

Proposed Erection of a Blue Plaque to Joseph Huntley

21 Christchurch Road

In 1822, Joseph Huntley, an important local entrepreneur during the Industrial Revolution in this country, founded a bakery and confectionery shop at what was then 72 (now 121) London Street Reading. With his son, Thomas, he established Huntley's Biscuits. In 1857 this became Huntley and Palmers a company which became one of Reading's most celebrated and famous biscuit companies, known throughout the world.

Between 1837 and 1842 Joseph Huntley lived at 9 Whitley Crescent, now 21 Christchurch Road RG2 7AA. The house is part of a Grade II listed terrace in the Christchurch Conservation Area.

The house owner of 21 Christchurch Road RG2 7AA, Diz Adelman, proposes to erect a Blue Plaque to Joseph Huntley during the 2022 celebrations to mark the bi-Centenary of the founding of Huntley and Palmers.



9 Whitley Crescent (now 21 Christchurch Road) in 2022

This erection of a plaque on the front of the house will highlight the importance of his residing at this address from 1837-1842.

It will recognise the importance of his life, and his legacy in founding the Huntley and Palmers biscuit business, which brought world fame to the town. His residence is of special historic interest and significance in the history of Reading. No other plaque to his memory exists.

Immediate neighbours in Christchurch Road have been canvassed regarding the erection of the plaque and the proposal has been met with unanimous approval verging on excitement at the prospect.

Members of the CAAC and Reading Civic Society Committees have been involved in the development of this proposal and the agreement of the text.

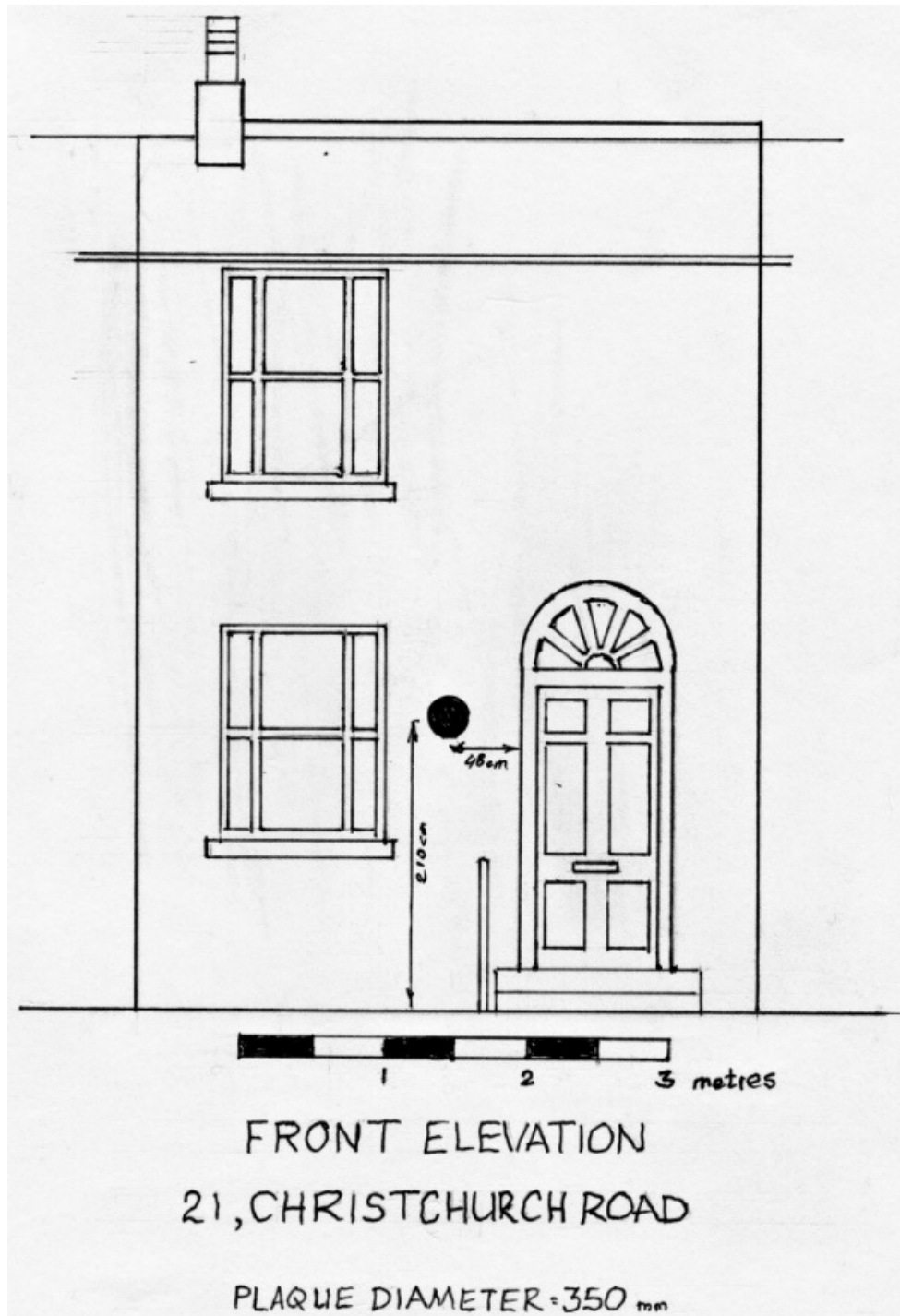
The aim is to erect the plaque during summer 2022.

