

FRIENDS OF READING ABBEY

SUMMER LECTURE

Saturday 18 June 2022 2.30 pm

St James' Church

Abbot's Walk, The Forbury, Reading, RG1 3HW

The Dissolution and its Impact on Reading

Prof. James Clark

The story of the Dissolution of the Monasteries at Reading is dominated by one dramatic scene: the traitors' execution, on 15 November 1539, of Abbot Hugh Cook, together with two secular priests, John Eynon and John Rugg, before the gate of the great Benedictine abbey. Their deaths opened a fortnight of state terror that saw the execution of abbots and monks at Colchester and Glastonbury. Within four months the whole of monastic England was extinct.



Reading had held a conspicuous profile in this kingdom of cloisters since soon after the Norman Conquest but beyond the grisly winter spectacle of 1539, the experience of the Dissolution in the town and its' neighbourhood is not easily glimpsed in the fragments of written and material evidence that now survive. This talk will trace what can be known of the last months of Reading's monks and friars, and the places and people associated with them, and also their fortunes following the crown's seizure of their buildings, contents and outlying property.

James Clark is Professor of History at the University of Exeter. He has written widely on monasteries and their place in the cultural, religious and social fabric of medieval and Reformation England. He has worked with national and regional heritage organisations in the interpretation of the

sites of medieval monasteries including Buckland Abbey, St Albans, Sherborne, Tewkesbury and York St Mary's. He is regular contributor to broadcast history on TV, radio and podcasts. His most recent book is *The Dissolution of the Monasteries. A New History* (Yale, 2021).

St James's RC Church is next to Reading Gaol, in the Abbey Precinct. It will be open from 2.00pm. Free entry, with a voluntary retiring collection.