

VICTORIAN ARCHITECTURE IN READING



by
H. G. ARNOLD
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(Front Cover - Reading Town Hall from North West)

Foreward

This is not a work of exact scholarship. It has been written and re-written in time borrowed from family life, from years of labouring in the Civic Society to prevent Reading from destroying itself, and from working to establish and to maintain in difficult times and in a town hostile to the cause of conservation a single handed architectural practice. These circumstances must explain if they do not excuse the faults, errors and omissions, a sometimes embattled, embittered tone in the comments, the frequent references to and descriptions of buildings which have been destroyed since the first draft was composed.

A comparison with 1967 when Nicholas Taylor wrote a descriptive list for a Victorian Society visit shows the loss since then of:-

St. Marys Vicarage
One of the cemetery chapels
The walls and towers of Reading Jail
Suttons shop in the Market Place
Longlamps and Huntley, Boorne & Stevens buildings in
London Street

with threat of demolition hanging over:-

Reading Town Hall, Museum, Library, Art Gallery and
Police Station
The Reading Dispensary Trust
St. Johns Church and St. Stephens Church
(the latter to close and be redundant this summer)
together with their schools
All of Messrs. Simonds buildings once the firm leave the
town centre

To list these alone confirms the urgent need for a better study than this is, but until that exists this will have to serve. I am grateful to friends who have amended the several "editions", in particular to Sydney Gold whose knowledge has justified drastic criticism (which, in the time available, has had to be left largely unsatisfied), and also to Rev. Basil F. L. Clarke who has been generous in sharing the results of his researches.

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Janet Wendy Bell, Incorporated Photographer

Reading Museum and Art Gallery

VICTORIAN ARCHITECTURE IN READING

Chapter I - The changing scene

Change in towns and cities can be symbolised by the changes in their skylines; one can contrast the London of today, where blocks of offices and flats towering over all with the views painted by Canaletto of a city where St. Paul's Cathedral and the gleaming spires of churches rose above the roofs of houses and wharves.

So too it is with Reading: in the well-known "South Prospect of Reading" engraved in 1734 by S and N Buck and made when the gardens of Southampton Street divided the town from the country, the Abbey gate house, the ruins and the steeples of the three churches then stood above everything else. The views made early in the Railway Age show a town scarcely changed but today the distant prospect of Reading from Mapledarham or from the Kennet meadows is of an assortment of ill-matched commercial towers. Victorian Reading lay somewhere between the two contrasting scenes and yet, although the changes from the earlier, almost mediaeval scene were already great, Victorian Reading was closer to the old than it is to the new Reading of towers, motorways and spreading estates.

The industries which made the nineteenth century prosperity of the town were already well established before the coming of the railway linked them to the rest of the United Kingdom and so, by sea, to the ends of the earth. Simonds Brewery was thriving in the eighteenth century, John Sutton began trading in seeds in 1806 and Huntley and Palmers biscuit factory was started in 1823.

One may take as signs of how far that era has vanished, both the fact that two of the railway stations and many of the factory and warehouse buildings serving those concerns are now demolished, and that not one of those firms is now governed from Reading by Reading families. Perhaps the two best and most characterful buildings which remain to represent the trade and commerce of the period are Simonds Maltings of about 1856 and the Italian Palazzo of Simonds Bank (now Barclays) in King Street.

In the nineteenth century the Suttons, Huntleys and the Palmers were all Quaker families and it was undoubtedly this Quaker link which brought to Reading one of the great Victorian Architects, Alfred Waterhouse. He was born in 1830 of a Liverpool Quaker family, established his name in Manchester with his winning design in the competition for the Assize Courts in 1859. The elder Waterhouses moved to Reading in 1870. He took one of the large estates into which the park of Whiteknights was being divided and there built his own house, Foxhill. In Reading there are or were about sixteen of his buildings. After the cities of London, Liverpool and Manchester, no other town except Cambridge has a comparable number. These are however but a tiny proportion of a prodigious output. Four of them are certainly worthy of respect:- the Municipal Buildings (1872-75), his own house at Foxhill (1868), Reading School (1871) and Caversham Free Church (1875-7).

The first and last of these particularly show the distinctive qualities of his style; the use of Gothic forms, the use of terra cotta and of bricks and tiles of various colours and forms, and the exploitation of cramped sites to produce buildings which are well arranged internally and which make, when seen from the street, a dramatic landscape. At Caversham the elements are bold and simple and relatively inexpensive, a high roof banded in tiles of different textures and a short tower with pyramid roof, sited at the junction of three roads. At the Town Hall the elements are more numerous, the grouping more complex. The tower is exactly placed for the vistas from the Market Place and Friar Street; to many people this view represents Reading as typically as the Bridge and Palace of Westminster represent London.

The brick and terracotta which Waterhouse used were of course made locally by Colliers of Tilehurst; their brickworks closed in 1967 and the site is largely built over, yet in their day they were one of the premier brickworks in England. Their decline and closure is yet another sign of the end of that particular era.

The second celebrated Victorian architect to be referred to in connection with Reading is Augustus Welby Pugin. In this town he built the Roman Catholic church of St. James among the Abbey ruins in 1840. This, built in the Norman style which was then briefly fashionable, is a building which even though altered and enlarged still retains much of its charm and delight. It was a tragedy that the Presbytery beside it, also built in Norman style and consequently of extreme, almost unique rarity, was altered into a dull modern style. But although his work for Reading is relatively minor, altered and uncharacteristic, the town is also extremely fortunate to have given a home to one of his masterpieces, the chancel screen from St. Chads Cathedral in Birmingham which was bought and re-erected at Holy Trinity Church, Oxford Road.

Pugin had a burning zeal for the Christian faith, and for Gothic architecture - for him the two were virtually synonymous. If it is too strong to say that he turned the course of architecture, the influence throughout the nineteenth century of his vision was immeasurable. The nineteenth century was a great age of faith, much of its wealth went into the building and restoration of churches and the building of schools and so it was inevitable that the religious affiliations of architects were important. Waterhouse was a Quaker, Pugin a Catholic convert, and our next character, Henry Woodyer, a Tractarian, High Church Anglican. Woodyer is much more a local man than the others; he was a pupil of Butterfield and most of his best work is in Berkshire, consisting of schools, churches and almshouses, works of Victorian piety. The masterpiece is Christ Church, with its remarkable chancel screen, like a veil in stonework and its noble spire which crowns the vistas of London Street, Kendrick Road and Northumberland Avenue, and can also be seen on its hill top for miles across the Kennet valley.

After Woodyer we move from designers whose work has power still to excite our emotions and to move us and we come to respectable professional practitioners whose work is sound, durable and practical and according to the taste of the day. James Piers St. Aubyn was responsible for drastic enlargement and restoration of St. Giles Church. This was made necessary by the rise of population in the parish and by the resurgence of faith which followed the Evangelical revival of the late eighteenth century, bringing great crowds to the church. A finer building by St. Aubyn is All Saints, Downshire Square; had its steeple ever been built it could have rivalled Christ Church.

Besides the churches and the Municipal buildings, public buildings of the Victorian age include the Royal Berkshire Hospital (1837), the Reading Dispensary (c 1840), the Great Western Hotel (c 1835) which is the oldest railway hotel in the world. Perhaps the most astonishing creations of the era in Reading are the fantastic structures of Station Road and McIlroy's store designed by Joseph Morris & Son in 1901-3. Several of the schools built in the last quarter of the century are worth attention.

We turn now from public buildings to domestic architecture. Foxhill has been mentioned. Another wealthy mansion very different in style is "Hillside" in Allcroft Road, designed in 1881-2 by Morris and Stallwood on a plot leased by William Isaac Palmer from Christ's Hospital. The house was later occupied by members of the Sutton family. This is in somewhat a Dutch, brick and terracotta style, belonging to the late nineteenth century when the restrictions of the Gothic style were being felt. Gothic might well be, as Pugin insisted, the only Christian style, but buildings of the Gothic revival were not always light or convenient

and architects and patrons looked back with fresh interest to the more recent past. Close to Hillside is The Mount, a compact development of terraces and six larger houses, a perfect small Victorian estate. There are turrets set to catch the eye at the corners of the road, steep gables, diaper patterns of pale bricks against yellow stocks, and zig-zag window arches. Less self assertive, and very agreeable to live in still are the quiet tree-lined streets near Reading School and Alexandra Road.

