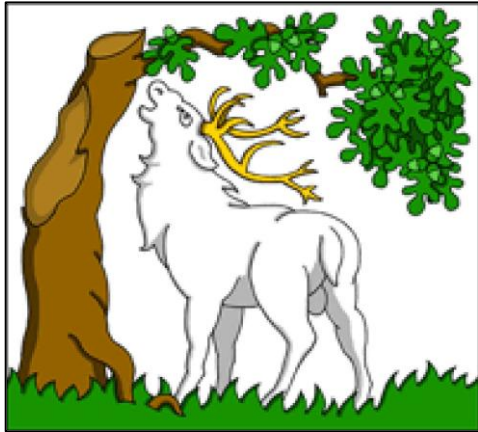


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Berkshire Local History Association



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May 2026

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.

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Chairman's Corner

For this year's AGM we reverted to the usual format – a Saturday in late March, tea and coffee on arrival, the formal meeting, a talk on the area in which we find ourselves, then lunch, and in the afternoon, a visit. It was disappointing that we didn't have as many joining us as usual, but apart from that the day was most enjoyable.

Those who arrived early at the Hedgerley Memorial Hall found the Chairman of the Hedgerley Historical Association, Peter Phippen, setting out the chairs, along with Julian Hunt, our speaker and guide. The main meeting went smoothly, with our President, Joan Dils, our Secretary, Jo Alexander-Jones, and myself behind the table at the front.

The talk on the history of Hedgerley was enjoyed, and illustrated with slides. Perhaps it was a pity that we couldn't fit in a walk around Hedgerley, to see some of the buildings that had been mentioned – especially because it was a fine day. The lunch was good, with plenty for everyone.

The visit to the church at Langley in the afternoon was on the way home for most of us. Julian, our guide, busied himself setting up a projector and screen. Because the old parish library, attached to the church, is small, we divided into two, with one half listening to the presentation on the history of Langley Marish



and the lords of the manor, while the others went up the steps and through the lord of the manor's pew to the Kedermister library. The librarian, whose name I didn't catch, told us about the richly decorated room dating from the early 17th century, and showed us some of its treasures. I couldn't imagine two better guides – Julian and the librarian.

It was noticeable that one of them spoke of the Kedermister family, and the other of the Kederminster family, and someone naturally asked which name was correct. It appeared that when the family was around, it was Kedermister, but in later centuries, "Kederminster" became normal, and that the name had nothing to do with the Worcestershire town of Kidderminster.

I should like to thank the members of the Hedgerley Historical Society, and members of our own committee, for making the day happen and run smoothly.

Looking to the future, on 27 June the Association has arranged a local history walk round the Whiteknights Park Campus of the University of Reading,

especially appropriate this year, when the university celebrates its centenary. The campus includes interesting buildings, an ornamental lake, and a botanical garden, so there will be a lot to see.

Rather more imminent is the closure of the Central Library in Reading, on Saturday 9th May. It opened in 1985, and will re-open on a new site in Bridge Street, just to the south of St. Mary's Butts during the summer. This is a major collection of local history material for the town and round about, and many will miss having access for a few months. When we can return, it will be interesting to see the changes, especially if, like me, you have been knocking around for a good number of years. When it was in the Victorian buildings in Blagrove Street, the local studies collection was on closed access, meaning that you had to search the printed catalogue (and supplements), order items, and wait for them to be brought to you. Some things change for the better!

David Cliffe, Chairman BLHA

A Word from the Editor

As David so eloquently described above, our 2026 AGM was held at Hedgerley then we visited the Kedermister library. I would like to add my thanks to the Hedgerley Historical Society for inviting us and then facilitating our day, to Julian Hunt for his excellent narratives and to Jane Sculpher, the librarian at Kedermister. Not forgetting to thank my fellow committee members who planned and organized the event so smoothly. I have certainly enjoyed visiting across the county at these annual events, meeting our dedicated membership and always learning new things about our county's history.

Notices and Articles

Hosting the BLHA AGM

As those of you who come to our AGMs will know, we do try and vary the location of this annual event moving around the county each year to represent our membership. It is something we have done for several years now, and they have been very genial occasions. They offer members the opportunity to showcase their local areas, including walks, tours of buildings and visit those hidden away gems like the Kedermister library, present aspects of research and give talks to likeminded individuals. If you think your society would like to host our AGM, please do get in touch with our secretary if you have any questions. The BLHA covers the cost of hall hire, refreshments and will subsidise lunches to members should catering be available. We look forward to hearing from you.

100 years of Reading of University – a centenary walk

The BLHA are offering members the chance to join a free 2-hour walk of the Whiteknights campus on Saturday 27 June at 10:30, in celebration of the charter awarded to the university 100 years ago this year. BLHA committee members, Johnathan Brown and Margaret Simons, will offer the opportunity to explore the history of the Whiteknights estate and will talk about how its role evolved as the home of Reading University. The university campus is easily accessed by bus and parking is available. If you are interested, please book your place by emailing our membership secretary Ann Smith at membership@blha.org.uk. Details will be sent nearer the time. We look forward to seeing you there.

Berkshire Heritage Fair

This online fair will take place on Saturday 18 July between 10.00-12.00 and then 14.00-15.00. It will be on Zoom and hosted jointly by the Berkshire Family History Society and the Berkshire Local History Association. Local and family history groups, museums, archives, libraries and heritage organisations will be taking part including The History of Reading Society, Berkshire Industrial Archaeology Group and the Windsor Local History Group. The aim is to attract people from anywhere in the world who are interested in the historic county of Berkshire. If you would like more information, please contact Ann Smith at membership@blha.org.uk.

Pulsometer 125: Engineering Excellence at the Heart of Reading since 1901

A remarkable new display now open to the public is shining a spotlight on Reading's untold engineering heritage, revealing how a factory on Oxford Road helped shape world industry - and telling the extraordinary human stories behind it.

Marking 125 years of Pulsometer Engineering, today known as SPP Pumps, the display explores how a Reading-based company became a global force in innovation, scientific research and wartime production. Drawing on rare artefacts from Reading Museum, the SPP archives and private collections, it reveals a story of ingenuity, skill and civic pride rooted firmly in the town.

Among the most striking highlights are artefacts connected to Trooper Frederick Potts VC, one of Reading's most celebrated sons. Before the First



World War, Potts worked for seven years as a fitter at Pulsometer Engineering. In 1915, during the Gallipoli campaign, he carried out an extraordinary act of bravery, dragging a severely wounded comrade to safety under enemy fire using a shovel, an act that earned him the Victoria Cross and the nickname “the hero with the shovel.” On display is the original telegram sent by the company to Potts congratulating him on his award, a powerful reminder of the close bond between the town, its workforce and those who served.

Pulsometer engineering proved vital during both World Wars. Objects such as a World War II fire-watch helmet, worn by staff protecting the Oxford Road works during air raids, speak to the acts of bravery carried out on the home front. Photographs document visits by members of the Royal Family and the role of workers placed in reserved occupations, whose skills were deemed essential to the war effort. “The Potts material is an extraordinary reminder that industrial history is ultimately about people,” said a museum spokesperson. “This is not just a story of machinery, it’s about skill, sacrifice and shared pride.”

The display also features a rich range of engineering artefacts telling the wider Pulsometer story: from early photographs of the factory’s formative years and tools used by skilled foundry workers, to export plates that trace Reading-made technology to every corner of the world. A rare Geryk ‘Duplex’ vacuum pump, recently rediscovered in Australia and returned to Reading Museum in 2025 thanks to support from SPP, highlights the firm’s international role in cutting-edge scientific research.

