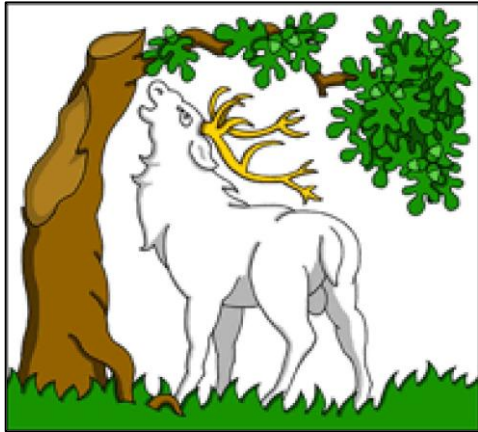


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Berkshire Local History Association



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Berkshire Local History Association Newsletter

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Next Newsletter:

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

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

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

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

Cover picture: 100 Years of Reading University Walk (Ann Smith)

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Chairman's Corner

When I sat down to write this piece on a hot afternoon in early August, I thought that nothing much had happened since I wrote the last one. Gradually I came to realise that a number of interesting things had happened, or were about to happen, and one thing that had to be postponed.

There were a good number of takers for the walk round Whiteknights Park on 27 June. The Park is now a campus of the University of Reading, which this year is celebrating the centenary of the granting of the charter which made it an independent university. Ann Smith and her colleagues had everything in place, but the weather forecast for the day was for very high temperatures, and it seemed wise to postpone the event. Little did we know that this would be followed by a succession of heatwaves. As you'll see later the walk successfully took place on 22 August.

Then on 18 July, another very hot day, we had the Berkshire Online Heritage Fair. For three hours on a Saturday, people from around the world were invited to consult experts on Berkshire local and family history. Libraries, local societies, the Berkshire Local History Association and the Berkshire Family History Society took part, and the event was run jointly by the BLHA and the BFHS. I'm told that all went well, but I can only speak for the History of Reading Society, as represented by Caroline Piller and myself. We had seven enquiries, and were able to help most visitors. Some we passed on to other organisations, some only wanted to talk, and one just wanted to listen in and see what was going on. I was pleased to be able to answer one question straight off, because the answer was in a book I was writing at the time. The international nature of the event was brought home to me by the lady in Texas, who before asking a question, apologised for the United States government, and the lady in Australia, who was well wrapped up because it was midwinter there, while I was keeping the curtains drawn in an attempt to keep cool.

Reading Central Library opened in its new location, in the Civic Offices in Bridge Street, on 18 June. Opening hours are unchanged – still closed on Wednesdays. Katie Amos, who looks after the extensive local studies collection there, has kindly written an account of the move, which appears below, so I won't comment further, though I have already done some research work in the new library, and was favourably impressed.

At the Royal Berkshire Archives, work is going ahead to extend the building, and 'future-proof' it for many years to come. The Archives are open as usual, but please make enquiries before you go if you're arriving by car. The next exhibition, from 22 September, is about Agatha Christie in Berkshire, and runs to the end of the year. She lived in Sunningdale, and towards the end of her life moved to Winterbrook, near Wallingford. Her grave is in the churchyard at

Cholsey.

For a couple of years now, people from the “Ancestry” website have been working away behind the scenes at the Royal Berkshire Archives on the Berkshire parish registers. The results are to be made available in September, and if you don’t subscribe to “Ancestry,” you should be able to see them at the RBA, and at public libraries across Berkshire. It makes me smile to think of how the attitudes of county archivists have changed over the years. When digitisation of old records first became possible, they didn’t want it. One of the ways in which record offices measured their success was the number of visitors through the doors. Family history was booming, but if people could look at old records at home, the footfall would decline. We are now living in more enlightened times.

It looks as though the Royal County of Berkshire will continue to exist for ‘ceremonial purposes,’ with Lords Lieutenant and High Sheriffs, despite the forthcoming local government changes, which are to take place on 1 April 2028. And I hope that the Berkshire Local History Association will continue, too. Reading Borough will not be taking over the bits of Tilehurst which are just outside its boundary, and the big change will be to the north and west of Reading, where the areas administered by the existing Vale of White Horse Council, South Oxfordshire Council and West Berkshire Council will be combined and run by a new Ridgeway Council. I recall the changes of 1974, which brought about the 6 unitary authorities and the ‘loss’ of North West Berkshire. The government sent each household a leaflet showing several options. People were invited to vote for one of them, and the government then went ahead with something completely different. There was a legal challenge, which was dismissed. Like 1974, I expect we’ll take things like this in our stride.

David Cliffe, Chairman BLHA

A Word from the Editor

Can I remind those who receive the BLHA newsletter that we do not send it to your members directly and rely on you for distribution. A number of people have commented that they do not get the newsletter sent on to them. I have also been informed that some members have received scam message in the name of the Association; we have no control over these, and if you suspect someone is trying to scam you in our name, or any other suspicious emails, please inform the [National Cyber Security Centre](https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/report@phishing.gov.uk) using the address report@phishing.gov.uk.

A number of you may know that Sarah Orr, the Principal Archeologist at West Berkshire Council, has recently retired. Her role was to advise planners,

landowners and others on the conservation and management of the archaeological resource of the West Berkshire area, both at a strategic and casework level. On many occasions I have benefitted from Sarah's advice on all things archaeological in the west of our county and she, along with her team of Beth Asbury and Phil Smithers, have helped me resolve many a query. As David Cliffe mentioned the current local government changes are impacting the services in West Berkshire and I hope that the expert advice we are able to call on from this team isn't lost or diluted. I wish Sarah a happy and fruitful retirement and, in time, who knows we may tempt her to join some of our groups and maybe even tease out the odd talk.

Notices and Articles

100 Years of Reading University – a centenary walk

This BLHA walk led by Dr. Margaret Simons and Dr. Jonathan Brown, took place on 22 August. It was postponed from June due to the heatwave.

Starting from Park Place, we learned about the history of the Whiteknights campus before the university arrived in 1947, including the profligate Marquis of Blandford and his wonderful garden. After he went bankrupt, the estate was divided into six large plots with leasehold houses. Two of these were demolished. We walked round the campus looking at the four remaining Victorian houses: Park Place, Blandford Lodge, Old Whiteknights House and Foxhill - the latter designed by Alfred Waterhouse. All of them had access to Whiteknights Lake. We also saw the Library, the Faculty of Letters and other academic blocks. Some of these have been refurbished as part of the centenary celebrations. The history of the university buildings was brought to life with anecdotes about what went on in some of these places. The walk ended in the Harris Gardens. Many thanks to Margaret and Jonathan for an entertaining and informative tour of the campus.

Berkshire Heritage Fair

This was jointly organised by the Berkshire Local History Association and Berkshire Family History Society on 18 July. It took place on Zoom so that people anywhere in the world who have an interest in Berkshire history could take part. Most of our overseas enquiries came from Australia and the USA.

Nineteen local and family history groups offered information and advice, including Berkshire Local History Association, The History of Reading Society, Windsor Local History Group and Project Purley. There were also military history museums, The Royal Berkshire Archives and Reading Local Studies Library.

Most people asking and answering questions found it useful. In the BLHA

room, a woman waiting for her turn answered a question, using her knowledge of Maidenhead, that the previous person had asked! So, it was a learning experience for all of us.

News from the Royal Berkshire Archives

The early stages of our extension have taken longer than expected, so the main building work did not start until June. Apologies for anyone inconvenienced by noise over the summer. We hope all will go smoothly from now on. Please remember that you **MUST** now park in the staff car park, preferably along the back wall of the building, and collect your parking permit!



