



A Christmas message from our Chair, Jill Hall



As we reach the end of 2024 we look back on another successful year for the Friends. Our well supported events have been plentiful, varied, and fun. Alongside the range of our successful Coffee Mornings, there have also been the annual boat trip as well as the visit to the Mill at Sonning. Outstanding in the year was the Desert Island Discs event with Revd Bryan Taphouse as the guest and well attended by an audience of around 200. You can read more on all our trips as well as some of next year's which are planned, further through this newsletter.

We now have our new live website thanks to a great deal of hard work and effort from Robert Barker at Shinytastic. Do take a look www.romseyabbeyfriends.org. It has all our events, photographs and the projects for the Abbey that we have paid for from donations, legacies and subscriptions from our members since the Friends started in 2009. It has a facility for new members to join so please encourage your friends, if they love the Abbey, to join us or use our Justgiving page to donate.

Please give our Coffee Morning a try, open to Non-Members as well as Members. Bring a friend along, it is a great social event with homemade biscuits and plenty of coffee.

I would like to thank the Trustees for their dedication and hard work through the year and the membership for your ongoing support for our beautiful Abbey.

PROJECTS

Progress since our last newsletter in the summer has been, perhaps, slower than we would have wished although we have completed several small projects with the remainder continuing to go through the planning, approval, oversight and practical considerations .

Abbey signage

This remains very much on our agenda but planning restrictions meant that it had to be amended and referred back to the Test Valley Borough Council. We are hoping that it will come to fruition in the next few months and you will be able to see the difference.



Stewards' lanyards

The stewards were equipped by the Friends with new lanyards with the new and improved badge on them looking more professional. The lanyard ribbon are double sided which means no-one has to juggle to ensure that their identity to visitor is in any doubt.

Cardboard cut-out of the Abbey

The Gift Shop had sold out of its supply of the cardboard cut-outs of the Abbey and we were pleased to fund a fresh supply which is now on sale in the Shop. Ideal for a small gift to any age.



Alice Taylor effigy

Following a visit from the conservator early last year, he plans to re-visit early in 2025 to review the progress with the drying out process of the effigy. We will hope for a more permanent solution to keep the statue dry and in good order.



St Swithun's vestry

This project has slowed as the damp in the wall of part of the vestry is in need of repair work by a builder which is not within the scope of the work we have agreed to undertake. St Swithun's are seeking quotes from builders to gain the best option for this work to be carried out, prior to the renovations to which we are committed.



Light in the Abbey

As we have in previous years, we have funded the costs of the children's events for Light in the Abbey - part of the Ethelflaeda Festival. It was a hugely popular and enjoyable event with tickets selling out well ahead of the event.

Ceiling Viewer

There have been requests for a ceiling viewer to allow those who cannot look at the crossing ceiling due to the pressure it can put on the neck muscles and for those who are unable to look at the appropriate angle. This was due to go before a PCC meeting in November but has now been moved to January. This is a facility available at many ecclesiastical establishments and we would love to be able to help visitors in this way.

More to come

There are always additional projects which are under consideration and for which research and costings need to be carried out prior to the Friends taking on such projects. We aim for all those projects which we adopt to enhance the visitor experience which in turn will increase the numbers of those who visit our beautiful Abbey.

We are always open to suggestions so if any Friends feel there are projects which would come under our auspices, we are always happy to consider them.

A DELVE INTO THE ABBEY HISTORY

The Alice Taylor effigy

Near the north door of Romsey Abbey is the touching effigy of a little girl who died young and tragically over 180 years ago. Her name was Alice Taylor and she was the daughter of Romsey surgeon Francis Taylor.

In 1843 she fell ill with scarlet fever. Her parents gave her the tenderest loving care but their efforts were in vain. Within 4 days on December 10th, little Alice died, aged two years and five months. She was one of a number of Romsey children whose lives were claimed by scarlet fever in the winter of 1843-44. It was a particularly wet and foggy winter – “very injurious to health” as the *Hampshire Chronicle* put it at the time.

