

**Reading Abbey Revealed  
Conservation Plan**  
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## **Historical Timeline for Reading's Abbey Quarter**

- 870-71 Viking army encampment - first record of Reading as a Royal town
- 1086 Royal borough recorded around the Saxon Minster Church of St Mary
- 1121 Reading Abbey founded by Henry I, endowed with land across Britain and religious relics chiefly the hand of St James the apostle
- 1136 Henry I buried in front of the High Altar
- 1164 Abbey church consecrated by Archbishop Thomas Becket in the presence of Henry II
- 1185 Henry II receives Heraclius, patriarch of Jerusalem at the Abbey
- 1240c '*Sumer is icumen in*' earliest known English round written down
- 1254 Royal charter given to town
- 1359 marriage of John Gaunt and Blanche of Lancaster at the Abbey. Their son was Henry IV, first Lancastrian King of England
- 1453 Parliament newly summoned to meet at Reading by Henry VI
- 1464 Edward IV publicly announces Elizabeth Woodville as his Queen after they secretly marry
- 1485 Grammar School established by Henry VII in the Refectory of the Hospitium
- 1539 Dissolution of Abbey by Henry VIII - execution of the last Abbot, Hugh Cook Faringdon, for treason
- 1557 St Laurence churchyard created
- 1560 Charter from Elizabeth I, a frequent visitor to Reading staying in her royal residence within the former Abbot's Lodgings
- 1578 Town Hall moves into the Refectory of the Hospitium, in a chamber above the school
- 1643 Siege of Reading - earthwork defences built around Reading
- 1688 'The Reading Fight' - troops of James II and William III clash in town's streets, the only blood-shed of the Glorious Revolution
- 1720 A mob led by Mayor Robert Blake (Blake's Cottages commemorates his wharf) destroys canal works on the Kennet Navigation, fearing loss of trade
- 1776 first antiquarian survey of Abbey Ruins
- 1785 Jane Austen and her sister Cassandra attend school in Abbey Gateway
- 1786 Georgian Town Hall opens
- 1791 St Laurence's churchyard enlarged
- 1793 County Gaol opens in the Forbury
- 1804 Simeon Monument designed by John Soane, a native of Reading
- 1810 Kennet & Avon Canal opens
- 1833 Abbey South Transept and Chapter House purchased by public subscription
- 1837 Sutton's Seeds opens their premises in Market Place
- 1837-40 St James Roman Catholic church designed by A.W.N. Pugin
- 1840 Brunel's Great Western Railway arrives in Reading
- 1841 Huntley & Palmers, world's biggest biscuit factory opens
- 1856 Public Pleasure Gardens laid out in the east part of the Forbury
- 1861-62 Sir George Gilbert Scott restores the inner Abbey Gateway after its collapse
- 1875 Town Hall designed by local resident Alfred Waterhouse
- 1883 Reading Museum opens to the public
- 1886 Maiwand Lion memorial unveiled
- 1897 Oscar Wilde leaves Reading Gaol
- 1911 Berkshire's Shire Hall opens
- 1915 Abbey becomes a Scheduled Ancient Monument
- 1932 World War Memorial unveiled
- 1943 Air raid damages Town Hall and St Laurence's church, killing 41 people
- 1962 Sutton's Seeds vacate town centre site and Prudential develop offices on the site
- 2003 Prudential offices demolished and Forbury Square created
- 2006 Forbury Gardens restored with HLF support
- 2007 Simeon Monument and Market Place restored
- 2013 Reading Prison closes

## **1.0 Executive Summary**

This Conservation Plan was commissioned by Reading Borough Council to accompany a Second Round Heritage Grant application to the Heritage Lottery Fund. The document provides a description of the ruins of Reading Abbey and the Abbey Gate. The heritage asset is placed within a local and wider regional/national context through a statement of significance. The document also discusses the vulnerabilities and opportunities of the heritage asset and sets out policies to ensure that the significance of the Reading Abbey is maintained.

Reading Abbey is a site of local, regional, national and international significance. This is recognised in the level of heritage protection for the site which reflects its considerable historical importance.

The project focuses on the remains of Reading Abbey, within the context of Reading's Abbey Quarter, the former Abbey precinct and the historic heart of Berkshire's county town. At the project's core are the substantial standing ruins of Reading Abbey and the Abbey's intact inner gate, both Grade I listed buildings standing within a Scheduled Ancient Monument. The project will undertake urgently required conservation, repair and stabilisation works to the Ruins and the Gate in order to protect these iconic links to Reading's history. The work will result in a radical improvement to their condition and enable the reopening of these significant structures to be enjoyed and explored. Working with communities, we will develop new interpretation, activities and learning opportunities for people of all ages; revealing the hidden history of Reading Abbey and the prominent role that Reading has played across 1000 years of English history.

Policies for the conservation of Reading Abbey have been developed that will ensure that the significance of the building is preserved.

## 2.0 Introduction

The plan focuses on understanding the heritage significance of Reading Abbey and consideration of how best to approach future management, use and care of these heritage assets. The Plan has been written in line with HLF Conservation Plan Guidance (2012).

### Contributors

Those involved with this Conservation Plan are:

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### Participation and consultation

Reading Borough Council (RBC) has consulted on its approach to the Abbey Quarter following the closure of the Abbey Ruins to the public in summer 2009 due to the safety risk of falling stones. A Project Board was established to oversee the fundraising and conservation process for the ruins. The Board includes representatives from all political parties in RBC – Historic England and the Friends of Reading Abbey.

### Scope

This conservation plan has been developed from the outline conservation statement written to accompany the Round 1 Heritage Lottery Fund application. Its purpose is to define the Abbey Quarter in Reading, which is centred on the site of the former Benedictine Abbey and its significant heritage features. The vision for the Abbey Quarter is to conserve and enhance an historic environment of national significance. Initially this will be focused on the conservation and presentation of the surviving standing ruins of the Abbey – south transept, chapter house, dormitory and Reredorter – and the inner Gate as restored by Sir George Gilbert Scott. The Abbey Quarter vision will transform the approach to interpretation and public engagement within this historic part of Reading. Implementing this vision has been identified as a high priority in Reading Borough Council's Heritage Statement, December 2013.

The Plan describes the rationale behind the conservation project and its associated activities; the understanding of the significance of the buildings and monuments within the Quarter and the approach to the ongoing management and maintenance of the buildings and monuments. Reference is made to the Conservation Plan Guidance, October 2012, provided by the Heritage Lottery Fund and the plan follows the recommended format.

### Other planning work

An Interpretation Plan and an Activity Plan have been developed by specialists.

## Limitations

The Conservation Plan is not intended to be a complete history of the site but provides only sufficient background information, or references to where such information can be found, to set the context for the site in physical, historic and social terms and to enable decisions to be made on the implications of change.

## Other documents

Reference is made to the Stage D Report covering the condition survey of the Ruins, trial repairs carried out on them, on-going stone loss monitoring and repair proposals and the condition survey, repair and alterations proposal for the Abbey Gate.

## Reading Abbey Revealed HLF project vision and project aims

The vision of the HLF project is to enhance the Abbey Quarter's strong sense of historic identity and create a unique heritage destination for residents and visitors. It underpins a step change in the approach to conservation, interpretation and public engagement in the heart of Reading.

The aims of the HLF project are to conserve the Abbey Ruins, restore the Abbey Gate and enhance pedestrian routes to and through the site as part of establishing the Abbey Quarter. A further objective is to actively create opportunities for communities to participate in and learn about their heritage.

### 3.0 Understanding the Heritage

#### 3.1 Description of the heritage (see Plan at appendix A)

The site currently contains a wide spectrum of uses, representing a significant portion of the historic town centre of Reading. The surviving standing ruins of the Abbey buildings occupy a slice through the middle of the site starting at the south end with the remains of the Reredorter fronting the river on Chestnut Walk and working northwards with the site of the Dormitory buildings forming an enclosed grassed public park area. To the west of this, outside the ownership of Reading Borough Council, is the surviving wall of the Refectory. The Chapter House and South Transept ruins stand more austere in a gravelled area and the visible ruins peter out with fragments of the North Transept in amongst the Presbytery and School attached to St James Roman Catholic Church, also not in RBC ownership. In Forbury Gardens themselves, there is a significant amount of carved facing stonework from the Abbey build into the access archway, the boundary walls and the park shelter. The church, presbytery and school are Victorian buildings forming a family of flint-faced ecclesiastical design. To the east of this is the Prison where the ornate early Victorian 'Tudor' style cross-block is enclosed within a high modern security wall. This has recently closed (December 2013) and now provides a further exciting opportunity to enhance the site (see RBC Outline Development Framework, The Site of Reading Prison, March 2015).

Chestnut Walk is a tree-lined avenue running between the prison wall and a quay for narrow boats on the River Kennet (where it is part of the Kennet & Avon Canal). It has railings and street furniture designed on an Oscar Wilde theme and forms part of a well-used pedestrian route eastwards along the river. On the opposite bank of the Kennet there is a well-preserved terrace of early Victorian houses which have been included in the Abbey Quarter on account of their contribution to the river frontage.

The area to the west of the 'Abbey ruins slice' is divided either side of Abbot's Walk and The Forbury which run westwards through the middle of the site. On the north side are Forbury Gardens including Forbury Hill, St Laurence's church and churchyard, the former Abbey Hospitium and the Victorian Civic Buildings including the Museum which holds original stone sculpture from the Abbey within a dedicated exhibition. On the south of this east west axis is a varied collection of prominent modern commercial developments including The Blade whose site includes the single standing arch of the former Abbey Mill, the Abbey Gate, the Victorian Assize Court (now Crown Court), the Edwardian former Shire Hall (Berkshire County Council, now the Forbury Hotel), the medieval-planned Market Place with the Simeon Monument designed by Sir John Soane and other listed buildings. Amongst the group of late 20<sup>th</sup> century office blocks to the north of St Laurence's churchyard and the Civic Buildings there are some isolated survivors such as Walter Parson's Corn Stores on Forbury Road. Blagrove Street links the Quarter to the Railway Station complex and has several buildings with retained Victorian facades.

#### 3.2 History

The Abbey Quarter includes the area of the original Abbey precincts and a representative segment of the medieval town. Its history divides naturally into a series of periods relating to the changing relationship between the Abbey and the town.

1. Reading before the Abbey		870 - 1121
2. The Abbey period	– power and wealth	1121 - 1539
3. Post Dissolution	– royal ownership and asset stripping	1539 - 1661
4. The Abbey site	– private ownership and fragmentation	1661 - 1833
5. The Abbey site	– Victorian industry and civic pride	1833 - 1915
6. The Abbey site	– modern times, statutory protection & conservation	1915 -

## 1. Reading before the Abbey 870 – 1121

Reading is first documented in 870 by the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle when the Danish Viking army overwintered here. Asser's *The Life of King Alfred* records that the Danes built a rampart between the rivers Thames and Kennet 'on the right side of the royal vill'. This is likely to have been located on the low gravel ridge that later became the precinct of Reading Abbey that defines the Abbey Quarter.

The Saxon settlement (Asser's royal vill) was located on the River Kennet at the inter-section of two important roads, the east west London to Bath road and the north south route between Oxford and Winchester. A small town grew around St Mary's church some distance to the west of our site and was given 'borough' status, i.e. a degree of self-government, at some point during the 11<sup>th</sup> century before the Norman Conquest. Our site therefore lay relatively undeveloped on the eastern edge of the Saxon town.

## 2. The Abbey period – power and wealth 1121 – 1539

'Henry I built this monastery between the rivers Kennet and Thames, in a spot calculated for the reception of almost all who might have occasion to travel to the more populous cities of England, where he placed monks of the Cluniac order, who are at this day a noble pattern of holiness and an example of unwearied and delightful hospitality'. *William Malmesbury, 12<sup>th</sup> century chronicler*

Though the town itself is centuries older, the first recorded activity on this site is the founding of the Abbey by King Henry I, the youngest son of King William 'the Conqueror', as both a memorial to his only legitimate son and as his own burial place. It was founded as a Benedictine house on the Cluniac model. Its convenient location in the centre of southern England, with easy access by road and river, and its close proximity to London, made it a favourite stopping place for kings. As a royal foundation it received considerable patronage, making it among the ten wealthiest Benedictine houses in England. Its relics, including the hand of St James the Apostle, also made it a major centre of European pilgrimage. The Abbey was regularly the focus of national events bringing prestige and business to Reading. The town developed as a cloth-making centre and enjoyed the benefit of unrestricted trade at numerous annual fairs held by Royal grant in the Abbey's outer court – the Forbury.

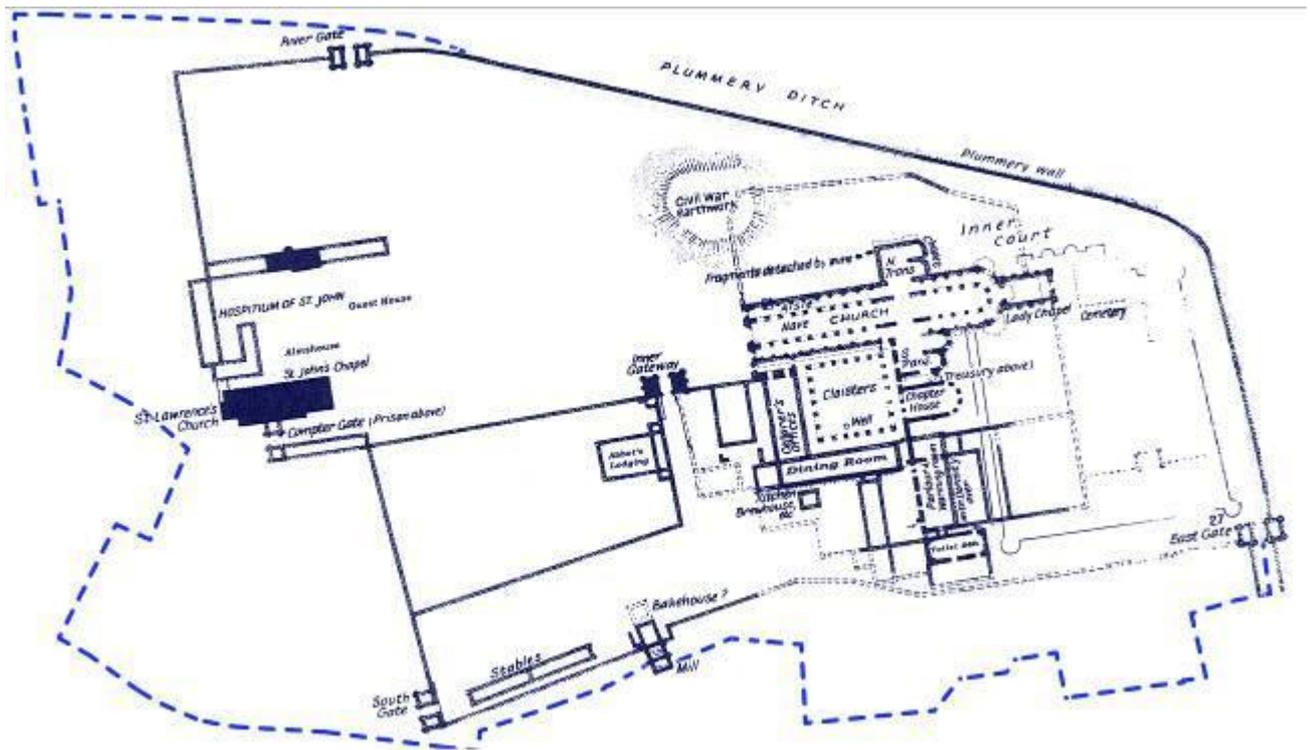
The Abbey church was built over a period of 43 years between its foundation in 1121 and its consecration in 1164 and would have physically dominated the relatively primitive buildings of the adjacent town. The occasionally fractious relationship between the Abbey and its subject town was formalised in an agreement in 1254 and a Royal Charter in 1487 which enabled both to coexist and prosper. During the latter part of this period some significant aspects of the life of the Abbey changed. The number of visiting pilgrims declined leading to the disuse of the Hospitium and, in the face of hard economic times, the Abbey's alms-houses, various chapels and bridges in the town were neglected and the Leper Hospital was closed down. The Abbey itself came to an abrupt end when it was dissolved by Henry VIII in 1539 and the Abbot, Hugh Cook Faringdon, was publicly executed.

