

THE FRIENDS OF ABINGDON

Abingdon's Civic Society



Newsletter – Spring 2015

Chairman's Message

Well it looks as though we have again escaped a severe winter as signs of spring are popping up all around us. I hope that this does not mean it is too late for me to wish you all a very good New Year from myself and the other Officers and the Executive committee.

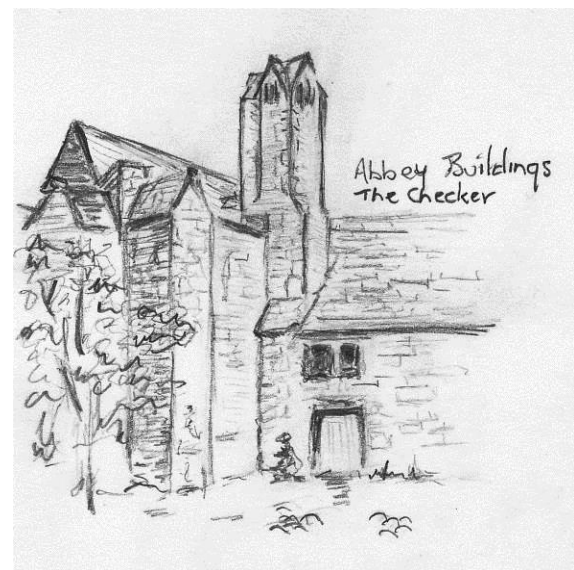
As you will see from the rest of this newsletter we continue to try and further the aims of the society. The Executive has now agreed the plans for the refurbishment of the toilet facilities in the Abbey Buildings: this should be going ahead very soon and will I am sure be very welcome to the growing number of users of the Buildings. With the imminent closure of the Guildhall we hope that we will be able to offer accommodation to groups who have not thought about us before

I hope to see many of you at our AGM on 3 June when I shall be standing down and we hope to see some new faces joining the Executive. I wish them the very best and am confident that they will find that they are joining a hard-working and forward looking group. I do sincerely thank the existing members for all their hard work and support over the past years.

Following the AGM we shall be welcoming Mr. Michael Liversidge FSA, FRSA the Emeritus Dean of the Faculty of Arts at Bristol University who will be speaking on "Revisiting St.Helen's Lady Chapel Painted Ceiling: The Artist's Workshop." Michael wrote a monograph about the ceiling some 50 years ago and was involved in its restoration in the 1990s. Apart from being very distinguished in his own right he is the son of another distinguished late citizen of

our town Mr Bill Liversidge, one-time Mayor and Master of Christ's Hospital and also the grandson of the first Vice-chairman of the Friends of Abingdon, Mrs.Ursula Liversidge who later became one of our early Vice-presidents. We look forward to a very interesting and informative talk. Visitors are always welcome at our AGM though of course only members are allowed to vote.

Michael Matthews



The Abbey Buildings

As mentioned in the last newsletter, we are about to embark on three major projects in the Buildings: two of them forced on us by the ravages of time and weather and the third a much-needed improvement to the facilities we offer our users.

The first two are repairs to the Long Gallery Roof and to our iconic chimney. In recent years we have invested in moss-treatment for the roof and it is proving generally

effective; however the North-facing roof-covering to the Long Gallery at the Checker end has eroded so badly that an area of approximately 25 square metres has to be replaced. Also, those of you who raise your eyes to look at our beautiful chimney may have noticed that it has developed some alarming foliage growth (see pictures on our website): we need to remove this and repair any resultant damage.

Needless to say, all of this work has to be done to the high standards required by English Heritage so as to preserve the appearance and integrity of our buildings. We have been successful in applying for a grant from the Joint Environmental Trust which will cover part of the costs, but they will still impose a heavy burden on our budget for this year and we are actively looking for ways to increase our revenues. The third project is an upgrade to the cloakrooms in the Lower Hall: they are functional but outdated and the Ladies' is very cramped. With advice from our architects, West Waddy ADP, and consent from English Heritage, we will shortly start work to improve them, including a slight expansion to the Ladies. We explored the possibility of incorporating a disabled toilet but it is not practicable in this part of the Buildings; we will continue to look for alternative ways of meeting this need in future.

Opening Times

The Buildings will re-open for the summer at the beginning of May. As last year, opening times will be 2.00–4.30pm Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays and Sundays,. However our curator, Jenny Berrell, is happy to arrange visits outside these times subject to reasonable notice. Entrance is free, but we encourage donations to help with maintenance costs. Do please encourage your friends, family and visitors to come and see our beautiful buildings.



