

## **FRIENDS OF READING ABBEY (FORA)**

### **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

#### **MINUTES**

Of the Annual General Meeting held in the Soane Space, Town Hall, Reading, on **Saturday 25 October 2014 at 2.30pm.**

**Present:** P. Durrant (Chairman)  
Professor B Kemp, J Bond, and the Mayor of Reading (Councillor Tony Jones) J Painter (Secretary), I Hunt (Treasurer), D Beaumont, S Cooke and D Sykes (Committee)  
The speaker (Professor G Bernard)  
42 Friends and guests

**Apologies for Absence:**

The Lord Lieutenant, A and M Ailes, M Saunders, J Still.

#### **1. Welcome**

The Chairman, Dr Peter Durrant MBE, welcomed the Mayor of Reading (Councillor Tony Jones), the speaker (Professor George Bernard), and the 50 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 26 October 2013**

These were agreed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record, subject to two corrections.

As a matter arising, the possibility of a visit to Reading gaol, now closed, was raised. The Chairman explained that this had been explored with the Ministry of Justice who had moth-balled the gaol and were not, at present, opening it to any outside visits.

#### **3. Chairman's Report**

The Chairman, Dr Peter Durrant, noted that 2014 was the 30th anniversary of the formation of the Friends, in 1984, and reflected on a busy and successful year for the Friends, with a more professional approach, improved presentation, and greater engagement in events associated with the Abbey. The Friends had met the challenge, set at the 2013 AGM, of doubling its membership over the year, but the current membership of 137 remained 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, circulated a written report on the work of the Friends' Committee during 2013-14. 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 900<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Abbey's foundation in 1121. In this regard it had agreed four key themes to form the basis of its work programme:

a) Abbey Quarter Project - Reading Abbey Revealed.

The Committee had worked with the Council on its bid for £1.7M heritage lottery funding towards a total Project cost of £3.1M. This had been successful at stage 1, which had enabled the Project to move onto Phase 2 with the crucial second bid to be submitted in September 2015. The Project would conserve the Abbey Ruins, restore the Abbey Gateway roof, and improve signposting and interpretation to and throughout the Abbey Quarter.

In support of the bid, the Friends had responded positively on the Council's heritage statement; made a formal submission of support for the bid; and had actively promoted the Council's web-based public consultation exercise on the bid which had attracted 1,800 responses in total, the most successful consultation run by the Council.

During 2014 both the Friends and the Council had opened up the Abbey Ruins to the public, under safety-controlled (hard hat) conditions on four occasions - a Friday in May, the Waterfest Saturday on 21 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. Next year we aimed to increase the number of openings, linked to key dates in the Abbey's history, and needed more volunteers to help.

b) Promotion

The Committee had developed an action plan with four main elements, all of which had been done or are under way:

- Updating and re-issuing the Friends' leaflet
- Producing a new leaflet for a tour of Reading's Abbey Quarter - to get you as near to key locations as possible
- Refreshing the Friends' website
- Having a stand at the Waterfest, and again at the Friends' Annual Garden Party.

Copies of the two leaflets were available at the meeting.

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 22 June 2014. Over the year, the Friends had also grown its relationship with St James's RC church, which occupies an important site on the north transept of the Abbey.

d) Membership

In addition to successfully meeting the Chairman's target of doubling our membership, the Committee had worked to improve its communication with the membership. It has continued to issue three newsletters a year, which are posted to members who are not contactable by email, and has supplemented this with monthly email updates sent to members with electronic access.

The Committee had also organised a successful spring lecture, by Professor Brian Kemp, on Reading Abbey's Royal Connections; and an autumn outing was to Winchester.

In the ensuing discussion, communication with members who were not contactable by email was discussed. There had been no reduction in the standing arrangement to issue three newsletters a year, which had been expanded in size and content, but it was recognised that the September issue had given late notice of the autumn outing. Options were discussed to improve

communication further, including developing a buddy system, promoting a facebook page, and circulating the Newsletters to local libraries.

The report was received, and the Committee would give further consideration to options to enhance communication to all members.

## **5. Treasurer's Report**

The Treasurer, Iris Hunt, circulated the accounts for 2013-14 and list of current assets, and spoke to them. Expenditure had exceeded income by £96; the Friends had balances of £3,016 and other funds and assets of just over £3,000. Expenditure had been increased to meet additional printing and IT costs associated with the 2013/14 work programme, in particular the production and printing of leaflets and the website upgrade.

To date, the Treasurer had received annual subscription payments for 2014/15 from only one third of the membership, and she would be writing to members to encourage and expedite payment.

The accounts were adopted at the meeting.

## **6. Election of Officers**

The Chairman thanked the 2013/14 Committee for its active support during the year.

The following were elected *nem con* for 2013/14:

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

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

## **7. Appointment of Independent Examiner**

The Chairman advised that the accounts for 2013/14 had been examined by Mr A Hutt. The meeting approved Mr Hutt's appointment as Independent Examiner for 2014/15.

## **8. Subscriptions**

The meeting considered and agreed the following recommendations from the Committee to retain the subscription fees for 2014/15 at the same levels as in 2013/15, 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 Professor George Bernard (Southampton University) on the Dissolution of the Monasteries.