation and cataloguing of our archive, plus some decisions to make to ensure its continuity into the future.

*Catherine Sampson*

### **Thatcham Historical Society**

Thatcham Historical Society enjoyed a strong start to 2025, beginning with a well-attended AGM in January. Our first talk of the year featured Dr. David Peacock, who guided us through the history of Medieval churches in West Berkshire. This was followed by a fascinating presentation from Adrian Doyle of Hillside House Honey, who spoke about beekeeping and its long history. Dr. Nick Young then explored the story of the "Thatcham Hundred," tracing its origins back to the Anglo-Saxon period and the beginnings of modern Thatcham. In May, Sue Ellis delivered an engaging talk on Alfred the Great, covering his life and the events surrounding his reign.

In September, Mark Thomas shared the story of Amy Johnson, and in October we welcomed Sarah Somerville with her talk "Shaw House: Berkshire's Hidden Gem". We concluded the year with a presentation on recent archaeological discoveries in Thatcham by West Berkshire Archaeologist Beth Asbury and Finds Liaison Officer Dr. Phil Smither.

Throughout the year, members have been updating the monumental inscriptions of Midgham Church, which are scheduled for publication in 2026. Work is also underway on revising the records for St Mary's Church, Thatcham, as well as preparing an updated edition of "Thatcham Over 2000 Years".

Looking ahead, 2026 promises to be an exciting year. We begin with our AGM on 26 January, followed by our first speaker meeting on 23 February, where Dr. David Peacock will discuss Tudor buildings around Newbury. We will also be including a guided visit to a local historic building and a local history walk.

*Dr. Nick Young, Vice-Chair*

## **Twyford & Ruscombe Local History Society**

This autumn has been one in which we held two speakers' evenings which provided some interesting contrasts.

In September Dr. Pihlens spoke about Littlecote Roman Villa, a hidden gem in our neighborhood. Well worth a visit to view and to have lunch or tea in the hotel in the grounds of which the Roman Villa is situated. He explained how it was discovered, and then deliberately lost, and finally rediscovered and brought back to life by a group of volunteers lead by Dr. Pihlens. At its centre is a distinguished mosaic which was in advance of its time. In our October talk Alan Copeland demonstrated the changing face of Reading over the past forty years. In an amazing series of photographs showing the impact of the IDR creation which was needed to cope with the post-war traffic chaos in the centre of the town. This compilation had been lovingly put together by Douglas Noyes. When he died, Alan was permitted by Mrs. Noyes to take on the mantle and give life to it. Those present at the talk who were familiar with old and new scenes were particularly affected by the scale of changes and the destruction of much social history.

In November Amanda Shora highlighted the history of folk music, using anecdotes and unaccompanied singing to illustrate a historical sweep of the music of ordinary people, rather than those of current elites with their sense of need for accuracy and formality. Our December speaker gave us a festive history of Christmas, enjoyed while members and guests eat a "bring and

share” feast.

We do try and feature places and locations nearby so that our members can follow up with visits themselves. We have also continued to publish our journal which is available in digital form for remote access to read and study. We continue to consult our members to gain feedback from all on how we can improve our offerings, and how best to increase our membership.

*Pamela Graddon, Secretary*

## **Wallingford Museum**

How do we know so much about Wallingford castle when it was all but demolished 400 years ago? How has the Market Place changed in the last hundred years? What happened to the brewing industry in the town? Just some of the local mysteries explored by an enthusiastic team of researchers from The Wallingford Historical and Archaeological Society and Wallingford Museum at a Research Study Day in November.

The team shared their investigative methods and discoveries with an audience of 50 people who came along to “Find Our Past”, an event held at the Methodist Church in the town centre. The day focused on the research methods used to explore Wallingford’s fascinating history. How documentary research in archives can be brought together with maps, pictures, oral history and archaeological evidence to form a richer picture of the past. The team showed that you don’t need to be an expert to carry out research into local history. The information is often there if you know where to look. You can unearth evidence and uncover clues to help you piece together stories about Wallingford itself, the people of the town and the lives they lived.

The day ended with a talk on finding the often “overlooked stories” of Wallingford, brought to life with case studies of children from the Union Workhouse, who they were, why they were there and what happened to them.

Agatha Christie, the celebrated “Queen of Crime Writers”, lived in Wallingford for 42 years. She would surely have enjoyed hearing about the diligent sleuthing which is gradually revealing more of the truth about our town’s intriguing past.

