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Reading Abbey Gateway after restoration © Berkshire Archaeology

BERKSHIRE **ARCHAEOLOGY**

Welcome to our new edition of **Berkshire Archaeology News**

We hope you enjoy our latest newsletter with news of some exciting recent discoveries and archaeological projects in east Berkshire. In this newsletter, amongst other items, you can read about a previously unknown Early Neolithic monument at Datchet (also reported in The Guardian!); a once lost, now found, Bronze Age burial mound in Ascot; and the possible paw print of a cat on a sherd of Iron Age pottery from Shinfield.

The above image is of the recently conserved Abbey Gateway in Reading, part of the complex of buildings and structures of the nationally important medieval Reading Abbey. The newly restored Abbey Gateway was formally unveiled in April this year

and you can read more on the conservation works to the Abbey ruins on page 11.

We have some sad news to report. David Williams FSA, our Finds Liaison Officer, died unexpectedly in December. David was passionate about archaeology and especially artefacts. He had a deep and wide knowledge of finds of all periods and the Finds Liaison Officer role provided him with an opportunity he relished. He will be greatly missed.

Past editions of our newsletter are available on our website (www.berkshirearchaeology.org.uk) but you are always welcome to contact us at any time with news or comment on the archaeology of east Berkshire.



David Williams, Finds Liaison Officer reproduced by kind permission of the Portable Antiquities Scheme

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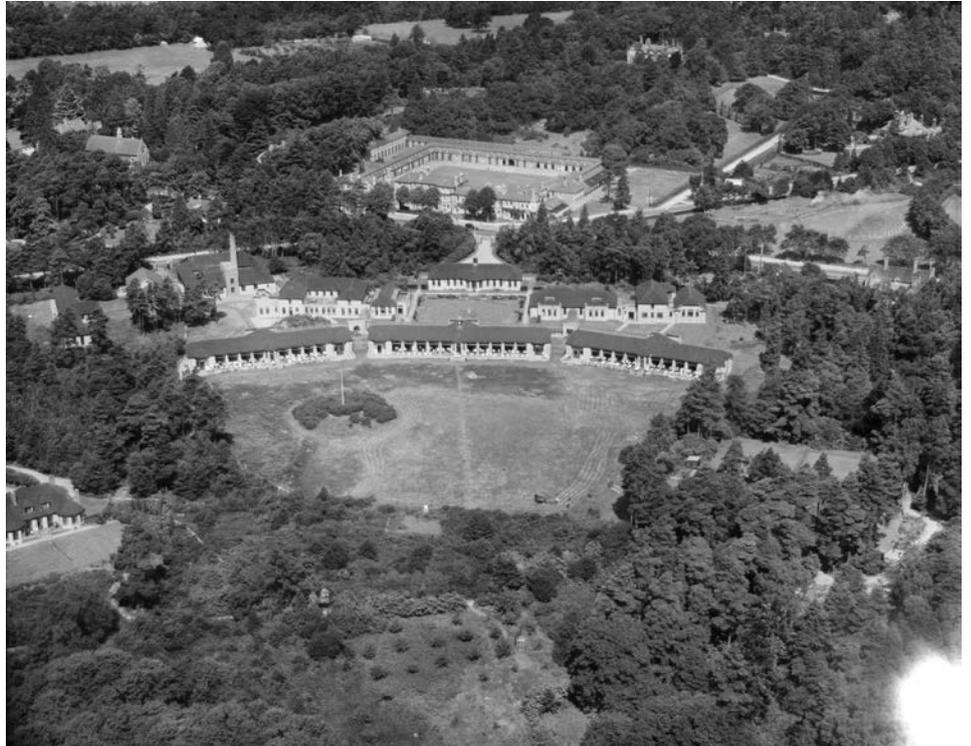


Soldier's Pillar – a Bronze Age barrow, lost and now found - at Heatherwood Hospital, Ascot

Heatherwood Hospital lies to the west of Ascot Racecourse and is an important asset to the local community. It is nearing its 100th birthday, as the Hospital first admitted patients in 1922. It originally specialised in the treatment of tuberculosis and an aerial photographic of the Hospital, taken in 1931, shows the purpose-built Hospital, with open verandas with awnings, facing south to provide fresh, clean air to its patients. These elements of the original Hospital still survive today within the Hospital site.

