

Reading for Modern Pilgrims

St James' Way and The Camino Inglés



Reading and Caversham Pilgrimage Sites

1. **St James' Church** – Reading's C19th Roman Catholic church, dedicated to St James, was built by AW Pugin in the Abbey Precinct, near the north transept of the Abbey church. It boasts a shrine to St James and images of the saint and his coat of arms in stained-glass windows. The church is the starting point for the St James' Way. Get your trail passport stamped there.
2. **Reading Abbey** – Reading was a Royal Abbey, from 1121 when it was founded by King Henry I to be his burial place, until its dissolution in 1539. It held over 230 relics including The Hand of St James. Pilgrims visiting Reading at the feast of St James were granted indulgences by the church. The Ruins of the Abbey are open to the public every day.
3. **Modern Shrine** – Built 1902-21, it includes a shrine chapel, re-designed between 1954-58 to include the external squint on South View Avenue for observance by passers-by. This has a large 500-year old oak statue of Our Lady and Child. The shrine was redecorated in 2017 with images reflecting the original medieval shrine, which was lost following its dissolution in 1538 but was located at Caversham manor at Dean's Farm in Lower Caversham.
4. **St Anne's Well** – Of medieval foundation, although the current structure dates from 1908. People believed its waters had curative properties and 'brought many pilgrims to Caversham in the Middle Ages'. It is now dry.
5. **St Peter's Church and Caversham Court Gardens** – St Peter's, the medieval parish church of Caversham, is of Norman foundation but was substantially re-built by the Victorians. It was once thought (wrongly) to be the location of the Shrine of Our Lady of Caversham. Immediately south of the church via steps in the churchyard, Caversham Court Gardens is a public pleasure garden running down to the river, with public toilets and a café run by volunteers at weekends.
6. **St Anne's Chapel** – Caversham Bridge was the original bridging point between Reading and Caversham and in medieval times on each bank there was a chapel for travellers to pray. St Anne's Chapel was on the Caversham bank; there is a plaque to it at the Reading bank of the bridge.

7. **De Montfort Island** – Now known as Fry's Island, a trial by combat was held on the island in 1163, witnessed by King Henry II, between Robert de Montfort and Henry of Essex. Essex, believed dead, was taken to Reading Abbey where he recovered and became a monk. The island now houses a boathouse and a bowling club, both accessed by boat from the south bank.
8. **Greyfriars** – In 1285, the Abbey gave this land for the site of Reading's Franciscan (Grey) Friary. Greyfriars was dissolved in 1538 but Reading Corporation bought the Nave of the church in 1543 to become their new Guildhall and they retained ownership over the next 300 years. It was restored in 1863 for use as a church.
9. **St Laurence's Church** – Established by the Abbey soon after its own foundation in 1121 originally as an oratory by travellers and pilgrims to the Abbey before they entered the precinct. It was enlarged in the 1190s to cater for the Hospitium of St John the Baptist. During the Middle Ages St Laurence's became the town church and gained parish status.
10. **Hospitium** – On the northside of the graveyard behind St Laurence's is the Dormitory, the remaining part of the medieval Hospitium of St John, which survived because from 1486 it housed Reading Grammar School, and from 1578 also the Guildhall of the Corporation of Reading. It is now a nursery school.
11. **Forbury Gardens** – At the time of the dissolution, this whole area would have been the outer, public area of the Abbey where fairs and public gatherings were held, with the Abbey church at its eastern end. Pilgrims to the Abbey would walk through the Forbury to enter the Abbey church at its West End.
12. **Abbey Gateway** – The only remaining Gateway boasts the carved head of a pilgrim, with a large hat bearing the scallop shell and the pilgrim staff. Is it St James himself? The Abbey Gateway later became a school for young ladies and a young Jane Austen was among its pupils in 1785. It can be visited as a Victorian schoolroom experience today through Reading Museum.
13. **Reading Museum** – The ideal starting point for visitors to explore the Abbey Quarter. The Story of Reading Gallery is an introduction to the history of the town, including finds from Reading Abbey and a full-sized reconstruction of part of the Abbey cloister. Highlights include a medieval pilgrim badge decorated with the scallop of St James and a 12th century book from the Abbey's library. You can also discover Britain's Victorian replica of the Bayeux Tapestry.



From Reading to Santiago via the St James' Way and The Camino Inglés

The English Way (Camino Inglés in Spanish) was the most popular route for pilgrims heading to Santiago de Compostela from England during the 12th to the 15th centuries. After leaving Reading, travellers would sail to Galicia in north-west Spain from English ports such as Southampton and Plymouth and from the Galician coast continue on foot to Santiago in order to visit the shrine of the Apostle Saint James.

Reading, whose grand Abbey was the centre of the St James' cult in England, would have played a crucial role in the pilgrimage to Santiago, with pilgrims visiting, to then continue towards Southampton, along what we know today as St James' Way.

