



The Friends of Tewkesbury Abbey

Newsletter – December 2023

From the Chairman

Dear Friends

Since I last wrote to you in the Annual Report much has happened in the Abbey. Most significantly and happily, of course, has been the arrival of Rev Canon Nick Davies as our new Vicar. We have welcomed Fr Nick and his family to Abbey House and, on behalf of The Friends, wished them a long and happy ministry among us. Fr Nick was instituted and inducted at a magnificent service on 7th September. Within a couple of weeks he attended his first Friends' Council meeting at which he was presented with a copy of the facsimile edition of *The Founders' Book*. Fr Nick writes below to introduce himself and also to outline the challenging financial situation in which the Abbey finds itself. In response to that and following a request from the PCC, Council has agreed to designate a total sum of £240,000 over the coming three years, providing a grant of £80,000 for each year in 2024, 2025 and 2026. It is hoped that by then the Abbey will have restored its finances to return to a balanced budget. We have asked that, in accordance with our Constitution, our grant be applied to supporting the fabric of the Abbey. There will be an annual review of the position at the end of each of the three years. In doing this we are expending almost all of our available funds, whilst retaining our endowments (£149,000), our maintenance reserve (a sum of £200,000 set aside to meet any unforeseen emergency) and our restricted funds (approximately £130,000 mostly comprising the money raised from our 2021 Appeal). We shall therefore need to increase

our efforts to raise additional funds to replenish our coffers.

An important development in the husbanding of The Friends' financial resources has been Council's decision to engage an investment manager. We have previously managed our own investments, but bearing in mind our statutory duties as trustees and in the light of an increasingly volatile financial climate, it was felt that we should have expert advice in the management of our funds. To that end we spoke to three companies and interviewed two of them, the outcome being that we have just completed the formalities of transferring the bulk of our finances to Rathbone Brothers who



Revd Canon Nick Davies

have an enviable reputation for their work with charitable organisations. We shall ensure that funds are not put at risk and that any investments are ethical in line with Church of England guidelines. We are nevertheless hopeful that Rathbones will be able to manage for us a portfolio that will significantly increase the amount of interest that we are able to earn. The situation will be closely monitored by our Finance and Investments Committee and be regularly overseen by Council.

The Friends have been active socially too. Friends' Festival was a joyous occasion, celebrating our 90th birthday. Bishop Rachel presided at the Festal Eucharist and the Very Revd Michael Tavinor was our preacher. We were honoured by the presence of Mr Edward Gillespie, Lord Lieutenant of Gloucestershire and one of our Vice-Presidents. The service was followed by a most convivial (and delicious) Bring and Share lunch, the requisite AGM and an afternoon presentation highlighting the many contributions made by The Friends to the Abbey since our foundation by Canon Gough in 1933. It was a particular delight to have with us Julia Maxlow-Tomlinson, Canon Gough's grand-daughter,



Cutting the 90th Anniversary Cake at the Friends' Festival in July

who helped the Chairman to cut the birthday cake at afternoon tea. The day concluded with Choral Evensong. Huge thanks are due to all who ensured such a memorable Festival.

On the following Monday a group of Friends joined an excursion to Leicester to visit the Islamic Centre there and, afterwards, to the Richard III Centre, where we were given two lectures and a very delicious lunch. It was a

pity that the Cathedral remained closed for major building work, but as is evident from the report below, all who went had a thoroughly enjoyable day. Thanks to the Events Committee and, in particular, to Rafael Bellairs its Chairman for making the arrangements.

Our Autumn Lecture this year was given by Tim Jeffree, who spoke enthusiastically about his extensive work in local churches. Again, a brief report is to be found elsewhere in the Newsletter, but we're hugely grateful to Tim for his knowledge and expertise. As always, the evening was enhanced by wine and nibbles, provided by the Events Committee under the thoughtful supervision of Janice Smail.

I'm also delighted to let you know that our new website has now been launched. This has many more features than our previous one including a members only area where you will be able to access your own record (but no-one else's!) and make any necessary amendments. There is also a selection of special articles about various aspects of the Abbey, which we hope to keep updated with new contributions - you'd be most welcome to provide any items or articles that you think might be appropriate (though we shall, of course, reserve editorial rights). There is also a facility to donate, to pay annual subscriptions directly, to book tickets for talks and visits, and to make direct application to become a member.

2021 Appeal: It has been a source of great disappointment that plans to provide a lighter, more welcoming entrance at the north door remain unfulfilled. Having been turned down by the Diocesan Advisory Committee, the project has been set aside for the time being. We hope that in due course, perhaps next summer, the plans can be revisited, revised and resubmitted. Once approval has been granted, The Friends stand ready to provide such funding as has already been raised and to re-launch our successful appeal under a different title and with a more precise objective. We remain grateful to all who have contributed so far and assure donors that their gifts will be ring-fenced for this worthwhile and much-needed development.

