

= Reading , Berkshire =

Reading (/ ˈrɛdɪŋ / RED @-@ ing) is a large town and unitary authority area in the ceremonial county of Berkshire , England . It was an important centre in the medieval period , as the site of Reading Abbey , a monastery with strong royal connections . The town was seriously affected by the English Civil War , with a major siege and loss of trade , and played a pivotal role in the Revolution of 1688 , with that revolution 's only significant military action fought on the streets of the town . The 19th century saw the coming of the Great Western Railway and the development of the town 's brewing , baking and seed growing businesses . Today Reading is a commercial centre , with involvement in information technology and insurance , and , despite its proximity to London , has a net inward commuter flow .

The first evidence for Reading as a settlement dates from the 8th century . By 1525 , Reading was the largest town in Berkshire , and tax returns show that Reading was the 10th largest town in England when measured by taxable wealth . By 1611 , it had a population of over 5000 and had grown rich on its trade in cloth . The 18th century saw the beginning of a major iron works in the town and the growth of the brewing trade for which Reading was to become famous . During the 19th century , the town grew rapidly as a manufacturing centre . It is ranked the UK 's top economic area for economic success and wellbeing , according to factors such as employment , health , income and skills . Reading is also a retail centre serving a large area of the Thames Valley , and is home to the University of Reading . Every year it hosts the Reading Festival , one of England 's biggest music festivals . Sporting teams based in Reading include Reading Football Club and the London Irish rugby union team , and over 15 @, @ 000 runners annually compete in the Reading Half Marathon .

The Borough of Reading has a population of 155 @, @ 698 (2011 census) and the town formed the largest part of the Reading / Wokingham Urban Area which had a population of 318 @, @ 014 (2011 census) . The town is currently represented in the UK parliament by two members , and has been continuously represented there since 1295 . For ceremonial purposes the town is in the county of Berkshire and has served as its county town since 1867 , previously sharing this status with Abingdon @-@ on @-@ Thames . It is located in the Thames Valley at the confluence of the River Thames and River Kennet , and on both the Great Western Main Line railway and the M4 motorway . By the national road network , Reading is located 40 miles (64 km) east from Swindon , 27 miles (43 km) south from Oxford , 41 miles (66 km) west of central London , and 16 miles (26 km) north from Basingstoke .

= = History = =

Reading may date back to the Roman occupation of Britain , possibly as a trading port for Calleva Atrebatum . However the first clear evidence for Reading as a settlement dates from the 8th century , when the town came to be known as Readingum . The name probably comes from the Readingas , an Anglo @-@ Saxon tribe whose name means Readas ' People in Old English , or less probably the Celtic Rhydd @-@ Inge , meaning Ford over the River . In late 870 , an army of Danes invaded the kingdom of Wessex and set up camp at Reading . On 4 January 871 , in the first Battle of Reading , King Ethelred and his brother Alfred the Great attempted unsuccessfully to breach the Danes ' defences . The battle is described in the Anglo @-@ Saxon Chronicle , and that account provides the earliest known written record of the existence of Reading . The Danes remained in Reading until late in 871 , when they retreated to their winter quarters in London .

After the Battle of Hastings and the Norman conquest of England , William the Conqueror gave land in and around Reading to his foundation of Battle Abbey . In its 1086 Domesday Book listing , the town was explicitly described as a borough . The presence of six mills is recorded : four on land belonging to the king and two on the land given to Battle Abbey . Reading Abbey was founded in 1121 by Henry I , who is buried within the Abbey grounds . As part of his endowments , he gave the abbey his lands in Reading , along with land at Cholsey . It is not known how badly Reading was affected by the Black Death that swept through England in the 14th century , but it is known that the

abbot of Reading Abbey , Henry of Appleford , was one of its victims in 1361 , and that nearby Henley lost 60 % of its population . The Abbey was largely destroyed in 1538 during Henry VIII 's dissolution of the monasteries . The last abbot , Hugh Cook Faringdon , was subsequently tried and convicted of high treason and hanged , drawn and quartered in front of the Abbey Church .

