

THE FRIENDS OF READING ABBEY

SUMMER NEWSLETTER 2026



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 MP for Reading Central

The MP for Reading West and Mid-Berks

President: Janet Bond

Vice President: John Mullaney

www.readingabbey.org.uk

READING
WATER FEST
2026



SATURDAY 27 JUNE 2026 - 11am to 5pm

This popular event celebrates the Kennet and Avon Canal and the many historic spots close by. Once again, there will be many stalls and workshops in the Forbury Gardens, the Abbey Ruins and along Chestnut Walk where the colourful canal boats are moored.

With a variety of live music throughout the day, activities, food and drink - and free entry - it's a day not to be missed.

The Friends of Reading Abbey will have a stand at Waterfest alongside other heritage groups. We will be ready with information on the abbey, have books on sale and be running our Children's History Trail. Do drop by for a chat, we'd be delighted to see you.

Look out for the full programme on our website and Facebook page, nearer the date.

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The Friends have been very active since the start of 2026, beginning with the BRIAN KEMP MEMORIAL LECTURE, on 14 MARCH. We had an excellent attendance at St James' RC Church in March and our speaker, Tony McAleavy, gave an informative and very entertaining talk on The Story of Malmesbury Abbey, the final resting place of its founder St Aldhelm and of King Athelstan the first King of All England. Tony will also be our guide on our summer outing to Malmesbury Abbey, on 22nd July, which promises to be a very enjoyable day.

Heritage Custodian Cleaning, 17 March.

Members of the FORA committee and volunteers assembled at the Town Hall to collect cleaning materials, having answered the call to help spring clean the Information Boards in Reading Town Centre, the Forbury Gardens, Abbey Ruins and Library areas. On a sunny, spring morning it was a pleasure to be involved in keeping the boards looking clean and cared for.

Reading Festival of Walks: Reading Town Centre Heritage Walk, Saturday 16 May. John Painter, FORA'S Secretary, lead a group of 18, all keen to learn of Reading's heritage. At just 2.8 miles, this circular walk was **full** of variety, covering ancient and modern - and in between! Beginning at St Laurence Church, the route took us through the Forbury and the abbey ruins, then via quiet paths along the canal-side surrounded by modern apartments, old warehouses and memories of Huntley & Palmers. We entered the bustle of the Oracle and on to Reading 's Minster Church of St Mary - another important stop. The walk ended in the Butter Market/Market Place - with a huge round of applause for John.

A leaflet for this route can be found at Reading Museum. It contains an easy-to-follow map and is a great way to learn some of the town's heritage, while enjoying a pleasant walk.

FRIENDS' COFFEE MORNING, 22 MAY - Boyes Turner Offices.

Around 30 of us gathered over coffee, for a talk from Malcolm Summers on Dr Jamieson Hurry, the local doctor with a particular interest and love of Reading Abbey. He published the first full history of the abbey, in 1901 as well as many other books on the subject and set up several monuments in the Forbury Gardens and the Abbey Ruins. Malcolm's new book, **Dr Hurry and Reading Abbey** was available at the coffee morning and from Malcolm's description of Dr Hurry, it will be a good read. FORA are very grateful to Boyes Turner for their generous hospitality, and for the views we enjoyed over the Forbury, the Gaol and the Abbey Gateway from their offices on the top floor of Abbots House.



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY:

- 3 - 20 June** Secret Shakespeare - Julius Caesar. The Secret Shakespeare production takes place in the **Abbey Ruins**. For tickets and details visit www.secretshakespeare.co.uk.
- 15 - 25 July** Hamlet - The Progress Theatre offer their outdoor production of **Hamlet** within the **Abbey Ruins**. Book online via: <https://www.ticketsource.com/booking/venueplan/ymwxawqvwxdp>
- 23 July** Friends Summer Outing (fully booked)
- 11 - 20 September** Heritage Open Days
- 31 October** FORA AUTUMN LECTURE – Dr Harriet Lyon, York – Memories of the Dissolution

YOUR PHOTO ROUND-UP: SIGN CLEANING ON 17 MARCH. Later, that day some of us took the opportunity to view the original medieval manuscript of *Sumer is Icumen in*, also known as the famed 'Reading Rota' which was on display from 10 March to 9 May at the Museum. The first time the manuscript had returned to the town since the dissolution of Reading Abbey in 1539.



READING TOWN CENTRE HERITAGE WALK, 16 MAY.

