

Newsletter – September 2010

From the Chairman

We were pleased to welcome new members to the Council of the Friends of Abingdon at the A.G.M. in June and sorry to say goodbye to retiring members. The new members are working well with the established members as we ask them to undertake the various jobs in the work of the Friends.

You will see from the contents of this newsletter that we are working hard to dispel the belief that The Friends of Abingdon are solely the custodians of some old buildings and are set on attracting to our membership all local residents who are concerned with the life of their locality and appreciate a body that can present their feelings in a strong form to the relevant authorities. The larger our membership the stronger our voice.

We are taking an interest in the wider civic life of Abingdon as becomes the town's civic society and as members of the new Civic Voice organisation.

We were very pleased to welcome Dr.Simon Bradley with his two tours of Abingdon in conjunction with Mostly Books. All the participants seemed very interested in the Long Gallery and our other buildings which many of them had not seen before.

You will see that we are strongly represented in the production of the new town tourist maps where I hope that our experience with local tourists and our local knowledge has been of value.

We watch with interest the progress of the developments at the Old Gaol which is such an icon of the town and the negotiations over the management of the Guildhall, again a building of great importance to the townspeople. We also watch with interest the proposals for the updating of our rather tired shopping precinct and have already passed

our comments to the developers . We trust that an acceptable plan will evolve to bring more life back to the centre of Abingdon.

As more and more of our members become part of the electronic age we hope that you will take the opportunity of sending us your comments on things that you feel affect the life of the town so that we can speak with some authority on your behalf. Many of you will have received this newsletter electronically for your convenience leading to a great saving in time and costs to the Friends. We do thank you and I look forward to welcoming you at some of our future events.

AGM Report

The 2010 AGM was held on 15 June. The reports and accounts circulated with the last newsletter were all accepted. The officers were re-elected and 2 new members were elected to the Council. Pen-portraits of the new members and a full list of the Council members are on the back page of this newsletter.

The meeting also approved a motion to join Civic Voice, the new national umbrella organisation for Civic Societies. This will give the Society access to information and practical support of various kinds and our members will also benefit directly (see page 4). For more information about Civic Voice activities or to join the mailing list for their newsletter see <http://www.civicvoice.org.uk/>

After the formal business of the meeting we had a very interesting presentation from Heather Brown, Manager of the Choose Abingdon Partnership about their activities in the first nine months of their existence and their plans for the future. There is more about this elsewhere in this newsletter.

Abingdon news



Old Gaol

The Vale Council has announced that following demolition of non-historic areas of the site and completion of the detailed archaeological work required by English Heritage, ownership of the Old Gaol site has been passed from the Vale of White Horse District Council to developers Cranbourne Homes and building work can start immediately.

Initially, the work will concentrate on site infrastructure and constructing a new 60 space underground car park, before moving on to building the new flats and restaurants.

So far, Cranbourne has paid the Vale just over £2 million for the site. As part of the deal, the council will receive further payments (possibly up to a further £2m) from the sale of residential units in the development. The final value of the scheme to the council will not be known until all units have been sold and the final value of the developed site is known.

The Old Gaol project includes four restaurants, accommodation for the Abingdon Bridge charity, public access to the river and gardens, 61 residential units and significant extra parking.

It is hoped that the site will be fully complete by autumn 2014.

Guildhall

The future arrangements for the management of the Guildhall are still under discussion between the Vale and Town Councils, with the likelihood being that the latter will take over responsibility for its operation. Ideas under consideration include establishing closer links between the various arts venues in that part of the town, possibly including a shared booking office. Councillor Richard Webber, Vale Cabinet member

responsible for this project, says that the councils hope to make an announcement in the near future which will secure the future of the Guildhall and its use by the people of Abingdon.

New maps in Abingdon

The maps in the Market Square and elsewhere in Abingdon are looking very old and faded. Their replacement has been one of the projects coordinated by Heather Brown of the Choose Abingdon Partnership. She asked for volunteers from The Friends of Abingdon to help with the planning of new maps so Michael Matthews and Alan and Pat Bryden have spent a few happy hours as part of a small working group trying to make sure that the maps are relevant to particular sites and that all the required information is present and correct. Heather commissioned pictures from local artist Peter Bellingham and we saw the first fruits of our efforts when draft maps were produced by the cartographer Glyn Kuhn for public consultation at the end of July in the Community Shop in the Abbey Shopping Centre. Many people made useful comments and after site visits and further close inspection by our group, the maps are now undergoing final revisions. The map frames have recently been spruced up by the Town Council and it is hoped the new maps will be installed in them by the end of October.

