



FRIENDS OF READING ABBEY

NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2021

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:** Vacant



The Professor Brian Kemp Memorial Lecture Saturday 27 March 2021 at 2.30pm via ZOOM

The Heraldry of Reading Abbey and its Legacy by Adrian Ailes

This will be the inaugural **Brian Kemp Memorial Lecture** in memory of our late President and co-founder. Deferred from the first lockdown of 2020, the date has been chosen due to its proximity to Brian's birthday, 25 March (Lady Day).



Vice-President of The Heraldry Society, Adrian Ailes is an honorary Research Associate at Bristol University and his postgraduate dissertation on the royal arms of England was supervised by Professor Brian Kemp in the Graduate Centre for Medieval Studies at Reading University.

'This lecture recreates the heraldry that may have been seen in Reading Abbey and examines how the Abbey's own arms of three gold shells have influenced local heraldry up to the present day'

ARRANGEMENTS: With future restrictions on public gatherings uncertain, the committee has reluctantly decided that a 'live' Spring Meeting will not be possible this year. Instead, as with our AGM, we will hold a virtual lecture through Zoom. Joining instructions will be issued by the Secretary nearer the event, via his regular email updates. Members who receive their **newsletter by post** and who wish to join the lecture 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.



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, 24 OCTOBER 2020

With public gatherings still banned, the committee arranged to hold the annual general meeting via Zoom. An audience of around 31 people embraced this relatively new concept, and took part in proceedings from the comfort of their homes.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Dr Peter Durrant MBE, had circulated a written report noting that 2019-20 had been directly affected by the COVID-19 lockdown, which curtailed all of the planned summer activities, but the committee had remained active, issuing three Newsletters, regular email updates and a position statement on the disposal of Reading gaol by the Ministry of Justice. The Chairman thanked the committee for its work over the year, and in particular Bill Hicks and Iris Hunt, who were standing down. He also thanked the Mayor of Reading, Councillor David Stevens, for his interest in the work of the Friends, for selecting FORA as one of his Mayoral charities for 2020-21, and for hosting a programme of Zoom talks with historians of the Abbey, the first of which, with John Mullaney, has been recorded and published online: this was a splendid initiative to promote interest in the Abbey in difficult times. The Chairman looked forward to a more active year celebrating the 900th anniversary of the Abbey's foundation in 2021.

Secretary, John Painter added - During the year, and despite the lockdown, three illustrated talks about the Abbey had been given to local groups, with three more in the pipeline; and one guided walk of the Abbey Quarter (again with more planned). The lack of activity in 2020, due to the lockdown had resulted in a squeeze on membership, which now stood at 241, with only six new members joining in 2019-20, some four more not renewing their subscription and a further 30 subscriptions still unpaid. This was understandable but disappointing, and the committee was working on plans to raise FORA's profile again in 2021, to celebrate Reading Abbey 900: the 900th anniversary of the Abbey's foundation, on 18 June 1121, which will be the focus of FORA's activities during 2021, with a specific profile at next June's Reading Waterfest.

Dr Joanna Laynesmith, University of Reading Graduate Centre for Medieval Studies, has very kindly agreed to give her lecture on Elizabeth Woodville and her links to Reading, at our next AGM on 30 October 2021.

COLLABORATIVE DOCTORAL AWARDS

It was announced in December 2020 that as part of their programme of celebrations for **Reading Abbey 900** in 2021, that the Archaeology Department at the University of Reading has been working with Reading Museum to develop a collaborative post-graduate research project into the archaeology and heritage management of Reading Abbey. This has been successful in securing funding from the Arts & Humanities Research Council, and will start in September 2021, running for three years.

This project connects the medieval archaeology of Reading Abbey with current heritage needs and opportunities in the town of Reading. It offers a unique platform for a doctoral student to make an original contribution to archaeological understanding of this site of national historical significance; to develop innovative approaches to 4D digital data modelling and visualisation; and to use the research to inform local conservation policy and community engagement with heritage.

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Doctoral
Training
Partnership**



NEW INFORMATION SIGNS AT READING STATION: From November 2020, visitors have had the benefit of three new information points at Reading Station to help them find their way around the town.

Known as 'wayfinding' signs, they feature maps with a wealth of useful information for visitors on how to find key destinations around the centre of Reading, and feature signs to the Abbey Quarter which complement existing pedestrian signage installed as part of the Council's Abbey Quarter Project. This will certainly raise awareness of the location of the abbey ruins, especially when rail travel opens up once more.

Mayor of Reading Completes his Santa Row

As mentioned in our Chairman's report, **The Mayor of Reading, Councillor David Stevens** has listed FORA as one of his chosen charities, along with No. 5 Young People, Royal British Legion and the Royal Navy & Marines Charity. To raise money for Reading Rotary Club and his chosen charities, the Mayor took an alternative approach to the Virtual Reading Santa Run 2020. He is pictured here with daughter, Annabel.