We were delighted to receive a lovely collection of material relating to Ockwells Manor in Bray, one of the most important medieval houses in Berkshire, 1813-2025 (D/EX3073). It includes a wonderful set of photographs, some showing the house at its most dilapidated in the mid-late 19th century, and some showing the process of restoration.

We have also catalogued an interesting collection from the Lock family of Sutton Courtenay and Abingdon, 1721-21C (D/EX3085). They were carpenters and stonemasons, and highlights include the business accounts of Joseph Lock (1839-1905), a monumental mason, mainly for work on gravestones in a number of nearby parishes. There is also an account ledger kept by William and Joseph Godfrey of Faringdon for stonemasonry work in the area, 1827-1847. Joseph Lock learnt his trade by being apprenticed to Joseph Godfrey in the late 1850s and must have acquired this book from him.

Joseph's son Henry George Lock (1876-1963) wrote a fascinating memoir about growing up in Sutton Courtenay, including some things which would not have otherwise been recorded. He recalled, for instance, regular fights with rival villages, including a big battle with men from Drayton at Limersham Hill. He recalled, "it was hardly safe to visit another village (especially boys) unless you wanted to fight".

More memoirs of life on a family farm through the 20th century have come from the rich archive of the Castle family of Wantage and Grove (D/EX2547). They show how farms diversified in the second half of the century.

We have acquired the programme for the '8th Annual United Band of Hope and Temperance Festival' in the grounds of Purley Park Hall on 15 July 1891. Bands of Hope were for youngsters who had agreed to sign the pledge not to

partake of any alcohol (D/EX2456).

We have catalogued the records of several Bracknell schools: Holly Spring Primary School (formerly Infant and Junior Schools), 1960-2016 (SCH53); Berek, Braybrooke and Kennel Lane Special Schools, 1966-2016 (SCH54); and Meadow Vale Primary School (formerly Infant and Junior Schools), 1965-c. 2017 (SCH55). Meadow Vale Infant School was the first school to be built in the New Town, and it and the Junior School both had special units for deaf and partially hearing children.

A small but interesting group comes from J E "Ted" Vidal, the last headmaster of Frilsham House School, Frilsham (D/EX3065). Frilsham House was a small private boarding preparatory school which opened in 1945 in the mansion of the same name and was forced to close when the M4 motorway was built through the grounds in 1968. The prospectus noted in the 1960s that "those who show promise are encouraged to work for scholarships, but policy is strongly against heavy cramming of doubtful candidates" for the most competitive independent schools. Boxing, dancing and, for the older boys, shooting were offered as paid 'extras'. Mr Vidal spent the Easter holiday in 1967 visiting a selection of private boarding schools in West Germany, and took the opportunity to see the Berlin Wall, then only a few years old.

Lisa Spurrier, Archivist

Updates from West Berkshire Council's Archaeology Team

West Berkshire Council's Archaeology team is the team that provides historic environment information and archaeological advice for the district. We are based in Newbury and wrote a little bit about our work in the September 2024 issue. Since then, we have been involved in many things and wanted to share with you some of our activities from recent months.

On 13 March, we helped unveil a new interpretation board at [Streatley Warren](#), east of Goring, as part of the [Historic Ridgeway Project](#). We are partners in the project, which is connecting local communities, landowners, visitors and volunteers to this historic routeway and the ancient landscapes that it passes through in West Berkshire and Oxfordshire. This first board, funded by [Mend the Gap](#), highlights human activity from over two thousand years ago. Streatley Warren was designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest due to its rare chalk grassland habitat, and the lack of modern ploughing has also preserved the earthworks of Iron Age and Roman fields, which show up well in low light in the open landscape. The ancient field systems would have been widely distributed across the Berkshire



Downs, and their range is mapped on the board.

Archaeological information from the [West Berkshire Historic Environment Record \(HER\)](#) was provided for the board, in collaboration with Historic England, the Friends of the Ridgeway and others. Nine further boards funded through the North Wessex Downs National Landscape and Farming in Protected Landscapes will be installed over the summer. Dan Bashford of Historic England, the Project Manager, and Sarah Orr of our team were interviewed at the [Streatley Warren board's unveiling](#). Historic England is the government body that has oversight of standards within the historic environment sector in England. It also assists with HER audits every five years. We finished our most recent [audit](#) in March and were extremely pleased to get the highest or second highest rating in all four service areas. For more information on HERs, Historic England recently launched [two short films about them](#).

Beth Asbury, Asst Archaeologist (HER and Outreach), West Berkshire Council

Caring for Your Collections Webinar

The Mills Archive Trust, located in Reading, is an accredited archive and library service focussed on preserving records of milling, wind and water power. In November they are running a webinar, '[Caring for your Collections](#)', where they will share over two decades of archival skills. The webinar will give an overview to what exactly an archive is, why we should preserve records of the past, and how to start sorting collections of documents, photographs or even digital files. This may be useful to members who are interesting in learning about preserving and caring for artifacts, records and more in their own collection, whether a beginner or experienced.

Reading Library Update

I am sure many of you will know that Reading Central Library is now open at its new site at the Civic Centre, and have hopefully popped a long to take a look.



So, how did we get here – well, without going into the political side – the answer is with lots of effort, planning and help! Although the old site at Abbey Square closed back in May, there had been plenty going on behind the scenes before then, including contracting a specialist moving company. Once the doors had shut, they came on site and following plans put together by senior staff over the preceding months, they proceeded to pack up, section by section, all the books into crates, pile the crates onto metal cages, and load the cages onto a truck to travel the short distance across town and then do everything in reverse.

This isn't to say that the library staff were just sitting on their hands during this period, some were deployed to other branches, others were checking through stock to make sure everything was in the right place, before and after transportation. There were also the staff areas to go through and pack up, very much like moving house.

Once everything was roughly in place there was the finer details to go through to make sure we were familiar, not only with where the stock was, but with where we were – a whole new building to get used to!

One of the most obvious differences was the feeling of light and space in the new library, but right up there was also the fact that it had air conditioning – such a bonus with the recent heatwaves we've been having.

So, in terms of the Local Studies section, it is now based on the 1st floor, with easy access via the stairs from the square on the ground floor, or there is a lift round to one side. We still have all the stock that you will have previously found at the old site – books, street directories, electoral rolls, press cuttings, monumental inscriptions, parish registers, estate catalogues, phone books, newspapers on microfilm, and maps, although the latter has been reduced slightly.

However, a bit like the British Library, we are not able to store everything at the Civic Centre, so the items that were previously 'round the back' at Abbey Square are now housed in an off-site storage area. We are able to retrieve items from the store for customers to see, but this a process that is likely to take a couple of weeks, rather than days, at least for now, so if there is something that you would like to take a look at then do be prepared for a little bit of a wait.

Finally, if you aren't sure just what we actually have on the shelves, whether it is a local book or photograph or fiction etc, then try the [library catalogue](#) and see what treasures you can find!

Katie Amos, Local Studies Lead - I am part-time and work Monday (10 am-3 pm), and Tuesday and Friday (9 am-5 pm) if you wish to come in and see me.

Peascod Street – What's in a street name?

As a Windsor historian, I am often asked why the town's main street has the rather curious name of Peascod Street, rather than the more conventional, High Street. Where could this unique and unusual name come from and how old is it? Of course, in an ancient town, it is difficult to be entirely certain about such matters, but nonetheless it is possible to hazard an informed guess based on the rare, and highly unusual circumstance that in Windsor several hundred of its medieval property deeds survive, some dating as far back as

the late 12th century.

