



**Friends
of
Reading
Abbey**

NEWSLETTER

Spring 2018

Patrons:

The Lord Lieutenant of Berkshire

The Right Worshipful the Mayor of Reading

The Right Reverend the Bishop of Reading

The Abbot of Douai

The MP for Reading East

The MP for Reading West

The Vice Chancellor, Reading University

President: Professor Brian Kemp **Vice Presidents:** Janet Bond Leslie Cram

Spring Lecture of the Friends of Reading Abbey

Friday 13 April 2018 at 7.30pm

St Laurence Church, Friar Street, Reading RG1 1DA

'A Place Strongly Fortified' - The Civil War Siege of Reading

Speaker: Simon Marsh

Simon Marsh is a freelance researcher specialising in early modern military history, particularly the British Civil Wars (1637-1660). He co-authored *Battle for London* (Amberley, 2010) with Dr Stephen Porter. His latest book *The train of artillery under the Earl of Essex* was published by the Pike and Shot Society in 2016 and he contributed a chapter to *A new way of fighting: Professionalism in the English Civil War* (Helion, 2017) looking at the development of light artillery in the first part of the 17th century and how it influenced the parliamentary ordnance maker James Weymss. Simon has also written for the Journal of the Society of Army Historical Research, the Pike and Shot Society's Journal, *Arquebusier* and the Battlefields Trust e-journal, *Battalia*. He is an active member of the Battlefields Trust, serving as Chair of its Mercia Region and Research and Battlefield Threats Coordinator. Simon lives in Buckinghamshire with his wife and two children and works in London as a Civil Servant.



St Laurence Church has ample seating room with an opportunity to enjoy the beautiful interior of this late medieval church.

Entry will be free, with voluntary donations at the end of the evening

The church is open from 7pm - Tea/Coffee available

Members and non-members are warmly invited

**IT'S OFFICIAL!
ABBAY RUINS
TO RE-OPEN ON
16 JUNE 2018**

FRIENDS OF READING ABBEY AGM 29 OCTOBER 2017

The Chairman Dr Peter Durrant MBE, welcomed the large audience, which filled the Waterhouse Chamber to capacity. He reported that conservation works to the Abbey Ruins had begun in February 2017 and good and visible progress was being made.



He congratulated everyone involved in the success of the project to date. The Chairman continued by saying that there was still much work to do; completing the conservation of the Abbey Ruins and Gate and re-opening them to the public, would be an important milestone which in turn posed the challenge of maintaining and promoting the Ruins for future public use. However, the celebration of both the Abbey Ruins' reopening in 2018 and the 900th anniversary of the Abbey's foundation in 2021, only four years away was a very exciting prospect!

The Secretary, John Painter, circulated a written report on the work of the Friends' Committee during 2016-17. 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. The Friends had continued to be involved in the Hidden Abbey project, about the Abbey below ground. The Committee also maintains an up to date website and Facebook page and are both are used to promote Reading Abbey and activities associated with it. FORA had joined the Reading Abbey Revealed Project, along with Friends of Reading Museum and Caversham Court Gardens at this year's Reading Waterfest on 10 June 2017. During the year, four illustrated talks were given to local community groups on Reading Abbey, plus three guided tours of the Abbey Quarter, in return for contributions to FORA's funds. The secretary was pleased to report that over the past four years, FORA's membership had tripled.

Following completion of official business we were delighted to welcome our speakers Matthew Williams, *Reading Museum Manager* and Giles Pritchard, *Design Manager, Heritage Architecture, Hants CC*. **Matthew** gave a full account of the Reading Abbey Revealed conservation works to date. He covered the importance and power of the abbey when it was built, the site of which even today affects the road layout in the town. We heard that many future events are planned once the abbey ruins re-open in 2018 and the area will be a place for the people of Reading to become involved in. **Giles** outlined the stages of the conservation works and described the erosion problems caused by cement capping applied in the 1970's and 80's. This was being removed to be replaced by soft capping to prevent water penetration. Work had begun on the Abbey Gateway after a temporary roof had been erected to allow the existing roof to dry out. Once completed, the Gateway will house the Museum's Victorian Schoolroom.



