



## READING CIVIC SOCIETY

### **AGM - 15 April 2023** **Chairman's Report – to 31 December 2022**

#### **People**

##### **Sidney Gold**

In February Sidney Gold died. He had been a member since 1974 and a hugely valued committee member between 2004 -2016. Author of several books his Magnum Opus is the Biographical Dictionary of Architects at Reading published in 1999. Cllr Rowland paid tribute to his work during a Planning Applications Committee in March. I was invited by the family to give the Eulogy at his funeral. We hope that there will be a tribute in; Reading Chronicle, Reading Today, Reading Bridge, the Henley Advertiser and possibly the Guardian.

**Minutes Secretary** we were delighted to welcome Linda Fothergill in this role.

#### **A. Events during the year:**

**AGM 2021.** The then High Sheriff, Willie Hartley-Russell MVO DL gave a thorough explanation of the role of a High Sheriff and his experiences during his year. The notes of his talk were later provided to members and are accessible on the AGM page of the RCS website.



#### **Our Events and engagements**

##### **The Rise and Fall of Biscuit Town Huntley and Palmer 14th May. Abbey Baptist Church**

Joe Doak explained "What did biscuits ever do for Reading?". 75 people attended, we ran 2 events one after the other. Guests included those from the University, RBC's CUDO, CADRA, Sonning Civic Soc and a large number of guests outside of the Society.

## **The Gentlemen Danes of Reading Book Launch 19 May 2022 - Haslams Estate Agents**

**65 people attended.** Guests included; representatives from the Danish Embassy, Sean Taylor DL, Cllr Tony Page & a number of John Nixon's Danish Connections. RCS Chair Richard Bennett DL represented the Lord-Lieutenant of Berkshire. With the support of Haslams we were able to provide refreshments.

### **Water Fest 4 June 2022**

We shared a stand with the Friends of Reading Museum. We displayed information about our Look Draw Build project for Primary Schools. John Nixon explained about his book "**The Gentlemen Danes of Reading**" and had his picture taken with the Mayor of Reading. It will be held on 10 June 2023, again we will share with the Friends. We will display the selected 3 model stations from this year's Look Draw Build project.

**Reading Economy and Destination Agency (REDA)** July attended the launch event in the Malmaison Hotel.

**Grade II The Oval (Princess St/ St John's Rd** Alison and I were invited in July see the works being done to this Lloyd Turner property and to go on the roof with the CUDO

### **Bremont Watches 23 July**

13 members of Reading Civic Society visited the Wing, in Henley on Thames, to learn more about Bremont Watches journey to make crafted watches here again in the UK and see its modern factory.

During our 3 hour visit to the site we were given a short presentation about the company and ended up in the shop.

**24 July Dog Show in Caversham Court Gardens** with Friends of Reading Museum.

### **Heritage Open Days 9-18 September 2022.**

- 12 September John Missenden gave his new talk about Georgian Reading in the Garden Hall of Watlington House. **Approx 60** people attended.
- 16 September "**The story of Buckler Cars**" by David Montgomery, Registrar of Buckler Cars. Approx 30 people attended. Held in Thames Lido it attracted a very different audience. It linked in with the unveiling of the BP on Caversham Rd.
- Walks 10+16 September A new RCS/ Walkabout event; The Mount, Redlands Road & Alexandra Road Conservation Areas. Approx 15 people on each. We dropped in on Adam Sowen to pick up copies of his book about New Road. Terry has run the walk since.

### **10 September the Blue Plaque to Joseph Huntley unveiled -21 Christchurch Road.**

Diz Adleman, organised a blue plaque to mark Joseph's time (1837-1842) on her house

The society, with her neighbours, members of the CAAC and others, supported & guided Diz in the process of; developing the idea of a BP, applying for planning consent and finding a maker of the plaque and the chaps who erected it.

The plaque was unveiled by Chair of Reading Civic Society.

Following the unveiling there was a presentation in nearby Christ Church about the history of Huntley & Palmers. It was attended by around 50 people.