For modern-day pilgrims and walkers, the St James' Way is a 68.5 mile mostly flat route that, after starting in Reading, follows rivers and canals through beautiful parts of the country as well as historic sites in Bramley, Upper Wield, Winchester Cathedral to reach the medieval walls of Southampton and its God's House Tower. After crossing the sea, Galicia welcomes modern pilgrims with the possibility of continuing the route to Santiago either from the port city of A Coruña (46 miles) or from Ferrol (70 miles) in a most authentic Camino experience. Along the way, retrace the steps of our ancestors through historic towns such as Pontevedra and Betanzos, swim on the breathtaking Galician coast and enjoy the wonders of its gastronomy before reaching the World Heritage city of Santiago and its iconic cathedral, a masterpiece of Romanesque and Baroque art. ¡Buen Camino!



Look and find ... the pilgrim scallop shell in Reading!

Pilgrims to Reading adopted a round badge showing three scallop shells, the emblem of St James and of those on a pilgrimage to Santiago. Can you find these other examples?

- Reading Abbey Chapter House – 3 memorials including Hugh Faringdon
- Forbury Gardens – memorial to King Henry I
- Forbury Gardens – Victoria Gates (by war memorial)
- St Laurence's church – on right-hand side of West Door
- Abbey Gateway – on the carved head of a pilgrim



Walking the St James' Way and on to Santiago de Compostela along the Camino Inglés

Welcome to Reading, a modern destination with a medieval history. Reading is the departure point for modern pilgrims and walkers retracing the steps of medieval pilgrims along St James' Way to Southampton and then on to Galicia in north-west Spain to join the English Way, one of the routes of the world famous Way of Saint James, the Camino de Santiago.

Reading has lots to see and do while you are here, including a number of important pilgrim sites. This map guide will help you make the most of your visit and set you off on the right route to walk the St James' Way ... and maybe on to Santiago!

Pilgrimage in Reading

Throughout the Middle Ages, Reading and Caversham were recognised centres of pilgrimage. The focus in Reading was Reading Abbey, which possessed over 230 relics including the Hand of St James, which made Reading the centre of the cult of St James in early medieval England. On the other side of the River Thames was the Shrine of Our Lady of Caversham, dedicated to the Virgin Mary, which was visited in person by Queen Catherine of Aragon as late as 1532. Both were dissolved in the late 1530s, after which the location of the Shrine of Our Lady was lost to local memory, and has only been re-identified in recent years.

The St James' Way is a long-distance walk of 68.5 miles running from Reading Abbey south to Southampton, and part of the Camino Inglés, the network of pilgrimage trails that run as far north in England as Durham to Santiago de Compostela in Galicia, where St James is buried. This route will soon be marked with the scallop shell, symbol of the pilgrims to Santiago, and a yellow arrow to point you in the right Camino.

Make the most of your visit to Reading to discover its pilgrimage heritage on both sides of the Thames.



Pilgrimage Sites

- 1 St James' Church
- 2 Reading Abbey Ruins
- 3 Modern Shrine, Roman Catholic Church of Our Lady and St Anne
- 4 St Anne's Well
- 5 St Peter's Church and Caversham Court Gardens
- 6 St Anne's Chapel
- 7 De Montfort Island (now Fry's Island)
- 8 Greyfriars
- 9 St Laurence's Church
- 10 Hospitium
- 11 Forbury Gardens
- 12 Abbey Gateway
- 13 Reading Museum

Hotels

- 1 Crown Plaza Reading
- 2 Great Expectations
- 3 House of Fisher 100 Kings Road (serviced accom)
- 4 ibis Reading Centre
- 5 ibis Styles Reading Centre
- 6 Malmaison Reading
- 7 Market House Reading
- 8 Mercure George Hotel Reading
- 9 Novotel Reading Centre
- 10 Pentahotel
- 11 Premier Inn Reading Central
- 12 The Roseate Reading
- 13 Travelodge Reading Central

Key

- Car Park with Disabled Spaces
- Public Toilet
- Taxi Rank
- NHS Reading Walk-In Health Centre

Attractions

- 1 Caversham Boat Services
- 2 Grosvenor Casino Reading
- 3 Reading Biscuit Factory Cinema
- 4 Reading Museum
- 5 Thames Lido
- 6 Thames Rivercruise Reading
- 7 Vue Cinema



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Where to get your pilgrim passport stamped in Reading

The pilgrim passport documents your journey by collecting stamps (sellos) from the places that you pass through during your pilgrimage. It can be obtained from the Confraternity of Saint James.

Pilgrims who wish to start their pilgrimage in Reading can collect pilgrim stamps in the following Reading locations:

- St James' Church (call 0118 957 4171 to arrange)
- Reading Museum (Tuesday - Saturday only)
- Some Reading hotels, cafés, pubs... that display the scallop shell symbol of the Camino Inglés to Santiago on their premises

The stamps that you obtain in Reading, along the rest of Saint James' Way and in the Camino Inglés in Galicia serve as a record of your camino. The passport is what you present at Santiago Pilgrims' Office to prove that you have undertaken the minimum distance to qualify you for the 'Compostela', the ultimate pilgrim recognition of having completed the Camino de Santiago!