Pat Bryden

Oxfordshire County Council spending reviews

Plans for the introduction of a 20 mph speed limit in much of the Town Centre and the completion of improvements to the High Street and the Square (including stabilisation of the War Memorial) have been put on hold by Oxfordshire County Council as part of their post-election spending review. There will be a public consultation on the spending reviews in September: the Abingdon meeting will be on Thursday 30 September at 19.30 in the Guildhall.

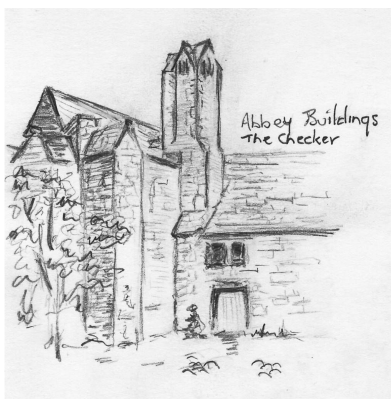
Choose Abingdon Partnership

The Partnership's first newsletter, "Choice" is now available, summarising all the ideas they have been asked to consider for improvements to the town and explaining how they are going about prioritising them. It also highlights some projects they have already undertaken, mainly relating to publicity and communications.

Forthcoming developments for the Partnership include the setting-up of a Community Forum, to enable the Partnership to work more closely with existing community groups, and the launch on 16 October of a Loyalty Card scheme for Abingdon shops. For more information about the Partnership's activities, contact Heather Brown, Choose Abingdon Partnership Manager, on 07768 177577 or e-mail heather.brown@chooseabingdon.co.uk

Community Shop

The Partnership has arranged with Scottish Widows, landlords of the Abbey Shopping Centre, for one of the empty shops (the one formerly occupied by Adams Childrenswear) to be made available for use by local community groups. Groups can book it – free of charge – for one or two weeks to publicise or demonstrate their activities. They can either just use the window for a display or use the shop itself: selling goods is not permitted, but tickets for forthcoming events can be sold. During the period leading up to Heritage Open day on 11 September the shop has heritage-related displays from AAHS and Friends of Abingdon – do call in and have a look. To find out more about booking the shop contact Heather Brown.



Heritage Open Day

Abingdon town centre will be buzzing on Saturday 11th September for the annual Heritage Open Day.

Heritage Open Day celebrates Abingdon's architecture, culture, and history by allowing visitors free access to interesting properties that are not usually open or normally charge an entrance fee. It also includes walking tours, dancing by local groups, bell ringing, and a family competition to find out what some of our local shops were selling in the past.

A record number of properties are open this year including some which have not been opened before. There are also two interesting guided walks: one of Victorian Abingdon and one to the new Jubilee Junction of the Wilts and Berks Canal. More details are in the enclosed leaflet.

NB The event is run by volunteers and more help on the day would be very welcome: if you could spare an hour or two to help please let us know: Pauline Burren or Hester Hand for the Abbey Buildings or Alastair Fear (07775 920659) for any of the other venues or the information stall in the Market Place. No specialist knowledge is required but it is an opportunity to find out a lot!

Abingdon Museum Appeal

The Abingdon Museum Friends' fundraising campaign for the Museum re-development is now well under way. The public launch was at an all-day event in the Museum on 19 June; in July over 100 visitors came to an Open Garden Day involving 6 Abingdon gardens and on 14 August there was much merriment in the Market Place, including the pleasure of seeing the Mayor and his deputy in the stocks: charging people to throw wet sponges at them proved a lucrative fundraiser!

The next major fundraising event is a Literary Quiz on Tuesday 9 November (19.30 Manor School, Shippon). This is an annual Mostly Books event but they have kindly agreed that this year all proceeds will go to the Museum Appeal. Teams of 10 - you can either arrange your own or let chance take you where it will on the night. This promises to be a really fun event; but it is popular so advisable to book places early.