Civic matters

Guildhall

The Guildhall complex is closing from 31 August for major refurbishment work to both the "old" and "new" sections. The Town Council has not yet been able to secure funding for their original ambitious plans and are now looking at a staged approach.

Although the old part of the building was spruced up in 2012, this was largely cosmetic and bigger changes are now planned, including provision of disabled access to most of the rooms. For the new part, the plans provide for a major upgrade to the Abbey Hall including improved acoustics and the introduction of retractable seating so it can be used for concerts, films etc. Plans for the entrances and foyer are not yet finalised and proposals for a purpose-built cinema have not been abandoned but will have to wait till funding arrangements are in place.

Discussions are ongoing about a temporary location for the Information Centre during the shutdown, but we understand that it will return to the Guildhall when the refurbishment is complete. The Music Centre will remain in the Old Magistrates Court. Some maintenance is also planned for Roysse Court, including repairing uneven paving, and removing some trees. They also plan to remove the fountain which, although not ancient, does have historical significance, being one of the few publicly visible artefacts made by Cowley Concrete.

While the Guildhall is closed, the various groups using it will have to find alternative venues: Guildhall staff are helping them with this and we hope that some of them will come to the Abbey Buildings, in particular the Unicorn which is available all year round for talks, concerts etc.

Old Abbey House

There have been no further developments since the last newsletter, except that, following the Crowmarsh Gifford fire, the Vale Council is currently making temporary use of the building for meetings. However they have told us that they intend shortly to re-start the sale under the process required for an "Asset of Community Value".

From the date the formal announcement is made there will be a 6-week period in which community interest groups can register expressions of interest in making a bid: if

any such expressions are received the Vale has to allow a further 20 weeks for the group(s) to prepare a business plan and arrange finance. During these moratorium periods the Vale is not allowed to sell the building to a commercial bidder, but at the end of the moratorium, they may sell it to whoever they wish. The Friends are not in a position to make a bid themselves and do not currently know of any other groups who plan to do so, but very much hope that one will come forward.

Community Shop

Since 2011 the Friends of Abingdon have worked jointly with the Choose Abingdon Partnership to run the "Community Shop" – a project whereby one of the vacant units in the Bury Street shopping centre is made available free of charge to community groups and voluntary sector organisations to promote their activities. In the last year it has seen several art exhibitions, displays by the Carbon Cutters and Woodcarvers, the highly successful exhibition of Abingdon People in the First World War and a wide range of workshops for young and old. The Councils' funding for Choose Abingdon is coming to an end so they will not be able to support this project in future and the Friends are looking for ways to continue to run it without ChAP. We hope to secure a grant to cover most of the costs but will need more volunteers to help with running it: the tasks are mainly administrative, but also include showing new users the premises, handling key arrangements, organising minor maintenance etc. We would be interested to hear from any members who would like to help with this. We would also welcome ideas for a new name: the word "shop" is slightly confusing as one thing we are not allowed to do in there is sell anything!

Abbey Gardens and Abbey Meadow

As reported in the last newsletter the Vale Council has been consulting on ideas for improving these much-used public spaces. They have identified three alternative options and the public are invited to vote on these during a further round of consultation in March. The consultation brochure is available from Added Ingredients, Mostly Books, the Guildhall and the District Council offices at Abbey House, or on the Vale website <http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/>. There will also be an exhibition and the opportunity to talk to Vale officers in the Community Shop from 23-28 March.

Planning Matters

The Friends of Abingdon's response to the local plan consultation focused mainly on the need to provide appropriate transport and other infrastructure before allowing major developments to go ahead. The recent announcement of additional funding, some of which may be used for upgrading the Lodge Hill interchange is a small step in the right direction.

We have held a useful meeting with the Vale Conservation officer about creating a "Local list" of buildings. There is more groundwork to do, but if this project is to go ahead we will need a lot of help from members so would be interested to hear from any of you who would like to be involved.

We have also recently received a reply from the Leader of the Town Council agreeing to meet us to discuss the possibility of a Neighbourhood Plan for Abingdon. Many other local towns and villages are going down this route and we believe that it would be a significant help in ensuring that future developments are done in a manner sympathetic to the character of the town.

Stop Press: first news is coming through of proposed major infrastructure improvements in the Science Vale Area Action Plan. We will examine these with interest to see what impact they may have on Abingdon.



