



Friends
of
Reading
Abbey

NEWSLETTER

Spring 2015

Patrons:

The Lord Lieutenant of Berkshire

The Right Worshipful the Mayor of Reading

The Right Reverend the Bishop of Reading

The Abbot of Douai

The MP for Reading East

The MP for Reading West

The Vice Chancellor, Reading University

President: *Professor Brian Kemp* **Vice Presidents:** *Janet Bond* *Leslie Cram*

You are invited to the

Spring Meeting of the Friends of Reading Abbey

Friday 10 April 2015

7.30pm

St James RC Church, Forbury Road, Reading RG1 3HW

John Mullaney

will talk on

The Relationship between Reading Abbey and the Catholic Community in Reading – from the Middle Ages to the Present

John Mullaney is a local historian and writer, who produced the book
Reading's Abbey Quarter, in the autumn of 2014



DIARY DATES 2015

- 13 June** Waterfest and Hard Hat Tours of
Abbey Ruins
- 21 June** Caversham Court Gardens Summer
Party
- 24 October** Annual General Meeting

Annual General Meeting and Lecture - Saturday 25 October 2014



Brian Kemp, Janet Bond, Tony Jones, George Bernard, Peter Durrant

Our AGM was attended by over 50 people, our largest turn-out for some time. We were delighted to welcome **The Mayor of Reading, Councillor Tony Jones**.

The guest lecture was given by **Professor George Bernard** (University of Southampton), on *The Dissolution of the Monasteries*. This was informative and very well received. Professor Bernard has recently published a related book, *The Late Medieval Church (vitality and vulnerability before the break with Rome)* (Yale University Press, 2013 - £30 paperback).

Minutes of the meeting are on our website – see *Programme – Past and Forthcoming*.

Abbey Quarter Project



The Abbey Quarter Project is entering a very exciting new phase. 2015 promises to be an important year.

The success of the Heritage Lottery Bid is key to achieving the Friends of Reading Abbey targets of getting the Abbey Gateway renovated and the Abbey Ruins conserved and re-opened to the public by 2021, the 900th anniversary of the Abbey's foundation.

The Project got through the first stage of the Heritage Lottery Fund's two-stage process in June 2014, and the Council intends to submit the second round bid in September 2015. To get there, it is working with Hampshire County Council as its architectural adviser, and has now appointed two specialist independent consultants to work up key elements of the bid - an activity plan, and an interpretation plan.

The activity plan will be developed by Julia Holberry Associates, who have recently worked successfully on the renovation of the William Morris gallery in Walthamstow. It was the subject of a public consultation exercise during January 2015 which ran until the start of February 2015.

If you want to find out more about the Abbey Quarter, John Mullaney's recent, illustrated book on *Reading's Abbey Quarter* is available at local bookshops, Reading Museum, Reading Central Library, or from the Scallop Shell Press (www.Scallopress.co.uk), priced £15.

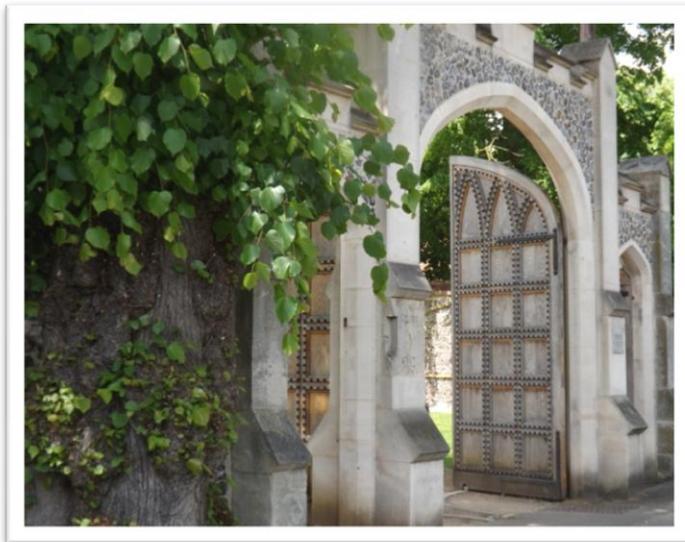
Reading Waterfest – Saturday 13 June 2015

The next occasion when the Abbey Ruins will be opened to the public, under safety-controlled (“hard hat”) conditions, will be on Saturday 13 June 2015, during Reading Borough Council’s annual Waterfest. FORA will again be joining with the Reading Museum Service to help escort these tours, and we will have a presence in Chestnut Walk, by the River Kennet. Another date for your diary.