Arriving in Reading in 1901, Pulsometer Engineering became one of Reading’s longest-standing manufacturers and a major employer in west Reading. Generations of local families passed through its gates, contributing to a culture of craftsmanship that continues today, with SPP Pumps still operating from Theale as an international award-winning business at the forefront of modern British engineering.

Compact but rich in storytelling, the display offers visitors a fresh way to see Reading, as a place where local engineering skills powered global change, and where a factory workforce could include both master craftsmen and a Victoria Cross hero.

The Pulsometer 125 display is open to the public and free to visit. It will be running until 12 September 2026. For more details see [Pulsometer 125: Engineering Excellence at the Heart of Reading since 1901 | Reading Museum](#)

Brendan Carr, Community Engagement Curator, Reading Library

Windsor and the Bayeux Tapestry

This September, and for the first time in over 1,000 years, the Bayeux tapestry – or more accurately, the Bayeux embroidery – is to go on display in the British Museum. A needlework that charts the Norman version of the eleventh century dispute concerning the rightful heir to the English throne, a matter hotly contested and that consumed the most part of a century to resolve. The death of king Edward ‘the Confessor’ in 1065 brought the Normans, the (English) Anglo-Saxons and the powerful Scandinavians into armed conflict, believing that God’s will could be known through battle.



Scene 25 from the Bayeux tapestry: The ailing Edward the Confessor, receives earl Harold, c. 1065

Windsor, of course, played no part in this matter, but its central figure, King Edward was closely associated with the pre-conquest manor. According to the sources, his attention had been drawn to the place because it offered opportunities for sports – hunting was his favourite pastime. Admittedly, the most explicit of these, including those

talking of a supposed royal ‘palace’ at the royal site, Old Windsor (then known as Windlesora), have since been proved forgeries. But doubtless this place counted as a special royal domain, a territory of particular kingly importance. Interestingly, the earliest documentary reference to Windlesora comes in 1061, close in date to when Edward is depicted in the Bayeux tapestry. Here he is shown as an old man with long beard, clearly not the muscular huntsman that might come to mind if his Windsor estate was held solely for the purpose of recreation. Rather, it appears Windlesora fulfilled other less energetic purposes, most obviously as a nodal point between river and (arduous) road journeys, a place where travel between the west Saxon capital of Winchester and Edward’s new palace at Westminster were necessarily, but agreeably broken. By 1061 this site must have been in royal use for some time, and on account of this, it was deemed an appropriate place to announce senior church appointments to the royal court. Held in some affection by the monarch, the Windsor manor also features in Edward’s will, where it is gifted to his abbey of Westminster, his mausoleum, as part of its foundation endowment. This abbey formed a component in the new national centre of government based in Westminster, recently transferred from London, the city then being abandoned to commerce alone, as it remains to the present day.

But if Edward’s Thames-side resort held special royal affection, then

historically it remains something of an enigma. Low-lying and prone to winter flooding, this was an unlikely place for any significant sized settlement, let alone one attracting royal patronage. It had poor defensive qualities and no discernible topographic advantages. Indeed, investigation of the site's eleventh century archaeological record suggests it was not only short lived but had little to distinguish it from any other Thames-site settlement, lacking elite connections. Tentative archaeological evidence indicates that this site hosted an elite community in the late seventh century, but this collapsed in the ninth, possibly following a Viking raid. It was perhaps memory of this settlement that influenced its Edwardian (?) revival in the early eleventh. But this possibility assumes that its population could be drawn from an existing nearby community, since forested east Berkshire was hardly inhabited.

That there had indeed been a significant such relocation is suggested by the Old English – that is, the pre-eleventh century – descriptive field names attached to land adjacent to the (later) castle site, three miles to Windlesora's north-west, these ancient names surviving in medieval legal documentation. Collectively, they confirm that this elevated site once hosted a sizeable, organised and complex Anglo-Saxon community, but unlike Windlesora, one that is not mentioned in the chronicles. The topography of this later castle site was much more appropriate to elite settlement than Windlesora, because it offered unique defensive qualities and a vantage point that overlooked the entire Thames valley. Reason to think that the Confessor was not the first monarch to be attracted to the Windsor estate, but merely the first to have a documented attachment.

If this chronology is correct then present-day Windsor merely returned to its earlier site in c. 1109, when 'New' Windsor is first mentioned in the sources, rather than originating at Windlesora. All of which disturbs the accepted evolution of the names attached to Windsor's two communities, 'New' and 'Old'. The prefix 'Old' was added to Windsor (Windlesora) in the late twelfth century to distinguish it from the separate and growing castle-side settlement, called until 1972, New Windsor, the likely oldest Windsor site. The 'Old' and 'New' are thus the wrong way round.

In national terms, however, and in 1066, Windsor was a place of, at best, secondary importance, insufficiently well-known to boast any direct part in contemporary politics. But this may be an injustice. The first third of the Bayeux tapestry concerns William's violent exploits before 1066, and if, rather than stopping at Hastings, far from the end of the invasion story, it had continued to depict William's subsequent, and often bloody, suppression of the English, then Windsor castle may well have made an appearance.

This becomes a possibility as the documentary visibility of Windsor increases

dramatically in the early years of Norman rule. Evidence that its long attachment to royalty was purposefully adopted by the Conqueror to bolster his claim in the succession struggle. The estate, very expensively repossessed from Westminster abbey, is bracketed together with much larger and seemingly more important royal sites, such as Gloucester, Winchester and Westminster. It was intensively used for royal gatherings, routinely at Whitsun, important in cementing Norman authority; this further underlined in c. 1070 with the construction of its truly massive castle. The tapestry, however, only tells a fraction of this extended 'take-over' story, one that actually continued for more than twenty years after 1066. Indeed, the tapestry's carefully curated omissions are what make it such an intriguing source of history (perhaps read, propaganda), when compared with documentary sources, although these too have their problems. Its truncated story carefully overlooks any fact that might inconveniently undermine the Norman's claim.

The most blatant of its omissions concerns the true circumstance of 1066, and the two battles that preceded Hastings. These included the battle of Stamford Bridge where, against all odds, Harold defeated his brother Tostig and powerful Scandinavian forces, a monumental victory that would usually be taken as godly confirmation of earl Harold's rightful claim. A muddying of the historical waters, that the tapestry's likely patron, Bishop Odo (William the Conqueror's half-brother), further compounds with the base assertion behind the Norman's claim that King Edward had no legitimate Anglo-Saxon heir. The young Edgar Aethling, the grandson of Edward's half-brother Edmund Ironside, was not only legitimate, and perhaps championed by Tostig, hence Stamford Bridge, but his blood claim was far superior to that of the Conqueror, based merely on Earl Harold's supposed vow to stand aside from the English succession. But why would powerful Harold make such a promise to a foreign ruler? The tapestry gives no answer.

Amazingly, the tapestry has survived almost intact, mostly because it was little known (or unrolled) before its rediscovery in the early eighteenth century. Just the final three scenes are thought to have been lost, these depicting William enthroned, having vanquished all others with God's help, balancing its first scene, showing king Edward similarly all-powerful. But here again, a distortion of eleventh-century reality. William's ultimate victory was far from certain in c. 1077 when the tapestry was made. Well into the 1090s viable threats of particularly Scandinavian invasion continued, a danger that lay behind the 1086 Domesday survey, ordered to determine the precise capacity of the Norman's new English possession to wage (and finance) war on their behalf.