*Garry Elliott, Chair of Research Group*

## **Wargrave Local History Society**

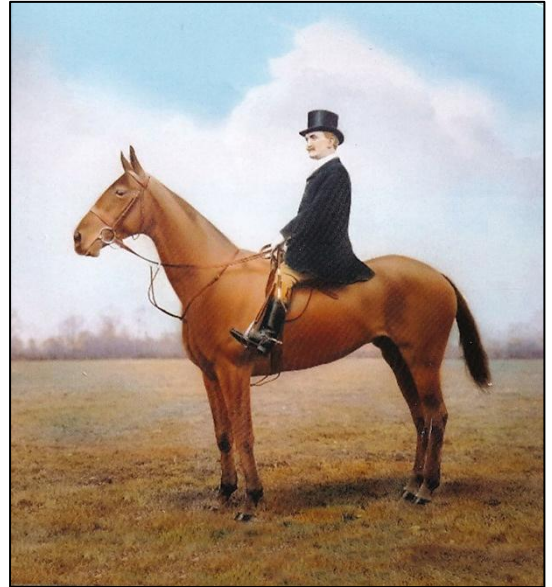
Sally Hughes recounted the history of the mill and theatre at nearby Sonning for Wargrave Local History Society’s September meeting. The history of the

site goes back for well over 900 years - 3 mills being recorded at Sonning in the Domesday Survey. Being timber built, mills are susceptible to fire, and a new one had to be built at Sonning in the 1300s and the building was replaced again in 1797 after another fire. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the mill was owned by the Witherington family, who supplied Huntley and Palmers' biscuit factory in Reading. Changes in the biscuit making industry led to Sonning mill being closed as a working mill in 1969. The mill lay empty for a while before Tim and Eileen Richards became interested. Tim was a civil engineer, and approaching retirement age it was suggested that he "find a little project". Meanwhile, their daughter, Sally, was studying at drama school in London. Having been to watch her at The Kings Theatre, which was a dinner/theatre, Eileen suggested that starting one could be the project that Tim might tackle. Whilst out looking for suitable premises "one July summer Sunday", waiting at the traffic lights by Sonning bridge, they saw the "For Sale" sign. They took a closer look at the dilapidated building - it was boarded up, but they broke in! On the top floor, they could see was the sky and pigeons. They decided to sell their house, and buy the mill. It took four years to convert, opening on 22 July 1982. It does not rely on grants, being funded by sales of tickets (the restaurant being important in this respect) and Sally told of the wide variety of productions that are put on to attract patrons.

The October meeting looked in the other direction, when Dr. Michael Redley, Chairman of the Henley Archaeological & Historical Group, explored the growth and modernisation of Henley in Victorian and Edwardian times. In earlier centuries, Henley had been an inland port on the River Thames, whilst the main turnpike road down Remenham Hill and across Henley Bridge brought trade to several large coaching inns. However, the arrival of the railway in 1857 had a dramatic effect, the loss of traditional activities such as hostelry, boatbuilding, etc causing economic hardship in the town, and many, especially the young, moved away for employment. The Town Corporation believed introducing the Regatta would enliven the town, but most visitors went direct from the station to the Regatta, as many still do. Much of the work available around Henley was provided by the great landed estates, but these tended to be closed up in winter, whilst many agricultural workers lived in insanitary conditions. To mitigate these changes, the Corporation encouraged the use of Henley as an inland resort and pleasant residential area for commuters, notably by developing housing on the south side of the town and a more effective sewage system. However, the town centre's narrow winding streets meant creating a new shopping area would be a major project, and Michael looked in detail at the changes this brought to Duke Street. Other developments in the town at this time included a new Congregational church, and a new Town Hall – the material from the old one being used to create a new home at Crazies Hill for the builder who had done the demolition work -

and Henley Mayor dealing with many of these projects - Charles Clements!

