

bridge

Newsletter of the Sonning & Sonning Eye Society

The Treacher Papers

David Gambrill

In the autumn 2017 edition of this magazine, there is a reference to the brick built bridge constructed by one John Treacher in 1790. Those words took me back a few years to a time when I was fortunate enough to take a course in Modern History at the University of Reading as a mature student and, of course, I had to prepare a thesis. I had wanted to tackle something that relied on primary sources and related to an important part of my course. The Victorian period had attracted me as one when so much occurred that helped to mould our modern society. I was guided towards the Berkshire Record Office and had very helpful discussions with a couple of archivists.

It was suggested that I base my work on a diary – there were many stored in the building in Reading. After some research, I chose one set of papers as it met my need to cover at least a part of Victoria's reign and it had a local flavour. The diary I chose was written by a young man called John Treacher whose grandfather is the one referred to above. The younger John kept his diary over the five year period 1837 and 1842. Whilst only covering a short period his jottings covered so many aspects of Victorian life. The following words represent just a small part of his diary and my thesis.



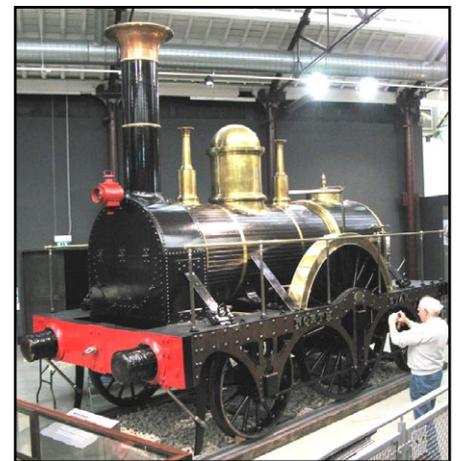
The Coming of the Railway

At the beginning of his diary there are references to the building of the railroad. By the end of the short period he would use it to travel to such places as Bath, Bristol and Margate. On 26th August he refers to a boy being killed on the railway near Reading, followed by another incident on 22 November when two men were killed by "falling dirt". This particularly nasty form of death, according to the diary, was not an uncommon fate for railway workers. This view is supported by E.T MacDermot, in his History of the Great Western Railway, Vol. 1 he writes: "West of Twyford the great cutting through Sonning Hill was a source of much trouble and delay." The Berkshire Chronicle (30 January 1839) also expresses concern about not only the accidents but also the whole project which was being undertaken by a young engineer. This young person was, of course, Isambard Kingdom Brunel.

Opinion on the coming of the railway was certainly divided. The two Members of Parliament for Reading were on opposite sides of the argument. Charles Russell had been Chairman of the Commons Committee which had considered the bill of 1835 (approving the Great Western Railway) and had strongly supported building the railway. The other Reading MP, Charles F. Palmer, who was a large landowner, would object strongly to the project. According to Angela Perkins in her renowned 'The Book of Sonning', it was because: "He would not be able to preserve his

game at Sonning and Woodley".

The Act of Parliament was passed on 3rd July 1837. On 30th March 1840 the railway to Reading was opened for public traffic and a couple of months later John records a visit to the line: "In the evening went up to the Railway and saw a new Engine, started today, the Tiger. I have seen altogether 9 Engines running on the railway the "morning star", evening star, Dog star, ajax, Planet, Mars, Firefly & Tiger". (NB. John was literate but not great at grammar, punctuation and spelling).



North Star replica (built in 1923 using some parts of the original) a sister engine to Morning Star, on display at Swindon, 2008.

Photo credit: Geof Sheppard

Continued on page 6 -->

Bridge is the newsletter of the
Sonning & Sonning Eye Society

email: bridge@sonning.org.uk

web: www.sonning.org.uk

Printed on paper from responsible sources by a
company supporting the Woodland Carbon Scheme



>>Eye on Sonning a view from the Bridge

Mike Hart, Chairman

Members and guests who attended the AGM and dinner in Pearson Hall on Saturday 18 November will have heard a summary of the events of the past year that were more fully described in the Annual Report, sent to all members by email in advance of the AGM this year. It was a successful year for the Society in which all our panels, Education, Planning/Traffic and Membership, were very active, the Sonning Conservation Area Appraisal was adopted by WBC and we launched the new-look Bridge and website.

We were fortunate to have Jesse Elzinga, the Headmaster of Reading Blue Coat School (RBCS), make the after-dinner speech. In a very articulate and well-presented talk he started off by describing his background in the USA, his education and sporting achievements, his teaching assignments at Harrow and then his arrival as HM at RBCS a year ago. He went on to explain the history of RBCS and how the generous benefaction by Richard Aldworth in 1646 has enabled RBCS to provide bursaries to so many pupils today, and finally he explained how he wants to build on that legacy to increase the charitable status of Blue Coat School.