The Bayeux tapestry is a remarkable historical document, not only because of its intended political message, but for much more besides, including

information about contemporary dress, castle building and patronage. It is well worth an informed visit when the opportunity arises, armed, of course, with a sceptical assessment of its politics, but warmed by its indirect links to Windsor.

Dr David Lewis

Editorial Note: a Victorian replica of the Bayeux tapestry is on permanent display at Reading Museum.

News from the Royal Berkshire Archives

If you have not already done so, do pop in to see our new exhibition, 'Fallen: The Clewer House of Mercy 1848-1954'. This tells the story of the House of Mercy and the Community of St John Baptist which ran it. It will be open until 26 June and accompanies the publication of the first register of the Penitents at the House of Mercy by Berkshire Record Society, due this spring.



Building work on our extension will continue until next spring. Apologies in advance to visitors for any noise and disruption. You must now park in the staff car park along the west wall of the building – remember to collect a parking permit at reception when you arrive! Yeomanry House next door has now been sold and is also undergoing building work.

We have recently catalogued the papers of Muriel Longhurst of Wokingham, a teacher, which form a fascinating collection (D/EX2840). A highlight is a set of copies of her letters to a friend in Singapore which chronicle the 'Big Freeze' of the early months of 1963 – read all about it in our [blog](#).

We have been given a nice set of plans of Messrs H & G Simonds' Brewery, Bridge Street, Reading, 1886-1975 (D/EX2996).

A considerable amount of material has been added to the archives of Wallingford Relief in Need Charity (formerly Wallingford Municipal Charities), and the constituent charities, 1895-2005 (D/QWA). They show how charities changed in the second half of the 20th century, such as moving from handing over physical sacks of coal to making contributions to gas bills. They included almshouses for the elderly, support for the poor (cash, heating, and clothing/bedding), and education and apprenticeship. One even provided for the maintenance, repair and lighting of Wallingford Bridge.

Additions have been made to the archives of the Berkshire (later Berkshire and Oxfordshire) Farmers' Union (D/EX1413). This includes an almost complete set of their yearbooks, 1919-1986, and continues the set of magazines up to 1983, giving an insight into farmers' interests over a period of great agricultural change.

We were fascinated by the memoir of Mary Macintyre, nee Fairbairn, a London girl who trained as a mental health nurse at Berkshire Mental Institution in the 1930s (D/EX3077). She wrote about the training, and her own and fellow nurses' private lives, and adds anecdotal colour to what can sometimes seem dry records.

A small but interesting collection has been received for the Cook family of Reading, basket makers, 1818-20C(D/EX3091).

We have received a photograph album of the activities of the Berkshire Royal



Horse Artillery Ammunition Column in Aden, 1915 (D/EX3088). Photographs of the 250th Reading Anti-Aircraft Battery R (TA) taken for Illustrated magazine in c. 1940 show us a forgotten side of the Second World War, with images of the men on and off duty: building defences, firing the anti-aircraft guns, and even asleep in bunks (D/EX2934).

We were pleased to receive a photograph and set of slides recording the last day the Reading trolley buses ran in 1968 (D/EX2941). An interesting recent purchase was a notebook compiled by Walter Rivers, a 19-year-old journalist (and later editor and proprietor) of the Reading Observer in 1893 (D/EZ228). It includes a fascinating article on 'life in a newspaper office'.

A couple of miscellaneous collections we have purchased include interesting insights into disputes around the church. One (in D/EZ227) is a declaration signed in 1736 by thirteen Lambourn landowners and tenants. The wealthy Thomas Garrard claimed to be entitled to tithes from the year's second mowing of hay. Everyone else declared his claim to be 'contrary to all law, custom and usage'. The signatories contributed to a defence fund for a lawsuit against one man who had refused to pay, fearing it would be a precedent used against them. It would of course be another century before tithes were commuted, and two before the tithe rent charges were completely abolished. The other is an arbitration agreement relating to use of a particular pew in the chapel of St. Andrew and St. Mary Magdalene in Maidenhead in 1608. The

pew in question had historically belonged to the warden, bridgemen and burgesses of the borough, but it had been taken over by two women, Margaret, wife of John Davis and Elizabeth, wife of Thomas Awstin. Various lawsuits ensued, with allegations of assault and battery by the women and their husbands, and those who disputed their claim. The couples were evicted from the pew and relegated to the next two seats below it (D/EZ230). One of our [recent highlights](#) took a look at a similar pew dispute in Warfield in 1677.

Students from Reading University have spent some time exploring a fascinating Georgian recipe book held here (D/EZ224). Their findings have been published on our blog pages: [A Georgian Cookbook Mystery](#) and [Homemade Georgian Winter Cheese](#).

Lisa Spurrier, Archivist

Cataloguing Collections to Save Mill History

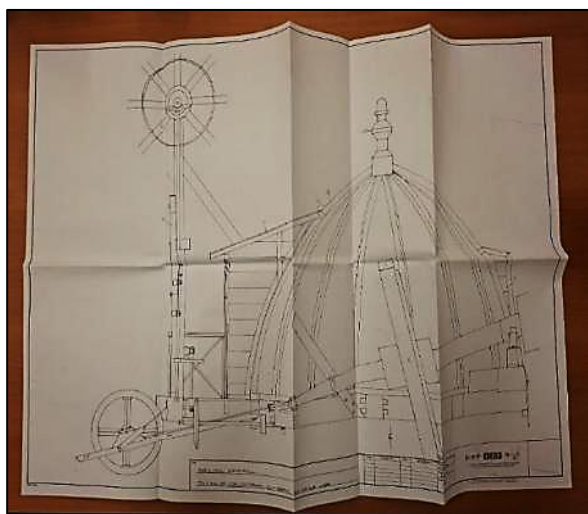
In the modern day, a millwright is more likely to refer to a professional craftsman who installs, maintains, and repairs machinery or heavy equipment. However, the term was historically used to describe someone who built, installed, or repaired mills. Just like the number of mills in the United Kingdom, the number of millwrights has also declined. The millwrighting profession has been put on the Heritage Craft Association (HCA) RED list for traditional crafts in 2019. There are about fourteen active millwrights in the country where at least twenty millwrights are needed at any given time to pass on the trade. However, as traditional mills such as windmills and watermills increasingly fall into disuse and disrepair, the skills of a millwright become ever-the-more vital to preserve these heritage structures.

To contribute to sustaining the millwrighting profession, the Mills Archive Trust is currently cataloguing four of its major millwrighting collections with the hopes of improving access to millwrighting information. The Trust has obtained funding from the National Archives' Archives Revealed project to hire a project archivist to catalogue the collections of Rex Wailes, Vincent Pargeter, Luke Bonwick, and Owlsworth IJP (now Owlsworth Conservation Ltd).

