



**Friends
of
Reading
Abbey**

NEWSLETTER

Spring 2017

Patrons:

The Lord Lieutenant of Berkshire

The Right Worshipful the Mayor of Reading

The Right Reverend the Bishop of Reading

The Abbot of Douai

The MP for Reading East

The MP for Reading West

The Vice Chancellor, Reading University

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

Spring Meeting of the Friends of Reading Abbey

Friday 31 March 2017 at 7.30pm

St Laurence Church, Friar Street, Reading RG1 1DA

Joan Dils

will talk on

St Laurence Parish and Reading Abbey: years of crisis c 1520 - c 1570

Since retiring from the Department of Continuing Education at Reading University, Joan Dils has been awarded the post of Honorary Research Fellow in History at the University. She has produced a major study on the History of Reading, currently with her publishers.

Joan undertook editing the churchwardens' accounts of St Laurence 1498-1570 for the Berkshire Record Society and this evening's talk will address how the parish coped during the difficult period of the Reformation in Europe, England and therefore in the borough, using details from these records.

We are holding the lecture in St Laurence again this year, which has ample seating room and also provides another opportunity to enjoy the beautiful interior of this late medieval church. It is part of the Abbey precinct and was founded by the Abbey as a place of worship for the townspeople.

Entry will be free, with voluntary donations at the end of the evening

The church will be open from 7pm - Tea/Coffee available

Members and non-members are warmly invited

FRIENDS OF READING ABBEY AGM—29 OCTOBER 2016

The Chairman, Peter Durrant, welcomed the 50 plus members and guests to the meeting.

He noted that 2015-16 had been another busy and successful year for the Friends, stimulated by the announcement in December 2015 of the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) grant to the Council's Reading Abbey Revealed project to allow the conservation of the Abbey Ruins to go ahead. He expressed the Friends' gratitude to Reading Borough Council for its ongoing commitment to the project at a time of considerable financial stringency.



The Secretary, John Painter, circulated a written report on the work of the Friends' Committee during 2015-16. The Committee had continued to work to the four key themes which it agreed in 2013:

1. Working in partnership with the Council's Abbey Quarter Project
2. Promoting the Friends and the Abbey Ruins, and overhauling and updating the Friends' website
3. Improving communication with our membership and partnership links
4. Recruiting more members

These key themes were focused on a basic mission – to get the Abbey Ruins and Gate conserved and re-opened to the public on a regular basis by 2021 – the 900th anniversary of the Abbey's foundation.

Once the official business had been concluded there followed an extremely informative and interesting talk by Dr Ron Baxter on the subject of **Reading Abbey as a Royal Palace**.

The continued excellent attendance at the AGM was much appreciated and the photo (*top right*) was taken while members were still arriving. We've been aware that FORA is outgrowing the available space in the Town Hall, therefore a larger venue for this year's AGM has been located, which will be The Friends Meeting House, Church Street, Reading. Seats for all!



*Dr Peter Durrant, Ron Baxter
and Professor Kemp*

HAVE YOU OVERLOOKED YOUR ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION? In the hustle and bustle of daily life, it's easy to overlook subscriptions and if you intended renewing membership to The Friends of Reading Abbey, you have a few weeks in which to do so. Otherwise, your copy of the Newsletter and other benefits will then cease. The fees remain at a very reasonable £7 for single members; £10 Joint/Family membership and Society/Commercial Membership is £15. Please see our website for details on how to pay by electronic transfer/direct debit or send your payment to Iris Hunt, Treasurer, 3 Mitchell Lodge, 269 Bath Road, Reading, Berks RG30 2BN.



The support of our members is very important to The Friends, as it gives us the resources to assist the Museum Team; provide updates on The Reading Abbey Revealed Project; arrange talks and an annual outing; produce newsletters - and to continue to promote the importance of the Abbey Ruins.

FUTURE EVENTS IN 2017 - dates for your diaries:

31 MARCH	FORA SPRING MEETING
10 JUNE	WATERFEST
4 JULY	FORA SUMMER OUTING TO CHAWTON (<i>Date and programme to be confirmed</i>)
9 & 10 SEPTEMBER	READING HERITAGE WEEKEND
28 OCTOBER	ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Don't forget to check out our website www.readingabbey.org.uk which we continually review and update, plus our Facebook page.