The layout of the site was recorded in modern times by the pioneering amateur historian Dr. Jamieson Hurry whose plan of 1896 superimposed the medieval layout on the contemporary street plan (see appendix C). Subsequent refinements to this plan informed by archaeological investigations inspired the creation of the site model housed in Reading Museum. In the following description, buildings which still exist in whole or part above ground are in *italics*. More survives below ground, especially within the area defined as a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

We see the classic layout of a substantial Cluniac monastery comprising a large cruciform church (*south transept*) with a Cloister Square on its south side around which are arranged a *Chapter House*, *Dormitory*, *Reredorter*, *Refectory* and other accommodation. Detached from the principal complex are the Abbot's lodging, Kitchen, Infirmary, *Mill*, wharf and other utilitarian buildings. A Leper Hospital was sited a mile to the east along the London Road at Cemetery Junction on the medieval Borough boundary. The whole is enclosed within a protective wall with gates located at four key points. The site is internally divided across its east-west axis between the more public *outer court* (Forbury) on the north side of the church and the private monastic complex on the south side with access between the two through the *Inner Gate*. The interface between the Abbey and the outside world is represented by the chapel 'ante portas' (*St Laurence's church*), the Guest House (*Hospitium dormitory*) where visitors and pilgrims were received, and the Alms-house. The adjacent west or Compter Gate was the focus of the giving out of alms.

We can imagine that throughout this period there would have been regular construction activity within the Abbey area, both on the repair of existing buildings and on new projects such as the building of the Lady Chapel in 1314. Meanwhile the town had gradually expanded to fill the space between it and the western boundary of the Abbey. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century the Abbey created a new commercial centre for the town by laying out several new planned streets (today's Broad Street and Friar Street). These were designed to draw trade away from the old market at St Mary's Butts towards the Abbey's new Market Place, located immediately outside the west or Compter Gate.

The Inner Gate was enlarged and embellished during the thirteenth century when the original Norman round arch was enclosed by Early English pointed arches surmounted by steeply pitched head moulds. The distinguishing character of the Gate deriving from this time are the repeated squinch canopies either side of the buttresses which support octagonal turrets at the corners and simply batter back against the buttresses on either side of the archway. These framed a series of twenty four sculpted head stops of which remnants of eight of the medieval originals survive. There is no evidence that the flint work and corbelled parapet which feature in the Gilbert Scott restoration existed on the medieval original, in fact the earliest picture of the Gate shows it being crenelated and having an all ashlar stone frontage. Most of the original plain lancet windows were, over time, replaced with rectangular timber casement or sash windows until they were reinstated in the restoration. The stairs rise within the eastern wing and continue up to the second floor following the line of a narrow band of barrel vaulting between the front and inner arches. This stair had clearly been concealed and was not known about until it was discovered during the initial opening up works in 1860 which preceded the restoration. At some point not long before or after the dissolution, a brick stair tower was built onto the south west corner of the Gate, similar in appearance to one which survives on the north side of the Hospitium. The substantial chamber above the gateway is believed to have been the venue for meetings between the Abbots and the burgesses representing the townspeople.

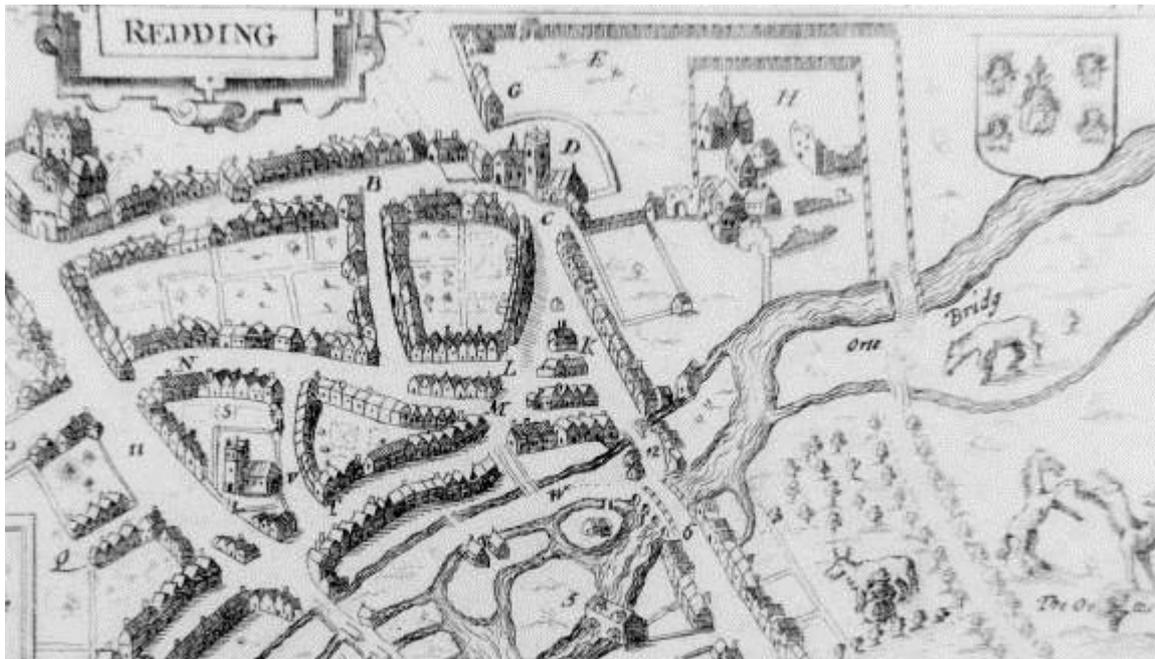


1: Plan of Reading Abbey drawn by Jamieson Hurry in 1896

### 3. Post Dissolution – royal ownership and asset stripping 1539 - 1661

At its dissolution the Abbey came under direct Royal control, all its portable wealth was immediately sequestered by the Crown and monks and lay brothers dismissed. There was no religious interest in the Abbey and its buildings were either used for functional purposes or as a source of building materials. Much of the domestic accommodation including the Abbot's Lodging became a Royal Residence, with the dormitory of the former Guesthouse converted into royal stables. This was maintained as a convenient establishment capable of hosting periodic royal visits. Elizabeth I was a frequent visitor and maintained her own seat in St Laurence's church. The Abbot's administrative control over the town was replaced by a new Royal Charter and some of the Abbey's buildings were also given to the town. The Abbey's chapel at the west gate became the parish church of St Laurence and gained its graveyard in 1557, replacing the town cemetery that had been located to the north of the Abbey church. The established use of the refectory of the Guesthouse or Hospitium as a free school was allowed to continue. This building was later divided to accommodate a new town hall in addition to the school.

The destruction of the Abbey church and monastic buildings took place during several episodes within this period of royal ownership. The first, following the death of Henry VIII, started in 1549. The lead and roof tiles of the Abbey buildings were systematically stripped and sold off. Windows, internal fixtures, floor tiles and some stonework from the cloisters and 'battlements' were similarly disposed of leaving the buildings gutted and roofless. There are then three well-documented deliberate disposals of stonework. St Mary's church was reconstructed using stone (and timber) from the Abbey between 1551 and 1555. There is evidence that it was the stonework of the 14<sup>th</sup> century Lady Chapel which was used for the construction of The Poor Knights Lodging at Windsor Castle in 1554. In the charter of 1560 from Elizabeth I, which provided the town with property including the Town Hall site, stone from the Abbey was made available to rebuild the town's nineteen bridges.



2: Extract from Speed's Map of Reading of 1610, the earliest known map of the town, possibly suggesting that a substantial part of the Abbey church crossing and chancel might still have been standing

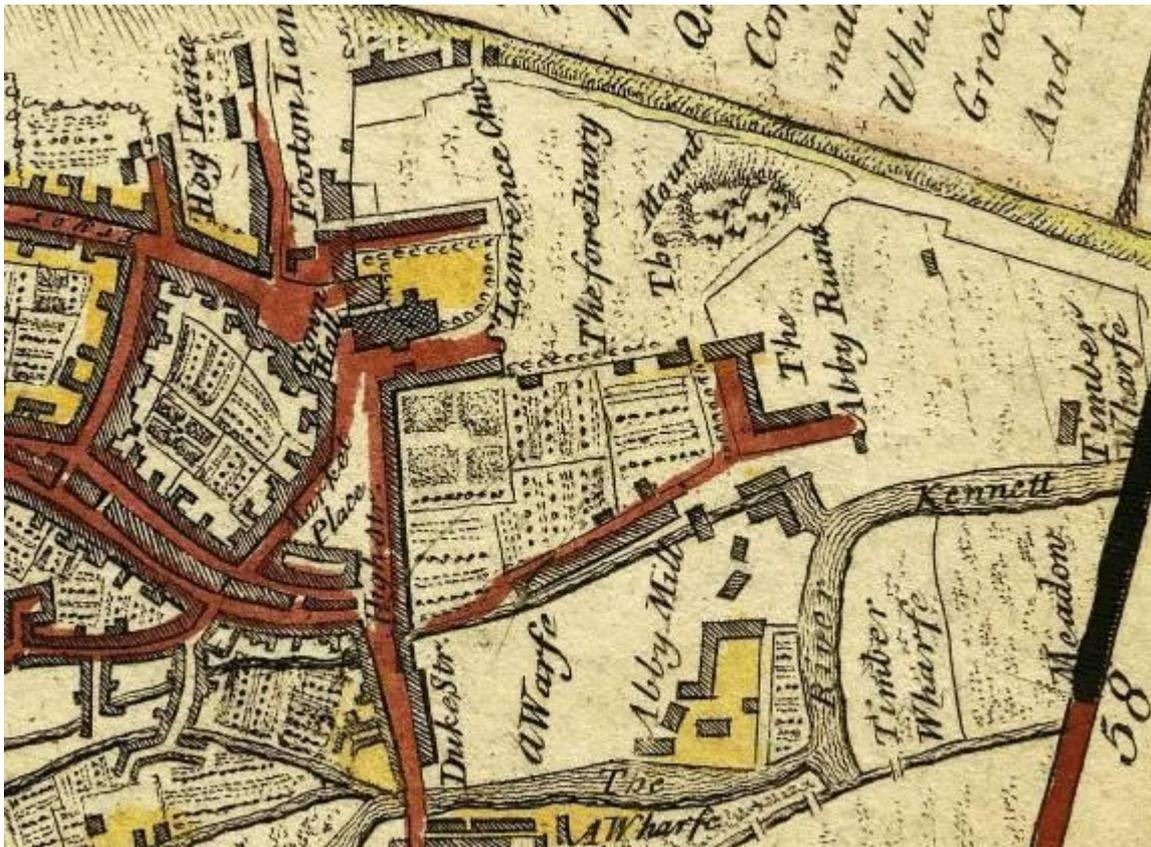
At this point it can be inferred that the roofless church had lost its nave and Lady Chapel but still had substantial remains of the chancel, crossing and transepts. What finally put paid to these was a further destructive episode during the Civil War of 1642-5 in the course of which Reading was besieged (in 1643) and changed hands three times. This involved the repeated building up and demolition of defence works round the Abbey. A ditch and rampart was thrown up right through the nave and cloisters and there is evidence of fortification of the dormitory area. At some point during this period the crossing area was destroyed in an explosion. The diagonally orientated masses of masonry close to St James RC church survive from this event for which there is also buried archaeological evidence. The surviving Forbury Hill in Forbury Gardens, possibly the remains of the castle erected by King Stephen, was incorporated into the Civil War defences as a redoubt. A survey of the site then 'owned' by Parliament was carried out in 1650 in which all the Abbey buildings to the east of the Royal Residence are referred to as ruins '...fit to be demolished, the materials valued at £200' i.e. quite extensive. The period ends in 1661 when the whole site apart from the stables was leased off by Charles II to one Thomas Clarges. The unrest of this period also hastened the decline of Reading's traditional industries of cloth and leather working.

The remarkable thing is that after these two episodes of concentrated destruction the rate at which the remaining ruins disappeared slowed down dramatically. The earliest topographical views of the ruins show that comparatively little was lost during the subsequent 350 years and this is what now makes the site special.

#### 4. The Abbey site – private ownership and fragmentation 1661 - 1833

From the late 17<sup>th</sup> until early 19<sup>th</sup> century the town's economy developed as a local agricultural centre due to the improvement of the London to Bath road and the development of navigable waterways that eventually led to the opening of the Kennet & Avon canal in 1810 (on the southern side of the Quarter).