When Mr Elzinga offered to take questions he found that guests had strong feelings about the traffic problems resulting

from RBCS pupils parking along Sonning Lane. He explained that as a resident of Sonning he shares these concerns not least because of his responsibility for the safety of his pupils. He explained how he is working with WBC, SPC, the Society and the sports clubs to come up with a long term solution and is confident that these efforts will soon bear fruit.

Earlier in the evening Annabella Marks mentioned that the Society has provided support to the Junior School in a project to research the history of the Sonning Heroes who gave their lives in the wars. The pupils presented their findings to the Committee last week and we were so impressed that we have asked them to repeat their talks and exhibition for all members. We will give you all the details in the new year.

Executive Committee & Panels

Patrick Hamblin, Planning & Traffic Panel

Planning applications

The Planning and Traffic Panel continues to meet monthly. There have been 16 applications reviewed at the three meetings held since the last edition of Bridge. Comments were sent to Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) relating to the following applications:

- 20 Glebe Lane, Sonning
- Acrefield, Charvil Lane, Sonning
- Reading Blue Coat School relating to process & means of updated travel plan
- The Atrium, Thames Street, Sonning
- 6 Hawthorn Way, Sonning
- St Andrew's Church gates

Information on planning applications to WBC and South Oxfordshire District Council are now shown on the Society's website under the Local News menu heading.

Major decisions by WBC and Appeals

- Appeal against decision to refuse an application for change of use of land adjacent to Model Farm Cottages, Bath Road, Sonning dismissed
- Pool Court redevelopment to be the subject of an Appeal

- Acrefield, Charvil Lane, Sonning refused
- The Atrium, Thames Street, Sonning approved

Sonning Parish Council Planning Committee meetings

The Society has been represented at all the above meetings since the last edition as an observer.

Traffic

The joint working group consisting of representatives from the S&SES and SPC continue to have useful discussions with Sonning businesses regarding parking problems and possible solutions. WBC appears to have accepted the problems of parking in Sonning Lane and is preparing a scheme for restricting the parking. It is understood this might take up to one year to implement. The Society is very grateful for the input by Jesse Elzinga (Headmaster, Reading Blue Coat School) in working with us, SPC and WBC to endeavour to improve the current situation relating to the parking of pupils' vehicles.

It is understood that the digital speed indicator installed by SPC in Pound Lane near the school entrance at Ligure

Way continues to have some effect on reducing the speed of traffic although it is understood one vehicle was recorded as having passed the indicator at 65mph!

Sonning Bridge

The bridge, a Grade II listed structure, was damaged by a vehicle in April 2017. Repairs have now been completed.

Local Plan Update:

No changes have been made to the list of sites for updating the local plan that will guide development in the Borough for the next 20 years and also the gypsy and traveller local plan since its publication by WBC. There are seven sites listed in Sonning. The Society is continuing to monitor the list.

Sonning Eye issues relating to Caversham Quarry extension:

The Society is supporting the Sonning Eye Action Group (SEAG) in its efforts to get more information on ground water issues. The footpath near Spring Lane referred to in the previous edition has been reinstated following the installation of a bridge for gravel across Spring Lane.

The Train Now Departing From Twyford... ... is the Oscar Wilde Connection



Joyce Reed continues our railway theme

May 18th is a memorable day in the history of Twyford Railway Station. It was from here that prisoner C3.3, Oscar Wilde, left Reading Gaol and Berkshire far behind, one hundred and twenty years ago.

After a notorious trial, he was eventually transferred to this 'model' gaol. Travelling from Clapham Station, in prison uniform, handcuffed and accompanied by warders, his lengthy wait on the station attracted crowds; ugly scenes ensued.

The gaol and abbey are at the heart of Reading's historical centre. A recent exhibition held 'inside' encompassed moving photographs of inmates, both children and adults, hands raised to the camera. Inspired art work 'installations', exhibits by Ai Weiwei and others, and public readings by Colm Toibin, Ralph Fiennes and Ben Wishaw, were thought provoking, as was the chance to tread the corridors, stairways, chapels and cells.



Prisoners with their hands held up

Wilde's friends hoped to avoid any repeat of the unpleasantness, on his release, by laying a 'false trail' with a brougham, blinds pulled down, to avoid the massing journalists and crowds. However, holding a copy of 'De Profundis', his letter to Alfred Douglas, Wilde left wearing everyday clothes, without handcuffs, accompanied by officials. He travelled by cab along the Reading to Twyford road with its open vistas and countryside, in stark contrast to the 'thickly muffled glass of the small iron-barred windows'. Although no lover of the countryside, Wilde



Red staircase on C wing

was ecstatic on the platform to see May blossom, exclaiming 'Oh beautiful world! Oh beautiful world!'. Wilde's sentence was not formally complete until the next day when he was released from Pentonville.