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The 18th century saw the beginning of a major iron works in the town and the growth of the brewing trade for which Reading was to become famous . Reading 's trade benefited from better designed turnpike roads which helped it establish its location on the major coaching routes from London to Oxford and the West Country . In 1723 , despite considerable local opposition , the Kennet Navigation opened the River Kennet to boats as far as Newbury . Opposition stopped when it became apparent that the new route benefited the town . After the opening of the Kennet and Avon Canal in 1810 , one could go by barge from Reading to the Bristol Channel . From 1714 , and probably earlier , the role of county town of Berkshire was shared between Reading and Abingdon .

During the 19th century , the town grew rapidly as a manufacturing centre . The Great Western Railway arrived in 1841 , followed by the South Eastern Railway in 1849 and the London and South Western Railway in 1856 . The Summer Assizes were moved from Abingdon to Reading in 1867 , effectively making Reading the sole county town of Berkshire , a decision that was officially approved by the Privy Council in 1869 . The town became a county borough under the Local Government Act 1888 . The town has been famous for the Three Bs of beer (1785 ? 2010 , Simonds ' Brewery) , bulbs (1837 ? 1974 , Suttons Seeds) , and biscuits (1822 ? 1976 , Huntley and Palmers) .

The town continued to expand in the 20th century , annexing Caversham across the River Thames in Oxfordshire in 1911 . Compared to many other English towns and cities , Reading suffered little physical damage during either of the two World Wars that afflicted the 20th century , although many citizens were killed or injured in the conflicts . One significant air raid occurred on 10 February 1943 , when a single Luftwaffe plane machine @-@ gunned and bombed the town centre , resulting in 41 deaths and over 100 injuries . The Lower Earley development , built in 1977 , was one of the largest private housing developments in Europe . It extended the urban area of Reading as far as the M4 motorway , which acts as the southern boundary of the town . Further housing developments have increased the number of modern houses and hypermarkets in the outskirts of Reading . A major town @-@ centre shopping centre , The Oracle , opened in 1999 , is named after the 17th century Oracle workhouse , which once occupied a small part of the site . It provides three storeys of shopping space and boosted the local economy by providing 4 @,@ 000 jobs .

As one of the largest urban areas in the United Kingdom to be without city status , Reading has bid for city status on three recent occasions ? in 2000 to celebrate the new millennium ; in 2002 to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II ; and 2012 to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee . All three bids were unsuccessful .

= = Government = =

Local government for the town of Reading is principally provided by Reading Borough Council , a single level unitary authority without civil parishes . However some of the town 's outer suburbs are in West Berkshire and Wokingham unitary authorities . These outer suburbs belong to civil parishes , in some cases with their own town status . Reading has elected at least one Member of Parliament to every Parliament since 1295 . Historically , Reading was represented by the members for the

Parliamentary Borough of Reading , and the parliamentary constituencies of Reading , Reading North , and Reading South . Since the 2010 general election , Reading and its surrounding area has been divided between the parliamentary constituencies of Reading East and Reading West . The whole of the town is within the multi @-@ member South East England European constituency .

Reading is the site of both a Crown Court , administering criminal justice , and a County Court , responsible for civil cases . Lesser matters are dealt with in a local Magistrates ' Court .

Reading has had some degree of local government autonomy since 1253 , when the local merchant guild was granted a royal charter . Since then , the town has been run by a borough corporation , as a county borough , and as a district of Berkshire . The Borough of Reading became a unitary authority area in 1998 , when Berkshire County Council was abolished under the Banham Review , and is now responsible for all aspects of local government within the borough .

Prior to the 16th century , civic administration for the town of Reading was situated in the Yield Hall , a guild hall situated by the River Kennet near today 's Yield Hall Lane . After a brief stay in what later became Greyfriars Church , the town council created a new town hall by inserting an upper floor into the refectory of the Hospitium of St John , the former hospitium of Reading Abbey . For some 400 years up to the 1970s , this was to remain the site of Reading 's civic administration through the successive rebuilds that eventually created today 's Town Hall . In 1976 , Reading Borough Council moved to the new Civic Centre .