A Doctor's Tale

There have been two carved wooden chairs in the Green Room for many years: they were given to the Friends of Abingdon in the early 1950s. Recently a close examination revealed written labels attached to each chair with the words 'Donated in 1951 by Miss Paulin-Martin: chair which belonged to her father' We were intrigued to discover more..

Dr Paulin Martin, father of Miss Dorothy Paulin Martin, lived and had a surgery in The

Clock House, Ock Street. He took over an Abingdon practice which he worked single-handed for 45 years until his eldest son joined him. They carried on this large country practice together until his son's death in 1926. He was a noted collector of antiquities, especially books. He died in 1929. This extract from an obituary* of Dr Paulin Martin vividly describes the life of an Abingdon GP at that time:

"Dr Martin's profession absorbed him and left little time for leisure, but what time could be spared was devoted to literature and geology. While at Radley College he started his now famous collection of old books, a hobby which he never dropped; he specialized in Shakespeare, early printed books, and Bibles. Rare books could be bought without great expense in those days, and the rarest and best were not out of reach if one knew, as Dr Martin did, what were the best. He searched and bought carefully and assiduously, and entirely without thought of any future monetary profit.

"He formed a collection of fossils and antiquities from the neighbourhood of Abingdon, which was an early Neolithic settlement; the doors of his house were propped open in summer with cannon balls from the Civil War, and an ancient tilting helmet shared the wall of his study with portraits of Shakespeare and Chaucer.

"His practice extended for many miles around Abingdon. He generally drove himself, his round often being between thirty and forty miles over stony roads in a dog-cart, or in very bad weather in a brougham. He did his own dispensing, often having fifty bottles of medicine to make up at the end of the round.

"He did a great deal of midwifery – seventy or eighty cases in the year, mostly at a guinea a case – though later (in 1880) he gave up the guinea ones and charged two guineas."

*(BMJ 1929;2:1137)
<http://www.bmj.com/content/2/3597/1137.2>

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David Egerton-King

It is with great regret that we report the death on 26th January of David Egerton-King, David was the Friends Treasurer from 1993 to 2006: he had had a career in the

army and then joined Abingdon School as Bursar. On retirement he took over the Treasurer's job on the Friends' Council. Calm and confident and used to giving orders, the Council were very happy to allow him, sometimes aided by the Secretary, to get on with implementing their decisions. To recount an example, it had been decided in the late nineties that the Checker roofs needed replacing: in 2000, David organised a millennium appeal which raised £42,000 in grants and donations. Then, together with our architect, he successfully organised the reroofing. David was a great Treasurer and served the Friends well. Our condolences and best wishes go to his widow, Jane.



Managing the Society

Securing our Future

Income-generation is going to be essential in the next few years: as you will have seen from this newsletter we have some very big bills to pay and these will not be covered by our normal revenues. While we can use our reserves for improvement projects and to provide immediate funding for emergencies, it is our duty to ensure that ongoing expenditure is covered by income. We are also finding that increasing statutory regulation means increasing costs. Bruce Hunt is therefore leading a group looking at ways of increasing our revenues – whether by extending the range and number of groups and individuals hiring the buildings, more actively seeking donations from visitors and those attending our events, better publicity, getting sponsorship from local businesses, running our own fundraising events and campaigns, increasing membership – and more.

We would very much like to hear from members with skills, contacts or experience

in publicity, marketing or fundraising who would be willing to help with this.

We would also like to ask any of you who are reviewing your wills to consider leaving a legacy to the friends of Abingdon: we are proud of the organisation set up 70 years ago by our forebears and this would be a good way of helping to preserve it.

Other plans

We continue to look for ways to refresh our organisation, to keep in touch with best practice and Charity Commission guidance.

Two areas we are currently looking at are:

- updating our constitution. This was last done in 2000, but large parts of it have remained unchanged since it was first drawn up in 1953. This will be a long process, probably culminating at the 2016 AGM, but areas we have been advised to consider include: terms of office for trustees, conflict of interest and even whether our current status as a charity is the best one for us, or whether we should adopt one of the new organisational formats now available.
- updating the Newsletter - we have used this format for five years now and advances in technology mean it looks dated. We will continue to provide paper copies for as long as members want them, but the new style will be more geared to electronic circulation. We would also like to give it a name - does anyone have any suggestions?

Affiliations

The Society is affiliated to Civic Voice, the umbrella organisation for Civic Societies which provides useful support and guidance for campaigns on civic and planning matters. They also provide benefits to individual members of our Society by way of a free day pass each year to a National Trust and an English Heritage property. (If you already belong to one of these organisations you can still apply for a pass to give to a friend or family member.) If you would like to know more contact our membership secretary, Barbara Beach for details of how to get a pass.