Less fortunate was the impressive large mound of a presumed Bronze Age barrow which can be seen just left of centre in the aerial photograph. This barrow, named Soldier's Pillar on late Victorian Ordnance Survey maps, was one of four Bronze Age burial mounds documented at or near this location. The reason why the monument was named Soldier's Pillar is unknown but the aerial photograph appears to show a flag pole or pillar rising from the centre of the mound.

A second barrow mound can be seen behind Soldier's Pillar, between the two Hospital buildings. Remarkably this monument still survives today within the Hospital grounds and is protected by Historic England as a Scheduled Monument. An excavation of this Scheduled barrow in the early 1970s demonstrated



An aerial photograph of Heatherwood Hospital, Ascot, taken in 1931 showing the Soldier's Pillar Bronze Age burial mound
© Historic England

that it was built around 1,450 BC, nearly 3,500 years ago.

Unfortunately the Soldier's Pillar barrow mound was flattened during the redevelopment and expansion of the Hospital in the 1960s, and it was assumed that all trace of this ancient monument had been lost.

However exploratory archaeological work at the

Hospital in 2017 remarkably found that below-ground traces of the monument still survive. The infilled ditch around the barrow, from which the central mound material was quarried, was found, along with possible traces of the original ground surface below the mound. It is hoped that further investigation of this monument will take place in the future so that we can learn more about when, how and why these burial mounds were built in this part of Ascot.



The black upper fills of the ditch surrounding the Soldier's Pillar barrow mound
© Thames Valley Archaeological Services



Arborfield Garrison - heritage from the First World War back to the Bronze Age

Land at Arborfield Garrison was first acquired for military purposes in 1904 by the then War Office, for use in the supply and care of horses following the Boer War. Initially on a small scale, the Remount Depot expanded rapidly with the outbreak of the First World War when many temporary buildings and stable blocks were constructed. With the cessation of hostilities in 1918, many of the horses that served in the War were brought back to Arborfield for rehabilitation and sale. However the British military would not need the unprecedented levels of horse power again in future conflicts and the Depot was scaled back, although not officially closed until 1937.

Although not associated with horses, the military role of Arborfield Garrison continued for several decades. With the end of the Garrison, the former military land is currently in the process of being developed for a new village community. The site's important WWI heritage has not been lost as the 'Infirmary Stables' built in 1911-12 have since been designated as a protected Scheduled Monument and are a fitting memorial to the role of the horse in this great conflict as we reach the centenary of the end of the Great War.

Meanwhile exploratory archaeological investigations within and around the Garrison are showing that the site's



1933 OS map of Arborfield Remount Depot – reproduced by kind permission of the Berkshire Record Office

heritage extends back at least two millennia. The exploratory archaeological work has largely taken the form of machine-dug trial trenches that are used to identify any areas of the site where ancient buried remains survive. This archaeological work, undertaken by the Museum of London Archaeology has found evidence for Bronze Age and Iron

Age metalworking. A ditch was also found full of Roman pottery dating to the first millennium AD, just a decade or two after Claudius' invasion of Britain. Pits and ditches containing medieval pottery show that the land was settled and farmed up to the establishment of the Remount Depot. Archaeological work at the former Garrison continues and further discoveries are awaited!



1st century AD Roman pottery on the base of a ditch
© Museum of London Archaeology



A 'tin tabernacle' is rediscovered at St George's Hall, Reading

St George's Hall in St George's Road, Reading, is an innocuous looking, apparently mid-20th century church hall set to the side of the fine, late Victorian, church of St George. St George's Church was consecrated in 1886 to a design by Sidney Gambier Parry (1859-1948), an architect who designed several churches throughout southern England. The Church was built to service the urban expansion of Reading and also to serve the newly built Brock Barracks along the Oxford Road, which housed the Royal Berkshire Regiment.

Interestingly, documentary research in 2017 by Pre Construct Archaeology has shown that although St George's Hall has the appearance of a 1960s community building, it was in fact built in 1880 as a 'tin tabernacle' or pre-fabricated corrugated iron building. 'Tin tabernacles' were frequently built as temporary churches erected by any denomination. They were erected before permanent buildings could be provided. In the 19th and early 20th centuries many 'tin tabernacles'



St George's Church and St George's Hall
© Pre Construct Archaeology



The 'tin tabernacle' to the side of St George's Church in 1899.

Reproduced with the kind permission of Berkshire Record Office
© Berkshire Record Office

were designed and made in kit form to be bought from catalogues. The most common type was timber framed, externally clad with galvanised corrugated iron and lined with high quality tongue-and-groove boarding.

