

HERITAGE STATEMENT

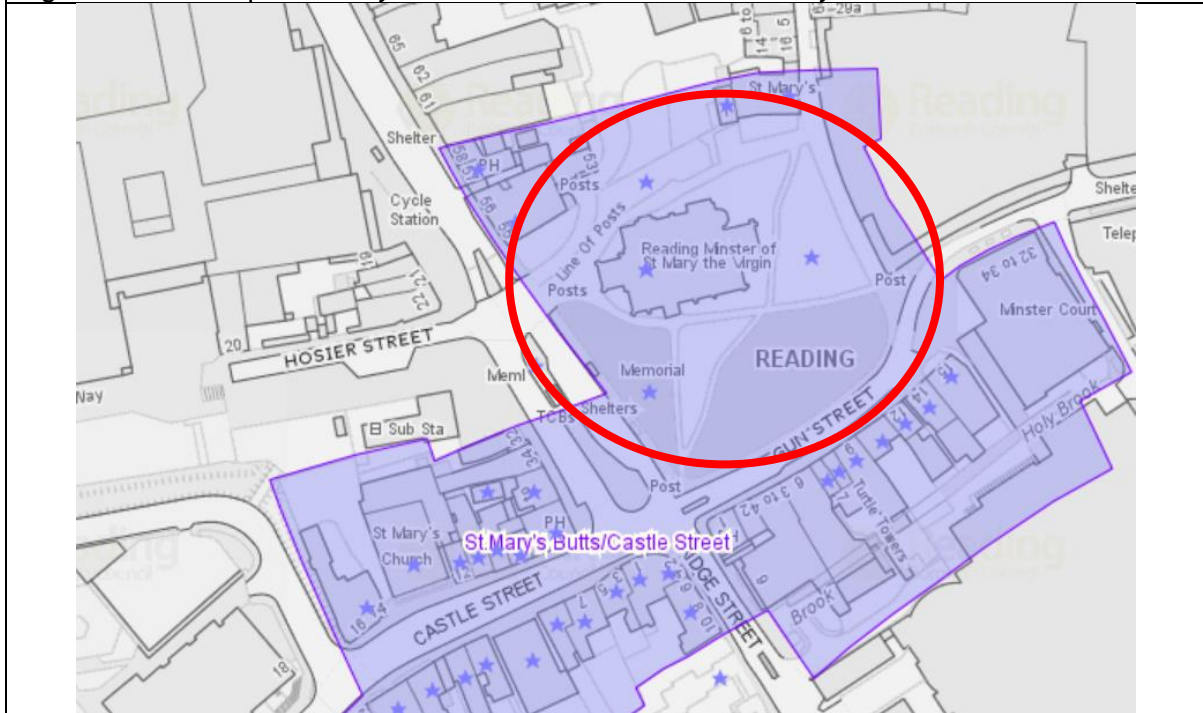
Church of St Mary, St Mary's Butts, Reading

Statement of Significance

The site is in the heart of Reading, within St Mary's Butts / Castle Street Conservation Area. St Mary's Butts, the oldest part of Reading, takes its name from the archery butts where yeoman practiced archery. St Mary's Church and its Cemetery is a Grade 1 listed building and an outstanding local landmark surrounded with the churchyard, a significant open space / green area.

The earliest map of Reading, published in John Speed's atlas of Great Britain in 1611 shows that the plan of the town in the early 17th century resembled a triangle with a church roughly at each corner: St Mary's, Greyfriars and St Laurence's. The main building, then as now, was St Mary's Church. The present church is essentially a sixteenth century re-build on the Saxon site, which incorporated remnants of the early church and using stone from the dissolved Reading Abbey (RBC, 2008).

Fig. 1: Location Map of St Mary's Church. The Church and Cemetery is circled in RED.



The listing on Historic England's HE Website states:

"Nothing retains of the Norman Church except a doorway built into north wall. Built in distinctive materials: a chequerwork of quarry and quaternary flint and Taynton stone ashlar with tiled roofs. Prominent west tower, hall church with four bay aisled nave and projecting chancel. The tower, 1550-53, is of three stages, crenellated and with polygonal angle buttresses capped by crocketed pinnacles. The south aisle with projecting gabled porch in third bay is 5+2 (later) bays with dividing buttresses and Decorated-style tracery. Three bay chancel (1864) in Early English style with bill flowers to moulded cornice. To north vestry projects with door to east and older polygonal turret with decorated cornice. The north transept is indicated by a gable. Three bay north aisle (1871, Joseph Morris) with decorated tracery."

General Comments

Church of St Mary lies at the heart of the St Mary's Butts / Castle Street Conservation Area, surrounded with historic commercial and domestic buildings reaching back to sixteenth century. The current street pattern dates from medieval times, when the St Mary's Parish was the original heart of the town (RBC, 2008).