The Mayor commented *"Rather than running, I donned a Santa hat & completed a 5K Row on the River Thames, accompanied by my children and Andy from Reading Rowing Club."*

You can contribute to the Mayor's Charities by following this link:

<https://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/CllrDavidStevensMayorofReading>



Photo by kind permission of Chris Forsey

MAYOR'S VIDEO TALKS - Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Mayor has been unable to show his support for FORA through active participation in live events, so working with the Mayor and his office, we produced a series of video talks on themes relating to Reading Abbey, and these can now be viewed via youtube.

October 2020: **The Mayor of Reading and John Mullaney - The Coronation of the Virgin Stone** The link is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ZX1iKQp9mQ>

November 2020: **The Mayor of Reading and John Painter - Reading's Royal Abbey** The link is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mNihukYe2I>

December 2020: **The Mayor of Reading and Lindsay Mullaney - King Henry I, founder of Reading Abbey** The link is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wy2Rmf1KPWI>

Full details on our website www.readingabbey.org.uk

TWILIGHT TRAIL

Reading's first ever Twilight Trail unfortunately had a short run due to Tier 4 'Stay at Home' Restrictions being introduced. It was a magical festive trail through Reading's iconic Forbury Gardens and Abbey Ruins where trees and statues were illuminated and the ruins were beautifully lit. Here are just two photos taken at the Trail one evening in December.



READING GAOL UPDATE: READING BOROUGH COUNCIL GIVEN TIME TO REVIVE ARTS VENUE PLAN AFTER SUCCESSFUL BIDDER WITHDRAWS. It was announced in November 2020 that the sale of the Grade II-listed Reading Prison had fallen through.

A spokesman for the Prisons Service commented: "The bidder for the former Reading prison site has withdrawn and a decision on next steps will be made in due course. We will seek the best outcome for taxpayers while ensuring that any purchaser complies with planning requirements concerning this historical site's future use." The council's bid for the former jail was rejected earlier this year.

At the end of December 2020 the BBC News website reported that plans to transform Reading Prison into a cultural and artistic centre had taken a step forward, following a government announcement. An MoJ spokesperson said it had agreed a period of exclusivity until 15 March 2021, to allow Reading Borough Council to develop a business case with local partners.

In January 2021, THAMES TAP featured an update, of which this is an extract:

A business case is being drawn up to turn Reading Gaol into a culture and arts hub after the Government agreed to allow the council to present its proposals.

A spokeswoman for Reading Borough Council said: "Reading Borough Council has been negotiating a period of exclusivity with the Ministry of Justice to develop our previous bid to purchase this site. We have also sought to engage key national organisations with a view to supporting our ambition to secure the future of the gaol. Reading Prison is an iconic building and a hugely important part of Reading's heritage, particularly in the context of the Grade I-listed Reading Abbey Ruins. Our position remains that the site offers huge potential for heritage-led regeneration and we have long held a vision to transform the gaol and the entire Abbey Quarter area into a beacon of culture and heritage. We will provide further updates on our latest bid in due course."

High profile celebrities including **Dame Judi Dench, Stephen Fry and Sir Kenneth Branagh** have given support to the gaol's possible use as a culture and arts hub and to celebrate its most famous inmate, Oscar Wilde. **Watch this space!**



Photo by David Shephard highlights the close proximity of the gaol and ruins.

TALKS VIA ZOOM

Two talks have been successfully held. The first was by Lindsay Mullaney on *The Hand of St James*, on 10 December 2020. Lindsay gave us a fully illustrated and absorbing account of the history of this holy relic. The talk can be seen on youtube by typing in *The Hand of St James at Reading Abbey by Lindsay Mullaney*.

On 28 January 2021 we enjoyed a talk on Dr Jamieson Boyd Hurry and Reading Abbey, given by Malcolm Summers. Dr Hurry was a local physician who promoted the study and history of Reading Abbey at the turn of the Twentieth Century. During his lifetime, he donated 10 paintings to Reading Museum and the story of his very full life was fascinating.

EVENTS TO LOOK FORWARD TO IN 2021

Saturday 27th March	The Professor Brian Kemp Memorial Lecture	<i>'The Heraldry of Reading Abbey and its Legacy'</i> Via ZOOM
Saturday 19 June	Water Fest - focusing on Reading Abbey 900 Celebrations	
Saturday 30 October	Friends of Reading Abbey AGM	<i>'Elizabeth Woodville'</i> Joanna Laynesmith

Don't forget to visit our website www.readingabbey.org.uk and our Facebook page.

We have just been informed that our Vice President, Leslie Cram has passed away. He will be greatly missed.