As for your reading matter on your commute, take your own diaries. As Wilde said, 'one should always have something sensational to read on the train!'. Save your Twyford ticket dated May 18th; it's Wilde memorabilia!

Photo credits: Joyce Reed

The Amazon Explored with Alastair Driver

Pauline Simmonds, Education Panel

In October about 70 members and guests assembled for a glass of wine in the comfort of the village hall, but with the help of the new large screen - and Alastair Driver, they were soon transported to another village - on the banks of the Colombian Amazon.

The main object of the expedition, led by Col. John Blashford Snell, was to undertake wildlife research and scientific experiments but the delivery of an ambulance boat, along with supplies and medical expertise was also part of the plan. Locals, for example, were treated by the two visiting dentists and the arrival of new spectacles was an obvious delight!

With amusing quotes and behind the scenes 'footnotes' Alastair soon introduced everyone to the numerous challenges - like filming the disappearing animals, the high humidity, the mosquitoes and a

daily diet of fish caught straight from the river! The explorers lived in the village huts and obviously had the full experience of jungle life.

Throughout the evening we saw amazing shots of colourful birds, different reptiles, strange-looking insects and new plant forms - only a sample we were told - of the great variety available in Colombia - or still to be discovered! The vastness of the Amazon basin and the isolation of these riverside

communities however was still a major barrier to change. Western technology was gradually creeping in but the culture and life-style of its inhabitants was still in the past, and their day to day survival remained closely dependent on the surrounding environment.

At the end of the evening, 'our journey' was also at an end. A lot of questions followed but all agreed that they had been lucky to see this fascinating area, albeit briefly, and thoroughly enjoyed the experience.



Lantern Bug - Photo credit: Alastair Driver



A Flag for Berkshire

The registered county flag is well hung

Mike Hart

In early 2017, realising that their county was one of only six in England without a registered flag, a number of Berkshire organisations (including the Sonning & Sonning Eye Society) threw their weight behind a campaign to see the traditional hart and oak, in original colours, registered as the Berkshire county flag. A total of twenty-four county bodies, from across the county supported this move and with the subsequent sanction of James Puxley, the Lord Lieutenant and Victoria Fishburn, the High Sheriff, the design was duly registered on 27 February 2017 as the county flag.

The flag features the traditional hart (stag) and oak theme associated with the county for several centuries, which appears on the badges, emblems and logos of a large number of county organisations.

The hart and oak refer generally to the forestlands of Berkshire and specifically to the legend of a late 14th century royal huntsman named Herne The Hunter. Legend has it that after various nefarious deeds by his jealous rivals, this one-time favourite of the king was dismissed from royal service and distraught, he hanged himself from an oak tree which was then struck by lightning. The hart is “one of the manifestations of his restless spirit” and, according to Michael Drayton’s poem of 1627, a banner

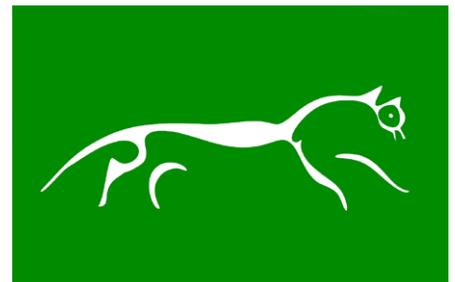
with this badge, or something very like it, was carried by the men of Berkshire at the Battle of Agincourt “*Barkshire a Stag, vnder an Oake that stood,*”.

Research conducted by Brady Ells, Assistant County Flags Officer of the Association of British Counties, located and identified a seal used by the former Berkshire County Council before its formal acquisition of arms in 1947, which depicted the hart and stag emblem, in both monochrome and coloured versions, where a naturally brown stag stands under a similarly naturally coloured oak tree, with



leaves and surrounding grass set against a field of gold. This traditional depiction maintains the resonant local theme, steeped in Berkshire history and culture, as evidenced by many further examples of the emblem in use in the county. The harts found in the county, known as ‘royal stags’, have twelve points on their antlers; this is reflected in the realisation of the deer shown on the flag. The combined hart and oak has been

used as a regimental badge by the Royal Berkshire Militia and the same combination was found on the badge of Berkshire constabulary.



Another strong contender for the county flag on traditional grounds, was the county’s other recognised emblem, the Uffington White Horse, which was first deployed as a flag by the Friends of Berkshire in the 1980s. The design bears the image of the horse produced by removing sections of green turf, to reveal the white chalk below.

The estimated three thousand year old chalk carving certainly has a long association with the county and has been deployed as a badge by the Berkshire Yeomanry. Unsurprisingly, with its ancient origins, the device has also been favoured as insignia by county based archaeological concerns and local family history society. With its ancient stylisation the emblem is strikingly distinct and unique to the county.

Ultimately however, the hart

