

THE FRIENDS OF ABINGDON

Abingdon's Civic Society



Newsletter – May 2012

Message from the Chairman

The Council of The Friends of Abingdon has continued with vigour its twin role of custodian and promoter of our ancient Abbey Buildings and as a civic voice of the town. I thank all the council members for their dedicated work in these areas.

We have recently seen the unveiling of a second time line in the Checker, this time tracing the era of the abbey itself. We are delighted to be able to hang these two very interesting illustrations of local and national history and are currently investigating ways to provide better lighting for them. They are proving to be of considerable interest to our individual and group visitors.

We have been pleased to welcome visitors from the Oxfordshire Historic Buildings Trust and from other experts who always find something new to add to our knowledge of our historic buildings. The wall paintings in the Long Gallery have been reassessed and a tree ring survey of our ancient roof timbers is underway. The power supply to the buildings has been reorganised. In order to preserve and maintain our growing archive we have installed new storage cupboards which will ensure good air circulation and freedom from damp for all our documents

We have been happy to work with Jane Bowen the new curator of Abingdon Museum who gave us a fascinating talk on the current upgrading of both the County Hall and the museum and we are happy to have been able to loan some of our artefacts which will be seen to good advantage in the new museum setting.

We have manned our stall at the Craft Fairs and other events hoping to bring our work to the notice of a wider audience and encourage membership as a way of involving people with the future of the town

We continue to work on the Characterisation Project and in talks with other community groups as well as trying to maintain a conversation with our local councils.

A new programme of local walks has been organised both within the town and the Abbey and also out into the surrounding country and riverside.

Use of the Abbey Buildings continues to grow and bring us in much needed finance. This would not be possible with out the dedicated work of our indefatigable curator Jenny Berrell for which we are so very grateful.

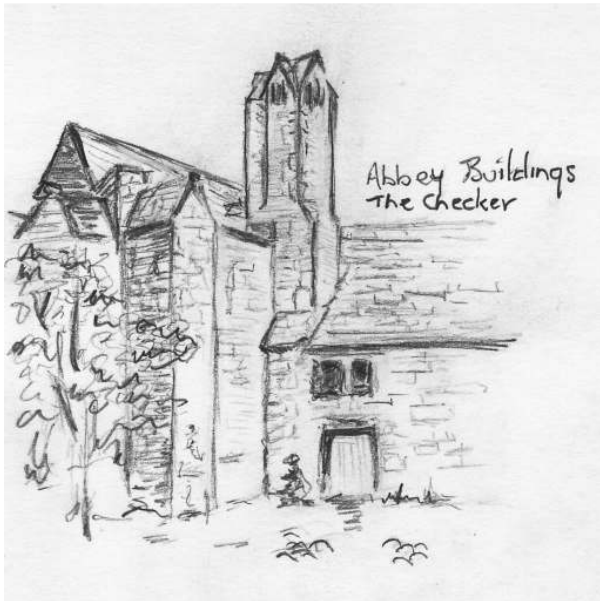
Abbey Buildings Report

Usage

Since the last newsletter, the Unicorn has hosted three plays, two sketch shows, three folk concerts, two Friends of Abingdon lectures and a ballet school show. The Spring Craft Fair occupied the whole site for most of April. In March there was a happy occasion when the new Abbey Timeline was officially opened and dedicated to the memory of Peter Berrell, our former curator. As the Chairman has mentioned, the two timelines provide an interesting new focus for visitors to the buildings. Now that the buildings are, as usual in the summer months, open to the public most* afternoons, we hope that our members will call in to see the latest additions – and the work that has been done

in the gardens. Do please also tell others that the buildings are open – it seems to be one of Abingdon's best-kept secrets!

*You may like to check with the curator before visiting to make sure they are not closed for a private function. She can be contacted on 01235 525339.



