

The Trooper Potts HERITAGE TRAIL

A walk around Central Reading

This trail starts at the north side of Reading Station and concludes on the south side. As you follow it you will learn something of the Trooper Potts VC story and gain a few insights into the history of Reading and its public art.

Trooper Potts Way

On the north side of the station there is a short road used mainly by buses to and from Caversham. This was named *Trooper Potts VC Way* in August 2014 to commemorate Frederick William Owen Potts VC who was Reading's only Victoria Cross winner in the Great War of 1914-1919. In August 1915 he was serving with the Berkshire Yeomanry in Gallipoli and was engaged in an attack on Turkish positions which failed. Fred was badly injured and as he attempted to return to the British lines he came across Trooper Arthur Andrews, also from Reading who was wounded even more severely. Fred refused to leave Arthur and for two days they remained in a hollow which sheltered them from Turkish gunfire. Eventually Fred dragged Arthur some 600 yards, clinging to a shovel and saved his life. For this act of bravery he was awarded the Victoria Cross.



Entrance to the Station

Walk a few yards to the station entrance and look back to your left and right.



This used to be the site of the Great Western Railway Signal Works. Here the Great Western Railway developed a system of Automatic Train Control based on ramps between the lines which engaged a mechanism below the locomotive and gave a signal to the driver and automatically applied the brakes if the driver failed to respond. This was back in 1906 and remained in service until the 1970s when British Railways replaced it with a new Automatic Warning System. Arthur worked here for many years after he recovered from his injuries.

Tunnel Under the Station

Walk on past the station entrance to the pedestrian tunnel which runs under the station.

This used to be the link between platforms and led to the parcels depot on the north side and the car park on the south side. Along the east wall of the tunnel you will see a cartoon telling the Potts story. This originated in the *Victor* magazine for boys in June 1967 and is reproduced by courtesy of D C Thompson Co who published the magazine.



Station Forecourt

When you emerge from the tunnel on the south side you will be faced with a steep climb either up steps or a ramp to bring you to the station forecourt.

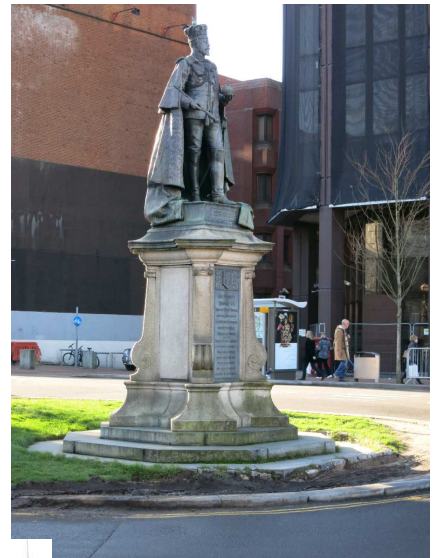
To your left you will see a pub called *The Three Guineas*. This was originally the main building of Reading Station which was built to a very unusual design. Both the 'up' trains (towards London) and the 'down' trains towards Bristol stopped at platforms on the south side so there was no need for a bridge to cross the tracks. This was because, at the time it was built, the town of Reading lay only to the south, to the north was a swamp leading up to the River Thames.



Statue of King Edward VII

As you pass the pub look to your right.

You will see a statue of King Edward VII in the centre of a roundabout. Beyond it is a building which used to be the Great Western Hotel and a reminder that the GWR was not just a railway but a complete travel service providing bus services, hotels, ships and promoter of tourism in the West of England.



Station Entrance

The modern station building in front of you was opened by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in 1982 and replaced the former South Eastern Railway station known as *Reading South*. It was later also used by the London and South Western Railway to provide an alternative route to London to Waterloo. The South Eastern Railway was originally promoted by the GWR so that freight could be



routed to Dover and the channel ports by-passing London. The GWR was originally promoted as a link between New York and London with steam ships docking at Bristol and goods and passengers completing the journey by train. This saved about two days to London and extending the route to Dover gave the GWR a three day advantage to Calais and Rotterdam over ships which had to battle up the English Channel.

Rail-Air

Walk past the station and you will pass the Rail-Air terminus.

From here you can catch a coach to Heathrow and from the station you can catch trains direct to Gatwick, Southampton, Birmingham and Manchester Airport stations. No other place has so many inter-modal transport links.

CORN EXCHANGE

Cross over the road leading to the car park and look ahead to your right.

