

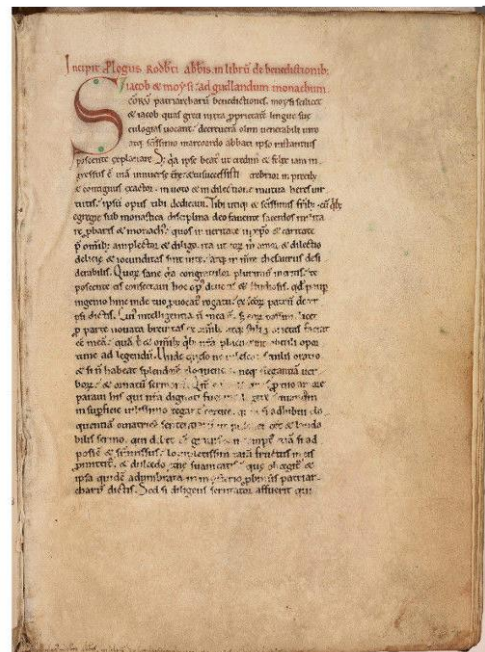
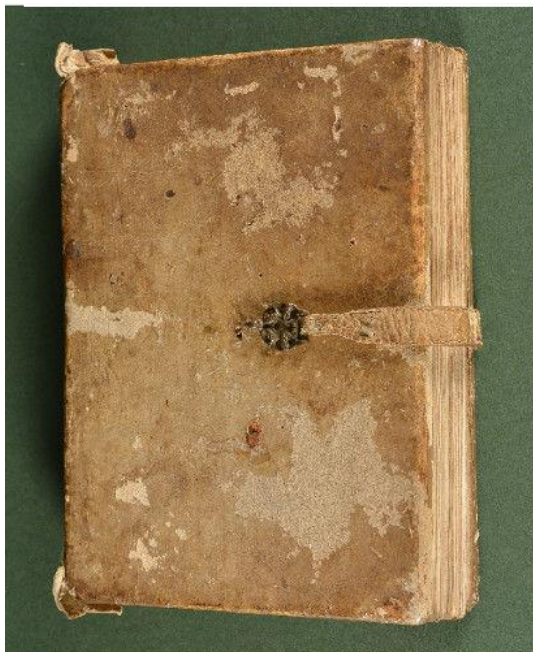
# Object explore and discover Learning from Museum Objects

Museum objects are irreplaceable evidence of our history and heritage and can really bring your lessons to life. Each of these downloadable resources explores one of the objects in our collection.

For even more ideas, discover our loan boxes at

<http://schoolloans.readingmuseum.org.uk/> and search our amazing online database at <http://collections.readingmuseum.org.uk/>

## Reading Abbey Manuscript



Follow this link [Reading Abbey Manuscript](#) to see the object's full record

### DESCRIPTION

**Object:** Medieval manuscript from Reading Abbey

**Museum object number:** REDMG : 1974.40.1

**Date:** end of 12<sup>th</sup> century

**Material:** Leather (binding); bronze (clasp on the binding); parchment or vellum (pages)

The Reading Abbey Manuscript is thought to have been hidden in a secret room at a house in Shinfield and discovered in 1793. It is a collection of four texts, and it was part of Reading Abbey's large library.

There were no **printing presses** in Europe until the 1440s and before then each book had to be written by hand. A **monk** called a **scribe** wrote every letter in this book by hand. As in other medieval **illustrated manuscripts**, brightly coloured letters start each new page or chapter (see right-hand picture above).

The book still has its original leather binding with a bronze clasp. The pages are made of **Parchment** or **Vellum** (very thin animal skin).

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

**Reading Abbey** was founded in 1121 by **King Henry I**, who was buried there. It's Church was consecrated and formally opened in 1164. The Abbey was home to many monks, known as brothers. Reading Abbey was one of the most important religious institutions in Europe through the Medieval Period. It was finally closed down in 1539 during King Henry VIII's 'Dissolution of the Monasteries', along with hundreds of other religious institutions in England.

Reading Abbey had an impressive scriptorium (library). Monks borrowed books from other abbeys to create copies and produced new works which were lent to other religious houses. The Abbey's library didn't have only religious books: there were also books on other subjects like law and music. The song [Summer is Icumen in](#) was first written at Reading Abbey. Not many books survive from Reading Abbey, and most of what is left is now part of the British Library's collection.

Reading Abbey was very grand and had extensive buildings: the Abbey Church, the [Chapter House](#) (meeting room and court for punishments), [Dormitory](#) (where monks slept), [Refectory](#) (for meals and meetings), Infirmary (hospital for monks) and Necessarium (communal toilet block). The Abbey had also its own [mill](#), [wharf](#) and [hospitium](#) (where people could stay). Most of those buildings were torn down with the Dissolution and the expensive stones sold or reused (some can be found in Reading's buildings).

## LINKS TO OTHER OBJECTS

We have a collection of artefacts from Reading Abbey that you may find useful in your lessons. These are a few examples.

- [Abbey stone - Weightlifter](#)
- [Abbey stone - Beakhead voussoir](#)
- [Abbey stone - Dragon Capital](#)
- [Reading Abbey seal \(replica\)](#)
- [Reading Abbey Pilgrim badge](#)

See also our [Loan Boxes database](#) for related objects.

For more information on the Abbey Manuscript see our [blog](#)

## IDEAS FOR ACTIVITIES

- **Make a manuscript**  
Children can make their own ink using old receipts that can be found online; they can experiment using dip pens to write; they can even try to recreate their own colourful letters inspired by the images of the Abbey Manuscript's pages in our [blog](#)
- **Download and use our [Reading Abbey Music Teaching Resources](#)**
- **Use the [Reading Abbey - interactive map](#)**  
The children can explore the Abbey's buildings and imagine the life of monks in Medieval Times
- **Think about how different materials survive through time**  
Why are books so rare in archaeology? What kind of materials survive more easily through time?