



## READING CIVIC SOCIETY

**Minutes of Annual General Meeting held on Saturday 15 March 2025 at Watlington House, at 2:00 p.m.**

**Committee members present:** Richard Bennett – Chairman  
Penny Kemp – Honorary Treasurer  
Alison Bennett – Membership Secretary  
Jo Alexander-Jones – Minutes Secretary  
Amanda Martin  
Terry Dixon  
Clare Platts  
Lynette Edwell  
Stephen Snook

**Other members present:** Chris Widdows, Jean Terry, Wendy Zhou, Ian Kemp, Katrina Parker, Elaine Proctor, Sylvia Clark, Sylvia Newberry, Judith Westwood, Rodney Oliver, Janet Novak, Marian Lynch, Fiona Rycraft, Hazel Alexander, Helen Lambert (CADRA), Vickie Abel, Christabel Winny, Judith Oliver, Victoria Gornall-King, Bill Gornall-King, Elaine Robson, Susan Hora, Helen Tweedie, Anne Green Jessel, Richard Jessel, Liz Marshall, John Nixon, Nick Haston (CADRA), Sally Ellis, Brian Morley, Tomiko Morley

### **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND WELCOMES**

Apologies had been received from 18 members: Richard Stainthorp (Committee), Dianna Wass, Ken Brown, Trish Brown, Gemma Solanellas, Peter Harding, Karen Lloyd, George Nowacki, Steven Dellow, Sean Duggan, Audrey Price, Margaret Ormonde, Clive Ormonde, Virginia Day, Phil Lewis, Sonning & Sonning Eye Society, Kevin Hogarth, John Dearing

Richard Bennett passed on the apologies from Tony Page, who was unable to speak at this AGM due to a family bereavement and passed on the well wishes from the Society.

### **2. MINUTES OF 2024 AGM**

The minutes of the previous AGM, held on 16 March 2024, had been circulated to all members. Penny Kemp proposed the approval of the minutes, seconded by Katrina Parker and accepted unanimously.

### **3. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT TO DECEMBER 2024**

The Chairman's Report followed the format of the recent Society Newsletter previously circulated to all members; copies were available at the meeting.

A more detailed report was given of the 'LOOK DRAW BUILD @ Reading and Bristol Stations Programme.

The 2024 Programme received funds of £8,700 provided by; The Royal Academy of Engineering (£3,600), National Lottery Heritage Fund (£3,600) and Haslams Estate Agents (£1,500). The 2024 cost were £6,600 with a current creditor of £700 as the 1<sup>st</sup> prize, a visit to Didcot Station had not yet been taken up by English Martyrs School, it seems unlikely they will do so at this stage.

The 2025 programme will cover eleven Reading schools in February and March and then will, for the first time extend down the Main Line to deliver the project to 10 schools in Bristol during April and May. The 2025 fund providers are The Royal Academy of Engineering (£8,000), The Earley Charity (£3,000), Network Rail (£3,000) and expected additional £1,000.

A report was also given of the work undertaken on the Society's website and the Heritage Blue Plaque Project. The Blue Plaque Project received a £3,000 grant from Reading's High Street Heritage Action Zone programme in 2024 to enable the website to be designed to hold information about existing plaques and to enable a voting process by the public on new proposals. By the year end £1,800 had been raised, by talks given, to fund potential new plaques, which cost around £700 each to commission and install. In 2025 to date a further £240 has been raised. A Panel is to be constituted to assist in the selection and prioritisation of future plaques. Chris Widdows highlighted that consideration should be given to [Ernest Hives, 1st Baron Hives - Wikipedia](#) former Chairman of Rolls Royce who lived with his parents at 31 Christchurch Road.

Acceptance of the Chairman's Report was proposed by Amanda Martin, seconded by Clare Platts and accepted unanimously.