You will see a pub now called The Corn Exchange; but in past days it was where Suttons Seeds had their main market in Reading. Suttons was one of the three Reading icons of Beer, Bulbs and Biscuits. It is likely to be obscured soon by a new building on the corner of Forbury Road and Blagrove Street.



WATERHOUSE EXTENSION



Cross the road and walk on the right hand side of Blagrove Street. On your left you will see the extension to the Old Town Hall, built by Waterhouse in 1882. As you pass look up to see some excellent sculptures in the frieze below the roof.



READING MUSEUM

Go in to the Town Hall by the first entrance and turn to your left.

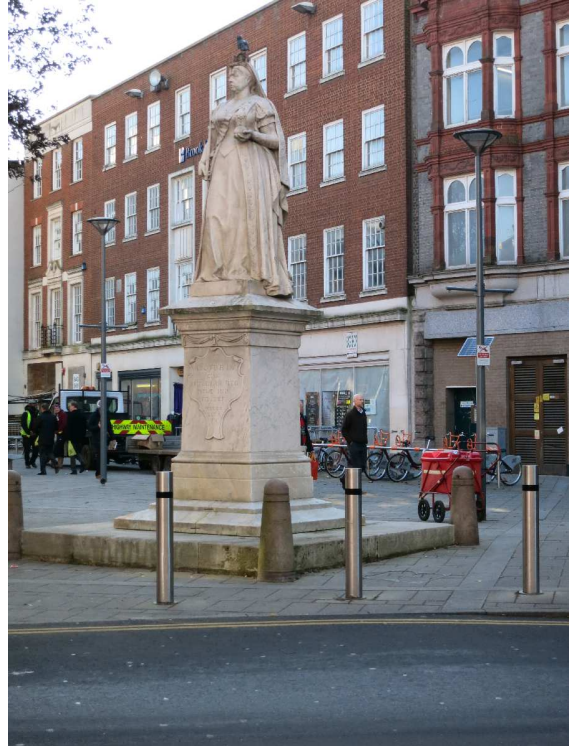
This will take you to Reading Museum where you could spend all day. On the second floor is the Bayeux Tapestry Gallery where you can see a reproduction of the tapestry made by the ladies on Leek in Staffordshire in 1880. Almost, but not quite a faithful reproduction of the original as the ladies added discrete pants to some of the men. Nevertheless you will get a better view and interpretation here than in Normandy. There is usually a display of some sort relating to Potts or the First World War and permanent displays of Roman Silchester, artefacts from Reading Abbey and a collection of biscuit tins from Huntley and Palmers.



STATUE OF QUEEN VICTORIA

Walk on from the museum to the Town Hall Square at the end of Friar St.

Friar Street linked Reading Abbey to Greyfriars Friary. The Abbot of Reading was instructed to provide a site for the Franciscans and gave them a muddy swamp on the road leading to the crossing to Caversham. In Town Hall Square you will see a statue of Queen Victoria erected to commemorate her Diamond Jubilee. It is a favourite perch for pigeons. One of her fingers broke off many years ago and you may have spotted it in Reading Museum.



ST LAURENCE'S CHURCH



At the east end of Town Hall Square is St Laurence's church. This was the townsfolk's church and provided the entrance to the grounds of Reading Abbey. It is now used as a Community Centre but it contains a number of war memorials and some interesting private memorials

THE BOMBING RAID

Adjacent to the church is the offices of Blandy and Blandy. This was the site of the bombing raid in 1942 which killed eight people and blew out the west window of the church.

THE FOUNTAIN

Walk past the church and note the drinking fountain against its south wall. It has a special trough for dogs at the bottom.



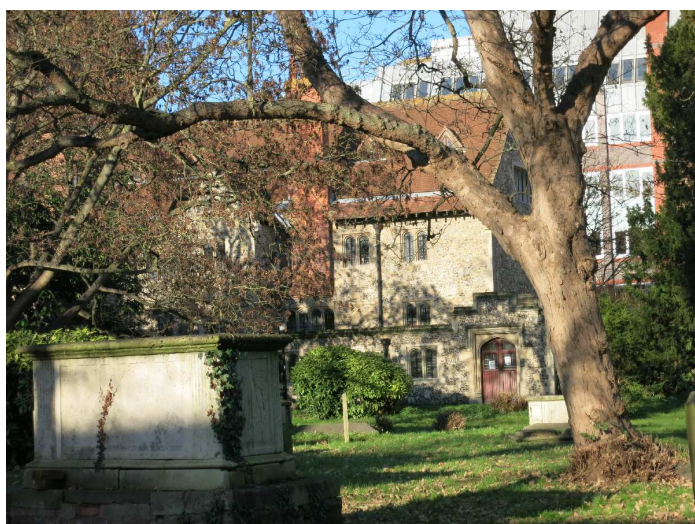
THE SIMEON OBELISK

If you look to your right you will see the Market Place. It is triangular and at the apex is the Simeon Obelisk. This was erected in 1804 as a lantern for the market to commemorate Sir John Simeon who served as MP for Reading around this period.