Giles Pritchard and Matthew Williams

Visit the website www.readingabbeyquarter.org.uk to keep informed on progress.

DIARY DATES - 2018

13 APRIL

FORA SPRING LECTURE

16 JUNE

WATERFEST - *the Abbey Ruins opening ceremony will be a focal point this year*

2 SEPTEMBER

FRIENDS 'LATE SUMMER' PARTY - *within the Abbey Ruins*

15/16 SEPTEMBER

READING HERITAGE WEEKEND

29 SEPTEMBER

OXFORD STUDY DAY - *Henry I's Reading Abbey*

27 OCTOBER

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING - *Speaker, Professor Anne Lawrence-Mathers*

4 or 25 JULY

ANNUAL OUTING TO TEWKESBURY (*the date to be confirmed asap*)



Cllr Sarah Hacker, the Mayor, Rose Williams and Cllr Tony Page at the gallery launch

IT'S OFFICIAL! The announcement that the Abbey Ruins will re-open on 16 JUNE 2018 was made during the launch of the Museum's new Reading Gallery, on 12 February. After a 3 year £3.1 million conservation project, the Abbey Ruins opening ceremony will form a focal point at this year's Reading Waterfest on 16 June. The Abbey Gateway is due to be completed in April and will house Reading Museum's Victorian Schoolroom experience in September 2018. **Councillor Tony Page**, Reading Borough Council's Lead Member for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport, said:

"I'm delighted the Council's long-standing ambition to re-open the Abbey Ruins to the public is finally becoming a reality. In the Abbey Quarter, Reading boasts a site of national significance. It is fantastic this important heritage has been preserved for future generations to appreciate and I am very much looking forward to the reopening date."

The excellent new permanent display in the Reading Gallery begins with objects highlighting the town's history before the Abbey was established and then focuses on the history of the Abbey leading up to its closure in 1539. It's well worth a visit.

Photo by Chris Forsey

The Forbury Mound

In June the Round Mounds team collected core samples which revealed archaeological material and evidence of everyday life in the past. The report says that the presence of certain tile types meant the mound is unlikely to be earlier than 13th or 14th century - ruling out the possibility that the mound was a Norman castle or any earlier monument. The abundance of tiles suggest the mound is at least partly made up of demolition rubble, likely from the demolished Reading Abbey. Therefore this evidence supports that the mound is part of Civil War defences.

The Round Mounds team emphasise that this evidence doesn't prove that an earlier mound didn't exist, but evidence for anything earlier no longer remains.

Game of Stones - could you own a piece of Reading Abbey's History?

The Hidden Abbey Stones Project (HASP) is an exciting new venture which aims to learn more about the lost and hidden stones of the Abbey that were removed following its dissolution in 1539. Many of the stones that once formed the Abbey still exist in Reading today, built into walls or houses or simply unrecognised in rockeries and flowerbeds. The Reading Abbey Revealed project is supporting the HASP in spreading the word and encouraging you to look differently at the stones around you. Perhaps you have a **hidden treasure** in your garden.

Visit www.readingabbeyhistory.com for more details.

READING BETWEEN THE LINES is a professional theatre company based in Reading which brought two very successful productions to the town in 2017, relating to Reading Abbey.

Reading's Royal Burial took place on 15 September in the Oracle, which worked extremely well as a venue. The photo represents Henry I's body being rowed to the abbey watched by an estimated audience of 1,000. **Matilda the Empress** was presented in the beautiful church of St James during November and drew large audiences each evening. The popularity of these plays reflects the great interest in the story of Reading's Abbey.

