

FRA Events Report 2015-16

The FRA Events Calendar runs by calendar year, with a schedule compiled in the autumn which is advertised around the New Year for events between January and December. As a result, this report leads on from the Secretary's Report from last year's AGM, focusing on the continuing 2015 programme and just a couple of events in 2016.

Our Events Diary for 2015 included a wide variety of visits and talks, which were generally well supported by the Friends. However, the programme saw several changes and cancellations, which was a disappointment for many members. In June, a planned walking tour in central London, "Barrow Boys And Bankers", had to be cancelled due to insufficient bookings to make it viable. Unfortunately, the threat of bad weather and the lack of suitable sheltered accommodation caused the cancellation of the Friends' Annual Strawberry Tea in August: alternative arrangements are being put in place for 2016 to avoid the necessity of taking such a decision again. Finally, the proposed weekend visit to York, postponed from 2014, was again cancelled due to lack of support.

Despite these disappointments, there were a number of successful events. Our AGM in June was well attended. After the business side of the AGM the Friends were entertained by the Rt. Revd. Geoffrey Rowell, who spoke with much humour and insight about his unique ministry as Bishop of Europe. Later the same month, in place of the London trip, a minibus-full of members enjoyed a re-arranged trip to Exbury Gardens.

On a trip necessarily brought forward from its original September date, in mid-August two minibuses took Friends to Wiltshire, to enjoy visits to three churches associated historically with Romsey Abbey. Steeple Ashton and Edington Priory are both still very much functioning churches; in contrast, the church at Imber St Giles is now the centrepiece of the deserted village of Imber, set in the middle of the MOD training area on Salisbury Plain, and only open to the public for a few weeks each year.

The Annual Dinner was held in Bertie's Restaurant in October, with the first visit to us of John Campbell, the Deputy Chief Constable of Thames Valley, as our guest speaker. This was clearly much enjoyed, as John has been invited back to be our guest speaker tonight!

In October, a small group of Friends were given a tour of the Abbey, with insights into the sculptures in the historic building. The theme of church architecture was

continued with a trip to Wimborne Minster in November, which included a fascinating visit to the Chained Library. Then in March, as the first event of the 2016 calendar, Liz Hallett presented her own personal insights into the variety of interesting features of the many churches she has visited in the past, comparing and contrasting them with our own Abbey.

The first trip of the 2016 calendar was made in April to the Kennett & Avon Canal, for a visit to the Crofton Pumping Station, followed by a trip on a horse-drawn barge at Kintbury, separated by a pub lunch. These canal trips are clearly very popular with members.

At the time of writing, a trip to RNLI Poole is imminent, and further trips and events have already been planned and publicised for the remainder of 2016. Spaces are still available for them all!

In addition to all these programmed events, the Friends continue to organise regular bi-monthly Coffee mornings in the Town Hall. These continue to be well supported, offering an opportunity for fellowship, as well as a chance to recruit new members and encourage members to sign up for the events.

A number of administrative changes have been made to the way Events are organised, and publicity for the events will be kept under review. This includes some of the procedures and policies for events, the publicity plan, and a tighter budgeting regime to ensure events do not run at a loss (one key objective being that the Events must make a contribution to the fund-raising by the Friends, not be a drain on the finances). In addition, members are now being encouraged to pay for events on-line, a much more efficient means of receiving payment in advance, though traditional methods of payment will of course always be welcomed by those who prefer to pay by such means.

As Chairman of the Events Committee, I would like to thank my fellow Committee members for their support and insight. This has been a steep learning curve for me, and not everything has gone as smoothly as one would hope, however nevertheless overall it has been a successful year. In that context, I must particularly thank all those who have directly or indirectly led or supported the many events which have been organised, both past and future. Without that input, there wouldn't be an events programme for members to enjoy. There are too many of you to mention you all by name: You all know who you are!

Dick Hewett
Chairman, Events Committee