Design and Access and Heritage Statements

A. Design and Access Statement

Placing of the plaque on the front of the building

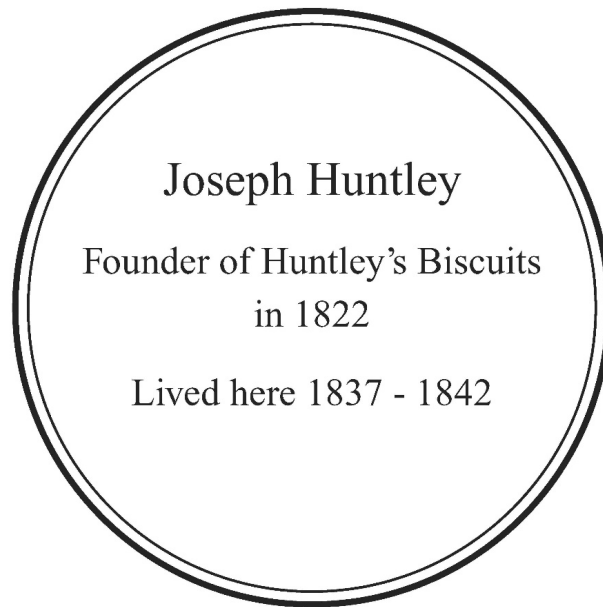
The plaque will be 350 MM diameter. The centre of the plaque will be 210 cm off the ground 48 cms to the left of the front door, as in the drawing below.



The wording of the plaque has been discussed and agreed with neighbours and members of the CAAC and Reading Civic Society committees.

Keeping the text simple aids legibility of the plaque by passers-by, who will be able to read it from the pavement. They will not need to walk down the path to the front door.

The distance from the gate to the front door is approximately 20 feet/6.96 metres.



The plaque will be 350mm in diameter

Manufacture of the plaque

Two options have been explored:

- Photocast Products in Liverpool www.photocast.co.uk – who quoted for a blue plaque in zinc. They made the Roll of Honour to the Berkshire Yeomanry in The Forbury and the Phoebe Cusden Blue Plaque in Castle Street.
- Signcast of Wolverhampton <https://www.signcast.co.uk> - who quoted for a blue plaque in pressed aluminium. They have made signs for City of Winchester Trust, The Chilterns Conservation Board and Battersea Dogs and Cats Home.

The above mock-up has been supplied by **Photocast**

Whichever company is chosen the blue will be the same as that for the Phoebe Cusden Plaque, below.