From 1880 onwards numerous streets of terrace houses of two or three storeys were built for the middle and the working classes. These are to be found along the Oxford Road, in Katesgrove and Whitley and along the London and Wokingham roads. All are characterised by patterned brickwork of many colours and in different streets one can often find a single design repeated in changed colours. One of the grandest is St. Leonards Terrace, 1888, just south of Whitley Pump on the Basingstoke Road, with dramatic contrast of dark grey walling and creamy window surrounds and ornaments.



Chapter II

ALFRED WATERHOUSE - ARCHITECT

In its Town Hall Reading owns a building of far greater architectural and historical importance than anything likely to be designed to replace it. The Town Council Chamber and Offices were built in front of the Georgian style old Town Hall, between 1872 and 1875. The Architect was Alfred Waterhouse, one of the most outstanding of Victorian architects who lived in Reading and in Berkshire for many years.

Alfred Waterhouse (senior), his Father, was a Broker of Liverpool, who was born in 1798 and died in 1873. His mother was Mary Bevan of Tottenham. Both were members of Quaker families and the Quaker cousinry which existed at that time; a network of manufacturing, business and banking families whose prosperity had been built up by several generations of hard work; and this appears to have been some help in the early days of the Architect's career. Some account of these connections will be given later.

Alfred Waterhouse, the son of Alfred and Mary, was born in 1830. He was educated at Grove House School, Tottenham, in the time of the first Headmaster, Thomas Binns. This Quaker School in London was the predecessor of the present Friends School, Leighton Park. Alfred was articled to a Manchester firm of Architects, Richard, Lane and Alley, whose buildings were principally in the classical style, and date largely from 1824 to 1831. They include Town Halls at Salford and Chorlton-on-Medlock, and Mount Street Friends Meeting House, Manchester. Another work belonging to a date long before Waterhouse could have been with them was built in 1836-37 - it is the Gothic Henshaws Institution, a Deaf and Dumb School at Old Trafford which has been described as "like some Gothic nightmare - a town house for Dracula".

After serving his articles, Waterhouse travelled in France and Germany. His earliest works were a Church at Hulme and a Warehouse for Benyon and Fryer close by, both now demolished. In 1853, he began practice on his own account in Manchester, and four years later, out of a hundred entrants and against the keen rivalry of Cuthbert Broderick, Norman Shaw, Thomas Worthington and Thomas Allom, he won the competition for the Manchester Assize Courts. The building was opened in 1859 by Ruskin who declared its Great Hall "the most truly magnificent Gothic apartment in Europe". The Courts were bombed in 1940 and only fragments of the building remained.

Rothay House, Ambleside, 1854, Cemetery Chapels at Ince-in-Makerfield 1855, Council Offices at Droysden 1858, are among the few other buildings which preceded his winning the competition. There follow several works which have Quaker or Congregational connections - Goldney House at Bristol, altered for Mr. Lewis Fry in 1860. In 1865 came the first block of what is now Queen Anne's School, Caversham, built as Amersham Hall, a Nonconformist School, also a Congregational Church at Ashton-in-Makerfield, Lancashire and Hutton Hall in Yorkshire for Sir Joseph Pease. In 1864, there was a Bank for Barclays at Darlington, and a Market and Public Offices in the same town.

This is perhaps the point at which to refer again to the Quaker background which, at this stage, was some help to his career. The later growth of his prodigious practice was due unquestionably to his skill and hard work, helped by considerable personal charm. It was said of him that "his smile was worth £10,000 a year".

Mary Bevan, the wife of Alfred (senior), was the daughter of Paul Bevan. The Bevan family were Pharmacists and related to Barclays, who were Bankers. Elizabeth Hodgkin, the wife of Alfred (junior), was the daughter of John Hodgkin, a Barrister with a large practice.

Her brother Dr. Thomas Hodgkin II of Newcastle, Banker and Historian, provides the link with the Pease family of Darlington. His Partnership, Hodgkin, Barnett, Pease and Spence, later (in 1902) became part of Lloyds Bank. Elizabeth Hodgkin's uncle, Thomas Hodgkin I, was a Trustee of Grove House School. Another Trustee of the School was William Allen whose firm (now known as Allen and Hanburys) was the successor of the Bevan concern. Mr. Lewis Fry, later the Rt. Hon. Lewis Fry, was for many years M.P. for Bristol, a lawyer and brother of the eminent Judge, Sir Edward Fry. Sir Edward was a pupil of John Hodgkin, the Barrister.

The elder Waterhouse moved to Reading in about 1858. Alfred and Elizabeth moved to London in about 1865 and then to Reading in 1870. The Whiteknights Estate was at that time being divided into several substantial estates; Waterhouse, taking one of these, built himself a house, Foxhill, in 1868. The move to London was followed by a great expansion of his practice with commissions covering a great part of the country, from Dorset to Kent, Oxford and Cambridge, Lancashire and Durham. Liverpool, Manchester, London and Reading each have a dozen or so of his works. His masterpiece is undoubtedly the Town Hall at Manchester, 1868, although the Assize Courts which established his name, were extremely fine, and their wartime demolition much to be regretted. Of the latter, Eastlake in his "History of the Gothic Revival" (1872) wrote "Time has shown that Mr. Waterhouse's plan for the Assize Courts is admirably adapted for its purpose; and with regard to the artistic merits of the work, it will be time enough to criticise when any better modern structure of its size and style has been raised in this country".

Eaton Hall, now largely demolished, was a Palace of Wagnerian grandeur for the Duke of Westminster; but, even by 1920, a house with 150 bedrooms was larger than convenient, and the Duke of that time left it for another of his houses. The cost of the house was said to have been £600,000 which could equal £6,000,000 today.

A totally different type of work is his Congregational Church at Lyndhurst Road, Hampstead. The strikingly original plan produced a hexagonal form with galleries developed on three sides only and a most unusual and successful building which in its plan and composition, if not in architectural detail, could well be studied by designers of Churches today.

He became President of the Royal Institution of British Architects and was held in general honour in his profession. In 1878 he built a house at Yattendon and became Lord of The Manor. A daughter married Robert Bridges, the poet. He died in 1906. In Civic Society circles he should be honoured not only as an architect of great distinction but also as a pioneer of the "Society for Checking the Abuses of Public Advertising".

Chapter III

BUILDINGS BY WATERHOUSE IN READING

Alfred Waterhouse's buildings in Reading include:-

Town Hall, 1872-5

This comprises the small block of Council Chamber - Tower and the curved wing towards St. Laurence's Church and is a small scale version of his Liverpool University composition of 1887-92.

His plan incorporates the old Georgian Small Town Hall which was redecorated in a good Italian style in 1864 and given the organ which was later rebuilt in the Large Town Hall.

In the Small Town Hall hangs a painting of the Council Meeting in their new Council Chamber in 1875, with named portraits of the Members and Officials. The furniture shown in the painting still exists.

The exterior of the building is in red and grey Colliers brick, with terracotta ornaments. These local bricks are a more sympathetic material than the very hard and uniform red which he later favoured. The tower is excellently placed to close the views from Friar Street and the Market Place. The scale is modest, the skyline interesting. To many Reading people this building symbolises Reading as eloquently as the Palace of Westminster represents London.

Reading School 1865-71

Drawings from Alfred Waterhouse's office for this still exist. A long front to Eriehg Road, with raised central block containing a hall above an open arcade and as the centre of an extended tripartite composition which is basically rigorously symmetrical. Symmetry is deliberately broken by a single emphatic turret. High slate roofs with dormers, ventilators and all details designed to give interest to the skyline. Chapel also by Waterhouse, 1873. Foundation stone is a marble pillar in the cloisters. Inscription reads: "This shaft was set by HRH Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, 1st July 1870 - Peter Spokes, Mayor - Thomas Rogers, Town Clerk". The Prince of Wales was accompanied by the Princess of Wales (subsequently King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra) at the laying of the Foundation Stone.

Buildings by other and later architects are described elsewhere.

Whiteknights Park

Foxhill, 1868, was built by Waterhouse for himself. The large 18th century classical mansion of Whiteknights was demolished in 1840. The gardens set out in 1785, were regarded as the most famous landscape in Southern England. The park was divided for building into six large private estates. Waterhouse chose one of these for Foxhill. Eriehg Park, 1859, and the Wilderness, 1873, also by him, have since been demolished. Foxhill is a large brick house, almost a compendium of Waterhouse details, well sited above the lake. A small library or study, panelled throughout, remains the most sympathetic of the interiors.

Whiteknights, 1868, which later housed the Museum of English Rural Life and now the Language Laboratory, has windows bricked up and has lost its turret roof. Near at hand is

a nice little stable block with interesting brick detail. Park House, now the University Senior Common Room has been attributed to him, but seems too "Gothic" in style. The house shows signs of having been altered from an 1840 original. Alterations could have been made by Waterhouse.

