



**FRIENDS
OF
READING
ABBEY**

NEWSLETTER
SPRING 2019

Patrons:

The Lord Lieutenant of Berkshire

The MP for Reading East

The Right Worshipful the Mayor of Reading

The MP for Reading West

The Right Reverend the Bishop of Reading

The Vice Chancellor, Reading University

The Abbot of Douai

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



An Invitation to the
Spring Lecture
of the Friends of Reading Abbey
Friday 22 March 2019 at 7.30pm in St Laurence Church
Friar Street, Reading

The Impact of the Dissolution of 1539 on the Town of Reading
Speaker: Joe Chick of Warwick University



Joe Chick grew up in Suffolk and gained an interest in the history of Reading when he took the masters in Medieval Studies at the University of Reading in 2014 -16. Since then, he has been working on a PhD thesis about Reading in the years 1350 -1600 at the University of Warwick.

The dissolution of the monasteries in 1539 is regarded as a major event in British history but in Reading it had a particular significance, since Reading Abbey was the lord of the whole town. Here it was not just a religious event but also a political, economic, and social one. The talk looks at how town society adapted to the removal of the abbey during the turbulent years that followed.

ENTRY IS FREE, with a voluntary retiring collection at the end to cover the costs of hire.

* Church open from 7pm

ALL ARE WELCOME

*Refreshments

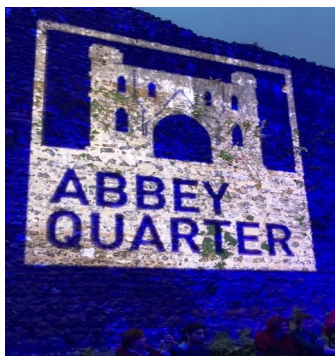
SUMMER 2018 - IN AND AROUND THE ABBEY

EVENTS IN THE ABBEY RUINS

The re-opening of the Abbey Ruins on 16 June was followed by a busy summer. **Open Air Cinema, Shakespeare in the Ruins** and of course the very successful and enjoyable **Summer Party** organised by the three Friends' groups on 2 September 18 were all held in the ruins.



Live Music from Flamingods on 8 September, brought to a close the summer programme in the Abbey.



The event was sold out and many people in the audience were visiting the abbey ruins for the first time. As light began to fall, the area was brought to life with atmospheric illuminations by designer Stuart Melrose.

BOOK LAUNCH, 11 SEPTEMBER 2018

The launch of **Reading Abbey and the Abbey Quarter**, published by Two Rivers Press, was very kindly hosted by Boyes Turner whose top floor offices afforded great views over the Abbey Ruins. The evening began with the authors Peter Durrant and John Painter, being interviewed by Sally Mortimore of TRP, followed by a book signing session. Peter and John continued to promote the Abbey Ruins and the publication, with a second signing session at Waterstones on 11 December 18 and a Town Hall Talk on 12 January 2019. Priced at a very reasonable £9.99, this beautifully illustrated book is available from the Reading Museum, Waterstones and Two Rivers Press.



READING ABBEY QUARTER PROJECT gains Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) 2018 South East Award for Excellence in Planning for Heritage and Culture. Announced at Brighton Pavilion on 22 November 2018, the excellent news was reported in Reading Council's press release below:

'The awards celebrate outstanding projects that demonstrate the power of planning in transforming the communities where we live. The judges said they were particularly impressed by the extent that Reading's heritage is seen as a catalyst for positive change and that the Abbey Quarter is at the heart of the town's cultural renaissance. They highlighted the Council's positive attitude to balancing heritage protection and being a destination for locals and visitors alike; and the creation of a strategic cultural and heritage strategy for Reading.'

RTPI South East Judges Panel Chair, Sue Percy, said: "The planners at Reading Borough Council saw heritage as a catalyst for social change in the city centre. Through their vision, the Reading Abbey ruins and Gateway have been transformed into the Abbey Quarter – now a thriving heritage quarter and landmark for locals and tourists alike. Planners will continue to reinvigorate places through heritage and culture." The full report, with photos can be found on <http://news.reading.gov.uk/reading-abbey-project-wins-top-planning-award>.



THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING on Saturday 27 October 2018 was held in St James Church and drew an attendance of 80 people. It was a pleasure to see so many gathered for the AGM and to welcome the Mayor of Reading, Councillor Debs Edwards in the audience. Our President, Professor Kemp, referred to 2018 as a momentous year both for Reading Abbey and The Friends. He and the Vice-President had been instrumental in setting up FORA in 1984, when Janet Bond was Mayor of Reading, for the promotion of the Abbey and the conservation of the Abbey Ruins. These objectives had been positively achieved through the successful completion of the Reading Abbey Revealed project, and the newly-reopened and conserved Abbey Ruins. He added that the Friends had gone from strength to strength. He commended the Committee on its good work, and wished it and FORA every success in the future.

The reports from our Chairman Dr Peter Durrant and Secretary John Painter, also reflected what a very active year 2018 had been - the main event being the re-opening of Reading Abbey Ruins on 16 June. Membership of FORA was reported to be flourishing, putting us in a very good position to prepare to mark the 900th anniversary of the founding of the abbey, in 2021.

Following the formal business, our speaker, Professor Anne Lawrence - Mathers provided a fascinating insight into the medieval mind during her talk on **Magic, Medicine and Miracles**. We heard of the miracles performed by the hand of St James; the healing powers of gemstones such as pearls, topaz, amethyst; and the medicinal herbs used to cure various ailments. A lively question and answer session brought this enjoyable afternoon to a close.



Anne Lawrence-Mathers, Peter Durrant, the Mayor and Brian Kemp

READING COUNCIL NEWS - Two important stone memorial plaques in the Abbey Ruins, celebrating the abbey's first and last abbots - Hugh de Boves and Hugh Faringdon - received extra protection in January 2019 to preserve them from adverse effects of the weather.



The memorial plaques were installed in 1911 by Dr Jamieson Boyd Hurry, a local physician and author, with a passion for local history. Photo: Reading Council News

The Council's conservation contractors installed stainless steel weather canopies over the memorial plaques on 15th January, as part of the ongoing work to preserve the abbey for future generations. The work also included improvements to the steel mounts on the carved stones along the Cloister walk. This protection work follows on from the annual winter conservation in November 2018 on low level sections of the dormitory walls, using a medieval technique of hot lime mortar, similar to the methods used in the original construction of abbey almost 900 years ago. This work is due to be repeated in spring when the conservation team will check for loose flint at a higher level.



We are extremely pleased to announce that The Friends of Reading Abbey won the Cultural Contribution at the Pride of Reading Awards on 2 November 2018! The award was presented by Chris Tarrant at the Royal Berkshire Conference Centre at the Madejski Stadium. It was a great honour to win this category - and our success reflected the work of the committee, our members and volunteers.

We were nominated by an appreciative visitor who felt that FORA had always ensured **Reading Abbey** kept a high profile both before and during the recent restoration work, with lectures, visits and by purchasing relevant artefacts linked to the site and for continuing to fly the flag for the Abbey.

The committee would like to thank our members, whose support and practical help has enabled FORA to continue to promote Reading Abbey Ruins, which are of such importance to the town. Thanks also to **M & G Real Estate**, sponsors of the Cultural Contribution award. A subsidiary of

Prudential, M&G own a number of key commercial sites in and around the Reading Abbey Quarter and we are very grateful for their support of Reading's cultural heritage. The award was collected by three members of the committee - *Secretary, John Painter, Chairman Peter Durrant and Newsletter Editor Dianne Sykes*, pictured here with two M&G representatives and Chris Tarrant. Photo: getreading



WHAT'S ON AT READING MUSEUM



CONFERENCE - Reading Abbey in Context: Royal Death and Burial: 6th April 2019, 9am to 5pm at Reading Town Hall.

Price £10 per person. Booking essential call 0118 9373400 or book via www.readingmuseum.org. Should you miss this conference, it's always worth visiting the Reading Museum website under 'Talks and Tours' to find out about future events.

THE VICTORIAN SCHOOLROOM EXPERIENCE (pictured), in the beautifully restored **Abbey Gateway** is usually held in school holidays. Check this out for the Easter break. Period clothing is provided. It's a highly recommended session and adults can join in - if able to squeeze into the small wooden desks! Once again, it is essential to book and there is a small fee.

Half Term can be a testing time keeping children entertained, but beginning on 21 February to 19 April is The Escape Room Trail, commencing at 10am. Sessions are always popular so check details first.

DIARY DATES for 2019

Saturday 15 June

Annual Outing

Saturday 26 October

WATERFEST

TBA

AGM at Greyfriars Church *Speaker: Malcolm Summers*