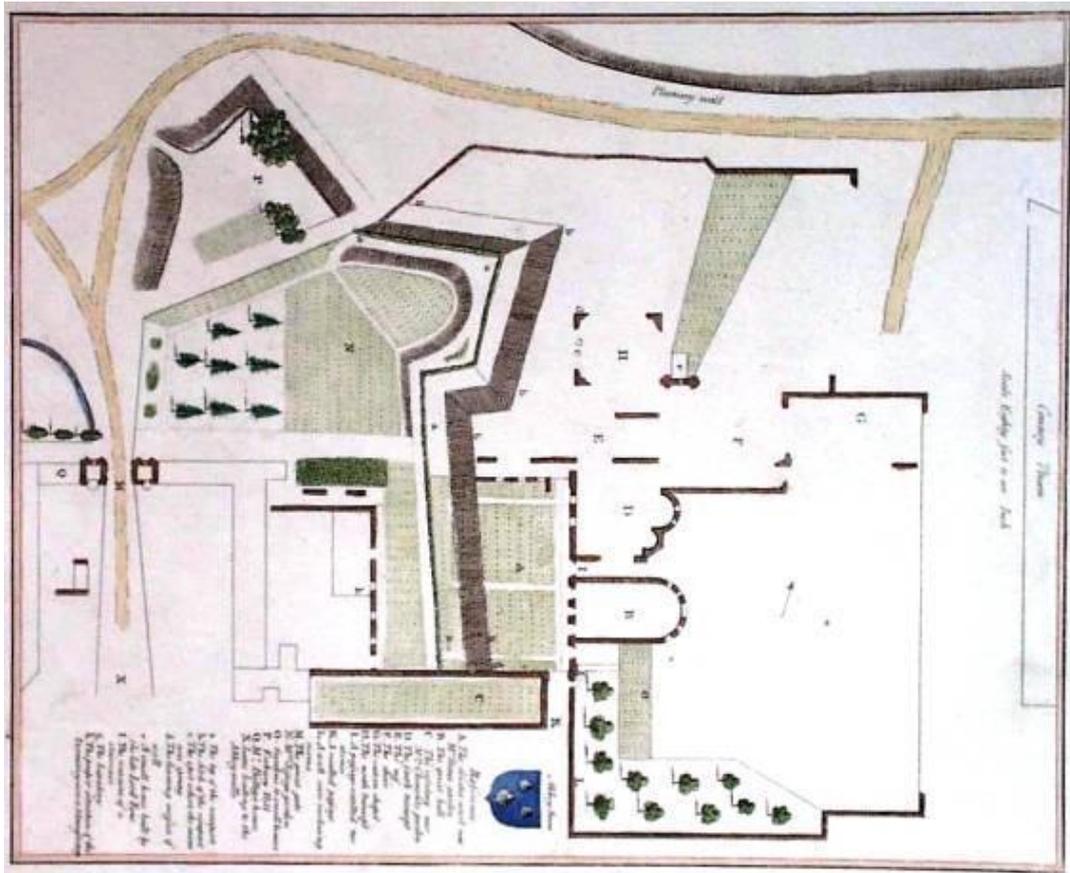
During this period the Market Place continued as one of the key market centres in southern England, and was improved in 1804 by the Simeon Monument. This was designed by Sir John Soane who was born and educated in the town. The opportunities presented by new trade links led to the development of several key industries including brick and tile making, brewing, baking and agricultural seed. In spite of post war town centre redevelopment surviving examples of 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century buildings in and around the Market Place still contribute to the Quarter's character.



3: Extract of map by Roque of 1761 which, apart from identifying the site, ignores the Abbey ruins

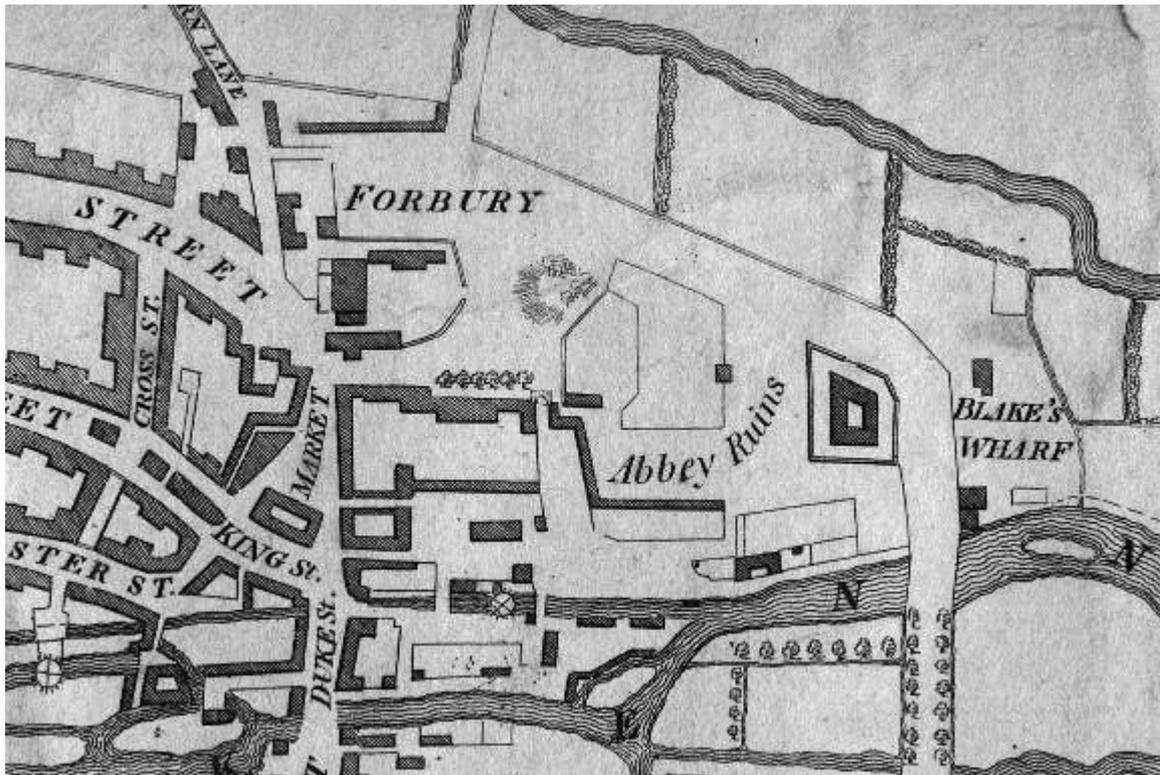
The Forbury continued as an informal open space. The regular involvement of the town in the Abbey's fairs held in the Forbury established historic rights over this area and the town had gradually extended its rights of use for markets, fairs and other public events. In other words, despite the fact that this open area was held on long leases by various families - Clarges, then from 1723 Blagraves and Dalbys and from 1780 Blagraves and Vansittarts - it was effectively a relatively unrestricted public open space. It seems to have become an uncomfortable compromise between a pleasant amenity for the houses which grew up overlooking it around its south and west edges and a general free-for-all site for the fairs and the dumping of rubbish. At some point the former royal residence based around the original Abbot's lodgings was replaced by contemporary houses. While the development of the prospering town densely packed the areas immediately to the south and west, the site of the former Abbey remained a lightly built up residential suburb containing the ruins of the Abbey and the locally recognised amenity and vantage point of Forbury Hill. The Forbury (road) was the centre of a respectable neighbourhood, home to medical practitioners, artists and various educational establishments. One of these was a school based in the house adjacent to and incorporating at least part of the Inner Gate. The school had been founded in 1755 as the Reading Ladies Boarding School and is remembered because it was attended by Jane Austen and her sister Cassandra from 1785 to 1786. It continued until 1794 when it went bankrupt. Contemporary views and maps show an enclosed walled garden and a semi-circular green defined by a ditch projecting out over what is now Forbury Gardens separating the row of houses and their genteel inhabitants from the rougher open area of the Forbury. (see illustration 6).

General indifference to the surviving ruins meant that further loss of fabric only occurred for specific reasons such as the construction of the County Gaol between 1785 and 1793 which effectively boxed in the area to the east. The standing ruins were so massive that, instead of being demolished, they tended to be incorporated into new structures such as the cottage built against the remnants of the North Transept, and Abbey Wall cottages built against the south face of the Refectory. A school for National Education for 300 children, set up by public subscription in 1812, was actually built within the Chapter House using its walls to support the roof.



4: Survey of the Abbey ruins by Francis Englefield, descendant of Mary I's keeper, 1776. Most of these walls have survived (plan orientated with north to the top of the page to match other illustrations)

Interest in the ruins of the Abbey grew in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and a succession of topographical artists published engravings of them. A more objective study of the Abbey ruins was published in 1776 by Sir Francis Englefield (descendant of Mary I's keeper of the Abbey). With some notable exceptions such as some blind arcading to be seen within the Refectory, most of the walls he recorded still exist. Running parallel with the rise in the status of the ruins to objects of historical and cultural interest was a sea change in the responsibilities of local government, such as the statutory introduction of street paving and lighting in the 1780s. This led to improvements to the public domain across the town including the Forbury neighbourhood.



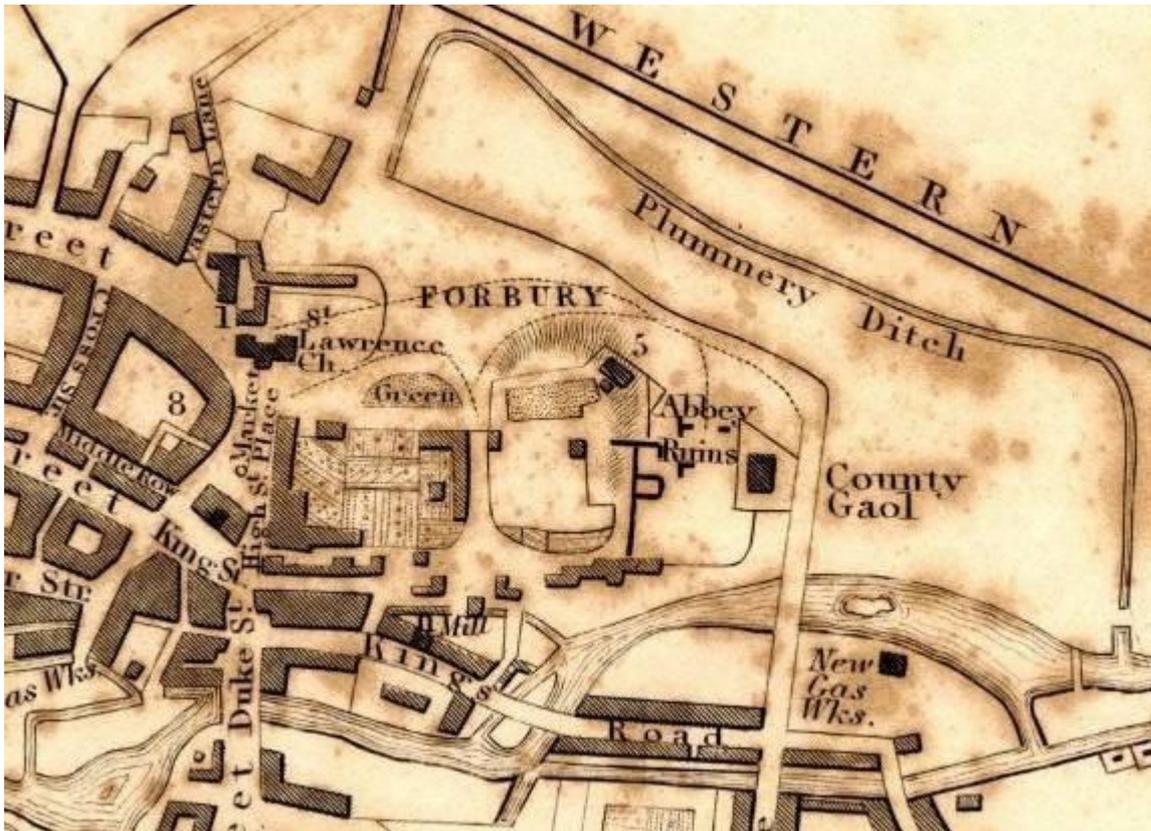
5: Map of Reading by John Man 1798 with the Abbey ruins still only identified by name

## 5. The Abbey site – Victorian industry and civic pride 1833 - 1915

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century Reading was at the forefront of general industrial development. The town was a coaching stop on the London to Bath road and several coaching inns survive from this time in the area of the Market Place. River transport was a crucial factor influencing the site chosen for the Abbey. Opportunities for bulk transport westwards were dramatically improved by the development of the Kennet Navigation followed by the Kennet and Avon Canal at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The river frontage at the south east corner of the Abbey Quarter continued to be useable when it became a backwater off the new canal.

The arrival of the Great Western Railway in 1840, just to the north of the Abbey Quarter, was a major benefit to Reading's emerging industries. Overlooking the tracks the Forbury was suddenly one of the desire lines leading to the Station. Three trades now known as the '3Bs' - beer, bulbs and biscuits - took advantage of this new opportunity to sell to the growing British empire. Beer was brewed by Simonds brewery, who also established a bank (later taken over by Barclays as their former Market Place branch within the Quarter). Bulbs were grown, packed and sold from Sutton's Seeds' Royal Seed Establishment that occupied a prominent site within the Quarter, now occupied by the Forbury Square development. Finally Huntley & Palmers biscuits started as a small bakery before expanding into the world's biggest cake and biscuit makers by 1900. The factory was located on the eastern edge of the Quarter opposite the County Gaol. The wealth generated by these and other businesses leave their mark today on the Quarter's character, especially in the form of public spaces and a fine collection of Civic buildings by leading architects including Pugin (St James church), Scott (Abbey Gate) and Waterhouse (Town Hall).

The process of protecting the remaining Abbey ruins began in 1833, in the face of a threat by the owner, Mr Vansittart (*sic*), to develop the site. The familiar 'half acre' of the ruins including the South Transept and Chapter House was purchased by public subscription for the townsfolk of Reading and placed under the guardianship of trustees. This was achieved quite independently of the Town Corporation. The National School vacated their Chapter House building which was taken down in 1837.



6: Weller's map of 1840, including the ruins, the new Catholic church of St James (5) and the Great Western Railway

The first public use of the ruins was by the Reading Horticultural Society for its annual show in 1839, a use which continued until 1912. A site to the north of the ruins was provided by its owner, James Wheble, for the new Roman Catholic church of St James designed by Pugin in Romanesque style and built between 1837 and 1840. This ecclesiastical establishment grew southwards, gradually covering the site of the North Transept and the Crossing of the Abbey church with its Presbytery and School.

The same landowner partly donated and partly sold the eastern half of the Forbury, including Forbury Hill to the Corporation in 1854 for the purpose of creating Reading's first public Pleasure Gardens which opened in 1856. The gardens were cut off from the standing Abbey ruins by the site occupied by St James RC Church. The desire to link them together was so strong that the Board of Health, who were responsible for the development of the Gardens, negotiated permission to excavate a way through under the access path to the church. Many carved stones from the Abbey unearthed in the process were artfully incorporated into the arch of the underpass. Additional found stone was used to build the arched shelter at the north east corner of the Gardens.

All this was followed in 1860 by the acquisition from the Blagrave estate of the rather more intensively used western half of the Forbury, though it was a further ten years before it was physically united with the Pleasure Gardens and disruptive events such as visiting fairs and circuses were banished to recently acquire public land at King's Meadows.

The western part of the ruins, including the Abbot's Lodging / Royal Residence site and the cloister site were not saved from development. Having changed hands several times in the 1830s and 40s it was developed as Abbot's Walk extending the Forbury (road) eastwards over what had been the south aisle of the Abbey church for access to a row of twelve substantial houses with gardens which extended back over the site of the cloisters (houses Nos. 12-19 survive).

In 1844 Reading Gaol was rebuilt in Neo-Tudor style. It is one of the earliest designs by Sir George Gilbert Scott. He designed it with his partner William Bonythorn Moffatt. Their outer prison wall with its castellated towers and gatehouse was demolished in 1971, but the original cell wings and central tower remain.

