

WHITEKNIGHTS PARK

The history of Earley goes back to before the Norman Conquest and is recorded in the Domesday Book. In the 12th century the Manor of Earley Regis, so named because it was owned by the King, came into the possession of the de Erlegh family. A descendant, John de Erlegh, was known as the White Knight, and consequently the manor took the name Earley Whiteknights in the early 14th century. There followed a succession of owners through the later Middle Ages, notably the Aldryngtons and Bekes from whom possession passed to Sir Francis Englefield. Having had much of their estates confiscated for recusancy in 1585, the Englefield family moved from Wootton Bassett, Wiltshire to Whiteknights in 1606. There they built a mansion as their substitute Berkshire home but gave more attention to literature, religion and science than in beautifying the park. The family remained there for almost 200 years until the estate was sold to William Byam Martin, formally of the East India Company, in 1783 and then to the Marlborough Family Trustees in 1798.

BLANDFORD ERA 1798–1819

In 1798 the estate was leased to the Marquis of Blandford, the eldest son of the 4th Duke of Marlborough. Regardless of cost the Marquis spent lavishly on the mansion and gardens to make Whiteknights Park one of the most celebrated estates in the country. The house was magnificently furnished, displayed many great works of art and housed an unrivalled library and a wonderful wine cellar. However, the splendid gardens, beautifully laid out with the rarest of plants were the greatest attraction. A lavish collection of flowering shrubs, rare trees and exotic plants from all parts of the world was introduced to adorn the lawns and embellish the paths. Open walks and a French garden were laid out and a variety of other features such as rustic bridges, fountains, arbours and grottoes were created. Our knowledge of Whiteknights Park during that era is greatly enhanced by a detailed and lavishly illustrated book commissioned from Barbara and Thomas Holfand and published in 1819. This profligacy brought the Marquess bankruptcy in 1817 after which he succeeded his father to the Dukedom in 1819 and withdrew to Blenheim. The estate was returned to descendants of the Englefields and the house was demolished in 1840.

GOLDSMID ERA 1849–1947

During the 1840s there were several unsuccessful attempts to develop the estate but in 1849 it was conveyed to Sir Isaac Goldsmid in whose family it remained for the next hundred years. The Goldsmid family were wealthy bankers who played a key role in the development of London University. The initial plan was for Whiteknights to be a family home and in 1859 a new house, known as Whiteknights Park House, was built roughly on the same site as the original mansion. However, by 1867 this idea had changed and the park had been divided into six leaseholds, each with a house. Thus to the existing Whiteknights Park House (now known as Park House) were added Whiteknights (now known as Old Whiteknights House), Earley Park (or Erleigh Whiteknights), Blandford Lodge, Foxhill and the Wilderness (or Wilderness House). Several were designed by Alfred Waterhouse who lived in Foxhill. This arrangement continued for about a hundred years, until 1947 when the freehold of the entire park was purchased by the University.

UNIVERSITY ERA 1947–1967

See overleaf.

THE FRIENDS OF THE UNIVERSITY

The Friends of the University of Reading is an association founded in 1927 to foster contact between the University and those interested in its educational goals, its history, its current activities and its future development.

The aim of The Friends is to raise funds through subscriptions and contributions in order to enable the University to undertake initiatives outside its core activities of teaching and research. The University is grateful for the energetic involvement of the members of this association and their financial support.

On the broader front, periodically, the Association organises talks and special heritage events which allow the public to see parts of the University that are not generally accessible. Sometimes such Friends' events are linked to special anniversaries or to particular national commemorations.

For further details of The Friends, including the annual programme of events, a full list of completed projects and a printable online membership form please visit: www.reading.ac.uk/thefriends

COVER

The Faculty of Letters building (now known as the Edith Morley Building) was opened by Her Majesty The Queen on 22 March 1957. Designed by Easton & Robertson, it was one of the first buildings to be erected by the University in Whiteknights Park. Work began on 18 October 1954 with the Vice-Chancellor, Sir Frank Stenton, cutting the first turf on the site and the foundation stone was laid on 18 May 1955, by the Chancellor of the University, the Right Hon the Viscount Templewood.

