

## INTRODUCTION TO GEORGIAN READING

Reading has a rich legacy of Georgian architecture if you know where to look, with hundreds of listed buildings from the period c.1700-1840. This was the golden era of coaching and Reading was an important stopping point on the route to Bath and the West Country. Today the important coaching inns (the Crown and the Bear) have vanished, but the **King's Arms** remains as residences on Castle Hill, while **The George** in the town centre also reflects this pre-rail era. The historic approach roads to the town, moreover, reveal splendid Georgian streetscapes that reflect the increased trade and wealth from this period: **London Road/London Street** and **Castle Street/Castle Hill**.

Built from high quality red and grey bricks fired locally in the kilns of **Katesgrove** and **Coley**, these classical-style buildings contrasted the timber-framed townhouses of earlier eras. They were seen as signs of elegant taste and modernity, inspired from the architecture of Renaissance Italy (especially the work of Andrea Palladio), which in turn looked back to ancient Greece and Rome. Alongside buildings, wide paved roads, street lighting, and other urban improvements were important markers of progress. The provision of better urban infrastructure formed a continual political battle in Reading from the late eighteenth century onwards.

As Reading industry expanded in the early nineteenth century, the areas adjoining the London and Bath roads expanded into genteel residential districts centring on **Eldon Square** in the east and **Russell Street** in the west. These stately late Georgian terraces were built by local families of builders as speculative developments, notably Henry and Nathaniel Briant, Richard Billing II, Thomas Jesse, and William Pratt Swallow. While they were not nationally known and only some had formal architectural training, the rich inventiveness of these buildings testify to their design skills. After the completion of the **Kennet & Avon Canal** in 1810, golden Bath stone facing also became available, and Reading's Regency buildings reflect wider national trends from London, Bath and Brighton.

Speculative building was often a slow and risky business, and there were also many abortive schemes, such as plans for an oval east of Watlington Street (only one partial quadrant was built), or Jesse's unfulfilled plans for a grand square fronting the Bath Road. Many of Reading's builders also moved on to other professions. Henry Briant, who, aged 24, won first *and* second place in the competition for the **Royal Berkshire Hospital**, abandoned architecture for the church while the hospital was under construction, serving as a parish priest for another forty years.

Today, Reading still preserves important glimpses of the Georgian city and how it evolved from the late seventeenth century, with the introduction of classical architecture and brick buildings, to the improvements in transportation and evolution of taste that culminated in rapid urban expansion and the coming of the railway at the onset of the Victorian period. This pamphlet provides two walking routes which can also be combined for one longer walk, together encompassing a highlights tour of Georgian Reading.

## HIGHLIGHTS



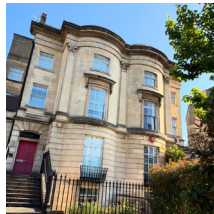
SIMEON OBELISK (B)



HIGH BRIDGE (C)



WATLINGTON HOUSE (E)



KING'S ROAD (F)



ELDON SQUARE (H)



ROYAL BERKSHIRE (I)



ALBION TERRACE (J)



ADDINGTON'S HOUSE (L)



THE GEORGE (N)



SIMONDS BANK (O)



CONGR. CHAPEL (R)



ST MARY'S CASTLE ST (S)



HOLYBROOK HOUSE (T)



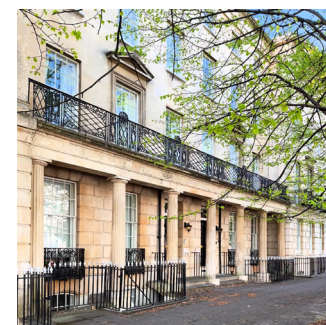
KING'S ARMS (V)



RUSSELL STREET (W)

