

FORA OUTING – 24 JULY 2019

CHOLSEY

Saxon Settlement

- On island near Thames, *Ceol's Eye*- Ceol was King of Wessex 591-597
- Suggestion that kings of Wessex owned land in Cholsey and had palace there
- His son was King Cyneglis – may have stayed in Cholsey when he first met St Birinus, 634

Saxon Monastery

- Founded 986 by King Ethelred II and his mother, Queen Aelfrith – possibly a nunnery
- Site not certain – possibly nearer station
- May have been destroyed by Danes in 1006 when they attacked Wallingford
- No mention in Domesday Book – but current church is mentioned

Church

- Saxon foundation – evidence of late C10th long-and-short quoins in lower stages of tower, also in crossing piers (much re-modelled)
- In 1066, owned by crown. Later given by William I to Mont St Michel.
- Included by Henry I in foundation charter for Reading Abbey, 1125
 - reference to destruction of three ancient monasteries at Reading, Cholsey and Leominster.
 - Mont St Michel exchanged Cholsey for land in Budleigh (Salterton), Devon.
- Cruciform church of flint and stone (hard yellow oolite) - Tower oldest part – early C11th
- Re-built by Abbey, 1150-70, in Norman style
 - Chancel and both Transepts had apsidal eastern chapels – evidence of arch in north transept
- Chancel lengthened c1260-70 in Decorated Gothic style - See East Window of 3 lights
 - Also works to Transepts - see South Transept window
- Tower raised c1300
- Restorations –
 - 1847, Brandon – Nave and Tower
 - 1877-78 – Woodyer – chancel, and north transept
- Church layout re-worked, 1990s, following appeal to consistory court – move from chancel to nave
- Dame Agatha Christie and Sir Max Mallowan buried in graveyard – lived at Winterbrook.

Links to Reading Abbey

- Part of foundation estate – church and manor owned by Abbey until dissolution 1539
 - Manor retained by crown and bestowed on Princess Elizabeth, 1551
 - Later granted by Queen Elizabeth to Sir Francis Knollys and his wife, Catherine Carey (her cousin)
- Abbots had county house at Cholsey – re-built by Abbot Hugh Faringdon. Called *Blomes*.
- Cholsey Great Barn – built by Abbey in late C12th or early C13th
 - Said to be the largest in Europe – aisled - 303' long, 54' wide, 51' high
 - Survived to 1815, when demolished
 - Present barn half the width, but possibly using old timbers and foundations
- Cholsey Ale – brewed for Abbey in manor, used in Abbey feasts and anniversaries

Cholsey Castle

- Possible evidence of siege castle built by King Stephen during Anarchy, when Empress Matilda was at Wallingford – earthworks near church (not clear where)
- On land owned by Reading Abbey – so may have been 'Reading Castle' destroyed by Henry II, 1153.