



Friends of Reading Abbey

NEWSLETTER

Summer 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

SPRING MEETING 10 APRIL 2015

The beautiful church of St James, built within the ruins of Reading Abbey, was the venue for this year's talk.

A large audience gathered to hear John Mullaney give a fascinating account of the Abbey and the Catholic Community in Reading. The talk was followed by some wide ranging questions for the speaker.

The Abbey Stone



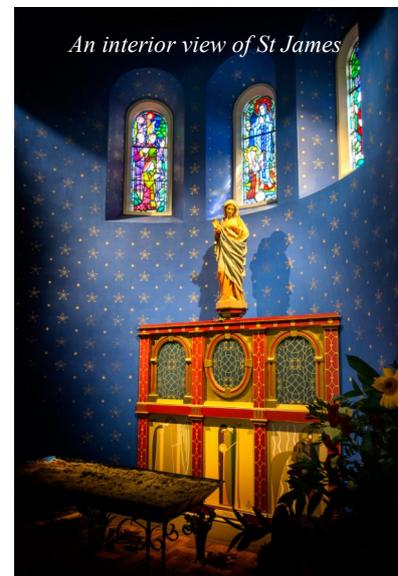
We are extremely grateful to Father John O'Shea for his hospitality and for the excellent refreshments provided by the church.

On the topic of St James, it is widely believed that the burial site of Henry I lies either beneath or behind the nursery school attached to the church. Philippa Langley (who inaugurated the successful project to find the lost grave of Richard III), has shown interest in initiating a search for the burial site of this royal founder of Reading Abbey.

Preliminary talks have taken place with Reading Borough Council and the RC Diocese of Portsmouth, attended by representatives from Friends of Reading Abbey and Friends of Reading Museums.

The Hidden Abbey project has subsequently attracted national media interest, following an article in the June edition of the BBC History Magazine.

We will continue to monitor any developments.



An interior view of St James



White roses heaped around the statue of Richard III at Leicester Cathedral in March 2015. Philippa Langley inaugurated the search for the grave of this last Plantagenet King.

JUNE EVENTS NOT TO BE MISSED—COME RAIN OR SHINE

Free Admission to Both - Everyone Welcome



Reading Waterfest 13 June 2015
Forbury Gardens & Chestnut Walk RG1 3BQ
10am to 5pm
20 minute 'Hard Hat Tours' of Abbey Ruins
11am to 3pm - book on the day

Friends Summer Party 21 June 2015
Caversham Court Gardens
Church Road, Caversham RG4 7AD
2pm to 5pm
Cream Teas, Live Music





ABBEY QUARTER UPDATE



There has been a lot of activity in developing the next fundraising application to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for the Reading Abbey Revealed project. The project was successful in June 2014 in getting Stage 1 funding, which is being used to develop the Stage 2 bid, to be submitted in September 2015. A final decision from HLF is expected by Christmas.

During February a specialist buildings archaeologist was examining the Abbey Ruins, to interpret the existing standing remains and identify significant surviving features or evidence of the Abbey Church buildings. The core remains of the South Transept, Chapter House and Dormitory are still able to give clues as to how the former abbey may have looked. From this on-site work the archaeologist has developed a fuller picture of how these areas of the Abbey may have looked in their original form. The work also provides suggestions as to what happened to the Abbey after it was dissolved; including the damage caused the ruins during the Civil War. The results of these findings will form part of the conservation plan being prepared for the second round application to the HLF.

In addition, Julia Holberry Associates have been developing an activity and interpretation plan. A second online survey was run in January 2015, which was completed by 1,053 people. The consultants also spoke to key stakeholders, including FORA; and held public consultation exercises. The results revealed that:

- 99.5% of people either agreed or strongly agreed that the Abbey Ruins and Abbey Gate were an important part of Reading's History and Identity.
- Local people (99.6%) and schools (98.8%) should have the opportunity to learn more about its history.
- Respondents were keen to learn more about the lives of monks and ordinary townspeople (95%) as well as royal and famous visitors (87%).
- People wanted to learn about the Abbey Ruins through a variety of ways including new signage and information panels, guided or self-guided tours, a new exhibition in Reading Museum, talks, and open-air theatre and events in the Ruins.
- Over half of the people that responded (57%), expressed an interest in volunteering with the project. The information collected from the survey will be used to inform the Council's Stage 2 bid to HLF.



WE ARE ON FACEBOOK ! A link to the Friends of Reading Abbey's Facebook page was added to our Website in March. Anyone who has a Facebook account can make their own contributions on the page. Please share it with your friends. If you don't have an account, you can still view the contents of the page by clicking on the link.

Further website changes implemented this year:

- Larger font for the links on the front page .
- Content has been divided between information relating to the Friends and information about the Abbey
- New content has been added - *A list of notable dates in the Abbey's history; A Timeline of the Abbey and a 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.

Future planned changes: - revamp the front page with a different colour scheme & add more photos
- restructure the Abbey Quarter Information page; improve its appearance, making the latest information about the Reading Abbey Revealed project easier to find
- add basic information about the Abbey, location etc - as well as keeping the website up-to-date!

If any member has comments or thoughts about the FoRA website, please contact:
secretary@readingabbey.org.uk.