What we do know about Peascod Street (pronounced Pes-cod Street) is that it is one of the town's oldest thoroughfares, first documented in c. 1180 by Merton Priory. Evidently, by this date New Windsor (as it was called until 1972), consisted of a significant sized community, maybe about 500 people, the town set out according to formal street plan, arranged in a 'T' shape. Peascod Street was the descending bar of this 'T', but within fifty years of this initial setting out, new streets had been added, requiring street names to differentiate one part of the settlement from another. This was something not required in Eton until the 15th century.

Windsor was a nucleated settlement centred on its market place and parish church, these set out, side-by-side, on Moor Street (renamed in the 15th century as High Street), occupying the top bar of Windsor's 'T' shaped plan. Such formal planning had been initiated in 1135, to allow the relocation of the civic community from the castle's lower ward, to space immediately outside the castle's defences, then owned by the FitzOther family, a corner of their manor of Ortone. No doubt this move had been prompted by the settlement's need to expand, since within the confines of the castle's ditches the construction of new domestic property was heavily constrained. Indeed, such urban expansion was a hallmark of the 12th century, as the national population expanded, following an improvement in the national diet, which now included more grains.

It is known from Windsor's property deeds, however, that Peascod Street was not the first name attached to this important thoroughfare, which had long held significance as an artery in the national road network. It led (eventually) to Winchester, through the forests south of the town, and importantly, in the early 12th century, to Reading.

The street's original name was Peascroft Street (various spellings), a name that survived in common use until the late 13th century, when it was increasingly corrupted to its modern form, Peascod Street. Somewhat curiously, this was a name that also made reference to a favourite medieval snack, akin to a mange tout: a peascod was a peapod fried in butter and flavoured with pepper. No doubt, a delicacy that had been sold to travellers as they passed through the town, but also a name easier to remember and pronounce than Peascroft, possibly explaining its popular adoption, even, eventually, in legal records.

The street's former name, however, is interesting and important, as it provides a window on Windsor's distant past, quite possibly several hundred years before the Conqueror even thought to build a castle overlooking the river Thames.

We know from the medieval property deeds that in the 12th century Peascroft was located in the fee of the Lord of Clewer, and therefore that it stood on land north of the street. This was its only possible location, since the parish and manorial boundary between Windsor and Clewer, established in the 10th century, ran down the centre of Peascroft Street. The reference to a 'croft' in its name indicates that it came from a time when Windsor was un-nucleated, a 'toft and croft' community, well before its twelfth century planning, feasibly dating back to the 9th century. Windsor, it appears, was then composed of a series of scattered dwellings, some with attached cultivated land (a toft), others without (a croft). The name Peas-croft is thus a compound, the first element referring to a person called 'Pea', possibly a pea grower, with the second element referencing his cultivated acreage, his 'croft'.

The reason why the street adopted his croft name was probably because it lay parallel to the street, possibly accounting for a substantial part of its developed extent. This type of rectilinear plot arrangement is known from several other early villages, where typically such plots, running in parallel to the street, faced open land. And indeed, in Windsor, this was also the arrangement, since the south side of Peascroft Street formed a boundary with the community's open field, called the Worth. A name that is again of ancient origin and of significance, since the Worth is the Old English (Anglo-Saxon) term denoting land recovered from the forest, and enclosed. The creation of cultivated land in this way, bordering Peascroft street, could date the street to the earliest extensive occupation of the chalk upland.



Computer-generated image of what the street would have looked like

The arrangement of Peascroft with respect to its namesake street was to change dramatically when Windsor was subject to formal planning after 1135, however, adopting its 'T' shaped arrangement. The old scattered toft and croft plots were done away with, to be replaced with a series of fashionable equally

spaced plots, two perches wide, within a uniform block, plots now (significantly) set at a right angle to the street. The long gardens attached to these plots allowed for the cultivation of food crops and / or the keeping of stock, while minimising the valuable frontage against the street, in time, frontages that became shops. And although the buildings set within these uniform medieval plots, known as burgage plots, have, over the years, been replaced several times, their boundaries have often remained unchanged, becoming a well-known tell-tale of early urban planning. Indeed, in Windsor its early 12th century boundaries survived complete and unchanged into the 19th century, and to the present day, in places, can still be detected in the street scene.



Windsor town map c. 1819, showing its uniform, medieval burgage plots

Pea and his croft existed many years before written town records were even thought about, but the street name associated with his property, coined probably in the ninth century, has endured quite remarkably. It provides evidence not only of the town's antiquity, that hugely exceeds that of its famous castle, but also about the settlement's earliest, Anglo-Saxon arrangement, when it amounted to little more than a large, disbursed village. Quite a weight of history to be carried in just a street name!

Dr. David Lewis

News from Friends of Reading Abbey

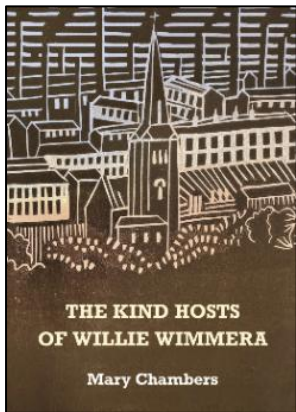
A members' coffee morning was held on 22 May in the Boyes Turner offices in Abbot's House, where local historian and author (and Friend) Malcolm Summers spoke to his new book on Dr. Hurry and Reading Abbey. On 22 June we had a private viewing of the Royal Berkshire Archives Exhibition 'Fallen - The Clewer House of Mercy 1848-1954'. The RBA offered a private viewing for members of their summer exhibition, on the Clewer House of Mercy. Reading Water Fest took place on 27 June. Due to the red heat warning at the time we withdrew from this year's Water Fest and did not have our usual stand and display.

Our members' summer outing was to Malmesbury Abbey, on 22 July, where our guide was Tony Mcleavy, who gave our Spring Lecture on the Abbey and town. It was an all-day coach trip, with 43 people taking part. Tony's knowledge of and enthusiasm for Malmesbury was a significant factor in the success and enjoyment of the day. Information on FORA and its events can be found on the FORA [website](#).

John Painter, Secretary

New local books

The Kind Hosts of Willie Wimmera by Mary Chambers



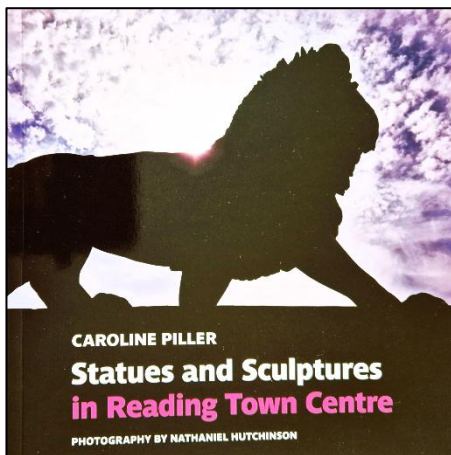
Published by Two Rivers Press this is the story of Willie Wimmera, an Aboriginal boy, who was ten years old when clergyman Lloyd Chase brought him from Melbourne to Reading in 1851. Tragically, he became ill and died only a few months after his arrival. He is buried in Reading Old Cemetery, his grave marked 'An Australian boy'.