IMAGES

Kindly supplied from collections of The Museum of English Rural Life and the University of Reading Special Collection Service.

SOURCES AND FURTHER READING

Childs, W. M., *Making a University* (1933).

Holt, J. C., *The University of Reading: the first fifty years* (1977).

Smith, E., *A History of Whiteknights* (1957).

Smith, S. and Bott, G. M. C., *One Hundred Years of University Education in Reading: A Pictorial History* (1992).

Thompson, B., *Whiteknights, a History of the University Site* (1986).

OTHER LEAFLETS IN THE SERIES



UNIVERSITY HERITAGE 1
Valpy Street
1882-1906

A history of the College from its foundation in Valpy Street in 1882 until its move to the London Road campus.



UNIVERSITY HERITAGE 2
London Road
1904-2021

A history of the London Road campus to which the University College moved from Valpy Street in 1904-06.



UNIVERSITY HERITAGE 3
Whiteknights Park
1798-1819

A history of the development of Whiteknights Park by the Marquess of Blandford.



UNIVERSITY HERITAGE 4
Whiteknights Park
1849-1947

A history of Whiteknights Park during the Goldsmid era, 1849-1947.



UNIVERSITY HERITAGE 6
Halls of Residence
1894-2022

A history of the development and growth of the University's Halls of Residence.



UNIVERSITY HERITAGE 7
Foxhill House

A history of Foxhill House, built by Alfred Waterhouse in 1868 and now home to the University's Department of Law.

THE FRIENDS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF READING

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The Friends of the
University of Reading



UNIVERSITY HERITAGE

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Whiteknights Park 1947-1967



WHITEKNIGHTS PARK 1947-1967

The University of Reading began as an extension college of Oxford University in 1892. Initially located in Valpy Street close to Reading Town Hall, the college expanded rapidly and gained university college status in 1902. Four years later it moved into premises in London Road, presented by the Palmer family. The College continued to grow and in 1926 it was granted University status, the only British institution to achieve that status between the wars. By the 1940s, the University was experiencing severe space shortages, its London Road buildings being small and the site restricted. Despite acquiring several nearby buildings (eg Hillside), it seemed unlikely that the University would be able to take part in the national expansion scheme for university

education which the government intended to promote after the war.

Plans were already well advanced to use the London Road site to its utmost limit when an unexpected development presented itself. In 1946, seeking to build a new hall of residence, the University purchased Park House situated on a small plot of land on Upper Redlands Road on the edge of Whiteknights Park. During the course of negotiations, the question was informally asked whether the University would be interested in an offer by the Goldsmid family to sell the freehold of the entire estate. The acquisition of a site of some 300 acres would solve the University's space problems for an almost indefinite period.

The University acquired Whiteknights Park in 1947 and the next twenty years were crucial to the development of the park and the University. J C Holt, writing in *The University of Reading – the first fifty years* thought: "The acquisition of Whiteknights was the most important single event in the history of the University." Initially there were several years of planning and discussion: where in the park should the University be developed, what to do with the Victorian houses, what order should departments move to Whiteknights, what should happen to the London Road site after the move? In the early years the park was used for student accommodation. Thus Whiteknights Park House, Blandford Lodge and Park House became temporary halls of residence.

The first university building to be constructed on Whiteknights was The Faculty of Letters, officially opened by Her Majesty the Queen on 22 March 1957. This was followed by other early buildings for Physics, Sedimentology Research Laboratory (SRL), Chemistry and Mathematics departments, the Library and new halls of residence (Whiteknights, Windsor, Wessex, Childs and Bridges).

Elsewhere on campus, the remnants of the earlier occupation slowly died away. As the leases on the Victorian houses expired the University took control of them. Those which were in a poor state of repair were demolished, i.e. The Wilderness and Erleigh Whiteknights, whilst four remain, together with most of the Victorian gate lodges all now Listed Grade II.