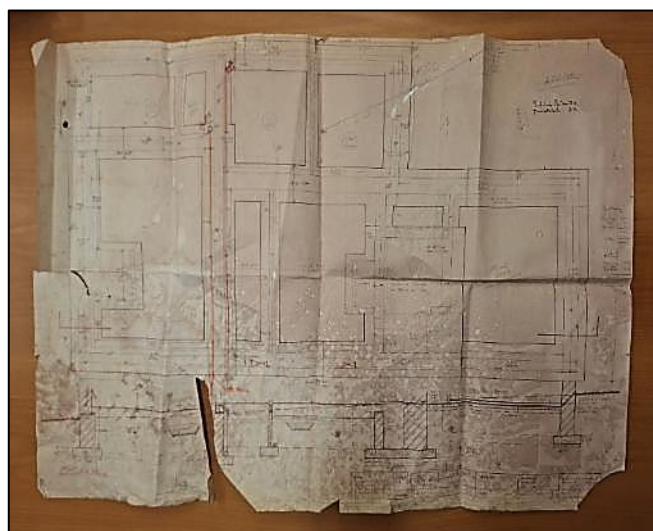
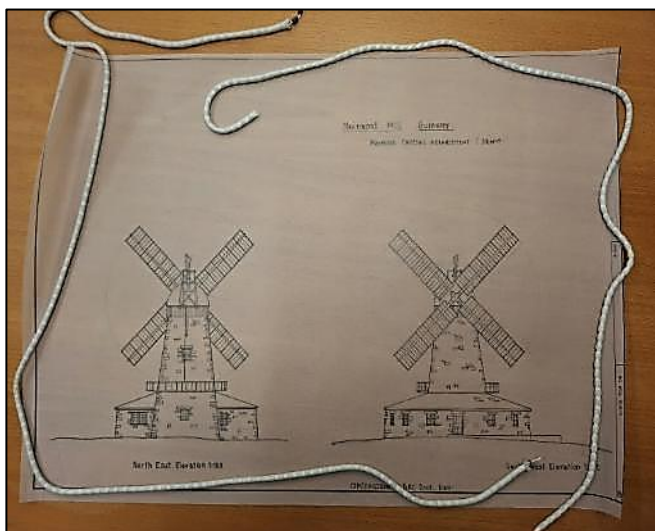
Three of the collections are personal collections from mill historians and millwrights. Reginald "Rex" Wailes (1901-1986) was an engineer who had an interest in industrial archaeology. He collected many technical drawings, prints, and ephemera of mills, some of which have been long destroyed and demolished. Vincent Pargeter (1943-2015) was a millwright with forty-three years' experience. He died suddenly in 2015 after a short illness, which was a huge loss for the milling community. Luke Bonwick is a current millwright

who has kindly donated his collection to the Mills Archive Trust. These collections constitute an invaluable source of technical and cultural knowledge.

The fourth collection, Owlsworth's, is from a Reading-based company that specialises in the 'care and repair of historic structures'. Owlsworth has repaired windmills and watermills in various regions of England, such as Bradwell Windmill in Milton Keynes and Brixton Windmill in London. They have also undertaken international projects, such as the restoration of the Morgan Lewis sugar mill in Barbados, which is one of the two surviving sugar mills in the Caribbean. The organisational basis of the collection gives insight into the workings of a millwrighting company.



A glance at the Owlsworth collection in the Mills Archive Trust reveals rolled and flat drawings of windmill structures. While most of these plans date back to the 1990s to the 2000s, some drawings date back to the 1970s. The older the drawings are, the more likely they are to be in poor condition. Left is a section of the cap of Bradwell Windmill. Below are the Norimont Mill in Guernsey (Dec 2001) and the Alton Millhouse foundations (Sep 1973).



The collection also includes folders of mill restoration projects that Owlsworth has undertaken. These folders usually include reports on the mill before and after restoration and plans for restoration. They may also contain research about the historical context of the mill, such as oral history interviews with mill owners and workers. These restoration projects span the length and breadth of England, but they are commonly based in neighbouring counties, such as

Oxfordshire and Greater London.

Cataloguing the Owlsworth Collection preserves the contributions of Reading and Berkshire towards the conservation of mill history. The Mills Archive Trust, situated in Reading, looks forward to making Owlsworth's collection accessible to the wider public.

Hei-Ann Tsui, Project Archivist, Mills Archive Trust

News from Friends of Reading Abbey

Our spring lecture, in memory of our co-founder Professor Brian Kemp, was held at St James's RC church, Forbury Road, on 14 March 2026. It was given by Tony Mcaleavy, from the Friends of Malmesbury Abbey, on 'Patronage, Scholarship and Scandal: the story of Malmesbury Abbey', with an attendance of over seventy. Later in the year, Tony will be our guide when our summer outing will be to Malmesbury Abbey on 22 July. It will be an all-day coach trip for members.

Seven of us joined up with Reading museum volunteers to clean the information boards and signage in the Abbey Precinct in March. There are images on our [Facebook page](#).

The British Library (BL) loaned the original medieval manuscript with the music and words of the 'Sumer is Icumen in' canon to Reading Museum for two months. This manuscript is the earliest-known printed record of noted English vernacular music. The music appears in the Reading Abbey document (London BL Harley 978) which is a mixed volume containing musical, calendrical, medical and literary texts. The canon manuscript dates to the mid-thirteenth century. Reading Museum did exceptionally well to get the document.

We are offering two walks in Reading's Walks Festival: Caversham Pilgrimage Trail (13 May) and Reading Town Centre Heritage Trail (16 May).

On 22 May a members coffee morning will be held in the Boyes Turner offices in Abbot's House, where local historian and author Malcolm Summers will promote his new book on 'Dr Hurry and Reading Abbey'.

At Reading's Water Fest on 27 June, we will have our usual stand and display in the Abbey Ruins. Our AGM and autumn lecture will take place on 31 October at the Abbey Baptist Church. The lecture will be given by Dr Harriet Lyon, University of York, on 'Memories of the Dissolution'. This lecture is open to the public, and free.

John Painter, Secretary

Society Contributions

Berkshire Family History Society

By the time you read this, and after two years of planning and hundreds of hours of volunteer time, we will have finally moved into our new premises. We officially said goodbye to Reading Central Library at the end of April, having enjoyed eight and a half years there. We enjoyed being next door to the local studies library and working alongside the friendly library team, and whilst sad that this chapter of our history has come to an end, we are excited to start the one ahead. And of course, we will continue to keep in close contact with the library and wish them every success in their new premises when they reopen in the summer.

Our new home is a ground floor suite of offices in the Reading University London Road Campus. The premises gives us a light and airy Research Room, separate events area, kitchen, toilets, and admin and storage areas. Our new landlords are Reading University, and we are looking forward to building a close relationship with them. There are good public transport links to our new Centre and free parking at weekends and in the evenings.

Unpacking and preparing the Centre for reopening will take some time but we hope to reopen as soon as possible. Our website will have the up-to-date position. In the meantime, our new address, should you need to write to us is Berkshire Family History Society, Ground Floor, L14 London Road Campus, London Road, Reading RG1 5AQ.

In March, we published another sixty data downloads of parish register baptism transcriptions from across Berkshire. These are published in PDF format and available to buy from our website. The order is fulfilled immediately upon payment. Of the new parish transcriptions published, probably the most significant are those for Newbury St Nicolas, owing to the poor condition of some of its early registers, rendering them very difficult to read. Transcribing and checking these was a long and painstaking process, involving ultraviolet light lamps, but we think that the end result is about as good as it's possible to get. Some of St Nicolas' later registers contain some useful extra information, not usually included by ministers, such as the cause of death, making them particularly important.

Our events programme continues to be busy, and we have now settled into our new venue of the Abbey Church, Abbey Square in Reading for our Centre talks programme. Our visits programme continues to expand to new places of interest. In the winter months, for obvious reasons, these have tended to be church tours and indoor venues, but now that spring has arrived there are

more guided walks on offer. Over the coming months visits are in place to Caversham Chalk Mines, Shottesbrooke Church and the former Fair Mile Hospital.

Catherine Sampson, Chairman

Berkshire Industrial Archaeology Group

We kicked off 2026 looking at Bracknell before the new town giving us details of the history which was sadly swept away by the more recent changes, and we stayed around Bracknell for our next talk on the railways of Bracknell Forest before the First World War.

