



FRIENDS OF READING ABBEY

NEWSLETTER

AUTUMN 2020

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: Janet Bond

Vice President: Leslie Cram



AGM ANNOUNCEMENT - meeting to be held via Zoom on 24 October 2020

At a recent meeting to review the remainder of the year's programme, the committee reluctantly acknowledged that in the light of continuing lockdown restrictions on public gatherings a 'live' Annual General Meeting would not be possible this year. Instead we will hold a virtual AGM, through Zoom, which we believe will enable more members to be involved, without leaving home.

Further details about how this will work will be circulated in early October. However, the time will be the same:- **2.30pm on Saturday 24 October**. By necessity, access to the AGM will be electronic, through a compatible device. Given the size of our membership, it will not be practical to send invitations to every member, and instead in early October you will be asked by email to indicate whether you wish to be sent a Zoom invite. Members who receive their newsletter by post and who wish to attend the AGM via Zoom are asked to contact the Secretary on 0118 9267893 and supply either an email address or a mobile phone number to which the invitation can be sent.



The focus of the AGM will be on transacting the business that we need to do. This is approving the end-of-year accounts and agreeing the membership fee for 2020-21, and electing the officers and committee for 2020-21. In terms of subscription, you will be pleased to hear that the Committee is not recommending any change in rate, which will mean that the subscriptions will continue to be £7 for individual members, £10 for families and £15 for corporate members, for the fifth year running.

It follows from this that our October public lecture will be postponed, until our AGM in 2021. The lecture will still be delivered by Dr Joanna Laynesmith, on Queen Elizabeth Woodville.

The Abbey Ruins remain open and a leaflet for a pleasant and informative walk around the Abbey Quarter can be found on our website - follow the link on the 'About Reading Abbey' page.

NEWS AROUND THE ABBEY QUARTER

The improvement works to **Chestnut Walk** have been completed and the walk is now edged by sweet chestnut trees, planted to replace the diseased horse chestnuts. Depending on the condition of the felled trees, some of the wood may be recyclable with a view using it for artwork or seating in other parks and open spaces across Reading. New lighting has been installed as part of the Council's improvement scheme for this popular direct route into the town centre.

Early September 2020 brought good news for Reading Borough Council when the Abbey Revealed Project won a national planning award for **Best Use of Heritage in Placemaking**. The judges were impressed with the community participation in consultations to ensure a broad spectrum of people could participate and enjoy a new "sense of place."

<https://www.planningresource.co.uk/article/1693409/award-best-use-heritage-placemaking>



READING GAOL UPDATE

The Ministry of Justice announced in April 2020 that the gaol had been sold to an unnamed developer.

In a recent feature in GetReading, Matt Rodda, MP for Reading East, revealed that a report from Historic England (a public body of the government) had stated "Any reuse of the site should embrace the prison's historic and cultural significance" and has backed Reading Borough Council having control of the site. This has given a boost to hopes that the gaol could become a cultural hub for the town.



Reading Museum re-opened on **8 September** and is delighted to welcome visitors once again. The Museum was certified with the 'We're Good To Go' Industry Standard from Visit Britain, which means it adheres to Government and public health guidance.

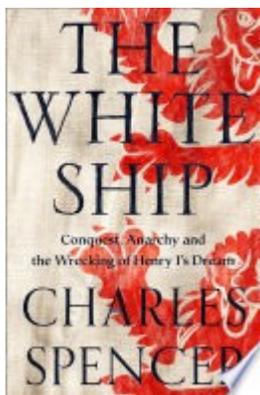
The Museum will be open Tuesday to Saturday 10am – 4pm, with shop hours reduced to match Museum opening times. A meet and greet will operate at the main entrance. Importantly, visitors to the Museum will need to pre-book in advance at www.readingmuseum.org.uk/welcome-back. Anyone who cannot access bookings online can call **0118 9373400** during opening hours.

The Museum Team say there will still be lots to see and enjoy with special children's trails available for families to follow. The Museum's popular 'Animal: World Art Journeys' exhibition in the Art Gallery has also been extended.

As Councillor Karen Rowland, Reading's Lead Member for Culture, Heritage and Recreation said: "Where else in the UK can you see a full-size Victorian version of the Bayeux Tapestry in its magnificent entirety! The 8 September will be a great day for all museums in Reading, with the excellent news that our partner museum, The Museum of English Rural Life, will be opening on the same day. You can find out more on The MERL's reopening at <https://merl.reading.ac.uk/visit-us>."