The government of the Borough of Reading follows the leader and cabinet model . Following the 2011 local elections , a Labour minority administration replaced the previous Conservative @-@ Liberal Democrat coalition on the casting vote of the mayor . The borough also has a (largely ceremonial) mayor . Cllr Sarah Hacker has been the mayor of Reading since May 2015 .

Since 1887 , the borough has included the former villages of Southcote and Whitley and small parts of Earley and Tilehurst . By 1911 , it also encompassed the Oxfordshire village of Caversham and still more of Tilehurst . A small area of Mapledurham parish was added in 1977 . An attempt to take over a small area of Eye and Dunsden parish in Oxfordshire was rejected because of strong local opposition in 1997 . Today the borough itself is unparished , and the wards used to elect the borough councillors generally ignore the old parish boundaries and use invented ward names .

Reading 's municipal boundaries do not include all of the surrounding suburbs , some of which (Tilehurst , Calcot , Earley and Woodley) are , at least partly within West Berkshire or Wokingham Borough . This unusual configuration creates difficulties . The diminishing amount of land available and suitable for development within the borough 's boundary can bring the council into conflict with its neighbours ' development plans . This particularly affects education (many schools have catchment areas that cross administrative boundaries) , and transport . A perennial example is whether to construct a third road crossing of the Thames , which South Oxfordshire 's politicians and residents oppose . On this subject , Rob Wilson , MP for Reading East , said in a House of Commons debate in January 2006 :

" However , the process has been painfully slow and it appears that , for every two steps forwards , there are three steps backwards ? mainly because of the view of South Oxfordshire district council , which is being incredibly parochial about this matter . Meanwhile , Reading Borough Council is adopting strategies that prioritise local traffic in Reading , obviously to the detriment of through traffic . We have now reached the point at which we desperately need direct Government intervention to break the logjam between those local authorities . "

= = Geography = =

'As the crow flies ' Reading is 36 miles (58 km) due west of central London , 24 miles (39 km) southeast of Oxford , 70 miles (110 km) east of Bristol , and 50 miles (80 km) north of the English south coast . The centre of Reading is on a low ridge between the River Thames and River Kennet , close to their confluence , reflecting the town 's history as a river port . Just above the confluence , the Kennet cuts through a narrow steep @-@ sided gap in the hills forming the southern flank of the Thames floodplain . The absence of a floodplain on the Kennet in this defile enabled the development of wharves .

As Reading has grown , its suburbs have spread : to the west between the two rivers into the foothills of the Berkshire Downs as far as Calcot , Tilehurst and Purley ; to the south and south @-@ east on the south side of the Kennet as far as Whitley Wood , Lower Earley and Woodley ; and to the north of the Thames into the Chiltern Hills as far as Caversham Heights , Emmer Green and Caversham Park Village . Outside the central area , the floors of the valleys containing the two rivers remain largely unimproved floodplain . Apart from the M4 curving to the south there is only one road across the Kennet floodplain . All other routes between the three built @-@ up areas are in the central area , which is a cause of road congestion there .

The floodplains adjoining Reading 's two rivers are subject to occasional flooding . However , in the 2007 floods that affected much of the UK , no properties were affected by flooding from the Thames and only four properties were affected by flooding from the Kennet .

Depending on the definition adopted , neither the town nor the urban area are necessarily coterminous with the borough . Historically , the town of Reading was smaller than the borough . Definitions include the old ecclesiastical parishes of the churches of St Mary , St Laurence and St Giles , or the even smaller pre @-@ 19th century borough . Today , as well as the town centre Reading comprises a number of suburbs and other districts , both within the borough itself and within the surrounding urban area . The names and location of these suburbs are in general usage but , except where some of the outer suburbs correspond to civil parishes , there are no formally defined boundaries . The Reading urban area , sometimes referred to as Greater Reading , incorporates the town 's eastern and western suburbs outside the borough , in the civil parishes of Earley , Woodley , Purley and Tilehurst .

Like the rest of the United Kingdom , Reading has a maritime climate , with limited seasonal temperature ranges and generally moderate rainfall throughout the year . The nearest official Met Office weather station is located at the Reading University Atmospheric Observatory on the Whiteknights Campus , which has recorded atmospheric measurements and meteorological observations since 1970 . The local absolute maximum temperature of 36 @. 4 ° C (97 @. 5 ° F) was recorded in August 2003 and the local absolute minimum temperature of ? 14 @. 5 ° C (5 @. 9 ° F) was recorded in January 1982 .