Katie Amos, Local Studies Lead at Reading Library reviewed the book saying "It was a pleasure to be asked to read and review this book. Having been in correspondence with the author during her research, I had had glimpses of what the book was about, and of course the story of the young Aboriginal boy wasn't new to me, as the library already holds a couple of other books about him. What was new, however, was the detail that the memoir (printed in full at the end) gives us of Willie's time in Reading and Iwer, and Mary's thorough researching of the names obscured in it. Mary also reflects on the lens through which we view his circumstances and treatment at the time, from our own understanding of Aboriginal peoples today, where much more is known and understood of their culture.

Despite having removed the boy from his people and country of origin, the book suggests that the Chases and others that Willie came into contact with, didn't treat him as a second-class citizen at all, but gave him a good (if strongly religious) education, and that Willie's own character seems to have helped inspire positive feelings in others towards him. Perhaps the saddest thing to note however, is that although Willie and his story have not been forgotten in over 170 years, is that partly for cultural reasons, his true Aboriginal name is unknown - Willie presumably being an Anglicised version of it, and Wimmera coming from his home territory.

This book sets his story in the context of the time, and introduces us to the wider cast of townsfolk who helped Willie in his adopted home, and helps reinforce Reading's reputation as welcoming to in-comers. I'd be happy to recommend this to anyone looking to find out more about one of Reading's youngest notable residents."

Statues and Sculptures in Reading Town Centre by Caroline Piller



This book, due to be published In September, documents a large number of statues and sculptures in central Reading. The book is beautifully illustrated by a young local photographer, Nathaniel Hutcheson, who has managed to capture the essence of the featured artefacts to complement Caroline's text.

As well as documenting over 30 current artefacts, Caroline includes a section entitled 'Lost but not Forgotten' reminding us about statues and sculptures which once graced Reading but are now lost or moved to other places.

Having lived over thirty years in Reading and in the belief that I knew the town pretty well, I was surprised at how many of the statues and sculptures had eluded my gaze. I noted that Caroline had started her 'project' when devising an art programme for her Year 1 and 2 students at New Town Primary school which grew in to a trail for the children to share with their parents. While I am sure the children and their parents would have enjoyed their walks, this book now allows the rest of us to follow in their footsteps finding and learning more about Reading's artwork. I shall certainly be seen walking Reading's streets book in hand and finding out so much about the art pieces that it is all-to-easy to walk past as we scurry through the town.

Jo Alexander-Jones, Secretary BLHA

Society Contributions

Berkshire Family History Society

The Family Research Centre is now open at Berkshire Family History Society, Ground Floor, L14 London Road Campus, London Road, Reading RG1 5AQ. The Official opening will be in late October and invitations will be issued in September.

We are seeing a steady stream of visitors keen to try out our expanded offering especially on IT with access not only to Ancestry, Find My Past and the Genealogist but also Family Search as an affiliate library which allows access to millions more images not available to ordinary Family Search members. The British Newspaper Archive is another valuable resource that visitors can access. We have six desks available and a collaboration space / workshop room for project activities. Currently open Mondays and Tuesdays and some Saturdays, we are looking to recruit more research assistants to include an evening each week and more regular weekend offerings as parking is unrestricted at the weekend.

We have held a number of fully booked site tours for members and guests which are free and these will continue into the autumn. We can also organise tours for organisations; please contact booking@berksfhs.org.uk if this would be of interest to any groups.

We were delighted to co-host the Berkshire Heritage Fair on 18 July with the Berkshire Local History Association and which was very well received with an international audience.

Our programme of events both centrally in Reading and across the county is continuing, including workshops on writing up your family history, Royal Navy records, Royal Airforce records and Army records for WW2. Visits to Cumberland Lodge in Windsor Great Park and All Saints Church Maidenhead are planned, along with walks in the Eldon Road area and on the topic of Medieval Reading. Local Team meetings are being planned, and our quarterly combined Team meetings had an excellent talk on 15 July about Drovers by Tim Healey including how they impacted communities they passed through from Wales to London and along the South Coast. All of our events are accessible on our [website](#).

We have submitted over 160,000 new transcriptions of baptism entries from Berkshire Parish Registers to Find My Past.

Nick Prince, Chairman

Berkshire Industrial Archaeology Group

In April we were delighted to have Ann Smith talk to us about 'A Hundred Years of Shopping in Reading'. I was a little worried that the topic would be straying a little from our normal industrial themes, but the audience really warmed to the virtual walk through the town and joined in with reminiscences of their early life in the area. Before our next talk we slipped in another of our river and canal walking series; this time it was along the Grand Union Slough Arm and was shared with the River and Canal Historical Society.

May saw us back to St Mary's church for a talk on the medieval tilery found in Silver Street, Reading. David Sanchez brought to life both the potential use of this area on what was then the southern edge of the town, and the frustrations of having to manage an archaeological excavation in two parts when the tilery works were spread across the whole site. We followed this talk with Dr. David Lewis speaking to us about the Windsor Conduit - a significant 16th century engineering project designed to supply fresh water to the castle, often overlooked in the town's earlier history. Documentary evidence suggests the system was developed around 1510–1560, with ongoing maintenance needed to support the castle's water needs, reflecting the area's development during the Tudor period. For BIAAG these two talks took us further back in to the past than our Victorian industrial focus, but were much enjoyed by the members.

Back to our walks theme, we traversed the Kennet & Avon canal stretch by Pewsey in Wiltshire combining it with a visit to the Pewsey Heritage centre.

As part of the wider family of industrial archaeologists we joined our colleagues from the southern England groups at the South East Region Industrial Archaeology Conference which was held in Norwood Hill, London, in April. The day saw a wide-range of topics discussed from Brunel's timber viaducts to the 'working coast' which explored the various industries that have made our seaside places what they are. The conference was held in the Stanley Art centre, formerly the Stanley Halls, which formed an archetypal Victorian centre of learning for the masses built by a local philanthropist. We were lucky to have the venue's manager talk to us about the history and the building's restoration programme, and I would urge anyone in the West Norwood area to pop in for a visit.

Along with many other BLHA members, BIAAG took part in the Berkshire Heritage Fair jointly organised by the Berkshire Local History Association and Berkshire Family History Society in July. It was a pleasure to help those with questions for us and also to spend a little bit of time speaking to our fellow society representatives.

Jo Alexander-Jones, Secretary

Hedgerley Historical Society

On 5 June, a group from Hedgerley Historical Society took a trip on the Regent's Canal from King's Cross to Little Venice, under the guidance of one of our most popular speakers, Charlie Foreman. Charlie seems to have an encyclopaedic knowledge of London and its history. And he's a particular expert on the canal.

Any of you who enjoy narrow boating will know that one of its joys is its ability to transport you into another world; whether you are travelling through the countryside or the heart of a great city, you see everything from a different perspective: at a slow pace, from the water, always surrounded by wildlife. Familiar sites look strangely different. And so it is, as you wind yourself through London, and navigate the 4½ miles and the locks of the Regent's Canal. The canal was built between 1812 and 1820, proposed by one Thomas Homer and designed by the famous John Nash. When it was built, it was a vital contributor to the economy of London, used as a key industrial transport route to bypass central London and connect the Midlands' industrial canal network with the docks on the River Thames. It primarily carried heavy goods such as coal, timber, construction materials, foodstuffs, and even Norwegian ice. In fact, our trip started from the London Canal Museum, at Battlebridge Basin – an interesting destination in itself - and occupying a former 'ice house'. This was a building acting as a hub for the receipt of vast quantities of ice, initially from Norway, for onward distribution to the local households and businesses. This was once a thriving business.