The 'tin tabernacle', built for a cost of £748, therefore pre-dates St George's Church and was used by the congregation while the main church building was under construction. It would have been used for regular church services and served a poor community of tradesmen, labourers and soldier's families. Once St George's Church was built, the 'tin tabernacle' was used as a Sunday School into the early 20th century before becoming a more general purpose 'church hall'.

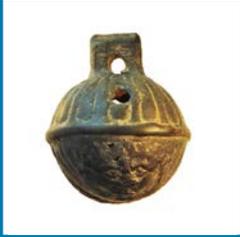
Survey of St George's Hall demonstrated that parts of the 'tin tabernacle' still survive within the existing structure.

These include the ornate iron 'rose' window in the east of the building, the scalloped barge boards and corrugated iron sheeting nailed to timber studwork. Decorative iron roof trusses and the 'rose' window show that the iron church was originally open to the roof.

These surviving elements were hidden when the building was converted in the late 1950s and early 1960s, changing a 'tin tabernacle' to a modern community hall.



The surviving iron 'rose' window of the 'tin tabernacle'
© Pre Construct Archaeology



Some typical metal detector finds from east Berkshire in 2017

As in most years, a range of metal finds from east Berkshire have been reported to Berkshire Archaeology over the last 12 months, mostly found by detectorists and recorded on the Portable Antiquities Scheme database at www.finds.org.uk. This year many are typical of casual or accidental losses as people in the past have gone about their everyday business. A good example is a silver half groat of Elizabeth I, minted between 1590 and 1592 in London and found in Bracknell Forest. The coin is heavily worn and damaged and so was in circulation for a long period after it was minted. Less than 2cm in diameter and very thin, the coin was easily lost, perhaps while its owner was out hunting. If the owner was aware of the loss of a silver coin, he or she probably endeavoured to find it but in this case was clearly unsuccessful.

A small, copper animal bell is a similar casual loss. Found within the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, it is less than 4cm in diameter and is decorated with two rather chubby faces! It is likely to date to the 17th or 18th centuries. It may have been attached to a dog or other small animal.

Perhaps less of a casual but more of a deliberate loss is a decorated Roman brooch found in Wokingham. This small item would have held clothing together



Medieval enamelled harness pendant
reproduced by permission of the Portable Antiquities Scheme



Silver half groat of Elizabeth I
reproduced by permission of the Portable Antiquities Scheme



Roman copper alloy brooch
reproduced by permission of the Portable Antiquities Scheme

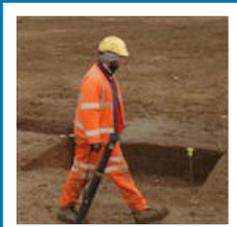
but the pin has been broken and perhaps it was therefore deliberately discarded. The brooch dates to the 1st century AD.

Also a more surprising loss is a medieval, enamelled harness pendant found near Reading. The pendant is decorated with the Arms of England, three lions passant gardant, on a field of red enamel, and retains traces of gilding. It probably dates to the 14th century AD. It seems unlikely that this fine item would have been lost without someone making every effort to find it.

These finds are typical of the range and date of material recovered by metal detectorists and reported to Berkshire Archaeology. They provide a valuable contribution to our knowledge of our past, alongside the set piece archaeological investigations described elsewhere in this newsletter.



Post-medieval copper animal bell
reproduced by permission of the Portable Antiquities Scheme



A previously unknown Neolithic monument is discovered near Datchet



Pottery and animal bone (the remains of a feast?) close to the base of one of the enclosure ditches

© Wessex Archaeology

In last year's newsletter we reported on prehistoric discoveries at CEMEX UK's gravel quarry at Riding Court Farm, north of Datchet. This year we can report that the quarry has not yet given up all its archaeological secrets as, during the course of

further investigations in 2017, Wessex Archaeology discovered the remains of a previously unknown Neolithic monument. The monument is a causewayed enclosure, so-called because an area was enclosed by regularly spaced ditches, in between which were gaps or 'causeways'.

Causewayed enclosures were built in the Early Neolithic period between 3,800 and 3,500 BC. They are a rare monument type, with less than 100 known from Britain, mostly across southern England. The causewayed enclosure at Datchet is only the second known example of this monument in east Berkshire, although the other lies nearby at Eton Wick. Remarkably there are also two other examples known in this part of the Thames Valley at Dorney and at Staines (more-or-less under Junction 13 of the M25). The former has never been subject to archaeological investigation while the latter was subject to 'rescue' excavation in the 1960s prior to gravel extraction.

