

A Nutshell History of Our School

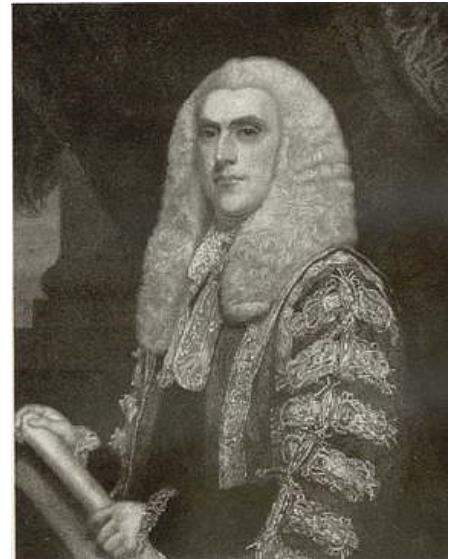
By Ken Brown

(Adapted from the original article that appeared in the Spring 2010 issue of *The Old Redingensian*)



Print owned by Reading School

Reading School is the great School of the Town of Reading and, with the Minster Church of St Mary the Virgin, one of its two oldest surviving institutions. Whilst the *Victoria County History of Berkshire* suggests that it may start even earlier, the School's accredited history dates from 1125. Nine hundred years will soon have passed since its foundation and it will enter its tenth century. This establishment, of such great antiquity, has nurtured men who have made contributions in all spheres of life, local, national, and



Print in Erleigh Court and Its Owners

international, including to the highest offices of our land: an Archbishop of Canterbury (*William Laud, pictured left*) and a Prime Minister (*Henry Addington, pictured right*) amongst them.

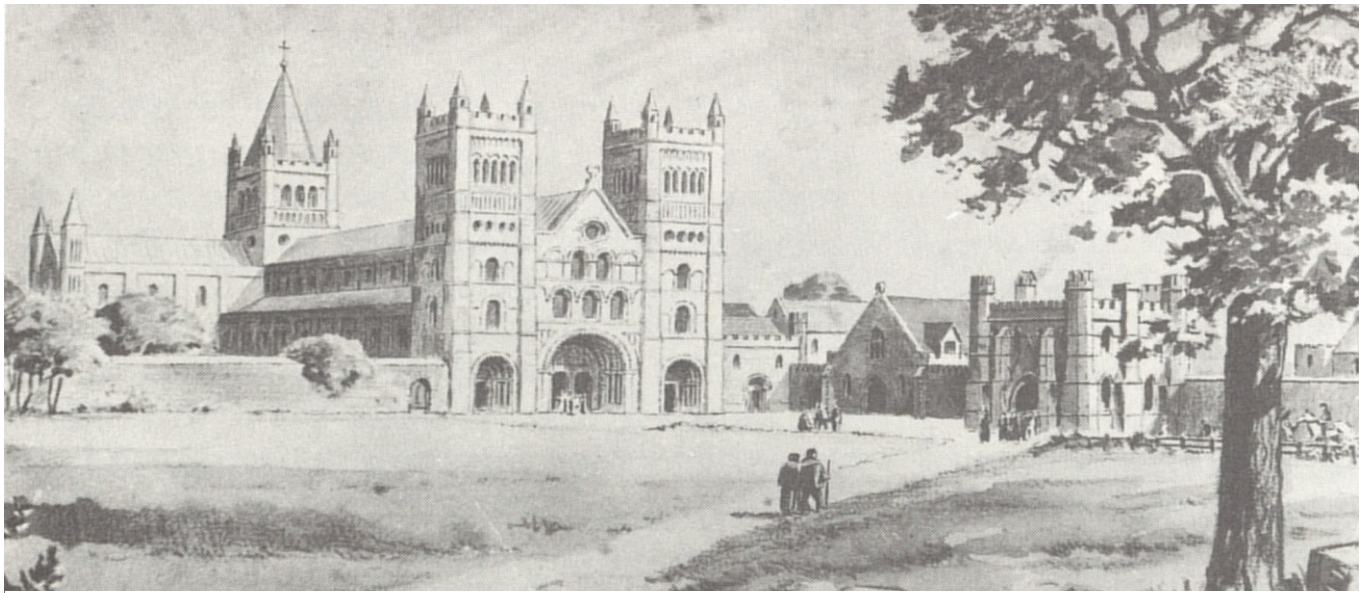
The School's history may be divided into three periods and summarized as follows:

I 1125 - 1539: Reading Abbey was founded in 1121 by Cluniac monks under the patronage of King Henry I. The secular functions of the Abbey, including the School, commenced in 1125. Henry VII established grammar school status in 1486, refounding the School in the Abbey's Hospitium of St John. In 1539 the Town was thrown into turmoil with the dissolution of the Abbey.

II 1540 - 1866: Civic responsibilities passed from the Abbey to the Town Corporation. The School's governance was regulated by King Henry VIII's grant of Letters Patent, in 1541, to Headmaster Leonard Coxe. The subsequent Charter that Queen Elizabeth I gave to the Town of Reading in 1560, included clauses that effectively governed the School, in the Forbury, Reading, for a further three hundred years. In the middle of this era came the expansion of the School's buildings - and horizons - under Haviland John Hiley, Headmaster from 1716 to 1750. The School rose to the pinnacle of its fame under Dr Richard Valpy, who was Headmaster from 1781-1830, but there followed a steep decline in its fortunes after his long reign ended and the Victorian gentry began to establish the modern network of Public Schools.

III 1867 to date: With the passing of the Reading School Act of 1867 the School was enabled to move to its present site in Erleigh Road, Reading, where the foundation stone was laid by Edward, Prince of Wales, in 1870 and Alfred Waterhouse's splendid buildings opened in 1871. Following some reconstitution in 1882, the transition to a Maintained School came under Dr William Charles Eppstein (Headmaster 1894-1914), the absorption of Kendrick Boys School in 1916 occurred under George Haydn Keeton (Headmaster 1914-1939), and the Education Act of 1944 (which introduced the 11+) was passed while Charles Edward Kemp was Headmaster (1939-1966). Kemp's fine achievements were recognised by his peers with his election to the Headmasters' Conference.

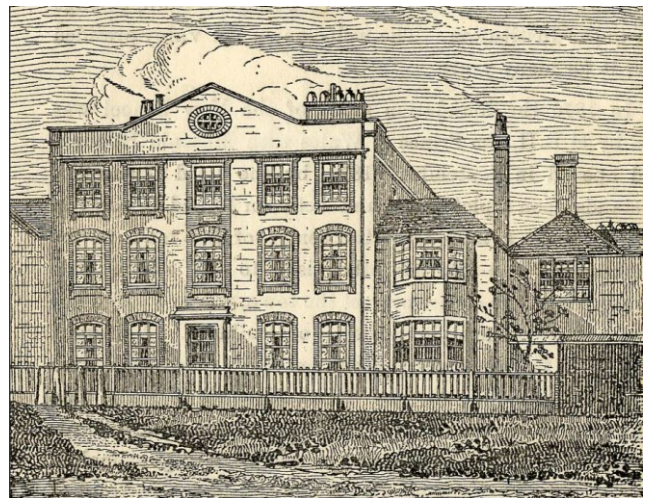
The twenty-first century Reading School is a Grammar School for boys, of some 880 pupils, which selects on the basis of examined ability, usually at age 11, with further entrants at 13 and 16. It has Academy Status. There are no fees for day pupils; boarders pay for food and lodgings but not for schooling. Ashley M Robson, BA (Hons) MBA NPQH became Headmaster in 2012.



An impression of Reading Abbey



The Hospitium in The Forbury c1800



The Old School House in The Forbury c1820



The School in Erleigh Road opened in 1871