== Demography ==

The borough has a population of 160 @, 825 and a population density of 3 @, 981 per square kilometre (10 @, 311 / sq mi) (mid @-@ 2014 est .) , while the Office for National Statistics ' definition of the urban sub @-@ division of Reading is significantly larger at 218 @, 705 people in an area of 51 @. 14 square kilometres (19 @. 75 sq mi) . This urban subdivision is itself a component of the Reading / Wokingham Urban Area with a population of 318 @, 014 (2011 census) , and is the most populous town in the United Kingdom not to have city status .

According to the 2011 census , 74 @. 8 % of the population were described as White (65 @. 3 % White British) , 9 @. 1 % as South Asian , 6 @. 7 % as Black , 3 @. 9 % Mixed Race , 4 @. 5 % as Chinese and 0 @. 9 % as other ethnic group . In 2010 it was reported that Reading has 150 different spoken languages within its population . Reading has a large Polish community , which dates back over 30 years , and in October 2006 the Reading Chronicle printed 5 @, 000 copies of a Polish edition called the Kronika Reading .

== Economy ==

Reading is an important commercial centre in the Thames Valley and Southern England . The town hosts the headquarters of several British companies and the UK offices of foreign multinationals , as well as being a major retail centre . Whilst located close enough to London to be sometimes regarded as part of the London commuter belt , Reading is a net inward destination for commuters . During the morning peak period , there are some 30 @, 000 inward arrivals in the town , compared to 24 @, 000 departures .

Major companies BG Group , ING Direct , Microsoft , Oracle Hibu (formerly Yell Group) , have

their headquarters in Reading . The insurance company Prudential has an administration centre in the town . PepsiCo and Wrigley have offices . Reading has a significant historical involvement in the information technology industry , largely as a result of the early presence in the town of sites of International Computers Limited and Digital . Other technology companies with a significant presence in the town include Agilent Technologies , Cisco , Ericsson , Symantec , Verizon Business , and Commvault These companies are distributed around Reading or just outside the borough boundary , some in business parks including Thames Valley Park in nearby Earley , Green Park Business Park and Arlington Business Park .

Reading town centre is a major shopping centre . In 2007 , an independent poll placed Reading 16th in a league table of best performing retail centres in the UK . The main shopping street is Broad Street , which runs between The Oracle in the east and Broad Street Mall in the west and was pedestrianised in 1995 . The smaller Friars Walk in Friar Street is derelict and will be demolished if the proposed Station Hill redevelopment project goes ahead . There are three major department stores in Reading : John Lewis Reading (formerly known as Heelas) , Debenhams and House of Fraser . The Broad Street branch of bookseller Waterstone 's is a conversion of a nonconformist chapel dating from 1707 . Besides the two major shopping malls , Reading has three smaller shopping arcades , the Bristol and West Arcade , Harris Arcade and The Walk , which contain smaller specialist stores . An older form of retail facility is represented by Union Street , popularly known as Smelly Alley . Reading has no indoor market , but there is a street market in Hosier Street . A farmers ' market operates on two Saturdays a month .

= = Culture = =

Every year Reading hosts the Reading Festival , which has been running since 1971 . The festival takes place on the Friday , Saturday and Sunday of the August bank holiday weekend and is the largest of its kind in the UK aside from the Glastonbury Festival . For some twenty years until 2006 , Reading was also known for its WOMAD Festival until it moved to Charlton Park in Malmesbury , Wiltshire . The Reading Beer Festival was first held in 1994 and has now grown to one of the largest beer festivals in the UK . It is held at King 's Meadow for the five days immediately preceding the May Day bank holiday every year . Reading also holds Reading Pride , an annual LGBT+ festival in Kings Meadow .