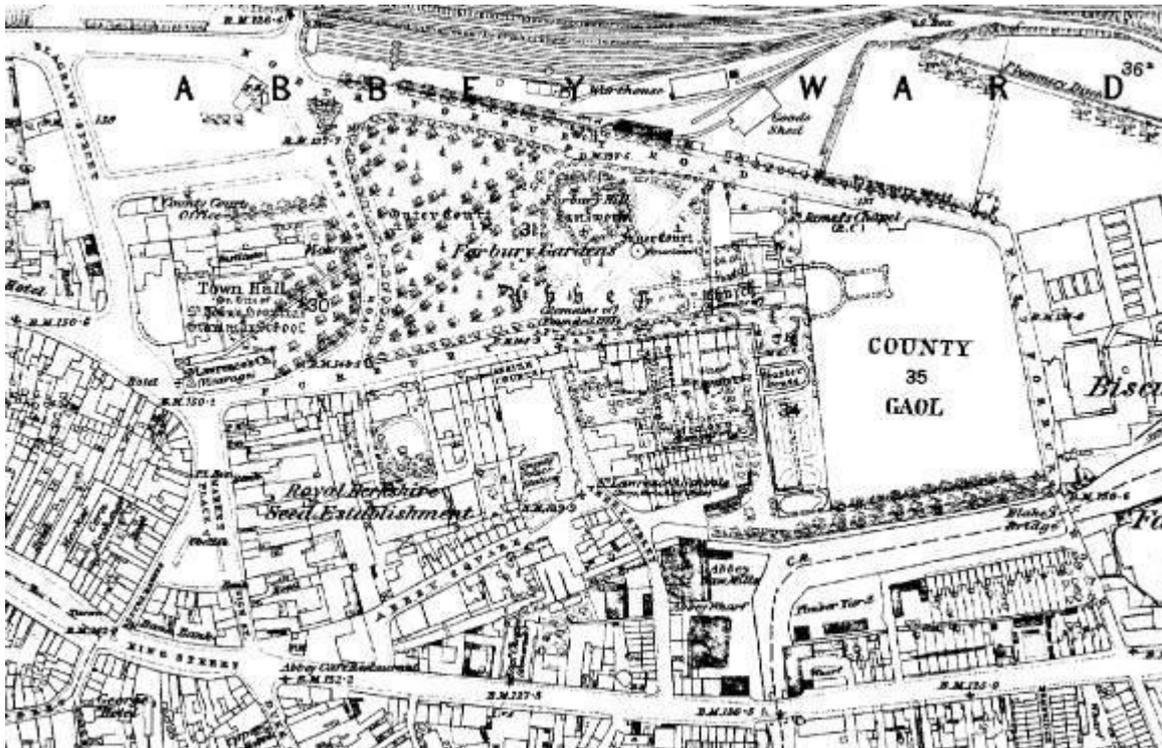
Reading Gaol is famous as the place where Oscar Wilde was imprisoned, in cell 3.3 (which survives in the cell wing), between 1895 and 1897. After he was released, Wilde wrote his famous poem *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* about his experience of the Gaol. However, Wilde already had a long association with Reading through his friendship with the Palmer family, the owners of Huntley & Palmers biscuit company. He was especially close to Walter and Jean Palmer. Walter was the third son of George Palmer, the founding partner of Huntley & Palmers. Jean was a leading society hostess, holding literary parties at Westfield, their Reading home, where Wilde and his wife Constance were regular guests.

One weekend the guests at Westfield included George Meredith, another noted wit, and Louise Jopling the actress. Jopling later wished she had 'a hidden phonograph, to keep indelible records of all the brilliant things spoken'. Wilde had just finished his play *A Woman of No Importance* and gave his first public reading of the final act: 'They had all been moved to tears, when Oscar, in his most impressive manner said, "I took that situation from *The Family Herald!*"...he loved descending from the sublime to the ridiculous'. This may have been the same weekend that the party visited the biscuit factory and all signed the visitor's book that is now in Reading Museum's collection.

The ownership of the Abbey Gate (Inner Gate) was split either side of the archway but both parts were sold to the Corporation during the 1850s just in time for the collapse of the archway vault and its subsequent comprehensive reconstructive restoration by Gilbert Scott in 1861. His work is considered to be a faithful reconstruction of the exterior as it appeared in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, though the interior is unexceptional with few features and has been much adapted since. In 1859-61 the new county assize courts (now the Crown Court) were built immediately to the west of the gate facing the Forbury Gardens.

After its restoration the Abbey Gate took on more of a community role. The corporation began letting it out to local groups and societies in order to make money back on their investment. In March 1862 the Rifle Volunteers (Reading Rifles) became the first tenants, using the hall above the Abbey Gate as a meeting hall. In 1867 it was converted into a community gymnasium offering facilities for recreation to encourage public fitness; however in 1885 it was decided that the free standing apparatus was unsatisfactory and the gymnasium was moved. The most significant group to have tenanted the Gate was the Berkshire Archaeological Society which began using it in 1889 and was in occupation until 1915. They used the gate rent free under the condition that they opened the gate to the public, created a collection of artefacts from the Abbey and offered guided tours of the Abbey ruins. During this time there was continuous maintenance and repair of the building. The society opened a museum on the ground floor of the Abbey Gate in 1902 displaying artefacts from the Abbey.

The last available area of the ruins, the Dormitory and Reredorter including the river frontage running eastwards as far as Blake's Bridge, was purchased for the town, once again by public subscription, in 1859. The Hospitium dormitory was vacated by the Grammar School in 1871 and the building was subsequently rescued for the town by the then mayor Arthur Hill (the half-brother of Octavia Hill, founder of the National Trust) and put to use as the Junior Library. It was sensitively restored in the 1890s and became the University Extension College. In 1908 it narrowly escaped demolition to make way for an extension of the Civic Buildings, designs for which were modified to accommodate it following intervention by the Berkshire Archaeological Society.



7: Ordnance Survey Map 1879 including the complete footprint of the Abbey church, Forbury Gardens, the Southern Railway terminus and detail of late Victorian Reading's industries

In the course of three decades a dramatic transformation had taken place, bringing a significant area of the Abbey precinct into the public domain. Much of this had previously been open to public use through long-standing access rights and landowners appear to have tolerated all kinds of activities on the unenclosed areas of their property. However, what the formal transfer to public ownership brought was protection of the ruins and active management and maintenance of the sites. By the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the publicly owned areas of Forbury Gardens and the Abbey Ruins were, along with the expansion of the Town Hall-Council Chambers, Concert Hall, Museum, Library, College of Art and Courts, the focus of Reading's civic pride. The enormous Maiwand Lion sculpture of 1886, by George Blackall Simonds, in the Gardens is as much a symbol of this as a memorial to the 329 men of the 66 Berkshire Regiment who died in the Battle of Maiwand in Afghanistan (1880) .

In 1911 Dr Hurry commissioned two stone panels to the first and last Abbots for the Chapter House. In 1913 these were joined by a panel celebrating *Sumer is icumen in*, one of the best-known of English medieval songs that was written down at the Abbey. The 13<sup>th</sup> century manuscript is a highlight of the British Library's collection.

#### 6. The Abbey site – modern times, statutory protection & conservation 1915 -

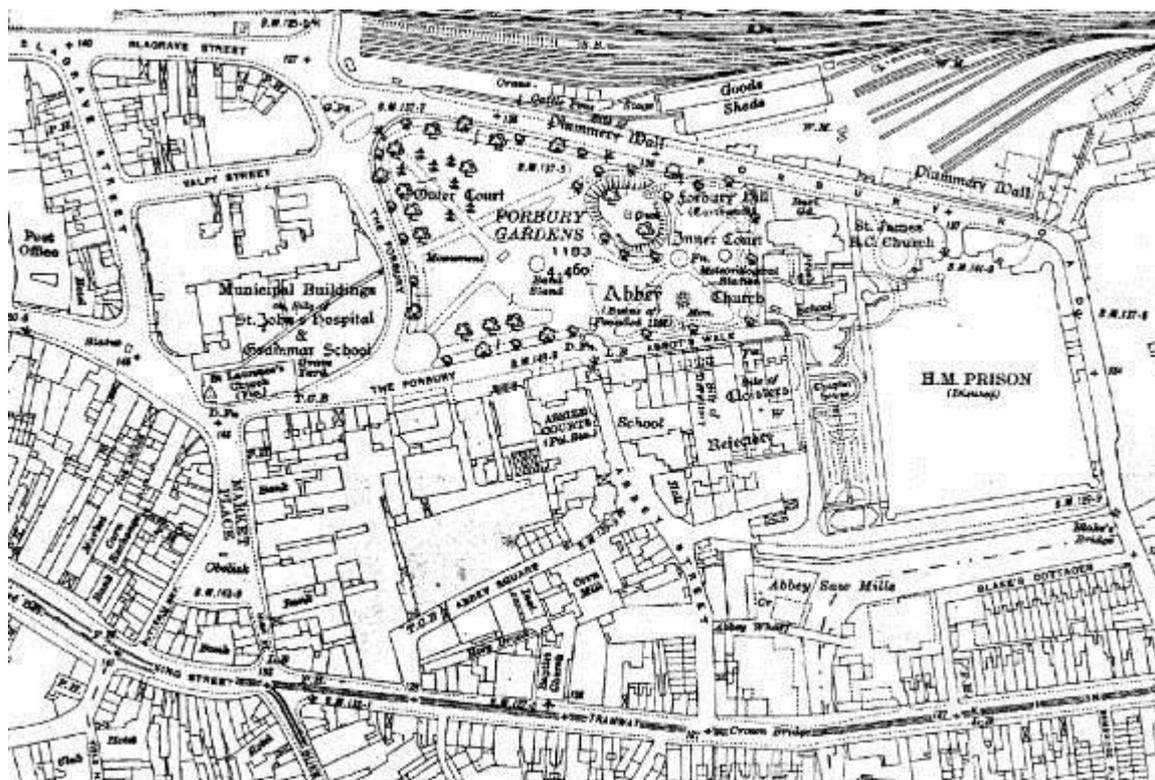
The physical form of the Abbey Quarter was relatively stable through the first half of the twentieth century with the effects of two world wars and their aftermath inevitably bringing about a period of gradual neglect. Two tunnel form air-raid shelters were built in the middle of the Dormitory area of the ruins, an area which in terms of medieval archaeology had already been destructively disturbed during the Civil War when it was part of the town's fortifications. They remain in place under the lawn. The twentieth century is dominated by the rise of local government reflecting the huge growth of the town. This involved both Reading Borough Council and Berkshire County Council which existed as the strategic authority between 1888 and 1998. Plans for a new Civic Centre for the town on The Forbury were hotly debated in the 1930s and effectively sabotaged by the outbreak of the Second World War.

The Abbey Gate continued to be let to local societies until 1937 when it became an art gallery. The hall was refurbished and used to house display cases and exhibit the historical paintings depicting key events in the history of Reading Abbey commissioned by Dr Hurry and presented by him to the Town. During the Second World War the Gate was used to show films promoting air raid precautions and the Reading Spotters Club

(aeroplanes) used the hall as a headquarters. From 1942 to 1953 the west side rooms were leased to Thomas McLachlan, Public Analyst & Official Agricultural Chemist. This is the probable date of the infill of the south west doorway and the lead-lined sink.

After the war the Gate continued to be let out to local societies including the Reading rowing club, farmers club, naturalists club, camera club, radio society and university student association. In 1949 an internal steel fire escape ladder was installed in the west side of the gate. In 1957 the Abbey Gate was given a Grade I listed building status. The escape ladder was replaced by an internal stair linking with the external stone stairway under the archway in 1973 and in 1981 the first floor room on the east side was converted to provide a kitchen and toilets. Up until this time there had been an external toilet in the small yard on the south east corner of the Gate. External repairs were carried out in 1956-8 and in 1980. The road through the gate was finally closed to traffic in 1984, ten years after this was first suggested.

The final tenants of the Abbey Gate were the Reading All Steel Percussion Orchestra (RASPO) who used the Abbey Gate for rehearsals and performances. They were forced to leave the Abbey Gate after it was deemed to unsafe due to its on-going deterioration. In February 2010 the Abbey Gate was closed. After part of one of the high level corbels fell into the pedestrian walkway, protective fencing was erected around the gate and covered scaffolding walkways were constructed within the archway and over the access ramp to the Crown Court next door to protect the public from the risk of further stone loss. Since its closure the Abbey Gate has fallen into further disrepair as a result of water ingress.



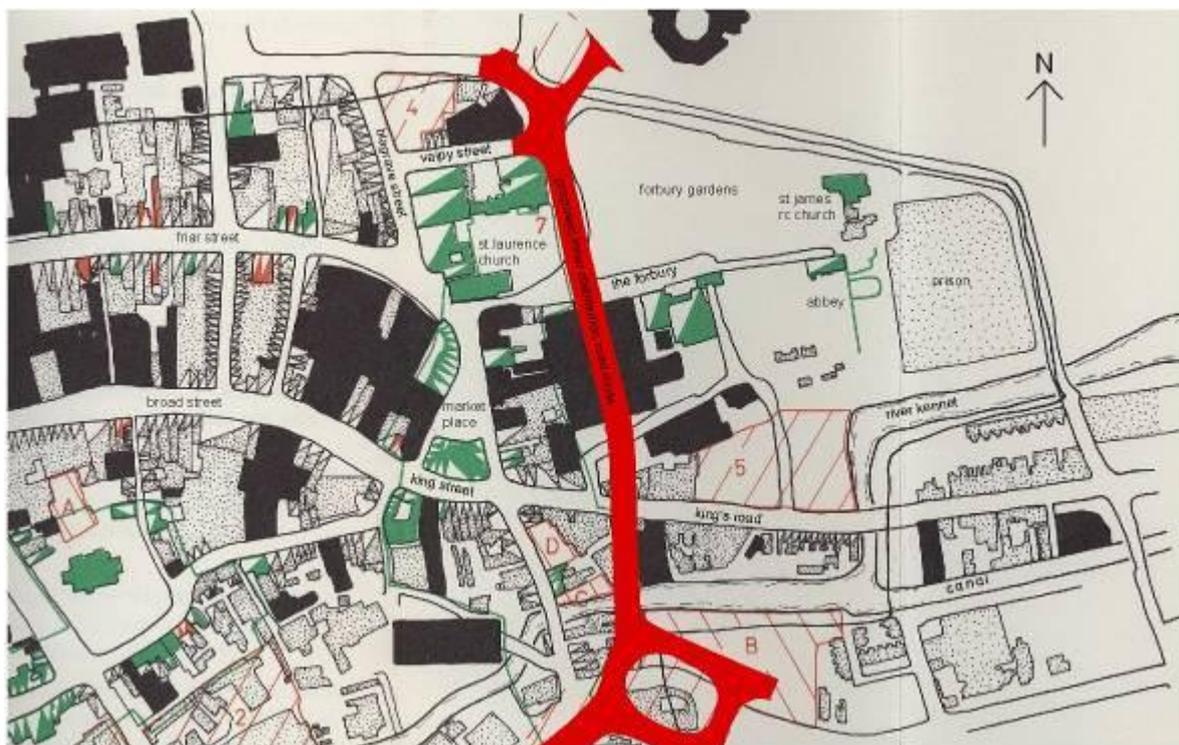
8: Ordnance Survey Map 1931 showing the development of the outer Forbury, completion of the Civic Buildings, expansion of the Suttons Seeds and Huntley & Palmers sites and appearance of Berkshire County Council.

