

THE FRIENDS OF TEWKESBURY ABBEY

REPORT ON THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF CATHEDRALS, ABBEYS AND GREATER CHURCHES

PETERBOROUGH CATHEDRAL 11th - 13th OCTOBER 2019

In the magnificent surroundings of Peterborough Cathedral and its precincts, representatives from 36 Cathedrals, Abbeys and Greater Churches gathered for the 11th biennial Friends' Conference. Anglican representation came from as far away as Truro, Belfast and Edinburgh, whilst there were also representatives from two Roman Catholic cathedrals: Arundel and Westminster.

As always the conference provided an invaluable opportunity to share experiences, challenges and successes with Friends from around the country. It was especially pleasing for us to be able to confer with colleagues from Worcester, Hereford, Gloucester and Malvern. Indeed it was suggested during the Conference that we might set up a regional group of Friends' organisations for mutual support and encouragement. Tewkesbury and Gloucester have been doing this since the Ely Conference in 2017. In general it is helpful to know that we are all experiencing similar circumstances, developing a range of events and activities, seeking to recruit and retain new members and exploring innovative means of raising funds for our various churches. It is clear that none of our establishments would flourish (or even in some cases survive!) without the support of their Friends' organisations.

The Conference had been well planned and a varied programme of sessions put together by Linda Dowell of Peterborough. We were certainly given a warm welcome and the hospitality was remarkable, including a meal in the Becket Chapel on the first evening and a Conference Dinner in the "New Building" (dating from c.1510!) on Saturday, hosted by the Dean and with the presence of Judge Neil McKittrick, the High Sheriff of Cambridgeshire, who delivered a highly engaging and pitch-perfect mid-dinner address. There were also several opportunities for worship in the beautiful setting of the cathedral, including Choral Evensong on Friday and Saturday and a thought-provoking Eucharist on Sunday morning.

As always on these occasions there was a mixture of formal sessions with expert speakers, more informal question and answer sessions, and even more informal opportunities to talk with others of their approaches and experiences. Of the formal sessions the following is a brief synopsis.

Session 1 An update on the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

Natalie Freeman and Sue Ratcliffe. Peterborough Cathedral

This session was billed as an update on the information given at the last conference. It was stressed that GDPR is intended to "avoid harm through the mismanagement or misuse of data" and to "strengthen the rights of data subjects". Some definitions were provided alongside some general principles. Almost all of what we are told is being followed at Tewkesbury, thanks to the expertise and vigilance of Karen. Some points are perhaps worth repeating: the individual's right to be forgotten; the need for a retention policy and publication of retention periods; the need for a data audit form; the need to restrict information to particular computer devices (if individuals' own computers are used to process data there must be a policy governing their use). All related policies should be regularly reviewed and

updated. Where data sharing occurs (e.g. between The Friends and the Abbey) their needs to be a data sharing agreement.

In the discussion following the presentation it emerged that many Friends' organisations (including ours) are very much "up to speed" on GDPR, though others still have a way to go.

Session 2 **Income Generation**

Dawn Caplin. Head of Fundraising, Peterborough Cathedral Trust

Fundraising is an issue that concerns all Friends' organisations and it was useful to have the insights and experiences of Dawn Caplin. She talked us through her personal background and the fundraising that she had achieved across a number of charitable organisations both in this country and abroad. She used her experience to exemplify some of the principles that she proposed: have a specific aim for fundraising; establish networks of potential donors, developing a donor base; explain how any money raised is spent and be sure that donors are made aware; develop corporate partners (whether for financial donations or pro-bono work); increase volunteer numbers; demonstrate passion and determination; recognise and exploit opportunities; develop relationships; always follow up and ALWAYS SAY THANK YOU.

In her work for Peterborough Cathedral Trust, Dawn has pursued strategies such as grant applications, a legacy campaign, corporate engagement, liaison with other Cathedral donor organisations (such as The Company of St Peter and The Friends), an annual Nave Dinner (with auction); the latter raises £40,000 each year. She stressed that corporate approaches need to be tailored to individual companies, with appropriate acknowledgement. It is also crucial to have close co-ordination and co-operation between all fund-raising bodies within the organisation.

The presentation led to animated discussion among delegates about the need for and the challenges of fundraising, particularly in current straitened economic circumstances. Delegates were encouraged to exchange ideas and experiences. Dawn ended on an upbeat note to suggest that funds can be raised, though it takes time, energy, creativity and (ironically perhaps) money. Peterborough has raised £8 million pounds over recent years towards a target of £10 million. So it can be done!

(At the end of this session, we were also informed that under an EU protocol, all charitable, fundraising trusts will soon (2020?) required to be registered with HMRC.)