The building fabric

The past year has seen some interesting activity within and on the built element of our responsibilities. Our Archive storage cupboards have been rationalized and made more secure from the continuing concerns of unauthorized access and, equally important, the humidity and direct damp conditions which are so damaging to paper records. We are discussing with English Heritage the possibility of reorganizing the area under the Unicorn balcony to improve its usefulness for storage. A matter of greater concern has recently manifested itself which regards structural movement and an area, of serious proportions, of beetle infestation and damage in some of the ancient timbers. Specialist investigation has been initiated and remedies will hopefully be recommended.

Our preliminary application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for support in providing an entrance lobby with toilet facilities for the Unicorn Theatre which would serve all the other areas, regrettably fell on stony ground. This will be further addressed when the general excitement surrounding Jubilee and Olympic activities is over.

Editors note: one piece of good news as we go to press is that recent tests for suspected asbestos in the Undercroft have proved negative.

Abingdon news

County Hall refurbishment

The building is looking magnificent from the outside and Jane Bowen's recent talk to the Friends gave us tantalising glimpses of what to expect inside. There will be a limited number of guided tours on Jubilee Weekend but the display areas will not re-open till around July, with a formal opening ceremony planned for the Autumn.

Guildhall

The historic parts of the building have now been refurbished and are back in use. Discussions are continuing over the future of the modern part: the Town Council has taken advice (including suggestions from community groups) on how best to configure the building to make it viable: the decisions on this will inform the brief for both internal and external redesign. They are also exploring possible additional funding which could enable the project to be more ambitious and have promised to consult when they have some clear ideas to present.

Heritage Weekend 8-9 September

This year the weekend events in Abingdon will have a river theme in recognition of our re-naming as Abingdon-on-Thames: fortuitously this has been assisted by the decision to reschedule the Dragon Boat racing (a tradition, albeit a rather more recent one!) to the Sunday so there should be plenty of people around. The weekend will also provide an excellent opportunity to see the refurbished County Hall and old part of the Guildhall. The Abbey Buildings will be open on the Sunday and Friends of Abingdon will also be organising Abbey Trail walks and a Boundary Walk as well as helping with the overall running of the event. The programme will be published in July, so keep the dates free.

"Portas Pilot" competition

Following the "Portas Review" of the state of Britain's High Streets, the government has launched a scheme for towns to compete for awards of up to £100,000 to help fund innovative schemes to revitalise their town centres. Bids have to involve not just councils, but a "town team" of retailers, landlords and community groups, so Abingdon's bid was led by the Choose Abingdon partnership which represents all of these stakeholders. The Friends of Abingdon registered their support for the bid. There were nearly 400 entries and only 12 will be

selected so the competition will be fierce but if we win it will bring not only the cash to fund much-needed projects, but also valuable publicity for the town since there will inevitably be media coverage. The result is due in the next few weeks. There is more information on the Choose Abingdon website <http://www.chooseabingdon.co.uk/>

Community Shop

It is not practicable to operate a Community Shop in the precinct during the refurbishment, but Choose Abingdon and the Friends are looking for an alternative empty shop and aim to re-open in late Summer.

Planning Matters

Several planning applications which The Friends recommended for refusal last year have now been resubmitted. Tesco at 15 Oxford Road have re-applied for an advertising sign, with the only change being that it is in a slightly different place on the site. The Friends consider that it is just as obtrusive in its new site, and have asked that the proposal should be refused. A third application to replace a bungalow in Northcourt Lane with two 4 bedroom detached houses has been submitted. The Friends are still concerned about the size and height of the houses and their impact on the Northcourt Conservation area, in particular the rural nature of Northcourt Lane.

The last newsletter mentioned the rejection on appeal of the proposal to demolish Champion House in Wootton Road and replace it with 24 sheltered apartments. (A previous application for replacement of Champion House by 10 flats had already been approved.) A new application has now been submitted, again for 24 sheltered apartments, which claims to address all the concerns of the Inspector when she dismissed the appeal. Although the mass of the building has been reduced, it is still a large building on a not very large site.