THE HOSPITIUM

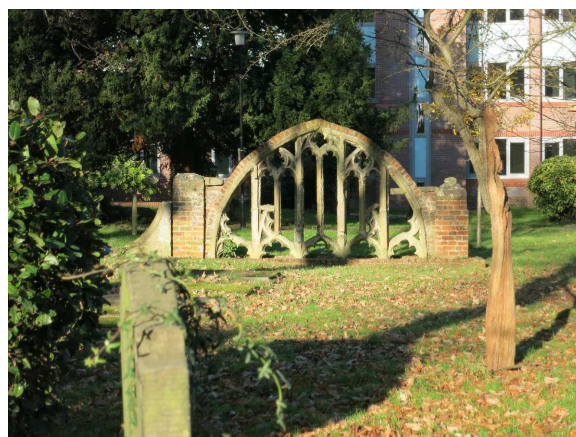
Walk on alongside the church and at the end peer over the wall into the churchyard (sorry children!)



Across the churchyard to your left is the Hospitium. This dates back to the 13th century and was where pilgrims visiting the Abbey were accommodated. In later years it was the home for Reading School

THE WEST WINDOW

Also in the centre of the churchyard is the remains of the west window of the church destroyed in the air raid of 1942.



BERKSHIRE AND READING WAR MEMORIAL

Cross Forbury Road and approach the war memorial which stands at the entrance to Forbury Gardens. This was a rather belated memorial erected in 1933. It is now the focus of the town's Remembrance Sunday observation after many years of using the Cenotaph in Brock Barracks as the focus. It is hoped to place the pavement slab to Fred Potts in this area.



THE MAIWAND LION

Enter the Gardens and walk to the monument dominating it.

The Maiwand Lion was erected in 1895 to commemorate the men of the 66th (Berkshire) Regiment who fell in the 2nd Afghan War (1879-1881). It is one of the earliest memorials recording the names of ordinary soldiers. It was designed by Blackall-Simmonds and recalls another of Reading's three Bs - this time Beer.



THE BANDSTAND



Follow the path past the Lion and you will come to the Bandstand. Set into the grass in front of you is a memorial to the men from Reading who took part in the D-Day landings of 1944.



CIVIL WAR DEFENCES



Walk on past the bandstand heading east. The mound to your left was part of Reading's Civil War defences and provided a platform for cannon.

BURMA STAR MEMORIAL

Carry on eastwards and take a small diversion to your left. You will find a secluded rosegarden which was constructed to commemorate the men from Reading who fought in the Burma campaign of 1944-45.



THE FOUNTAIN

On our right is a fountain.



HENRY I MEMORIAL



Close by is the memorial to Henry I. He was the founder of Reading Abbey and was buried before the high altar. However today his grave is not known

ST JAMES CHURCH

In front of you to the left is the Catholic Church of St James. Much of the material for the church came from the Abbey ruins. The church got its dedication from the abbey holding the hand of St James and its association with the pilgrimages to Compostella.



ST JAMES PRIMARY SCHOOL

To the right of the church is St James' Primary School

ABBEY RUINS

Sadly it is not possible to visit the Abbey ruins owing to their current state. We are hoping for a successful Heritage Lottery bid which will enable Reading Borough Council to undertake extensive restoration work to make it safe again for visitors.

ABBEY GATEWAY

Turn around now and exit the Gardens by the gate next to the cafe.

In front of you is the Abbey Gateway which was restored in Victorian times, having once served as school attended by Jane Austen.



TROOPER POTTS MEMORIAL

As you pass through the gate look to your right. Here you will find the memorial to Trooper Frederick William Owen Potts VC and to the men of the Berkshire Yeomanry who fell in the wars of the 20th Century. It was designed by Tom Murphy and unveiled in October 2015 to commemorate the centenary of the award of the Victoria Cross to Fred.