The Frank Matcham @-@ designed Royal County Theatre , built in 1895 , was located on the south side of Friar Street . It burned down in 1937 . Within the town hall is a 700 @-@ seat concert hall that houses a Father Willis organ . Reading theatre venues include The Hexagon and South Street Arts Centre . Amateur theatre venues in Reading include Progress Theatre , a self @-@ governing , self @-@ funding theatre group and registered charity founded in 1947 that operates and maintains its own 97 @-@ seat theatre .

The demonym for a person from Reading is Readingensian , giving the name of the local rugby team Redingensians , based in Sonning , and of former members of Reading School . An alternative demonym is Readingite .

= = = Cultural references = = =

Jane Austen attended Reading Ladies Boarding School , based in the Abbey Gateway , in 1784 ? 86 .

Mary Russell Mitford lived in Reading for a number of years and then spent the rest of her life just outside the town at Three Mile Cross and Swallowfield . The fictional Belford Regis of her eponymous novel , first published in 1835 , is largely based on Reading . Described with topographical accuracy , it is still possible to follow the steps of the novel 's characters in present @-@ day Reading .

Reading also appears in the works of Thomas Hardy where it is called ' Aldbrickham ' . It features most heavily in his final novel , Jude the Obscure , as the temporary home of Jude Fawley and Sue Bridehead .

Oscar Wilde was imprisoned in Reading Gaol from 1895 ? 97 . While there , he wrote his letter De Profundis . After his release , he lived in exile in France and wrote The Ballad of Reading Gaol , based on his experience of the execution of Charles Wooldridge , carried out in Reading Gaol whilst he was imprisoned there .

Ricky Gervais , who is from Reading , made the film Cemetery Junction , which , although filmed elsewhere in the UK , is set in 1970s Reading and is named after a busy junction in East Reading .

Jasper Fforde 's Nursery Crimes Division novels , The Big Over Easy and The Fourth Bear are also placed in Reading , Berkshire .

BBC Two Sitcom Beautiful People based on the memoirs of Simon Doonan is set in Reading in the late 1990s .

= = = Landmarks = = =

The Maiwand Lion in Forbury Gardens , an unofficial symbol of Reading , commemorates the 328 officers of the Royal Berkshire Regiment who died in the Battle of Maiwand in 1880 . The Blade , a fourteen @-@ storey building completed in 2009 , is 128 m (420 ft) tall and can be seen from the surrounding area . Jacksons Corner with its prominent sign , former home of Jacksons department store , occupies the corner of Kings Road and High Street , just south of the Market Place .

Reading has five Grade I listed buildings , 22 Grade II * and 853 Grade II buildings , in a wide variety of architectural styles that range from the medieval to the 21st century . The Grade I listed buildings are Reading Abbey , the Abbey Gateway , Greyfriars Church , St Laurence 's Church , and Reading Minster .

= = = Media = = =

Reading has a local newspaper , the Reading Chronicle , published on Thursdays . The town 's other local newspaper , the Reading Post , ceased publication on paper in December 2014 , in order transition to an online only format under the title getreading . An online magazine , Alt Reading , publishes articles focusing on arts , entertainment and culture in Reading . A local publishing company , the Two Rivers Press , has published over 70 book titles , many on the topic of local history and art .

Three local radio stations broadcast from Reading : BBC Radio Berkshire , Jack FM Berkshire and Heart Thames Valley . Other local radio stations , such as London 's 95 @.@ 8 Capital FM , Basingstoke 's The Breeze and East Berkshire 's Time 106 @.@ 6 , can also be received . Local television news programmes are the BBC 's South Today and ITV 's Meridian Tonight .

= = Public services = =

Reading has over 100 parks and playgrounds , including 5 miles (8 @.@ 0 km) of riverside paths . In the town centre is Forbury Gardens , a public park built on the site of the outer court of Reading Abbey . The largest public park in Reading is Prospect Park , previously an estate owned by Frances Kendrick and acquired by the Reading Corporation in 1901 .

The principal National Health Service (NHS) hospital in Reading is the Royal Berkshire Hospital , founded in 1839 and much enlarged and rebuilt since . A second major NHS general hospital , the Battle Hospital , closed in 2005 . Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust runs a NHS hospital , Prospect Park Hospital , that specialises in the provision of care for people with mental health and learning disabilities . Reading has three private hospitals , the Berkshire Independent Hospital in Coley Park , the Dunedin Hospital situated on the main A4 Bath Road , and the Circle Hospital at Kennet Island .

