



The Friends of Abingdon
Civic Society

President The Earl of Abingdon Registered Charity No. 225880

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE FRIENDS OF ABINGDON FOR 2012

The Society

The 'Friends of Abingdon' civic society was founded in 1944. In summary, our aims are as follows: a) to arouse interest in Abingdon and its setting b) to help preserve the best old buildings and ensure that new buildings are appropriate, and c) in support of these aims, to acquire and restore buildings and to promote meetings and lectures. The Earl of Lindsay and Abingdon has been President of the Society since 1973.

The Society owns the freehold of the Abbey Buildings, a range of medieval buildings remaining from Abingdon Abbey. Legal ownership of the property is now vested with the Official Custodian for Charities, whilst beneficial ownership remains with the Society. It is the policy of the Society to hire out different parts of the buildings.

The business of the Society is administered by an Executive Council which meets several times each year. Officers are elected annually at the Annual General Meeting, together with half of the elected members. The Officers and elected members constitute the Charity Trustees. A Curator manages the day to day operation of the buildings. She also occupies the curator's cottage and is invited to meetings of the Executive Council when appropriate.

Chairman's report

I am pleased to report that your society is in good heart and continuing to flourish. During 2012 we made slow but steady improvements to our ancient buildings, and widened interaction with the community and increased involvement of our members, especially those who joined during that year..

The year saw the installation of new storage facilities for our growing archive in 18 Thames St. The new cupboards will help preserve our documents in damp free and airy conditions with good accessibility. A second Timeline was installed in the Checker, this one recording the history of the Abbey itself. New lighting was installed to improve the illumination of both the timelines which are proving

an added attraction to the buildings. We continue to look towards improving lighting in general throughout the buildings by replacing the old tungsten lighting, which is proving very costly in electricity, with a much more economical and brighter LED system. We continue to look at other ways of making the building more comfortable and attractive and plans to upgrade the Undercroft with the installation of a new floor are progressing well. Our new exhibition stand which we can use at the Craft Fairs and other events is proving worthwhile as a display background for our increasing selection of souvenirs being resourced by Pat Bryden and her group.

May 2012 saw the first of our Commemorative Luncheons to mark the anniversary of our foundation in 1944. Over 70 people sat down for an excellent and convivial meal at Cosener's House and our intention is that this will be an annual event. Although, sadly, for medical reasons our President Lord Abingdon was unable to travel down from Scotland for the event (happily he and his wife were able to attend in 2013). I was also very pleased to welcome many of our senior members and all the previous living Chairmen of the Society. Another innovation was the New Members Evening which we held in the Autumn. This time we invited those who had joined us in the recent past to enable them to meet with members of our council and hear from them more details of what we are trying to do. Feed back from this enjoyable evening was good and we propose to repeat the evening every few years - or if our membership soars, more frequently.

We continue to welcome visiting groups to the buildings, outstanding this year was a visit by the Northern Architectural Historical Society who visited Abingdon in July and we were happy to co-ordinate their visit to the town's historical treasures. They were a large and very well informed group and were very appreciative of what we and others were able to show them.

Thanks to Pat Bryden and her helpers we have commenced a series of informative walks around the town and outlying area introducing local people and visitors to the history of Abingdon and its great Abbey. These walks are proving very popular and we hope to continue them at Bank Holidays and other times

The ground work was laid for a number of projects which are coming, or have come, to fruition in the current year and I am very grateful to the hard work of the members of the Executive Council in this context. The council is hard working and innovative and I praise them for all their work. Sadly Tony Legge after a very successful period as our Hon. Secretary has decided to stand down and we thank him for his hard work, diligence and wise counsel and wish him a more peaceful time in the future. Pauline Burren is handing over the Membership Secretary role to Barbara Beach: our thanks go to Pauline for her work in this role and we are pleased that she has agreed to stand for re-election to the Council so that she can continue with her other activities for us.

As ever the work and dedication of our Curator Jenny Berrell has been exemplary and she has maintained our grounds to an excellent standard despite the difficult weather over the whole year. She manages the complexities of juggling conflicting bookings and helps to maximise the use of the buildings and the income that they produce for the Society.

Thanks must also go to Mike Ward for his expertise in operating the Unicorn Theatre. Without his skills much darkness would descend on our delightful little theatre.

Treasurer's report

This year the first point of note is in the first line of the accounts – Tea Towels, Quantity 10. When I took over as treasurer in 2006, we still had 600 tea towels in stock. We are almost there!

The main feature of the accounts is the increase in expenditure in 2012 of some £5000 over 2011. There has been a corresponding increase in income of some £3200, but the net result is that a small surplus of some £700 in 2011 has been turned into a small loss of £1107 in 2012. One neutral item of increased expenditure in 2012 is shown on the “Social Functions” line. There was a Friends lunch held at Cosener’s House during the year and an outing to the British library and the Wallace Collection. This expenditure has been balanced by a corresponding increase in the “Social Functions” income line. We also spent significantly more on refurbishment in 2012. The major works were new storage cupboards and refurbishment of the archive area in the dressing rooms in the Thames Street house, new locks for most of the doors in the buildings, and the installation of the time-lines in the Checker. With the new locks, most doors can be opened with a single key. We had a donation from the Vale of White Horse District Council that covered part of the costs of the time-lines.

This year I have made a change to the format of the accounts by lumping the small income from admissions and sales of goods together with donations on a single line. The bookkeeping necessary to keep this small cash income separated out is not worthwhile.