Tickets (£5) are available from Mostly Books at 36 Stert St. For more information or to buy online, go to www.mostly-books.co.uk or phone 01235 525880.

The Museum Friends have a number of other activities planned for the autumn: for more information or to support their campaign, see www.abingdonmuseumfriends.org.uk/ or contact Sue Stevens - 01235 200350



Pevsner Walk

On Tuesday 6 July, a lovely summer evening, fifty people crowded into the courtyard of Mostly Books in Stert Street for the start of a walk around Abingdon. It was led by Dr Simon Bradley, the series editor for the new editions of the Pevsner *Buildings of England* county guides and a co-author of the revised and enlarged guide for the historic county of Berkshire that has just been published. He was an enthusiastic and (it goes without saying) very knowledgeable guide.

A tour of an hour and a half can only take in highlights, and Dr Bradley had chosen an interesting selection. He pointed out the different architectural styles visible when standing between St Nicolas' Church and the Guildhall, the medieval statue of the Virgin in a niche in the Abbey gateway that had escaped the attention of the puritans, and the upper window in the Guildhall that used to have a balcony. He invited us to inspect the back of the County Hall and the way the staircase tower was clearly an afterthought. The size and quality of St Helen's Church show the prosperity of the medieval town and the 14th century painted ceiling in the Lady Chapel is unique in England. The Jacobean panelled hall of the Long Alley Almshouses is a room fitting the status of Christ's Hospital and is where the Master and Governors still meet. The walk ended in the Long Gallery at the Abbey, the former abbey guesthouse, with strawberries, cream and wine and a question and answer session with Dr Bradley.

Thank you to the organisers and Dr Bradley and to all those who opened buildings and provided the refreshments. An interesting and enjoyable evening that was so popular that it was run a second time a month later.

JB

Editor's note: for more detail and pictures of some of the points of interest on the tour see <http://mostly-books.blogspot.com/>



Membership Benefits

Individual members of all civic societies who join Civic Voice can receive the offer of a free National Trust day access pass. The pass is transferable and can be given to friends or family if a member is already a member of the National Trust.

For those with internet access the free pass can be downloaded by going to www.civicvoice.org.uk/nationaltrustcivicvoiceoffer. Those who do not have internet access can obtain their pass by sending a stamped addressed envelope to Civic Voice, Unit 101, 82 Wood Street, The Tea Factory, Liverpool L1 4DQ requesting one and providing your contact details. You should also say that you are a member of Friends of Abingdon.

This offer is available in the first year that a civic society joins Civic Voice. Why not apply now and use it for the Chastleton trip?

Civic Voice also has a partnership with Bluefin insurance offering a range of products (health, home, car, travel, pet and heating insurance) for our members. The Friends will get a contribution for each policy taken out by one of our members. More about this in the next newsletter.

Message from the Editor

If you are receiving this newsletter by hard copy but would be happy to have it by e-mail please let me have your e-mail address (my contact details are on the back page).

We recognise that many of our members prefer hard copy but postage accounts for as much of the cost as the printing. We already have volunteers delivering by hand to some areas of the town and would very much like to hear from anyone who would be willing to deliver in the following areas:

- Shippon
- Anna Pavlova Close
- Bath Street/Fitzharry's Road
- Spring Road to Conduit Road area
- Brewery area,
- Radley Road (could be split North-South)
- Sutton Courtenay (or part of it)

There would probably be no more than 10-15 houses in each area – the exact scope is open for discussion.

Hester Hand

Events in Abingdon

Friends' Events

Visit to Chastleton House, Moreton in the Marsh. Saturday, September 25

See enclosed leaflet. An ideal opportunity to use your free National Trust pass.

Christmas Party – Tuesday 7 December

Always a popular event - get the date in your diaries now and watch out for details nearer the time.

Abingdon Autumn Craft Fair

Thursday 21 – Sunday 24 and Thursday 28 – Sunday 31 October. 10.00 – 17.00 – late opening to 19.00 on Fridays.

The Craft Fair remains a major source of income for Friends of Abingdon – and of course an excellent source for Christmas presents - so please continue to support it.

