

## FRIENDS OF READING ABBEY (FORA)

### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 29 OCTOBER 2016

#### MINUTES

Of the Annual General Meeting held in the Soane Space, Reading Town Hall, on **Saturday 29 October 2016 at 2.30pm.**

**Present:** P. Durrant (Chairman)  
Professor B Kemp, J Bond, I Hunt (Treasurer), J Painter (Secretary), D Beaumont, S Cooke, W Hicks, D Sykes and H Young (Committee)  
The speaker (Dr Ron Baxter)  
50 Friends and guests

**Apologies for Absence:**

M Beek, M Fulton, L Fothergill, M Gomes, Prof. R Houlbrooke, Rev. B Metcalfe, Prof. I Miller, R Stainthorp.

#### 1. Welcome

The Chairman, Dr Peter Durrant MBE, welcomed the speaker (Dr Ron Baxter), 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 24 October 2015

These were agreed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record, subject to the following correction:

Minute 6(2) - Delete "forum", replace by "quorum".

#### 3. Chairman's Report

The Chairman, Dr Peter Durrant, noted that 2015-16 had been another busy and successful year for the Friends, stimulated by the announcement in December 2015 of the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) grant to the Council's Reading Abbey Revealed project to allow the conservation of the Abbey Ruins to go ahead. He expressed the Friends' gratitude to Reading Borough Council for its ongoing commitment to the project at a time of considerable financial stringency, and in particular for the work of the project team, and congratulated everyone involved in preparing the successful bid.

One significant factor in the success of the Council's HLF bid was the level of local support, where FORA had made an important contribution: through the website, newsletters, regular updates, lectures and events, and support for the Museum's hard-hat tours and Abbey Quarter tours.

The Chairman acknowledged and thanked the committee and volunteers for their hard work over the year; the wider membership for supporting events; the President, for his advice and help; and Reading Museum and the Reading Abbey Revealed project team for their active and continuing support.

There was still much work to do: winning the HLF grant was a milestone, not a destination, and FORA had to continue fostering and promoting public interest in and support for the Abbey, and

in the longer-term to plan to celebrate its reopening in 2018 and the 900th anniversary of its foundation in 2021, only five years away! It was a very exciting prospect!

**The report was received.**

#### **4. Secretary's Report**

The Secretary, John Painter, had circulated a written report on the work of the Friends' Committee during 2015-16. 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 continued to work to the four key themes adopted in 2013, as follows:

##### Abbey Quarter Project

The *Reading Abbey Revealed* Project had secured £1.7M Heritage Lottery Funding in December 2015, towards a total cost of £3.1M, with the Council meeting the remainder. The Project would restore the Abbey Gateway roof and conserve the Abbey Ruins, to allow regular public access. It has been developed for the Council by Hampshire County Council Architectural Services. Work above ground would start early in 2017, with an expected completion date late in 2018.

The Project included a significant element of community engagement and voluntary support. During 2016 FORA had continued to work with the Council to open up the Abbey Ruins to the public, under safety-controlled (hard hat) conditions, on the Friday and Saturday of the Heritage open days' weekend in September; and had promoted the Project through its activities at Waterfest (11 June); and the Friends' summer party (19 June).

The Friends had also been involved in the Hidden Abbey Project, which had attracted local, national and international attention in June 2016. Reading Abbey Revealed was about the Abbey ruins above ground, and the Hidden Abbey Project was about the Abbey below ground. Stratascan Sumo had been commissioned to do GPR mapping to identify the buried foundations of the Abbey church by the owners of the land covering the Abbey church: the Borough Council (Forbury Gardens), the Roman Catholic Diocese of Portsmouth (St James's church and associated buildings) and the Ministry of Justice (Reading gaol).

##### Promotion

The Committee had:

- continued to update its website, and set up a Facebook page, promoted through the website, with both featuring photographic images of our activities over the year
- re-printed both the membership leaflet, and the walking tour of the Abbey Quarter
- had stands at both the Waterfest and the Friends' summer party.