The Reading Borough Public Library service dates back to 1877 . Initially housed in Reading Town Hall , the central branch of the library relocated in 1985 to a new building on King 's Road .

Mains water and sewerage services are supplied by Thames Water Utilities Limited , a private sector water supply company , whilst water abstraction and disposal is regulated by the Environment

Agency . Reading 's water supply is largely derived from underground aquifers , and as a consequence the water is hard .

The commercial energy supplier for electricity and gas is at the consumer 's choice . Southern Electric runs the local electricity distribution network , while SGN runs the gas distribution network . A notable part of the local energy infrastructure is the presence of a 2 @-@ megawatt (peak) Enercon wind turbine at Green Park Business Park , wired to the local sub @-@ grid . It has the potential to produce 3 @.@ 5 million units of electricity a year , enough to power over a thousand homes .

The dialling code for fixed @-@ line telephones in Reading is 0118 . BT provides fixed @-@ line telephone coverage throughout the town and ADSL broadband internet connection to most areas . Parts of Reading are cabled by Virgin Media , supplying cable television , telephone and broadband internet connections .

= = Transport = =

Reading 's location in the Thames Valley to the west of London has made the town an important location in the nation 's transport system .

The town grew up as a river port at the confluence of the Thames and the Kennet . Both of these rivers are navigable , and Caversham Lock , Blake 's Lock , County Lock , Fobney Lock and Southcote Lock are all within the borough . Today , navigation is exclusively for purposes of leisure : private and hire boats dominate traffic , while scheduled boat services operate on the Thames from wharves on the Reading side of the river near Caversham Bridge .

Reading was a major staging point on the old Bath Road (A4) from London to Avonmouth , near Bristol . This road still carries local traffic , but has now been replaced for long distance traffic by the M4 motorway , which closely skirts the borough and serves it with three junctions , J10 @-@ J12 . Other main roads serving Reading include the A33 , A327 , A329 , A4074 and A4155 . Within Reading there is the Inner Distribution Road (IDR) , a ring road for local traffic . The IDR is linked with the M4 by the A33 relief road . National Express Coaches run out of Reading Coachway , at Junction 12 of the M4 . The Thames is crossed by both Reading and Caversham road bridges , while several road bridges cross the Kennet , the oldest surviving one of which is High Bridge .

Reading is a major junction point of the National Rail system , and hence Reading station is a major transfer point and terminus . In a project that finished in 2015 , Reading station was redeveloped at a cost of £ 850m , with grade separation of some conflicting traffic flows , and extra platforms , to relieve severe congestion at this station . Railway lines link Reading to both Paddington and Waterloo stations in London . Other stations in the Reading area are Reading West , Tilehurst and Earley . Green Park railway station is planned on the Reading to Basingstoke Line to serve Green Park Business Park .

There have been two airfields in or near Reading , one at Coley Park and one at Woodley , but they have both closed . The nearest airport is London Heathrow , 25 miles (40 km) away by road . An express bus service named RailAir links Reading with Heathrow , or the airport can be accessed by rail by taking the Paddington train and changing to the Heathrow Connect rail service at Hayes and Harlington railway station .

Today local public transport is largely by road , which is often affected by peak hour congestion in the borough . A frequent local bus network within the borough , and a less frequent network in the surrounding area , are provided by Reading Buses . Other bus operators include First , Arriva South East , Stagecoach and Thames Travel . Readibus provides an on @-@ demand transport service for people with restricted mobility in the area .

The OYBike bicycle sharing system operates in Reading , with approximately 15 bicycles and with docking stations at Reading station , Holiday Inn (Basingstoke Road) and Green Park . In March 2011 , Reading Borough Council approved a larger scheme similar to Barclays Cycle Hire in London , with 1 @,@ 000 bicycles available at up to 150 docking stations across Reading .

= = Education = =

Reading School , founded in 1125 , is the 16th oldest school in England . There are six other state secondary schools and 37 state primary schools within the borough , together with a number of private and independent schools and nurseries .