Unicorn Theatre events

*Lady Windermere's Fan by Oscar Wilde
19.30 Wednesday 15 – Sat. 18 September
Studio Theatre Club*

Tickets £7.50 (concessions available) from <http://www.studiotheatreclub.com/> or 01865 778105 or from The Gift Centre.

*Rebecca by Daphne du Maurier
19.30 Wednesday 22 – Sat. 25 September
and matinee 14.30 Saturday 25.*

BreakaLeg Productions

Tickets (£6 or £8) from The Bookstore or by post from BreakaLeg Box Office, 40 Castle Street, Steventon, OX13 6SR

Opera in Aid of Home Farm Trust

Professional singers perform opera favourites from 18.00. For more information and to book please contact 01525 376564 or hilary.colbert@hft.org.uk

*Stepping Out by Richard Harris
19.30 Wednesday 17 – Sat. 20 November
Abingdon Drama Club*

Tickets from The Bookstore or contact <http://www.abingdon-drama-club.com/>

Unicorn Comedy Club

19.30 for 20.00 Thursday 9 September and Thursday 4 November.

Information about acts and tickets (£7) from <http://unicorncomedy.moonfruit.com/>

Other events in Abingdon

The Twenty-six Centuries of Abingdon: County Hall Museum – till 31 October

A major exhibition of the town's rich history and a foretaste of what we will see when the museum re-opens in 2012. Accompanied by a themed exhibition on the Stuarts, following last year's Tudors exhibition.

Boundary Walk for Heritage Weekend: Sunday 12 September – leaves Market Place at 11.30

An easy walk with an informative guide – fascinating even if you think you know the town.

Celebrating Abingdon's History: a tribute to Mienneke Cox. Saturday 9 October 11.00 – 17.30, St Helen's Church.

Speakers include Dick Barnes, Manfred Brod, Michael St John Parker and Jackie Smith. Tickets £5 from Mostly Books or The Abingdon Bookstore or by post from Mrs A Smithson, c/o The Church Office, St Helen's Court, Abingdon OX14 5BS (enclose SAE). Proceeds to St Helen's Church.

Remembrance Day service and ceremonies. Sunday 14 November From 10.00 – more details from Town Council

Mayor's Charity Quiz: 19.00 Friday 19 November Guildhall Contact Town Council for entry forms.

Choose Abingdon Partnership events:

AGM and Community Forum. Monday 11 October 11.00 and 14.30 Guildhall.

Loyalty Card Launch Festival: Saturday 16 October from 11.00 Market Place and Town Centre

Local Food and Craft Market: Saturday 23 October, Market Place. To link in with main Craft Fair and showcase local products.

Please remember that there is no parking at the Abbey Buildings: drop off and pick up only. There is free parking after 16.00 at Abbey Meadows, Abbey House or Cattle Market car parks.

"Who's Who" in the Friends of Abingdon

Pen portraits of the new members of the Executive Council

Bobbie Nichols

Bobbie has lived in Abingdon for 17 years, but she has been a regular visitor to the town for over 40 years. She first became directly involved in Abingdon civic life when she was active in the *Community in the Old Gaol* campaign. This led her to learn more about the long and interesting history of Abingdon, which she strongly believes is not promoted enough either within the town or in the wider community. She feels that the Friends of Abingdon can and should be playing a major role in this, particularly in developing links with schools.

She is also involved in the organization of the annual Heritage Day, and is member of the committee of the Abingdon European Society

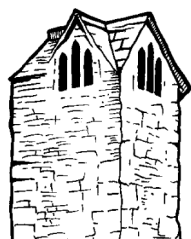
Alan Bryden

Alan has lived in Abingdon most of his life. He worked in science, first at Rutherford Appleton Laboratory and then in Swindon, and thereafter taught IT at The Open University.

He was a Town Councillor in Northcourt for 8 years (7 of these on the Planning Committee) and County Councillor for North Abingdon for 8 years. For the county he carried out several reviews including the county museum service and the quality of road repairs, and was on the review committee which looked into the delay and cost overrun in the repaving of Cornmarket Street in Oxford. He takes a great interest in education and has been a governor of Fitzharrys School since 1996.

Alan is a keen walker and is president of Oxfordshire Ramblers. He is a past chairman of Abingdon Duplicate Bridge Club and is a volunteer guide at the Bodleian Library in Oxford University.

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