The University archives contain a number of early photographs of these houses and particulars of the changes in the estate.

St. Andrews Hall, Redlands Road

This was built in 1880, by Waterhouse, as a house for Alfred Palmer. As usual the detailing was careful; the main interiors are believed to survive, the outside is not very interesting.

"The Acacias", London Road

The home of William Isaac Palmer, although mainly a Regency villa, has bay windows on the garden side, which have the stamp of a Waterhouse addition.

Leighton Park School, Shinfield Road

A small extension to School House, 1890, and Grove House, 1892-4, are both by Waterhouse. Leighton Park was founded by Quakers as a successor to Grove House School, Tottenham, which had been founded in 1828 and closed in 1878. The new school, opened in 1890 with Benjamin Townson as Headmaster. As a Quaker Architect, who had until recently lived close at hand at Foxhill, Whiteknights, as a former member of Grove House School and as a Member of that Quaker country, whose links strengthened countless businesses and professional practices, Waterhouse was a natural choice as Architect. His wife was of the family of J. B. Hodgkin, Chairman of the Directors of the new School; his mother, Mary Bevan, was of a family linked by marriage and business partnerships to William Allen, one of the founders of Grove House.

The buildings are serviceable, but unattractive.

Caversham Free Church, Prospect Street

1875-7, also by Waterhouse. A study in the use of materials, brick, stone and roof tiles of different colours. The West Memorial Institute, 1865-6, was also by him and was the earlier Free Church. This is not a very good building; the later Church is outstandingly superior.

Queen Anne's School, Henley Road

One block was built as Amersham Hall, a Nonconformist boys' school, successor to a Baptist Academy at Amersham. The client was the same Mr. West after whom the Institute is named, principal of Amersham Hall.

This block was altered in 1894 by Joseph Morris (see Chapter VII).

Chapter IV

CHURCHES

Reading's churches are the work of distinguished architects of whom Waterhouse was only one.

St. James R.C. Church, Forbury

1837-40 by Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin in Norman style is not very typical of him, and has been much enlarged. It is to be hoped that the Presbytery is recorded in photographs as before "modernisation" it was a delightful piece of Norman revival. There was a brief fashion for this style just before 1840. Pugin, born in 1812, was argumentative, intense and creative beyond belief. His career ended with sadly early death in 1852.

Nicholas Taylor notes that the first of the aisles was added in 1925 by W. C. Mangan, a well known Roman Catholic architect, and the later one (to the North) by Bingham Towner in 1962.

Holy Trinity, Oxford Road

The Church was built in 1826 to the design of Edward Garbett, the Architect of These Parish Church. The Pugin Chancel screen from St. Chad's Roman Catholic Cathedral, Birmingham has fortunately been re-erected here. St. Chad's Roman Catholic Cathedral was built in 1839 and finished and furnished according to Pugin's principles. To him, a Church without a screen was scarcely a Christian Church at all, but the "ambonoclasts" have defeated him. To quote Sir Nicholas Pevsner "To remove Pugin's screen from St. Chad's Cathedral was vandalism unmitigated; to re-erect it at Holy Trinity is more than a rescue operation, it is a service to Holy Trinity and a profession of faith in what is most pertinent in early Victorian art".

The present west front was an improvement of 1845 by John Billing.

St. Mary's Episcopal Chapel, Castle Street

This was built in 1798 at a cost of £2,000 to accommodate an Evangelical following which had been formed at St. Giles by the Rev. William Talbot (Vicar from 1768 to 1784) and which largely succeeded on the appointment of a successor who was initially fiercely critical of his predecessor's ministry. The Chapel was originally a simple Georgian style building, but in 1840 a hexastyle temple front in the Greek Corinthian style was added, crowned by a narrow turret using the order from the Tower of the Winds in Athens. The designer was "Mr. Briant" (he was later ordained). Henry and Nathaniel Briant designed the Royal Berkshire Hospital (q.v.). The temple front, and the rather meagre "pepper pot" - and, one might add, the sober "neat" interior - typify almost everything that Pugin most loathed in Church design. It none the less remains one of the best Church interiors in Reading and the portico is an ornament to what is left of the street.

St. Giles Church, Southampton Street

This was largely rebuilt in 1873 by James Piers St. Aubyn. The tall spire was added then to an unaltered mediæval tower replacing a nice little Gothic affair. William Talbot's successor as Vicar was the Hon. William Bromley Cadogan (1774-1797) who in turn took up the cause of the Evangelical revival. Galleries were added to the old Church, for attendances of 900 were common. Old photographs and plans show the Church fitted up with its galleries

and box pews, all centred on the pulpit and reading desk, with the old small chancel almost as a separate room for Communion Services. At the time this was a common way of dealing with the problem of using an old Church for a form of worship and a size of congregation for which it had never been planned. Re-building and enlargement were essential, and the whole east end was extended and reconstructed. The Rev. C. H. Travers was responsible for all this in the few years from 1870 to 1874.

All Saints, Downshire Square

1865-74, by St. Aubyn was built as a daughter Church of St. Mary's to serve the newly built district of large stuccoed villas lining the Bath Road - all now demolished and replaced by flats. The church is long and high and gloriously decorated, with a painted chancel and with mural mosaics at the west end. Downshire Square was given a formal layout of roads but the buildings, except for the pair of stone houses on the Bath Road, do not match this intention. A steeple was clearly intended to close one of the vistas; had it been built, the Church could have rivalled Christ Church as an effective architectural feature in the townscape.

St. Luke's Church (1885) Erleigh Road

This was built on the Redlands Estate, by St. Aubyn, in red brick and is unlike the other two Churches by him in Reading.

Christ Church

Built by Henry Woodyer in 1861-2 and enlarged in 1874 is exceptionally fine in its setting and its features. The noble spire closes the rising vistas of Kendrick Road, and the much later Northumberland Avenue, and is clearly seen from a distance of several miles over the Kennet plain. The columns of the arcade are described by Eastlake in his "History of the Gothic Revival" as "difficult to accept in an artistic sense, but present day taste would accept them as original Victorian creation without medieval precedent". They have capitals abounding in gables and naturalistic flowers and foliage. The openwork stone tympanum of the Chancel arch is similarly original and entirely successful.

Woodyer, a Tractarian architect, did much of his best work in Berkshire. He was, for a time, assistant to William Butterfield and his work inherits something of the master's quality of originality; there is the same play with the sharp shapes of solid geometry and also that same ability to give great variety and interest to quite plain and simple buildings in traditional form which Philip Webb displays in the next generation. The little Church School at the junction of Basingstoke Road and Whitley Wood Road is a perfect example - a little masterpiece doomed surely, since it is in Reading, to neglect and demolition. Sir John Betjeman's comment on Woodyer is "Wokingham's two Churches provide an excellent example of how "heavy handed" a great Victorian Architect could be when "restoring" an old building and how inventive and imaginative and skilful when building a new one".

St. Bartholomew's London Road

Corner of Palmer Park by Waterhouse, 1879. Chancel by Bodley 1902-5. From Nicholas Taylor's notes it is learned that the correct date for the Chancel is 1902-5 and not 1881 as in Pevsner nor 1898 as given by Betjeman. By Bodley are:- the rood screen 1907 and the font. By Sir Ninon Comper are:- the north porch 1920, the Lady Chapel's east

window 1908, the singers' gallery 1922, and the high altar, reredos and east window 1946.

"The original church was a Palmer benefaction - High Church this time because the first Vicar, C. R. Honey, was a fellow Liberal in politics; also the parishioners were largely Palmer employees".

St. Stephen's, Orts Road

1864-6 by William White; one of the Goodhart-Rendel's "rogue architects", but here quite tame. It cost under £2,000. The Church was enlarged in 1886 when the south aisle and chapel were added by C. Pemberton Leach, being paid for by a gift from Mr. Charles Simmonds (Banker) of Victoria Square. Due for demolition.

St. John's, Watlington Street

1872-3 by W. A. Dixon. It replaced a little Church built in 1837 in "Commissioners" Perpendicular style, which was in several ways unsatisfactory and was considered unsuitable by Bishop Wilberforce to be the Church of a newly formed parish. The new Church cost £11,000. The style has been described as "coarse and muscular" 13th Century French Gothic. It appears to be unloved and is, with St. Stephen's to be demolished in order to build a new "house of God" more humble, more convenient for a 20th Century congregation's life and work, and less convinced and convincing architecturally. Before St. John's is demolished, take note of the spire (which the Civic Society tried to save), the "structural polychromy" of the richly detailed masonry of the school and the church, and the loving craftsmanship of even the tiny window arches. We shall not replace them in this generation with work equally deserving of honour. The stained glass windows of the chancel are memorials to the thirty years ministry of Rev. William Payne.

