



FRIENDS OF READING ABBEY

NEWSLETTER SPRING 2020

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: Janet Bond **Vice President:** Leslie Cram



The Professor Brian Kemp Memorial Lecture

**Friday 20 March 2020 at 7.30pm in
St Laurence Church, Friar Street, Reading**

The Heraldry of Reading Abbey and its Legacy



We have re-named our Spring Lecture after our late President and the inaugural Memorial Lecture will be given by **Dr Adrian Ailes**, formerly of The National Archives.

Adrian Ailes is an honorary Research Associate at Bristol University and his postgraduate dissertation on the royal arms of England was supervised by Professor Brian Kemp in the Graduate Centre for Medieval Studies at Reading University. Adrian is a Vice-President of The Heraldry Society.

'This lecture recreates the heraldry that may have been seen in Reading Abbey and examines how the Abbey's own arms of three gold shells have influenced local heraldry up to the present day'

Church open from 7.00pm ALL WELCOME
ENTRY IS FREE with a voluntary collection at the end of the evening

St Laurence is a late medieval church, founded by the Abbey as a place of worship for townspeople and is part of the Abbey precinct.



READING GAOL HUG SUNDAY 13 OCTOBER 19 Hundreds of people gathered in the Abbey Ruins in support of the campaign to stop Reading Gaol being sold to the highest bidder for housing. The event was organised by Linda Saul who said "The gaol needs to be retained as an asset to the community, a public theatre, an arts and music space with a museum." There were speeches from the Mayor, Councillor Paul Woodward and local MPs Matt Rodda and Alok Sharma. The MPs put political differences aside and gave each other the first hug of the afternoon.



Supporters then took their positions around the Gaol and the bells of St James church rang to signal the start of the READING GAOL HUG, when everyone linked arms. The rain decided to fall at this point, but the crowd remained stoic and were determined to demonstrate the level of local concern over the fate of this historic building.



Further news on the Gaol site:

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL AGREES TO BID FOR READING PRISON:

In an announcement on 19 November 2019, Council Leader Jason Brock stated that "Following discussion in the closed session of tonight's Policy Committee meeting the council can now confirm that it intends to submit a bid to purchase the Reading Prison site. The full details of the bid must remain confidential given the commercial and competitive nature of the bidding process, however the council's bid would be conditional on securing significant external public funds in order to manage the risk of taking ownership of this historic property."

ON MONDAY 11TH NOVEMBER 2019, READING MUSEUM AND TOWN HALL WAS FILLED WITH THE 'SOUNDS OF READING ABBEY' thanks to Year 5 children from Geoffrey Field Junior School and Caversham Park Primary School who expertly performed music associated with the history of the Abbey.

The group from **Caversham Park Primary** told us what they'd learned about the history of the abbey and entertained the audience with a dance in the style of the period. They also displayed photos and drawings from their visit to the abbey site. The group from **Geoffrey Fields Junior School** outlined the reasons why Henry I built the abbey and explained what life in the abbey would have been like. Both schools gave a spirited rendition of *Sumer is Icumen in*.

Later, pupils of Geoffrey Fields Junior School performed their own 'Reading Abbey Rap' providing a fresh 21st Century approach, as this verse demonstrates:

*'Henry I built Reading Abbey
Henry I made a monster big church
The market town became not too shabby
A religious spot for travellers in the lurch'*



Photo courtesy of Reading Museum

King Henry himself made a royal appearance and presented certificates to both schools for completing the Sounds of Reading Abbey Project.

It was a most enjoyable session and the pupils had learnt an impressive amount by exploring the History of Reading Abbey through music.



THE FRIENDS' ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING on Saturday 26 October 2019 took place in Greyfriars Church and some 80 people battled the wind and rain to attend.

The Chairman, Dr Peter Durrant MBE, welcomed the speaker (Malcolm Summers); and members and guests present. It was announced with sadness that our President and co-founder, Professor Brian Kemp, had died in August 2019, to the great loss of the Friends and the Abbey. The meeting stood for a minute's silence as a mark of its heart-felt respect to Professor Kemp and his memory.

Dr Durrant raised the challenge of maintaining and promoting the Ruins for future public use, encouraging and fostering public interest in and support for the Abbey, and planning a high-profile celebration of the 900th anniversary of the Abbey's foundation in 2021. It was a very exciting prospect, to consolidate and build upon the interest generated by the re-opening of the Abbey Ruins in 2018, and to work with the Council, the Reading Abbey BID and other local partners to plan for Reading Abbey 900 in June 2021.

The Secretary and Treasurer gave their reports and the hard work of the committee and volunteers over the year was acknowledged. The Chairman reported that the Committee had invited Janet Bond, co-founder and Vice-President, to succeed Professor Kemp and was delighted that Mrs Bond had accepted.