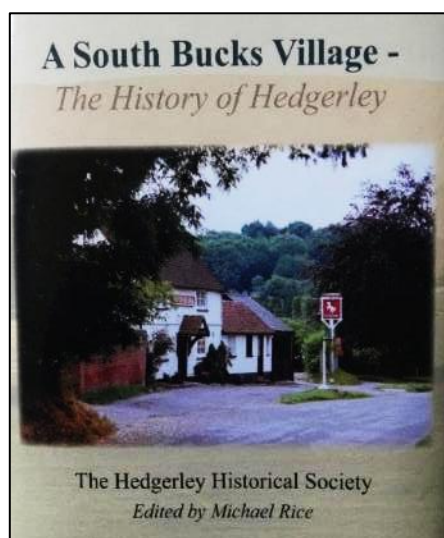
Our chair continued his comprehensive walk programme along the waterways of the county, this time along the Oxford canal and part of the Thames Path, a chance to get out and experience Industrial Archaeology outdoors.

March saw a very interesting talk about the history of AWE as it celebrates its 75th anniversary, followed by Ann Smith taking us through a 'hundred years of shopping in Reading' in April – we reminisced on shops long gone that brought back memories of how different things were then when there were specialist shops like a butcher and a baker on the High Street.

Jo Alexander-Jones, Secretary

Hedgerley Historical Society

Our vibrant local history society based in the pretty South Bucks village of Hedgerley is celebrating its 50th Anniversary this year. Founded in 1976, the society continues to thrive, with about 250 members. It holds monthly meetings on a Wednesday evening through most of the year, together with additional meetings on a Saturday and a rich programme of special events.



In March this year it hosted two special talks, each with over eighty people in attendance in Hedgerley memorial hall. The first marked the launch of our new book 'A South Bucks Village – The History of Hedgerley'. Published to coincide with our anniversary year, the book has been two years in the planning. But its story really begins forty-six years ago when the first edition was published, under the editorship of Michael Rice (soon after the birth of the society itself). He was an early (and very young!) member of the society, later its chairman, and now our President. Remarkably, Michael has

edited the subsequent editions as well, including this, the latest. The new book builds on its predecessors but incorporates considerable new research, some of it simply the product of new scholarship, but some the result of new technologies not available forty-six years ago, such as LiDAR. A number of new chapters have been written by Julian Hunt, the renowned local historian and author and one of the society's most popular speakers. Another chapter on the history of brickmaking in Hedgerley has been added by Kevin Langford, one of the society's committee members and a history teacher in one of our local schools. The result is a triumph. Members of the society subscribed to about hundred copies in advance. The confidence that this gave us, combined with generous financial support from Stoke Park, the British Association for Local History and Burnham Beeches Rotary, meant that we could invest in high production values. Most importantly, the depth and extent of the research means that few comparable villages in England can boast as thorough a work of local history. And for those of us with an interest in history and who believe that it is often best understood through a patchwork of local histories – from the 'bottom up' – I feel that we've contributed a very important piece in the jigsaw of the story of our collective past.

The second talk was a lecture from Philippa Langley, famous for her discovery of the remains of Richard III in a Leicester car park. Her talk was on her research into the fate of the so-called 'princes in the Tower', Edward V and his brother Richard. Long assumed to have been murdered on the orders of their uncle, her research argues that they survived and mounted invasions to reclaim the throne during the reign of Henry VII. The two claimants known to us in our school days as the 'impostors' Perkin Warbeck and Lambert Simnel were indeed who they claimed to be. It was a fascinating talk and contained a wealth of detailed research. And here I would encourage those who might approach this subject with a large dose of scepticism, to maintain an open mind. There is such an enormous cognitive dissonance for all of us who thought we knew something as 'fact' and are being asked to revise our opinions that we are reluctant to change our minds. Having listened to her talk and since read her excellent book 'The Princes in the Tower', it is clear to me that this research cannot be dismissed lightly and deserves serious engagement.

If you would like to join the Hedgerley Historical Society, or if you would like to purchase a copy of the History of Hedgerley (£25), please contact our secretary John Lovelock at jdlovelock@btinternet.com.

Peter Phippen, Chairman

The History of Reading Society

Our December talk, transmitted via Zoom, was given by Robin Kent, Group Leader of the 89th Scouts, Emmer Green. He called the talk 'Chalk, Bricks and Scouts,' and the importance of the Scouts became apparent as it progressed.

The chalk mines were under the part of Caversham known as Emmer Green. Two mines are known – there may be more. The more northerly mine is now known as the Scout Mine. Its extent became obvious when the village hall on the corner of Peppard Road and Kiln Road subsided into a void overnight, and investigations were carried out. The landowner sold, for a very small sum, areas of land that couldn't be built upon, to several local organisations, including the Scouts, and the Scouts have hung on to their land – and have explored the mines below, and had them made safe for visitors. Students from the University of Reading have also been involved in surveying and recording.

The southern mine is known as the Hanover Mine. When building the sheltered housing known as Wordsworth Court, the Hanover developers were made aware of the underground workings when one of their excavators suddenly disappeared into the void. Investigations resulted in concrete being sprayed into the hole below Peppard Road to prevent further subsidence.

Mr. Kent explained the formation of the chalk, and the bands of flints, about three feet apart, which were obvious on his underground photographs.

The mines were used in conjunction with a brickworks, which was on the site between the Peppard and Kiln Roads. Brick-making in the area has been recorded from around 1480 onwards, and the mining of chalk from 1722. Clay could be dug nearby, which went hand in hand with brick-making, and mining the chalk and flint. The chalk was burnt in the kilns to produce quicklime, which made mortar, whiting, and whitewash, and was used for whitening the sailcloth manufactured in the Katesgrove area of Reading, and used by farmers as a soil improver. The flints were used for paving roads and footpaths. These are still obvious, here and there, as are old houses in the area which were almost certainly built of bricks from here. The works was at its busiest around 1890, when it employed around two hundred men, and ran a steam lorry. It was in decline in the 20th century, and closed soon after the end of the Second World War.

During that war, part of the mines was used by Reading Borough Council to store some of the most valuable objects from the Museum and Art Gallery, and some of its most valuable archives. The bombing of the town centre was feared. (The establishment of a County Record Office was some years in the future.) Also in the early years of the war, when enemy invasion seemed likely, an operations centre was established down there, its whereabouts known to

only a few. In the event of invasion, a few selected members of the Home Guard would live down there, to emerge by night and surprise the enemy. Two underground Nissen huts are still in situ. When the invasion scare receded, the mines were used for the storage of emergency food supplies – the packaging they arrived in is still there.

Another point of interest is the bats which roost there in the winter. At least five species have been recorded. They enter by the old entrance, which cannot now be accessed by humans, and visits to the mines are organised so as not to disturb them.

The talk ended with an account of the graffiti in the mines, which span four centuries. Perhaps the Society might help in listing them, identifying the people, and suggesting why they might have been in the mine. Among the better known are Dr. Richard Valpy, the Headmaster of Reading School, and William McIlroy, the owner of the department store who was Mayor in 1941. And maybe we shall be able to organise a visit to the mine for members. Access these days is by special arrangement, via a vertical ventilation shaft, about seventy feet deep. Visitors are lowered down on a belay, but must leave the mine by climbing a vertical steel ladder with about eighty rungs – so not for the unfit or faint-hearted. The talk was greatly enjoyed.

