



**Friends
of
Reading
Abbey**

NEWSLETTER

Spring 2014

Patrons:

The Lord Lieutenant of Berkshire

The Right Worshipful the Mayor of Reading

The Right Reverend the Bishop of Reading

The MP for Reading East

The MP for Reading West

The Vice Chancellor, Reading University

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

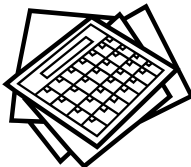
You are invited to the

Spring Meeting
of the Friends of Reading Abbey
Friday 11 April 2014
7.30pm at
The Berkshire Record Office
Coley Avenue, Reading RG1 6AF

A talk on
'Reading Abbey's Royal Connections'

will be given by our President
Professor Brian Kemp

(Entry is free – tea & coffee available at a small charge)



DIARY DATES 2014

9 May

14 June

22 June

July

13/14 September

25 October

Hard hat tours, Abbey ruins

Waterfest

Caversham Court Gardens Summer Party

Summer Outing – details to follow

Heritage Weekend

Annual General Meeting

CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

By the time you read this, Reading Borough Council will have submitted its new bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for funds to support the restoration of the Abbey ruins and the Abbey gateway. As you will find elsewhere in this Newsletter, the Friends' committee has been working closely with the Council in the preparation of the bid. We are represented on the Abbey Quarter Board, have had regular meetings with the project team, and have submitted a letter of support, emphasising the importance of the Abbey not just to the history of Reading but as a major asset to the town today, which was included as a supporting document in the application.

We have also committed ourselves to ongoing support for the project. HLF assessors place considerable weight on community involvement, and the Friends have been identified as one of the key partners in the project. However, if we are to do this effectively we will need help from the membership. *Can I urge you to consider whether you could help in some way?* Our secretary, John Painter gives more details in the Reading Abbey Revealed section.

We have also placed a high priority on attracting new members. We need a larger membership, both to give us a sounder financial base and to demonstrate that the Abbey has a wide base of support in the community. At the AGM I said that I hoped to see the membership double in size by the end of the year. We have begun a recruitment campaign and have produced an attractive new membership leaflet. You can obtain copies from the secretary, and they will also be available at the Spring meeting. Please pass them on to your friends.

If every existing member could persuade one friend to join we would easily reach our target.

I hope to see many of you at the Spring meeting when our President, Professor Brian Kemp, will be talking about the Royal Abbey of Reading.

Peter Durrant
Chairman



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AN EASIER WAY TO RENEW MEMBERSHIP

Conscious of rising postal costs, you may find it easier and more convenient to set up a standing order or make an electronic payment, when the annual membership is due. The details you will need to process this are as follows:

Bank: Lloyds
Account Name: Friends of Reading Abbey
Sort Code: 77-49-04
Account No: 60275168

Please add 'FORA membership renewal' as reference to identify your payment.

This information will be repeated in the Autumn Newsletter.

(Cheque payments still accepted)

READING ABBEY REVEALED



The Friends are working in partnership with the Reading Borough Council Abbey Quarter project team to support the Council's latest bid for heritage lottery funding to conserve the Abbey Ruins and repair the Abbey Gatehouse roof. RBC has named the project 'Reading Abbey Revealed'. The Council are developing a project for £3.1M, and are bidding for £1.7M from the heritage fund. The bid was submitted on 24 February 2014. The bidding process has two phases, and we will know whether the bid has got through the first phase by June 2014. If it is successful here, the Council then has up to two years to develop a detailed bid and hopes to do so by June 2015. If this second phase bid is successful, to this timescale, the funding will be released from April 2016.

As part of the bid, the Council set up a web survey to seek public views about the Abbey Ruins. This attracted 1,156 responses, by far the highest response to a Council web survey to date. Over 98% were positive. In total, the Council received 1,800 responses by all media, including a letter of support from the Friends, which has been circulated electronically to every member with an email address.