# GEORGIAN READING

## SELF-GUIDED WALKING TOUR



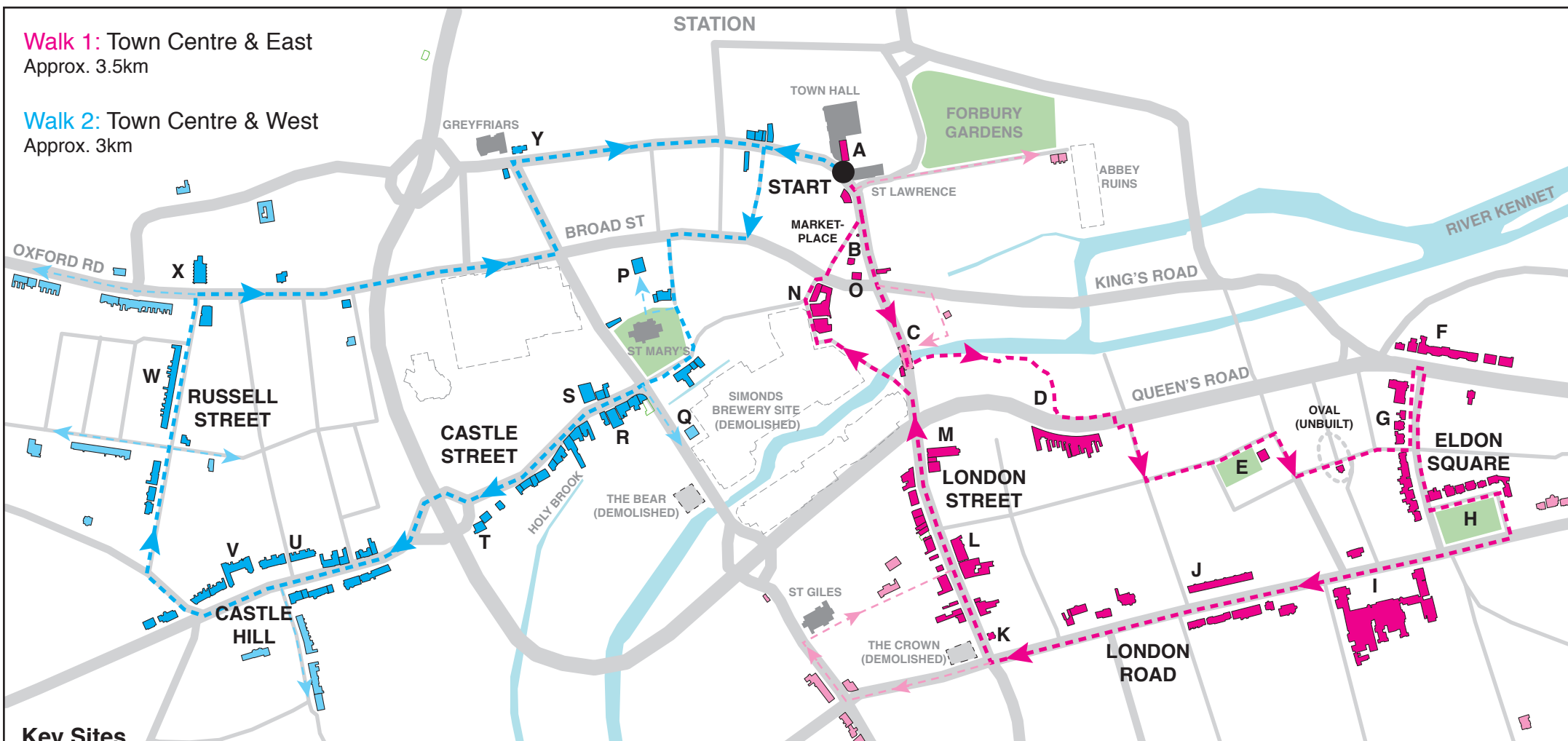
Dr Stephen Gage

In partnership with REDA



**Walk 1: Town Centre & East**  
Approx. 3.5km

**Walk 2: Town Centre & West**  
Approx. 3km



### Key Sites

- A.** Old Town Hall (Victoria Hall), 1786 (Charles Poulton)
- B.** Simeon Obelisk, 1804 (Sir John Soane)
- C.** High Bridge, 1788 (Robert Brettingham)
- D.** Queen's Crescent, 1841 (JJ Cooper)
- E.** Watlington House, 1688, extended 1720s
- F.** Wilberforce Place & Waterloo Place, King's Road, 1832-1840 (Henry & Nathaniel Briant)
- G.** Eldon Road, 1834-1840 (H & N Briant)
- H.** Eldon Square, 1834-1840 (H & N Briant)
- I.** Royal Berkshire Hospital, 1836-39 (H Briant), (extensions by Morris, Smith, 1844-1912)

- J.** Albion Terrace, London Road, 1825-35 (Richard Billing II)
- K.** Huntley & Palmer's Shop, 1822 (rebuilt)
- L.** 73-75 London Street, 1748/54 (home of Addington)
- M.** New Public Rooms/Mechanics Institute, 1843 (William Brown Sr)
- N.** The George (medieval origins but primarily C18 with early C19 extensions)
- O.** Simonds Bank, King Street, 1836-39 (H & N Briant), (extended with new entrance, 1893)
- P.** Independent Chapel (now Waterstone's), Broad Street, 1707 (Broad Street front, 1892)
- Q.** Seven Bridges House, 1790 (for Simonds)

- R.** Congregational Chapel (now Brewdog), Castle Street, 1837 (JJ Cooper)
- S.** St Mary's Castle Street, 1798 (front by N. Briant, 1840)
- T.** Holybrook House (63 Castle Street), c1750
- U.** Jesse Place, 134-74 Castle Hill, 1835-1838 (Thomas Jesse)
- V.** Former King's Arms Inn (154-60 Castle Hill), 1734
- W.** Russell Street, 1829-1840 (William Pratt Swallow)
- X.** Holy Trinity Church, 1827 (front by J. Billing, 1846)
- Y.** Greyfriars Vicarage (rebuilt; original by Soane, original garden walls remain)