Local historian and author Caroline Piller's presentation to the November meeting considered the history of horse dealers in Reading in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, including the Irishman, Oliver Dixon (pictured). He came from a poor Irish farming family in County Mayo, who brought horses to sell in England. As a boy, Oliver's job was to ride them for buyers to see, which included a horse dealer from Reading, Michael Donovan. Oliver so impressed Michael that he offered to teach him the trade, and Oliver became highly regarded as having very good judgement of a horse's potential. After several



years he married Lucy, Michael Donovan's sister-in-law, took an increasing role in the business, and in 1894, after Michael had died, Oliver bought the business. He bought a large plot of ground off Crescent Road in Reading, and established substantial equestrian facilities there, patronised by his wealthy clients – even arranging by telegraph to meet them from the train. In 1911, when the Crown Prince of Germany was interested in buying a horse from him, Oliver took a “beautiful blood grey Irish horse” to Buckingham Palace for the Prince's inspection, and purchase. He maintained his connections in Ireland, with his supply of horses coming from the famous Irish horse fairs. His adverts noted that the horses he sold, which included hunters, chargers, harness horses, match pairs, ladies' hacks, cobs and polo ponies, were all “personally selected by Oliver Dixon”. The events of the First World War, however, created problems for the horse trade. Many men were being enlisted for military service, whilst the army still needed large numbers of horses for moving equipment (motor vehicles still being in their infancy). The effect was that by 1916, seven of the eight major horse dealers in Reading had closed down. It was Oliver's shrewd judgement that enabled his business to survive until he died in 1939. He was also an acknowledged expert horseman, and when peace returned and equestrian sports could be resumed, he took the opportunity – supplying not only English gentry but also European royalty. However, as well as his connections with the aristocracy, Oliver never forgot his humble Irish origins, and continued to provide generous support to what remained an impoverished community. Caroline's illustrated book “The Life and Times of Oliver Dixon, A Reading Horseman Remembered” includes much more on this unusual aspect of local history, and is available at Reading Museum.

December's meeting was our Christmas party, when members enjoyed the traditional home-made mince pies and mulled wine expertly prepared by Wendy Smith. During the evening, the society secretary took another look at some items from the society archives. Although these were, as on some previous occasions, postcard views of the village, this particular selection looked at the messages on the back more than the views on the front. They ranged in date from 1906 through to the 1930s, and were the equivalent of the email of today. It was even possible to send a postcard for somebody's birthday, and it would be received on the same day as posted!



Other messages give an insight into life at the time – catching an evening bus from Maidenhead to Hare Hatch and then happily walking the mile or so into Wargrave, or problems with the lights on a bicycle on the way home, girls working in service, at some of the local large houses, or mention of a “wire” (telegram) to announce the arrival of a friend's baby. Most of these cards were addressed to a Miss Viner – not a familiar village name, her family coming from Reading – but her descendants turned out to include Wargrave Local History Society's first Chairman!

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](mailto:blha@aldermastonhistory.uk))

## **Berkshire Archaeology Society**

Andrew Hutt ([chair@berksarch.co.uk](mailto:chair@berksarch.co.uk))

## **Berkshire Archaeological Research Group**

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

([roger@psrltd.demon.co.uk](mailto: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](mailto:secretary@berksfhs.org))

## **Berkshire Gardens Trust**

Fiona Hope: 23 St James Close, Pangbourne RG8 7AP [fiona.hope@btinternet.com](mailto:fiona.hope@btinternet.com)

## **Berkshire Historic Churches Trust**

John Pritchard ([secretary@berkschurchestrust.org.uk](mailto:secretary@berkschurchestrust.org.uk))

## **Berkshire Industrial Archaeology Group**

Jo Alexander-Jones ([secretary@biag.org.uk](mailto:secretary@biag.org.uk))

## **Berkshire Record Society**

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

([margaretsimons@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:margaretsimons@hotmail.co.uk))

## **Blewbury Local History Group**

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

([audreyrosettalong@gmail.com](mailto:audreyrosettalong@gmail.com))

## **Burnham Historians**

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

([burnhamhistorians@btinternet.com](mailto:burnhamhistorians@btinternet.com))

## **East Garston Local History Society**

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

([karen@pryer.com](mailto:karen@pryer.com))

## **East Ilsley Local History Society**

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

([info@eastilsleyhistory.com](mailto:info@eastilsleyhistory.com))

## **Eton Wick History Group**

Sue Evans: ([sueevanswindsor@tiscali.co.uk](mailto: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

([goringgaphistory@gmail.com](mailto:goringgaphistory@gmail.com))

## **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](mailto:jdlovelock@btinternet.com))

**History of Reading Society**

Vicki Chesterman: 7 Norman Rd, Caversham, Reading RG4 5JN – 07776 340923  
([historyofreadingsociety@yahoo.com](mailto:historyofreadingsociety@yahoo.com))