The first talk of the New Year, again online, was given by Bill King – ‘A Walk along the Thames from Pangbourne to Marlow,’ illustrated by photographs. In fact the walk must have happened in several stages, and the talk was one of seven, describing the course of the Thames from its source to the Thames Barrier, a distance of 184 miles. The walking was done by Bill and his wife, who live in a village near Cirencester and the source of the river.

It was interesting that Bill obviously thought of the Thames as having east and west banks, where people living in Reading thought of them as north and south banks. He pointed out that near the source, there was Cotswold limestone available for building, but by the time you had descended to Pangbourne, dressed stone was hard to come by, and churches were built largely of flint. There were a number of good photographs of flint churches.

Inevitably, much of what we heard in the commentary was already familiar to the audience. In the questions and comments that followed the presentation, audience members were able to provide updates here and there – for example regarding Mapledurham House and Mill, the Horse Bridge near Marsh Lock at Henley, and the Rainbow Bridge at Temple. On the other hand, there must have been photographs of places, buildings and things that audience members had missed during their travels. For myself, I would now like to visit the church at Hurley, and see the Anglo-Saxon wooden cross, and I was

interested to hear about the history of Danesfield, now a hotel but an aerial reconnaissance centre for the R.A.F. in the Second World War.

Our speaker (and photographer) had given us an enjoyable evening, during which I would guess everyone was pleased to revisit old haunts, and everyone learned something new.

For February, our Secretary, Vicki Chesterman, had put together a second picture quiz, via Zoom. Over the years, the Society has received a number of photographic collections from former members, most of them dating from the 1960s and 1970s. Eventually it is hoped that they can be added to the local illustrations collection at the Central Library: with the Library's forthcoming move to a new location, it will be impossible for them to deal with them for a while. Once this can be achieved, the images will be viewable from the library catalogue via the website.

During the quiz, the locations of the photographs became progressively harder to identify. There were three subject groups: places of worship, pubs and hotels, and businesses. A number of them in this third category showed rather grand Victorian office buildings in the town centre, and it struck me that they could be used as illustrations for a book on commercial architecture in Reading – but I must restrain myself and try to finish one book before starting another. Hopefully we can have another picture quiz next year.

For our March meeting we were back in the Abbey Baptist Church, for a short AGM, followed by a lively and entertaining talk on 'Caversham Park's 930 Years at the Centre of History,' by Dr. Stephen Goss. The talk was chronological, but did not say much about the site of the first manor house by the Thames, and the evidence suggesting that the Chapel of Our Lady of Caversham had stood nearby. Nor was there much mention of the building of the new manor house by Sir Francis Knollys, on the hill above, where it was dryer and had extensive views across the Thames valley. Sir Francis died before the house was completed, and it was his son who entertained Queen Elizabeth and King James at Caversham Park.

Of course, we heard much about the lords of the manor, notably Walter Giffard and his family, and William Marshall. They were knights and crusaders. By the 18th century there was a succession of owners who overspent on the estate and lavish entertainments, and were forced to sell, and in the following century, between 1844 - 1922, we had the industrialists, the Crawshay family. They had ironworks in South Wales, and when the house burned down in 1850, they had it rebuilt on an iron frame, with a stone exterior. The house was sold to the Oratory School, and in 1926 was again damaged by fire, but rebuilt. By 1939 the school had moved to its present site at Woodcote, and

the wartime government was intending to use the house as a military hospital, but instead, it was sold to the B.B.C. and became their monitoring station. The hilltop site was seen as advantageous, linked to an array of aeries in nearby Crowsley Park.

It was intriguing to hear how our speaker showed how Caversham Park had been 'at the centre of history' for the best part of a millennium. The house down by the river had been the favourite residence of William Marshall, who had virtually ruled England from there towards the end of his life. In the 20th century as the B.B.C. Monitoring Station, it provided the first news of events round the world to the government in London, and played a key role in transmitting vital information from what President Khrushchev had said in Moscow to the Kennedy Administration in Washington during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962.

In more recent years, intelligence was received via satellite rather than via radio waves, and it was sensible to have the Monitoring Station in London. With the B.B.C. leaving the site, its future was unclear for a few years, but now it was intended to use the big house as a care home, and to build some sheltered housing in the grounds. But rather than building more houses on the site, it was proposed to open the grounds to the public, with its remaining 18th century landscaping and 'temple.'

The talk was well attended, with a good number of visitors, a number of whom during the question-and-answer session gave us some of their memories of the area.

David Cliffe, Chairman

Hungerford Historical Association

In April our Speakers Secretary, Dr Helen Lockhart, entertained an audience of over a hundred members and visitors with her detailed research of Lady Craven's adventures travelling through the Crimea to Constantinople in 1786. Lady Craven's journal offers an early example of female travel writing in which a woman displays knowledge and learning, while at the same time observing the lives and appearance of foreign women in harems and female bathhouses, spaces inaccessible to male travellers. Lady Craven was intrepid and adventurous, undeterred by treacherous terrain, rough roads, steep mountain passes, perilous seas and plague conditions. Lady Craven describes her time at the Court of Catherine the Great at St Petersburg, criticising the hang of the paintings in the Hermitage and complaining of the very cold rooms of Prince Potemkin's palace in which she was entertained. In her account of the journey across Russia by a somewhat precarious sledge, she is impressed by the

good state of the teeth of the Russian peasants' she encounters and later recounts mock battles put on in her honour by Cossacks in Crimea. She gives an account of her expedition into the spectacular grotto on the Greek Island of Antiparos and her trip to Athens and the Acropolis. Lady Craven recalls how in Romania she and Vernon were lavishly entertained in the harem of Prince of Wallachia but she was unimpressed by the loud music they had to endure. She rounds off her journey passing through the spectacular and often dangerous landscape of the Balkans. At this time Greece and the Balkans were ruled by Turkey as part of its empire. Finishing her travels in Vienna Lady Craven was happy to be back in western territory. Helen illustrated her excellent talk with maps of the countries crossed and with contemporaneous paintings of the characters and places within Lady Craven's writings.

Dr Caroline Ness, Chairman

Newbury District Field Club

Highlight of 2025 was our History Day in October, this focused on the parish of Greenham, from the historic parish boundaries to the use of the common as an airfield via the racecourse! Five varied talks delivered to an appreciative audience. This year our History Day will be on the parish of Speen, from its beginnings in the Roman age, to the second battle of Newbury and Lambourn Railway. The day is scheduled for November and full details will be on our website nearer the time.

Work on our oral history project is gaining momentum led by an enthusiastic team. Focus of the interviews carried out so far was the renowned heavy engineering company of Plenty & Co, unfortunately it seems we have interviewed the last employees just as the company finally leaves the town. Work is also ongoing to publish our next volume of local records, our 'Transactions'.

Finally, our popular talks on local subjects continue. We have recently heard about Newbury Almshouse Trust, from one of the trustees. Then we have the history of Donnington Priory and then, by way of a change, recollections of Asian refugees from Idi Amin, flown into Greenham Common in the seventies.

Our talks are held on the 3rd Monday of the month at St Johns Church Hall, St Johns Road, Newbury, RG14 7PY. All are welcome and a small fee is charged for non-members.