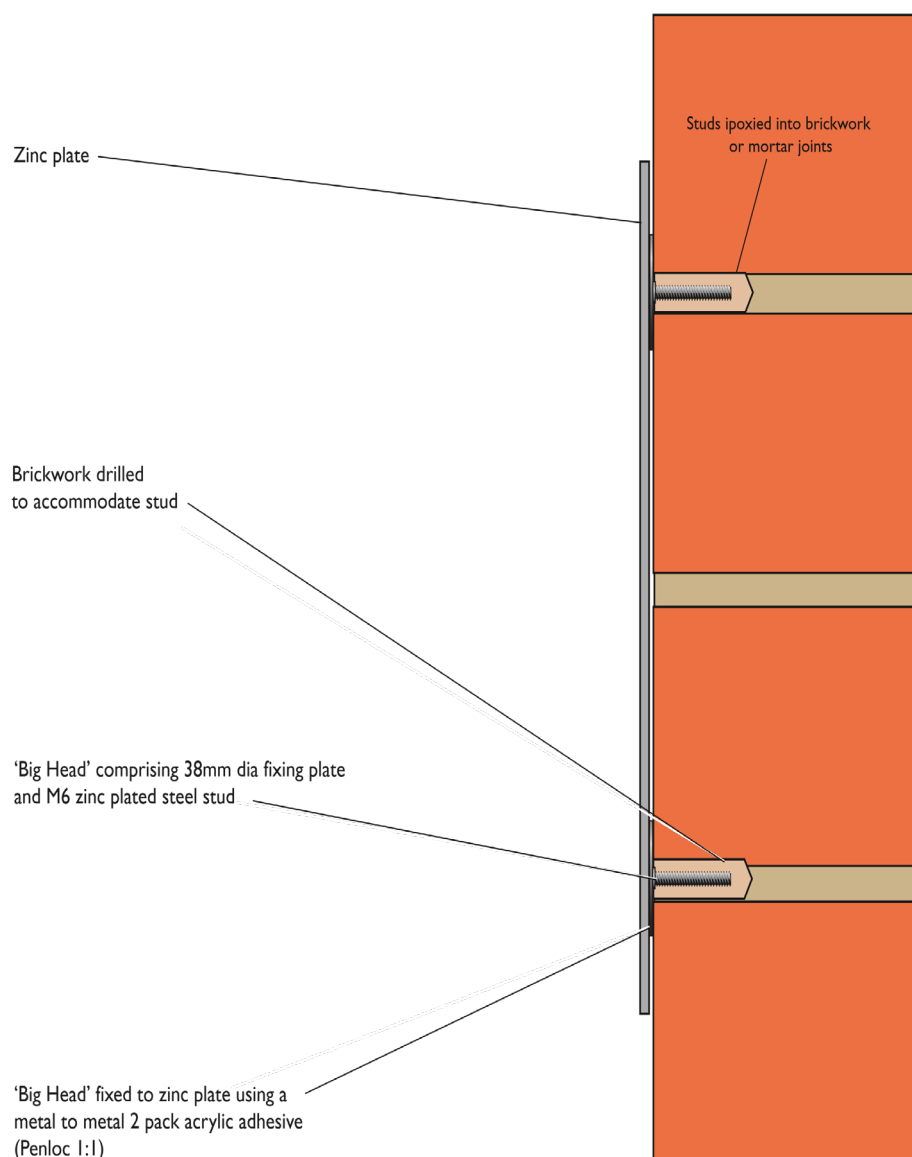


The Cusden Plaque was originally set on a base of oak (which inevitably warped). This was replaced in late 2021 by Lakeland Slate.

Learning from experience, and advice from suppliers, it is not intended that the Huntley plaque will have a backing.

Rather it will be fixed by two /three invisible bolts (provided by the supplier) direct to the wall. Following the advice given by Historic England, and the suppliers, the bolts will be fixed into the mortar between the bricks and not directly into the bricks. Thus, the installation minimises any impact on the structure of the building.

The following drawing is contained in a detailed method statement for the fixing of zinc plates from Photocast Products and illustrates the method to be used.



B. Heritage Statement



9 Whitley Crescent (now 21 Christchurch Road) in 2022

No 21 Christchurch Road is part of a Grade II listed terrace which dates back to the 1830s.

The Historic England listing is

Statutory Address 11-25, CHRISTCHURCH ROAD

List Entry Number: 1321966

Date first listed: 14-Dec-1978

District: Reading (Unitary Authority)

National Grid Reference: SU 72137 72228

Details

CHRISTCHURCH ROAD 1. 5128 (North Side) (Nos 11 to 25 odd) SU 7272 9/85 II GV 2. Before 1840, built as part of Whitley Crescent. 2 storeys. Brick with slate roof. Glazing bar sash windows. Each house has 1 range of windows and a door, only Nos 21 and 23 retain their 6-gimnelled doors, rest altered. Small quadrant surrounds with radiating fanlights over. The continuous trellis veranda now retained only before Nos 15 and 17 and Nos 23 and 25. Nos 15-25 retain low arrowhead rails with panel standards.

