



**Friends
of
Reading
Abbey**

NEWSLETTER

Autumn 2017

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
Annual General Meeting
of the Friends of Reading Abbey
Saturday 28 October 2017 at 2.30pm
(doors open at 2.00pm)
Waterhouse Chamber, The Town Hall, Blagrove Street, Reading RG1 1QH

Following the AGM there will be an illustrated talk on

THE READING ABBEY REVEALED PROJECT



given by
Matthew Williams
Reading Museum Manager
and
Giles Pritchard
Specialist Conservation Architect, Hampshire CC Architects

The Waterhouse Chamber can accommodate larger numbers than in previous years, so please bring friends and colleagues along to hear the latest news on the conservation works.

ALL ARE WELCOME AND ENTRY IS FREE

The Palmer Café is open from 10am to 4pm, where refreshments can be purchased



On 10 June Friends of Reading Abbey teamed up with the Friends of Reading Museum and Friends of Caversham Court Gardens and pooled resources to promote all three groups. The sun shone all day and although breezy, our gazebo didn't blow away, anchored as it was by weights kindly provided by the Museum team. Four tours of the Abbey Quarter were offered throughout the day and take up was brisk. A big thank you to the Tour Leaders who made the walks so enjoyable and informative (and managed to not to lose anyone on the way), plus the volunteers who gave so generously of their time.

Throughout the day, visitors shared their many memories of playing in the abbey ruins and of summer picnics within the grounds and were keen for updates on the conservation works. Everyone fondly remembered the performances of Shakespeare held there.

The Museum Loans Box proved a great attraction to budding historians who could handle medieval objects from the abbey itself and adults too found the items fascinating. Inspired by the patterns on the floor tiles in the loans box, children moved on to the Abbey on Wheels and were eager to paint a tile in their own design which they could take home and bake.

With the other activities taking place and the colourful craft and characters on the river, Waterfest is a great way to celebrate the history of Reading and its waterways.



Our Jane Austen inspired trip on 4 July began at St Nicholas Church, Steventon, North Hampshire, where her father and brother were rectors. Jane was born in Steventon and worshipped at this church for the first 25 years of her life. Our group enjoyed a talk by Canon Michael Kenning the retired Rector, on the history of this lovely Norman church and its Austen connections.



FRIENDS OF READING ABBEY ANNUAL OUTING

4 JULY 2017

The interior of St Nicholas Church

From Steventon we made our way to the village of Chawton, where we had coffee at Cassandra's Cup. After a

leisurely lunch, the group toured the cottage where Jane settled in 1809 with her mother, sister and Martha Lloyd. Here Jane began the most prolific period of her writing career. There is an extensive collection of family mementoes and documentary material to see, including Jane's writing desk and copies of her letters.



Jane's writing desk



Surrounding the cottage (above), is a very pretty garden stocked with many old varieties of flowers and herbs.



Chawton House

Our next stop was Chawton House, an Elizabethan Manor inherited by Edward Austen. We were given an enjoyable and informative guided tour of the property, which is now **The Centre for the Study of Early Women's Writing, 1600-1830**. Then a chance to discuss the day so far, over tea and cake.

Lastly to Chawton church dating back to at least 1270. Jane Austen's mother and sister are buried in the churchyard. It contains memorials relating to the Knight family, the forebears and

descendants of Jane Austen's brother Edward, most noticeable being the magnificent marble semi-recumbent effigy to Sir Richard Knight dating from 1679. This visit concluded a very enjoyable day.



ABBEY ON WHEELS EXHIBITION ROLLS OUT

Over the past few months, interest in the Abbey Quarter has been rapidly building as Abbey on Wheels has rolled out. Abbey on Wheels is the main outreach programme for the 'Reading Abbey Revealed' project. Over the summer months we have been keeping ourselves very busy by popping up all over the town.



We started the year in **Dee Park** all the way back in April. We then attended **Forbury Fiesta** as part of the **Children's Festival**, the **East Reading Festival**, the **Oxford Road Fun Day** and the **South Reading Churches Fun Day**. We ended our summer of fun at the inaugural **Reading on Thames Festival** where we set up in the beautiful Caversham Court Gardens.

Now we must not forget this year's **Waterfest!** Museum staff set up in the shadow of the Abbey ruins alongside members of the Friends of Reading Abbey and the Friends of Reading Museum.

With our joint efforts we were able to tackle the crowds with ease. The Friends' were instrumental in the smooth running of Abbey Quarter tours – both by being our expert guides, and by managing it all on the day.



Also available was an Abbey themed school loan box; a popular tile painting activity, and our virtual reality headsets that transported the viewer to the top of the conservation scaffold!



Abbey on Wheels has been a great success this summer. We have been inspiring a new generation of supporters with our hands-on activities.

A huge thank you goes out to all of the Friends' and volunteers who have made this possible!

Contributed by: Jessica Freeland

*Reading Abbey Community Engagement Officer
Reading Museum & Town Hall | Environment & Neighbourhood Services*

DIARY DATES

- 7 October** *Blood and Bones* A talk by Dr Ron Baxter at Reading Museum (part of the Reading Abbey Lecture Series).
- 28 October** *FORA AGM* at Reading Town Hall, 2.30pm.
- 2 - 18 Nov** *Matilda the Empress* at St James' Church, Reading. Another production from Reading Between the Lines, following the hugely successful 'Reading's Royal Burial' performed in the Oracle.
- 13 April 2018** *FORA Spring Lecture* at St Laurence Church, Reading.
'Reading Abbey in the Civil War' Speaker - Simon Marsh, Research Officer at the Battlefields Trust.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

Members will have received a reminder that subscriptions for 2017 - 18 were due on 1 September. The good news is that fees remain the same as in the previous 4 years:

Single membership £7 Family/Joint £10 Society/Commercial £15 Life Membership £105

Payment can be made by cheque, standing order or by electronic transfer. Please refer to the recent subs reminder letter for full details or contact the Treasurer, Iris Hunt at 3 Mitchell Lodge, 269 Bath Road, Reading, Berks RG30 2BN or via email: treasurer@readingabbey.org.uk. The year 2018 will be one of great importance, culminating in the completion of Reading Borough Council's Reading Abbey Revealed Programme and we will be working actively with Reading Abbey Revealed to celebrate the completion of the works.

WE RELY ON SUBSCRIPTIONS TO FUND OUR EFFORTS AND YOUR MEMBERSHIP MATTERS