

FRIENDS OF READING ABBEY

BRIAN KEMP MEMORIAL LECTURE

Saturday 29 March 2025 2.30
pm

St James' RC Church, Forbury Road, RG1 3FD

**Medicine for the Monks: Medieval
Monastic Infirmaries, Healthcare,
and Reading Abbey**

Dr. Ruth Salter



This talk will focus on healthcare within the medieval monastery, with particular attention to English communities in the high Middle Ages. Would all who were sick have been sent to the infirmary and what such spaces were like? What forms of therapeutic care and medicine may have been on offer in these monastic houses, and what level of medical knowledge was available to these communities and to the 'average monk'?

Special attention will be given to Reading Abbey and what we may be able to learn about the now-lost infirmary, its function and possibly its positioning and appearance.

The miracles attributed to St James at Reading, carefully translated by the late Brian Kemp, will also offer insight into broader understanding of healing w 'earthly' and miraculous medicines were both part

Ruth is a lecturer in medieval history in the Department of History at the University of Reading. She is also a member of the Graduate Centre for Medieval Studies (GCMS) and the Centre for Health Humanities (CHH), both also at Reading. Ruth has published on medieval health and healing and has a particular interest in accounts of healing miracles. Her first book *Saints, Cure-Seekers and Miraculous Healing in Twelfth-Century England* was published by York Medieval Press in 2021,

with the paperback being published in 2024. She is currently working on a research project with a team of archaeologists at Reading and the British Museum to explore 'The Medieval Ritual Landscape: Archaeology, Material Culture and Lived Religion'.

St James's RC Church is next to Reading Gaol, in the Abbey Precinct. It will be open from 2.00pm. Free entry, with a voluntary retiring collection.