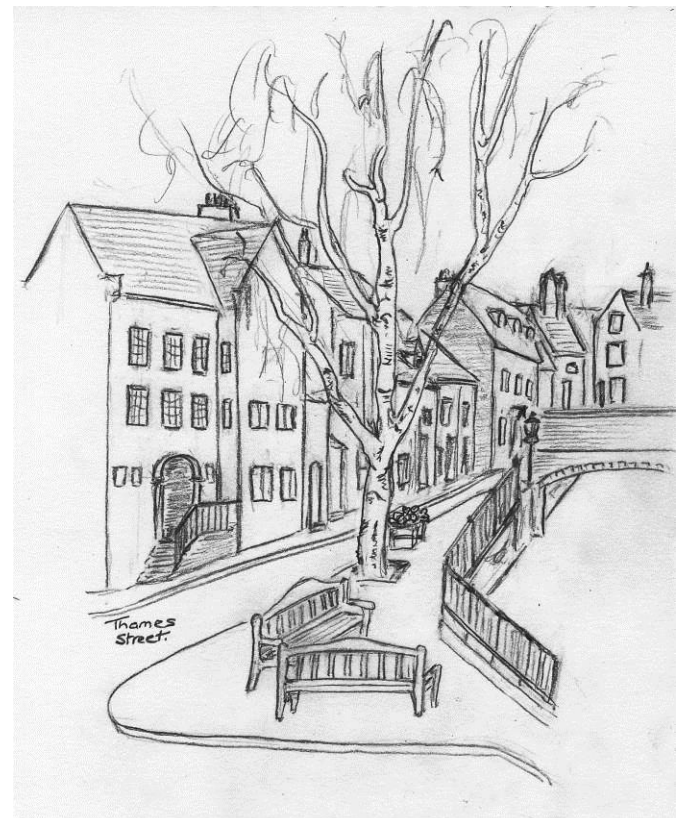
We have also recently affiliated to the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB): William Morris was one of its founders and it still abides by the manifesto which he wrote in 1877. They will provide useful sources of information and

ideas for those looking after the fabric of our building and some interesting talks and visits which our members can go to. See p7 for an example. More information about SPAB on their website <http://www.spab.org.uk>

Membership

As part of our efforts to increase income we need to increase the numbers of our members: we welcome both those who want to help with the various activities mentioned in this and previous newsletters, but also those who simply want to help financially by subscribing and attending our events. Annual membership is only £8 individual, £12 couple and life membership is excellent value at £55 individual, £85 couple. If you know of any friends or neighbours who would like to join us do please put them in touch either with Barbara (contact details on back page) or via the website.

As well as individual members, the Friends of Abingdon also welcomes Corporate Members from local businesses. The latest to join us are Renaissance Retirement who design, build and manage luxury retirement developments. The company is currently selling one and two bedroom apartments at its Fleur de Lis development on Wootton Road, Abingdon.



Friends of Abingdon Events

Rubens and his Legacy: visit to Royal Academy Exhibition Sunday 29 March. Further details on next page.

Founders' Lunch – Sunday 17 May, Coseners House. Further details on next page

Bank Holiday Walks and Tours – Monday 25 May – more information nearer the time

AGM – Wednesday 3 June, 19.30 Unicorn Theatre. Guest speaker, Michael Liversidge FSA, FRSA *"Revisiting St.Helen's Lady Chapel Painted Ceiling: The Artist's Workshop."*

"Music for a Summer Evening" with Abbey Strings Sunday 19 July 19.30 Long Gallery. More details nearer the time.

Heritage Weekend: 12-13 September.

Unicorn Theatre events

For more details, tickets etc please contact the organisers or see the Unicorn website: www.abingdonabbeyunicorntheatre.org.uk/

Gaslight by Patrick Hamilton. Presented by Breakaleg Productions Wed 11- Sat 14 March

Harvey by Mary Chase. Presented by Studio Theatre Club Wed 18 – Sat 21 March

Henry V by William Shakespeare. Abingdon Drama Club Wed 25 – Sat 28 March

The Oxfordshire Drama Network annual Drama Festival
Monday 8 – Saturday 13 June

Music at the Unicorn
Concerts approximately once a month – see <http://www.musicattheunicorn.org.uk/>