Trinity Congregational, Queen's Road

By Poulton and Woodman (well known Nonconformist chapel architects). This is not particularly inspiring inside or out. In Reading, Woodman was also responsible for the restoration of Greyfriars Church from a state of roofless ruin. (See also Chapter VII).

Greyfriars Church

Building commenced in 1288 and the Church was dedicated in 1311. In 1538, the Church was defaced and dismantled; confiscated by the King, plundered by the townspeople. It declined into being the Town Guildhall and later the jail in which the Quakers were imprisoned (George Fox's journal has an amusing incident here in 1670 - "After I had stayed with them and supped with them, I went down the stairs, and the gaoler was standing at the door, and friends were very fearful; so I put my hand in my pocket, which he had such an eye unto, and the hope of some silver that he forgot to question me. So I gave him some silver and bid him be kind and civil to my friends in prison whom I came to visit, and so I passed out, and the Lords power came over him But the next time that came to visit them he stopped" (Jnl. p.567).

The "History of the Church of Greyfriars" by Gordon Spriggs describes the restoration (completed in 1863). The Rev. William Whitmarsh Phelps, who for twenty years had hoped for the restoration of the ruined church seized the opportunity given by the sale of the plot of

land to the west to launch the project, following this by himself buying the building from the Corporation. Money was raised by an appeal to rebuild the church and endow the living and to acquire the Soane-style house of Leonard Austwick which was built on the site of the vanished chancel, and which until rebuilt in 1963 served as the Vicarage. Although the loss of the vicarage is to be regretted the reclamation of the church deserves thanks and praise as something rare and almost unique in Reading's long history of self-destruction.

Tilehurst - St. Michael's

Early and charming William Morris glass 1869.

St. George's Church, St. George's Road

1885-6 by S. Gambier Parry - unfinished and rather minor.

St. Saviour's Church, Berkeley Avenue

Fairly routine stuff but likeable. The foundation stone was laid by Mr. Bligh Monk, the Squire of Coley Park, who gave the site. The architect, Mr. Albury, was a local man - the building was never finished.

Kings Road Baptist Church

This is worth a visit as a typically neat, plain, polished mahogany and white painted 19th Century Church, solid, sober, prosperous. It appears like many other good things in Reading doomed to early destruction. The date stone records -

Founded in Church Street	1640
Removed to Hosier Street	1752
And to this spot	1834
Enlarged	1858
Further enlarged	1860

The architect for the 1833-4 rebuilding was John James Cooper, Architect and Builder.

Chapter V

HOUSES

Caversham Park, B.B.C. Building

This is the fifth or sixth house on the site, having been rebuilt after a fire. A vast Italian pile, impressive by its bulk and siting - not architecturally important, alas, but a large lump of social history. The drawings of the house with colonnaded wings, added in 1841 by J. T. Crew, were exhibited at the Royal Academy. He entered the Royal Academy schools in 1834 and exhibited from 1833 to 1859 including a number of views of Rome. The Crawshay family, ironmasters of Cyfartha, owned it from 1848, but rented it from 1839. The previous owner, Colonel Marsack, had died in 1837.

Margaret Stewart Taylor's book "The Crawshays of Cyfarthfa Castle" describes vividly the history of the family from the time of James the First when Miles Crawshay was living in Yorkshire. In 1786 a descendant Richard Crawshay took over the forge and foundry at Cyfarthfa and prospered sufficiently to receive a grant of arms in 1793. His grandson William Crawshay II built Cyfarthfa Castle early in the 19th Century (a story - possibly legendary describes a descendant choosing a carpet, and then ordering two miles of it for his castle).

William II sold one of the family's Welsh houses and in 1839 having much business to attend to in London, rented Caversham Park. He bought it in 1848. It was in his time that the house caught fire and the present mansion was built. The eldest son, William III was drowned, and Robert inherited the estate. He was married in 1846 at Caversham Parish Church to Rose Mary Yeates, daughter of a local family. His eldest son, William Thompson Crawshay married Florentia Maria Wood of Scout Hall, Reynoldston, Gower. She became a Roman Catholic in 1896, and gave vestments, carpet, organ and marble altar to the newly established church of Our Lady and St. Anne - and Christmas presents every year from Heelas to every child in the nearby Roman Catholic School.

The Judge's Lodging

This is No. 12 Christchurch Gardens on the corner of Northumberland Avenue. A picturesque composition in brick and tiled, interesting and, for its period, somewhat austere. One is most curious to know the architect.

The main roof runs east and west, to the north are a pair of gables of unequal width - one rising from second floor and the narrower rising from third floor level. A single-storey porch projects between with steps downward covered by a lean-to.

On the south the gables are smaller, lower and differently placed allowing the main roof slope to dominate. There is a porch of form related to yet distinct from the other, the pointed wooden arches are almost the only "period" reference in the design. The walling has occasional dispersers of large scale, and the wider sash windows have relieving arches. The two chimney stacks are only one flue thick, giving them impressive width on both main elevations.

Careful brick and carpentry detailing throughout, bold and simple and yet more massive. The style is related to that of Butterfield and Webb or E. W. Godwin. The sunflower motif above the front porch suggests a date in the 1880's, the absence of "revival" detailing suggests a designer thoughtful and original.

26 Redlands Road

This is said by Pevsner to be attributed to May Morris, daughter of William Morris. It is possible that there is a confusion here with the daughter of Joseph Morris the designer of Reading's most fantastic buildings - McIlroy's Store and Pearl Buildings in Station Road. Sir John Betjeman, who met her, states that she continued her father's practice after his death.

Hamilton Road

One good brick villa in the upper half - Wokingham Road side.

Whiteknights Park

(see "Alfred Waterhouse")

Hillside, Allcroft Road

Christ's Hospital has owned estates in Reading since 1624 by a gift of John Kendrick. In 1879 a lease for 94½ years was granted to William Isaac Palmer, on condition that "he engaged to erect a large residence". Mr. Palmer put the work into the hands of the local architects Morris and Stallwood of 17 Friar Street, Reading who completed it in 1880/82. In 1893 Mr. Palmer assigned the lease to Leonard Goodhart Sutton, and five years later part of the land was let for building plots. In 1949 the lease was assigned again to the University of Reading who purchased the property in 1954.

It has the somewhat Dutch brick and terracotta style associated with W. Eden Nesfield, a distinguished but not prolific Victorian Architect, who is chiefly known for Kinnel Park, Anglesey. The brick ornaments include "pies", a sunflower-like motif which was high fashion in artistic or "Aesthetic" circles in 1880. Splendid brickwork and terracotta ornamental detail in red brick dentil courses and gauged arches, all no doubt from the local brickworks of Collier's. The stable and coach house are decorative and of a forceful design, and the balancing of the bays, gables, projections and recesses on the main fronts of the house is very skilful. The grounds are surrounded by a handsome railing with brick piers, and there is a charming little potting shed and greenhouse with curly gables at the west end - all part of a unified design. Recent research has discovered that the architects were the local firm of Morris and Stallwood; an illustration of the house calls it Hillside, Southern Hill. Southern Hill was certainly until the early years of this century the name attached to the area around Christchurch Green.

This is one of a considerable group of wealthy residences connected with Palmers and Suttons in this part of the town extending from "The Acacias" in London Road as far as "Foxhill" by Waterhouse and a Sutton house at the bend of Northcourt Avenue. This house has the support of the Victorian Society for listing purposes and is threatened by the University.

The Mount, Christchurch Road

A compact estate of four streets containing terraces of small but rather florid Victorian houses as well as a number of larger villas. Two of the latter facing Christchurch

Road have ornamental turrets. Brickwork is of yellow stocks, with white inlaid patterns. Roofs are slate, varied in pitch. Window arches are incised with patterns. Cast iron railings fortunately still survive. Two pairs of small houses of similar style stand in Crescent Road, Earley, but since these notes were first written they have been subjected to "Do-it-yourself" face lifting.

Chapter VI

PUBLIC, COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL BUILDINGS

Barclays Bank, King Street

An Italianate Palazzo 1838-9, by Henry and Nathaniel Briant built as Simonds Bank. Important and threatened under the regrettable scheme for redevelopment of the Market Place, prepared by distinguished consultant architects totally out of sympathy with Reading - Sir Robert Matthew, Johnson-Marshall & Partners.