At Earley Gate the Temporary Office Buildings (TOBs) remained under government control long after the University purchased the park. Finally, in 1953 the requisitioned area was released to the Ministry of Works for use by many government departments, e.g. Agriculture, Health and Housing, before becoming part of the University in 1969. Also at Earley Gate during the 1950s the government constructed Reading War Room 6.

After twenty years the core of the University had moved to Whiteknights having successfully overcome the constraints of the London Road site to become part of the expansion of University education planned by the government for the post-war period.



FACULTY OF LETTERS

The Faculty of Letters (now known as the Edith Morley building) was the first University building to be constructed on Whiteknights. Sir Frank Stenton, Vice-Chancellor, performed the ceremony of turning the first sod on 18 October 1954. The following year, the Chancellor, Viscount Templewood, laid the foundation stone on 18 May 1955 and the completed building was opened by Her Majesty the Queen on 22 March 1957.



THE LIBRARY

Planning for the Library on Whiteknights was started in 1957, the first sketch designs were made early in 1958 and building work started in December 1960. The building was completed in November 1963 and officially opened by the Chancellor, the Rt Hon the Lord Bridges, on 15 May 1964. The building had a total floor area of 84,500 sq ft (7,850 sq m) with seating accommodation for 583 readers and storage capacity for 500,000 books. The University's expansion in the 1960s meant the library was soon full and the urgent need for an extension was a preoccupation throughout the 1970s. An extension was completed in 1984. Continuing changes in student needs and demands are reflected in the University having recently undertaken a £40m refurbishment of the building.



