

THE FRIENDS OF READING ABBEY

AUTUMN NEWSLETTER 2024



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The Vice Chancellor, Reading University

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www.readingabbey.org.uk

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING ANNOUNCEMENT

Saturday 26 October 2024 at 2.30pm
Abbey Baptist Church, Abbey Square, Reading RG1 3BE

A warm welcome awaits at the AGM, which will be followed by our Autumn Lecture

Our speaker this year is David Sánchez

'Tiles for the Abbey: A Medieval Tillery and Occupation at 40 - 68 Silver Street, Reading'

This lecture describes the results of an open area excavation undertaken in two stages on the western side of Silver Street which revealed several phases of activity. The first occupation of the site consisted of a Medieval tillery comprising two tile kilns and a well, dated between the 12th and 14th centuries. That the tillery was supplying tiles to the Abbey is demonstrated by designs on wasters from the kilns matching designs on tiles recorded in-situ in the floor of the Abbey cloister in excavations of the 1960s.

Abandonment of the tillery was followed by a phase of intensive occupation and we will hear evidence of post-medieval occupation.

David Sánchez arrived in England in 2015 after 9 years working in archaeological projects in Spain, Portugal and Ireland, and with a background in Ancient History and Archaeology from a History degree in the University of Salamanca and a Postgraduate degree in Prehistory and Archaeology in the University of Madrid. David is Projects Coordinator for Thames Valley Archaeological Services and has produced a number of publications, including the results of excavations at Silver Street, Reading.



David Sánchez

*Abbey Baptist Church is behind Reading Central Library, in the Abbey Precinct.
It will be open from 2.00pm. Tea & Coffee. Free Entry, with a voluntary retiring collection.*

This year's event was very popular and the Friends of Reading Abbey's stand was constantly busy, with many people interested in the history of the abbey and the books on sale.

During the day we were pleased to welcome the Deputy Mayor, Councillor Alice Mpfu-Coles, who stopped by for a chat at our book stall. The **Cluny Kids Abbey Trail** proved extremely popular, and forty 'trailers' of all ages took part. Hopefully some future historians have been created!



The very successful day was rounded off perfectly by local folk duo **Simon Mayor and Hilary James** on the acoustic stage. This was promoted by FORA with generous sponsorship from the Earley Charity, to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Federation of European Cluniac Sites (FESC) of which Reading Abbey is a member. Hilary and Simon ended their performance with a lively version of 'Sumer Is Icumen in'.

Just a few photos here, more are on our Facebook page.



'Cluny Kids' with their Trail Papers

FRIENDS OUTING TO GLOUCESTER ON WEDNESDAY 17 JULY 2024

Our party left Reading Station by coach at 9.30am. Arriving at a sunlit Gloucester Cathedral, we made our way to the Parliament Room for tea and coffee and a short talk on the history of the former Abbot's lodgings. Richard II's parliament met here in 1378 and Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn also stayed during their royal progress of 1535. Other notable dates: 1085 William I held his Christmas Court in the Chapter House and commissioned the Domesday Book; 1134 Robert Curthose, Henry I elder brother, buried in Abbey church; 1216 Henry III, aged 9, crowned king in Abbey church; 1327 burial of murdered King Edward II on north side of Presbytery; 1540 Dissolution and conversion of church to cathedral (in 1541).

We walked around the cathedral at our leisure, before taking a lunch break. In the afternoon, we assembled at Blackfriars – one of the most complete surviving friaries of Dominican 'black friars' in England, later converted into a Tudor house and cloth factory. Founded in 1239, it is now owned by English Heritage and leased to Gloucester City. We were given an excellent guided tour and more refreshments! Significant features include the fine scissor-brace dormitory roof and the Scriptorium, the oldest purpose-built monastic library in the country. We were back in Reading by 6pm after another excellent summer outing.



Photographs beginning top left: Group assemble at **Cathedral**; Parliament Room; Great Cloister. Monuments— Robert Curthose, King Edward II. **Blackfriars** - interior of church nave; exterior of Scriptorium; scissor-brace roof.

FEDERATION OF EUROPEAN CLUNIAC SITES LECTURE
SATURDAY 28 SEPTEMBER 2024, ST JAMES' RC CHURCH, FORBURY ROAD, READING RG1 3FD

We have an extra talk for you this year! Caroline Johnson will speak on 'READING ABBEY IN THE CONTEXT OF CLUNY' to be held in the lovely setting of St James RC church, at 2.30pm.

'This talk will look at the history of Cluny, from the background of its founding to its spectacular rise to power. Why was it the monastic order of choice for Henry, and where did Reading Abbey sit in the Cluny family'.

Caroline Johnson is a second-year, part-time, PhD candidate with the Graduate Centre for Medieval Studies at the University of Reading. Caroline's Masters dissertation focused on how Cluniac death rituals influenced patrons of the Cluniac monastic houses in Norfolk, and she is now researching the women in the cartularies of the English Cluniac houses. Caroline is also the newest member of our FORA committee.

*St James' church is next to Reading Gaol, in the Abbey Precinct.
It will be open from 2.00pm. Refreshments available.
Entry is Free, with a voluntary retiring collection. All welcome!*



Other news from this busy summer ...

We can report that present at Waterfest on 8 June, was Mr Channing Bi, owner of Ziran Foundation and buyer of Reading Gaol. He was introduced to our secretary John Painter, by Ken Mawbey who was promoting VisiAR Augmented Reality, a 3-D representation of the Abbey buildings viewed by scanning a QR code onto a mobile phone. The photo of this meeting features the banner which promises amongst other things, an Arts Hub, Historical Walks and Hotel Suites in 2028. All plans relating to this Grade II listed building in a Scheduled Ancient Monument will of course be subject to planning and other statutory consents.

(L/R Mr Channing Bi, Mr John Painter and Mr Ken Mawbey)



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY:

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| 6 - 15 September | HERITAGE OPEN DAYS. At time of printing, there may still be a chance to visit some of the incredible amount of buildings open to the public - check out https://whatsonreading.com for the full programme. All are free entry, but most (not all) require booking. |
| 28 September | FESC LECTURE, 2.30pm at St James' RC Church |
| 26 October | AGM followed by the AUTUMN LECTURE 'Silver Street Tilers' - David Sánchez |
| 29 March 2025 | SPRING LECTURE - Dr Ruth Salter will speak on 'Abbey Infirmaries' |



SUBSCRIPTIONS - MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

A reminder that our 2024-25 subscriptions will be due from the end of October. The Committee is recommending once again that they remain unchanged, at £7 for single membership, £10 for family membership, £15 for corporate membership, and £105 for life membership.

If you have any outstanding subscriptions, it is never too late to renew! Cheques made out to The Friends of Reading Abbey, can be sent to the Treasurer at 25 The Crescent, Earley, Reading RG6 7NW. Or you can pay directly by electronic banking into the FORA bank account, Sort Code 77-49-04 Account 60275168: Please remember to register your name when paying electronically.

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