The new bronze statue of Trooper Fred Potts VC rescuing Trooper Andrews during the Gallipoli Campaign, and the memorial (behind) to the fallen of The Berkshire Yeomanry which were unveiled on 4 October 2015.

See Page 2

PHOTO: RICHARD BENNETT

The award-winning new bridge over the Thames for cyclists and pedestrians, officially opened by The Mayor of Reading, Cllr Sarah Hacker, on 1 October 2015.

See Page 2

PHOTO: ALISON BENNETT
Statue of Trooper Fred Potts VC and the Berkshire Yeomanry Memorial

If anyone ever says to you, “Let’s put up a statue”, be prepared for a marathon, totally absorbing, task. Over the last 3 years the Civic Society’s Chairman, Richard Bennett, has also been Chair of The Trooper Potts VC Memorial Trust and has said that, in spite of working on some complex projects during his career, this has been the most demanding, and probably the most satisfying.

The key has been information and advice gathering, fundraising, meeting planning regulations, consulting with interested parties, selecting, and specifying to, manufacturers and craftsmen, PR and interfacing with the media, diplomacy and, above all, co-ordination.

Everything developed from the wonderful design for the statue of Trooper Potts and Trooper Andrews produced by the sculptor Tom Murphy. Curators of the Berkshire Yeomanry Museum guided Tom Murphy on the accurate depiction of the uniforms and weaponry. It was appropriate also to pay tribute to soldiers of the Berkshire Yeomanry who had died in the conflicts of the 20th century and a Roll of Honour was designed to share the site with the statue. Some of the cost of the memorials was met by the adoption of names on the Roll of Honour by family members or people who had the same name (Richard and I adopted two Bennetts). The Yeomanry Museum provide such donors with copies of biographies, service records and photographs of the men whose names had been adopted.

Educational outreach has been an important factor in the creation of the memorials, with visits by members of the Trust and the Yeomanry Museum Curators to local secondary schools, primary schools and Reading College. This educational aspect continues in the provision on site of two interpretation boards. Designed by Reading-based Anne-Marie Carroll, they tell the story of Fred Potts, the Gallipoli Campaign, the Victoria Cross and a history of the Berkshire Yeomanry with a timeline of their world-wide deployments to date.

This project was an opportunity to use the expertise and talents of local people as far as possible. The groundwork and cores of the plinths were by Francis Construction. A F Jones clad the plinths in Portland stone and the VC and the Berkshire Yeomanry badge were hand-carved by their young stonemason Jonathan Rayfield. The bronze statue was cast by the renowned art foundry of Morris Singer at Lasham. Robert Rigby produced the architectural drawings for Planning and Michael Naxton, of Caversham, Curator of Lord Ashcroft’s VC Collection, was an advisor. Filming of the manufacturing processes and of the unveiling ceremony was carried out by Dan Corns of Third Lens Films of Burghfield.

Funds came from a great variety of sources: the initial seed-funding from Reading Borough Council; local grant-giving agencies; personal donations from the families of Fred Potts and Arthur Andrews; students gaining sponsorship for events; Rotary Clubs and the Masonic Charity; Network Rail; individual donations in memory of family members who were at Gallipoli, and street collections on Armed Forces Day. Major Sponsor Haslam’s Estate Agents assisted the Trust to arrange two very successful Charity Balls and auctions at which, with the invaluable help of Chris Tarrant OBE, local companies and supporters were very generous and the major proportion of the funds were raised. Haslams have been excellent facilitators with great enthusiasm for the project. People have been so supportive that the Trust has been able to establish a fund for the very important tasks of annual cleaning and re-waxing and future maintenance.

Thank you to everyone involved, we have a lovely new piece of commemorative art in the town. ABB

Website: www.pottsvctrust.org

New Thames Crossing

It was very exciting in early March to learn that the new pedestrian and cycle bridge, linking Caversham riverside to Vastern Road and the station, has won an award – a Commendation from the Civic Trust in the South East Region section.

The structure is composed of a single 39-metre high mast with a steel deck about 120m long supported by 14 pairs of cables. On the Caversham side the deck reaches down to Christchurch Meadows while on the Reading side it is connected to the towpath by a slope and steps, with balustrading made from rust-coloured weathered steel.