Despite the arrival of the railways soon after its construction, the Regent's canal remained an important industrial transport route, linking directly with the stations in the King's Cross area, well into the 20th century, until it officially closed for freight traffic in 1969. Today it passes through a mixture of spectacular modern architecture, industrial heritage sites, grand private houses and the majesty of Regent's Park. Taking the route as we did, we were soon passing the new Google building and the highly successful regeneration of the King's Cross area. We went through Camden Lock, arguably the most famous feature of the canal, where the towpath widens and becomes a vibrant hub for street food, crafts and music. Moving west, the canal skirts Regent's Park running directly alongside the aviaries and enclosures of London Zoo, and finally reaching the peaceful enclave of Little Venice and the picturesque triangular pool where the Regent's Canal meets the Grand Union Canal.

We then made the return trip. Charlie and our skipper told us in advance that the speed of our progress would be entirely dependent on whether we reached each of the locks when open to us, or whether we would have to wait for them

to empty or fill. In fact, the locks were in our favour in both directions. What a lovely way to spend an early summer's day.

Think of Luton and what springs to mind? An airport, hats, vehicles, a walled garden? Luton Airport opened in 1938 and has evolved from a municipal airfield to a major international airport. During WW2 it was a base for 264 Fighter Squadron. Hats, initially straw and later felt ones, have been made in Luton since the 17th century. At its peak in the 1930s there were 500 manufacturers employing 10,000 people producing 70 million hats every year. There are still ten hat manufacturers and Luton Town Football Club are called 'The Hatters'. Now, vehicles; Vauxhall Luton was operational from 1905 until 2025 employing at its peak 37,000 people, initially producing passenger cars and later light commercial vehicles. Do you remember the Vauxhall Viva, Cavalier, Carlton and Vectra?

Just south of the town on the border with Hertfordshire is the Luton Hoo Estate. The estate contains an historic walled garden that is being lovingly restored by teams of volunteers. One of the volunteer researchers, Dianne Steel, approached us in November 2025 regarding a property called Scotlands (now Scotlands Drive) just off Black Pond Lane in Farnham Royal. In the late 1920s a lady called Margaret Pryce, who worked for the Wernher family in the late 19th and early 20th century lived at Scotlands. Following this approach the Hedgerley Historical Society arranged a guided tour in July.

Taking its name from the Anglo-Saxon term 'hoo' meaning the spur of a hill the estate once extended over 10,000 acres encompassing a grand mansion (now a hotel), lake, park, cottages and farmland. The current 1,200-acre estate retains many of the historical features, including the octagonal walled garden that was designed by Lancelot 'Capability' Brown. In 1763 John Stuart, 3rd Earl of Bute, commissioned Brown to landscape his park including damming the River Lea to form a lake. Lord Bute had spent a few years advising Frederick, Prince of Wales, and subsequently his widow Princess Augusta on the creation of Kew Gardens. Brown chose a ten-acre site on one of the highest points on the estate to build a 4.83-acre octagonal walled garden with the walls aligned to take advantage of early morning sunlight in order to grow tender fruits such as peaches. In fact, some walls face the direction of sunrise and sunset at the spring and autumn equinoxes and midsummer and midwinter solstices.

The arrival of John Shaw Leigh and his family in 1847 transformed the garden and he built a grand conservatory, glasshouses and a substantial house for his head gardener. The estate was sold in 1903 to Sir Julius Wernher and his wife Lady Alice, who were keen to modernize and bring innovation. A

magnificent glasshouse range, designed and built by Mackenzie and Moncur, measuring 229 feet long with a central fernery was built. Walls were raised to accommodate a new peach house. The head gardener, Arthur Metcalfe, employed fifty-four gardeners, and a bothy was built to accommodate the trainee gardeners.

During WW2 the walled garden was a training facility for the Women's Land Army with the Government determining the types of vegetables and fruit grown. After the war twenty gardeners had to grow enough produce, which was sold at Covent Garden, to cover their wages. However, by the 1950s the walled garden had become less financially viable and some areas went out of production. In the 1970s, with a workforce of five gardeners, Lady Wernher decided to open a garden centre; this closed on her death in 1977 and the walled garden was left to decay.

In 2001 Mrs Lucy Phillips instigated a research project to uncover the history of the Grade II listed site, including oral histories gathered from previous gardeners and estate workers, with a view to rejuvenating it and opening it to the public. In 2006 work began to clear the garden of weeds and brambles. Each week on average thirty volunteers tend the herbaceous borders, vegetables and soft fruit under the guidance of a head gardener. In addition, a team of fifteen conservation volunteers are gradually repairing the garden structures including the Mackenzie and Moncur wooden conservatory. [The Walled Garden](#), an RHS Partner Garden, is well worth a visit.

Heatwave conditions were not exactly what I had in mind when I arranged a summer evening at Bekonscot Model Village and Railway in early July. The conditions did not seem to worry the 5000 (at the last count) residents of this delightful model village – the oldest in the world.

It was started as a hobby by London Accountant Roland Callingham in the 1920s after he moved from Ascot to Beaconsfield. His collection of model buildings soon outgrew his home and as Managing Director Brian Newman Smith explained that his wife told him that "either the models left the house or she would!" Roland purchased some land and built tennis courts and a garden pool for entertaining guests. Buildings and paths were then laid out around the pool. A friend, James Shilcock, then laid out a garden railway.

James Shilcock, lived in Ascot, so it was decided to combine the names of the two places and call the village 'Bekonscot'. Friends encouraged Roland to open the village to the public so on 4 August 1929 the gates opened for the first time to much acclaim and started a movement to develop similar model villages across the country.



There was no admission charge, but visitors were invited to put money in collection boxes for charity. In 1932, the Bekonscot Model Railway & General Charitable Association was set up to administer the village and distribute surplus money to charity and has operated on this basis since.

As the sun set we were privileged to see the village in the evening light. As the tourist attraction approaches its centenary in 2029 let's hope that it continues to enchant visitors, both young and old alike, for many generations to come.

John Lovelock and Peter Phippen, Hedgerley Historical Society

The History of Reading Society

Our talk in April was 'Northcourt Avenue, Reading: its History and People' by Penny Kemp. This might seem a bit specialised, but it attracted a large audience, some of whom lived in the Avenue. Penny had published a book on the subject in 1996, with the help of a residents' association, and copies had quickly sold out. Recently, a new edition had been published, and copies were on sale.

The Avenue is about a mile long, and houses were being built from 1905 onwards. It was not paved until 1930, when lime trees were planted along it, with the residents paying the Borough Council for the tarmac and the trees. Just two gas lamps were installed.

Before the First World War, the houses were large, on large plots, individually architect-designed, and in the Arts and Crafts style. They were on the west side of the street, several had tennis courts, and one had a cottage for the chauffeur in the grounds. In the 1920s, more modest houses were built, on both sides of the street, some of them described as 'chalet bungalows.' Almost all of the houses were built by 1939.

Our speaker put all of this activity into the context of the development of the town. There was tendency of wealthier families to move from the smoke of the town centre to the slopes above, on the edge of the countryside. The growth of the town as a centre for manufacturing and distribution had its effect on the people coming to live in the avenue, as did the proximity of Leighton Park School, with its Quaker connections. Later, when the university acquired Whiteknights, this had an effect. As well as teaching staff living in Northcourt Avenue, the university built a hall of residence, and had its sanatorium, or health centre, there. A surprisingly large number of artists lived in the avenue – painters, book illustrators, designers, and architects.