Session 3 **Membership - Recruitment and Retention**

Mary Boyall, Membership Secretary, Friends of Peterborough Cathedral

As Membership Secretary, Mary is the only member of Peterborough Friends' Council to deal directly and regularly with members. She emphasised how important such direct and regular contact is. As we'd been advised at a previous conference we should always respond to members' letters, e-mails and phone calls, if only to acknowledge them. Members need to feel valued. In common (it later transpired) with almost all Friends' organisations, Mary takes every opportunity to promote the Friends and recruit new members, so at all major events (concerts, fetes and Christmas Fairs, major services) there is a Friends' presence and plenty of application forms. It is important to offer some benefits of membership (much discussion again about the restrictions placed on these if donations

are gift-aided). Mary also spoke about the age-profile among their Friends (again, a common issue) and the need to recruit among younger people. They have a student membership scheme for those from 16 - 21 with a birthday card at 21 inviting full adult membership. Mary also raised common problems like what to do about those who don't increase their subscriptions as appropriate and those who simply don't pay. Much discussion about donation/subscription rates, with a variety of views. Many are raising them, some reluctantly; some are maintaining current rates. There was also a discussion about life membership; some Friends' organisations are dropping that, replacing it with 5 or 10 year membership. It is encouraging to know that the issues we've been recently working through at Tewkesbury are being considered by virtually every other Friends' organisation.

In subsequent discussion several other approaches were shared: a membership challenge (recruiting a target number of members during a year - reach 900 for 2021 perhaps!); a "Friends' vision for the future" leaflet to accompany application forms; "Family Friends"; gift membership at Christmas, or for birthdays; new members occasions; online membership. Exchanges of ideas continued informally throughout the conference.

Session 4 Publicity

John Grubb, Editor of Peterborough Friends' Journal

The session focussed very much on the production of an Annual Report, in Peterborough's case The Peterborough Chronicle, which seemed to be a joint production between the Cathedral and The Friends. This is a lavish publication of some 90 pages, taking between 4 and 5 months to prepare and costing £5.00 per copy. (Many delegates pointed out that this, with the addition of postage, would be disproportionate for them in terms of annual subscriptions). John explained that there was an element of advertising revenue to be taken into account when calculating overall costs. The crucial elements of such a publication he suggested were: target audience; simplicity and directness of message; means of delivery; and desirability of feedback. He argued that the target audience consisted of existing and potential members, visitors and members of the cathedral community. He did speak briefly too of the use of the website, but did not explore this in any detail; it was not clear if the magazine was available electronically. As with all of us, delivery was by a combination of hand-delivery, postal delivery and some e-mail communication. He was cautious about social media, though many delegates urged that in current times such platforms were essential if Friends were to get their message across. John suggested questionnaires as a principle way of obtaining feedback from members.

Subsequent discussion attempted to widen the focus of the presentation to look more widely at means not only of communicating with members but also of promoting the organisation much more widely to attract and recruit more members. It was agreed that there was a need for representation in local news media as well as across all social media. The development of promotional materials and the design of user-friendly application forms and associated paperwork was felt to be key to the success of any Friends' organisations. We like to think that Tewkesbury is well advanced in this area, not least thanks to our active Membership and Communications Committee, though, of course, there is always more that can be done.

Session 5 **Junior Friends - How to get young people involved**

Joanne Raywood, Young Friends' Co-ordinator, Tewkesbury Abbey

In the final session of the afternoon, Joanne delivered an upbeat and inspirational account of the establishment and development of The Young Friends of Tewkesbury Abbey. She explained how it came into being and provided details of the kinds of activities offered to young people to help nourish a sense of relationship with the building and its history in order for them to appreciate the need for an organisation such as The Friends to ensure its preservation for future generations. Joanne stressed her belief that the term "Junior Friends" should be avoided as it suggested that our youngsters were somehow subordinate to the organisation where we want them to be treated as of equal value. Joanne was also keen to distinguish Young Friends from "Sunday School" or education work, although elements of both might be present in the various activities. Joanne's talk was illustrated with extensive illustrations of our Young Friends involved in finding out about the Abbey, undertaking various cleaning and maintenance tasks, engaged in activities inside and outside the Abbey and, yes, fundraising. She also pointed to the possible availability of outside funding to support the work of a Young Friends organisation, given that there is quite a focus currently on voluntary work with young people. Finally Joanne made the point that in providing activities for youngsters, parents too become involved, with the possibility that they may be recruited to The Friends.

Following Joanne's presentation, Ruth Groome spoke of her work with youngsters at Peterborough Cathedral, where the activities she undertakes are integrated into the Cathedral's Sunday school programme. Friends from other cathedrals and Greater Churches also spoke of their experience of trying to develop areas of work with young people. In subsequent discussion delegates were full of praise for the development of Young Friends and many spoke afterwards of their admiration of Joanne's presentation, which concluded the conference on a positive, uplifting and forward-looking note.

Session 6 **Looking ahead**

The final session looked ahead to 2021 when we shall be hosted by Ripon, with the support of Bradford. Philip Arundel of Ripon and Jill Wright of Bradford encouraged us to suggest topics for the 2021 Conference, which will be held between 9th and 11th October. All were also invited to share their contact details with the Ripon/Bradford organisers.

Looking further into the future, Hereford offered to organise the 2023 Conference. The future of the National Conference of Cathedrals, Abbeys and Greater Churches continues to look assured.

Huge thanks were expressed to Linda Dowell and her team for a superbly organised conference and for a warm Peterborough welcome.

Graham Finch
Joanne Raywood

October 2019