It was perhaps not what we had expected from a third Thames crossing, i.e. another road bridge, but it is a useful and attractive addition to the transport infrastructure. It was made possible by funding from the Council’s Local Sustainable Transport Fund.

The bridge is not only a facility for commuters. When I was there to take a photograph, in the middle of the day, in the middle of the week, it was being used by mothers with small children and by cyclists.

But what should we call it? “The new bridge” works at the moment but it will have to have a more meaningful name, especially if it wins awards. The Council feels the name should relate to key people or events in Reading’s history or the local surroundings.

Consultations produced a short list of 4 names: Christchurch Bridge, Cusden Bridge, De Montfort Bridge and William Marshal Bridge.

Votes have now been cast online and we await the result. ABB
PLANNING UPDATE

1-3 Castle Crescent (151924, 151925)

An application for the restoration and conversion of this listed building has been received. Any work to this building is long overdue and, following the demolition of a large part of an old addition, the intention is to convert the house into 5 flats. Derelict outbuildings and garages are to be demolished and replaced with a development of mews-type housing on two sides of a courtyard. Although the outbuildings, etc. are in the curtilage of the listed building, they currently do it no favours vis-à-vis its setting so would not be missed.

From the drawings, the mews houses look as though they could be a bit overbearing, viewed from the front of the site, crowding the listed building. However, to push the new development further to the south of the site would lead to overlooking neighbouring houses. As the new builds appear to be the enabling development for the restoration of the listed building, I don’t think the number or size of units would be reduced willingly.

Seven Bridges House (151619, 151620)

This application has been permitted for another GII listed building. The application is for a change of use from Class B1 office to Class A3 restaurant with associated minor internal and external modifications, including outside seating area and installation of external plant units and ventilation equipment. As far as I can see the outside seating area is a rather unappetising bit of yard, facing the high blank wall of the Oracle shopping centre, and which is the access for deliveries – so don’t all rush.

There is quite a detailed Consultee Response from the Conservation Officer concerning any internal alterations or additions, and requiring his prior approval of any fireplaces which are to be reinstated.

Red Cow Public House (160176)

The applicants wish to convert this redundant GII listed pub, on the corner of Crown Street and Southampton Street, into a restaurant on the ground floor and two flats above. There would be various internal alterations to achieve this. However, they wish to replace the ground floor windows to the front elevation with four large “shop windows”, which are completely out of keeping with the building. We have objected to this.

The Heritage Statement with the application claims that the listed status of this building is only for the rounded corner extension to Crown Street, which dates back to the 1860s. This is not correct, according to the listing, and we have raised this matter with the Planning Officer and have queried why there is only one application on the website, rather than a full application and one for Listed Building Consent.

Two applications we mentioned in the last newsletter were for Nos. 16-40 London Road (Portland Place) and Yates Wine Lodge and they have now been approved. The proposed awnings at Yates Wine Lodge don’t seem to have been pursued – but summer is coming! A further application (160141) concerning Yell House, Queens Walk is for an amendment to the original application, i.e. to reduce the amount of grey cladding on three of the elevations, leaving the west elevation, visible from the IDR, as previously permitted.

We also noted a forthcoming application for a 22-storey residential block on the site at 29-35 Station Road. This was received (151962) but has now been withdrawn. Presumably this will return in an amended form.

Richer Sounds, 114-118 Oxford Road (150721)

An application has been permitted for housing on the site of the Richer Sounds shop on Oxford Road, immediately to the east of Holy Trinity Church. Originally the site was occupied by two Victorian semi-detached villas with high gables and decorative brickwork (Hulme Villas), which were replaced in the 30s with a petrol station/garage in the typical style of the time. The application is a second attempt to redevelop this site, the previous one for a new shop and flats behind was refused in 2008. This latest application is for demolition of the existing buildings, replacing them with a 4 and 5 storey building providing 16 residential units, facing Oxford Road, with parking to the rear. The western end of the new building incorporates a steep gable which echoes the shape of the façade of Holy Trinity Church, its neighbour, while the eastern end follows a lower, flatter outline which matches the shape and height of the government building which is its neighbour to the east.