The importance of these monuments is that they represent the earliest examples in British prehistory of the formal enclosure of space. They also date to the earliest years of agriculture and the domestication of animals in Britain so they were constructed and used at a period of rapid and seminal change in society. So far only about 25% of the causewayed enclosure at Datchet has been exposed



A previously unknown Neolithic monument is discovered near Datchet

but the remainder will be investigated as the gravel quarry progresses across the site. Current calculations suggest the enclosure was 200m long and 100m wide, with just a single circuit of ditches defining the space within it. The ditches varied between 0.5m and 1.1m deep. There were no ditches along the north side of the enclosure where a stretch of boggy ground seems to have marked its limit.

So far very few contemporary Early Neolithic finds or deposits have been found within the enclosure – an exception is a very fine ground and polished stone axe, slightly damaged, but still an object of great beauty and highly tactile! The use to which the enclosure was put will therefore mostly derive from the finds that are recovered from



Neolithic polished stone axe from within the enclosure
© Wessex Archaeology

the ditches around it. To date an extraordinarily rich collection of Neolithic pottery, animal bone and struck flint has been found near the base of the ditches. Over 3,500 sherds of Neolithic pottery have already been recovered, while human remains were also found on the base of the ditches. The remains of a teenage young woman, face down, were found. Her remains were incomplete – for example the skull was missing – and it may be that her remains were intentionally

interfered with after her death. A human skull was found in another ditch segment but this was from a separate individual.

It is early days in the investigation of this intriguing monument. On present evidence it seems that the enclosure may only have been used for a short period of time. The finds suggest the monument was used for both domestic and 'ritual', probably feasting, purposes. While many of the finds can be considered 'everyday' items, the quantities and distribution of them in the ditches of the monument hint at more sophisticated and exceptional activities. More of this exciting monument will be excavated in 2018 and we will update readers in our 2019 newsletter!



The Riding Court Farm causewayed enclosure from the air looking east towards Heathrow and west London
© Wessex Archaeology



A rare Saxon belt buckle fragment is found at Eton College

Tucked away and hidden behind trees south of the A332 between Eton and Slough lie Eton College's all-weather tennis courts. When plans to increase the number of tennis courts and sports facilities were proposed, exploratory archaeological excavation revealed a modest number of Bronze Age buried remains, suggesting a small farm, like several known along this stretch of the Middle Thames Valley. However further investigation, demonstrating the unpredictability of buried archaeological remains, actually found the remains of a small Saxon house. This modest structure was a semi-sunken building, similar to those found at Castleview Road, Slough, and reported in last year's newsletter. Scientific dating has shown that the Saxon house at Eton College dates to around the 7th century AD.

In this case, however, the remains of the building contained a small fragment of a tinned, copper alloy object, with incised line and punched dot decoration. Although only a tiny fragment, experts at the British Museum have recognised it as a fragment of a much larger belt buckle. In fact, the fragment can almost certainly be compared to a complete example from France. The French belt buckle was found in the late 19th century from a Frankish cemetery found at Saint-Loup, east of Paris and south of Épernay in the heart of the Champagne region of France. The Eton College fragment is only the third piece of this type



Complete Frankish belt buckle from Saint-Loup, Marne, France

© The Trustees of the British Museum.

Frankish belt buckle fragment from Eton College

© Thames Valley Archaeological Services



of belt buckle found in Britain to date making it a rare find.

The mystery is why do we have only a small fragment of a much larger item? The jagged edges suggest the original buckle may have been deliberately broken up, perhaps by a metalworker

prior to recycling. It was certainly once part of an impressive item, worn by a person of considerable importance and status.



Bronze Age water holes and burnt flint mounds in Crowthorne

Those who travel regularly along the Old Wokingham Road in Crowthorne will have watched over the last eighteen months the gradual demolition of the buildings and structures of the former Transport Research Laboratory (TRL). As reported in last year's newsletter, AOC Archaeology made a record of most of these structures prior to their loss. AOC, on behalf of Legal and General, has since gone on to search for older buried remains prior to the construction of new housing and they have not been disappointed.

The heathland on the Berkshire and Surrey border is well known for its surviving upstanding earthworks, such as the Iron Age hill fort of Caesar's Camp and Bronze Age barrows in Ascot and Bracknell Forest. However few buried remains have come to light in the heathland to show where and how the builders of these monuments lived and farmed.