Reading College has provided further education in Reading since 1955 , with over 8 @, @ 500 local learners on over 900 courses .

The University of Reading was established in 1892 as an affiliate of Oxford University . It moved to its London Road Campus in 1904 and to its new Whiteknights Campus in 1947 . It took over the Bulmershe College of Higher Education , a teacher training college , in 1989 , becoming Bulmershe Court Campus . The Henley Management College , situated in Buckinghamshire and about 10 miles (16 km) from Reading , was taken over in 2008 , becoming Greenlands Campus . The University of West London maintains a presence in the town for its higher education students , principally in nursing , but has now divested itself of its previous ownership of Reading College and its further education students .

English language schools located in Reading include Gateway Languages , The English Language Centre , ELC London Street and Eurospeak Language School .

= = = Museums = = =

The Museum of Reading opened in 1883 in the town 's municipal buildings . It contains galleries relating to the history of Reading and to the excavations of Calleva Atrebatum , together with a full @-@ size replica of the Bayeux Tapestry , an art collection , and galleries relating to Huntley and Palmers .

The Museum of English Rural Life , in East Reading , is a museum dedicated to recording the changing face of farming and the countryside in England . It houses designated collections of national importance . It is owned and run by the University of Reading , as are the Ure Museum of Greek Archaeology , the Cole Museum of Zoology and the Harris Botanic Gardens , all of which can be found on the university 's Whiteknights Campus .

The small Riverside Museum at Blake 's Lock tells the story of Reading 's two rivers , the Kennet and the Thames . In the suburb of Woodley , the Museum of Berkshire Aviation has a collection of aircraft and other artefacts relating to the aircraft industry in the town .

= = Religion = =

Reading Minster , or the Minster Church of St Mary the Virgin as it is more properly known , is Reading 's oldest ecclesiastical foundation , known to have been founded by the 9th century and possibly earlier . Although eclipsed in importance by the later Abbey , Reading Minster has regained its importance since the destruction of the Abbey .

Reading Abbey was founded by Henry I in 1121 . He was buried there , as were parts of his daughter Empress Matilda , William of Poitiers , Constance of York , and Princess Isabella of Cornwall , among others . The abbey was one of the pilgrimage centres of medieval England ; it held over 230 relics including the hand of St. James . Today all that remains of the abbey are the inner rubble cores of the walls of many of the major buildings of the abbey , together with a much restored inner gateway and the intact hospitium .

The mediaeval borough of Reading was served by three parish churches : Reading Minster , St Giles ' Church , and St Laurence 's Church . All are still in use by the Church of England . The Franciscan friars built a friary in the town in 1311 . After the friars were expelled in 1538 , the building was used as a hospital , a poorhouse , and a jail , before being restored as the Church of England parish church of Greyfriars Church in 1863 .

The Bishop of Reading is a suffragan bishop within the Church of England 's Diocese of Oxford . The bishop is based in Reading , and is responsible for the archdeaconry of Berkshire . There are a total of 18 Church of England parish churches in Reading .

St James 's Church was built on a portion of the site of the abbey between 1837 ? 40 , and marked

the return of the Roman Catholic faith to Reading . Reading was also the site of the death of Blessed Dominic Barberi , the Catholic missionary to England in the 19th century who received John Henry Newman into the Catholic faith . There are now a total of 8 Roman Catholic parish churches in Reading .

Reading has had an organized Jewish community since 1886 . At least one Jewish family living in the area has been traced back as far as 1842 . The group grew to 13 families , who in 1886 declared themselves a community and commenced building a synagogue . On 31 October 1900 , Reading Synagogue officially opened in a solemn public ceremony , packed to capacity with dignitaries , led by the Chief Rabbi Hermann Adler . Reading Synagogue , which still stands on its original site at the junction of Goldsmid Road and Clifton Street near the town centre , is a Grade 2 *- listed historical structure , built to a traditional design in the Moorish style . The community forms the spiritual and communal centre for Jews in Berkshire and surrounding counties and is affiliated with the Orthodox United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth . Reading also has a Liberal Jewish community which convenes in the Reading Quaker Meeting House and a Reform Jewish community which convenes in nearby Maidenhead Synagogue .

