MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE

FRIENDS OF ROMSEY ABBEY

THURSDAY 26th November 2020 Via Zoom

**Present:** were 35 members.

**Introduction by the Chairman.** Roger Rowe welcomed the members and said that this was our first virtual AGM but hoped that we would have a face to face one next time. He said he was very grateful for all the help the Friends had received.

**Opening prayer.**

**Welcome**: The President, Rev. Thomas Wharton, welcomed themembers and said that this year had been like no other, with all the restrictions in place because of Covid 19. He thanked Roger and the committee for the work they do. The Friends help in practical ways and are providing a new software package called Church Desk which will take over the Abbey electronic communication and interaction, including the website, rotas, bookings and bulletins.

We have welcomed Rev. Sally Wormersley and Rev. Lee Thompson to the Abbey this year. The Calling Widow speaks powerfully about how we are all called and it has increased the visitor footfall considerably. We are looking forward to working with the Friends on social and environmental concerns in the community.

**Apologies:**  Margaret Lillywhite, Jim Wilkes, Christine Edginton, Jackie Weston, Liz Holloway, Hilary and Jim Philbin, Gordon and Margaret Massie, Mike Perfect.

**Minutes of the AGM on 6th June 2019** were agreed as a true record. Proposed by John Thompson-Hall and seconded by William Slegg.

**Chairman’s Report 2019/20**

The 10th Anniversary of the Friends occurred in 2019, and our membership exceeded 400. But when we reviewed our membership records this year it revealed that the number who actually met our membership criteria at the end of the year was 395. At our last AGM we elected 4 more Trustees: Patricia Kerridge, Mike Prince, Bill Slegg, and Andrea Woolridge. As you will see from the Dick Hewett’s Events report, we had a busy and much enjoyed Events programme supported by well attended meetings of his Events Committee. When we had settled into a rhythm with our new Trustees we found it best to merge the Trustees meeting agenda with the Projects meeting agenda: I chaired the Trustee items and John Thompson-Hall chaired the Projects items. This pattern also suited our Vicar Thomas Wharton and Church Warden Janet Wallace, with one or other attending all our meetings. Communication with “The Abbey” has been very good as a result. As you will see in John Thompson Hall’s report, we were able to provide substantial help during the year to Abbey funds. The pipeline of projects we are considering grew well during the year, too. I am very grateful to Dick Hewett as Treasurer, Events Chair and Vice Chairman, to our secretary Jill Hall, and to John Thompson hall as Projects Chair for their hard work during the year; and to all Trustees for the contribution they have made. The current Office holders are all happy to stay on as Trustees. But I will not be putting my name forward as Chairman and John Thompson Hall will not stay on as Chair of the Projects group. In the last month of our Year, Covid struck so our activities in 2020/21 have had to be curtailed, to our great disappointment.

Roger Rowe

Chairman

**Treasurer’s Report.**  Copies of the report had been distributed. Dick Hewett reported that Mike Phillips will independently audit the accounts before they go to the Charity Commission. The income from subscriptions looks as if it has gone down but we had a major blitz to identify where the money is coming from. Money from those who donated more than their subscription, was changed to a donation. Subscription money has therefore gone down from £6000 to £3000.

We spent £11,770 on grants and events and we had £90,717 in the bank at the end of the year. Money spent on projects is down, but we have a lot of new projects in the pipeline.

Approved by Mike Philips

Seconded by Geoff Gibbs

**The Projects Committee Report 2019/20**

The Friends 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 members subscriptions including gift aid donations, small profits from our various events and generous individual donations. In summary we have again made a partial contribution to the annual costs for the work of our Children and Families Worker, Rhiannon Wilmott and a contribution to the annual Ethelflaeda Festival held in October. 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. We have provided funds to refurbish the effigy of the three-year old child, Alice Taylor who died in 1843, which has just been completed. Funds were provided for re-housing our Saxon plaited hair display item, believed to be from a coffin buried during the period AD 895 -1123. 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. We have funded the purchase and installation of new curtains for the Church Rooms. Smaller funds are allocated for sports equipment for our Youth Worker and for the Education Officer on a needs only basis. More recently quotations have been received for proposals to place on show our 15th Century Cope, these are now being reviewed by the committee. The Friends have recently made a contribution of £2030 towards the substantial costs to re-open the Abbey for the public, following the COVID 19 shutdown in March 2020