Following the meeting, Malcolm Summers gave an extremely interesting talk on **The Grey Friars in Reading 1233 – 1538** and a brief extract is below:

'In 1233 some Franciscan friars – known as Grey Friars from the colour of their habits – arrived at Reading Abbey to ask the abbot, as Lord of the Manor of Reading, for a gift of some land to establish a friary. The abbot, Adam de Lathbury, reluctantly acquiesced and, with some stringent conditions, allowed them some land outside the town, in the low-lying lands by the road to Caversham bridge.

The land was what we would now call a greenfield site, with the recurrent problem of flooding by the Brook and the Thames. After 50 years of coping with the flooding, the friars asked for the help of their Order to improve their lot. The abbey granted a further plot of land in May 1285. Importantly this was uphill from the first friary, and it was on top of this hill that the friars built their new church, in stone and flint, which has come down to us as Greyfriars Church today. While the mission of the monks of the Abbey was to praise God through their daily services and in their scholastic and other work, all based in the abbey, the friars lived among the people of the town.

The friary ended its life on 13 September 1538, an early casualty of the Act for the Suppression of the Lesser Monasteries.

The nave of the church has survived because the Mayor, Richard Turner, asked that it be given to the town for use as its guild hall. The friary nave survived its subsequent chequered history, mostly as a prison, until its restoration as a church in 1863.'



Interior of Greyfriars



A full summary of the talk can be found on our website www.readingabbey.org.uk

2021 IS THE 900TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FOUNDATION OF READING ABBEY BY KING HENRY I ON 18 JUNE, 1121. Reading Museum would very much like you to be part of their celebrations as part of this article from their website explains:



'In 2018 we reopened in the Abbey Ruins as part of the £3.15m Reading Abbey Revealed project, supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Historic England. The Abbey Quarter and Reading Museum now sit firmly at the heart of Reading's cultural offer. Through conservation, interpretation and community collaboration, our ambitious project has reinvented the precinct of the Royal Monastery as the town's main heritage destination.

To celebrate the Abbey's 900th anniversary, we want to develop an exciting mix of arts, culture and heritage events across the town and we are inviting you to be part of it. We are seeking new events, alongside popular favourites, to create a packed programme of events themed around the 900th birthday celebrations.

Our flagship event will be the **2021 Reading Water Fest**, taking place across the weekend of the **19th/20th June**. We'd also love to feature as many of our local arts and community groups as possible.

If you'd like to get involved by hosting an event or activity linked to the 900th anniversary please email us at reading.abbeyquarter@reading.gov.uk and let us know what you'd like to deliver in 2021!

Chestnut Walk Tree Replacement Begins as Part of £160,000 Improvement Plan by Reading Council.

A total of 18 distinctive mature horse chestnut trees along the Walk have been declining for a number of years, suffering from canker, fungal brackets and other defects. Inspections have found they are a risk to public safety and four have been felled previously for the same reason.

Work to remove the remaining horse chestnuts is set to begin on February 17th. They will be replaced with sweet chestnuts, a large, robust species known to be resilient to the issues that affected these trees, and for their tolerance in urban environments. Depending on the condition of the felled horse chestnut trees, some of the wood may be recyclable with a view using it for artwork or seating in other parks and open spaces across Reading.

Chestnut Walk does not currently have any pedestrian lighting. As part of the wider Council Improvement scheme, new lighting will also be installed, as well as a CCTV camera to improve security along what is already a popular direct route into the town centre. There will be temporary diversion route signs for pedestrians and no access from the Abbey Ruins onto Chestnut Walk during the period of works.



THE READING ABBEY REVEALED Project has been shortlisted for one of Europe's most important and prestigious awards.

Reading Borough Council's Reading Abbey Revealed was named as a successful 2020 National Civic Trust AABC Conservation Awards project in December 2019. The project was selected as one of only 8 successful National/International projects from 50 applications and will receive either an award or be highly commended at the 61st Annual Civic Trust Awards Ceremony, held on Friday 6th March 2020, at the Imperial War Museum North in Manchester.

The Civic Trust Awards encourage and recognise the very best in architecture through promoting sustainability and inclusiveness throughout the built environment and rewarding projects that offer positive social and economic benefits to their local communities. It is also Europe's longest running architectural and built environment awards programme.



Congratulations to the Reading Abbey Revealed Team!

DIARY DATES FOR 2020

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| Friday 20th March | The Professor Brian Kemp Memorial Lecture | 'The Heraldry of Reading Abbey and its Legacy' |
| Saturday 13 June | Water Fest | |
| 7/8 & 14/15 September | Heritage Open Days | |
| Saturday 24 October | Friends of Reading Abbey AGM | 'Elizabeth Woodville' Speaker: Joanna Laynesmith |

Don't forget to visit our website www.readingabbey.org.uk and our Facebook page.