Overview of Joseph Huntley's life in support of recognising its significance as founder in 1822 of Huntleys Biscuits in London Street Reading.

Joseph Huntley (1775–1857) was a **19th-century biscuit maker and innovator**, who lived in the English town of Reading. In 1822 he founded a small biscuit bakery and confectioner's shop at 72 London Street. At this time, London Street was the main stagecoach route from London to Bristol, Bath, and the West Country.

From Reading Evening Post 1.10.68 by T.A.B. Corley author of the book "Huntley and Palmer's of Reading 1822-1972"

Joseph Huntley was a rather shadowy character. No portrait of him exists and his grave near a disused chapel in Stoke on Trent is unmarked and overgrown with rank grass and brambles. Yet he was probably one of the line of eccentrics who enlivened the English Scene.

More certainly he deserves a not insignificant place among the entrepreneurs of the Industrial Revolution, responsible for making Reading famous throughout Britain and his own surname a household name in almost every corner of the world.

- He married Mary Willis, daughter of a maltster in Reading 1801 and worked there as a Quaker schoolteacher. Prior to this he was a Quaker school teacher in Burford Oxon where his father ran a highly regarded school for Quakers. Having moved to Reading in 1811 he became insolvent 3 years later and apprenticed his son Thomas to a confectioner. Thomas returned to Reading in 1822 when he and his father set up a biscuit baker's shop in London Street. It is this shop that grew into the world-famous Huntley and Palmers.
- In the small shop, Thomas baked, his 2 sisters served at the counter and Joseph stood at the door greeting famous customers such as the local author Mary Russell Mitford, who never forgot the exquisite taste of the Huntleys biscuits. Soon Joseph was sending a delivery boy with baskets of biscuits to every stagecoach that stopped at the Crown Inn opposite. The ingredients were of the finest quality, but they lost their freshness after a couple of days.
- Joseph called in his youngest son Joseph Junior to help. He had set up an Ironmongers shop opposite the Crown Inn, and in no time, he was manufacturing tin boxes to keep the biscuits fresh and undamaged almost indefinitely. A commercial traveller Thomas Worth was engaged, and he began canvassing prestigious customers (Fortnum and Mason were an early customer) in Oxford Cambridge Eton Bath and Cheltenham.
- A turning point for the business came when Joseph retired in 1838, a year after moving to 9 Whitley Crescent. Thomas found he needed a partner to replace his father. His wife's young cousin, George Palmer, showed interest in joining him as he had some training as a baker. Thomas took George on as a partner in 1841 to form Huntley and Palmers on Midsummer Day.

Why it is Important to commemorate the life of Joseph Huntley?

Significance of his achievements and his legacy

- Without Joseph Huntley's foundation of Huntley's Biscuits in London Street Reading there would have been no Huntley & Palmers.
- There is no known existing commemoration of him. He lies without note in an unmarked grave in Stoke on Trent, where he died in 1849 whilst visiting his half-brother.
- Other than Joseph Huntley Street, named after him in the new riverside development in Reading called 'Huntley Wharf', there is no other commemoration of him.

The relevance of erecting the plaque in Joseph Huntley's name in 2022

It is 200 years since Joseph started the biscuit business with his son Thomas which led to the formation of Huntley & Palmers in 1857, after Thomas had died. George Palmer, whose two brothers joined him in partnership, decided to keep the name Huntley in the company name as it was so well known.

Events and activities planned to commemorate 200 years of biscuit heritage in Reading in 2022

- See [Reading Biscuit Town 2022 | What's On Reading \(whatsonreading.com\)](https://whatsonreading.com/reading-biscuit-town-2022/)
- Twilight Trail: Biscuit Town - a biscuit-themed trail to celebrate Reading's link with the world-famous Huntley & Palmers factory – (took place in December 2021)
- Talk by Joe Doak entitled: **The rise and fall of Biscuit Town – the Huntley and Palmers' Story** for the Berkshire Industrial Archaeological Group - February 2022 (approx. 60 online)
- **Terry's Reading Walkabouts** Huntley & Palmers 200th Anniversary Walkabouts May 2022

- Exhibition at Museum of English Rural Life “**Biscuit Town: 200 years of Huntley & Palmers in Reading**” - May 10-September 25, 2022
- “**Unsweetened**” Ode to Biscuits is a film screened at the new community hub – the Reading Biscuit factory- March 2022.
- Talks by Joe Doak entitled: **The rise and fall of Biscuit Town – the Huntley and Palmer Story** for Reading Civic Society 14th May 2022 (2 sessions some 130 people booked).
- Children’s Festival in Forbury Gardens 14th May.
- Huntley and Palmers Audio Trail from 21 June.