Other Abingdon-on-Thames events

Annual Parish Meeting Wed 11 March 19.00 Guildhall

ATOM Festival of Science and Technology
Wed 18 – Sat 21 March
<http://www.oxscifest.com/atom>

Abingdon Rowing Club Head of the River Race Sun 12 April 9.30 – 16.00

Abingdon Music Festival Fri 1 – Sun 3 May
<http://www.abmusfest.org.uk/>

Oxfordshire Art Weeks (South Oxfordshire) - 16-25 May <http://www.artweeks.org/>

Abingdon Air and Country Show – Sun 3 May
<http://www.abingdonairandcountry.co.uk/>

Annual Town Council Meeting and Mayor-making – Wednesday 13 May

Sculpture in the Vineyard – Bothy Vineyard, Frilford. Thursdays - Sundays between 23 May and 7 June.
<http://www.bothyvineyard.co.uk/sculpture>

Fun in the Park and Music in the Park – Saturday 6 June

Election of the Mayor of Ock Street – Saturday 20 June

Museum Exhibition

Port Meadow: Photographs by Adrian Arbib
7 February - 19 April

Markets

Local Excellence Market: Saturday 30 May.
Farmers' Market: Fridays 20 March, 17 April, 15 May, 19 June.

Regular talks

The following groups run regular monthly talks on subjects which may be of interest to FoA members. Contact them or see their websites for details.

- Museum Friends: first Thursday
- Astronomical Society: second Monday
- Abingdon Artists: second Thursday
- ADFAS: third Wednesday (afternoon)
- Naturalists: third Wednesday
- Twin Towns Society: third Wednesday
- AAAHS: third Thursday

NB there are many other interest groups in the town – there is a full list, with contact details, at www.abingdon.gov.uk/community-services/clubs-societies

For more details and a wider range of events in Abingdon-on-Thames see the What's On in Abingdon leaflet, published twice a year, or the events calendar at www.abingdon.gov.uk/events

Founders Day – Sunday 17th May

We are celebrating this occasion by having a lunch party at Cosener’s House.

All members with their partner or friend are invited to come. Details below:

- A three course lunch with a glass of wine
- Each course, Starter Main and Dessert, has a selection for you to make a choice and we finish our meal with coffee or tea.
- The cost of the lunch is £18 per person.

Please make out your cheque to The Friends of Abingdon and forward to Mrs P Burren, 18, Norman Avenue Abingdon, OX14 2HQ. We will send you a copy of the menu for you to make your choice. Although this event is some way off, please book ASAP as this greatly helps all those involved.Thank you.

SPAB Visit to Sandham Memorial Chapel and Whitchurch Silk Mill - Tuesday 21 April

The local branch of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings is organising this visit and since the Friends are corporate members we can go. For more details and booking form please contact Peter Clarke on 01235 522190 or peter.clarke111@btinternet.com

Bank Holiday walks – Monday 25 May

The Bank Holiday walks organised by The Friends of Abingdon and other groups in the town are now into their fourth year. There will be walks and tours to suit everyone highlighting Abingdon’s History and Natural Environment.

There will be another chance to explore Abingdon on foot as part of Heritage Weekend on Sunday 13 September.

PS We would like to hear from any members willing to help with these events, this time or in future – doing publicity, taking bookings, serving refreshments, or stewarding walks.

Music for a Summer Evening with Abbey Strings – Sunday 19 July

After last July’s sell-out concert in the Long Gallery, which raised over £1000 for the Friends, Abbey Strings have kindly agreed to offer us a similar event this summer. The date is the evening of Sunday 19 July (*note change from last newsletter*): put it into your diaries now! More details will follow nearer the time.

THERE ARE A FEW PLACES AVAILABLE FOR OUR VISIT TO THE

Rubens and His Legacy: Van Dyck to Cézanne Exhibition

ROYAL ACADEMY, BURLINGTON HOUSE, LONDON

WHY NOT JOIN US ON SUNDAY 29 MARCH

WE HAVE BEEN ALLOCATED A TIMED BOOKING OF 33 PLACES ONLY

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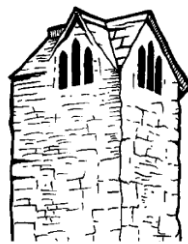
Pick-up point: STRATTON WAY, ABINGDON. Departure 9am.

Make your cheque payable to the Friends of Abingdon and return to:

Mrs P Burren, 18 Norman Avenue, Abingdon OX14 2HQ

Confirmation of your booking will be sent by email

Contact us by telephone or email			
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