

## The Election of Thomas Clerke to be Mayor of Reading by the Abbot John Thorne I. (1460)

*Painted by Stephen Reid (1873-1940), 1921*

Object No. 1931.274.1

Location - Foot of the main staircase, Museum of Reading



The painting represents the Abbot's appointment of the Mayor of Reading, from three burgesses nominated by the Guild Merchant, on the feast of St. Michael the Archangel, 29 September 1460.

The scene is set in the upper room in the Inner Abbey Gateway. In the centre is the Abbot of Reading, John Thorne I. Before him stand the three burgesses, Thomas Beke, Thomas Clerke and William Rede, selected by the Guild to stand as Mayor of Reading. The Abbot, however, called this officer the Warden of the Guild.

Nearby stands William Pernecote, the retiring Mayor, who is waiting to hang the chain of office round the neck of his successor. In the background to the left of the picture is Stephen Dunster the cofferer, or keeper of the town chest, with the chest in his hands.

When Henry I founded the Abbey in 1121 he gave control of the town to the Abbot. The town grew rich providing goods, services and labour to the abbey and pilgrims. The Abbot wanted to keep his influence over the town, but by the mid 13<sup>th</sup> century tensions had grown because the town's people wanted more control over their own affairs.

Most of the conflict was between the Abbot and the town's leaders in the Merchant Guild. Often these disputes were about the Abbot's right to choose the Mayor of Reading. In 1498 the Guild ignored the Abbot's choice and picked their own man. The Crown was often drawn into these disputes and sometimes awarded certain rights to the Guild, much to the annoyance of the Abbots.