Conclusion

The houseowner of 21 Christchurch Road, Reading, proposes to erect a blue plaque on the front of the house in Joseph Huntley’s name. The simple and clear text will enable the majority of passers-by on the pavement outside the property boundary to read it from a distance.

It will recognise the importance of his life and his legacy in founding the Huntley’s Biscuits business, which led to Huntley and Palmers which brought world fame to the town. His residence is felt to be a matter for special historic interest and significant in the history of Reading worthy of a commemorative plaque being erected.

The plaque celebrates neighbourhood history and recognises the local pride felt by the Katesgrove community. It will have the power to educate & perhaps surprise. It links to the series of celebratory civic events planned in this bi-centenary year of the founding of Huntley’s Biscuits listed above.

The houseowner believes that no. 21 Christchurch Road is deserving of the affixing of the Blue Plaque.

Immediate neighbours in Christchurch Road have been canvassed regarding the erection of the plaque and the proposal has been met with unanimous approval verging on excitement at the prospect.

Diz Adelman

Owner

21 Christchurch Road

Reading

12 May 2022

Evidence of Joseph Huntley's residence at his address at 21 Christchurch Road Reading formerly 9 Whitley Crescent from 1837-1842

(Evelyn Williams 6 March 2022)

Summary

Joseph Huntley (1775-1849) lived at 9 Whitley Crescent (now 21 Christchurch Road) from 1837 to 1842.

Immediately before he moved to Whitley Crescent he lived on London Street, but not at the bakery and shop premises that he occupied in partnership with his son Thomas.

After he left Whitley Crescent, he lived on the south side of Crown Street.

Please refer to the map of Reading in 1842 in Appendix 1 and the note on interpretation of sources and references in Appendix 2

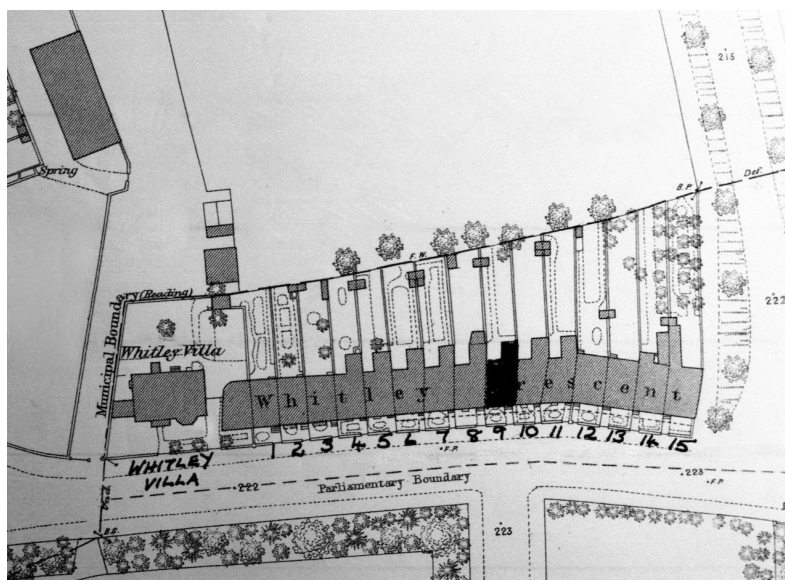
1. NUMBERING SYSTEM ON WHITLEY CRESCENT THEN AND NOW

1.1 The only records that give Joseph Huntley's address as number 9 on Whitley Crescent are the 1841 census and Snare's post office directory of 1842.

1.2 In 1841 Whitley Crescent comprised Whitley Villa (on the corner with Highgrove Street today) and 15 consecutively numbered properties (1-15).

1.3 An additional property, Christchurch Cottage, was inserted between Whitley Villa and 1 Whitley Crescent in the second half of the nineteenth century. Although there is a large building of some sort in the garden of Whitley Villa on the 1879 OS map, it does not appear as a separate address until the 1888 directory.