#### **4. MEMBERSHIP REPORT**

Subscriptions for 2024 were £1410. As at March 2025, 153 members have renewed plus the 3 honorary life members. Subscriptions for 2025 to date are £985.

Since the 2024 AGM nineteen new members have joined.

9 members do not have online access and receive notification of the AGM and relevant documents by post.

#### **5. HON. TREASURER'S STATEMENT OF THE ACCOUNTS TO 31 DECEMBER 2024**

The Hon. Treasurer, Penny Kemp, reviewed the accounts, copies of which had been previously distributed to members and were available at the meeting. Paul Welch FCA had examined the accounts.

Income was £23,094 and Expenditure was £12,574. The balance in the bank at year end £20,583 includes £11,779 of Restricted Funds for specific projects, not therefore available for general expenses.

Restricted Funds include £8,267 LOOK DRAW BUILD funds of which £5,000 is Grants received early for the 2025 Programme, the remainder being underspends versus grants on the programmes in; 2024 £2,079, 2023 £919 and 2022 £269. The underspends mainly relate to schools not taking up the 1<sup>st</sup> prize (a funded visit to Didcot Railway Centre) in 2024 and 2023.

In the Unrestricted funds Donations of £1,150 were made to charities following visits and talks (Donnington Hospital, Station Hill and the talk about Landmark Trust), funded by members' donations plus gift aid recovered. In addition, Civic Voice membership fee £195 was paid.

The £537 loss on events (Income £1687 less costs £1,150) relate to room hire for committee meetings and researching a new location for the member's lunch. Otherwise operation expenses were £564 (Post and print, Insurance, website, bank charges)

In the Restricted Funds expenditure on the Blue Plaque website of £2,150 leaves us with a £850 balance of the £3,000 RBC grant.

Gift Aid claims with HMRC are up to date. £550 was received in December 2024 for the year. In January 2024 Gift Aid of £644 was received covering 2022 & 2023 claims.

The Treasurer's Report was adopted unanimously, proposed by Katrina Parker and seconded by Rodney Oliver.

## **6. ELECTION OF OFFICERS**

Amanda Martin took the chair for the election of the Chairman. Richard Bennett agreed to continue in the role. He was elected unopposed, proposed by Penny Kemp and seconded by Vickie Abel.

**Membership Officer:** Alison Bennett agreed to continue in the role.

**Treasurer:** Penny Kemp agreed to continue in the role.

**Committee Members:** All current members of the Committee agreed to continue in their role. All were duly elected en bloc; proposed by Katrina Parker and seconded by Tomiko Morley.

The Society still has a number of roles vacant, in particular someone to focus on planning; volunteers were requested to contact Richard Bennett if they were interested in becoming involved.

## **7. APPOINTMENT OF TRUSTEES & CONSTITUTIONAL UPDATES**

**Trustees:** As minuted at the 2024 AGM additional trustees for the Society have been put in place; these are Penny Kemp, Clare Platts, Terry Dixon and Richard Stainthorp. The original trustees Richard Bennett and Amanda Martin remain in place.

**Constitution:** As minuted at the 2024 AGM the Society's Constitution has been updated. A copy of the updated Constitution had been circulated to members, copies were available on the day. The main updated elements are:

- **Purposes**
  - Section 6: Added Talks & Walks
  - Section 8: added - To engage members of the public in the story of Reading's people and its industries (the Blue Plaque project)
- **Subscriptions**
  - Membership fees section has been updated from £1.50, £1.00 and a junior membership £0.40 to £15.00 and £10.00. Removed the Junior members.
- **Officers**
  - Added Website Development / Social Media Officer
  - Roles may be combined
  - Vice Chairman "may be appointed"

Discussion was had on the inclusion of 'undertaking of educational projects in schools'. Bill Gornall-King advised including such a clause was essential to persuade grant bodies to support our educational work. It was agreed the wording will be shortened to 'undertaking of educational projects'. A discussion about the proposed removal of the Junior Member fee, which Rodney Oliver suggested should remain to encourage new young members. The Chair was not convinced this is an encourager to younger members (we had not had one for decades) and agreed that the attraction of younger members should continue to be a focus for the Committee.