It is the most pedestrian-friendly part of the Conservation Area with pedestrian routes crossing the large public open space: The Churchyard. The churchyard defined by curtilage listed walls, provides a wide and attractive green space in the urban townscape. The importance of the churchyard is unquestionable due to its sense of enclosure and connections to the rest of the town offering a pedestrian experience both for movement and relaxation.

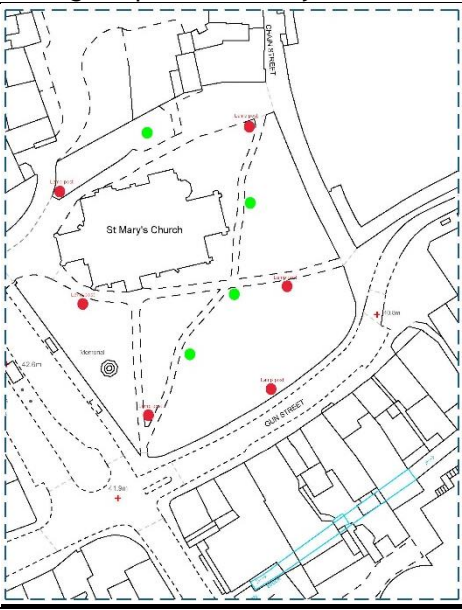
Good pedestrian links through and around the site provides connectivity to Broad Street Mall to the north and The Oracle to the south. However, these large modern buildings beyond the Conservation Area detracting from the scale, materials and grain of the historic town centre also shifted commercial activity from the centre to the outskirts and left the churchyard transitional.

With the newly emerging Minster Quarter (Hosier Street) area there is a chance to increase footfall and improve the public realm in St Mary's Butts area which will also benefit the church and the churchyard.

The Proposal

Reading Minster of St. Mary-the-Virgin is a Grade 1 listed ecclesiastical building situated in the heart of Reading. Attention required in terms of safety and additional lighting provisions due to the insufficient lighting levels creating blind spots in parts of St Mary's Churchyard.

After a recent crime was reported, it is proposed to increase the quality of the public realm by assuring safety and connectivity. This will involve installing 6 new, matching lamp posts in addition to the existing fixtures, which are in good condition, dark in colour and a timeless in design: Column 5018 is a 5m black steel lighting column fitted with an DW Windsor LED lantern and Mayflower Node.

Fig. 2: Existing lamp post in cemetery. It is proposed to add 6 more identical lamp posts, painted black.	Fig. 3: Location of proposed new lamp posts shown by Red Dots. Original posts shown by Green Dots.
	

Impact of the proposed works on significance

The installation of 6 additional lamp posts in the churchyard are considered to have a NEUTRAL impact (in NPPF terms) to the special architectural and historic interest of the curtilage listed churchyard and to the setting of the main church building. Due to the architecturally sensitive nature of the site, the installation of 6 additional lamp posts needs to match the existing ones to continue the sympathetic and in keeping feeling in the churchyard therefore no harm will be caused.

No alteration is proposed to the amount of the existing fabric.

No alteration is proposed to the churchyard layout.

No alteration is proposed to the scale of the churchyard.

No alteration is proposed to the accessibility of pedestrian footpaths.

No alteration is proposed to the premises landscaping, except for 6 additional lamp posts to be installed on the proposed locations.

Proposed installation of 6 lamp posts will be sympathetic and in keeping with the existing ones.

Prepared by: Reading Borough Council under HSHAZ project, July 2022.

Sources

Historic England Listing Description

<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1113573?section=official-list-entry>

British Geological Survey, Strategic Stone Study, accessed 4 February 2020 from https://www.bgs.ac.uk/mineralsuk/buildingStones/StrategicStoneStudy/EH_atlases.html

St Mary's Butts / Castle Street Conservation Area Appraisal, Reading Borough Council 2008
Historic Places Panel Review Paper, Reading 2020

Historic photos

Fig. 4: Historic England Archive-CC97/02835: The exterior from the south showing the chequerboard tower of knapped and squared flint and ashlar. The street name St Mary Butts refers to the practise of archery in the area, after Edward IV decreed that it should be done on Holy Days, 1890. Henry W Taunt.



Fig. 5 Historic England Archive-CGH01/01/0391: A view from the south-west of St Mary's Church, with the Queen Victoria Jubilee Fountain in the foreground, 1892 - 1933. C G Harper Collection.



Fig. 6: Historic England Archive-OP11515: A view from the south-west of St Mary's Church, with a man with a horse and cart and a group of people in the foreground, 1900 - 1920. EPPC: Berkshire.



Fig. 7: Historic England Archive-EPW022681: St Mary's Church and St Mary's Butts, Reading. 1928. Aerofilms Collection.

