



**Friends
of
Reading
Abbey**

NEWSLETTER

AUTUMN 2018

Special 5-page electronic edition

Patrons:

The Lord Lieutenant of Berkshire

The MP for Reading East

The Right Worshipful the Mayor of Reading

The MP for Reading West

The Right Reverend the Bishop of Reading

The Vice Chancellor, Reading University

The Abbot of Douai

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

www.readingabbey.org.uk

You are invited to the
Annual General Meeting
of the Friends of Reading Abbey
Saturday 27 October 2018 at 2.30pm
(doors open at 2.00pm)

St James Church, Forbury Road, Reading RG1 3HW

Following the AGM there will be an illustrated talk on

**MAGIC, MEDICINE AND MIRACLES
IN THE MEDIEVAL ABBEY**

by Professor Anne Lawrence-Mathers FRHS, FSA, SFHEA
Professor of Medieval History, University of Reading

Life in a great medieval abbey, such as Reading, involved frequent encounters with the supernatural. The miracles performed by the Hand of St James mention not only stones with healing powers, but also a terrifying encounter with a walking corpse. Works on medicine frequently refer to plants with the power to repel terrifying creatures and even demons, while bestiaries explain how birds and animals can be used to predict coming events. This lecture will explore the special relationship between monks and the supernatural, using examples from Reading and other English abbeys.

Anne Lawrence-Mathers is the Head of the History Department at the University of Reading, and has published on subjects including: monastic manuscripts from northern England; the figure of Merlin in medieval chronicles; and the role of magic in medieval society.

Most recently she has been researching on medieval weather forecasters.

ALL WELCOME - ENTRANCE IS FREE

RE-OPENING OF THE ABBEY RUINS 16 JUNE 2018



Photos by kind permission of Water Fest

Councillor Debs Edwards, Mayor of Reading, was delighted to perform the official opening ceremony

The long awaited re-opening of the Abbey Ruins was a hugely successful event, drawing many hundreds of people eager to explore the newly revealed ruins. Now restored after a 3.15 million conservation project, this was a great day for all involved. Coinciding with this year's Water Fest, there was much to see and do in Chestnut Walk and the Forbury Gardens, plus performances throughout the day on a specially erected stage within the ruins.

The Friends of Reading Abbey were present and passers-by visited our stand to read our literature and ask questions about the abbey's history. Members dropped in to say hello and we even had a visit from the Mayor, pictured below with some members of the FORA committee, Iris Hunt, Bill Hicks and Chairman Peter Durrant.



Some historic figures and below, crowds in the Dormitory Area



Earl Rivers Regiment of Foote in Action

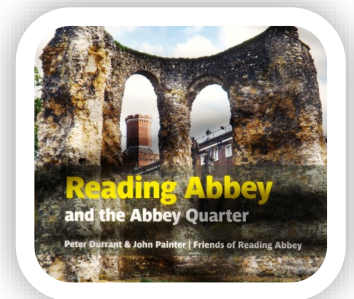


Many more photos from the day can be found on the Reading Water Fest Facebook page

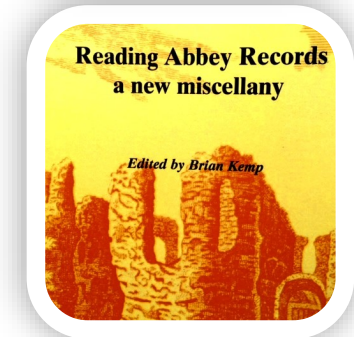
NEW BOOKS PUBLISHED THIS SUMMER:

Reading Abbey and the Abbey Quarter - new illustrated guide by Two Rivers Press

This new, and lavishly illustrated, guide to Reading Abbey has been published by local publishers Two Rivers Press to coincide with the restoration and re-opening of the Abbey Ruins and Gatehouse. It has been produced in partnership with FORA, and the authors are our Chairman and Secretary, Dr Peter Durrant and John Painter. FORA - along with the Earley Charity - has also provided funding to keep the price below £10. It is available in local bookshops, including the Reading Museum shop and Waterstones for £9.99 a copy. Copies can be ordered from orders@tworiverspress.com, or tel. 0118 987 1452.



Berkshire Reading Society - Volume 25, Records of Reading Abbey The latest RRS volume was published in June 2018, also to coincide with the Abbey Ruins re-opening. It contains the text of four original manuscripts: a set of annals; an account of miracles worked by Reading's prized relic, the hand of St James; an account of the ceremonial involved in the monks' annual commemoration of the death of their founder, King Henry I; and a record of the special allowances of food and drink made to the monks to mark the feasts of the Christian year and the anniversaries of benefactors and others. All are important for the history of the Abbey, and all are here published for the first time. The volume is also subsidised by FORA, to give a purchase price of £10 to FORA members and £12.50 to non-members (Plus £2.50 post and package). Copies can be ordered from peter.durrant@reading.gov.uk. Cheques should be made payable to 'Berkshire Record Society'. Ordered copies may be collected from the Berkshire Record Office to avoid the P&P charge.