Bob Bosley, Chair

Project Purley

We were delighted to welcome back Malcolm Summers as speaker in January with a talk on Reading's plaques, signs and memorials. Beautifully illustrated and presented, Malcolm took on a journey around Reading revealing memorials and plaques which many of us were unaware of and adding new insights to those with which we were far more familiar. This talk was based on Malcolm's book 'Signs of the Times', which a number of those present purchased a copy of afterwards. In February, Dave Hall gave a detailed talk on the history of Reading's trolleybuses. The talk looked at the early days of public transport in Reading from the decision in 1934 to replace the remaining tram routes with trolleybuses to the end of operations in 1968. It included many photographs showing the trolleybuses, the depots they operated from, and the streets and neighbourhoods they served. Given the period covered, it was not surprising that many of the images included parts of Reading which had long-since changed or even disappeared and featured lots of now closed shops and other venues. This was a very interesting talk which brought back memories of travelling on trolleybuses for many of those present.

March's meeting is always our AGM, which went smoothly (and quickly – down to thirteen minutes this time) after which we broke for wine and nibbles before settling down for our talk. Dr David Lewis gave an excellent account of the history of Windsor Castle from 1100 to 1700. It was a fascinating talk and again beautifully illustrated, on what surely must be the most important building in the county as home to forty reigning monarchs. Afterwards, there was a resounding request from our members that we must invite David back to cover the next stage of the history to present-day. April's talk hadn't yet taken place at the submission deadline date but was due to be by myself on 'Images of Purley: Recent Finds'. Despite Purley being a relatively small village until its development in the twentieth century, new photographs come to light on a regular basis and this talk shared some of those discoveries. We collect both physical and digital images in our archive and both old and new, aiming to preserve the present for those in the future. So, the talk also included some of the more recent occasions in Purley such as the Covid 19 pandemic and the late Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations as examples of our attempts to preserve material for future generations.

Looking ahead, the Rain or Shine Theatre Company returns with a performance of 'The Pickwick Papers' in June. We are holding a BBQ that same month, our first since 2019. And we are greatly looking forward to our visits to Cumberland Lodge in the Windsor Great Park and Holy Trinity Church in Reading.

Catherine Sampson

Thatcham Historical Society

We have gotten off to a flying start to the year having already had three speaker meetings including Dr David Peacock in February on Tudor buildings around Newbury and Sue Ellis walking us through the history of the Bayeux Tapestry, which is neither a tapestry or from Bayeux!

We have a range of talks coming up including Sandham Memorial Chapel with Heather Walkling and the history of Huntley & Palmers of Reading by Anne Garrison. Instead of a talk in June the society are having a short field trip for a private guided tour of Shaw House.

Dr. Nick Young, Vice-Chair

Twyford & Ruscombe Local History Society

On a sunny spring day in March, Twyford and Ruscombe Local History Society were pleased to welcome twenty members of The Berkshire Family History group for a short walk in Twyford led by the Chairman, James Fort. This report was prepared by one of those attending, one of our committee members, Jean Poulter.

Starting from Waitrose, we headed along the High Street towards the crossroads. The first stop was at the Memorial Hall in the Wargrave Road. The Reverend Ackworth bought the Wesleyan chapel in 1908 and gave permission for The Working Men's Club to meet there. In 1919 he donated the chapel in trust in memory of local men who had died in World War I.

Making our way along the Old Bath Road we passed the Old Farmhouse on the High Street, a 16th century two-bay cottage, part of the original Twyford farm. Stopping at the milestone to London, 34 miles, we were facing Bridge House, a grade II listed Georgian building. It had originally been the home of the mill owners but was leased to Henry Verey in 1862 and was home to the Verey family for four generations.

We crossed the Old Bath Road at the bridge over the river Loddon and walked up to the weir which had fed the mill race on that site in the late 1800s. This was originally a silk mill, then a flour mill and finally an animal feed mill owned by Berks, Bucks and Oxon, destroyed by fire in 1976, but subsequently rebuilt and continuing in operation until its closure in 1997. The Old Silk Mill and Weir Pool Court are now residential flats on that site.

On the East side of the railway bridge over the Henley branch line, we saw the Headmaster's House on the site of the Old Boy's School which had been built together with a chapel in the 1720s, on a site included in the bequest of

Edward Polehampton who founded the Polehampton Charity. Today, the school has been repurposed as an attractive new library for the local community, and the house has been divided into two residential flats.

Walking back to the crossroads, we passed the mill cottages, the butcher's hooks still hanging outside the estate agents and the Old Post Office, a grade II listed building. On the corner of the High Street and Wargrave Road, we passed The Bell Inn which closed in 1987 after three hundred years of trading.

At the traffic lights we turned up Station Road passing The Firs, where a forge had been housed in the back garden, and entered the churchyard of St. Mary's Church which dates from the late 19th century, the tower having been added in 1910 when the church was enlarged. In the grounds we saw the Millenium Garden and the War Memorial. Almost adjacent is the United Reformed Church, originally the Congregational Church, built by Wigmore and Sons in 1897.

It was noted that the coming of the railway to Twyford resulted in many changes, including construction of the Victorian cottages in Brook Street to house railway workers, and shops in Station Road and the Railway Hotel facing the station, now mostly residential properties. Now, with the Elizabeth Line, the station is busier than ever.

Returning to the village via the Waltham Road we admired the trees in the green space in Springfield Park, owned by the residents, which had once been the site of the Grove Hall Hotel.

In the High Street, the Almshouses, built in 1640 by Sir Richard Harrison, Lord of the Manor of Hurst, were the last port of call. They comprise five single-bedroom homes round a pretty courtyard in the centre of the village. They were renovated in 1998.

Thanks were given to James Fort for an interesting and very pleasant afternoon.

Our programme of talks for 2026 started with Catherine Sampson on 'Strolling around Berkshire Churchyards'. These, as well as functioning as dignified resting places for the deceased, also represent significant sanctuaries for wildlife and natural beauty with breathtaking vistas of flowers and trees. They also act as living historic documents capturing the evolution of customs and practices over the ages, and through the shifts of religious iconography from images of death to depictions of angels and a diverse range of crosses reflecting broader changes in attitudes to death and remembrance. They also record important moments of history - the graves of some who perished in national disasters such as the sinking of the Lusitania, a tragedy said to have

played a part in drawing the United States into the First World War - and also offer glimpses of supposed forgotten crimes as with the grave of Edith Marian Rosse who became mixed up in the Cash for Honours scandal under Lloyd George's government.

Our next topic transitioned to the 'History of aviation and its connection with the Woodley community'. Ken Fostekew provided a detailed account of Miles Aircraft Ltd, highlighting its operations at the former Woodley Aerodrome, as well as the activities of ML Aviation at White Waltham and the current status of the Museum of Berkshire Aviation at Woodley, where Ken volunteers. The museum is situated in original buildings located off Bader Way in Woodley.

Notably, in 1943, Miles Aircraft Ltd was prompted to investigate the potential for supersonic jet aircraft. Despite substantial progress, the government ultimately cancelled the contract; subsequently, certain components – possibly transferred to the United States – were evident in the first supersonic flight in 1947. The firm continued, and advancements were made; however, sales remained limited. Alternative approaches, including the production of all-metal planes, and making biros, were attempted, but financial difficulties during the severe winter of 1947 led to the appointment of a receiver. The company was acquired by Handley Page Ltd, which ultimately produced the Handley Page Dart Herald, famously flown by the Duke of Edinburgh and now meticulously restored by the Museum's staff. This significant exhibit is accompanied by the Fairey Jet Gyrodyne and a former Royal Navy Fairey Gannet, all prominently displayed within the collection.