Royal Elm Park (160199)

This is an outline application for a huge makeover of the grounds at the Madejski stadium to provide 600 residential units (predominantly apartments), an ice rink, a convention centre, a 246-bedroom hotel, 102 serviced apartments, a multi-storey car park, cafés, bars and restaurants and flexible retail space, which will all link up with the planned Green Park Station.
Visits to Newbury on 25 June 2015

After visiting the West Berkshire Museum 21 members of Reading Civic Society gathered in Newbury Market Place for a conducted tour of the centre of the town led by Phil Woods of the Newbury Field Club.

Looking up at the Old Town Hall, now offices, which has an outside balcony overlooking the Market Place and a clock tower, we learned that it was designed by James Money in 1881 in imitation of Waterhouse (who designed part of Reading Town Hall).

Fronting the Market Place is the Corn Exchange built in 1862 by J S Dodd in a classical style with three bays, paired pilasters and a pediment. It was renovated in 1993 and is now a venue for exhibitions and is used as a theatre, cinema and concert hall.

Also of note in the Market Place is the former White Hart Inn built in the 16th century, altered in the 17th century – then it had Georgian bow windows and a front door added in the late 18th century – and has been altered again for its present use as offices. From this inn the first ‘Flying Coach’ to London started in 1752, and completed the journey in 12 hours.

We returned to West Berkshire Museum, formerly the Old Cloth Hall, which dated from 1627 when it was built from the legacy of John Kendrick, a wealthy clothier, as a municipal cloth-weaving workshop. It was converted to its present use in 1902 and has recently undergone considerable improvements and amendments. The museum extends into the Granary or Corn Stores building of 1720 with its covered timber balcony along the upper floor.

By the canal is the great crane which was restored by the Newbury Society in 1982. Nearby is Wharf House (18C, restored in 1993) built as the wharf owner’s house. We walked over the ‘American bridge’ towards the stone bridge, a route giving very good views of Newbury.

Newbury Bridge in Northbrook Street was built as a five arched structure by James Clarke in 1769-72 on the Oxford/Southampton route. The canal boats passed through this point without their horses, their ropes cutting still-visible ridges into the brickwork. At Newbury lock we watched boats passing through. Nearby is a memorial to John Gould whose constant campaigning led to the restoration of the canal which was badly neglected after the war years.

Our circular canal-side walk took us past a mixture of old and new buildings and, crossing over the swing bridge to New Mills, Phil gave us a history of the alms houses and pubs that lined this road. The alms houses remain but the pubs, associated with a high death rate of canal drownings, are now houses. Passing on we came to St Nicolas Church which was built by Jack of Newbury and his son between 1500 and 1532 in perpendicular style, with a tower and battlements added. The chancel arch and rood were added by Woodyer in 1858 and the Gothic gateway in the 1770s.

After a short lunch break we enjoyed a leisurely boat trip on the ‘Jubilee’, a traditional narrowboat. These trips are organised and run by volunteers from the Kennet and Avon Canal Trust to raise funds for the Trust.

It was an enjoyable day in Newbury – a museum visit, a town walk, a boat trip and a lovely warm day.

Lynette Edwell
38 members of the Society and friends, in three groups, began our guided tour of Gloucester by viewing the main entrance of the cathedral. It has been a place of continuous worship for 1,300 years since Prince Osric established a religious house here in 678-9 AD and, after the Norman Conquest, Serlo, the first Abbot, started work on the Abbey church.

Although all periods of medieval church architecture are represented at Gloucester Cathedral, its two main building phases, Romanesque and Perpendicular, are of outstanding interest and importance. Highlights of its history include the crowning of Henry III and the acceptance of the body of Edward II for burial after he died in suspicious circumstances. The dead king’s shrine became associated with rumours of miracles and pilgrimages financed the remodelling of the east end in the Perpendicular style. The only threat came from Oliver Cromwell but the building was saved from demolition by the mayor and tradesmen of the city.

Palace Yard contains interesting buildings: Miller’s Green, a working corn mill until the middle of the 18C; the bishop’s palace, completed in 1861, became part of King’s School in 1984; Bishopscourt, a new house for the bishop, was built in the close in 1986; and the house lived in by the cathedral’s organists, among them Samuel Sebastian Wesley (1810-1876) the most outstanding church musician of his time.