The original Shire Hall (now the Forbury Hotel) built in 1904-11 was rapidly outgrown by the County Council which bought up surrounding buildings including the Abbot's Walk houses and other sites between the Forbury and King's Road as this area declined during the 1950s. Sutton's Seeds which had occupied most of the area between the Market Place and the Abbey sites relocated to Earley in 1962. Sutton's large site in the centre of the Quarter was redeveloped by Prudential Insurance in 1964. Their offices had a large central courtyard that was designed for the proposed inner ring road to pass underneath until this scheme was happily dropped (see below). Soundy's Mill which had over the

centuries grown around the original Abbey Mill closed and was demolished in 1964 (one of the two surviving medieval arched walls over the Holy Brook was saved).

During the 1960s a debate raged over plans for a new Shire Hall in Abbots Walk but in the end it was abandoned in favour of an 'easier' site at Shinfield on the edge of Reading. The development of motor transport on the historic road system brought traffic congestion into the heart of the town. The 1960s also saw a debate over the proposed inner ring road and its route, which was originally planned to follow the western edge of the Forbury and would have involved the relocation of the Maiwand Lion. Following the transfer of the Highways Authority from the Borough to the County in the 1974 Local Government reorganisation, the route was moved to follow Forbury Road, straddling the line of the Plummery Wall (the northern boundary wall of the Abbey precinct) to the north of the Gardens.

Disagreements between the Borough Council and the County continued during the 1980s over the design of the MEPC development which straddled the Holy Brook. The proposals were eventually modified in response to Reading's objections and a major archaeological dig was undertaken, exposing a sequence of water edge retaining structures dating from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century and contributing significantly to the body of archaeologically derived knowledge about the Abbey.



9: Route of phase III of IDR shown in red, taken from Astill G.G. 1978 'Historic towns in Berkshire : an archaeological appraisal'

In the wake of the Ancient Monuments Protection Acts of 1900 and 1910 the Abbey ruins were first listed as a Scheduled Monument in 1915 and since this date there have been periodic efforts to maintain and repair them. Initially it was reactive work to specific episodes of damage or risk such as that caused by the staging of the Reading Pageant of 1920 in the Chapter House, and the removal of an unstable section of the cloister wall in 1952 when the Ancient Monuments branch of the Ministry of Works was involved.

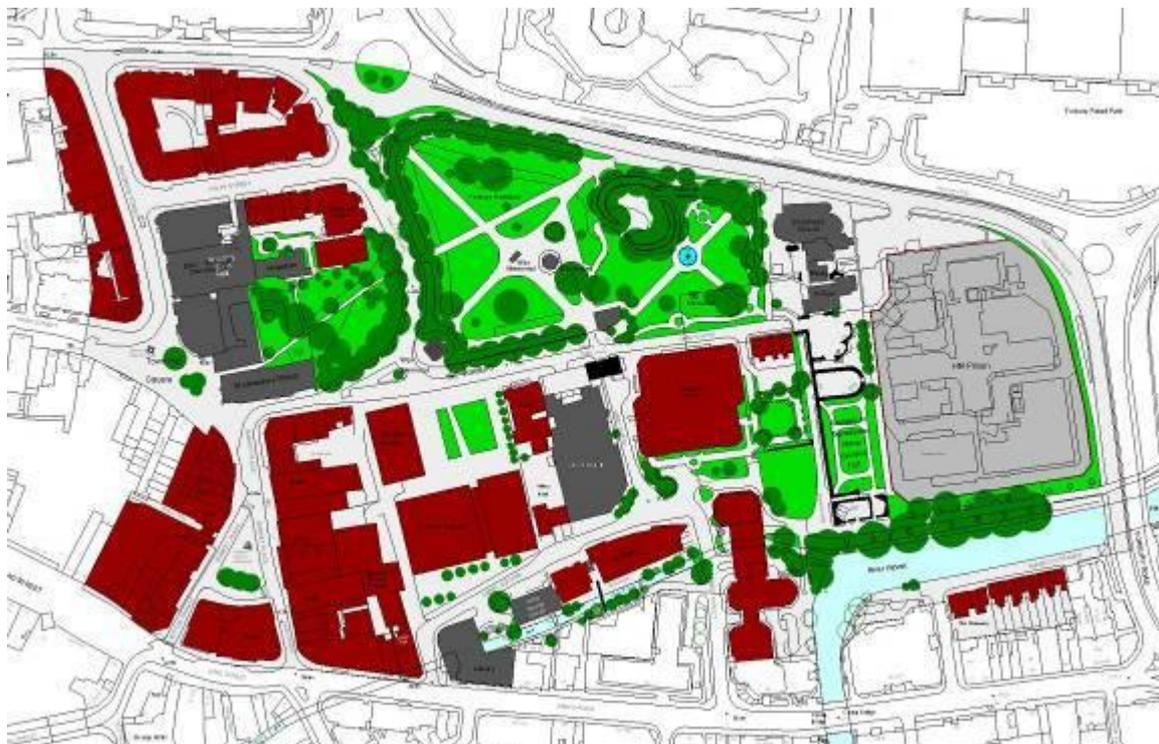
Further protection was given to the ruins when they were Listed under Town and County Planning legislation in 1957. A comprehensive campaign of repairs was undertaken in 1967 followed by regular planned maintenance but this gradually lost momentum and funding. By 1982 deterioration had reached a point where the ruins were closed to the public on safety grounds. Extensive debate and fund-raising resulted in a substantial repair project starting in 1985, the scope of which grew as the condition of the

walls hidden by plant growth became apparent. This work continued until 1991 but had to stop leaving the last section of the Dormitory wall and the Refectory wall unconserved. Once again a programme of annual maintenance was instigated, involving the removal of damaging plant growth, re-pointing and the re-setting of loose flints.

The last significant work carried out was the HLF Parks Programme funded Forbury Gardens restoration project in 2003-5. This funded localised works including the construction of a round-headed stone archway with flint-faced infill above to stabilise the opening at the location of the original doorway between the south aisle and the cloisters, which is on the principle pedestrian path through the Abbey ruins.

In 2005 the ruins were surveyed to identify a programme of inspection and routine maintenance. It was recognised that the previous reactive and piecemeal repairs had unintentionally contributed to the deterioration of the site, and that a more holistic and long-term approach to management was now required. In 2006 Historic England agreed to fund works to inform future conservation, to develop exemplar methodologies for dealing with recurring repair scenarios (thereby simplifying the consent process) and also for the production of a conservation plan. However it became apparent that the level of information available on the condition of the ruins in their entirety was not sufficient to be able to progress confidently and therefore a full condition survey was commissioned from Oxley Conservation in Henley (acting as professional advisor for the Historic England funded works, as required by Historic England terms and conditions). This survey included high-level inspection.

The full report for the condition survey was completed in May 2008 and highlighted a deteriorating condition that posed a risk to the public from falling flints that has since been exacerbated by recent severe winters. The Abbey ruins were once again closed to the public. The nature and causes of on-going erosion damage has been the subject of a number of recent surveys which are contributing to current proposals for longer lasting repairs. In 2011 a detailed graphic condition survey of the ruins based on photogrammetric elevations was undertaken. In 2013 Historic England grant funded a detailed condition survey of the Abbey Gate and, as a result of this, Reading Borough Council then erected a temporary roof over it to arrest water damage being caused by the leaking roof.



10: Abbey Quarter map based on Ordnance Survey 2011

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## Conclusion

The Abbey Quarter bears evidence of the successive layers of its dramatic history. Much of what can be seen today is only there because of the preceding uses of the site. The visible remains of the Abbey show evidence of their original purpose and construction, the part they played in centuries of national history and the convoluted story of their survival. There are ghosts of generations of buildings which have existed and then disappeared but, remarkably, there are representative survivors from almost every chapter in the story of the site.

The story of the site also raises some intriguing questions. For example, when James Wheble sponsored the return of the Catholic Church to Reading in the 1830s by providing it with a site on his property within the former Abbey precinct, the new church was apparently sited with some care at the north end to avoid encroaching on the footprint of the Abbey church. Pugin's design, contrary to his subsequent lifelong allegiance to the Gothic, paid particular homage to its Romanesque architecture. It was only later phases of building on this site which invaded the ruins. It is not inconceivable that they might have considered the possibility of re-building the chancel of the Abbey as the new church, at least until calculating how much that might have cost.

Several buildings such as St James RC church, though comparatively recent, are an echo of the structures and institutions which they replaced. The Crown Court, a public building dispensing justice and punishment, and the former Shire Hall, seat of County government for a hundred years, reflect the proximity of the former Abbot's Lodging and then Royal Residence, the local seat of church and state authority, while the Forbury Gardens as a place of public resort can claim direct descent from the Forbury which hosted the quarterly Abbey fairs in medieval times. The whole complex of Victorian civic buildings grew from the makeshift town hall first squeezed into the refectory of the Hospitium in 1578

In spite of significant post war town centre redevelopment there are surviving examples of 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century street buildings in and around the Market Place. Significant players in Reading's commercial success have left their mark. Sutton's Seeds were based on the site of the new Forbury Square and though they left in 1962, the row of different tree species which line the churchyard opposite bear testament to their past presence in the area.

The redevelopment of the areas to the south and west of Forbury Gardens over the last thirty years has given the Quarter a contemporary commercial core with some new public spaces. The Prudential offices were demolished and replaced in 2003 by the more appropriately-scaled Forbury Square, with a generous public open space connecting with the Forbury Gardens. The 'Blade' is a tall building which dominates the whole town and can be seen as a marker identifying the Abbey Quarter as well as symbolising the revival of Reading's town centre. The best of the new buildings extend a tradition of nationally acknowledged architects leaving their mark on the Abbey Quarter.

In 2013 RBC completed the full refurbishment of Town Hall Square improving this vital pedestrian gateway into the Abbey Quarter from Reading's main shopping areas and the railway station. This scheme improves the setting of the Grade I listed St Laurence's' church and grade II\* Museum and Town Hall. The scheme also repaired and cleaned two Grade II listed structures the statue of Queen Victoria and a drinking fountain that were previously in poor condition. In February 2015 RBC began on a scheme to restore the Grade II listed wall of St Laurence's churchyard through the Local Sustainable Transport Fund. The work was completed in August 2015.

### **3.3 Local context**

The Abbey Quarter is located in the centre of Reading on the eastern side of the main shopping district and south east of Reading train station. It covers an area of 12.85 hectares. This has been the traditional civic and ceremonial heart of the county town of Royal Berkshire since the medieval period. The Abbey Quarter is defined by the medieval streets and rivers that outline the precinct of Reading Abbey. This area contained the substantial buildings and grounds of Reading Abbey over a period of just over 400 years from its foundation by Henry I in 1121 to its dissolution by Henry VIII in 1539. The

Quarter is bounded by the Forbury Road to the north and east, the River Kennet and Holy Brook to the south and the historically significant Victorian Civic Buildings and Market Place to the west.

### **3.4 Wider heritage context**

Reading Abbey was founded in 1121 by King Henry I. The Abbey was one of northern Europe's most prestigious religious and political centres, and one of the ten wealthiest monastic houses in England by the 14th century. Locally its only rival in terms of importance was the abbey at Abingdon of which even less survives than does at Reading. The Abbey changed the shape of Reading, making it the most important town in the Thames Valley. The significance and quality of the surviving fragments of Romanesque carving place it in a European context. Examples of these are displayed in Reading Museum and all the known stones are recorded by The Corpus of Romanesque Sculpture in Britain and Ireland on-line project. The abbey church was the same size as Norwich and Gloucester cathedrals. An idea of what it was actually like can also be experienced at Tewkesbury Abbey whose construction overlapped with that of Reading and was financed from 1105 by one of Henry I's natural sons, Robert Fitzroy. A surviving but smaller example of a Norman barrel vault as existed in the Chapter House can be seen at Ewenny Priory near Bridgend, South Wales.

Within the wider Abbey Quarter there are a wide range of representative examples of historic building types ranging from buildings which were part of the Abbey complex itself including the Inner Gate, the *ante portas* St. Laurence church, the Hospitium and the Mill Arch to examples of work by A.W.N. Pugin, Sir John Soane and Alfred Waterhouse. Forbury Gardens are a recognised example of nineteenth century park design.

### **3.5 How the heritage is looked after**

#### Current Management of the Site

The Abbey Quarter lies within central Reading, and the streets and public spaces (including statues and monuments) are therefore managed by Reading Borough Council (RBC). Specific executive responsibilities for different aspects of the public domain and services offered to residents and businesses are spread across several different departments within the organisation.

Some of the areas designated Scheduled Monuments (Appendix D) are owned and controlled by RBC including Forbury Gardens, the Abbey Gate, the Abbey Ruins and the Abbey Stables archaeology under the Public Library. The St Laurence churchyard is also the responsibility of RBC as a closed cemetery. Other parts of the Scheduled areas are the responsibility of other organisations as follows: The St James RC Church, Presbytery and School site, including significant standing remains of the Abbey church north transept and chancel, belong to the Roman Catholic Diocese of Portsmouth. The Abbey Mill arch is the responsibility of The Blade development. The Abbots Walk houses and public gardens behind them, including the south wall of the Abbey Refectory and the archaeology of the Abbey Wharf, are all privately owned. The prison site which is included in the Scheduled Monument area is currently the responsibility of the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). Following the prison's closure (2013) RBC, Historic England and MoJ estates are working together to explore opportunities to develop the site that both protect and enhance the Abbey Quarter.

The entire Reading Museum & Town Hall civic complex is owned and managed by RBC.

## 4.0 Statement of Significance

### 4.1 Evidential Value

#### Scientific Heritage

An ecology survey was done in July 2015. This revealed that there is no evidence of unusual or rare plant species on the site but that there is potential for bat roosts. In order to investigate this bat emergence surveys are being planned. In the event of bats being present, conservation work on specific areas, such as the deep putlog holes in the Dormitory walls will be restricted

#### Rare or endangered heritage

The ruins of Reading Abbey and the Abbey Gate are currently included on the Historic England Buildings At Risk Register. In the case of the ruins this includes the sections outside Reading Borough Council's ownership – the mill arch, the refectory wall and fragments of the north transept.

### 4.2 Historical Value

#### Historical importance

Reading Abbey was founded in 1121 by King Henry I. It is possible that he was inspired to this great act of piety by the death of his only legitimate male heir, William the Atheling, the previous year in the White Ship disaster. The Abbey was one of northern Europe's most prestigious religious and political centres, and by the 14th century was one of the ten wealthiest monastic houses in England. It changed the shape of Reading, making it the most important town in the Thames Valley. Locally its only rival in terms of importance was the abbey at Abingdon. Throughout its 400 year history as an abbey it was an important site for royal councils, weddings and burials.

#### Archaeological significance

The site contains significant potential for archaeological discoveries and the re-examination of historic excavations many of which were poorly recorded. Little is known about the detailed physical development of the site between the foundation of the Abbey and its dissolution.