On my way home after the talk, I found myself musing over whether there were other streets in Reading which could have provided a similar amount of material for a talk and a book, but in the end I couldn't think of any!

Our last talk before the summer break was entitled 'From Blackboard to Mortarboard: Adult Education in Reading.' The subject seemed particularly appropriate at this time, because (1) the year 2026 is the centenary of the granting of the foundation charter to the University of Reading, and (2) the Society is hoping to publish a history of the Reading School of Art this year. The School of Art – later the Reading School of Art and Science, and then the School of Science and Art, was founded in 1860, and became part of the Reading University Extension College, which was to become an independent university.

Dr. Margaret Simons, herself a graduate of the university, and a tutor of adult education classes in Reading, seemed the ideal person to deliver the talk, and her knowledge of the subject, presented in a lively way, was impressive.

We were taken back to mid-19th century Reading, when the government and the Borough Council began to take an active interest in adult education. The

Workers' Educational Association was particularly active in Reading, and private individuals took an interest, among them George Lovejoy the bookseller, and particularly members of the Palmer family, the biscuit bakers.

Buildings in and around the town used to deliver adult education in its various forms, ranging from evening classes for pleasure or to learn practical trades to day-time degree courses, were illustrated. The gradual building up of the area between Blagrove Street, Valpy Street, West Forbury Road and The Forbury was described. Then later, the Borough Council offered land in London Road to the University Extension College, in exchange for the land in Blagrove Street where they had the Town Halls, Library and Museum and Art Gallery. The Extension College grew on the London Road site, and the new university was able to acquire Whiteknights Park in 1945.

The Extension College, and then the University proper continued to offer evening classes in technical subjects, but in the 1930s the Borough Council as local education authority began to make plans for a technical college. Evening classes were held in schools, and the council acquired the big houses around Victoria Square. War intervened but the Reading Technical College opened in 1955, occupying much of the square. Since then, the college has changed its name several times, at one stage being a campus of Thames Valley University, but is now the Reading College.

When Margaret asked how many in the audience had attended evening classes run by the Borough Council's Adult College, it was obvious that a good number of us had enjoyed them. It was good to think that New Directions (the successor of the Adult College), Reading College, and the University, continue to flourish.

Over the summer, we had two visits, both of them well supported and enjoyed. In June, it was to the building in London Street now occupied by RISC, the Reading International Solidarity Centre, for a long time before that was the biggest bookshop in Reading, and before that, a Quaker meeting-house where William Penn once worshipped. The July meeting was to look round the cemetery off Henley Road in Caversham.

Indoor meetings re-start on 16 September.

David Cliffe, Chairman

Hungerford Historical Association

Historian David Peacock presented a fascinating and immaculately researched talk on cloth-making in Berkshire during the Tudor period when the industry dominated the national economy and export market. Reading and Newbury were among the leading centres of cloth production in Berkshire on 27 May. The two most important cloths were the broadcloth and the kersey and by the 16th century these were the most important English exports. David's knowledge and mastery of his subject made for a fascinating evening.

To celebrate this year's 200th anniversary of the railway in Britain, Dr. Hugh Pihlens local historian and founder of HHA, presented an immaculately researched talk outlining the history of the railway in Hungerford on 24 June. Hugh's extensive knowledge and splendid array of heritage images made for a highly enjoyable and illuminating evening.

Dr. Helen Lockhart, Speaker Secretary

Oxfordshire Family History Society

Over the last few months activities at Oxfordshire Family History Society have included our lively and wide-ranging series of talks covering diverse subjects, such as how AI can help with family history research and Victorian quack doctors. As well as talks, we have hosted chatrooms to help with specific family history research queries, and we have been out and about at fairs and events. Unfortunately, we have stopped our drop-in advisor sessions at the Oxfordshire History Centre due to lack of customers there; we do, however, continue to have a good take up at county libraries including Abingdon - fourth Saturday each month, please telephone the library to book.

We continue to grow our Big Oxfordshire Names Database (BOND) with information gleaned from publications going back to medieval times and covering some old Berkshire parishes. For example, in Volume Two of the Cartularies of Abingdon Abbey, we found Robert Alyrton, in 1136 who was an abbot's cook in Abingdon.

More wills and probate records have been transcribed and made available in the Oxfordshire Wills database. The wills and probate records are next in line to be added to BOND.



We are gearing up for our annual family history fair to take place in The Cherwell School, Marston Ferry Road, Oxford on 24 October, where we are planning to celebrate our 50th anniversary as a society. Stallholders are booking their places including the Berkshire Family History Society. Information about all events and news can be found on our website www.ofhs.uk.

Angie Trueman, OFHS Publicity Coordinator and Webmaster

Project Purley

Our last talk before our summer activity programme was in April, when I gave a presentation of recent photographic additions to the Society's archive. We are very fortunate to continue to receive regular donations to our archive and this talk shared some of those discoveries. We collect both old and new images, 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. It provoked considerable discussion during and after the talk and the promise of more new material.

In May, it was the first of our summer visits – this one to Holy Trinity Church in Reading where churchwarden Ron Cutting gave us an informative tour. Built in 1826, the church appears in one of the earliest photos taken by Henry Fox Talbot, in 1840, making it possibly the first ever church to be photographed in the entire country. From the outside it is modest and plain, inside it is surprisingly large and extensively decorated in high church style. Holy Trinity is grade II listed, mainly because of its rood screen designed by Augustus Pugin, one of many items saved by its then minister in the 1960s. There is also a very ornate Queen Anne pulpit, originally from a church in Oxford, from which John Wesley is believed to have preached. However, the highlight of the tour for most was probably the visit to the hugely atmospheric crypt. Holy Trinity is one of two churches in Reading whose crypts were used for burials, and as we negotiated the labyrinth of darkened tunnels, we passed lines of memorial plaques set into the walls sealing each tomb. This was the Oxford Road area's Victorian population, or approximately 400 of them. One side passageway contained an air raid shelter poster, citing the rules for cats and dogs, a reminder of the crypt's many uses over time. This was a fascinating visit which will be remembered for a long time.

June brought our summer barbecue, held in the garden of two of our members, and a return visit by the 'Rain or Shine Theatre Company' who gave their adaptation of 'The Pickwick Papers'.

Our second summer outing was to Cumberland Lodge in the Windsor Great Park. The trip was slightly more problematic to arrange than usual, as we couldn't be guaranteed a date or tour guides until six weeks beforehand, but it was well worth the effort. We opted for the tour and cream tea package which was thoroughly enjoyed. Our guides were very knowledgeable and we were impressed that they had done their homework and talked about the connections between Purley and Cumberland Lodge's past Royal visitors. The artwork, all from the Royal Collection, was particularly impressive. We highly recommend this to others.

Looking ahead, our [programme](#) is published to the end of the year and we are now starting to think about our programme for 2027.

Catherine Sampson, Chairman

Thatcham Historical Society

Thatcham Historical Society joined the team at Thatcham Nature Discovery Centre in June for an event with the public. The society had a number of old photographs of the area on display along with various histories. Members of the public visited and were engaged with both learning more about the local history but also in sharing their memories.

On 30 June 2026, members and friends of Thatcham Historical Society were treated to a fascinating tour of Shaw House, Newbury. Our guide, Sarah, gave the group a wonderfully engaging tour, taking us into areas of the house that are not normally open to the public and giving us the opportunity to see parts of this important historic building from a rather different perspective.

