

## CIVIC PRIDE – BRINGING THE ABBEY BUILDINGS ALIVE

The Friends of Abingdon Civic Society, the owners of the Abbey Buildings, invite the community to a presentation entitled 'Bringing the Abbey Buildings Alive' at 7.30 pm on Friday 7<sup>th</sup> September in the Unicorn Theatre. You can also browse an exhibition of the work to date and talk to those involved either on that evening or over the remainder of the weekend, the 8<sup>th</sup> & 9<sup>th</sup> September, when the Buildings will be open under the auspices of National Heritage Weekend.

Abingdon Abbey was one of the first large monastic sites to be dissolved in the Reformation under the direction of Henry VIII and valuable stones, lead and window glass were transported down the Thames in barges to provide materials for the King's building projects. Apart from the Abbey Gateway and its adjacent buildings, all that remains is a range of domestic buildings dating from the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries which were used by the Benedictine monks for administration, guest hospitality, storage and baking and later used as residential dwellings and for many years, as a Brewery.

These Buildings were saved from demolition by the founders of The Friends of Abingdon Civic Society in the 1940s and following almost 75 years of care and maintenance are nationally recognised and architecturally Grade 1 listed. However, although the Buildings are wonderfully atmospheric, and a very popular wedding venue, many local people only know them as the home of the Unicorn Theatre and there is much to do to make them more accessible and functional.

As guardians of their future, the Friends successfully applied for a Heritage Lottery grant in 2017 and for the past eight months have been working on a feasibility study for the enhancement of these Buildings. We have developed a vision for making the Abbey Buildings secure for generations to come and usable for twelve months of the year, for continuing to develop an interesting programme of events, music, drama and entertainment and for creating an exciting visitor attraction animating over 1,000 years of history for the benefit of the Abingdon community and to attract more visitors to the town.

The main audience for this 'Enhancement Project' is the community of Abingdon and we have been encouraged and heartened by the support that we have received so far. We want townspeople to continue to enjoy the improved facilities and activities that these Buildings can provide and to enable residents to feel proud of Abingdon's remarkable heritage as one of the most important historic towns in the country.

So we would like to share our vision with the community, starting with this talk by the conservation architect leading our project and hope to see a great many of you there.

Bryan Brown

Chairman The Friends of Abingdon Civic Society

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