

Teacher Fellowship programme:
Henry on Tour: Teaching the royal progresses of Henry VIII

Exemplar work (Year 7)

King Henry VIII is a very well-known person from the Tudor period and was especially renowned for his progresses around England. There were many places that he visited, and Reading was only one of the small towns he went to; although from the research we have discovered it was not considered a small town back then! Moreover, even though we knew he went on these royal visits to places, we have not asked important questions and found out about it in more detail, until today! As we went on our exciting trip to the Royal Berkshire Archives, Reading Museum, and the Reading Abbey Ruins, we uncovered many secrets about his trips and found many answers to our inquisitive questions.

As we know, these royal trips would have been very lavish and eventful and must have had many big feasts and performances. But how did they prepare? And how much money could have been spent? Our squad has found that the tabernacles (tents) were tested before the king's arrival in 1516 in preparation for the sleeping arrangements. What does this mean? We can be sure that the hospitium near the abbey could hold 400 guests. So, did that mean that there were more than 400 people in Henry's troupe during his visits in 1516 and 1525? Additionally, it's clear to us from the interesting documents we saw at the Royal Berkshire Archives, that in 1525 the St Laurence church was swept during the setup for the king's arrival for a sum of 4 pence (£7.35 in the present) and the candlesticks were scoured for 5 pence (£9.19 today). Does this suggest where Henry and part of his large group were staying? Or it was the first place he went to on his arrival, or he went there frequently to pray?

Like other excursions, there were many performances that took place, and some were even compensated by the king himself. For example, in a document found in St Laurence Churchwarden's Accounts, King Henry paid for a play to be put on at Whitsuntide for 20 shillings, which is the equivalent to £441 in today's money. Furthermore, malt to make ale was bought from Roger Johnson, including some that were consumed during the play!

King Henry also received a "great present of fish" in 1520 which led to the king making a good report saying, "The King is contented with the new abbot here, and all we courtiers have cause to praise him for his kind and loving cheer." For the New Year celebrations,

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they exchanged gifts, with the gift for Hugh Farringdon including, gilt cruces, cups, a goblet and a bowl, and the King obtained £20 (£8,826 today) in a white leather purse. We even have statements indicating them hunting together in Whitley Wood, most likely in Hugh Farringdon's deer park. As proved by this evidence, we can see at this time, King Henry and the abbot of Reading have established a great friendship. This suggests his trips to Reading are much different compared to in progresses the king went to in other places as it is probable that he did not have as good a relationship as other abbots in England.

Another big question pleaded to be asked is, why did he come? Was there a particular reason he came so often? First, many people all around Europe came to Reading on Catholic pilgrimages to see the Hand of St James. Recently, archaeologists have discovered this to be a woman's hand but back in the 16th century, this would have been a religious relic that would give good luck to anyone that prayed to it. This could be a great explanation why Henry, who was a profound Catholic at that moment in time, visited Reading so very often. A second reason we have previously mentioned is King Henry's relationship with the abbot of Reading, Hugh Farringdon, but also the town and the abbey itself. What is more, before the dissolution of the monasteries, the abbey was the 3rd biggest in England and was known to be incredibly exquisite. We know this from a few artefacts recovered in the Reading Museum; this includes a part of one of the stained-glass windows in Reading abbey and a roof and floor tile which also is reported to be from the abbey. The research team also noticed a piece from leather shoe found by the museum to be from the Tudor period. As we are sure, leather was extremely expensive and going further if the abbey was as large and elegant as it was, it must have been extremely priceless. This must have meant, if Reading had all that money and leather, that it must have been a rich town with a distinguished abbey!

We have also deduced from a document that he could have possibly been there for political support on the matter of divorcing his wife, Catherine of Aragon. We have seen a bill in the Royal Berkshire Archives stating a fine paid to the Queen's almoner for not ringing the bells. The fact that Catherine of Aragon gave the money to her almoner (a person who gives to charity) who gave it to charity means she is a kind person who cares for the poor instead of keeping the fine for herself. We know that the bells are important for the arrival and to not ring them could be punished which means they were doing a very drastic movement to show disrespect. This stay was during the time where King Henry was asking the pope for his permission to divorce Queen Catherine of Aragon to marry Anne Boleyn, one of the members of court as she is Henry's next

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chance at a son. We can posit that this proves that Reading did not ring the bells to be on Henry's side of the divorce. We wondered if this was for genuine encouragement or a political gamble, but the good relationship Henry and Hugh Farringdon had, made us imply that it is most likely out of loyal spirit. More support for this theory included when we saw that the abbot of Reading wrote a petition to the pope in the king's favour!

At the start of the Dissolution of the Monasteries, we can see that Hugh Farringdon was nervous for the abbey's security as he starts bribing Thomas Cromwell, the King's chief advisor and the person behind the idea of the dissolution of the monasteries, with gifts. We can be almost certain that he may have given presents Thomas Cromwell to keep Reading abbey and his position of the abbot safe. Although the abbot tried to earn his trust with Cromwell, there is an account with a quote from Cromwell in 1539 describing the abbot as, "the meanest monk in Reading to be a governor of 3,000 marks a year and suffered him to pass time in his Grace's company at shooting, and used to call him his own abbot," found in the Letters and Papers of the King. We can also get from this yet again another remark about the close friendship the abbot and King Henry had and maybe Cromwell was a bit jealous of that. It is worth considering if a bit of the bribery Cromwell received from Hugh Farringdon was to gain back his approval and to mend Cromwell's impression of the abbot. I wonder if Henry knew about their rivalry. And the attempts the abbot made to redeem it.

We also saw some business was conducted in his visit in 1540, which was after Hugh Farringdon's execution. It showed, during 22nd August 1540, what was said in the Privy Council Meeting Minutes in the document of Letters and Papers of the King which could possibly been in the inner gateway. This meant that the King held important, private meetings in Reading! Does this mean that the King trusted Reading with such big responsibilities and important meetings?

In conclusion, our investigation has proved Reading to be a prominent place to King Henry VIII. He directed business there, brought big troupes and was even close friends with the abbot. The visits were just as significant and exciting to the town as they were for Henry! Lots of lavish events took place and lots of money was spent. Our exploration has revealed a lot of the past that no other person has dared to discover! We asked questions, and found our answers, and more! The trips we went on made us real historians and have opened us up to all the exciting elements of history!

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