A personal friend of Sir Robert Matthew said that "Robert would never have composed a scheme like that". Unfortunately, no doubt it was not the work of Sir Robert himself but merely done by his office in his name. Reading has to live with the consequences.

Reading Dispensary

1840 - a Bath stone front in Italian style, described by Pevsner as "a nice five-bay palazzo with short lower wings". A more pronouncedly Italian style with more wall than window, and heavily bracketted cornices became fashionable in the first third of the 19th Century - particularly associated with the name of Sir Charles Barry. The Briants, and the designer of this were quick to follow. This building, following the lamentable and totally unnecessary demolition of the fine Queen Anne Vicarage of St. Mary's, is now the most important single building in the "close" surrounding the Church. An application by the John Lewis Partnership to demolish it has accordingly been resisted by the national and local amenity societies, such as the Victorian Society, the Ancient Monuments Society, the Berkshire Archaeological Society and the Reading Civic Society.

On March 20th 1847 Builders ready to contract for the new Medical Dispensary could see the plans at the office of Mr. John Billing in London Street. The building was opened on May 11th 1848.

Castle Street

Vachel Almshouses by W. H. Woodman 1864-5. The Almshouses were endowed in 1634 by Sir Thomas Vachel for "six aged and impotent men, without wives". The old building was close to the present building to which the old inscription was transferred. Two lines of small bay windowed houses are stepped down toward the Holy Brook. The steep slated roofs of the two turrets which added point to the grouping were meanly replaced with flat tops by the building's guardians. Sir Thomas Vachel was one of the eighth or ninth generation of a family well known in the town for five centuries, and of which representatives still live elsewhere.

London Street, 29-31

1879 - was said to have been one of the earliest department stores in Reading. Demolished in 1972. The grey brickwork had, above the windows, the "pies" referred to

at "Hillside". In its last years, the building was occupied by "Longlamps Limited". The site is now that of the Wessex Finance Corporation Building.

London Street, 118-128

Huntley, Boorne & Steven's office block was quite fine, particularly before the building inspectors caused the upper cornices to be re-built in a mean plain style. (Demolished 1975).

Reading Jail

This was built in 1842-4 by the short-lived partnership of Scott & Moffat who built numerous work houses. This early work of Sir Gilbert Scott is no masterpiece, but when complete it had some character. In 1968, Reading Civic Society and the Berkshire Society of Architects, recommended its preservation, but their list was ignored and lost by the Corporation, who accordingly took no action to prevent demolition of the "toy-fort" like outer defences and symmetrical corner turrets. A characterless wall and entrance replaced them.

Royal Berkshire Hospital

1837-9. There was a competition for the design of the Hospital, assessed by George Basevi, in 1837. Henry Brient submitted two designs; one in the Gothic and one in the Grecian style, both of which were among the first three selected. The Greek design was built with modifications, based on the plans of the Gothic one. W. N. Brient of 25 Sydney Terrace, Reading, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1842 and 1843. The tower and portico of St. Mary's, Castle Street, were designed by Messrs. Henry and Nathaniel Brient of 164 Friar Street, Reading.

McIlroy's Buildings, Oxford Road, Chespside and Pearl Assurance Buildings (1901-3) - 7-25 Station Road

Two blocks in the most florid and fantastic style with fretted skyline, red and yellow brick, bays, oriels, arches and chimneys. These are the work of Joseph Morris and Son. In 1881, there was an extensive restoration of the tower and pinnacles of St. Laurence Church, with the west end of the aisle and the windows "under the care of Joseph Morris, Architect", by Mr. Higgs, builder and contractor at a cost of about £2,000. It was probably at this stage that "Blagraves Piazza", an open arcade beyond the south aisle and facing the Market Place, was demolished. No doubt, as this is Reading, it was done for road-widening.

Additions to the Royal Berkshire Hospital which include a Greek Doric colonnade and the outer plastered pavilions all remarkably sympathetic to the earlier building, are described as by "Morris & Smallwood" (1881-2). Of Morris and his work Sir John Betjeman writes:- "The Pearl Buildings in Reading are the most fantastic coloured art nouveau I know. The entrance porch has to be seen to be believed. The architect was Morris of the Reading firm of Morris & Stallwood. Morris joined Smyth Piggott's "Abode of Love", that is to say he became an Agapemonite and his architecture has a madness never more freely expressed than here. Though he did design McIlroy's shop in Reading now I fear destroyed and the noble spire of the church of the Ark of the Covenant on

Clapton Common for the Agapemonites. His daughter continued her father's practice and lived on in the empty Abode of Love near Bridgewater where I visited her before the War. Such strangeness as the Pearl Buildings is worth preserving".

Reading General Station

A two-storied block on Station Hill of Italian style, ten bays wide (3 + 4 + 3), built of buff brick and Bath stone. Ground floor has attached pilasters in the central bays (all now painted).

Timber cantilevered canopy at first floor level extending for full length of main block and also along single-storey wings each side.

Rusticated quoins at angles, deep plain moulded cornice to outer sections of centre block, bracketted cornice to centre, with blocking course above shaped up as a pediment.

Glazed lantern tower with illuminated clock. Chimneys taken down 1975.

Accounts of the date of the building vary. Pevsner gives "roughly 1840" which is clearly incorrect and refers to the original Brunel building which preceded this. The date of 1899 which is also sometimes mentioned must belong to the red and black brick centre and northern platform buildings (5, 6, 7, 8 and 9) when the station was changed from its original single-sided layout. An intermediate date is probable.

The Rev. Basil F. Clarke's notes disclose that the contract was signed in July 1865 and the building was near completion early in 1867. The contractor was Henry Lovatt of Wolverhampton, the work carried out under his foreman, H. Charlton. Plans were prepared by Mr. Lane, the Chief Engineer of the Company (G.W.R.). The white bricks were from Coalbrookdale, which is interesting as a similar "foreign" brick is used decoratively on many Reading houses and terraces.

Some minor but good "industrial archaeology" is at hand - the water tower by Vastern Road and the little goods station below. The old Southern Goods Yard, later Thompson-Howes works and now demolished was a pedimented single-storey warehouse with arched windows in arched recesses.

Telephone Building

This is in Blagrove Street and was the Vastern Hotel. It is supposed to be a very early reinforced concrete building. Not to be confused with the Minster Street Telephone Exchange (see later).

Great Western Hotel

Italian, rather minor and much altered. The Hotel closed in 1972. In the evidence submitted by amenity societies when the Corporation decided to oppose demolition, it appeared that the building is of more interest than its outward elevations suggest. In fact, it is the oldest surviving Railway Hotel in the world.

The Lodge Temperance Hotel, Kings Road

This was until recently a genuine Victorian survival, but is now closed and expected to be turned into offices; it was built to accommodate commercial travellers visiting Huntley & Palmers.

Huntley & Palmers

Some Victorian blocks still survive, but nothing of great merit, and it is believed that no old machinery remains.

The Bridges in Forbury Road, Watlington Street and Gasworks Lane have good cast iron balustrades.

Simonds Malt Houses - Hop leaves on cast iron wall plates. Architecturally impressive by reason of size and simple detail.

Bath Road

The little brick water tower has quite good detail in polychrome brickwork.

Reading School - Later buildings

There is documentary evidence for the existence of Reading School as the School of the Abbey in the Twelfth Century. It was re-endowed by Henry VII in 1488. Among its subsequent benefactors were two Old Boys, Sir Thomas White, Lord Mayor of London and Founder of St. John's College, Oxford; and William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury. It achieved national fame in the Eighteenth Century under Dr. Valpy, Head Master from 1781-1830. In 1871, it was refounded, largely by public subscription, and transferred to its present site; the present buildings are largely the work of Alfred Waterhouse (see earlier). Extensive boarding houses and other additions in polychrome brickwork (red and blue-black), the South House in 1888 being designed by a well known Reading architect, Charles Smith. The style is very close to that of Waterhouse.

Reading School, Head Master's Lodge and Garden

These were purchased for the school by the Trustees in 1916. The lodge originally stood in King's Road under the name of Penrhyn Lodge, and it was moved to 17 Craven Road when the Huntley and Palmer Biscuit Factory was built. This stone house of 1840 was erected for Alderman Barter who was buried in St. Giles Churchyard (Reminiscences of an Octogenarian) and who contributed so much towards our knowledge of Reading of that period. His architect was Henry Briant, brother of Nathaniel who designed the entrance to the Cemetery and the two Mortuaries. At that time it was called Swiss Villa. The transfer to Craven Road took place between 1840 and 1850 when some additions were made to the kitchen and pantry block. The gardens, of 1.04 acres are included in the total acreage of the School grounds, and it is the total range of buildings and land for which application for listing is now submitted.