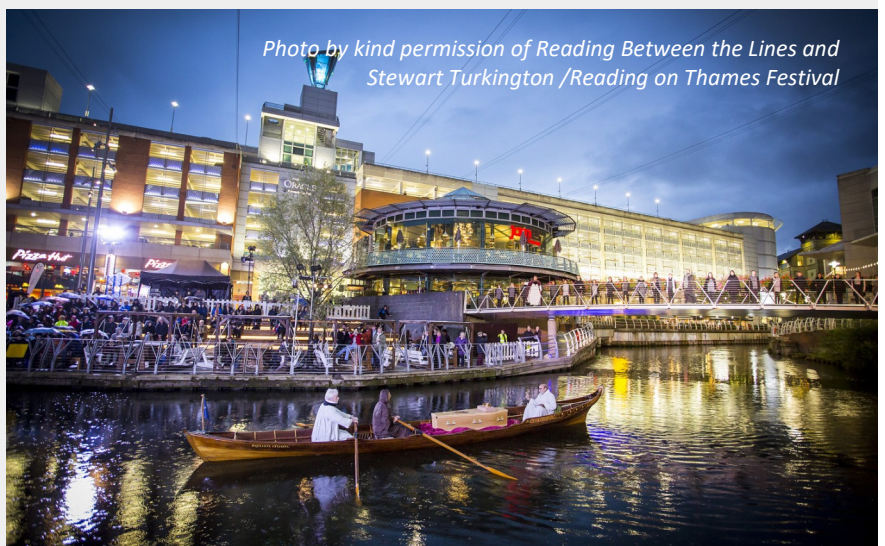


Photo by kind permission of Reading Between the Lines and Stewart Turkington /Reading on Thames Festival

HENRY I'S READING ABBEY:

The Architecture of his Burial Church

Saturday 29 September 2018, at Rewley House, 1 Wellington Square
Oxford OX1 2JA.

We are pleased to draw your attention to this special event - held in association with the Reading Abbey Quarter and the Friends of Reading Abbey, the Department for Continuing Education at the University of Oxford is running a study day on Henry I's Reading Abbey.

'In 1132 Henry I raised the status of Reading to that of Royal Abbey and it became his burial place. Founded in 1121 with monks from Cluny in Burgundy, Reading Abbey was to become one of the most important monasteries in England'

Programme

9.45 am	Registration	
10.00am	Reading Abbey - its architecture in context	KEITH HASTED
11.15am	Coffee / Tea	
11.45am	The surviving architecture and sculpture	DR RON BAXTER
1.00pm	Lunch	
2.00pm	Dissolution and the Abbey's later history	JOHN PAINTER
3.15pm	Tea / Coffee	
3.45 pm	Reading Abbey Revealed	MATTHEW WILLIAMS
5.00pm	Course disperses	

Fee Options: The Day Course without lunch is £67 (includes tea/coffee); with baguette lunch - £71.90 or with full lunch - £81.(Concessions may be available).

For more details, and bookings go to: <https://www.conted.ox.ac.uk/O18P100HCJ> or phone 01865 270380. Leaflets with enrolment forms will be available at our Spring Meeting on 13 April, or via email to treasurer@readingabbey.org.uk.

FRIENDS OF READING ABBEY - MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

If it has slipped your mind to renew your membership fee, there is still time to pay. Subscription rates have not been increased and remain as follows:

Single membership £7 Family/Joint £10 Society/Commercial £15 Life Membership £105

Please see our website for details on how to pay by electronic transfer/direct debit, or send your payment to Francoise Le Saux, Acting Treasurer, 25 The Crescent, Earley, Reading, Berks RG6 7NW. Contact can be made by email at treasurer@readingabbey.org.uk if you have a membership query.

The Friends of Reading Abbey are actively working to celebrate the completion of the conservation works and continue their mission to spread the knowledge of Reading Abbey and increase awareness of its history.

EACH MEMBERSHIP IS IMPORTANT TO US AND EVERY MEMBER'S SUPPORT IS VALUED

Treasurer

Iris Hunt has recently stepped down as Treasurer, due to ill health. We are indebted to Iris for the dedicated and conscientious way she has carried out the roles of treasurer and membership secretary. Francoise Le Saux has been appointed by the Committee as Acting Treasurer for the remainder of our current financial year and we welcome her on board.