RECOMMENDED AUTUMN READING

Beginning with a short review of the *The White Ship* featured in *The Times* on 19 September



THE WHITE SHIP by Charles Spencer - the kingdom that sank on one dark night.

Reviewer Paul Lay enjoys a vivid account of how the drowning on Henry I's heir plunged England into anarchy

"No ship that ever sailed brought England such disaster," the chronicler William of Malmesbury wrote of the wrecking of the White Ship, which crashed upon the Quillebeuf rock barely a mile off the Normandy coast on November 25, 1120. In one dark night the fortunes of a king, Henry I, and the destiny of his territories were changed for ever.

Paul Lay writes: **Charles Spencer** has shown himself to be a perceptive and lively historian of the 17th-century civil wars, a gifted storyteller. In *The White Ship* he looks back a further 500 years or so to another period of bitter division, which followed the reign of Henry I and the catastrophic loss at sea of his only legitimate male heir, 17-year-old William Aetheling.

The White Ship - Conquest, Anarchy and the Wrecking of Henry I's Dream. Hardback, published by William Collins September 2020.

A Tale of Two Towns - Scallop Press

Local historian, author and Friend, John Mullaney, is bringing out his new book: ***A Tale of Two Towns*** this month. This is a comparison between Calleva, the Roman urban settlement at Silchester, and Reading up to the foundation of Reading Abbey in 1121. The link below will take you to see John telling all about his book and how to order a copy:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R2C2bDwiTvQ> or search *A Tale of Two Towns - Mullaney*.

The publication was delayed by Covid-19. Unfortunately, this has prevented John from organising any launch events. In the last slide of the Youtube presentation, John explains about cost. He will be publishing the book in October. Amazon and all retail outlets require very substantial discounts, and/or make charges for their services, which push the price of the book price up by 50%. So, he is offering the book for sale now at a pre-publication price of £12.00. If you are interested in buying a copy, please contact John directly on 0118 9470 478.

In order to save P&P, anyone who wishes may collect it from his house, keeping social distancing of course.

Henry I and his Abbey - Scallop Press

Scallop Press announce a second book this year, and this one is written by Lindsay Mullaney. Lindsay's new book is 250 pages long and contains over 100 pictures, mainly in colour. As King, Henry regularly visited Reading and this must have been an important factor in his choice of the town for his great monastic foundation. As we celebrate its 900th anniversary, Lindsay hopes that many of you will want to read her book and perhaps consider giving it as a present this Christmas.

HOW TO RESERVE A COPY: To reserve a copy/copies at £18.00 (£20.75 inc. p&p) per copy, please email or phone Lindsay Mullaney: almullaney@aol.com or phone 0118 9470 478. No payment is required at this stage.



FURTHER INTEREST IN FINDING THE REMAINS OF KING HENRY I IS REPORTED IN 'THE TIMES'

This is an extract from an article featured in THE TIMES on 12 September 2020 which links to the review of Earl Spencer's book on page 3:

*A distant relative of Henry I, Charles Spencer, the 9th Earl of Spencer, has started a campaign to exhume the king's remains to give them a "dignified reburial" in a church. Earl Spencer, 56, a historian, author and brother of late Diana, Princess of Wales, said that Henry would have envisaged daily masses and prayers (at the abbey) for his soul close to his grave. Historians believe old records suggest that the tomb is on a day nursery site or the former prison grounds. Diggings have been carried out at the site but the borough council says there are no plans for further excavations. The Earl's interest was apparently raised during research for his book **The White Ship**. He hopes that crowdfunding can finance excavations to recover the remains. They could be removed to Westminster Abbey where Henry was crowned and married to his first wife, Matilda of Scotland, who was buried there. This would not be allowed under the abbey's rules, however, which permit only the burial of ashes. The earl said that, if reburial at Westminster was not possible, the bones should be moved to a church "of sufficient importance or magnificence".*

(Note: Any such activity would require permission of the council, the landowner and Historic England. Drawing attention to the site of the king's burial, and apparently gaining Historic England's attention to a crowd-funded excavation, could have implications for the MoJ's disposal of the adjacent gaol car park site - John Painter)



MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

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 by 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. Françoise Le Saux, Treasurer, 25 The Crescent, Reading Berks RG6 7NW*
(Cheques payable to Friends of Reading Abbey).

Your support is more important than ever as we move into 2021 and prepare to celebrate the 900th anniversary of the founding of Reading Abbey.

The committee remains active and is currently working on a series of Abbey 900 walks.

We greatly look forward to welcoming our members back to events, once restrictions ease.