Architect's drawings of the Craven Road house are signed by Joshua Greenaway - architect; the client named as John Oakley Taylor. The date is 1878.

Town Hall, Art Gallery, Library and Assembly Hall

The first extension of Waterhouse's building was by Thomas Lainson, 1879-82, the Concert Hall. There are differences in detail between the work of the two architects, which are quite clear on close inspection. The use of durable materials was particularly considered by the second architect; weatherings, copings and parapets are of terracotta with Staffordshire brick for buttresses. Only the sandstone base has decayed.

The organ is important; a Father Willis instrument (1864), and in its original condition. It was built especially for our Town Hall and presented to the Corporation by the President of the Royal Philharmonic Society on behalf of subscribers on October 6th 1864. It was reconstructed and enlarged for the official opening in 1882, the carved oak case was designed by Thomas Lainson, architect of the Large Hall, and executed by the firm of Chappell. The opening recital was given by Dr. Walter Parratt of Magdalen College, Oxford, who pronounced it one of the most beautiful and excellent organs in England. It remains in its original state with 2,238 pipes and 47 stops - a four manual and pedal instrument - the work of the great-grandfather of the present Henry Willis.

The Georgian Small Town Hall was given a good Italianate interior - presumably at the time when the large Town Hall partly took its place. The organ was removed from the smaller to the large hall and reconstructed to suit the changed acoustic quality of its setting. The Small Hall has been divided but is capable of restoration as a fine room comparable with the Guildhall at Bath.

The Art Gallery and Library block was built in 1894, filling in the corner of the site which until then stood empty, between the earlier School of Art in Valpy Street, and the Concert Hall. The designer was Mr. Howell, a local architect whose firm, Howell, Freeman & Batten still practice from an office just opposite. The original drawings for the building still exist; detailing follows that of the Lainson Concert Hall. The composition of the building closely follows that of Alfred Waterhouse's Town Hall at Manchester.

An inscription reads:-

This marble tablet
is placed here by
the Council of the Borough of Reading
as a memorial to the late
WILLIAM ISAAC PALMER JP.
who died on the fourth of
January one thousand
eight hundred and ninety three.
He was a very munificent
contributor to the funds for
the erection of the adjacent
Town Hall and Free Library
and Museum Buildings
and to him the Borough is also
largely indebted for this addition
to those buildings.

William Ferguson, Mayor

Henry Day, Town Clerk

1897

Other buildings on the island site include Magistrates Court and a Police Station. The latter incorporates a building which was originally the schools of Science and Art of the University Extension College of Reading, i.e. the nucleus of what later became the University College and ultimately the University of Reading. These two later buildings were attached to the old St. Laurence Vicarage which is still recognisable on the churchyard frontage, and were built on the Vicarage garden. In 1893 the vicarage was owned by Mr. Herbert Sutton, president of the College, from whom the College acquired the property as soon as it was incorporated as a Corporate Body.

The Corporation acquired the Hospitium in 1892. It was restored by S.S. Stallwood and adapted to science teaching. The Vicarage acquired in 1893 was altered by him also.

An architectural perspective shows the "British Dairy Institute", to be opened at Reading early in 1896, designed by S. Slingsby Stallwood, F.R.I.B.A., F.S.A. This is the building later converted into the Police Station and Magistrates Courts and is in its semi-Tudor style far less successful than his earlier more convinced and convincing Gothic building.

The intention of the Corporation is to sell the site for development in order to provide funds for the new Civic Centre. This could be expected to lead to the demolition of all the present buildings except the Hospice - much opposition has been aroused by the prospect. The Architectural Review for April 1976 refers to the case.

Brock Barracks, Oxford Road

1877 - A Square four-storeyed Victorian "Keep" with stair turrets one storey higher on diagonally opposite corners. Gate arch attached dated 1877. Red and black brick with stone details, battlements and copings. All is solidly built of "fireproof" construction. This is an important feature in the undistinguished length of Oxford Road. There is a valuable museum of military relics with historical associations with Berkshire Regiments. Basil Clarke's notes give: Major Hart R.E. as Engineer Officer in charge, Cook and Green of London - builders, Clerk of Works - Burt.

Good Victorian barrack buildings lie behind and a Lutyens Cenotaph (1/3 or 1/4 size of the Whitehall design) with attached painted stone flags.

A similar keep exists at Devizes, but it is, we understand, in less good repair - and in our architect's opinion is inferior in design and townscape value. We are glad that the buildings have recently been "listed".

Telephone Exchange, Minster Street

1900 - the architect was Leonard Aloysius Stokes (1858-1925). He belongs to the generation of Lethaby and C.F.A. Voysey, and to the Arts and Crafts group of architects who aimed to produce in late Victorian Britain a style of architecture which should be national in character, based on tradition but yet free of the revivals of the past styles which had preoccupied architects and patrons for some two hundred and fifty years. He deserves greater honour than he now has.

He married in 1898 Miss Gane the daughter of the General Manager of the National Telephone Company. Five telephone exchange commissions are recorded as completed by 1900 including this at Reading. Others followed to a total of nineteen but many have been altered or demolished. Locally he built a large house at Pangbourne for his father-in-law and the handsome group of shops and bank in the centre of that village.

All these show the merits of his particular style - good materials and craftsmanship, careful, interesting and rational detailing, unforced composition, and a traditional feeling which owes very little to exact historical quotation.

Standard House - London Street

A stone building erected in 1843 as a Literary Scientific and Mechanical Institute, to the design of William Brown. Converted into a Primitive Methodist Chapel in 1862, to a theatre in the early 1950s, and to its present use in about 1963. When first built the entrance was surmounted by the Royal Arms.

In the 1860 Directory it appears as "New Public Rooms, Literary Scientific and Mechanics Institute - Mr. Charles Barber, Hon. Sec., - Mr. John Kidgell, Librarian".

There is a handsome circular staircase and columned entrance hall, but the interior is not otherwise distinguished. The exterior, with its bold Ionic portico is the most striking architectural effect in the whole street, valuable as a contrast, being large in scale compared with all the rest of the buildings.

Charles Dickens spoke at the opening of the Institute. As the foundation stone was laid on August 31st 1842 by Miss Mitford, Literature was certainly well represented.

Chapter VII

Local Architects and their work

Although earlier chapters have referred largely to architects who were nationally known, Reading, like most provincial towns, sustained a number of architects whose practices could be entirely local - a situation which has almost totally ceased today, a disappearance partly explained by the passing of the control of local affairs and local businesses away from the hands of Reading citizens and families, partly by the growth of the public offices which now undertake the schools and houses formerly commissioned from private practices.

The following pages draw largely on the Rev. Basil F. L. Clarke's notes on Reading Architects and builders - without his research and his generosity in sharing the results of that they would be sketchy in the extreme.

Frederick William Albury - died 23 March 1912. His office was at 154 Friar Street. The church of St. Saviour was designed by him in 1888, also the school adjoining of 1902. The church was at first designed to seat 600 and cost £7,000 but was redesigned to seat 400 and cost £5,000.

The Friar Street address was at one time that of William Brown. It was occupied by John Thomas Brown with Albury as his partner later in the century. W. and J. T. Brown are referred to later. Later still the address of 154 Friar Street was used by Frederick Sainsbury - architect.

Basil Clarke has a note that Albury and Brown designed the Augustine Congregational Church (1877) and the Foresters Hall, 1878.

The Billing Family appear in Howard Colvin's Biographical Dictionary of British Architects. Richard Billing (Senior), Corporation Surveyor, a member of the congregation of St. Mary's Castle Street, is too early for this study. John Billing had an office in London at Abingdon Street, Westminster, but he continued to live at 39 London Street, where, as will be seen later, he also had an office.

Works by John Billing include -

- 1845 Holy Trinity Church improvements including the present west (south) front which replaced a mean tower.
- 1846 Houses in Victoria Square for the Technical College (demolished).
- 1846 Rebuilt the front of Holy Trinity Church.
- 1847 The Reading Dispensary - opened May 11 1848.
- 1849 The Savings Bank, London Street.
- 1852 Holy Trinity School - "chaste and suitable".
- 1853 Two Houses in Henley Road (possibly the two which are now part of Queen Anne's School).

In the Post Office Directory of 1847 he is described as "architect, engineer and surveyor to the town council". He was a member of the Oxford Architectural Society and a corresponding secretary.

He died on January 13 1863, aged 45 years.

Philip Webb was apprenticed to John Billing from 1849 to 1853. Billing being then something over 30, Webb 18 years old. The office was at No. 39 London Street.