#### Value through time

From being one of northern Europe's most prestigious religious and political centres the Abbey was reduced to being a source of building materials sold off to benefit the royal exchequer. The publicly perceived value of the site has gradually increased from the first recording of the ruins in the late eighteenth century, to early nineteenth century romantic descriptions in verse to public outcry at the threat of the demolition of the surviving ruins in 1831 and their purchase for the town by public subscription in 1833.

#### Preservation story

The story of the public acquisition and preservation of the site reflects universal changes in attitude towards historic remains in general and a more universal understanding of the value and importance of history. The site also illustrates the development of changing practices in building conservation.

### 4.3 Aesthetic Value

#### Artistic qualities

The importance of the Romanesque sculpture from Reading Abbey is recognised by the recording and interpretation on The Corpus of Romanesque Sculpture in Britain and Ireland ([www.crsi.ac.uk](http://www.crsi.ac.uk)). The Historic England grade I listing of the Abbey Ruins also refer to the important collection of Romanesque sculpture in Reading Museum collection. There is adequate above ground evidence to see that the ground plan of the abbey church is typical in that the crossing piers are elongated into short sections of wall running east west in order to provide adequate support to the central tower with lantern windows

and belfry spire above. This interrupts the rhythm of the arcading and vaulting but avoids introducing a narrowing of the body of the church at the crossing.

#### **4.4 Communal Value**

##### Contribution to wider environment

The Abbey site is the historic heart of Reading and provides a cultural focus within the town. Many of the current functions on the site, such as St James Catholic Church, the Hospitium (grammar school and town hall), the Law Courts and the Civic Buildings have an almost direct connection with their medieval counterparts. This makes the Abbey Quarter significant within the context of the modern town.

##### Community value

The area is a key source of local pride and identity, and local people are keen that it no longer remains a hidden gem. There is a long history of use of the ruins site by the community from the siting of a school for National Education within the walls of the Chapter House in 1812, the annual Reading Horticultural Society flower show and theatrical productions in the Chapter House to its regular use as a popular corner of Forbury Gardens.

##### Learning and recreation

The Abbey ruins have become a valuable resource for history field work and have been visited by school groups in conjunction with the museum. As a part of Forbury Gardens the ruins have been intensively used by the public.

##### Spiritual significance and commemoration

Among its relics the Abbey possessed the miraculous hand of St James which attracted pilgrims from all over England and Europe and linked it to Santiago di Compostela in north west Spain where the rest of the remains of St James were enshrined. The site's connection with the Saint was revived when the Catholic Church brought an active congregation back to it in 1840. The Abbey's founder Henry I or Henry Beauclerc was commemorated in 1909 with a large stone cross in Forbury Gardens at the location of the north west corner of the nave and again with a tablet within the ruins in 1921, the 800th anniversary of the Abbey's foundation. In 1911 the first and last abbots were commemorated with stone tablets mounted in the Chapter house with a further tablet featuring the words and music of 'Sumer is icumen in' as first written down at Reading in the thirteenth century following in 1913.

##### Specific groups for whom the Abbey has importance

###### Local residents

There are several voluntary groups specifically concerned with the Quarter's heritage including the Friends of Reading Abbey, The Friends of Reading Museum and Reading Civic Society. Recent consultation by Reading Museum revealed that the Abbey/Forbury area summed up 'Reading' for the respondents (this includes the area's Victorian and industrial heritage). This has been confirmed in more in-depth focus groups, with the area consistently being seen as the most important and interesting heritage in Reading. Since the closure of the ruins the Museum and project team have led tours and talks providing access to the site for interested groups, which have been consistently over-subscribed and all received very positive feedback. A public consultation held in January 2014 received 1156 responses and showed overwhelming support for the project, while another 1053 people completed an online questionnaire for the Activity and Interpretation plans.

There has been all-party political support for the protection and enhancement of the area. The Abbey Quarter project board has members from key stakeholder groups including the Friends, business, and Reading's Youth Cabinet.

### Local business

The area and its immediate surroundings have seen an increase in high quality office development, increasing the number of workers using the area's open spaces and facilities. The Quarter is home to a large number of local and national businesses including Reading UK CIC (the economic development company for Reading), The Forbury Hotel, the Institute of Directors regional hub and the HQ of Yell (Yellow Pages). It is also located beside Reading Station the busiest in the south east (16.4m passengers). The local media have also been interested in supporting the area's heritage, for example the leader of the *Reading Post* welcomed the Quarter project bringing 'focus to our many hidden gems. Reading has traditionally not made the most of its rich history which often comes as something as a surprise to visitors. The Abbey Quarter could change all that.'

### Statutory conservation agencies

The Abbey ruins and the Gate are not only formally recognised and protected by being scheduled and listed but on account of their current condition are on the Historic England 'Register of Heritage at Risk' Historic England funded a series of trial repairs on the ruins in 2010 which remain under annual review. They also funded a condition survey of the Abbey Gate in 2013.

### Visitors

The Quarter is a key attraction for tourists and visitors to Reading with its unique heritage and cultural facilities complementing Reading's shopping and leisure offer. The HLF funded projects for the Museum's first floor galleries and Concert Hall, and the Forbury Gardens, have all attracted increased footfall to the area. Reading UK CIC uses the area in its promotion of the town and its destination management strategy.

### Historians and Archaeologists

The Abbey is of key importance to British and European medieval political, religious and architectural history. It is recognised by Historic England as an excellent example of a medieval monastic complex. Medieval and architectural historians recognise the importance of the site and museum collections in the understanding of the development of Romanesque architecture. Academics at the University of Reading and other universities have researched aspects of its architecture and history and there are regular visits from international colleagues.

There are regular requests for collection and site tours from specialist interested groups such as the Institute for Archaeologists 2011 conference or a Courtauld Institute day school in summer 2012. Historic England and Berkshire Archaeology are represented on the project board.

The Quarter's 19<sup>th</sup> century architecture is also important to architectural historians, for example the Sir John Soane Museum and the Soane Monument Trust supported the recent restoration of the Simeon Monument.

### Faith groups

The area is still a place of significance for faith groups. For example in July 2011 the Confraternity of St James held a weekend pilgrimage to the site celebrating Reading Abbey's links to St James, with pilgrims from across the UK and Spain (since 2011 Reading Abbey has been reconnected to the official European pilgrimage network). The weekend included historical lectures and site tours as well as religious services. St James RC church is on the site and was Reading's first post reformation Catholic Church - the congregation are keen to be involved and took part in Heritage Open Days for the first time in 2011. Similarly St Laurence's church is focused on working with young people in Reading and in 2010 won the 'caring for places of worship' award from Historic England.

### Current uses of the Abbey Quarter

The surviving physical remains of the medieval Abbey complex are central to the significance of the Abbey Quarter as a whole and those elements of it which are at risk are prioritised in this project. The site lies within the commercial heart of Reading and the Abbey's remains are woven between a number of multi storey office buildings that give the Quarter its distinctive mix of ancient and modern. In some

cases these are the second generation of post war commercial development, a fact which highlights the short economic life cycle of such buildings. The prison has now been decommissioned and its site, adjacent to the Abbey ruins, is currently the subject of a planning framework covering its future development. This presents a future opportunity to extend the perceived extent of the Abbey ruins site to include the footprint of the former Lady Chapel at what was the east end of the church.

#### **4.5 Summary of significance**

The Abbey Quarter has many layers of significance on account of its varied history, the most important being the Abbey which was one of western Europe's most prestigious religious and political locations in the medieval period. The site's prominent position within Reading's post dissolution town centre has added further to its significance. The site is recognised and protected by national designations including scheduling and listing of all grades.

##### Protection

###### Scheduled Monuments

Much of the area of the Abbey precinct, including both standing and buried remains, is scheduled – 1007932 (Appendix D). The monument description also recognises the importance of the later English Civil War earthwork defences. The area of scheduling was revised in 1993 to cover a wider area than just the standing remains. It is described by Historic England as 'an excellent example of a medieval monastic complex, one of few such sites in Berkshire. The ruined abbey buildings survive well, standing almost to their original height. The complete Abbey site is well documented, both historically and archaeologically, and there is still considerable potential for the survival of archaeological material within its confines.'

###### Listed Buildings (Appendix E)

Grade I (Only 2.5% of listed buildings nationally are Grade I):

The Abbey Ruins are also a Grade I listed building due to their architectural importance to the development of Romanesque architecture and sculpture. The listing also refers to the important collection of Romanesque sculpture in Reading Museum. The Inner Abbey Gate restored by Sir George Gilbert Scott and St Laurence's church - the Abbey's chapel 'ante portas' are also both Grade I.

Grade II\* (only 5.5% of listed buildings nationally are Grade II\*):

Archway (tunnel) connecting Forbury Gardens to Abbey Ruins - due to extensive incorporation of Romanesque sculpture

The Simeon Monument is the only work by Sir John Soane in his native town.

Town Hall (Town Council Chamber and Offices with Clock Tower) by Alfred Waterhouse, who also lived and worked in Reading.

Grade II:

Many individual buildings and structures are Grade II including the Abbey Mill arch, Hospitium, Museum & Concert Hall, Prison, Crown Courts, St Laurence's churchyard wall and gate piers, Shire Hall (now the Forbury Hotel), Maiwand Lion and Queen Victoria's Statue.

###### Registered Parks and Gardens:

The Forbury Gardens (Appendix D), is a Grade II Victorian public pleasure garden

###### Conservation Area:

The west of the Quarter is within the Market Place /London Street Conservation Area (plan A1), protecting the medieval street plan and character of this historic commercial district that developed outside the main west gate of the Abbey. The last appraisal of this Conservation Area recommends a new conservation area is also created to the east based on the Forbury Gardens and the site of the Abbey.

**Historic Environment Record:**

The Berkshire Historic Environment Record (HER) records extensive archaeological finds and features and events across the Quarter .

**Local Planning Policy:**

The entire Quarter is within an 'Area of Archaeological Potential' in the Reading Borough Council Local Development Framework core strategy document.

**Museum Accreditation Scheme:**

Reading Museum is an Accredited Museum with the Arts Council England. It contains the most important surviving examples of Romanesque sculpture from Reading Abbey, as well as all the archives from modern archaeological excavations on site. It also cares for collections that illustrate the town's wider history, especially its industrial and Victorian heritage associated with the 3Bs, including Huntley & Palmers and Sutton's Seeds.

## 5.0 Risks and Opportunities

### 5.1 Risks

There has been a piecemeal approach to the conservation, understanding and public engagement with the various historic monuments within the Abbey Quarter and a more holistic and strategic approach will achieve a transformational project.



11: Photograph of repair work on the Ruins taken in 1952

Same view taken during the condition survey in 2011

The following risk assessments cover the four principal elements of the Abbey Quarter project:

1. The Abbey Ruins
2. The Abbey Gateway
3. Interpretation and Display

## Risk Assessment 1: The Abbey Ruins

Since 2005 Reading Borough Council (RBC) and Historic England (HE) have invested over £200,000 to develop a conservation strategy for the site. The Abbey Ruins are currently closed to the public due to serious health and safety risks. The deterioration of the exposed core work due to freeze-thaw action during recent severe winters has caused a significant amount of the stone and flint rubble core work to become loose and dislodged, resulting in stones and flints falling to the ground. The Scheduled Monument is now on the HE 'Register of Heritage at Risk' due to its deteriorating and generally unsatisfactory condition of the walls with major localised problems and the need for proactive management.

Repairs undertaken in the 1950s and 60s and again between 1985-1991 involved capping the tops of the walls and the openings with flint work in a hard cement mortar. This hard capping has failed in places causing cracks that allow water to penetrate the core. The run-off from the surface of these areas is eroding the softer lime mortar wall faces lower down resulting in a gradual undercutting of the upper areas. This history of well-intentioned repairs, being carried out in a reactive and piecemeal manner, at times using inappropriate methods and materials, has unfortunately contributed to the deterioration of the ruins. It is acknowledged that in the past there had not been any clear guidance available as to the repair and conservation of such sites, and that current conservation principles take a more holistic and long-term approach to management.

In 2006 HE agreed to fund works to inform future conservation, to develop exemplar methodologies and to inform a conservation plan. It was apparent that the level of information available on the condition of the ruins was insufficient and a full condition survey was required. The full condition survey report of May 2008 highlights the 'poor and rapidly deteriorating condition of the walls' and reiterates the 'potential serious health and safety hazard for anyone who uses, passes through and/or works at' the site. It identifies areas of risk throughout the site, but the general types of issues faced can be summarised as follows:

- Areas of hard (cement) mortar, causing water run-off, calcification and weathering of weaker areas below.
- Failure/weakening of cappings/wall heads, allowing water to penetrate and weaken the internal structure.
- Plant growth causing physical root damage and allowing water penetration
- Deterioration of exposed lime mortar, weakening walls.
- Loose, unsupported and overhanging masonry causing risk of failure at any time (falling masonry as evidenced by flints found at base of walls).
- Cracking on vertical faces, potentially causing large areas to shear away
- Physical damage from pedestrian traffic (and climbing).

Trials of a number of conservation techniques were undertaken in association with HE in March and April 2009. They included removal of sample areas of calcified surfaces and hard mortar pointing, a series of panels of thrown lime-based sacrificial coatings on the west wall of the Chapter House and a number of wall cappings including lime mortar flaunching with tile or slate overhangs, and grass and sedum turf as 'soft capping'. These trials have been reviewed annually and the success or failure of the various repairs logged. This provides a range of proven techniques that can be applied in subsequent repairs.

In 2010 applications were made for Planning and Scheduled Monument consents for gated railings around the site to prevent public access. These were installed in August 2010. A manageable risk remains to RBC staff who undertake grounds maintenance works within the area of the ruins.

A regular programme of stone loss monitoring is being undertaken at quarterly intervals by RBC staff. The fallen stones, mostly flints, have been recorded, marked on a site plan and retained for future use. Unfortunately it is impossible to identify whether they have come from the modern hard cappings at the wall tops or from the areas of eroded lime mortar below them but the plot of the accumulated stone collections gives a clear indication of the problem areas.

In February and March 2011 RBC commissioned a comprehensive survey as a first step towards defining a comprehensive programme of conservation work, this included:

- A systematic laser-scan survey resulting in photogrammetric elevation images
- Plotting areas of different condition from the ground and a mobile elevated platform
- Combining the condition plots and elevation images to make 'maps' of the wall surfaces, highlighting patterns of weathering and erosion and helping to identify the mechanisms at work.
- Creating accurate conservation costs by taking the areas of the different condition types off the drawings and transferring them to a spreadsheet to generate quantities and costs.
- A survey by a structural engineer focused on areas where there is visible cracking and specific stabilisation measures have been suggested and cost allowances made.