Reading also has places of worship of other religions , the Shantideva Mahayana Buddhist centre , a Hindu temple , a Sikh gurdwara , a Salvation Army citadel , a Quaker meeting house , and a Christadelphian Hall .

There is presently one mosque , the Central Reading Mosque . The £ 3 ? 4m Abu Bakr Islamic Centre , on Oxford Road in West Reading , was granted planning permission in 2002 . The community *- funded project began construction in 2006 , but , as of July 2008 , had no estimated completion date . A second Islamic centre in eastern Reading has also been granted planning permission . This £ 4m project has garnered some controversy .

= = Sport = =

Reading is the home of Reading Football Club , an association football club nicknamed The Royals , formed in 1871 . Formerly based at Elm Park , the club plays at the 24 *, 161 capacity Madejski Stadium , named after chairman Sir John Madejski , and which opened in 1998 . After winning the 2005 ? 06 Football League Championship with a record of 106 points , Reading F.C. spent two seasons in the Premier League before being relegated to The Championship . For the 2012 ? 2013 season , the club again competed in the Premier League , after securing first place in The Championship for the 2011 ? 2012 season , but were relegated back down to The Championship at season 's end .

Reading Town Football Club , formed in 1966 , played at Scours Lane and were playing in the Hellenic League Premier Division but were dissolved in 2016 , while fellow Non *- League football club Highmoor Ibis F.C. play at Palmer Park Stadium .

Reading is a centre for rugby union football in the area , with the Aviva Premiership team London Irish as tenants at the Madejski Stadium . Reading is also home to another three senior semi *- professional rugby clubs ; Reading Abbey R.F.C. , Redingensians R.F.C. and Reading R.F.C. .

The town hosts Australian rules football team Reading Kangaroos and American football team Berkshire Renegades . Palmer Park Stadium has a velodrome and athletics track . It is used by Reading Athletic Club and the Berkshire Renegades for training . The Reading Hockey Club play in the Men 's Premier Division and in Women 's Division One of the English Hockey League . The Reading Rockets basketball club plays in the English Basketball League .

Rowing is pursued by the Reading Rowing Club , the Reading University Boat Club , both next to Caversham Bridge whilst Reading Blue Coat School trains in Sonning adjacent to The Redgrave Pinsent Rowing Lake in Caversham , which provides training facilities for the GB National Squad . However almost all club rowing is done on the River Thames . The annual Reading Town Regatta takes place near Thames Valley Park , with the Reading Amateur Regatta taking place in June , usually two weeks prior to Henley Royal Regatta .

The town was home to a motorcycle speedway team , Reading Racers . Speedway came to Reading in 1968 at Tilehurst Stadium , until the team moved to Smallmead Stadium in Whitley ,

which was demolished at the end of 2008 . The team is inactive pending the building of a new stadium , which was once hoped to be completed in 2012 .

The Reading Half Marathon is held on the streets of Reading in March of each year , with 16 @, @ 000 competitors from elite to fun runners . It was first run in 1983 and took place in every subsequent year except 2001 , when it was cancelled because of concerns over that year 's outbreak of foot @-@ and @-@ mouth disease .

The British Triathlon Association was formed at the town 's former Mall health club on 11 December 1982 . Britain 's first ever triathlon took place just outside Reading at Kirtons 's Farm in Pingewood in 1983 and was revived 10 years ' later by Banana Leisure with one of the original organisers as Event Director . Thames Valley Triathletes , based in the town , is Britain 's oldest triathlon club , having its origins in the 1984 event at nearby Heckfield , when a relay team raced under the name Reading Triathlon Club .

The Hexagon theatre was home to snooker 's Grand Prix tournament , one of the sport 's " Big Four " , from 1984 to 94 .

= = Notable people = =

= = Town twinning = =

Reading is twinned with :

Düsseldorf , Germany (since 1947 , officially since 1988)

Clonmel , Ireland (since 1994)

Meaux , France

San Francisco Libre , Nicaragua (since 1994)

Speightstown , Barbados (since 2003)

Reading is also a sister city of :

Beruwala , Sri Lanka (since 2004)

Reading , Pennsylvania