The 1842 Directory lists between Nos 34 and 37 London Street the "PHILOSOPHICAL INSTITUTION". The street has been renumbered but this appears to refer to the site of No. 72. By 1860 the address was occupied by the Savings Bank (built in 1849 by John Billing). This had at the back of the ground floor a banking hall in the Grecian style of Professor C. R. Cockerell (demolished recently).

In W. R. Lethaby's biography of Webb it is said "Webb always spoke well of the competence and honour of Mr. Billing and in the miscellaneous work of a small town and its surrounding country district an architect's apprentice had to come at once into contact with the hard facts of building - it was not all paper and prizes".

In 1842 No. 39 was occupied by Mr. Edward Micklem, Land Agent - Register Office for the Sale of Estates. By 1860 it was occupied by Wm. M. Moxhay, Esq., Surgeon. As far as I can identify it this must have been the large property Nos. 74-76 now belonging to Messrs. R. P. Huggins, Solicitors, and previously used by Messrs. J. T. Cook, Builders.

The Briants have been referred to under St. Mary's Castle Street. Henry Briant was ordained in 1843, was later Vicar of Macclesfield and died in 1884.

1837-9 Royal Berkshire Hospital, competition and building.

1840 Turret and Portico, St. Mary's Chapel.

1841 40 acres of freehold building land adjoining Caversham Church to be sold. N. Briant architect and surveyor, 164 Friar Street.

Nos. 23, 24 & 25 Market Place were by Briant.

William Brown "late Superintendent of His Majesty's Works at Reading" began practice in 1833. He designed Reading Cemetery with its Doric gateway and the two Chapels, one Tuscan, Non-Conformist and surviving, the other Gothic, Anglican and demolished. 1842-3 The New Public Rooms in London Street (see "Standard House"). In 1854 W. Brown, architect and surveyor invited tenders for the formation of a new road from Castle Street to Hosier Street. Presumably this is Carey Street.

At September 1860 tenders were invited for a new building for Messrs. Welsteeds by W. Brown. A later rebuilding was in 1905. Previously at June 30th 1849 tenders for a new front were invited by W. F. Poulton, architect.

He was assistant architect for the rebuilding of Burghfield Church (1843 - see Clacy) and rebuilt Compton Church. Five houses in Horn Street (i.e. the bottom of Southampton Street) 1844. This could have been the arched block which opened to Letcombe Street (all now demolished).

W. and J. T. Brown designed the fine High Victorian Gothic premises for Suttons in the Market Place, a splendid confident stone building. The facade was quite barbarously destroyed and replaced by a miserable elevation in brick with "zip-fasteners" between the

windows. It is said that the upper parts of the building largely remain behind the new front. The loss is more to be regretted in that Gothic was not very frequently accepted as suitable for commercial premises and this was therefore somewhat of a rarity. In London, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool and Glasgow the majority of Victorian commercial buildings will be found to be in classical styles - Grecian, Roman, Italian.

W. and J. T. Brown also designed St. Laurence's Infant School opened May 12 1869, cost about £700.

Model dwellings for the working class were opened early in 1868, built for the Blagrove Estate. This block was demolished for the building of Sainsburys. A similar block stood at the junction of Forbury Road and Valpy Street and was demolished for the Insurance Office. The builder for the Friar Street block was Barnicoat.

John Barry Clacy (1810-1880). Has several references in Pevsner's "Berkshire" -

- 1843 Burghfield - a rather horrible Neo-Norman Church.
- 1848 Repairs to St. Mary's Church roof and north wall.
- 1849-50 King Alfred School, Wantage (in Early English style).
- 1852 St. Mary's Church School contract price £1,460.
- 1854 (with F. Hawkes Junr.) the Market entrance and Corn Exchange. In the Italian style, only the entrance arch and clock turret now remain.
- 1855 Dry Sandford Church.
- 1860-61 St. James Church, Barkham.

and in Oxfordshire the restoration in 1857 of South Stoke Church.

A competition for the Corn Exchange in 1852 produced a controversial choice. Eventually the designers placed first and second were awarded the commission jointly, i.e. Francis Hawkes and J. B. Clacy.

He was together County Surveyor, Auctioneer and Postmaster. The Reading postal staff under Clacy took up their quarters in the old Post Office in 1833. He resigned on August 18 1877.

Joseph Morris (q.v.) was County Surveyor of Roads and Bridges at a later date. It is not clear whether he was his immediate successor.

Plans for the layout of the Forbury Gardens were made in 1855. Those of F. Hawkes & Poulton and Woodman were both accepted - and handed over to J. B. Clacy!!

John James Cooper designed in 1837 the former Congregation Chapel in Castle Street (now Bilbey's Store). This is opposite St. Mary's Chapel and was founded by a further succession from that congregation.

H. M. Colvin's "Dictionary" adds that as "architect and builder" he was responsible for -

- Kings Road Baptist Chapel (i.e. the 1834 building later enlarged).
- 1832-3 Queens Crescent.
- Smiffesham Nonconformist Chapel.

He appears to have been Surveyor to the Paving Commissions and Treasurer of the Borough Fund.

Joseph Morris - 1836-1913 was Surveyor of Bridges and Buildings to the Berkshire County Council from 1872 to 1905. S.S. Stallwood came to Reading from Folkestone and entered into a partnership with Morris which lasted from 1875 to 1886.

Morris became an Agapemonite in Reading. He designed the only Agapemonite church in the world - The Ark of the Covenant at Clapton in London. The story of this faith is told in Ronald Knox's "Enthusiasm".

In order of date works of the firm are as follows -

- 1871 North aisle added to St. Mary's Church. (Builder - Henry Lovett - see Reading Station).
- 1871 School in Albion Street (St. Stephens Parish).
- 1872 Alterations to St. Mary's House (rebuilt in 1931).
- 1872 Tenders invited for out-patient's wing and nurses home at the Hospital.
- 1872 New Board School in Silver Street.
- 1874 Tenders for a new school near the Cemetery - presumably the very interesting Newtown School.
- 1876 Sunday School behind Castle Street Church.

Morris & Stallwood

(1875 - 86)

- 1878-9 Restoration of St. Peter's Church, Caversham.
- 1881-2 Colonnaded forecourt wings to Royal Berks Hospital.
- 1881-2 "Hillside" Allcroft Road for Wm. Isaac Palmer.
- 1881 Restoration of Tower and pinnacles St. Laurence's Church.
- Restoration Hungerford Church.
- Restoration Sulhamstead Abbots Church (also ascribed to W. F. Poulton).

- Morris 1887 Co-op premises in Caversham Road to be enlarged (possibly one wall with the initials R.I.C.S. in blue brick is a relic)
- 1894 Alterations to Amerham Hall (see Waterhouse) to form the first building of Queen Anne's School, Caversham, as successor to the Grey Coat Hospital, Westminster. (Builder - G. S. Lewis of Castle Street).
- 1903 Completed Mellroy's Store.
- 1901-3 Office of County Surveyor of Roads and Bridges, Station Road (now Pearl Buildings).
- Restoration at Hurst and Swallowfield and supposedly at Wokingham (but see also Woodyer, Christ Church).
- 1904 Wokingham Police Station.
- 1906 Maidenhead Police Station.

Morris & Son

- 1905 Cordes Hall - Sunninghill.
- 1902 Katesgrove School, enlarged.

According to Mr. Sydney Gold, Morris was the author of a pamphlet on "Housing for the Poor".

William Ford Poulton (c1820-1900) of 2 Butter Market, Reading was described in 1847 as "Architect, surveyor and agent to the Atlas Fire and Life Insurance Co." He died on 22 December 1900 at Great Malvern in his 80th year.

He designed Downington Square, Newbury (of about 1840) a neat square estate of stucco villas, later infilled with a number of incongruous more modern houses.

His plans for the restoration of St. Laurence's Church made in 1846 were not accepted. For his partnership see W. H. Woodman. For a design of 1849 for Wellsteeds see W. Brown.

1853 Downshire Square, Reading, planned by Poulton and Woodman. The two stone houses on the Bath Road frontage could presumably be to their design. (One was lately the offices of Bradfield R.D.C.).

1855 Designs by F. Hawkes and by Poulton and Woodman for the Fortbury Gardens were both accepted - and were handed to J. B. Clacy!!

William Ravenscroft (1848 - ?) W. Ravenscroft appears in "Pevsner" as architect of Amberrow Court, Sandhurst, 1885, Spencers Wood Congregational Church 1902 and Streatley Village Hall 1898, an interesting conversion of old Malthouses. Basil Clarke credits him with Wycliffe Baptist Church Reading and Goring R.C. Church.