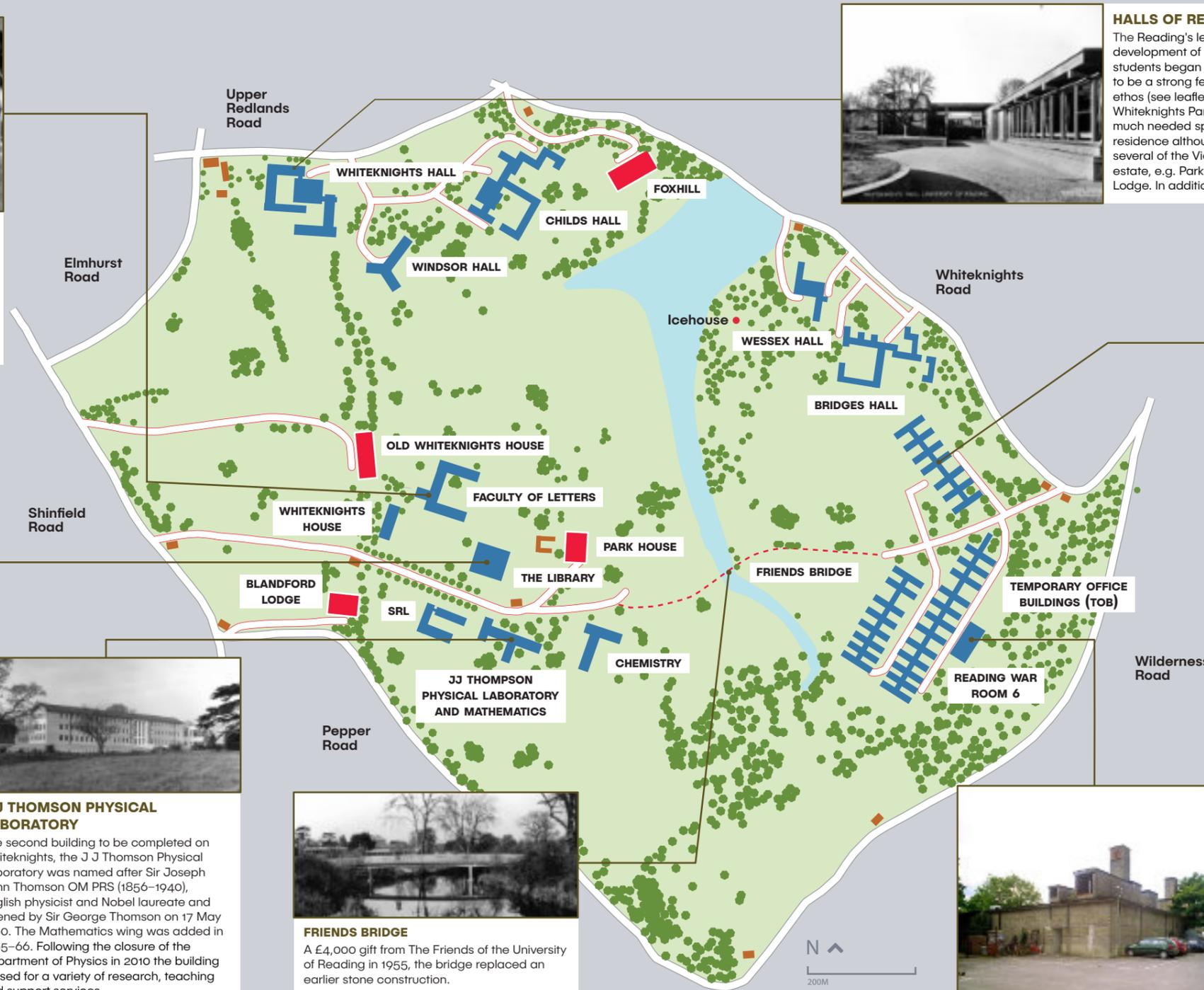
J J THOMSON PHYSICAL LABORATORY

The second building to be completed on Whiteknights, the J J Thomson Physical Laboratory was named after Sir Joseph John Thomson OM PRS (1856-1940), English physicist and Nobel laureate and opened by Sir George Thomson on 17 May 1960. The Mathematics wing was added in 1965-66. Following the closure of the Department of Physics in 2010 the building is used for a variety of research, teaching and support services.



FRIENDS BRIDGE

A £4,000 gift from The Friends of the University of Reading in 1955, the bridge replaced an earlier stone construction.



HALLS OF RESIDENCE

The Reading's leading role in the development of a residential system for students began in the 1890s and continues to be a strong feature of the University's ethos (see leaflet No 6). The acquisition of Whiteknights Park in 1947 provided the much needed space for new halls of residence although initially use was made of several of the Victorian houses on the estate, e.g. Park House and Blandford Lodge. In addition to extensions to existing

halls of residence, a programme of building new ones began on the 1960s, i.e. Whiteknights (1964), Bridges, Bulmershe, Wessex and Windsor (1965), Childs and Sibly (1967). The building of Wells in 1973 was enabled by the move of the College of Estate Management to Reading. The early 2000s saw the building of five additional residences in Whiteknights and the re-building of two existing ones; elsewhere, four residences were either used by the University for another purpose or sold.



TEMPORARY OFFICE BUILDINGS (TOBs)

The TOBs were built in the early 1940s on land requisitioned by the government at Earley Gate. Initially intended as a hospital to receive casualties from the planned D-Day landings (e.g. TOB 2 was designed as a burns unit), they have had several uses over the years and some are still in use today over 75 years later! In 1953 the lease on the requisitioned area was sold to the Ministry of Works and was used for several years as offices for government departments, e.g. Education, Health and Housing. As the University moved up to Whiteknights from London Road the TOBs offered ready-made accommodation for departments. Agriculture, Fine Art, Typography, Buildings Maintenance and the University's Staff Social and Sports Club have all been housed in them. Gradually most of the TOBs have been replaced by modern buildings for Agriculture, Meteorology and Psychology.



READING WAR ROOM 6 ['THE CITADEL']

Reading War Room 6, completed in 1953, was the regional base for Home Defence Region 6 during the early Cold War, and was designed to protect the functions of regional government from the atomic bomb and to co-ordinate defence. Home Defence Region 6 broadly covered Dorset, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire. Reading and other regional war rooms were replaced in the early 1960s by Regional Seats of Government which were better equipped to cope with the hydrogen bomb. Reading War Room then became the communications centre for the Warren Row Regional Seat of Government near Henley-on-Thames. More recently it has been used by the University for document storage.