

THE FRIENDS OF READING ABBEY

AUTUMN NEWSLETTER 2025



Patrons:

The Lord Lieutenant of Berkshire

The Right Worshipful the Mayor of Reading

The Right Reverend the Bishop of Reading

The Vice-Chancellor, Reading University

The Abbot of Douai

The MP for Reading Central

The MP for Reading West and Mid-Berks

President: Janet Bond

Vice President: John Mullaney

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING ANNOUNCEMENT

SATURDAY 25 OCTOBER 2025 AT 2.30pm
The Abbey Baptist Church, Abbey Square, Reading RG1 3BE

***We warmly invite you to our AGM and Autumn Lecture, to be given by
DR EUAN ROGER, PRINCIPAL MEDIEVAL SPECIALIST AT THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES***

***'Resilience & Transformation: Community Life at St George's College and Chapel,
Windsor Castle in the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries'***

St George's Chapel, the grand and impressive royal chapel within Windsor Castle, may be familiar to many of us today as the home of royal weddings and funerals, the Order of the Garter, and the monarchy. But what was daily life like in the chapel and its resident college 500 years ago?

The fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries were a period of dramatic resilience and transformation in the history of St George's, which would see the college go from a state of practical bankruptcy to the building of the grand new chapel we see today, in large part due to the efforts and innovations of the collegiate community. In this talk Dr Euan Roger will explore the challenges faced by the late-medieval community at St George's, and the experiences of daily life in a royal college during a period of civil war, epidemic disease and financial uncertainty.



Dr Euan Roger specialises in the records of late medieval and early Tudor English government, the central law courts, and the secular clergy. He is widely published and his work has featured in publications including the New York Times, TIME Magazine, The Guardian, and The Times.

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

For full details, follow www.readingabbey.org.uk



COFFEE MORNING

Friday 13 June 25

Our first Member's Coffee Morning was held in the Boyes Turner offices on the top floor of Abbot's House, next to the Abbey Gateway in the Abbey Quarter. This 1990s office block has been built on the site of the Abbot's Lodgings and the west side of the cloister. Around 30 members attended, and were able to

chat and get to know each other over morning tea / coffee. John Mullaney, our Vice-President and author of many books on Reading Abbey, very kindly brought along a scale model of the abbey church (an ongoing project), and this brought the dimensions of the building to life. Also on display were the 15 entries to the FORA Schools' Art Competition.

A bonus was being able to enjoy the far-reaching views over the Forbury Gardens, Abbey Ruins, the Gaol, and beyond. We're extremely grateful to Boyes Turner for providing both the venue and refreshments.



WATERFEST 28 JUNE 25

We had a very successful day at Waterfest this year, despite temperatures up to 30°C. The artwork from our Schools' Art Competition and the model of the Abbey Church drew a lot of interest, and many people, including the

Mayor, stopped by to chat. The History Trail proved popular with both children and adults with 25 completed trails returned - although some entrants may have been overcome by the heat and failed to reappear! However, interest continued strongly throughout the day. The morning began with the official unveiling of the Jane Austen Plaque within the Abbey Gateway, and we are grateful to Chris Widdows for the group photo from that event.



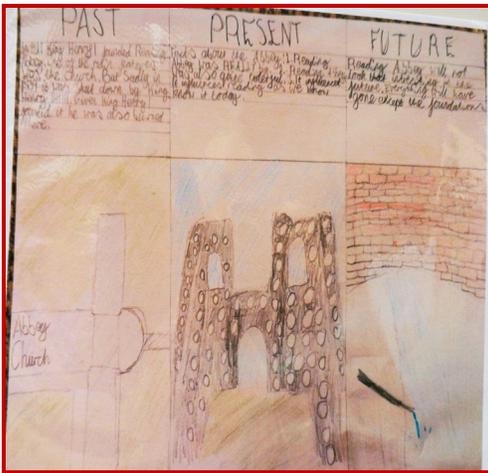
A visit from the Mayor of Reading and some happy History Trailers

Art Competition Display

CELEBRATING FORA's 40th ANNIVERSARY: A highly successful Art Competition!

The Friends of Reading Abbey Schools' Art Competition, launched to mark our 40th Anniversary, met with a gratifying response from the young people of Reading: some 15 pieces of artwork were submitted, from children in Year Groups 3 to 11. The approaches and techniques were varied and indicative of a genuinely personal engagement with the theme of the Competition, Reading Abbey – Past, Present and Future. The pieces ranged from monochrome pencil and delicate watercolour to highly colourful collage and mixed media, with moods encompassing a wistful sense of loss (as most strikingly exemplified by a weeping eye), but also a joyful celebration of past glory and present potential. Well-researched, detailed rendering of medieval architecture were submitted alongside streamlined, almost abstract designs. In brief, the artwork reflected the unique relationship of each child with Reading's now-ruined abbey. We owe a debt of gratitude to our judge, Mr Martin Andrews, retired President of the Reading Guild of Artists, who generously donated his time and expertise to support this initiative.

Copies of the artwork were displayed at the FORA stand at Waterfest, while the originals were exhibited in the foyer of the Blade between 19 June and 4 July. Many thanks to the Management of The Blade and to the staff at the desk who kept an eye on the exhibits and attested to the interest of the many visitors who viewed them.