The Friends and the Council have agreed a programme to work together to open up the Abbey Ruins to the public on more occasions each year. In 2014 there will be three openings:

- 9 May
- 14 June (to coincide with Waterfest on the River Kennet)
- The Heritage Open Days in September

We are looking for volunteers to work with Council officers to run hard-hat tours of the Ruins, either as tour leaders or as whippers-in. The Council will provide training if needed. The tours will be short in May and June, with around 12 people per tour; they will be longer in September (around 1 hour). This is an opportunity for Friends to engage actively with the Abbey Revealed project, and also to find out more about both the project and the Abbey. If you are interested, please contact me at j.g.painter@hotmail.co.uk or peter.durrant@reading.gov.uk.

READING GAOL

The Ministry of Justice announced in the autumn of 2013 that the gaol was to close, and it has now done so. The gaol site is next to the Abbey Ruins, and the closure opens up new opportunities to improve access, develop through routes and for archaeological excavation of the Choir ambulatory and Lady Chapel of the Abbey. The gaol is listed, and the site is a Scheduled Ancient Monument. The Friends wrote positively to the Council in November 2013. The Council has subsequently published an outline development framework for the gaol site, to protect it (6 February 2014).

John Painter, Secretary

Visit to Romsey Report

The Annual Outing took place on Wednesday 16 October 2013, with a visit to two Saxon Benedictine nunneries in the Test Valley, Hampshire. The first was at Romsey - now Romsey Abbey - and the second was at Wherwell, where the site is now part of the Wherwell Priory estate.

Both monastic establishments had connections with Reading through Queen Elfrida, widow of King Edgar, who also founded a nunnery at St Mary's Butts Reading.

Photo: WIKIPEDIA



Nine Friends took part, including the President, Professor Brian Kemp and Janet Bond, Vice-President. The visit to Romsey was accompanied by heavy rain. The party spent over an hour in the abbey church, which displays both Saxon and Norman architectural features. It was sold to the town at the reformation for use as the parish church and therefore has remained reasonably intact and offers a sense of what Reading Abbey church may have looked like; at a more contemporary level, it is also the burial place of Lord Mountbatten.

Following lunch at King John's house (a medieval hall) in Romsey, during which the rains abated, the party moved north up the Test Valley to Wherwell, a very pretty village, where it visited the parish church of St Peter and Holy Cross, rebuilt in the 1850s by Woodyer, but with architectural and sculptural fragments from the earlier medieval foundation.

This was followed by a guided tour of the adjacent Wherwell Priory by the owners: this is a building of many periods, principally the early 19th century. It was built alongside the site of the church of the Benedictine nunnery, of which there are no remains except the water leet, which now runs under the house and a Grade 1 listed 13th century barn or grange for the nunnery, subsequently used as stables and more recently converted to office space (following extensive conservation works).

The party ended a successful and very interesting day with afternoon tea at the White Lion pub in Wherwell, and then home. **John Painter**

READING MUSEUM STORES - Iris Hunt describes her visit:

In October 2013, I took part in a tour of Reading Museum's Store, which had been organised by the museum curatorial staff. We were taken through all the different departments and the curators explained the methods of conservation and how the exhibits are selected and displayed. The exhibits with connections to local families were of great interest as were the examples of colonial memorabilia – particularly the native spears and ceremonial regalia. Naturalism not forgotten, the group were shown how taxidermy played an important part to record and monitor the natural history of Reading and its outlying districts.

Jill Greenaway, the curator responsible for archaeology, drew our attention to the collection of stone exhibits and the remains of Reading Abbey. Excavation by Oxford Archaeology, when the Oracle in Reading was built, had uncovered a large quantity of stone which had been removed from the site of the Abbey. Some of the sandstone on display showed evidence of design in the carving, while the cairn stone appeared chiselled and square.

On another floor the findings from Silchester can be found on shelving for reference, including floor mosaics and further stone work.

Reading Museum welcomes visitors to its store by appointment.
<http://www.readingmuseum.org.uk/collections/find-out-more/>.



Photo: Reading Museum

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT EVENTS, MEMBERSHIP OR TO VOLUNTEER, PLEASE CONTACT
PETER DURRANT peter.durrant@reading.gov.uk or JOHN PAINTER j.g.painter@hotmail.co.uk