Shaw House dates from the Elizabethan age and was built in the 1580s for Thomas Dolman, a wealthy cloth merchant whose family became closely associated with the house and the surrounding area. Sarah brought the history of the Dolman family to life, explaining how the house developed and changed over the centuries and the various uses it has had. One particularly interesting chapter in its history was its later use as a school, adding another layer to the story of a building that has served very different purposes over its long history.



As well as telling us about the history of Shaw House and the people connected with it, Sarah explained how the house has developed over the

years and how its interpretation has evolved. It was particularly interesting to hear about the work that goes on behind the scenes to care for the building, manage the collections and decide how best to present its history to visitors. The visit was thoroughly enjoyed by everyone who attended, and the Society would like to thank Sarah and the team at Shaw House for such an interesting and informative afternoon.

The society resumes speaker meetings on 28 September with a talk on the history of Huntley & Palmers of Reading by historian Anne Garrison. More details can be found on our [website](#).

Dr. Nick Young, Vice-Chair

Twyford & Ruscombe Local History Society

Our first talk of the season, in April, was Dr. Richard Marks' 'The Germination of an Idea: The Story of the Suttons Seeds Company'. Members enjoyed a detailed and engaging presentation as Richard, an economic and social historian, traced the rise of one of Britain's most influential horticultural firms and showed how a Reading-based family business shaped gardening habits worldwide.

It began in early 19th century Reading, where John Sutton opened a modest seed shop in 1806. He explained how Sutton's Victorian entrepreneurship met the growing middle-class interest in gardening through reliability, quality control and scientific rigour. He also highlighted John's son Martin, whose scientific methods transformed the previously dubious Victorian seed trade. The talk showed how Suttons pioneered seed testing, packaging and distribution using its trial grounds, where new varieties were carefully grown, assessed and catalogued, setting industry standards. Members enjoyed anecdotes about the firm's record-keeping and guarantees of germination rates, which earned trust among gardeners and growers.

Richard also covered Suttons' role in global plant exchange. By the mid-Victorian period, the company imported seeds from across the Empire and beyond and exported British varieties to Europe, North America and Australasia. Its illustrated catalogues, clear instructions and reliable reputation made Suttons a household name and encouraged horticultural experimentation. Richard emphasised the human side of the story—generations of workers, family leadership and gardeners shaped by Suttons' products—before concluding with the firm's enduring legacy in British horticulture.

In May we welcomed Katie Amos, whose thirty-eight years at Reading Library, mainly in Local Studies, and front-of-house work for Reading Arts gave her strong historical and practical knowledge of the venues discussed. Using images, many from Reading Library's collections, Katie began with Reading Town Hall, a complex adapted over time for civic and cultural use. She highlighted the Father Willis organ, by the maker of the Royal Albert Hall organ, and events including a 1926 luncheon for the Prince of Wales and the 2023 display of *Gaia*. The Town Hall, comprising four buildings from the 18th and 19th centuries, still hosts organ performances. It now houses Reading Museum, the Berkshire Coroner's Office and conference and banqueting facilities, combining public use with historic character.

Katie then turned to South Street Arts Centre. Originally a labour exchange, it was linked to a Huntley and Palmers recruitment advert in 1933. After closing in the early 1980s, it reopened as an arts centre in 1989, with Michael Cashman attending the opening. Its Main Theatre and MacDevitt's Studio support music, theatre, comedy, literature, children's performances and other events, with flexible layouts for different uses. The venue was refurbished in 2003 and later redesigned and extended.

Finally, Katie discussed The Hexagon, named through a competition won by a 12-year-old schoolgirl and opened on 5 November 1977. One of the few council-owned venues in the country and now self-funding, it first staged Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Gondoliers* by The Sainsbury Singers. With capacity from 946 seated to 1,686 standing, it hosts theatre, comedy, music, sport, television and fairs, and has also served as a snooker venue and Covid food hub. Further accessibility improvements are planned.

In June 2016, Mike Cooper spoke on welfare and social care in Reading from the Middle Ages to the early 20th century, using images from Reading Central Library's Local Studies Collections. He showed how poor harvests, fires and misfortune forced people to rely on family, neighbours and parishes, and argued that each period should be judged by its own standards.

Over about 800 years, relief in Reading came from many sources, beginning with Reading Abbey, founded by Henry I in June 1121 to house his body, pray for his soul, offer hospitality, display piety and wealth, provide alms and grant land to Reading's people. The Hospitium of St John the Baptist opened in 1193 as both guest house and residential care for twenty-six people of good character, providing board, lodging, clothing, ale and clean water. This represented about 2% of Reading's population—roughly equivalent to 15,000 beds today—and likely gave residents better-than-average nutrition.

Almshouses for the poor but worthy followed, provided by churches and individuals; many were well built and survive today. For the able-bodied but work-shy, the workhouse was the alternative. Reading's Oracle began as a 17th century workhouse funded by wool merchant John Kendrick, who left £1,500 in 1628 to help poor people learn trades, especially broadcloth production. The scheme made Reading an important Navy supplier, but cheap cloth undercut the market and led to its decline. The Poor Law Amendment Act 1834 reshaped workhouse organisation. Battle Farm, later Battle Hospital, opened in 1867 as the Reading Union Workhouse, serving the destitute and infirm. With its chapel, bakery and laundry, it operated almost as a self-contained village and expanded as medical and social care grew.

In July, the Twyford and Ruscombe Local History Society enjoyed a summer lunch at Hennerton Golf Club, with lovely food and views across the golf course and countryside looking forward to the autumn programme featuring Dr. Stephen Goss talking about Caversham Park, Colin Oakes on Halloween and Sue Ellis on local pubs and all things relating to beer. The season ended with our Christmas 'Bring and Share Party' in December.

Pamela Graddon, Secretary

Wargrave Local History Society

At the April meeting of our Society, Mike Cooper considered the evidence of human settlement around Reading from the hunter-gatherers to the Romans. This was a time when there was no 'Reading', but a look at life in our area roughly 500,000 years ago. Apart from parts of St Mary's church, the oldest structures above ground in Reading itself are the remains of Reading Abbey, dating from about 1150, whilst the first detailed written record is the Domesday survey of 1086. However, burials in the area around Reading date from about 1200BC to 890BC, showing there had been people in this part of the country long before the town was built.

The development of the district followed the last Ice Age, which brought glaciers as far south as Oxfordshire. People were living hereabouts half a million years ago, constructing their first buildings about 10,000 years ago, and making their first settlement around 2,900BC - before the time when Stonehenge was built. The evidence that had been discovered could indicate where these people lived, and what they were doing. Mike went on to describe the various eras that followed the Ice Age. The first people would date to the Palaeolithic period (the old stone age), followed by the Mesolithic period (middle stone age), of around 12,000 years ago, when the first buildings probably appear, and then the Neolithic (new stone age), when settlements

were created around 4200 to 1500BC. This was followed by the Bronze Age, until 800BC, and then the Iron Age, before the Roman era. Evidence of all of these could be found locally, and Mike explained the reasons why the developments had taken place in the way the archaeology had revealed, and the skills that the inhabitants had acquired. It was by gathering information from a wide range of sources, that how those living in the area in ancient times related to the environment could be understood - long before any written records were created.



