

WATERHOUSE AND PALMER HERITAGE TRAIL

11 October 2009

- This leaflet describes the heritage places in the University, from Whiteknights campus to the London Road campus, that you can see today, many of which are not usually accessible to the public.
- This second Trail, organised by The Friends of the University, is focussed on the family and buildings associated with Alfred Waterhouse, the renowned Victorian architect, and on the buildings, and the relationship with the University, of the Palmer family.
- It will be necessary to climb stairs to reach a few of the rooms to be seen in many of the buildings open today.
- Free refreshments will be available at the Museum of English Rural Life between 4.00pm and 5.30pm and there will be a special display about today's theme.

• The **Heritage Trail** starts on the Campus at Whiteknights Park. This Park was first developed significantly after the Marquis of Blandford acquired it in 1798. He built a splendid mansion and laid out beautiful gardens, constructed the Lake and provided various adornments around the Park. It was opened by him for the public to enjoy. However he went heavily into debt, the Park was sold and the mansion was later demolished. In 1849 Sir Isaac Goldsmid purchased the Park and his family retained it until it was sold to the University in 1947. In 1867 Sir Isaac set up six leaseholds across the Park, five around existing houses – The Wilderness, Whiteknights Park House, Erleigh Whiteknights House, Blandford Lodge and Whiteknights House (Old), the sixth being the location for Foxhill House. There was also a Park House in Upper Redlands Road at that time but was not owned by the Goldsmids. After the Park was purchased by the University, The Wilderness, Park House (Upper Redlands) and Erleigh Whiteknights House were demolished, but the other four remain, two of which - Whiteknights House (Old) and Foxhill - can be seen today.

Alfred Waterhouse Senior moved to Reading in 1858 with his wife, Mary. The house 'Whiteknights' was built on land of the Whiteknights Park estate. Alfred Waterhouse Junior, the renowned English architect of the time, was commissioned to build Erleigh Whiteknights House in 1859, and later 'The Wilderness'. Then in 1867 he took up the leasehold for the Fox Hill estate himself, on which he built the house now known as Foxhill House for his family, having then moved from London. He married Elizabeth Hodgkin in 1860 and they had five children. There are many buildings in Reading and in the wider country that are of his design, most notably Manchester Town Hall, the Natural History Museum, Reading School and its chapel, the 1875 re-building of the Reading Town Hall and the Rising Sun Arts Centre in Silver Street (which he built as a Temperance Café for his wife to run).

The Palmer family, led by George Palmer, had a wide impact on the town of Reading beyond the Huntley and Palmers biscuit company. Particular interest was taken in education and the family has been keen to support the development of the University from its early start as an Extension College to Oxford University. George Palmer and his brothers, William Isaac and Samuel, developed the biscuit company between them, after the founder Thomas Huntley died, and then George's sons, George William and Alfred in particular, picked up the reins from their father with their substantial gifts to the University College. This has been continued by successive generations of Palmers through to the present day at the University of Reading.

The following lists each of the places that you can visit today on the Campus. We start at Whiteknights then onwards to two other places before going to London Road and ending at St Andrew's Hall in Redlands Road (now the Museum of English Rural Life) for refreshments.

Referring to the maps will help here as each place is shown by its number:

1. **Palmer Building**, a £240,000 lecture theatre block, was formally opened in November 1967 by Lord Chalfont, in the presence of Dr. Gerald Palmer and the Hon. Gordon Palmer. It was named to recognise the contribution that the Palmer family has made to the University over many years, now more than a century.
2. **(Old) Whiteknights House** was designed by local architect, Charles Smith, and completed in 1858 for Alfred Waterhouse (Senior), who had recently moved to Reading. This was one of the first houses built on the Whiteknights estate, having leased the land from the Goldsmid family. In the 1950s it was the early home for the Museum of English Rural Life.
3. **Foxhill House** was once the home of the renowned Victorian architect, Alfred Waterhouse, who designed this and hundreds of other buildings in Reading and across the country.

On the route between the Whiteknights and London Road campuses there are two buildings to visit:

4. **Elmhurst House** in Upper Redlands Road was built in the mid-19th century and was once the home of George Palmer and his family. It was later extended and integrated into the new St George's Hall which opened in 1939. George W Palmer and his family lived there for more than thirty years until he died in 1913.
5. **Hillside House** in Allcroft Road was originally built for William Isaac Palmer in 1880 and then, after his death in 1893, was purchased by Leonard Goodhart Sutton, a member of the famous seed family, and he extended the property in 1898. It became an extension of Wantage Hall in 1949. It is partially open to view today, in particular the entrance and the Common Room.

The **Heritage Trail** leads via Redlands Road to the London Road part of the Campus, a six acre site that was donated by Alfred Palmer on behalf of the Palmer family in 1904. The University Extension College, as it then was, moved from its early site by the Town Hall in 1905/6. The University did not receive its Charter until 1926, the Friends being founded the following year.

On the London Road part of the Campus, places that can be visited are:

6. **The Acacias**, which was built for a local merchant in 1818 and was bought by George Palmer in 1863, as his share of the biscuit business flourished. Adjoining the Acacias is **Greenbank** (not open), which was built in the late 18th century, around the time that the Old Red Building next door was built.
7. **The Great Hall** was built in 1905 and is magnificent to see. Although not strictly part of the Trail, it will be open during the afternoon. There will be organ music played by Graham Ireland (a member of the Friends).
8. **The Old Library**, built in 1923, is open for visiting. It was donated by George W. Palmer's family in his memory and there is a portrait of him on the first floor landing.
9. Finally, **St Andrew's Hall** in Redlands Road, originally known as East Thorpe, is another fine design by Alfred Waterhouse, this time for Alfred Palmer in 1880. In 1911, he leased the building to the University College and it was extended, then it was transferred to the University of Reading on his death in 1936. There is a portrait of Alfred Palmer in the entrance hall to the old house. Since its refurbishment in 2005, it has been the home of the Museum of English Rural Life and the University Special Collections. Part of the old house will be open for a guided tour.