##### Communication and Partnerships

As well as the ongoing partnership with the Reading Museum Service on the Reading Abbey Revealed Project, FORA had again joined with the other two Friends groups - for Reading Museum, and for Caversham Court Gardens - for a successful summer party on Sunday 19 June 2016, in the Forbury Gardens. This has involved working with St James church, and with Prof. David Owen Norris at the University of Southampton, for an afternoon of rehearsals and talk about *Sumer is Icumen in*, the Reading round first recorded by the Abbey monks in the C13th, which was then sung in public on the Forbury Gardens mound to end the afternoon's activities. Around 80 people had been involved in the singing, with an equivalent number of spectators, with the event featuring subsequently in the BBC Music Magazine.

The Secretary had given four illustrated talks to local community groups on Reading Abbey, in return for contributions to FORA's funds.

## Membership

In addition to extending the membership to over 220, the Committee has continued to issue three newsletters a year, posted to members who were not contactable by email, and supplemented this with monthly email updates sent to members with electronic access which promoted both Friends' events and gave news of local initiatives affecting the Abbey Quarter, such as the Ministry of Justice's plans to put Reading gaol on the market in the new year, and the very positive ArtAngel promotion of the gaol over the autumn.

The Committee had also organised a successful spring lecture, by Dr Martin Heale (University of Liverpool), on the Abbot in late Medieval and Reformation England, held in St Laurence church; and the summer outing to Lewes Priory, Southover, and Clayton church.

**The report was received.**

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

The Treasurer, Iris Hunt, circulated the accounts for 2015/16 and list of current assets, and offered an explanation on the content. Expenditure had exceeded income by £743; FORA had balances of £1,600 and other funds and assets of just under £7,500. Income from subscriptions had increased with the growth of membership.

To date, the Treasurer announced that she had received a small number of annual subscriptions from the total membership for 2016/17 and consequently would be writing to members to encourage and expedite payment.

The Treasurer was asked why the cost of the annual outing was not met wholly from receipts. The Treasurer replied that receipts had been used to cover the costs of coach hire and expenses, but not donations to the places visited.

The accounts were moved by Mrs J Butler and seconded by J Dils, and **adopted** at the meeting.

## **6. Election of Officers**

The Chairman thanked the 2015/16 Committee for its active support. During the year, the one vacancy on the Committee had been filled, by Bill Hicks.

The following were **elected** *nem con* for 2016/17:

Office	Elected	Proposed	Seconded
President	Prof. Brian Kemp	P Durrant (for the Committee)	V Abel
Vice-President	Leslie Cram and Janet Bond	P Durrant (for the Committee)	S Chumbley
Chairman	Dr Peter Durrant MBE	D Sykes (for the Committee)	J Bond
Secretary	John Painter	P Durrant (for the Committee)	M Ailes
Treasurer	Iris Hunt	P Durrant (for the Committee)	J Dils
Committee	Doug Beaumont, Stella Cooke, Bill Hicks, Dianne Sykes, Heather Young	J Dils	J Butler

## 8. Appointment of Independent Examiner

The Chairman advised that the accounts for 2015/16 had been examined by Mr J Butler. The Chairman thanked Mr Butler for taking on this role during the year and for agreeing to perform the duties again for 2016/17.

John Butler's appointment as Independent Examiner for 2016/17 was proposed by J Bond, seconded by J Dils, and **agreed**.

## 9. Subscriptions

The meeting considered and agreed the following recommendations from the Committee to retain the subscription fees for 2016/17 at the same levels as in 2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16, 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)

The AGM finished at 2.50pm.

## 9. Reading Abbey as a Medieval Royal Palace

The meeting was followed by a talk by Dr Ron Baxter (Director of the Corpus of Romanesque Sculpture in Britain and Ireland, and recent author of *The Royal Abbey of Reading* (Boydell) on Reading Abbey as a Medieval Royal Palace.

The meeting ended at 3.50pm.