

14 Chestnut Walk

Exit the Abbey and you are in Chestnut Walk, a new avenue of Chestnut leaved Oaks facing the River Kennet. Look up to your left to see the rear of Reading prison. The author and playwright Oscar Wilde was imprisoned there in the late 1800s. Following his release in 1897 he wrote *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*.

15 Weeping Willows

Turn right into Chestnut Walk and left at its end. Moving forward, you will cross over the Holy Brook as it enters the Kennet. Keep going forward several metres under the office block until you reach King's Road. Turn right, cross the road and then turn left into Crane Wharf. You meet the Kennet again and, to your left, you will see three splendid Weeping Willows gracefully hanging over the river.

16 London Plane

Turn right and walk along the riverside to High Bridge/Duke Street, where the street benefits from a magnificent London Plane on the far side of the bridge.

17 Lime Trees and Willow Trees

If you turn left at the bridge and cross immediately over the road and around the London Street Brasserie, you will enter The Oracle Shopping Centre's Riverside with each side lined with young trees. The Oracle, which opened in 1999, was built on a former bus depot and Courage Brewery site.

18 Bear Island

Continuing through The Oracle, follow the river until you reach Bridge Street, crossing the road to the north bank. Pause at the railings to see County Lock and Bear Island just ahead of you. Note how the trees soften the environment here. Turn right and make your way up Bridge Street and back to your starting point at St Mary's.

19 Optional extra:

Just before you reach St Mary's turn left up Castle Street and on up to Castle Hill. Midway up on the right hand side is one of Reading's most notable trees, the magnificent Cedar of Lebanon. This landmark tree is believed to have been planted in 1796 by Catholic priests. They lived in the house (then called "Reading House") which was originally a coaching inn on the main London to Bristol stagecoach route. Return down the hill to your starting point.

Useful information

How to get there:

As this tree walk is in the town centre, the best way to reach the starting point at St Mary's is on foot, following the street plan on the map.

Further information on trees:

You can find out more about these tree species online or in Paul Sterry's (2007) *Collins complete Guide to British Trees*, Harper Collins. Look out for Adrian Lawson and Geoff Sawers' book *The Shady Side of Town: Reading's Trees* (2017), Two Rivers Press.

All information in this leaflet correct at time of publication.

Reading Tree Wardens:

You can find out more about us and forthcoming events by visiting our website at <http://www.readingtreewardens.org.uk> or our Facebook page (Reading Tree Wardens)

Walking time:

One to one and a half hours approx.

This is one of seven urban tree walks developed by Reading Tree Wardens. The other walks are Caversham, Coley Park Meadow, Tilehurst, Redlands, Riverside and a Winter walk. You can download them from the Reading Tree Warden website.

Publisher:

Image Box. www.imagebox.co.uk

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Updated 2025

The Earley Charity
by hook or by crook

Reading Year of Culture Partner
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Introduction

Our starting point is Reading Minster, or the Minster Church of St Mary the Virgin, a Grade 1 listed building and the oldest ecclesiastical foundation in Reading.

1 Indian Bean Tree

In front of the Minster's main entrance are the remains of an old Indian Bean Tree with twisted trunk. Its young replacement, adjacent, was donated by the Berkshire Foundation of Townswomens' Guilds. This tree is a native of SE USA and is named after its long slender bean-like seed pods.

2 Evergreen (Holm) Oak

Walk along the left side of the Minster towards the Evergreen (Holm) Oak opposite Bill's. The character Grade 2 listed building dates back to the 1700s. Look out for another Evergreen Oak on your walk.

3 London Plane Tree

Turn right and pause at the massive London Plane Tree at the side of John Lewis. It is one of the largest trees in Reading and considered to be about 150-200 years old. The London Plane is a popular town and city tree because it is resistant to storms and, importantly, absorbs atmospheric carbon while its leaves provide oxygen.

4 London Planes

Proceed along Chain Street to Broad Street and turn right. The street is lined with London Planes to provide a pleasant pedestrian environment.

5 Sorbus or Common Whitebeam

Carry on to Butter Market and turn left walking up to Town Hall Square. Did you spot the second Evergreen Oak outside Marks and Spencer? Here, too, are two Sorbus or Common Whitebeam.

6 Reading Town Hall

Pause to appreciate Reading Town Hall built in Victorian Gothic style by Alfred Waterhouse in 1875. The frontage was built with red and grey bricks and terracotta ornaments, all products of the town's Collier brickworks at Tilehurst.



7 Judas Tree

Look for the alleyway between St Lawrence's church and the law firm Blandy and Blandy. This leads you into the churchyard where you will see, among other trees, a recently planted and a mature Judas Tree with heart shaped leaves. Legend has it this is the tree on which Judas hanged himself after betraying Jesus, after which white flowers turned red with his blood. Continue across the road and enter Forbury Gardens.

8 Forbury Gardens

Forbury Gardens is a Victorian town garden, originally the forecourt of Reading Abbey. The gardens are dominated by the Maiwand Lion in memorial to those in the 66th Berkshire Regiment who fell during the Battles of Maiwand and Kandahar.

9 Verdun Oak

If you go forward as you enter the gates you will encounter an oak that was among several grown from acorns gathered at the battlefield of Verdun in France in 1916. The acorns were grown on at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. A resulting seedling was planted by Reading Mayoress Mrs. Stanley Hayward on Peace Day, 19th June, 1919 to be a reminder of the human cost of war and the benefits of peace.



10 Handkerchief Trees

Among many other interesting trees in the garden are two Handkerchief Trees, one on the boundary to Abbot's Walk and another on the boundary to St James' church. In May these trees produce white leaf bracts that look like waving white handkerchiefs.

11 Maidenhair Tree

Nearby, you will see the Maidenhair Tree with its fan shaped leaves on the boundary to Abbot's Walk. This is a very ancient tree species from China, endangered in the wild but widely cultivated. Ginkgo (maidenhair) herbal supplements are said to provide a mild improvement to memory.

12 Mulberry Tree

Note the Mulberry Tree to the rear of the kiosk. The black mulberry is a native of Asia, cultivated for its raspberry-like fruit. The gnarled trunk and the twisted branches can make even a young tree look old.

13 Reading Abbey

Keeping right, proceed to exit the gardens through the archway to the Abbey. Explore the ruins of the Abbey founded by Henry 1 in 1121, conservation work undergone in 2018. Follow the information boards in the South transept, the treasury, the chapter house, the dormitory and the refectory.