In March 2015 Stuart Harrison, Cathedral Archaeologist at York Minster, undertook an above ground interpretive survey of the standing ruins making use of the photogrammetric elevations. Close observation of surviving evidence enabled him to make some new discoveries about the original form of the Abbey and other monastic buildings and superimpose recreated Norman elevations on those of the existing ruins. This work will help us to preserve and interpret significant surviving features on the walls during conservation works. The report is available as a separate document: 'Archaeological Survey Report on the Ruins of Reading Abbey for Reading Council' Stuart Harrison RSA, Rydale Archaeology Services Ltd. March 2015

#### Risk Assessment: The Abbey Ruins

Risk	How likely? L/M/H	How serious? L/M/H	Consequence	Action taken to date to reduce risk	Action proposed to reduce risk to acceptable level
Falling stones, safety risk.	H	H	Injury to public and maintenance staff.	Site closed off within new railings. Conducted 'hard hat' visits only.	Stabilisation & repairs to walls + landscaping to keep people away from high risk areas. Re-open to the public.
Irreversible loss of historic fabric through weather erosion and plant growth.	H	H	Damage to historic monument, failure to meet responsibilities as Listed Building owner. Remaining on HE 'Register of Heritage at Risk'.	Site trials of conservation methods. Detailed condition survey. Continued removal of plant growth.  Regular stone-loss monitoring. Collection and retention of flints for re-use during repair works.	Review performance of previous repairs and trials. Detailed repair & conservation proposals prepared and implemented.
Recurrence of fabric loss & decay after proposed works complete.	M	H	As above.	Analysis of previous repairs and how these have caused knock-on effect damage to adjacent areas.	Propose holistic repair strategy taking into account weathering of walls over time. Preparation of Conservation Management Plan and on-going watching & maintenance programme.
Extent of repair work exceeding anticipated	M	M	Overspend on budget, contract over-run.	Detailed structural & condition survey made and costs identified.	Assume worst case for each scheduled repair item. Include realistic

Risk	How likely? L/M/H	How serious? L/M/H	Consequence	Action taken to date to reduce risk	Action proposed to reduce risk to acceptable level
level.					contingency.  Organise works sequentially with priorities.
Vandalism, graffiti, climbing damage.	H	H	Damage to historic monument.	Site closed off within new railings.	Comprehensive conservation work to reduce invitation to deface ruins by presenting a 'looked after' appearance.  Management presence.  Night time closing.
Semi-permanent closure due to delay to conservation work.	M	M	Loss of public access to site. Acceleration of decay.	On-going but limited maintenance. Numerous surveys & appraisals keeping the issue live.  Initiation of current project. Public consultation, events and guided tours.	Implementation of current project to allow the ruins to be open once again.
Recording of archaeological features.	M	L	Hold up repair programme leading to overspend on budget/contract over-run.	Repairs and works designed to minimise the need to disturb / record archaeological features.	SAM status means archaeological recording anticipated and provided for in project costs/contingency.

## Risk Assessment 2: The Abbey Gate

The Abbey Gate has suffered stonework damage as a result of recent very cold winters. Apart from one string course corbel which fractured and dropped to the ground, it is the surface stone mortar repairs of the turret parapet copings and corbels which are failing and spalling off. The building has now been fenced off with temporary fencing and a scaffold crash deck installed to reduce the health and safety risk to members of the public who walk through the archway. This building is also currently included on the Historic England 'At Risk Register'.

In April and May 2006 the conservation architects Purcell Miller Tritton carried out a condition survey for Reading Borough Council. HCC Property Services re-visited the building in May and June 2011 and found that the findings of this survey were generally still valid but with some advancement of decay evident, particularly in connection with roof leaks. In March 2013 Historic England provided a grant covering 80% of the cost of a more detailed condition survey. This was undertaken between May and July 2013 and included a detailed measured survey, a graphically and photographically recorded condition survey which included the use of a mobile elevated working platform to examine the upper areas of the exterior, opening up investigations with an associated archaeology watching brief, a CCTV drain survey, a specialist timber decay survey, analysis of mortar and plaster samples and additional ecological and asbestos surveys. The present condition is summarised below.

The lead roof covering is at the end of its serviceable life and numerous inappropriate repairs have been undertaken to patch the splits and tears in the surface. The length of the lead trays is excessive and stepped joints between gutter panels inadequate allowing water to back up from blocked outlets and spill into the building causing localised wet rot and plaster damage. Some sections of the internal cast iron rainwater downpipes, originally built into the walls, have been replaced with cast iron, asbestos cement or plastic sections however the remaining down pipes have generally corroded and fractured with the result that water is running down the outside of the pipe and is saturating the surrounding building fabric. In addition to the localised areas of wet rot in roof timbers, floor boards and plaster damage at second floor level significant damage to walls, floor joists and boards has occurred at first floor level at the south west down pipe position. Damage to structural timbers is currently superficial but will rapidly become significant unless the water penetration is stopped. Replacement of sections of sarking board, wall plate, and floor joists and boards at first floor level will be required to bring the building back into use.

Attempts to undertake a full CCTV survey from the down pipes on the west side of the archway to the storm water inspection chamber south east of the Gate were frustrated by the pipes being blocked by silt. Water jetting up from the inspection chamber produced quantities of gravel revealing that this branch pipe is completely fractured under the yard area attached to the Gate. Water which does percolate through the blocked pipes is therefore soaking away into the gravel bed adjacent to or under the building.

Given the urgent need to stop water getting into the building in order to stop further damage to the fabric Reading Borough Council funded the £12,800 cost of temporary scaffolding supporting a sheeting roof and downpipes. This is allowing the fabric to dry out thoroughly before permanent repairs can be undertaken.

The tenants have been forced to vacate the building on account of its dilapidated condition and so it is currently empty. Unoccupied buildings, even if closely monitored, are always at a greater risk of accelerated decay and vandalism than occupied buildings.

A lack of long term use and secure future for the building has led to there being little investment over recent years to maintain the structure. The pressures on local government budget mean that less funding has been available for repairs so a long term use with income generation will help provide the capital for a full programme of preventive maintenance.

To identify options for long term sustainable use discussions have already begun with the Local Planning Authority and Historic England. Their pre-application planning advice has identified that office/business use is the most acceptable of the potential alternative uses that have been identified once the Gate has been conserved.

The priorities for the Abbey Gate are as follows:

- Conservation of roof structure renewal of the lead roof, down pipes and underground drain runs to the local inspection chamber.
- Conservation of parapet and turret stonework.
- Conservation of particular damaged or eroded stones at lower levels
- Conservation and repairs to windows and external doors.
- Internal refurbishment to suit appropriate long term use of the building.
- Fit out of ground level education room with exhibition.

#### Risk Assessment: The Abbey Gate

Risk	How likely? L/M/H	How serious? L/M/H	Consequence	Action taken to date to reduce risk	Action proposed to reduce risk to acceptable level
Falling stones, safety risk.	L	H	Injury to public.	Archway closed off with hoarding & scaffolding fans.	Repairs to stone walls & arch vault. Re-open to the public.
Irreversible loss of historic fabric through roof leaking & weathering of stone work.  Building unusable.	H	H	Damage to historic monument, failure to meet responsibilities of Listed Building owner. Remaining on HE 'Register of Heritage at Risk'.	Termination of temporary lease. Full condition & repair survey in 2013. Asbestos survey.  Emergency maintenance.  Installation of temporary scaffold roofing and downpipes.	Implement repairs identified by survey
Failure to find economically sustainable use for building.	M	M	RBC unable to carry cost. No funding for maintenance.  Uncertainty of future care of building.	Options for different uses considered.  Commercial opinion consulted.	Fabric repairs + appropriate conversion work will reduce risk in not securing tenant. New conservation layout that will appeal to small businesses to secure potential lease.
Extent of repair work exceeding anticipated	M	M	Overspend on budget, contract over-run.	Structural, condition & asbestos surveys made and costs identified unlikely to	Assume worst case for each scheduled repair item. Include realistic contingency.

Risk	How likely? L/M/H	How serious? L/M/H	Consequence	Action taken to date to reduce risk	Action proposed to reduce risk to acceptable level
level.				be further issues.	
Semi-permanent closure due to delay to conservation work.	M	M	Need for more temporary works i.e. roof. Prominent eyesore in the public eye. Acceleration of decay.	Action as above.  Public consultation, events and tours.	Implementation of current project to make the building viable and therefore secure in the long term.

### Risk Assessment 3: Interpretation and Display

Throughout the proposed Abbey Quarter, there is a lack of public awareness of the importance of Reading Abbey and the later post-medieval or Victorian heritage and there is little interpretation to enable visitors to understand the extent of the original buildings within the modern town layout. The standing Abbey ruins and the surviving buildings are disconnected and visitors fail to appreciate, engage with and understand them. Many visitors and residents are totally unaware of the Quarter's nationally important monuments and buildings.

Pedestrian signage is poor and has been designed and installed in a piecemeal way. Generally there is a lack of cohesion and identity on this significant site.

The main interpretation hub in the Abbey Quarter site, Reading Museum has its second floor galleries refurbished to a high standard in 1999-2000 with HLF support. However the 2008-9 review of Reading Museum & Town Hall by VT Four S highlighted the redevelopment of the ground floor as a key recommendation: 'Less satisfactory is the ground floor area which is spatially constricted and has a confused layout. The entrance area is, we believe, ill conceived and uninviting. The Reading displays do not do justice to the Borough's history and lack the quality of the upper floor galleries.' The Museum's recent public consultation has also highlighted the inadequacies of the current ground floor gallery layout and presentation of objects.

The older ground floor gallery fittings are reaching the end of their planned life (some aspects are almost 20 years old), especially cases and light fittings - many will soon be obsolete and do not meet current security, environmental, museum or energy efficiency standards. However in 2011-12 the Museum obtained £50,000 from the Earley Charity to improve the part of the gallery relating to Reading's recent (20<sup>th</sup> century) history and to engage local communities in this redisplay. In 2013 a further grant allowed the installation of a new high specification display case for the portrait of Queen Elizabeth I a key figure in the post-dissolution history of the Abbey Quarter. The lighting track was also upgraded with a grant from Arts Council England. This investment provides a template for further improvements to the ground floor gallery.

### Risk Assessments: Interpretation and Display

Risk	How likely? L/M/H	How serious? L/M/H	Consequence	Action taken to date to reduce risk	Action proposed to reduce risk to acceptable level
Lack of historic interpretation	M	M	Failure to make public generally aware of the	Raising the stakes by enlarging the scope of the project from	Proposals to bring consistency to directional signage

Risk	How likely? L/M/H	How serious? L/M/H	Consequence	Action taken to date to reduce risk	Action proposed to reduce risk to acceptable level
across the Abbey Quarter site.			Abbey Quarter's important heritage.	covering specifically the Abbey Ruins to include the whole Abbey Quarter. Public consultation, events, tours and regular newsletter.	across the Abbey quarter.  Introduction of heritage interpretation across the Quarter.
Lack of linkage between the Abbey Ruins site and the Museum's interpretation of them.	M	M	Disassociation between ruins associated artefacts and interpretation in Museum. Visitors tending to experience one or the other.	Analysis and understanding of problem. Preparation of the whole site Interpretation Strategy	Part of proposals to increase physical links through interpretation and experience. Implementation of the Interpretation Strategy.
Failure to adopt energy efficient services.	M	M	Increased running costs. Reduced opening times. Environmental damage not reduced.	Development of design brief for refurbishment.  Replacement of some track through ACE grant	Proposal to include state of the art energy efficient display systems.  Seek SALIX funding for further lighting
Reduced security of ageing displays.	H	M	Increased risk of inadvertent or gratuitous damage to artefacts and theft.	Development of design brief for refurbishment. Removal of high value/high risk objects from displays.	Proposal to include state of the art security provision within display systems.
Extent of repair works exceeding anticipated level.	M	M	Overspend on budget, contract over-run.	Condition surveys  Outline cost estimates.	Detailed design proposals for refurbishment and exhibition design to be costed.

### Summary of work undertaken at Reading Abbey Ruins by Reading Borough Council since 2005

- Maintenance plan was produced as part of Forbury Gardens project, identifying a handful of areas/features needing urgent works – report completed April 2005.
- Discussions with English Heritage (EH) regarding ongoing works such as buddleia removal, and a medium term programme of minor repair work – May to August 2005
- Site visit and inspection with EH Inspector of Ancient Monuments – September 2005

- Formal consultation with EH re repair methods for overhanging flint work at risk – Sept and Oct 2005
- Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC) application for minor repair works – November 2005
- Scoping and commissioning of John Ashurst report on flint and other masonry at risk (recommended by EH) – Jan to Feb 2006
- Negotiation re consents for works to Chapterhouse – Feb to March 2006
- Works to Chapterhouse and high level inspection of other areas – March 2006
- Agreement with EH that longer-term management plans required and withdrawal of outstanding SMC applications – April 2006
- Negotiations with EH re funding for and scope of trial repair works – May to Sept 2006
- Engineers report on Chapterhouse plaques – Sept 2006
- Agreement of method statements and formal submission of funding proposal – December 2006
- Funding offer from EH – 2007
- Commissioning of Oxley Conservation as specialist advisors – December 2007
- Interim report from Oxley Conservation identifying Health & Safety concerns – March 2008
- Brief QS exercise by Bare, Leaning and Bare re anticipated cost of repairs – July 2008
- Scoping of trial repair methodologies with EH – August and September 2008
- Tendering exercise for specialist stonework contractors – October and November 2008
- Commissioning of IJP as stonemason contractors for trial repairs – December 2008
- Pre-contract meeting and agreements – February 2009
- Trial repair works carried out – March and April 2009
- Report on trial works from Oxley Conservation – May 2009
- Brief review of photographic evidence by Richard Oxley– February 2010
- One Year review of trial repairs and report by Oxley Conservation – May 2010
- Temporary railings and gates installed after planning and SMC –

August 2010

- Programme of quarterly stone loss monitoring by RBC starts - December 2010
- Systematic drawing based survey, structural and laser scan condition survey and detailed conservation cost plan drawn up undertaken by Hampshire County Council architects- February and March 2011
- Three Year review of trial repairs and report by Hampshire County Council architects in consultation with EH – October 2012
- Abbey Gateway detailed condition survey including any necessary site investigations, heritage statement and full repair schedule and cost estimate by Hampshire County Council, grant funded by EH – May to November 2013
- Full review of conservation cost plan of Abbey Ruins and Abbey Gate undertaken by Hampshire County Council architects – October/November 2013
- Application for a grant made to Heritage Lottery Fund for the Reading Abbey Revealed project. February 2014
- First round pass for development phase received from HLF June 2014
- Archaeological Survey of the Abbey ruins by Stuart Harrison FSA March 2015
- Review of Condition surveys of the Abbey Ruins and Abbey Gate by HCC Property Services April – June 2015
- Arboricultural and Ecology surveys of the Abbey Ruins HCC Property Services June – July 2015
- External works design proposals for the Ruins and internal alterations design proposals for the Abbey Gate. HCC Property Services May - June 2015
- Refurbishment / demolition asbestos survey of the Abbey Gate Equin Environmental May 2015
- Stage D report Reading Abbey Revealed August 2015

## 5.2 Opportunities

### The Abbey Ruins

The conservation work on the Ruins offers the opportunity to improve their interpretation both in the techniques used for the stabilisation of the fabric and with a number of modest designed interventions. The involvement of a specialist archaeologist has significantly increased understanding of the surviving evidence of the original built forms. This will have a beneficial influence on how repair work is undertaken using approaches which avoid further destruction of significant evidence. The use of paved strips and metal ground edgings denoting some of the missing walls will enable visitors to get a more immediate understanding of the buildings. Ground cover planting and strategically placed railings and gates will both control visitors' route round the site to enhance their understanding of the monastic buildings and contribute to managing the residual risk from loose stones.

