

18th SEPTEMBER - THE ENVIRONMENT AGENCY

“RIVER THAMES FLOOD CONTROL SINCE 1947”

Melanie Ward and Chris Beales from the Environment Agency talked about the control of flooding on the River Thames since 1947, looking at past flooding patterns and concerns for future potential flooding along the Thames in the Reading area, especially in the light of global warming.

Chris showed some detailed charts and diagrams and pointed out that the Thames consists of 4600 square kilometres of water along its course, from its source in the Cotswolds to London and beyond where it flows into the North Sea. It is navigable as far as Cricklade.

Records of flows and floods go back each year to 1883 at Kingston on Thames. The worst floods recorded were in 1894, 1947 when it was a one in 75 years flood and 2013-14 when over half a year's rain fell in a ten week period. The belief is that we should expect a major flood every 20 years. Dredging began in the 1930s and lasted until 1998 when it was halted because of costs and its limited effectiveness. Caversham Weir was built in 1953 as a means of controlling the flow of water along that part of the river.

Melanie then told us about the work of the Reading Climate Action Network, supported by Reading Borough Council, as it plans and prepares models for different scenarios of wetter winters and drier summers, as well as more extreme weather patterns. She discussed the value of flood plains and the controversial plans for protective walls along the river's banks. These are ongoing issues that will no doubt generate much discussion in the years ahead, but it was useful to know what some of the future plans are.