One application causing a lot of concern is the proposal to convert 22 Appleford Drive into four 1-bedroom flats. The estate and the Fitzharrys Manor estate were specifically designed and built for families and The Friends do not believe that any of the family houses on these estates should be converted into small one-bedroom flats. This is a good example of the areas in which the

Characterisation Work described in the previous newsletter could have an impact.

Two members of The Friends attended a workshop run by Civic Voice on the Neighbourhood Planning process. This was very useful in learning about the emerging process, and in sharing ideas and experiences with other groups. Following this a meeting was held with a representative of South Abingdon Residents' Plan (SARP) to discuss current progress on their Plan. A meeting was also held with Fitzharrys Manor Residents Association to brief members on the Characterisation Study.

Following productive meetings last autumn with the Leaders of the Vale and Town Councils, we are still trying to arrange further meetings with the Leader and Executive Members of the Vale, and with the Leader and members of the Town Council on the issues affecting the town.

Visit to the British Library and the Wallace Collection, 8 March 2012



The main aim of the visit to the British Library was to see the exhibition of manuscripts owned by English monarchs, mainly from the Old Royal Library which was given to the nation in 1757 by George II.

The exhibits were divided into six groups. The first of these, Edward IV: Founder of the Old Royal Library, consisted of 50 manuscripts acquired by Edward IV, in the fifteenth century. Most were commissioned by Edward himself and made in Bruges. These manuscripts were exquisite with delightful illustrations of landscapes and interiors of an extremely high quality. The second group concentrated on the Christian

Monarch, and ranged from small prayer books to large gospel books and Bibles for display and liturgical use; all were richly decorated. The exhibits covered several centuries and illustrated changing styles. The third group, Royal Identities, consisted of manuscripts to aid monarchs in understanding and presenting their status as royalty. It also included coronation books documenting the ceremonies necessary to authenticate royal authority. The fourth group contained examples of successful rulers, drawn from both biblical and classical sources, as well as lives of the saints and manuals of warfare, in order to instruct the monarch in 'how to be a king'. The fifth group contained books of reference and learning – the World's Knowledge – including geographical compendia and works on health and hygiene. Finally, many books from Continental Europe were acquired by successive monarchs which demonstrated the close links between the English and European courts. Taken together, these manuscripts were a feast for the eyes as well as providing an overview of the culture of the medieval courts. The artistic quality was extremely high.



As well as special exhibitions, the British Library also has a permanent exhibition of some of its greatest treasures. These include two of the four extant copies of Magna Carta, the Sherborne Missal, the Luttrell Psalter, the Gutenberg Bible, Leonardo da Vinci's Notebook showing mechanical designs, sacred Islamic, Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist texts, original manuscripts including Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures Underground, original musical scores including works by

Schubert and Mozart, Beethoven's tuning fork, and much much more.

After this feast at the British Library we moved on to the Wallace Collection – an amazing collection assembled by a single family over five generations. Exhibits included European and Oriental armour, 18th century furniture, ceramics including Sévres porcelain from Versailles and a vast array of paintings. Artists represented included Canaletto, Guardi, Rembrandt, Frans Hals (The Laughing Cavalier), Fragonard (The Swing), Rubens, Romney, Reynolds, Velasquez – the list goes on and on. There were more Canalettos in one room than most of us had ever seen.

All in all we had an excellent day out, and our thanks go to Pauline and John Burren for organizing it.

Friends of Abingdon Events

Monday 4 June 10.00 – 16.30 Jubilee Walks
See next page for details

Tuesday 12 June AGM
19.30 Unicorn Theatre - drinks will be served from 19.00

Guest speaker Debbie Dance, Director of the Oxford Preservation Trust, the successful Oxford based charity which owns over 900 acres and listed buildings in and around the City. Debbie is an inspiring speaker and has completed a number of award winning conservation projects including the regeneration of Oxford Castle.

Sunday 8 July and Sunday 5 August
14.00 – 16.00 Abbey Trail Guided walks
Meet outside St Nicolas Church, finish with tea in the Abbey Buildings

Saturday 9 – Sunday 10 September Heritage Weekend
See page 2.