FRIENDS SUMMER OUTING, 25 JULY 2018 - TEWKESBURY AND DEERHURST

On a hot July day our coach left Reading station with 32 Friends on board. The first stop was Tewkesbury Abbey which is Norman, like Reading, but earlier: it was dedicated in 1121, the year of Reading Abbey's foundation. The Abbey church demonstrates both impressive C12th Romanesque architecture in its nave, transepts and choir, and later Decorated and Perpendicular Gothic reconstruction of its Choir and Chancel to house the chantry tombs of the de Clare, Despencer and Beauchamp Lords of the Manor in the 14th and 15th centuries. This establishes a link with Reading Abbey, as Constance of York, the last royal burial at Reading, was the widow of Edward Despencer, Earl of Gloucester (buried at Tewkesbury) and the mother of Isabella Despencer, who buried her first husband, Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Worcester, at Tewkesbury in a fine chantry chapel. After lunch we travelled to Deerhurst Priory, a Saxon foundation a few miles south-west of Tewkesbury, where the church also remains intact and in use. It is near to Odda's Chapel, a late Saxon chantry which later became part of the manor house and is now in the ownership of English Heritage.

The outing started with morning coffee in the Abbey Tearoom and finished with a cream tea on the way home. We were given an introductory talk on the history of Tewkesbury Abbey by Prof. Anne Curry (Southampton); and our President, Professor Brian Kemp (Reading) guided us *in situ* on the Abbey's architecture and Deerhurst Priory. The sun shone, there were no traffic hold-ups, and an enjoyable day was had by all.

Photos by kind permission of Chris Widdows



TEWKESBURY



DEERHURST



ODDA'S CHAPEL

SUMMER PARTY, 2 SEPTEMBER 2018

It was a great pleasure to hold this year's Garden Party within the Abbey Ruins to celebrate their successful re-opening. Held in the Dormitory area, under clear blue skies, the event was the result of many months of planning by the three Friends groups involved - the Friends of Reading Abbey, the Friends of Reading Museum and the Friends of Caversham Court Gardens.

The Mayor of Reading Cllr Debs Edwards kindly opened proceedings and the entertainment began with the **Pangbourne Silver Band**, followed by the **Shinfield Shambles Morris Group** and the **Rock Choir**. Hundreds of people gathered to watch the performances and visit our stands. Reading Museum provided crown and mask making sessions and our younger visitors were further catered for by following the History Trail. Cream teas, cakes and drinks were in great demand as were the Abbey Quarter tours run by FORA. Hot off the press and available to buy were copies of *Reading Abbey and the Abbey Quarter*, written by Dr Peter Durrant and John Painter and good sales were reported by Two Rivers Press. We'd like to thank the performers and **all those** who volunteered their time, or lent us equipment. We are particularly grateful to the Parks and Museum Services of RBC and Reading BID for supporting our event. You all helped to make the event a great success.

Photographs by David Shephard

(More photos are on our Website and Facebook pages)



The Rock Choir



Searching for answers on
The History Trail



Shinfield Shambles Morris Dancers



We are very privileged to have been nominated for a Pride of Reading Award after being put forward by an appreciative visitor who said: "I would like to nominate Friends of Reading Abbey for the tireless work they have been involved with over the past few decades. The group have always ensured Reading Abbey had a high profile both before and during the recent restoration work, with lectures, visits and by purchasing relevant artefacts linked to the site. Well done Friends of Reading Abbey for all the hard work and support you have given and for flying the flag for the Abbey."

FUTURE EVENTS

8 - 27 October

HENRY 11

The final part of the Conqueror's trilogy set on the day of the consecration of Reading Abbey, performed at Minster of St Mary the Virgin Church, Reading.
Tickets - www.readingbetweenthelines.co.uk

27 October

FORA AGM

2.30 pm at St James Church, Reading

IT'S TIME TO RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP

A reminder that your membership runs from 1 September to 31 August and subs remain at:

Single: £7 Family: £10 Society/Commercial: £15 Life: £105

Payment can be made Standing Order (see website for details); by Electronic Transfer to Lloyds Bank, Sort Code 77-49-04, Account 60275168 - referenced with your name, or by post to: *Prof. Francoise Le Saux, Treasurer, 25 The Crescent, Reading Berks RG6 7NW (Cheques payable to Friends of Reading Abbey).*

Your support enables us to continue to promote awareness of Reading Abbey through our lectures, literature and events

MORE SUMMER PARTY PHOTOS - taken by David Shephard

