

FRIENDS OF READING ABBEY (FORA)

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 24 OCTOBER 2015

MINUTES

Of the Annual General Meeting held in the Wroughton Room, Berkshire Record Office, Reading, on **Saturday 24 October 2015 at 2.30pm.**

Present: P. Durrant (Chairman)
Professor B Kemp, J Bond, I Hunt (Treasurer), D Beaumont, S Cooke, D Sykes and H Young (Committee)
The speaker (Harriet Mahood)
36 Friends and guests

Apologies for Absence:

V Abel, A Curry, J Dils, M and RM Fulton, B Grafton, W Hicks, P Kay, E Matthew, J Painter

1. Welcome

The Chairman, Dr Peter Durrant MBE, welcomed the speaker (Harriet Mahood), and the 44 members and guests present, in particular the President (Prof. Brian Kemp) and one of the two Vice-Presidents (Mrs Janet Bond).

2. Minutes of AGM held on 25 October 2014

These were agreed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

3. Chairman's Report

The Chairman, Dr Peter Durrant, noted that 2014-15 had been a busy and successful year for the Friends, with improved presentation and promotion through the website and the new Facebook page, continuing partnership work with the Council to promote interest in the Abbey and to support the Abbey Quarter bid, and active engagement in events associated with the Abbey. The Friends had continued to meet the challenge of recruiting more members, with membership having now topped 200, but it continued to remain low out of the population of 250,000 for the greater Reading urban area, and there was scope for further activity by all members to recruit more, and to promote greater interest in the most important historic site in Reading.

The Chairman thanked the Committee, the wider membership, Reading Borough Council and Reading Museum for their active and continuing support over the year.

The report was received.

4. Secretary's Report

The Secretary, John Painter, had circulated a written report on the work of the Friends' Committee during 2014-15. The Committee's basic mission was to work with the Council to get the Abbey Ruins conserved and re-opened to the public on a regular basis by 2021, the 900th anniversary of the Abbey's foundation in 1121. In this regard it had continued to work to the four key themes adopted in 2013, as follows:

- a) Abbey Quarter Project - Reading Abbey Revealed.

The Committee had supported the Council on its bid for £1.7M heritage lottery funding towards a total Project cost of £3.1M. The Project would conserve the Abbey Ruins, restore the Abbey Gateway roof, and improve signposting and interpretation to and throughout the Abbey Quarter. The crucial stage 2 bid had been submitted in September 2015, with a decision expected in January 2016.

In support of the bid, the Friends had helped promote the Council's stage 2 consultation process, which had attracted 1,200 responses in January 2015. It had also taken part in the work to develop a supporting Activity Plan, undertaken for the Council by Julia Holberry Associates.

During 2015 the Council and the Friends had opened up the Abbey Ruins to the public, under safety-controlled (hard hat) conditions on three occasions - the Waterfest Saturday on 20 June, and on the Friday and Saturday of the Heritage open days' weekend in September. On each occasion volunteers from the Friends had worked with staff from the Museum to run escorted tours, thereby doubling the number of tours and therefore the number of visitors. In total, this had facilitated over 400 visits to the Ruins, with all tours fully booked on every occasion. The Friends' pool of volunteers had also grown, and now totalled 12.

The Friends, along with the Council and St James's Church, have also been involved in the Hidden Abbey project, a proposal by Philippa Langley MBE to undertake and film for television ground-penetrating radar studies to reveal the buried foundations of the Abbey church and possibly locate the burial vault of Henry I.

b) Promotion

The Committee had:

- Continued to update and redesign its website
- Set up a Facebook page
- Re-printed both its leaflets - the Friends' leaflet, and the walking tour of Reading's Abbey Quarter
- Had promotional stands at the Waterfest and the Friends' Annual Garden Party.

c) Communication and Partnerships

As well as the ongoing partnership with the Reading Museum Service on the Reading Abbey Revealed Project, the Committee had again joined with the other two Friends groups - for Reading Museum, and for Caversham Court Gardens - for a successful summer party on Sunday 21 June 2015. It had also continued to develop the relationship with St James's RC church, which occupies an important site on the north transept of the Abbey, both through the Hidden Abbey project, and the 2015 Spring Lecture which was given by John Mullaney at St James's Church.