Wednesday 26 September "The Neighbour's Pigs and Running Water" - a talk by Ruth Weinberg. 7.30pm. Unicorn Theatre
How George Winship, Abingdon's Borough Surveyor for 41 years, brought the town into the 20th century, from Victorian Horse and cart times, though the advent of the motor car to the end of World War 1.
Free to members; non-members £2. The Buildings and pay bar will be open from 7pm.

Unicorn Theatre events

For more information and bookings contact the organisers or see www.abingdonabbey-unicorntheatre.org.uk or.

The Happiest Days of Your Life- Studio Theatre Club

Wednesday 23 – Saturday 26 May
 Tickets £8.50 from or 01865 778105 or tickets@studiotheatreclub.com

Folk at the Unicorn – Benji Kirkpatrick & Blair Dunlop - "the future of UK folk"

Thursday 7 June
 Tickets £10 in advance from Remade Guitars or <http://www.folkattheunicorn.co.uk/> or £12.50 on the door.

Monday 18 – Saturday 23 June Oxfordshire Drama Network Drama Festival

Two one-act plays per night, winners called back for Saturday Gala Night
<http://www.oxfordshiredramanetwork.org/>

Wife After Death by Eric Chappell – Abingdon Drama Club

Wednesday 11 – Saturday 14 July
 Tickets £8 (£7) from the Bookstore or <http://www.abingdon-drama-club.com/>

Other events in Abingdon-on-Thames

Jubilee Celebrations

Saturday 2 – Tuesday 5 June

For more information see Town Crier or www.abingdon.gov.uk/ or contact the Information Office 01235 522711.

Olympic Torch passes through Abingdon

Tuesday 10 July 07.30 - 08.20

Oxford Road and Town centre

Dragon Boat racing – Sunday 9 September

Charity event - re-arranged from May. Fun and entertainment on the river.

Up to date information on Abingdon events can be obtained from the Town Council Information Office or from the Whats on Diary at www.chooseabingdon.co.uk/home

Explore Abingdon on Jubilee Monday

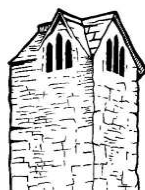
As our contribution to the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee celebrations The Friends of Abingdon are coordinating a variety of walks in and around the town on Monday 4 June. All walks are free, but please book in at our gazebo in the Market Place from 10:00 am.

Guided walks leave at 10:30 and 2:00. Remember to wear sensible footwear and come prepared for the weather. There is something for everyone:

<p><i>Walk to Sutton Courtenay with the Ramblers.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8½ miles via the Ock Valley and Drayton then back along the Thames Path. • Leaving at 10.30 am – pubs might be open or bring a packed lunch. 	<p><i>Explore Radley Lakes with the Friends of Radley Lakes.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 miles via the Thames Path to Radley Lakes. Leaving at 2.00 pm. • This might take 3½ hours if you stop for tea and cakes at the Lakes.
<p><i>Enjoy green Abingdon with Green Gym and the Twin Towns Society.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roughly 3 miles via the Ock Valley and Albert Park and will take about 2 hours. • Leaving at 10.30 am and 2.00 pm. 	<p><i>Learn more about the Abbey using the Lost Abbey Trail with The Friends of Abingdon.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tour includes St Nicolas Church and the Abbey Buildings and will take about 2 hours. • Leaving at 10:30 am and 2:00 pm.
<p><i>Visit the Abbey Buildings and look at the new Abbey Time Line.</i></p> <p>The buildings will be open for the duration of the walks and Jenny and her helpers will be serving tea and coffee and cold drinks.</p>	<p><i>Make new discoveries in Abingdon-on-Thames using our picture quiz sheets.</i></p> <p>Do this yourself with friends or others you meet on the same quest.</p> <p>Solutions on the Friends of Abingdon website www.friendsofabingdon.org.uk</p>

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You can keep in touch with Friends of Abingdon news in between newsletters, from our website <http://www.friendsofabingdon.org.uk/> or our Facebook page.



The Friends of Abingdon
Civic Society

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