READING ABBEY REVEALED PROJECT

There was excellent news in January when Reading Borough Council announced that the main contractor had been appointed for the project. The following is an extract from their Press Release issued on 24 January 2017:-

WORK to conserve one of Reading's oldest gems moved a step closer this month.

Reading Council has appointed the main contractor responsible for implementing the conservation side of the Reading Abbey Revealed project. CRL Restoration, who specialise in the restoration, conservation, and refurbishment of historic, period and modern buildings and structures, are a locally based multi-disciplined specialist contractor and one of the leading companies in the UK in this field. CRL signed contracts this month, with the plan to start on site from Monday 13th February.

The contractors will erect the necessary scaffolding in the Abbey Ruins before moving onto adjusting the safety scaffold on the Abbey Gateway into a working scaffold. Conservation work will commence in early March and will be carried out in four phases. Temporary interpretation will inform the public of the work being carried out and the history of the Abbey Quarter.

CRL Restoration will work closely with a number of specialist trades, who have long pedigrees in the field of conservation. These will include such works as a new roof to the gate house along with extensive conservation works to the ruins.

Stuart McLeod, Head of HLF South East, said:

"The 900-year-old Reading Abbey ruins and gate provide a visual connection to the important, but little known, role that the city has played in European history since medieval times. Our National Lottery investment to stabilise the ruins and open them to the public for the first time since 2009 will help people to rediscover the fantastic heritage on their doorstep."

There are plans for an exciting programme of events and educational activities to breathe new life into the Abbey Ruins, which sits alongside an extensive programme of conservation works to the Abbey Ruins and the Abbey Gateway, which starts this February. Site-wide interpretation of the Abbey Quarter will include a new display at Reading Museum. If you would like to read the full press release, please follow this link: <http://www.reading.gov.uk/PRabbeycontractor>

READING
MUSEUM
TOWN HALL



New Gallery Tours

The trained volunteer guides at Reading Museum are currently revising their tours to include more about Reading Abbey, its impact on the town and the exciting plans for the Abbey Quarter. Each volunteer will give a different introductory tour of the museum's galleries and pick out interesting objects that fascinate them. The new tours will start from mid-April. For all ages, Saturdays, 11.45am – 12.15pm (approx.)

The Museum is looking for more volunteers to give guided tours on Saturdays - full training given. Contact: nicollette.evans@reading.gov.uk

'READING ABBEY: THEN AND NOW' EXHIBITION PLANNED

An extract from the Abbey Quarter Newsletter advises that "A new art-based exhibition, celebrating the history of Reading Abbey from 1720s to the present day, is planned for **20th May to September** in the Sir John Madejski Art Gallery at Reading Museum. Using historical paintings, maps and lithographs, this interesting exhibition will chart the Abbey Quarter's history showing the Abbey Ruins and Abbey Gateway in their heyday and how they were used by the public in more recent times. Explore how the English Civil War impacted on the Abbey Ruins, the changing portrayal of the Abbey Gateway, the development of the Victorian pleasure gardens and the more recent past of open air plays. An exhibition not to be missed by anyone interested in the Abbey's history."

READING COLLEGE STUDENTS CREATE ABBEY RUINS VIRTUAL TOUR

In 2016, computing students from Reading College brought one of the town's historic landmarks back to life thanks to innovative technology. From 12-16 December it formed part of Light Up Reading, when the virtual tour was projected in the Town Hall Square from 6- 8pm each evening.

As part of [Reading's Year of Culture](#), the higher education computing and systems development students created a virtual replica of the Abbey ruins by taking and stitching together more than 7,000 photos. The students collaborated with A-level history students to create a website where visitors can click on specific areas of the abbey replica to access historical information. The **Reading Abbey Experience** was launched at the college to key

stakeholders on 8 December 2016, including those from sponsors Reading UK CIC. The Friends of Reading Abbey committee were invited to the preview and were very impressed by the students skilled application of 21st century technology to bring alive the town's ancient monument.

The project took 10 months to develop, with over 800 hours dedicated by staff and students. Follow this link for the full story:

<http://www.activatelearning.ac.uk/news/college-students-create-abbey-ruins-virtual-tour>



The A-level History Students Team



Computing & Systems Development Students Team



One of the projected images

LIGHT UP READING - December 2016 Many of Reading's landmarks including the Abbey Ruins and St Laurence Church, were given a new look at Christmas in the culmination of *Reading Year of Culture* when they were illuminated with stunning effect.