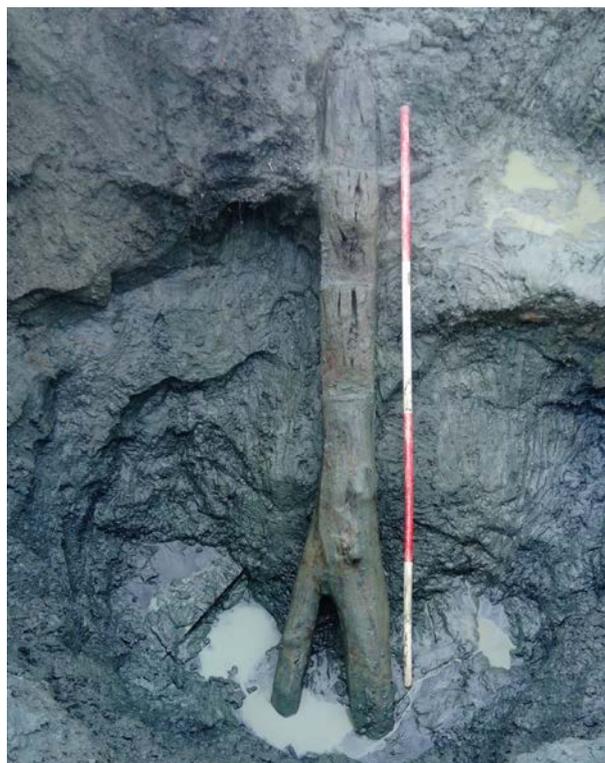
Archaeological discoveries at the former TRL site have begun to redress the balance with the discovery of three prehistoric 'burnt mounds' at the site. These 'burnt mounds' comprised spreads of highly burnt and shattered flint, which sealed water 'troughs' which were served by large, deep water holes at each location. Excitingly all the water holes contained pieces of water-logged wood, some worked, including an in situ log ladder providing access into one of the water holes. This crude



One of the 'burnt mounds' under excavation with a partially excavated waterhole in the foreground
© AOC Archaeology

but effective object was over two metres long and largely intact, with three 'notches' acting as steps. Other finds included pottery and a fragment of baked clay 'loom weight'. Conditions were also ideal for the survival of environmental remains, including insect remains.

Interestingly, one of the mounds included the foundations of a circular structure. It is unclear if this was the remains of a round house or a less substantial structure such as a wind break. The quality of the evidence that has survived should enable further analysis of these remains to shed some light on the purpose of these enigmatic 'burnt mounds', variously interpreted as industrial sites, cooking places and saunas. The results will also provide some really useful information on the nature of this heathland landscape in the later prehistoric period.



'Log ladder' in situ in its waterhole
© AOC Archaeology



The Round Mounds Project - Montem Mound, Slough, and Forbury Hill, Reading

The fragment of belt buckle found at Eton College shows that wealthy Saxons were living in the Thames Valley in the 5th to 7th centuries AD. Further evidence has recently been provided by the exciting news that the Montem Mound in Montem Lane, Slough, was almost certainly built as a prestigious Saxon burial mound in the 5th or 6th century AD. We reported on the University of Reading's 'Round Mounds Project' in last year's newsletter but we now have their results.

After coring the Montem Mound, the University recovered charcoal and a charred cereal grain from the land surface on top of which the Mound was constructed. These charred remains were radio-carbon dated, producing dates spanning the 5th and 6th centuries AD. These dates now provide secure evidence that the Mound was originally built in the Early Saxon period and was almost certainly constructed as a burial mound, sealing the remains of an influential and wealthy Saxon! Previously it had been speculated that the Mound was built as a medieval castle motte but we now know it is 500 years older than originally thought and it is one of Slough's most important archaeological monuments. A similar Saxon burial mound survives nearby at Taplow. This mound was excavated by antiquarians in the 19th century and they recovered the remains of a 'princely burial', including some extraordinarily fine objects, now held by the British Museum.



A reconstruction of the remains of a 'princely' Saxon burial at Taplow
Reconstruction drawing by Oxford Archaeology
© Buckinghamshire County Council

Researchers for the Round Mounds Project also recently investigated Forbury Hill within Forbury Gardens, Reading. This large mound, up to 35m in diameter and 2m high, sits within the precinct of Reading Abbey, which is a nationally important Scheduled Monument. Forbury Hill has been interpreted as a defensive earthwork, constructed during the English Civil war in the 17th century. However the earthwork may have remodelled an earlier medieval castle motte, which itself may have re-used an even earlier prehistoric mound. Reading University sought to give a definitive answer to

the origins of the mound. Two bore holes were drilled through the monument. Examination of the deposits and finds within them indicated that Forbury Hill is largely composed of material dating from the 17th century or later! It seems that it was built as a Civil War defensive earthwork, albeit one that was subsequently modified to create the hill we now know within the 'pleasure gardens' of Forbury Gardens. It remains a possibility that Forbury Hill was constructed prior to the 17th century but no evidence for this was recovered from Reading University's work.