He was born at Reading 21 March 1848. He was articled to W. H. Woodman and his first work was a drawing in connection with the restoration of Greyfriars. In 1869 he left Woodman and helped Poulton, and according to Basil Clarke he worked on Poulton's designs for Westminster Chapel, London.

In 1875 he began practice at 26 Market Place, Reading and continued until 1908 partly in partnership with his eldest son and W. R. Morris (who may have been a son of Joseph Morris). His principal buildings were the University Hall, Katesgrove Central Boys School and many houses in Reading and district. Among these is said to be Broad Oak, Upper Redlands Road, which is now the centre of St. Josephs Convent. He collected the first £1,200 towards the University College (according to the Berkshire Chronicle 1938).

1877 Victoria Hall, Fatherson Road.

1891 Palmer Park was laid out and the buildings designed by Ravenscroft.

The 1894 reredos of Greyfriars Church, in memory of the Rev. Dr. Barkworth the first incumbent, was to his design. The communion table, rails and desk were designed by him also.

A scheme for renovation at Greyfriars was made by Ravenscroft Son & Morris in 1914 to cost between £300 to £400. The same partnership was responsible for the Martin Hope Sutton Memorial Hall opened in 1902 and built on part of the Vicarage garden.

Ravenscroft Son & Morris designed the Park Institute in Palmer Park 1907.

Charles Smith (29 Oct. 1832-1912) has been referred to as the designer of Reading School's South House of 1888. He was also the architect for a layout and buildings proposed for the new University College of Reading on their London Road site.

He was articled to Poulton (say between 1850 and 1853) and became assistant to W. M. Teulon. He began practice in Reading in 1857. He became A.R.I.B.A. in 1854, F.R.I.B.A. in 1870. His first work of note was the development of the Whiteknights estate which was divided in 1867, having been sold in 1849 to Sir Isaac Lyon Goldsmid a bullion broker and the first Jewish baronet. His early years were devoted largely to work on the estates of the Duke of Wellington - Sir Francis Goldsmid and Lord Eversley. Charles Steward Smith, his son, joined him. He was mayor in 1874-76.

He restored East Tytherley Church Hampshire 1862 and Wolverton in 1871-2. The latter is a most unusual Georgian church which has a fifteenth century timber roof, and may be presumed therefore to be the remains of a half timber building such as may still be found along the Hampshire border. Unfortunately the restoration turned out the handsome wrought iron chancel gates which now stand in the churchyard. He did much Poor Law work. The firm of Charles Smith & Son did Park Hospital 1906 and many years of work for the University from 1906 at least until 1932 - taking us well out of the Victorian era.

Spencer Slingsby Stallwood, F.R.I.B.A., F.S.A. (c1843-1922) The "Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries" list his election as a Fellow of the Society on 11 January 1894, his admission on 1 March of the same year, and his death on 13 August 1922. From his obituary in the Proceedings (Vol 111 p 308) it appears that - "He was a Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects and did a great deal of work at Folkestone and later at Reading, among his more important works being St. Peter's Church Folkestone and private houses, schools and the Old College Buildings in Reading. For many years he was Diocesan Surveyor for Oxford Diocese and was also one of the honorary curators of the Silchester collection in the Reading Museum".

In Pevsner's "Kent" he is credited with restoration work in 1872 and possibly from 1869 to 1874 at the church of St. Mary and St. Eanswythe, Folkestone. In the same town St. Peter's Church is ascribed to R. C. Hussey 1862-64 with a horrible north aisle of 1870 by Stallwood, and red brick school buildings by him also.

In the "Berkshire" volume he is named as designer of St. Michael's Church, Spencers Wood 1908, and as having extended in 1908-10 the 1846 church which Benjamin Ferrey built on a new site at Twyford. In the 1918 Reading Directory his address is given as No. 57 Christchurch Road. This is one of the two larger turretted houses of The Mount, suggesting that he may have designed this development also.

In "Oxfordshire" he is mentioned as architect of the north-west wing of Culham College 1904 and the 1905 chancel added to Holy Trinity Church, Finstock and Fawler.

In 1882 his office was at 17 Friar Street; in 1918 it was 27-28 Market Place.

He was appointed Diocesan Surveyor on April 21 1898. His partnership from 1875 to 1886 with Joseph Morris has been referred to.

He died at his home at Whitley Croft in his 79th year. There is a lengthy obituary in the Berkshire Chronicle for 18th August 1922, which, in the more spacious reporting which the period enjoyed, records in a full column not only his career, but the music of the funeral service, the names of representatives, friends and relatives present and of those abroad or through absence in the holiday season prevented from attendance.

"His first work in architecture as a young man was the building of St. Peter's Church Folkestone. He was in the choir of this church and closely associated with the parochial work of the church which was then famed for its advanced practices Mr. Stallwood was a Churchwarden of St. Giles, Reading for over a quarter of a century ... He represented Church Ward on the Town Council from 1887 to 1893 chairman of the Survey Committee and a co-opted member of the Library Committee. He was an active Freemason he held the provincial rank of Past Grand Warden of Berkshire ... In early life Mr. Stallwood was a good sportsman and a crack shot".

"Mr. Stallwood was the architect of the residence of the late Mr. William Isaac Palmer now occupied by Mr. Leonard Sutton (i.e. "Hillside" Allcroft Road) and the Redlands, Battle, Oxford Road and Wokingham Road Schools, he also designed Victoria Street and the old College Buildings opened by the late King Edward (then Prince of Wales) in 1897.

- 1892 Abbey Hospitium converted for science teaching.
- 1893 St. Laurence's Vicarage converted for the new University College.
- 1898 The Dairy Institute (Builder - Henry Higgs & Son).
- 1899 St. Michael (The building later disposed of).
- 1902-4 St. Agnes Church, Silver Street (later superseded by the new St. Agnes at Whitley).
- 1904 Wing at Culham College.
- 1908 Spencers Wood.
- 1908-10 Enlargement of Twyford Church.
Restoration - Marlston
Uffingham, Upton
- 1910 St. Bartholomew's Church Hall - Builder G. S. Lewis & Bros.
- 1909 Designed Screen, stalls and lectern in the south chapel of St. Giles.
The stalls were postponed, the other items were made by Elliotts of Caversham.
Screen at West end of Nave, Gt. Giles.
- 1916 Gave oak Kneelers in Lady Chapel, St. Giles.
A parish hall for St. Giles, to replace that which occupied the former Baptist Chapel (the site is now Milwards Car Park) designed by him was postponed by the 1914-18 war.
- 1919 War Memorial crucifix St. Saviour's Church.

William Henry Woodman 1821 or 2 - 1879, Trinity Congregational Church, Queens Road was by the partnership - Poulton & Woodman, well known Nonconformist Chapel architects. According to Gordon Spriggs "History of Greyfriars", Mr. Woodman, as Borough Surveyor, was responsible for the valuation for sale of the church, disused as a prison, to Mr. Phelps, and afterwards acted for Mr. Phelps as architect for the restoration.

The Vachel almshouses in Castle Street were rebuilt by Woodman in 1864 in a style clearly Victorian and yet not over-emphatic, with the two parallel blocks stepped down the slope from Castle Street to the Holy Brook. The removal of the rather Germanic turret roofs (in about 1951) from the two towers near the street diminished the effectiveness of the composition.

In 1865 he was responsible for the virtual rebuilding of Rotherfield Greys Church (Pevsner). Rev. Basil Clarke credits him with restorations at Harwell and Letcombe Regis and gives his address as 1 Greyfriars Road.

1868 A monument in Holy Trinity Church to Archdeacon Phelps (see also Greyfriars Church). Plans for Caversham Bridge by Woodman were made in 1867. Tenders invited July 1868, work started 1869. This bridge was later rebuilt again. Wokingham Town Hall was opened on May 31 1860. It was designed by Poulton and Woodman - a fierce Victorian gothic design with steep gables and patterns in black brick on red.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Page 3	St. Leonards Terrace, Basingstoke Road
Sheet A	Town Hall - Council Chamber (see Page 6)
" B (Upper) (Lower)	Foxhill, Whiteknights Park (see Page 6) The Mount, Christchurch Road (see Page 13)
" C (Upper) (Centre L) (Centre R) (Lower)	Reading Dispensary (see Page 14) Standard House, London Street (see Page 20) Kings Road Baptist Church (see Page 11) Greyfriars Church (see Page 10)
" D (Upper) (Lower)	Barclays Bank, King Street (see Page 14) Pearl Buildings, Station Road - detail - (see Page 15)

A



B