St James Church is also planning to open up that section of the Abbey Ruins which are behind the Presbytery on Waterfest day. Opened in 1840, and designed by Pugin in the Romanesque style to match the Abbey, it is built on the north transept of the Abbey church, and contains the Reading Abbey Stone, a large capital from the Abbey which has been converted for use as a font. The church site also has within it two fallen blocks of masonry from the Abbey church, from which the ivy has recently been cleared away to offer a better view. This is the nearest the public can now get to part of the Abbey Ruins. The church is normally open to the public.

Friends' Annual Garden Party - Sunday 21 June 2015



This year's Friends Garden Party will be held in Caversham Court Gardens on the afternoon of Sunday 21 June 2015 (Fathers' Day). This is a high-profile event involving all three of Reading's Friends' groups - for the Abbey, the Museum and for Caversham Court - with live entertainment and refreshments in a lovely riverside setting. FORA will have their own display tent, and will be running an Abbey History Trail for children.



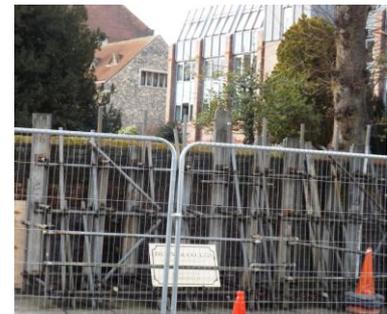
VOLUNTEERS NEEDED at this event from 1.30pm for various tasks such as welcoming people at the gates; giving 'What's On' information, or if you're feeling energetic, to help set up. There will be a briefing for volunteers on the day. For more information please contact secretary@readingabbey.org.uk .

Currently Friends of Caversham Court provide the lion's share of volunteers, so extra help from FORA members would be most welcome – and it's fun!

Message from Peter Durrant, Chairman

As you will see elsewhere in this newsletter, a lot is happening at the moment, and the Abbey is enjoying a high profile. Once again an online consultation exercise received over **1,000** responses – beating a similar consultation about Winchester Cathedral! Reading Borough Council has appointed consultants to help it develop the stage two bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund, due to be submitted this autumn. The consultants are already engaged in discussing key issues with local groups, including the Friends. The Museum of English Rural Life and Reading University's Graduate Centre for Medieval Studies are both promoting events exploring aspects of the Abbey's history. John Mullaney's recent book has offered a new look at the Abbey Quarter since the reformation.

The wall surrounding St Laurence's churchyard is at last being repaired (some of us think the scaffolding is so venerable that it itself should have been listed, but really we're pleased to see it go). Work should be completed by August 2015. And more tours of the ruins are planned for Waterfest. In all of this the Friends have been active, involved in discussions and circulating news.



Farewell to the scaffolding

The Friends are important because we represent a body of people, both local and from further afield, who care deeply about the Abbey. The voluntary support we offer makes a difference to the HLF bid, as it can be counted as support in kind (and given a financial value) – and the HLF takes community involvement seriously when assessing bids for funds. Our ability to communicate means that news of Abbey-related events is getting to a wider audience. And our steadily increasing membership gives us more and more weight in discussions. I am very encouraged by the response to my challenge at the 2013 AGM: we have succeeded in doubling our membership since then, to over 150 members. I'd now like to see it rise to 200 by the AGM in October. **Can you help us to achieve that?**

Finally, do come to our spring lecture at St James's Church. It will be an opportunity to learn more about the Abbey, to see inside Pugin's church – and to see a remarkable, and imaginatively re-used, relic of the Abbey. I look forward to seeing you there.

CHANGES TO THE FORA WEBSITE

Over the past year we have been updating our website, which can be accessed by following this link: <http://readingabbey.org.uk>. A number of changes have been made to the website to expand the content and make it easier to use.

These are:

- Larger font for the links on the front page
- Content now divided between information relating to the Friends and information about the Abbey

New content added:

- List of notable dates in the Abbey's history
- Timeline of the Abbey
- List of websites with content related to the Abbey

Articles about the Abbey in the on-line version of the Berkshire Archaeological Journal have been identified and set up in a Microsoft Word file.

Please note - all of the content from the previous version of the website is still there. We will continue working to make further improvements to the site – plus, there will be news of a FoRA Facebook page shortly!