### **7 October Service to mark the start of the Judicial Year in Reading Minster**

Several members took up the invitation to attend this service at the invitation of the High Sheriff, Alka Karbanda. A service which drew on her Hindu faith and certainly with a difference with Sikh drummers, some pyrotechnic and a large number of her family and friend. The church was filled.

## **November & Jan 23 meetings with Reading College team**

In November along with Alex Brannen (REDA) I met members of the staff. They wished to engage students more in the community. We subsequently suggested a group of students might wish to undertake the photo survey for the Eldon Square Conservation Area Appraisal update. Nothing ever came of it. Early in 2023 I met with their new CEO Gary Headland DL. There may be opportunities to engage the students but it has to be very targeted time wise.

## **31 November Visit to the Mayor's Parlour**

22 members visited the Parlour at the invitation of the Mayor, Cllr Rachel Eden. Rachel explained about the Mayoralty, with additions from Richard Stainthorp. On show were images of past Mayors back to the Victorian era. We were shown some silverware commissioned from Gerald Benney to celebrate the completion of the IDR.

## **Annual Luncheon at Pepe Sale, 12 November 2023**

Approx 30 people attended this year. Many thanks to Clare Platts and Penny Kemp for organising the event, to Chris Widdows for his quiz. The lower numbers than pre-Pandemic enabled a square table layout, which was felt to be better than long tables. The food did not receive great feedback and the staff were clearly struggling. Bel and the Dragon will be the venue on November 2023.

## **B. Social Media**

**Reading Civic Society Website** [www.ReadingCivicSociety.org.uk](http://www.ReadingCivicSociety.org.uk)

David Neale of RVA assisted us to simplify this in 2021. We have reduced the cost from £349 pa to £239 pa by no longer paying for related domains which he judged were unnecessary. During 2023 we will examine if a change of provider will potentially save a further £100 per year.

Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/ReadingCivicSocietyd> &

Twitter [www.ReadingCivicSociety@readingCivicSoc](http://www.ReadingCivicSociety@readingCivicSoc)

Instagram [www.instagram.com/readingcivicsociety](http://www.instagram.com/readingcivicsociety)

Posts to the Instagram page gain wider interest. Very few RCS members seem to view.

## **C. Newsletter.**

We do not have the physical resources to continue to prepare and publish a newsletter in the old way. During 2022 we issued 15 email updates (copied to those not on email) (17 in 2021). Newsletters when produced are sent to 3 Ward Councillors, MPs, Civic Voice and others.

## **D. Civic Voice Membership**

In 2021 Civic Voice faced a financial problem following a theft by their Treasurer. They appealed to Societies for support. The committee decided to make an advance payment on subscriptions of £300. Based on membership our subs for 2022 were £255 so we will not have to pay during 2023 and will have a small credit into 2024.

## **E. Membership of Reading Groups**

We joined Connect Reading (£25 per year), which has been running for 30 years, and the First Friday Club. We will review after a year.

## **F. Planning**

We continued to review Reading Borough Council's planning applications. Lack of a dedicated Planning Officer means we have to target Civic Society comments on areas of specific engagement. We have increasingly worked with the Conservation Area Advisory Committee to provide a comment on applications.

We continue where possible to engage early with developers as this assists our understanding of the constraints of a site and developer's plans.

- Feb we took part in the On Line Consultation about Kings Meadow view
- March we held a discussion with the owners of Bristol and West Arcade.

#### **Queen Victoria Place**

- 30 June we organised a Zoom event update on their plans, 30 people attended.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> November we organised a Consultation at Haslams Estate Agents

Around 40 people, including several shop unit tenants, attended this first physical consultation in Reading about a planning application since the start of the pandemic.

#### **G. Membership Report *Note previous year in brackets***

Subscriptions for 2022 total £1,110 (2021£1,350 £1,305 2020, £1,620 2019, £1,483 2018).

As at March 2023 there are 185 members (last year 175) (3 honorary life members – last year 6). We have issued 53 Pink Elephant membership chasers and subs are coming in.

Since the 20220 AGM we have had 12 new members, making 24 since 2020.

14 members do not have online access and receive notification of the AGM and the relevant documents by post. They receive hard copies of email updates which are now used in place of printed newsletters.

Richard Bennett

Chair

13 April 2023