Winner: Year Group 3 - 6

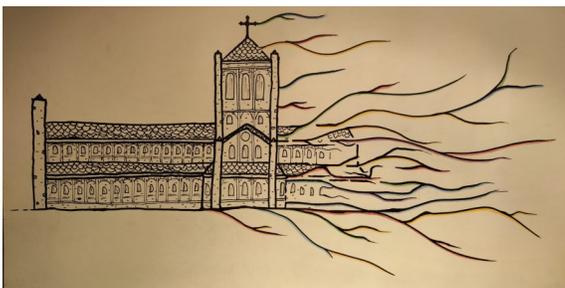
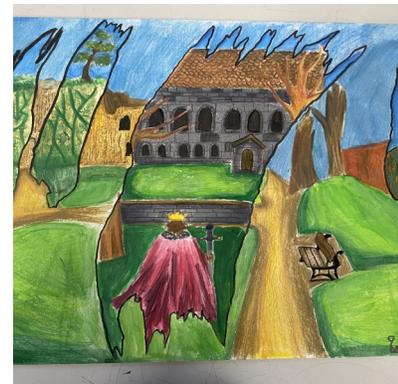
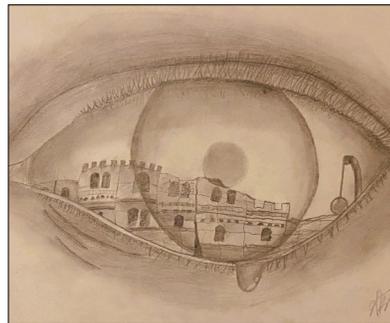


Winner: Year Group 7 - 9



Winner: Year Group 10 - 11

And some of the Highly Commended artwork:





UNVEILING OF BLUE PLAQUE, 22 JULY 2025

To further mark the 40th Anniversary of FORA, we commissioned a blue plaque to be installed at the RISC Building 35 - 39 London Street, Reading. Its purpose

was to inform people of the existence of large quantities of stones taken from the dissolved Reading Abbey and used in the construction of the building. Some stones remain in place in the basement while others now form an arcade in the appropriately named Stones Room.

We were delighted when The Mayor, Councillor Alice Mpfu-Coles agreed to perform the unveiling ceremony and also joined us for a tour, kindly given by Martin Mikhail of RISC. Martin told the group about the building's long and varied history and showed us the Roof Garden where there are also many standing stones from the abbey. Both the Blue Plaque and the Schools' Art Competition were partially funded by the Earley Charity and we were very pleased to welcome David Sutton, representing the charity, to the unveiling. Do go along to view the plaque, and perhaps call into the World Shop where Fair Trade items are on sale.



(Pictured are John Painter - Secretary, The Mayor, and Doug Beaumont, Committee Member who lead the project)

FRIENDS SUMMER OUTING, 23 JULY 2025. Our busy Summer Programme continued with the visit to Great Harmondsworth Barn, a medieval timber-framed barn built in 1426 by Winchester College and one of the most complete and unaltered pre-dissolution buildings in Britain. It's also one of the largest barns ever built in England, at 215ft long, 40ft wide and 26ft high. Our group were given a talk on the building's history and then had ample time to learn more as we explored the wonderful cathedral-like space. It was a short stroll from the barn to St Mary's Church where we received a warm welcome, followed by a talk on the history of this listed medieval building. Harmondsworth village is mentioned in the Domesday Book, but under threat from a third runway at Heathrow. If approved, the parish church and Great Barn would be only a few metres from the airport perimeter.



From Harmondsworth to Syon Park for lunch and a guided tour of Syon House. Syon derives its name from Syon Abbey, a late-medieval monastery of the Bridgettine Order which was dissolved in 1539. We spent time in the undercroft, the only remnant of the 15th century abbey, and toured the classical interiors designed by Robert Adam in the 1750's. This enjoyable summer outing concluded with a delicious cream tea. *More photos are on our Facebook and website pages.*



A polite reminder that your 2025-26 subs are due from the end of October. They remain unchanged at £7 for single membership, £10 for family membership, £15 for corporate membership, and £105 for life membership.

Above right, is the Great Barn and above left, the Undercroft and Long Gallery at Syon House.

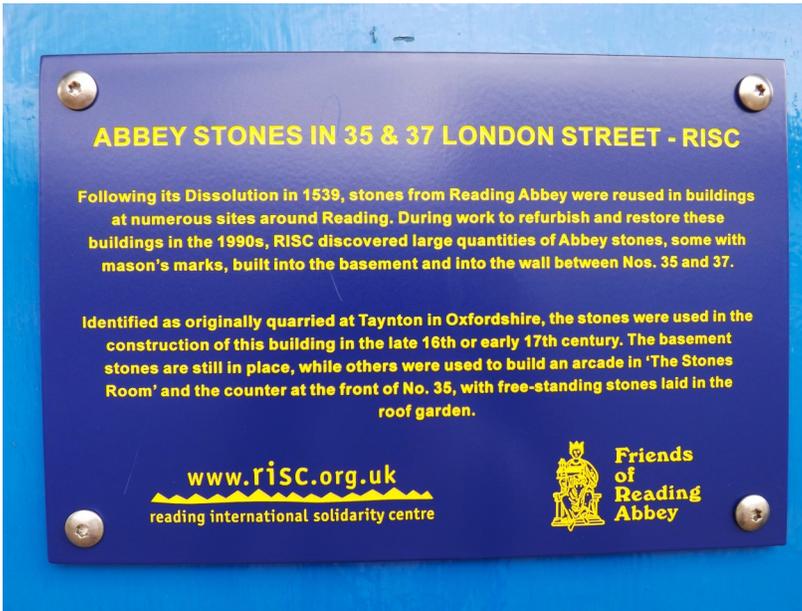
www.readingabbey.org.uk

Coffee Morning, 13 June 25



Waterfest, 28 June 25





RISC—22 JULY 25
showing the plaque, Stones Gallery, and the Rooftop Garden with standing stones.

FORA SUMMER OUTING, 23 JULY 25



From left to right:
Exterior of Great Harmondsworth Barn, St Mary's Church, Harmondsworth Village and its wooden altar table with 4 painted panels.

Syon House.