Alice was almost certainly buried in the North Churchyard. The headstones and table tombs were removed from the Churchyard in 1949 and the ground levelled, weeded and grassed. As far as we know, no record was made of the layout before levelling, so we are unable to be more precise.

The Memorial - Most of the victims are long-forgotten or remembered only as names in parish burials registers. But, Alice's grieving father ensured that his daughter would be known to generations of Romsey residents and visitors to the Abbey. Using his skills as an amateur sculptor, he created a life-size model of his daughter asleep on her bed. A particularly poignant touch is the rose bud in her right hand representing the one Dr Taylor had given her when she was ill. It is said that Alice was still clutching it when she died.

The re-created image of the little girl's tiny form asleep on her pillow and wrinkled sheets is a moving sight. The words on the base are also moving: “Is it well with the child? It is well.” The words come from a story in the Book of Kings which tells how the son of a Shunnamite woman and her husband was brought back to life by`

Dr Taylor's sculpted creation made an impact on his Romsey contemporaries. One wrote; “The monument is a piece of poetry. Romsey has reason to be proud of Mr Taylor. He has the hand of an artist and the tender susceptibility of a poet”. His artistic skills later took Dr Taylor to the 1851 Great Exhibition in the Crystal Palace in London's Hyde Park, where he exhibited a pieta.

This sad story and the memorial should remind us of how lucky we are today having inoculations against such childhood diseases and the importance of taking them up.

In the next newsletter – more about the Taylor family.



THE FRIENDS' SOCIAL SCENE

We have had a busy time since the summer with a range of trips in addition to our regular Coffee Mornings which are always enjoyable with great coffee, tasty biscuits, a busy raffle to say nothing of great company.

Take a look at some of our fun and if you haven't been able to or uncertain about joining a trip, do give it a try.

JIGSAWS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS ON CRANBORNE CHASE



The mystery of manufacturing jigsaws was revealed in great detail when the Friends of Romsey Abbey were given a thorough guided tour of J H G Jigsaws on Cranborne Chase on 30 July. Owner Julie was an enthusiastic host as she demonstrated all the working machinery needed to create jigsaws on wood or cardboard.

One of only five remaining manufacturers in the UK, Grovelly are proud to be the suppliers not just to esteemed customers such as the National Trust, but to King Charles himself, producing a jigsaw with one of his own paintings of Balmoral. The company specialises in producing short runs of jigsaws to a very high quality. Printing, trimming, glueing, cutting, bagging and boxing were all demonstrated by Julie and her colleagues.

The visit finished with tea and delicious home-made cake, rounding off a day which had begun with a visit to nearby Larmer Tree Gardens. This small Victorian pleasure park was complete with exotic buildings and plants, very welcome shade on a very hot day.

THE FRIENDS GO MESSING ABOUT IN BOATS

The Friends of Romsey Abbey have enjoyed another of their popular annual boat trips on the River Thames. This year's cruise was on the *MV Hibernia*, a luxury boat from the famous Hobbs & Sons boatyard, and travelled downstream from Henley to Hurley and back.

The weather was perfect, and the boat's caterers provided a delicious lunch for the Friends to eat as they watched the beautiful scenery along the river.

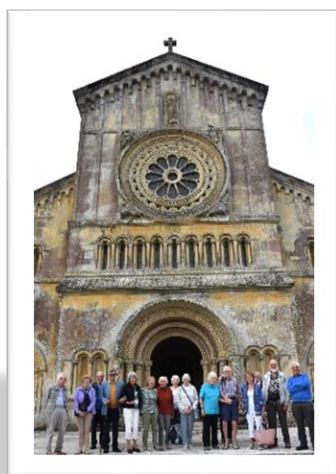
Before boarding the boat, the Friends visited the River & Rowing Museum on the riverbank in Henley and walked through the various exhibits, including a gallery covering thousands of years of life along the Thames. By common consent the best gallery was a walk-through exhibit showing characters and scenes from Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*.



The day proved once again the truth of Ratty's remark to Mole: "Believe me, my young friend, there is nothing - absolutely nothing - half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats".