### The Abbey Gate

The restoration of the Gate is an opportunity to bring this building back into economically viable use which will generate income for the on-going preservation of both the Gate and the Ruins. The proposals are light touch and flexible so that the possibility of the building's reverting back to public or community use in the long term will remain. The completion of the project will mean that the unsightly temporary scaffold tunnel, fan and roof which currently conceal much of the building from view will be removed.

### Interpretation around the site

During the project's Development Phase consultants developed an Interpretation Strategy for the Quarter creating opportunities for communities and visitors to actively participate in and learn about their heritage. This strategy was devised to appeal to local people as well as visitors, abbey 'beginners' as well as enthusiasts, and to offer a variety of media to suit different audiences and individual preferences, ensuring that the design scheme is physically accessible to people with limited mobility, vision or hearing.

An Abbey Quarter brand has been developed using the Abbey Gate as highly recognisable shorthand for the whole site, and a graphic approach for indoor and outdoor interpretation, to offer to the visitors a coherent and enjoyable experience around the site.

The two main components of the proposed interpretation are outdoor interpretation at the Abbey Ruins and around the centre of Reading and a new exhibition about the Abbey at Reading Museum. There will also be temporary on-site interpretation during the restoration of the ruins and a new microsite on Reading Borough Council's website to support and extend the visitor experience. The interpretation will describe the history of Reading from prehistory to the present day.

Refer to Reading Abbey Revealed Stage D Interpretation Plan, July 2015.

The future development of the prison site will also be an opportunity to further develop, protect and enhance the Abbey Quarter site (see RBC Outline Development Framework, The Site of Reading Prison, March 2015).

### Schemes in the Abbey Quarter which have been implemented in the past 12 months:

#### Town Hall Square

The upgrade of Town Hall Square in 2013 has removed a major risk that was previously identified. The Square now provides a coherent and sympathetic setting to its historic surroundings including the Grade I St Laurence's church and Grade II\* Town Hall. The statue to Queen Victoria has been cleaned and conserved.

## St Laurence Churchyard

The outward leaning Grade II Listed retaining wall around St. Laurence's churchyard had been propped since the 1980s due to being pushed out by the roots of trees in the churchyard. The temporary propping concealed parts of the wall and also blocked the pavement restricting safe pedestrian passage along the street.

Between 2004 and 2006 Reading Borough Council commissioned a tree survey and a geophysical survey which involved the excavation of trial pits conducted under an archaeological watching brief. A detailed condition survey of the wall was also made. The final proposal gained Planning and Listed Building consents and involved the introduction of reinforced concrete retaining structures only where necessary to resist the pressure from individual trees, with the sections between being tied back with ground anchors. The above ground parapet walls were dismantled and re-built plumb. The gateway piers dated 1791 were repaired and the overhead carriage lamp reinstated.

This scheme was finalised in August 2015 and resulting in the reopening of the pedestrian routes. RBC gained funding for the Town Hall Square improvements and the repair of the Churchyard wall from the Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF). Work started in February 2015 and was completed in August 2015. Key pedestrian routes have now been restored as a result of this work.

## 6.0 Policies

### Reading Abbey Revealed HLF Project - Policies

The objective of the HLF project is to conserve the Abbey Ruins, restore the Abbey Gate and enhance pedestrian routes to and through the site as part of establishing the Abbey Quarter, enhancing its strong sense of historic identity and forming a unique heritage destination for residents and visitors. It underpins a step change in the approach to conservation, interpretation and public engagement in the heart of Reading. A further objective is to actively create opportunities for communities to participate in and learn about their heritage.

On completion of the HLF project the overall policies for safeguarding Reading Abbey will be:

#### 6.1 Conservation, maintenance and climate change

#### 6.2 Access and Interpretation

#### 6.3 Income generation

### 6.1 Conservation, maintenance and climate change

#### Policy aim

The project will contribute to the conservation of the Abbey Quarter and ensure the future survival and management of its national important heritage.

#### Objectives

- To establish a definitive framework for better understanding, recording and caring for the Quarter's heritage through a Conservation Plan.
- To underpin a step change in the approach to proactive conservation around the site, contributing to the site's removal from Historic England's 'At Risk' Register.
- To undertake regular inspection and audit of the Abbey fabric and instigate necessary conservation work to repair fabric loss and maintain it in its current form.
- To learn lessons from past restorations, ensuring that the use of appropriate materials and methods are agreed with Historic England for repair and conservation.
- To ensure that alterations are carried out in a way which will allow a reversion to the previous form without loss of historic fabric or materials.
- To ensure that before any alterations are undertaken the affected area will be recorded and the information added to the site archive records. Archive material will be made available to interested parties. Any new material obtained should be reviewed for inclusion in the site archives which should be deposited with HER and the museum.
- To undertake conservation and alterations in such a way as to ensure that the future maintenance and repair costs are kept to a minimum.
- To ensure that professional consultants, contractors and tradesmen are carefully selected for their experience in conservation and working with historic buildings.
- To ensure effective and ongoing maintenance by the proactive implementation of the site's Management and maintenance plan
- To mitigate for the damaging effects of Climate Change on the Ruins and Gate by prioritising the management of rainwater run-off.

- To reuse the original materials (flints and stones) collected around the site during the conservation work to maintain the historic integrity of the Ruins and Gate but also to reduce the need for newly extracted minerals.
- To ensure that the species and habitats identified by relevant ecological surveys during the Development Phase will be protected and interpreted appropriately.
- To ensure that wherever appropriate low energy equipment, such as LED lighting, energy efficient heating and AV equipment are used to ensure that energy consumption is kept to a minimum.

Conservation Policy ownership: RBC Museum including Berkshire Archaeology

Delegated to: Conservation and monument maintenance - RBC Principal Archaeologist and external consultant (accredited conservation specialist)

Open space and outdoor interpretation maintenance - RBC Parks and Open Spaces Manager (Streetcare) through direct workforce and external contractors

Museum displays – RBC Museum Manager

Relevant documents: Maintenance and Management Plan

The future maintenance of the site through a regular programme of inspection, maintenance and repairs will be in accordance with the priorities identified in the project's Management and Maintenance Plan. This covers routine procedures such as the suppression of plant growth on the ruins, maintenance of the landscaping and the upkeep of railings, gates, furniture, interpretation panels and other hardware. It will also trigger reactive conservation work.

## 6.2 Access and Interpretation

### Policy aims

The project will ensure safe access to all parts of the Abbey Quarter for the public and staff.

The project will provide access and interpretation for the public, maximising opportunities for active participation, learning and enjoyment of the Abbey Quarter's heritage.

### Objectives

- To secure safe public access to the Abbey Ruins and Gate ensuring residents and visitors can engage with these important heritage assets.
- To ensure all new landscaping within the Ruins, including paths, improve access without damaging or detracting from the heritage.
- To underpin a step change in the approach to site's interpretation so that peoples' understanding and engagement with Reading's rich heritage is transformed.
- To implement a holistic Interpretation Plan for the Abbey Quarter, with enhanced pedestrian routes and signage to and throughout the site. The Plan will consider access requirements.
- To provide opportunities for people to learn about the conservation skills and techniques used at the site.
- To actively create opportunities, including volunteering, for communities to participate in and learn about their heritage through implementing the project's Activity Plan and are informed by the conservation work and surveys.

- To ensure the enhanced signage and interpretation, couple with a strategic position of the Abbey Quarter to a short distance and excellent links to Reading station, town centre, and busy office district will encourage visitors to access and explore the whole site on foot or by public transport.

Reading Borough Council has an Access Policy which applies to all its sites and public spaces. There is level access to the Abbey Ruins from Forbury Gardens and Chestnut Walk, circulation within it the site will be improved. Reading Museum has full access to all its galleries and has its own Access Policy. The Abbey Gate cannot be adapted for full accessibility without significant impact on its historic fabric which would not be justifiable for a Grade I listed building and Scheduled Monument. The upper floors will be let to generate income which will be used to maintain the sites.

<u>Policy ownership:</u>	RBC - Museum including Berkshire Archaeology
<u>Delegated to:</u>	RBC Museums Community and Learning Officers Projects Staff: Abbey Learning Officer, Abbey Community Engagement Officer, Abbey Volunteer Coordinator RBC Partners External consultants (interpretation designers and architects)
<u>Relevant documents:</u>	Reading Abbey Revealed Access and Interpretation Plans

### 6.3 Income generation

#### Policy aim

The project will ensure that sustainable opportunities for income generation are in place that will secure the long term future of the Abbey Quarter's heritage.

#### Objectives

- To ensure that the Ruins are used as a venue for community and cultural events to provide revenue streams for their maintenance.
- To provide a sustainable use for the Abbey Gate building without this affecting its historic fabric or detracting from its significance. Lease terms to cover maintenance and to avoid dilapidations.

<u>Policy ownership:</u>	RBC Business Development
<u>Delegated to:</u>	RBC Property Department Valuations, Business Development Team External consultants – accredited conservation specialists
<u>Relevant Documents:</u>	Abbey Gate Financial Appraisal and lease agreement, Maintenance & Management Plan, Activity Plan

## **7.0 Adoption and Review**

### **7.1 General Approach**

To be effective in guiding the future conservation of any site, a conservation plan needs to be adopted by the operator of the site, and used as a working document. Before adoption can take place, and before the draft plan can be accepted as definitive, a process of consultation is required. After adoption, and after a proscribed period, the plan will need to be reviewed to assess the degree of compliance; to assess its effectiveness; and to ensure that the conservation plan remains relevant to its purpose.

### **7.2 Implementing and Reviewing the Conservation Plan**

#### Action Plan

In order to manage and maintain the site once the project is completed the following will need to be undertaken:

- Preparation and maintenance of a design guide detailing appropriate materials, finishes and identity to inform future maintenance and alterations.
- Implementation and updating the 10 year conservation management and maintenance plan.
- Regular inspections of ruined masonry structures for signs of decay and attending to repairs promptly and in an appropriate manner. Ensuring that all repairs and alterations are fully recorded and updates provided for the Berkshire Historic Environment Record
- Providing education and training programmes.
- Ensuring that the site is adequately publicised and that information is regularly kept up to date.

#### Monitoring and Review

The advisory group will meet annually to review the implementation of the management and maintenance plan, and take corrective actions when required.

### **7.3 Consultation**

The conservation plan should be considered a live document and as such will be reviewed and updated at the end of the capital works to the project. Further appropriate input will also be sought from appropriate stakeholders such as:

- Reading Parks management
- Reading Museum
- Berkshire Archaeology
- Reading Borough Council as the strategic planning authority and land owner
- Historic England as the government's advisory body, also involved in making representations to the local planning authority on matters requiring formal approval, and as monitors for the implementation of works grant aided by the Heritage Lottery Fund

#### **7.4 Adoption**

The Plan was reviewed by the Project Team during February 2015 and by adopted by the Project Board in March 2015.

Copies of the adopted version shall be circulated to the consultees listed above. A copy of the plan is to be retained at the Museum and will be used as a working copy. As situations arise, such as when further developments are proposed, or opportunities emerge for the reversal or mitigation of previous developments, it will be referred to. Any proposals shall either be adapted to comply with the conservation policies or detailed guidance in the plan, or will be abandoned. Proposals that require testing under this plan, particularly those that need statutory approval, shall be circulated among the consultees for prior comment. These comments shall be taken into consideration before commissioning the work. All work carried out under this plan shall be commissioned through appropriate experts or consultants, and in accordance with the conditions of the Heritage Lottery Fund grant.

## 8.0 List of illustrations in section 3.3

- 1: *Plan of Reading Abbey drawn by Jamieson Hurry in 1896*
- 2: *Extract from Speed's Map of Reading of 1610, the earliest known map of the town, possibly suggesting that a substantial part of the Abbey church crossing and chancel might still have been standing*
- 3: *Extract of map by Roque of 1761 which, apart from identifying the site, ignores the Abbey ruins*
- 4: *Survey of the Abbey ruins by Francis Englefield, descendant of Mary I's keeper, 1776. Most of these walls have survived (plan orientated with north to the top of the page to match other illustrations)*
- 5: *Map of Reading by John Man 1798 with the Abbey ruins still only identified by name*
- 6: *Weller's map of 1840, including the ruins, the new Catholic church of St James (5) and the Great Western Railway*
- 7: *Ordnance Survey Map 1879 including the complete footprint of the Abbey church, Forbury Gardens, the Southern Railway terminus and detail of late Victorian Reading's industries*
- 8: *Ordnance Survey Map 1931 showing the development of the outer Forbury, completion of the Civic Buildings, expansion of the Suttons Seeds and Huntley & Palmers sites and appearance of Berkshire County Council*
- 9: *Route of phase III of IDR shown in red, taken from Astill G.G. 1978 'Historic towns in Berkshire : an archaeological appraisal'*
- 10: *Abbey Quarter map based on Ordnance Survey 2011*
- 11: *Photograph of repair work on the Ruins taken in 1952  
Same view taken during the condition survey in 2011*

## 9.0 Bibliography

List any other plans that relate to this one, including your activity plan and any other documents. You should also include a list of your other organisational policies that relate to the management of your site, such as your access policy or disaster planning manual, if you have them. Refer to all the other material you have consulted to write this plan and where it can be found.

The town of Reading and its Abbey (2001)  
C.F. Slade MRM Associates Ltd / Local Heritage Books 2001

Archaeological events within the Abbey Quarter  
Berkshire Archaeology Event/Activity List Report July 2011

Monuments and find spots within the Abbey Quarter  
Berkshire Archaeology Monument List Report October 2011

Reading Abbey Ruins Records Search Project  
Berkshire Archaeology Historic Environment Record  
Access to Online Database: via [Heritage Gateway](#)  
Information on HER Services: [Berkshire Archaeology HER](#)

Reading Abbey Ruins Condition Survey Report  
Oxley Conservation Historic Buildings Consultancy March 2008

Reading Abbey Ruins Report on Trial Repairs  
Oxley Conservation Historic Buildings Consultancy May 2009

Reading Abbey Condition Survey Report  
Reading Borough Council / HCC Property Services March 2011

The Abbey Gate Reading. Condition Survey, Investigations and Repairs  
Reading Borough Council / HCC Property Services June 2103

Outline Conservation Plan February 2014 'Revealing Reading's Abbey Quarter'  
Reading Borough Council / HCC Property Services

Archaeological Survey Report on the Ruins of Reading Abbey For Reading Council  
Survey work and report undertaken by Stuart Harrison FSA Cathedral Archaeologist, York Minster Rydale  
Archaeology Services Ltd March 2015