John Thompson-Hall

**Events Report** 2019-20

FRA Events Report 2019-20 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 my Report from the 2019 AGM, focusing on the continuing 2019 programme and the impact of Covid19 on plans for 2020. Our Events Diary for 2019 included a wide variety of visits, which were generally well supported by the Friends. In early June Jill and John Thompson-Hall led a group to Uppark, the National Trust property on the South Downs which had been restored after a devastating fire some years earlier. A 10th Anniversary tea and evensong was enjoyed by many in July. This was followed in August by a trip led by Dick Hewett (with Tim Rogerson driving a second minibus) to Tyneham deserted village and Lulworth Cove and Castle, on the Jurassic Coast in Dorset: fortune smiled as the weather was glorious. Dick led another group to Eling Tide Mill and Eling Church in September, this time using just one minibus and running a shuttle service from Romsey, which worked well. Finally, Colin and Rosemary Davis once again led a large party by coach to the Mill Theatre at Sonning for lunch and a matinee performance of “Singing In The Rain”, which included the front rows getting a dowsing during the performance! Unfortunately, our booking for the Annual Dinner at the White Horse Hotel in early October was cancelled at only a few days’ notice when the hotel was closed due to financial irregularities. In addition to all these programmed events, the Friends continued to organise regular bimonthly Coffee mornings in the Town Hall. These were 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. The programme for 2020 was issued in the New Year. However as a result of the Covid19 lockdown from March, and the subsequent restrictions on transport and venues opening, all events planned for 2020 had to be cancelled, including the bi-monthly coffee mornings at the Town Hall (though one informal “bring your own refreshments” gathering was held in the South Garth earlier in the year). Many of those who had booked have retained their places for the same events which we hope to mount in 2021. Certainly the Thames boat trip and Sonning theatre visits have already been booked for April and December 2021 respectively, and others to the Newt Gardens in Somerset, the Hawk Conservancy, Dorchester Abbey in Oxfordshire, and the Watts Gallery and Hatchlands (National Trust) in Surrey will be rearranged. An Annual Dinner has been provisionally booked for October 2021 at the White Horse. We sincerely hope that the situation will have improved sufficiently for all our events to go ahead without the constraints of social distancing which severely limits the capacity of transport and venues and renders most of the events uneconomical. I would like to thank all members for their patience over the past year, which has been extremely frustrating and worrying for everyone. Some members requested refunds, which we were very happy to arrange; some requested that their payments be passed direct to the Abbey’s funds, which has been done; whilst many left their payments in our accounts, thus reducing the necessary financial transactions and giving us a core of supporters looking forward to returning to our popular events next year. The cancellation of events has also curtailed the addition of any surpluses to the funds.

**Dick Hewett Chairman, Events Committee**

**FRA Membership Report 2019-20**

Our Membership Year runs from April 1st to March 31st. It was looking earlier in the year that our Membership was over 400 on March 31st. But for several reasons a recount has shown that 394 was the true membership on March 31st. Your Membership Secretary was rather busy setting up and operating the Emailing system for Abbey Communications, which has been vital in distributing the abbey Bulletins, and failed to detect that a number of members had not renewed. Further he had not taken into account some members who had died and were still being counted as members. I am grateful to the Treasurer, who did a very detailed analysis of the membership records against our Bank receipts, to identify the members who had not renewed for 2019. The closing of the Abbey has meant that we do not have visitors to the Abbey picking up Membership forms, so we cannot really expect any real growth in our membership yet. That said, thanks to the publicity gained for The Friends in the Service on October 11th, we have received two new members.

**Roger Rowe Membership Secretary**

**Election of Trustees:**

Chairman - Vacancy

Dick Hewett - Vice-Chairman, Chairman of the Events Committee and Treasurer

Jill Hall - Secretary

Mike Prince - Chairman of the Projects Committee

Roger Rowe - Membership Secretary

Trustees - John Thompson Hall, William Slegg, Andrea Wooldridge, Patricia Kerridge

Events Committee - Colin and Rosemary Davis

These were elected en bloc, proposed by Liz Wagner and seconded by Mike Philips

**AOB**

Roger Rowe thanked everyone for their continued support. He especially thanked Thomas for all his support and said that the Friends have a very good relationship with the Abbey.