

‘In Reading Gaol by Reading Town’

The Turbine House, Riverside Museum at Blake’s Lock, Reading, RG1 3EQ

Saturday 31 August – Sunday 15 September 2019, 10am-6pm daily

Official Website: <https://inreadinggaol.uk/wp/>

Online Petition: <https://mattroddamp.com/stopreadinggaolselfoff>

‘In Reading Gaol by Reading Town’ are famous words from Oscar Wilde’s *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* – and the title of a forthcoming art exhibition – although these days the gaol isn’t so much by Reading town as in the centre, next to the ruins of Reading Abbey in the newly designated Abbey Quarter.

Reading-based artists are collaborating to show visual artwork inspired by the ballad. Curated by artists Jenny Halstead and Linda Saul, the exhibition will be held at the Turbine House at the Riverside Museum at Blake’s Lock, just five minutes’ walk from the gaol.

In 2017 a collaborative art project in Reading saw about 60 artists make lilies in tribute to Oscar and his writings. The lilies were arranged in an acclaimed installation at Reading Museum. Linda’s lily was inspired by *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*. Reading the ballad for the first time, she was astounded by the powerful imagery within it. This led to the idea of asking local artists to produce work inspired by the ballad for the forthcoming exhibition.

Jenny Halstead says ‘this themed exhibition offers an exciting opportunity for artists to respond in their own personal way to the spirit of this classic ballad’.

The exhibition will include some of the rubber stamps made by the late Peter Hay to illustrate the edition of *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* published by Reading-based publisher Two Rivers Press.

The future of the prison, built in 1844 and closed in 2013, is currently unclear. Since 2013 it has appeared in the occasional TV show, such as *Killing Eve*, but opportunities for the public to visit have been rare. In 2016 it was the venue for a major art exhibition hosted by Artangel, and was visited by tens of thousands. Linda Saul says ‘in the past inmates would have wanted to find a way out of Reading Gaol, now people are trying to get in’. She herself failed in an attempt in 2017 to get access to the prison for a photographic project.

The Ministry of Justice has indicated the intention to sell Reading Gaol to the highest bidder. However there is wide local support for a plan to develop it into a cultural centre with theatres and art galleries, and an [online petition](#) has been started in support of this.

Participating Artists: Carole Pembroke, Carole Stephens, Chris Mercier, Heather McAteer, Jane Vincent, Jenny Halstead, Joan McQuillan, Julie Simmonds, Linda Saul, Liz Real, Martin Andrews, Martina Hildebrandt, Mick McNicholas, Paul Woolley, Peter Hay (1951-2003), Robert Fitzmaurice, Sally Castle, Tim Wilson, Tom Cartmill, Trish Roberts

For more information please contact Linda Saul at linda@lindasaul.co.uk or 07950 330632 or Jenny Halstead at jennyhalstead@waitrose.com or 0118 9871613.



Reading Gaol by Jenny Halstead