



FRIENDS OF READING ABBEY

NEWSLETTER SUMMER 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

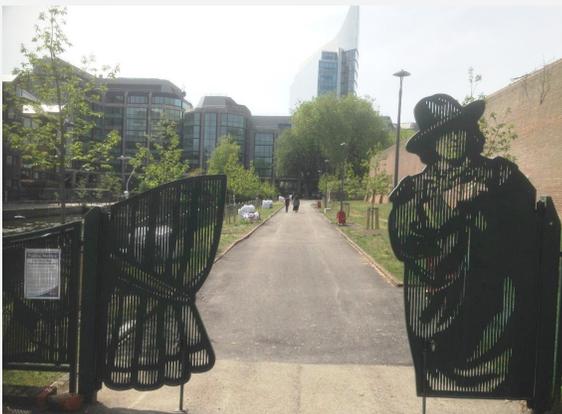
President: Janet Bond **Vice President:** Leslie Cram



CORONAVIRUS STOPS PLAY

FORA went into March with a full programme of spring and summer activities, all of which were scuppered by the Coronavirus lockdown. The first of these was our annual **Spring Lecture**, this year re-packaged and promoted as the inaugural Professor Brian Kemp Memorial Lecture, in memory of our late President and co-founder who died in August 2019. The topic was *The Heraldry of Reading Abbey and its Legacy* and the speaker, Dr Adrian Ailes, Vice-President of The Heraldry Society and Honorary Research Associate at Bristol University. Adrian's postgraduate dissertation on the royal arms of England was supervised by Professor Brian Kemp in the Graduate Centre for Medieval Studies (GCMS) at Reading University. This will now be given in spring 2021 instead.

We had also booked a stall at the annual **Reading Water Fest**, held each June along the River Kennet; the Abbey Ruins and the Forbury Gardens. This would have been in partnership with our other local Friends Groups from Reading Museum and Caversham Court Gardens. And with them, we also planned to have a presence at the annual dog show at Caversham Court Gardens, held on the first Sunday in August. Another casualty is the East Reading Festival on 21 June where we were to join forces with the Berkshire Archaeological Society.



'Reading Council has replaced the diseased trees in Chestnut Walk with healthy saplings. The Council has also kept open the Abbey Ruins for public access during the duration of the lockdown' Photos: John Painter, May 2020

Cont'd from overleaf: There will be no annual outing this summer, where provisional arrangements had been made to go to the City of London, to visit Smithfield (St Bartholomew the Great) and Charterhouse.

At the time of writing, we still hope to be able to hold our **Annual General Meeting** and autumn lecture on **Saturday 24 October**, which is our current focus for activity this year. This will be held at St James' church, in the Abbey Quarter, with Dr Joanna Laynesmith (Reading University GCMS) speaking on Queen Elizabeth Woodville, whose secret marriage to King Edward IV was made public at a Council meeting held at Reading Abbey. We hope that by this date the lockdown will have eased sufficiently to allow this to take place.



Elizabeth Woodville
WIKIPEDIA

In the intervening period of enforced inactivity, we have continued to take an oversight of developments involving the Abbey Quarter. These have mainly involved the Ministry of Justice's (MoJ) actions to sell their Reading gaol site on the open property market, to the highest commercial bidder, rather than to Reading Borough Council whose bid emphasised the historical and cultural value of the site, particularly in the context of re-opening the Grade I listed Reading Abbey Ruins. This decision has been the subject of critical comment in The Times, linked to the Gaol's connection with Oscar Wilde; and a campaign by Reading East MP Matt Rodda to invite the MoJ to reconsider its decision. Another significant development has been the Council's action to replace the diseased old trees in Chestnut Walk by healthy saplings, taking the opportunity to re-surface the walk and install lighting: this has opened up new views of the Abbey Ruins from the south. The Council has also kept open the Abbey Ruins for public access during the duration of the lockdown.

FORA's other main interest has been on plans to celebrate in 2021 Reading Abbey 900, the 900th anniversary of the foundation of the Abbey with the arrival of monks from Cluny Abbey and Lewes Priory on 18 June 1121. The Coronavirus pandemic and lockdown has inevitably introduced some delay and constraint into this process, but Reading Borough Council are working on exciting proposals, including having this as the focus of next year's **Water Fest**, to be held on Saturday 19 June 2021.

John Painter, Secretary

MAYOR OF READING'S CHARITY

We have some good news to share, in that the incoming Mayor of Reading for the Municipal Year 2021-22, **Councillor David Stevens**, has chosen the **Friends of Reading Abbey** as one of his three civic charities for his year in office. This is in recognition that the forthcoming year is the build-up to Reading Abbey 900, the celebration of the 900th anniversary of the founding of Reading Abbey, in June 2021. We are extremely grateful to the Mayor for his support.

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL'S ABBEY REVEALED PROJECT has been '**Highly Commended**' in one of Europe's most important and prestigious awards. One of only 8 successful shortlisted projects, it received the accolade at the 61st Annual Civic Trust Awards Ceremony, held on Friday 6th March 2020, at the Imperial War Museum North in Manchester. Battersea Arts Centre was announced as the overall category winner. **In addition, it has recently been announced that READING ABBEY QUARTER** has been shortlisted in the Planning Awards 2020 for the 'Best use of Heritage in Placemaking' category. The Abbey Quarter's Facebook page added '*This is fantastic news and more prestigious national recognition for Reading's important heritage*'.



Lastly, for any parents struggling with home schooling or keeping children occupied, Reading Museum (currently closed) is sharing its resources to help with learning and enjoyment at home. There's something for children of all ages and also a VE DAY 75 resource pack which many adults will find of interest. Visit www.readingmuseum.org.uk/resources

THE COMMITTEE OF THE FRIENDS OF READING ABBEY LOOK FORWARD TO RESUMING EVENTS AS SOON AS IT'S SAFE TO DO SO. OUR VERY BEST WISHES TO YOU ALL IN THESE UNFAMILIAR TIMES.