1.4 This makes up the 17 properties between Highgrove Street and Kendrick Road that we have today along the north side of Christchurch Road (no's 1-33). Whitley Villa is a detached property and the other 16 are terraced but of different heights and styles giving three broadly similar groups of houses from west to east of 4+8+4 properties.



Numbering on Whitley Crescent marked on the 1879 OS map.

9 Whitley Crescent (now 21 Christchurch Road) shaded black.

2. PROOF OF RESIDENCE of Joseph Huntley ON WHITLEY CRESCENT

2.1 St Giles Parish poor rate books are a continuous set of records which prove that Joseph Huntley lived on Whitley Crescent from 1837-1842¹. He was not there in 1836 or 184

2.2 Joseph Huntley was the occupier of the house which during this period was owned by Mr Strong who also owned No 8 next door. Property ownership is recorded in the poor rate books from 1838 onwards.

2.3 The position of Joseph Huntley in the list of occupiers of properties relative to his neighbours confirm that he did not move house along Whitley Crescent.

3. WHERE DID JOSEPH HUNTLEY LIVE BEFORE WHITLEY CRESCENT

3.1 In 1838 the result of the closely fought 24 July 1837 parliamentary election in Reading was scrutinised and Joseph Huntley senior's vote objected to and examined². His son Thomas Huntley said that Joseph Huntley had moved to Whitley Crescent *[not in the Borough of Reading at that time]* 14 or 15 months before the date of the examination. He had moved from a house on London Street separate from his business address. The vote was allowed as Joseph and Thomas Huntley were jointly rated on their business premises and Joseph Huntley was said to still visit the premises daily.

3.2 Joseph Huntley senior could not be traced in the available electoral registers for 1836, 1837 or 1838.

3.3 Joseph Huntley senior's house on London Street referred to in the disputed vote could not be found in the 1836 or 1837 poor rate books either. However, in the 1835 poor rate book³ there is a house on London Street (west) occupied by Mary and Ann Huntley. It is likely that these are the two unmarried daughters of Joseph Huntley senior⁴. 'London Street Described: A Reading Historic Record 1800-1900' does not provide any further assistance here⁵.

4. WHERE DID JOSEPH HUNTLEY LIVE AFTER WHITLEY CRESCENT

4.1 Joseph Huntley died on 24 May 1849 when visiting his brother in Stoke on Trent⁶ and was buried there⁷.

4.2 At the time of his death he was registered to vote with a Crown Street address⁸ and appears for a Crown Street (south) address in the poor rate book for that year⁹.

4.3 Joseph Huntley occupied a house on Crown Street (south) in the 1843 poor rate book and in 1845 he is still on this street but has moved to another property¹⁰.

4.4 Poor rate books for 1846, 1847 and 1848 were not checked but it seems likely that he remained on Crown Street throughout this period until his death. He is shown in Snare's 1847 directory as resident at 5 Crown Street.

5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to Dennis Wood, author of 'Views from the Hill, The Story of Whitley', for sharing his research on Katesgrove and the Huntley family and Katie Amos at Reading Central Library.

Other documents and maps sourced from the Berkshire Record Office and Reading Central Library or online via findmypast.

² Poor rate books consulted were 1837, 1838, 1841, 1842 and 1843. Some years have more than one rate book. Berkshire Record Office D/P 96/11/167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 176, 177, 178, 179, 180, 181

² Reading Mercury 17 March 1838 p2.

³ Poor rate book 1835 Berkshire Record Office D/P 96/11/218

⁴ Mary Huntley was living with her brother Joseph at the time of the 1841 census and Ann Huntley could be Hannah Huntley who was living with her father at the time of the 1841 census. Mary married Thomas Gill in 1857 but Hannah never married. Mary Gill and Hannah Huntley were living at 18 Kendrick Road at the time of the 1881 census.

⁵ London Street Described: A Reading Historic Record 1800-1900, ed James Smart, compiled by the London Street Research Group

⁶ Reading Mercury 26 May 1849

⁷ Reading Evening Post 1 October 1968, article about Joseph Huntley by T A B Corley

⁸ Berkshire Chronicle 18 August 1849, recorded as not voting

⁹ Poor rate book 1849 D/P 96/11/192

¹⁰ Poor rate books 1843 – 1845 D/P 96/11/ 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185.