

Chairman's Report

Here's wishing you all a healthy and happy New Year for this the 900th Anniversary of the founding of Romsey's Norman church. The Abbey is running a very interesting Abbey 900 programme of Events and displays. I particularly urge you to take time to look at the 900 Years timeline displayed in the nave. It is a mine of information about the Abbey and the Town.

Later in the year the Abbey will be welcoming a new Associate Priest, Revd Sally Womersley, which will be a big help to our hard working Clergy and allow them to grow the Abbey's outreach.

Our membership stays roughly steady at just over 400. We have welcomed 9 new members in since the beginning of December – quite a flurry! We think that most of them were introduced by you yourselves. Thank you for doing this – it is much the easiest and pleasantest way to get new members. The Committee has been strengthened as we added several new Trustees who are now playing an active role in our affairs.

We retain a very healthy balance of funds and are always on the lookout for projects making the Abbey an ever-better place to visit. John Thompson-Halls report below tells you more about the projects. We are already committed to fund some of the items featured in the 900 Programme will continue to play our part in supporting projects within the Abbey 900. John Thompson-Halls report tells you more about the projects.

We are close to finalising our Events Programme for 2020. Dick Hewett's report below tells what we did this year and what we have in store for you in 2020.

Projects Report by John Thompson-Hall

The Friends continue to make an annual financial contribution to the Abbey for various projects to enhance the visitor experience and to enable us all to develop the work and outreach of the Abbey. Our funds arise from member's subscriptions including gift aid donations, small profits from our various events and generous individual donations.

During the next twelve months will again make a partial contribution towards the annual costs for the work of our Children and Families Worker, Rhiannon Wilmott and a contribution to the annual Ethelflaeda Festival to be held in October 2020.

We continue to fund a 'state of the art' device in various local care homes to enable people regular access to the live streaming of Abbey services, and weddings to anywhere in the world. We continue to meet the costs of visitor leaflets in several languages which are an essential part of marketing the Abbey's history and artefacts. Also we have funded an innovative bell-ringing computer simulator for training young recruits. Investigations are continuing into the most suitable audio guide headsets for use during our popular guided tours, which we will then fund in the normal manner.

When the specification for the restoration work is approved, we will provide funds to refurbish the effigy of the three-year old child, Alice Taylor who died in 1843, whose memorial statue was wrought in plaster by her Father. We have just funded the completion for re-housing the Saxon plaited hair display item, believed to be from a coffin buried during the period AD 895 -1123, with an improved glass cabinet with special lighting effects for visitors to the Abbey. In the long term we have pledged our support for the Abbey Development Project including the St Lawrence Chapel Saxon foundations and protection of the exposed 11th century Saxon Rood carved in stone on the Abbey south elevation.

A recent item about to receive funding is for the improved display of our 15th century Cope, involving a new laminated safety glass screen to protect against natural light damage. In addition, we are making a contribution towards the cost of replacing worn out curtains in the Abbey Rooms.

Events Report – Dick Hewett

As members will be aware, our Annual Dinner in October was cancelled at short notice due to the closure of the White Horse. It was not possible to make suitable alternative arrangements, so those who had booked were offered a refund. A significant majority decided to leave their payments with us (thereby saving quite a lot of work on our part – many thanks to you all), most of which have already been used as part payments for the first trip of 2020.

We did manage a successful local trip to Eling Tide Mill and Eling church. The 2019 programme of events was completed with the annual trip to the theatre at Sonning to see “Singing In The Rain” in December – I’m told that some of the audience got wetter than they expected!

And so to 2020, the first event of which is the very popular Boat trip in April, this year from Caversham on the Thames. This sold out within 4 days of being announced, so apologies to all those who missed out. We do have a waiting list, but we don’t expect to get through all the names.

The programme for the rest of the year has now been confirmed, and a separate Events schedule is being sent with this Newsletter. Trips include the gardens of The Newt In Somerset in June, The Hawk Conservancy in July, Dorchester Abbey (Oxfordshire) also in July, and the Watts Gallery and Hatchlands (NT) in August. We hope this makes for an interesting eclectic mix.

We have booked to return to the White Horse for a Dinner on 6th October – and have been reassured the booking will be held even if the hotel changes hands in the meantime! The cost will be a little higher this year, however we hope that all those who were disappointed last year will book again for 2020. Tim and I are ready and eager to provide the entertainment we had prepared for 2019!

Then the final trip of the year will be a return to Sonning on 5th December for the Irving Berlin musical “Top Hat”. We expect this to sell out very quickly once again – so don’t delay your booking!

Bookings for all the above events are welcomed from 17th March onwards, as per the instructions on the Events schedule. No bookings will be acknowledged before then.

Finally, do remember the coffee mornings held every two months on the third Friday of the month in the Town Hall. All the surpluses from events and the coffee mornings go towards the many projects which we fund for the Abbey and the community.