FRIENDS EXPLORE WILTSHIRE CHURCHES

16 members of the Friends were treated to a guided tour of a range of churches to the west of Salisbury at the end of August. Their guide Brian Woodruffe, took the group first to the stunning Italianate church in Wilton, then four mediaeval churches in the Wiltshire Downs.



Their first call was an hour well spent at the Grade 1 listed church of St Mary and St Nicholas at Wilton which is probably unique in Southern England at least. It was opened in 1845, thanks to the generosity of Countess Yekaterina Semyonova Vorontsova, a Russian noblewoman who married the 11th Earl of Pembroke (of Wilton House). Her husband died in 1827 and she funded the construction of this superb edifice in his memory, replacing an earlier church in the town centre. Built with local Chilmark limestone, it resembles many of the churches of Tuscany, with a 33-metre high campanile, richly coloured mosaics and imported stained glass. The church certainly was well deserving of the visit.

The group continued on to see the outside of Dinton Church, a typical cruciform church with chancel nave, two transepts and a central tower, before calling

briefly at the tiny Baverstock church with its beautiful modern stained glass window. Lunch was followed by visits to the churches at Broad Chalke (with the grave of Sir Cecil Beaton) and Bishopstone. Both these churches date from around the 13th century displaying many interesting features both from those times and later.

BOTTLE TOMBOLA AT THE ABBEY CHRISTMAS FAIR

We ran the very popular Friends Bottle Tombola stall at the Romsey Abbey Christmas Fair, held in the Abbey on 30th November 2024.

Members of the Friends and the Abbey congregation had generously donated 277 assorted bottles.

On the day, visitors flocked to the stall, which was staffed by a team of Friends volunteers who were delighted to welcome all their visitors, who included our local MP The Rt. Hon Caroline Nokes.

The magnificent sum of £791 was raised for Abbey funds.



A stormy day out for the Friends of Romsey Abbey

A snowstorm was the one type of storm which we in Romsey did not experience on Saturday 7 December 2024. Rain and wind yes, as Storm Darragh moved across the country but snow, no!

The Friends did however experience a snowstorm, but this was in the warm and comfortable theatre in the Mill at Sonning, as they enjoyed a performance of Irving Berlin's famous musical 'White Christmas', whose climax is snow falling realistically over the stage and auditorium.

After their coach drive through the wild weather, the Friends had their usual good time in the Mill, with coffee on arrival in the Waterwheel Bar, a delicious 2-course buffet lunch and a superb performance of the musical by the young and energetic cast.



White Christmas was performed in the intimate theatre, which seats 215 in the semi-round and allows the audience to feel involved in the performance.

This was the latest in the series of annual trips that the Friends have been making to Sonning to see famous and popular musicals.

COMING UP IN 2025

Friends will be invited to join the latest of our popular cruises on the Thames on Monday 18 August. In 2025 the cruise will run from outside Oxford down river to Abingdon and back. We will be driven to Oxford in a luxury coach and enjoy and delicious lunch. Cost will be lower this year at £80 including the coach, lunch and boat trip.

Tuesday 26 August will see a minibus trip to North Hampshire Churches, costing £20.

22 November will follow our annual trip to The Mill at Sonning Theatre for a matinee performance of 'My Fair Lady'. The cost for the day of £110 will include luxury coach travel and a delicious lunch in the Mill's restaurant.

Full details of these trips and how to book tickets will be sent to Friends in the New Year when we publicise the full 2025 trips and events programme.

Don't forget the bi-monthly coffee mornings – January 17, March 21, May 16, July 18, Sept 19, November 21.

Where the money comes from and goes

Our likely net income will be in the region of £20,000 in the year to 31 December 2024 excluding grants to the Abbey for completed projects. The income is raised from subscriptions, donations, bequests, events as well as interest and gift aid.

£17,500 was paid out in February for projects which were completed in 2023. Up to £44,000 is budgeted for payment to the Abbey for projects completed in 2024.

Don't forget – our shiny new website informs on the range of our work as well as the fun and enjoyment www.romseyabbeyfriends.org