In May, society member Julia Freeman recalled her time as a tennis umpire, not only at Wimbledon, but internationally. Her presentation not only included pictures showing what they wore on court, but she also brought some of her actual designer outfits for the meeting to see. She began by outlining the history of the Wimbledon Championships, which had first taken place in 1877 but it was not until 1913 that the ladies' game gained Championship status. Originally the courts were in Worple Road, with the present site in Church Road coming into use in 1922. Julia's family had been living in Bangkok for several years, but on her return to England she applied to the Lawn Tennis Association to work as a tennis umpire. Having passed the training course in 1992, she needed to gain some experience before her first umpiring duty at Wimbledon, in 1994. The uniform from about 2006 was designed by Ralph Lauren, with the jackets no longer the traditional green, but dark blue edged in white. Each year, the umpires were given an extra skirt or pair of trousers -

Julia never wore the trousers for summer tournaments - meaning her grandchildren could identify her in the team of umpires; “Granny is the lady in the skirt”. Her presentation recalled many special events in her time at Wimbledon, from her first time judging the Ladies Final on Centre Court (in 2001), the visit of Queen Elizabeth in 2010, or the Men’s Singles Final in 2011, when Julia was an umpire for a good and very exciting match, in which Novak Djokovic beat Rafael Nadal 6–4, 6–1, 1–6, 6–3. An unusual incident occurred in 2019 when the racket of the Swiss player, Stan Wawrinka, who had a huge back swing and liked to stand well back on the court, caught Julia on the back and he was concerned that she was alright. Julia said she remembers with fondness the sweaty hug they shared! Julia’s informative and entertaining presentation also covered her work umpiring tennis abroad, including Denmark, Finland, Sweden, and Spain, tournaments in New Zealand for 18 years (noting the difficulty of large amounts of uniform and a limited baggage allowance for the flight home!).



June is the time for the Wargrave Village Festival, held biennially, and this year’s event included a display of photographs from the society archive about the history of the society itself, aerial photographs of the village at different times over the past century showing how the village had developed, and a section about transport serving the village, both by train and by bus. One of those pictures created a lot of interest, as quite a few people thought that it had been taken at Twyford station, not realising that for many years the railway station at Wargrave had a substantial brick building on the platform, where tickets could be purchased, and waiting passengers kept warm in the winter months with a coal fire in the waiting room. Built in 1900 to the standard GWR design, it was demolished in 1988, and replaced by a simple glazed metal shelter. Visitors also took time to try and identify twenty photographs of ‘Where is it in Wargrave?’. Several people thought one of these was at Crazies Hill, although actually it was only about 100 yards from where they were stood!

The Historic Village Walk proved to be as popular as ever, with all tickets sold well before the event. Fortunately, the afternoon was not one of extreme heat, and although warm, the forecast rain did not arrive, and there was at times a gentle breeze. The participants were in 2 groups (for their safety in the High Street), and a unique feature of this year’s Walk was the chance to visit the

grounds of Wargrave Hall and enjoy the view upstream of the River Thames. Wargrave Hall has a place not only in village history (being where Lord Barrymore - who had a theatre in Wargrave in the 1790s - was tutored before attending Eton College), but also in national history, as members of the Cabinet met there on occasion from just before and during World War 1, and in the post war era for discussions leading to the establishment of the Irish Free State. The house then belonged to Edward Goulding, who became Lord Wargrave in recognition of his involvement in these events.



In July, the society had its visit to a place of historic interest – this year to the National Trust's house and garden at Hinton Ampner, in mid-Hampshire. Hinton Ampner is mentioned in the Domesday Survey of 1086, which records the land as being 8 hides (a hide was the area of land to support one family) and the existence of a church. The Hinton part of the placename means it is a high place, whilst Ampner refers to an almoner - a church official who distributed charitable funds to the poor. The estate belonged to the church of St Swithun at Winchester, which later became Winchester cathedral. The Lord of the Manor for Hinton Ampner was therefore the Bishop of Winchester, who at times also held the Manor of Wargrave. In the case of the Hinton Ampner estate, it was leased to a tenant - probably from as early as the 13th century.

The first house on the estate was built in Tudor times, probably in the 1540s, and later occupied by Thomas Stewkley, who took on the lease of the estate in 1597. That 21-bedroom house was replaced by a small Georgian hunting lodge, built in 1793, the Stewkley family by then spending most of their time in Gloucestershire. The family returned to Hinton in the Victorian era, the house passing by marriage to the Dutton family. In 1897 they set about a programme of alterations to the hunting lodge, creating the basis of the present house. On the death of John Dutton in 1935, the estate passed to his son, Ralph. The latter thought of the house as a “Gothic Victorian pile”, and so set about returning it to a Georgian style, collecting appropriate furniture and fittings. The work was nearly completed when war broke out in 1939 - the house being requisitioned for Portsmouth Grammar School for Girls during the war. Ralph continued to add to his collections, but this was (almost) all lost in a disastrous fire in April 1960. The timber of the roof and floors and the house contents were destroyed - although the fire brigade had turned out, the lack of sufficient water (the nearest fire hydrant being about a mile away) meant they could do little. The brick structure remained, so for the second time Ralph set about rearranging the house, lowering the roof profile, restoring the spacious Georgian style rooms, and again collecting suitable period furniture and ornaments - sales to pay Death Duties at the time making many suitable items available. It is the house and contents in this form that passed to the National Trust when Ralph died in 1985.

The society's visit began with a tour of the gardens, with National Trust volunteer Amena as our guide. She not only knew about the gardens and the site's history, but also the shaded spots to tell us about them! The gardens were restored in the early 2000s to how Ralph Dutton had known them, and have a staff of 4 gardeners assisted by about 40 volunteers to tend them. The orchard occupies the site of the old Tudor house, which had faced north, towards the village of Cheriton. During the Civil War, the Battle of Cheriton in 1644 when the Parliamentarians defeated the Royalist army had been witnessed from the house by the Stewkleys, who supported of Charles I. The Stewkleys had to forfeit the estate, but it was restored to them by Charles II. The present gardens had been planned by Ralph Dutton, who had taken advice from his head gardener and other specialists such as horticulturist Harold Hillier. Ralph chose trees to create different features at different times of the year in his garden, whilst from the terrace on the south side of the mansion there are views across the estate to the Hampshire countryside beyond.



After the guided gardens tour, the group visited the interior of the house, a recreation following the 1960 fire of the Georgian style, and at one time thought to be of 'no historic value'. The ground floor rooms are airy and uncluttered, containing the items Ralph Dutton had collected after the fire. After the National Trust acquired the estate, it was let for several years to a tenant who made several changes. Eventually the Trust hopes to restore these to how Ralph designed them, and make more rooms in the house available to visitors.

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

Berkshire Family History Society, Family Research Centre, Ground Floor, L14 London Road Campus, London Road, Reading RG1 5AQ – 0118 9509553

Nick Prince (chairman@berksfhs.org.uk)

Berkshire Gardens Trust

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

Berkshire Historic Churches Trust

John Pritchard (secretary@berkschurchestrust.org.uk)

Berkshire Industrial Archaeology Group

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

Berkshire Record Society

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

(margaretsimons@hotmail.co.uk)

Blewbury Local History Group

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

(audreyrosettalong@gmail.com)

Burnham Historians

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

(burnhamhistorians@btinternet.com)

East Garston Local History Society

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

(karen@pryer.com)

East Ilsley Local History Society

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

(info@eastilsleyhistory.com)

Eton Wick History Group

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

Friends of Windsor and Royal Borough Museum

Len Nash: 27 Bourne Avenue, Windsor SL4 3JP

Goring Gap Local History Society

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

(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

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

Civic Centre, Bridge Street, Reading, RG1 2LU - 01189 937 5950

Reading Museum

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

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

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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	
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Individual	£ 9.00	£12.00	1	1
Family	£ 9.00	£12.00	1	1
Corporate	£18.00	£20.00	2	3