## **8. ELECTION OF EXAMINER OF ACCOUNTS**

Paul Welch was willing to continue as examiner of the accounts. He was elected unopposed, proposed by Penny Kemp, seconded by Richard Bennett.

## **9. REPORTS**

Terry reported on the guided walks and talks undertaken by 'Terry's Reading Walkabouts' during 2024-2025. The Walkabouts are run as a not-for-profit concern with proceeds donated to local charities. In the period described, he has raised £5,591. The walks programme now covers ten of Reading's fifteen Conservation Areas, in addition to many other areas and topics. The conservation walks have been developed in collaboration with the Society. In 2025 the charities Terry's work will support are 'The Ways & Means Trust', 'Camp Mohawk' and 'Models4Heros'.

Richard Bennett reported on the proposed new Jane Austen Plaque which is to replace the

inaccessible, unreadable and incorrectly sited Brass Plaque behind the east side of the Abbey Gateway. That he had been working on this proposal over the last year with Matthew Williams (Museum) and Christelle Beaupoux (RBC). It ties in with the Jane Austen 250 Celebrations this year.

The Plaque is proposed to be located on the inside of the Eastern side of the Abbey Gateway, which was attached to the school Jane Austen attended in 1785/6. The plaque is to be of Forest of Dean sandstone carved & installed by Cliveden Restoration.

The cost of the plaque's design, fabrication, mounting and Scheduled Ancient Monument Consent is projected at £7,500. The cost up to £6,500 is being covered from the CIL budget and a Shared Prosperity Grant. The Society has been asked if it can raise £1,000 the balance required. Donations at the meeting raised £91, £88 had previously been raised by a talk given by the Chair. The Friends of Reading Museum and Friends of Reading Abbey will be approached for donations to the project as will Jane Austen Societies around the world.

The plaque should be erected in June/July 2025 (Post meeting note: March 2025).

## **10. LOOKING FORWARD / COMING EVENTS**

The Society has arranged a number of events for members, plus there are other events being discussed but not yet finalised for 2025.

- Bracknell Before the New Town
  - A talk will take place on 12 April at 14.00 in Watlington House Garden Hall
  - A walk will take place on 12 June at 19.00 starting at Bracknell Railway Station
- Ways & Means Trust to talk on their Achievements and Challenges – planned for July / August
- Northcourt Avenue Walkabout to take place on 10 September starting at 11.00
- Heritage Open Days Events between 12-21 September – details in discussion
- Churches Tour on 5 October to take in St. Mary the Virgin, Iffley, Burford Church and St James the Great, Witney
- Annual Members Lunch at The Rising Sun in October – date to be confirmed
- Workhouses, Inns and Vestries talk by Dr Margaret Ounsley planned for November
- Joint event with the Berkshire Gardens Trust in the Autumn (Post Meeting note: Moved to 2026)
- Royal Meteorological Society talk – still in discussion

Rodney Oliver offered to contact A F Jones, stonemason, to restart discussion on a potential visit to their premises.

## **11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Member Helen, Lambert spoke about the work of the Caversham and District Residents' Association (CADRA) where she is the Chairman. On 13 May the Association will hold its AGM in New Testament Church of God, Church St, Caversham. It is an open meeting and after the AGM there will be a talk by Savills Planning Division. Richard Bennett congratulated Helen on her 20 years as Chair of CADRA as at this AGM she will stand down.

John Nixon gave an update on a project he is undertaking to put a celebratory stone to 'The Gentlemen Danes' in the Forbury Gardens.

### **Keynote speaker**

The formal business of the meeting having concluded Terry Dixon gave a talk about the writing of his and Linda Saul's book about "Influential Women of Reading" during the Pandemic.

The meeting closed at 4:30pm.