Members of the Committee had given two illustrated talks to local community groups, and one guided tour of the Abbey Quarter.

d) Membership

In addition to taking membership beyond 200, the Committee had worked to improve its communication with the membership. It continued to issue three newsletters a year, which are posted to members who are not contactable by email, and supplemented this with monthly email updates sent to members with electronic access which promoted both Friends' events and gave news of local initiatives affecting the Abbey Quarter, such as the restoration of the St Laurence churchyard wall, and the Trooper Potts VC memorial in The Forbury.

The Committee had also organised a successful spring lecture, by John Mullaney, on Reading Abbey and Catholicism; and a summer outing to Oxford, to visit colleges with direct links with the Abbey.

The report was received.

5. Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer, Iris Hunt, circulated the accounts for 2014/15 and list of current assets, and offered an explanation on the content. Expenditure had exceeded income by £44; the Friends had balances of £924 and other funds and assets of just under £7,500. Expenditure had been increased to meet additional printing and promotional costs associated with the 2014/15 work programme, and a gazebo and new display stands had been purchased and put to use.

To date, the Treasurer announced that she had received a small number of annual subscriptions from the total membership for 2015/16 and consequently would be writing to members to encourage and expedite payment.

The Treasurer added that new members are asked where and in what circumstances they were encouraged to join the Friends so that it is known where and in what direction to target for increased numbers.

The accounts were adopted at the meeting.

6. Constitutional Matters

The Secretary, in his report, proposed two changes to the Friends' constitution, as follows:

1) To increase the number of ordinary members on the committee from four to five

Para. 4 of the constitution specifies that the Committee shall comprise the Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer, and four Committee members in addition to the officers. Under Para. 8, the Committee may co-opt up to two members from the membership of the Friends.

At last year's AGM, three members were appointed to the Committee, leaving one vacancy. During the year, the committee used its powers under para. 8 to co-opt Heather Young.

Given the increasing membership of the Friends, and its own growing activity, the Committee had taken the view that its membership could usefully be increased by one person (to give a total committee of eight members), with a particular reference to enhancing the PR and marketing skills available to the Friends.

The meeting AGREED that Para. 4(f) of the constitution should be re-written as follows:

“(f) The committee shall comprise the Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer, and five committee members in addition to these officers”.

2) To amend the rule relating to the Chairman's casting vote

Under Para. 4 of the constitution, the forum for each committee meeting shall be four members. Under Para. 7, the Chairman shall not vote, except to exercise a casting vote in the event of a tied vote. This is an incorrect application of the concept of a tied vote, which is conventionally (and in law) a second vote which the Chairman can exercise to resolve a tied vote.

The meeting AGREED that Para. 7 should be re-written as follows:

“The Chairman may exercise a second, casting vote in the event of a tied vote”

7. Election of Officers

The Chairman thanked the 2014/15 Committee for its active support during the year.

The following were elected *nem con* for 2015/16:

President:	Professor Brian Kemp
Vice-Presidents:	Leslie Cram and Janet Bond
Chairman:	Dr Peter Durrant MBE
Secretary:	John Painter
Treasurer:	Iris Hunt
Committee:	Doug Beaumont, Stella Cooke, Dianne Sykes, Heather Young

There being one vacancy in the Committee membership, the meeting noted that the Chairman would now seek to fill this through co-option.

8. Appointment of Independent Examiner

The Chairman advised that the accounts for 2014/15 had been examined by Mr A Hutt. The meeting approved Mr Hutt’s appointment as Independent Examiner for 2015/16.

9. Subscriptions

The meeting considered and agreed the following recommendations from the Committee to retain the subscription fees for 2015/16 at the same levels as in 2013/14 and 2014/15, as set out below:

Individual:	£7.00	
Family:	£10.00	2 members at same address
Life:	£105.00	(x15 the single rate)
Society / Institutional:	£15.00	(x2 the single rate)

9. Dissolution of the Monasteries

The meeting was followed by a talk by Harriet Mahood (Reading University) on Medieval Monastic and Ecclesiastical Gatehouses.