Through the 13C St Mary’s Gate is a little green with the statue of Bishop John Hooper, martyred in 1555 by Mary Tudor for his Protestant faith, and a strange battered statue of Charles II which was erected after the Civil War as a token civic gesture. Gloucester had endured a destructive Royalist siege and the statue soon vanished and was only recently found in a back garden.

As we left the cathedral area we passed timber framed buildings, from the 15/16th centuries, until we came to the Shire Hall built in 1816 in the classical tradition with pillars modelled on the British Museum. Among the many buildings en route was the beautiful GI listed Ladybellegate House where the family of Robert Raikes, the social reformer and pioneer of the Sunday School movement, lived from 1732. Raikes himself lived in the Tudor house shown below in the latter part of the 18C. The house, now a bar/restaurant, has been very well restored, and is named after him.

We called in briefly by ‘The Tailor of Gloucester Shop’ which is a small museum and shop full of Beatrix Potter books and toy characters, in a pretty little building illustrated in the original book.

There are many churches in Gloucester – two members of our party managed to visit 23 in the afternoon! Of note are the 13C Blackfriars church and cloister (best preserved Dominican Friary in Britain); the odd Greyfriars House c.1800 originally a private house, now an art college, which overlooks, at the back, remains of a 16C Franciscan Friary; and St Mary de Crypt (Norman with 13C features) – burial place of banker and miser Jemmy Wood, inspiration for Dickens’s Scrooge.

In East Gate shopping centre a glass observation panel allowed us to look down on remains of the Roman East Gate and medieval archaeology. The town was very important in Roman times and was given the status of a ‘colonia’ by the Emperor Nerva.

After lunch we enjoyed our own explorations of the town, the regenerated docks and the cathedral.

Photographs by Chris Widdows

Lynette Edwell
Around Town

The two gas-holders behind Liverpool Road have come down, changing the Newtown skyline and views of Reading from the east, removing more evidence of our industrial past, and providing another brown field, though it’s an awkward site between the Paddington and Waterloo tracks. Any development could be an opportunity to improve the very narrow and muddy path from Kennet Side to Sutton’s roundabout.

Chatham Place is finished; the smart new high-rise has clean lines, good proportions and judicious splashes of bright colour. Muse Developments commissioned Sally Castle to design nine historical bronze panels for the public space, depicting Reading landmarks past and present, including the rare back-to-back houses that used to occupy part of the site. Jelly staged nine artistic happenings to celebrate their installation. At the last of these Tony Page reiterated his determination to deck over the adjacent part of the IDR and to demolish the Travelodge — which I think looks more like a sinister detention centre than a hotel.

You win some….The Council’s Reading Abbey Revealed project has secured a second grant from the HLF. The £1.7m, plus £1.3m matched funding from RBC, will pay for condition surveys, conservation, repairs and interpretation at the Ruins and the Gateway. Physical work is to start in September, and the site should be fully open to the public by Summer 2018.

….and you win some more: the Arts Council has stepped in with £500K to keep 21 South Street going.

Over and Under

Pedestrians and cyclists are enjoying two new off-road north-south links: the Third Bridge and a reopened tunnel. The elegant steel span near Fry’s Island, much nicer than the clunky Kennet bridge by the Jolly Anglers, provides a quiet route to central Caversham (if you can find it from the northern interchange at the station). Even better hidden is the southern portal of the ‘Biscuit Tunnel’, behind Hobbycraft in the Forbury Retail Park: look for a welcoming ‘No Public Right of Way’ sign. The last vestige of H & P’s railway system, it is actually a fusion of five bridges built in stages as the main lines were widened. It is of enormous historic importance to Reading and its prosperity: through here arrived countless tons of baking ingredients, and hence departed untold millions of cookies en route to the world. Now it enables the residents of Lucinia View to make the Bel and the Dragon their local, and those of Kenavon Drive to nip to Tesco.

NEW PUBLICATION

Before and After
By Edith Morley
Ed: Barbara Morris
Published by Two Rivers Press
Paperback £ 9.99
Hardback £14.99

A Reading pioneer: look out for a new book from Two Rivers: Before and After, a memoir written in the 1940s by Edith Morley, the first woman in the country to be appointed professor. There is much on her highly restrictive Victorian childhood, her determination to be properly educated, her fight for recognition at University College, Reading, and her involvement with the Fabians, the Suffragists and the WEA, and her work organising help for refugees in WWII.