Reading University researchers drilling a borehole through Forbury Hill in front of the cameras
© University of Reading



An Iron Age Moment-in-Time Captured at Shinfield

In last year's newsletter we reported on the discovery of an Early Bronze Age round barrow, amongst other prehistoric features, at Shinfield, south of Reading. Following the completion of the fieldwork by Oxford Archaeology, detailed analysis of the finds from the project has revealed new information about this important site. In particular there has been the notable discovery of the possible imprint of the paw of a small animal on a sherd of Early Iron Age pottery (700 – 400 BC). The sherd was recovered from a pit, one of several on the site,

filled with domestic rubbish. The remains of a number of smaller post-built structures were also identified. This was certainly a modest Iron Age farmstead, one of several now known in this area, which was clearly heavily farmed throughout the Iron Age.

The paw print was made on to the base of a flint-tempered pot, presumably when the pot was upside down while it was drying prior to firing. The animal responsible for leaving his or her mark on this pot was a small mammal. The size and shape of the

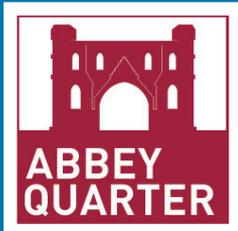
paw print, especially the absence of claw marks, suggest that it may have been a domestic cat, perhaps the settlement's resident mouser, or it may have been a wildcat, although this species is notoriously shy and unlikely to have wandered into a bustling Iron Age settlement. It was too small for a fox or dog, both of which would have left claw as well as paw marks. If it is indeed the paw of a domestic cat, it would be amongst the earliest recorded examples for their presence so far recorded in Britain.

While we will never be able to be certain about its identify, this creature has left its mark from a fleeting moment in time that it wandered across this Iron Age site thereby bringing this site to life today! Once analysis is complete, the results of this project will be published in the Berkshire Archaeological Journal.



Early Bronze Age round barrow at Shinfield
© Oxford Archaeology

A cat's(?) paw print impressed onto a piece of Iron Age pottery © Oxford Archaeology



An Update on Reading Abbey Quarter

In our 2016 newsletter, we reported on the Reading Abbey Revealed Project and the exciting plans to conserve the nationally important Abbey ruins and to create a cultural quarter within the grounds of the former monastic complex. By the time you read this newsletter, these plans will largely have come to fruition, especially the re-opening of the Abbey ruins to the public in June 2018. If you have not yet visited, now is the time to do so!

Conservation works to the Abbey ruins has included the re-pointing of existing masonry using period-authentic techniques, restoring a large proportion of the fallen masonry and capping the tops of the walls with a sedum seeded turf. The sedum turf will absorb most of the rain water, preventing it entering the core of the walls, which was one of the causes of previous problems. The results are impressive and well worth the wait. Meanwhile repairs to the Abbey Gateway, include a new roof and the reconfiguration of the inside to allow better use of space.

In view of the historical and archaeological importance of Reading Abbey, the conservation works have included a programme of monitoring by archaeological and historic buildings specialists from the Museum of London Archaeology to ensure that a full record of the works is made. These will add to the significant archive that already exists for this important monument in Reading Museum.



Restored Abbey ruin with sedum turf capping. Reading gaol in the background © Reading Museum

The Museum itself has a new permanent display about the Abbey and its relationship to the town. The display includes a reconstruction of part of the Abbey cloisters, highlighting the many beautifully carved capitals that still survive. The gallery also includes many important objects from the Abbey including a 12th century book of religious Latin text from the Abbey's library and many smaller archaeological finds that demonstrate daily life in the Abbey. The Abbey Quarter now has a dedicated website where

you can find out more about the project and events at the abbey: www.readingabbeyquarter.org.uk

The restored ruins and the new Museum display rightly place the Abbey and its heritage at the heart of historic Reading and rightfully re-establish Reading Abbey as one of the foremost archaeological and historical monuments in central southern England.



Museum of London Archaeology archaeologist at work monitoring the conservation works © Museum of London Archaeology