Following the conclusion of the AGM's formal proceedings, members were treated to 'A Very Amateur Organist', a discussion led by Michael Humphries. Throughout his extensive life, Michael's passion for both organs and playing them was evident. Primarily self-taught, he honed his abilities by understudying the local organist, Sibyl Stevenson, a well-known character in the village and, during work-related travel, securing permission from local vicars to practise on church organs. He later attended a course called 'The Reluctant Organist', which enabled him to participate in 'organ crawls' with other enthusiasts, further expanding his experience.

As a result of his participation on the course, Michael was invited to be presented to the Queen during the 150th anniversary of the Royal College of Church Music; this memory remaining with him to this day. He also discussed the variety of organs located in Twyford; while some churches have preserved their original pipe organs, St. Mary's Twyford, was compelled to replace its pipe organ with a modern alternative due to irreparable damage, much to the disgust of Sibyl. Nevertheless, Michael managed to acquire three examples of the pipes, decorating them in styles reminiscent of those encountered

during his travels. The members were very interested in the example he showed to them. Michael had adapted its sound for use as his doorbell.

We look forward to hearing 'The History of the Sutton Seeds Company', a prominent anchor industry in Reading, and what features of Reading and the environment nurtured this, to be given by Dr Richard Marks after Easter.

Pamela Graddon, Secretary

Wargrave Local History Society



The Bull Hotel in Wargrave was the topic for Wargrave Local History Society's January meeting, when Jayne Worrall - the present landlady – reminisced about her 'three lives' at the Bull. The Bull is around six hundred years old, originally a 15th century coaching inn where travellers could and the horses could take a rest. It was bought in 1779 by Robert Brakspear for £850 - a substantial sum then. Jayne

had spent eight years working as an air hostess for BOAC before moving to the pub trade. Becoming a public house landlord meant registering with an agent, who sent details of properties that might be of interest. Jayne was unsuccessful with her first application, at Bix, a short time later Brakspears telephoned to say that The Bull at Wargrave was available if she would like it. Her response was "Where is Wargrave?"! She took over on 8 January 1980, and The Bull was very different to how it is now. The beams of the building's timber frame were not visible, whilst the ladies' toilet was down the garden, needing a kettle of hot water in the winter to melt the ice. Jayne stayed at The Bull for about four or five years, then moving to a pub at Witheridge Hill, before returning to The Bull in 1998. Work was put in hand to restore its character, exposing the timber frame and the large open fireplace. In 2008, Jayne left Wargrave, due to the increase in the tenancy but returned to The Bull in 2012. It was somewhat different. The 'characters' – many having been born and lived all their life in the village – who frequented the pub when first she came to Wargrave were no longer there, and the size and nature of the village population had altered. As well as recalling the various changes she made during her time as the landlady, Jayne also told of the ghosts reputed to have a presence there – all 'friendly' – she said that she 'keeps an open mind' about such experiences. Jayne added that being a landlady was not a job, but a 'way of life', and delighted the meeting with tales of many incidents from her times at The Bull.

In February three members of the Trooper Potts VC Memorial Trust, Richard Bennett, Brig. Tony Verey, and Capt. Andrew French, gave an enlightening presentation about Fred Potts VC, from Reading, who became known as 'The Hero with the Shovel' for his courage at Gallipoli in August 1915. Photography



of the military was banned on the Western Front during World War I, but was still possible in the Mediterranean area, enabling the talk to be illustrated with pictures of the troops there, whilst extracts were also read from letters sent home by some of the Berkshire men – creating a more personal account of what the troops endured. The Berkshire Yeomanry had been formed in 1794 as a home defence cavalry regiment, the main qualification being that men had to turn up with their own horse. The regiment had its first overseas posting about a century later, fighting against the Boer commandos in South Africa. In 1914, the Berkshire's were mobilised in Reading for service in World War I,

and after training embarked at Avonmouth for duty in Egypt in April 1915. The letters home described the conditions, where it could be 100 Fahrenheit in the shade, as they trained to be an infantry unit, working without their horses. In August 1915 they sailed across the Mediterranean, planning to open the Dardanelles to Allied shipping. However, mines and other hazards meant they had to back off, in due course landing at Sulva Beach in Gallipoli, on the northern side of the Dardanelles on 18 August. The Berkshire Yeomanry took the lead for the Battle of Scimitar Hill, moving forward with bayonets ready, but unable to hold their position, they retreated to a trench behind the front line. Amongst them was Frederick Potts, from the Katesgrove area of Reading. During the battle he was wounded in the thigh, whilst his friend Arthur Andrews had suffered a serious injury to the hip. Despite his own injuries, Fred tried to drag Arthur back to safety, but this meant he was exposed to Turkish gunfire. Having dragged Arthur a short way, Fred also found a shovel, which he used to sit Arthur on, and using it like a sledge brought him back to relative safety. Overall, though, a high price had been paid, with about half of the force either killed, wounded or taken prisoner. For his heroic action, Fred Potts was awarded the Victoria Cross. Although much celebrated at the time, the story was largely forgotten until 2009, when committee was formed to create a memorial to Fred Potts and record the names of other members of the Berkshire Yeomanry. The Trooper Potts VC Charitable Trust wanted to do more than just create a memorial, so they also embarked on an outreach programme, particularly to schools and young people's organisations, often ending with a 'shovel race', to re-enact Fred Potts heroic act.

The March meeting began with the AGM, when the Chairman, Peter Halman, reported on another successful year, with a varied programme of speakers. The society's finances were in good condition, and membership numbers remained at a healthy level. Following this, the society held a 'Bring and Tell' time – members telling the story behind a variety of items brought to show to the meeting. The smallest was a Wargrave & District Rifle Club medal about the size of a thumbnail, with '1910, Best Shot, Wargrave Sectn' engraved in the centre, awarded to Albert Steer. Research showed him to have been a house painter living in Victoria Road. The oldest items which looked like small stones were found whilst clearing a family home. A young member of the family thought the marks on one looked like hieroglyphics. He was nearly right, as they were cuneiform writing, subsequently verified by the British Museum, whilst another piece was a shard of pottery from a Roman amphora. Other items brought along included a delightful telegram case made of leather, with a silk lining. made in Birmingham in 1909 - a nice glimpse of life in the era long before emails or similar means of communication. Some family photographs found when another family home was being cleared resulted in family history research. One picture, from about 1907, of a family group had a farmhouse in the background, which was found to still exist, even having the same name.



The example of a medieval pilgrim's badge was actually a replica. It has a rebus for Eton, and when placed on loan to the College, several silver copies were created – some features of its design leading to some interesting questions! Lastly, crested china was something popular to collect in the early 20th century, and the model of Bill Sykes' bulldog not only had a crest representing Wargrave on its back, it also had the name of the village shop who sold it on the bottom – as much of interest about the local business as the figurine itself. All in all, it was a fascinating mixture of objects and their stories.

To find out more about the society, visit our [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

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Blewbury Local History Group

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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

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East Ilsley Local History Society

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

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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

(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)

History of Reading Society

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

Hungerford Historical Association

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

Hurley History Society

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

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
(paul@c21networks.co.uk)

Marcham Society

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

Middle Thames Archaeological & Historical Society

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

Mortimer Local History Group

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

Newbury District Field Club

Bob Bosley: 7 Baxendales, Newbury RG14 7SA (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)

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

Heather Kay: 5 Augustfield, Charvil Lane RG4 6AF
(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)

Swallowfield Local History Society

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

Tadley and District History Society

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

Thatcham Historical Society

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

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

The Central Library will close on 9th May, to re-open in the Civic Centre in Bridge Street in the summer.

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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Vice-President Prof E J Collins

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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

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