NOTE re gas-holders

Our 2014 London visit to the King’s Cross area took us close to a site where the old gas-holders were being redeveloped, not dismantled. They are now finished and on the market, providing modern canal-side apartments set within the GII listed cast iron gas-holder columns, with roof gardens by the Chelsea gold medal winner Dan Pearson. The prices of these apartments start at £785K.

A missed opportunity for Reading?

ABB

The Only Way to Essex

As work on Crossrail proceeds, there seems to be an assumption that its completion will help Reading’s economy and further boost house prices (a good thing?). But the benefits might be less than they might: half-hourly trains will stop many times, taking 102 minutes (without toilets!) to reach Shenfield. Off-peak leisure travellers not in a hurry will enjoy not changing at Paddington, and the benefits of thoroughness will increase as you proceed eastwards through London with limited stops; but what will commuters do? At least they should get a seat on a train that starts here. Perhaps a better service pattern might be modelled on Thameslink’s Bedford-Brighton line: we could have a mix of fasts and slows from Oxford and Newbury to Colchester.

AS
Not so delighted with …

…the appearance of the Simeon Monument in the Market Place. After all the care which went into its restoration, it is now draped in an ugly plastic banner advertising the Friday morning food market. I think that originally there were two banners on two sides of the triangle so at least it is now down to one. However, this is not a good look!

While the cooked food market offers local office workers some alternatives to the usual sandwiches at lunchtime, I have noticed on some occasions that one or two stalls are not very good neighbours; one particularly was emitting a very strong smell of overheating oil, accompanied by billowing smoke. What a pity that the artisan bread maker from Hook gave up hacking into Reading and back – he had some really good things.

ABB

PHOTO: RICHARD BENNETT

After so many years of there being scaffolding along this stretch of the wall around St Laurence’s Churchyard, and further round the corner, it was wonderful to see its removal. It had blighted this corner but now this area is an asset to the Abbey Quarter rather than something we tried not to look at.

Richard Bennett has written on behalf of the Civic Society to congratulate Reading Borough Council on the splendid job they have done in repairing and strengthening the wall and dealing with the difficulties posed by the mature trees on the site.

The work carried out by local company Dunne & Co. looks excellent, including the refurbishment of the late 18th century gate piers. I like the traditional style of lantern suspended across the gateway.

ABB

PHOTOS: ALISON BENNETT
AGM
Saturday, 2 April 2016 at 2 p.m.
at The Garden Hall, Watlington House,
44 Watlington Street, RG1 4RJ

AGENDA
Minutes of 2015 AGM and matters arising
Chairman’s Report
Sub Committee and Officers’ Reports
Hon Treasurer’s Statement of Accounts
Election of Officers
Election of Auditor
Any other business

Following the official business of the meeting, Brendan Carr, Community Engagement Curator at Reading Museum, will talk about the forthcoming exhibition at the museum entitled
ON TRACK – READING RAILWAYS PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Brendan will explain the process of creating an exhibition, the partners and resources involved and give us a glimpse into the contents of the exhibition itself.

NEW MEMBERS
Mr A Ihringer, Professor I Mills

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Dates for your diary
The Royal Holloway College at Egham
on Tuesday, 2 August 2016

We will visit the Royal Holloway College, University of London, by coach, leaving Reading at 9.30 a.m. and returning by 4.30 p.m.
The day will start with a guided tour of the Grade I Founder's Building, including the Chapel, North Quad, Founder's Dining Hall, South Quad, Founder's Library and the Victorian Corridor.
We will have a sandwich lunch served in the Picture Gallery followed by a talk about the paintings and free time to enjoy the paintings themselves (some surprises, “I didn’t know that was here”).
“….. mind-blowing buildings, and the Art is a time capsule of High Victorian taste.” Adam Sowan
“I found the art and architecture together quite an experience” Amanda Martin

Haslams Estate Agents, Friar Street
A Heritage Open Day event
Thursday, 8 September 2016 at 7 pm

Booking forms will be issued later in the year.

Contributions to the Newsletter
Please send contributions to the newsletter and Letters to the Editor to Adam Sowan, contact details below.