**Hungerford Historical Association**

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

**Hurley History Society**

David Burfitt: Nutwood, Mill Lane, Hurley SL6 5ND - 01628 823503  
([davidrburfitt@gmail.com](mailto:davidrburfitt@gmail.com))

**Longworth and District History Society**

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

**Maidenhead Archaeological and Historical Society**

Paul Seddon: 1 Vine Cottage, Stubbings Lane, Maidenhead SL6 6QN  
([paul@c21networks.co.uk](mailto:paul@c21networks.co.uk))

**Marcham Society**

Peter Blackmore: 2 Walnut Mews, Mill Rd, Marcham OX13 6NZ – 01865 391275  
([spblackmore@googlemail.com](mailto:spblackmore@googlemail.com))

**Middle Thames Archaeological & Historical Society**

David Kneller: 15 Vine Rd, Stoke Poges SL2 4DW - 07950 139309  
([sec.mtahs@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:sec.mtahs@yahoo.co.uk))

**Mortimer Local History Group**

Janet Munson: The Laurels, Ravenworth Rd, Mortimer RG7 3UD  
([munsonsinmortimer@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:munsonsinmortimer@yahoo.co.uk))

**Newbury District Field Club**

Bob Bosley: 7 Baxendales, Newbury RG14 7SA ([bobbosley1@outlook.com](mailto:bobbosley1@outlook.com))

**Oxfordshire Family History Society**

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

**Project Purley**

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

**Sonning & Sonning Eye History Society**

Heather Kay: 5 Augustfield, Charvil Lane RG4 6AF  
([kaydenis@googlemail.com](mailto:kaydenis@googlemail.com))

**Stanford in the Vale & District Local History Society**

Michael Macfarlane: 53 High St, Stanford in the Vale SN7 8NQ – 01367 710358  
([mmacfarlane1@beinternet.com](mailto:mmacfarlane1@beinternet.com))

**Swallowfield Local History Society**

Maggie Uttley: 2 Hornbeams, The Street, Swallowfield RG7 1QY ([kcuttley@aol.com](mailto:kcuttley@aol.com))

**Tadley and District History Society**

Carol Stevens: 5 Church St, Pamber Heath, Tadley RG26 3DP  
([tadshistory@googlemail.com](mailto:tadshistory@googlemail.com))

**Thatcham Historical Society**

Susan Ellis: Open View, New Road Hill, Midgham RG7 5RY  
([susancarveth@gmx.com](mailto:susancarveth@gmx.com))

**Theale Local History Society**

Graham Reeves: 52 Parkers Corner, Englefield, Reading RG7 5JR  
([thealehistory@btconnect.com](mailto:thealehistory@btconnect.com))

**Twyford & Ruscombe Local History Society**

Pamela Graddon ([pamela.graddon@gradients.co.uk](mailto:pamela.graddon@gradients.co.uk))

**Wargrave Local History Society**

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

**Windsor Local History Group**

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

**President** Joan Dils

**Vice-President** Prof E J Collins

## **Officers**

**Chairman** David Cliffe  
Email: [chairman@blha.org.uk](mailto:chairman@blha.org.uk)

**Treasurer** Dr David Lewis FCA, FSA  
Email: [treasurer@blha.org.uk](mailto:treasurer@blha.org.uk)

**Secretary** Jo Alexander-Jones  
Email: [secretary@blha.org.uk](mailto:secretary@blha.org.uk)

**Committee Members** Dr Jonathan Brown (Journal Editor)  
Email: [journal@blha.org.uk](mailto:journal@blha.org.uk)  
Jo Alexander-Jones (Newsletter Editor)  
Email: [newsletter@blha.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@blha.org.uk)  
Dave Osborne (Web Designer)  
Email: [webdesigner@blha.org.uk](mailto:webdesigner@blha.org.uk)  
Dr Margaret Simons (Newsletter Distributor)  
Ann Smith (Membership Secretary)  
Email: [membership@blha.org.uk](mailto:membership@blha.org.uk)

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:

|                   |                                                                                   |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Individual</b> | Individuals and couples living at the same address                                |
| <b>Family</b>     | Families living at the same address                                               |
| <b>Corporate</b>  | Local history societies and institutions, such as libraries, archives and museums |

2026 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          |