Report of the Friends' Conference

The Friends of Tewkesbury Abbey were represented by the Chairman at the most recent biennial conference of Friends of Cathedrals, Abbeys and Greater Churches, held this year at Hereford Cathedral. As always the conference provided an invaluable opportunity to share experiences, challenges and successes with Friends from many different locations. It was especially pleasing for us to be able to confer with colleagues from Worcester, Hereford and Malvern. 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. There were several excellent talks and discussions, including a reflection by the Canon Chancellor of Hereford about the importance of Friends' organisations; a presentation by Rathbones about investment opportunities; an exploration of the new Cathedrals measure; and a session to share experiences about recruitment and retention of members. We were also entertained by the thoughts of the columnist and commentator Quentin Letts with a highly personal view of the current state of the Church of England. There were several services for us to attend during the course of the weekend and also an organ recital on Saturday afternoon. Hospitality at Hereford was generous and plentiful and our guest speaker at the final dinner was the former Dean of Hereford (and our former Vicar) the Very Revd Michael Tavinor, who celebrated the contribution that Friends' organisations make to Cathedrals and Greater Churches.

As always, much of the value of the conference was the opportunity to talk informally at its edges to discover how others were working and developing (or not!). Existing friendships cemented and deepened and new friendships initiated were the greatest benefit. I was encouraged that Tewkesbury seems to be among those Friends' organisations being well-



Delegates to the Friends' Conference, Hereford

run and prudently governed. Our financial situation would be the envy of many. We are in good heart and can therefore be encouraged in our efforts to grow and further improve The Friends of Tewkesbury Abbey.

A fuller report about the Conference can be found on The Friends' website.

Appeal for additional funds

As I mentioned in my letter earlier, The Friends have agreed to designate a total of £240,000 over the next three years to support the PCC in its efforts to return the Abbey finances to a sound and secure footing. Fr Nick has explained how this situation has developed and the strategy required to address it, most urgently through a budget recovery programme. In making a major grant to this effort, The Friends have depleted their available funds very significantly. We shall need to make every effort to replenish them and I begin that process immediately by appealing to our Friends to think seriously about the possibility of making a one-off additional contribution to our finances. I am acutely aware that it is only very recently that we asked for your support in raising £202,100 for our 2021 Appeal. That Appeal remains open, but it is unlikely that the PCC will be able to draw down on it for at least the next 12 months. In the meantime the Abbey desperately needs our help. I hope that you might consider responding generously to its SOS message.

If you are in a position to donate you can do so either by a donation through the Friends' website, by cheque (made payable to The Friends of Tewkesbury Abbey) sent to us at

The Abbey Office, Church Street, Tewkesbury GL20 5RZ or by BACS, using the reference FriendsSOS. The bank details are as follows: Account Name: The Friends of Tewkesbury Abbey; Sort Code: 30 - 91 - 87 (Lloyds Bank); Account Number: 02759206

As always, we are grateful to those Friends who remember us in their will. We have recently been notified of legacies from Mr George Buttery, Mr Michael Sprackling and Miss Patricia Gentry. We also received a generous donation from Mary Holbeck, one of our American friends, in memory of Gill Smith, which will be applied to the maintenance of the Abbey fabric, as requested by the donor.

I close by thanking you all for your continuing membership of, and interest in, The Friends. On behalf of Friends' Council I wish you a blessed and peaceful Christmas and a very happy New Year.

Graham Finch, Chair of the Friends

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An Introduction from Fr Nick

I am delighted to be the Vicar of Tewkesbury Abbey and I hope to bring skills which may be useful to the Friends: prior to ordination I worked in charity sector fundraising, and have previously been involved in large capital appeals for major projects.

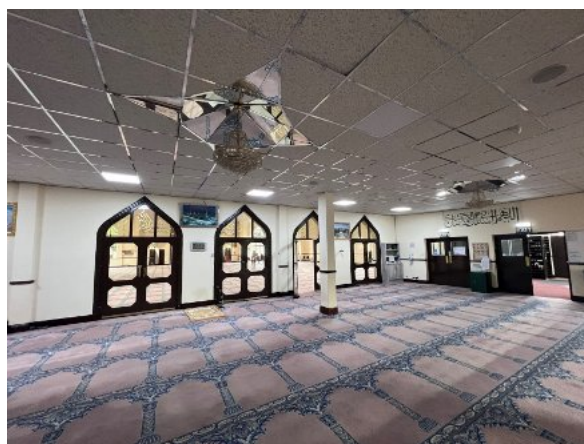
Thank you for all that has been done through the Friends. The fabric of the Abbey is in really good shape, and that is in no small measure down to hard work by the Friends.

The pandemic was unprecedented and the Abbey is still working its way through, a year behind most other places on account of the interregnum. There are many challenges ahead, most urgently with regard to the financial situation at the Abbey. A budget recovery plan is in place and we are working hard to establish clarity and strategy in fundraising. I look forward to working with the Friends and our partnership in meeting these challenges together.

Fr Nick Davies, Vicar of Tewkesbury Abbey

Visit to Leicester, 3rd July 2023

Embarking on a cultural journey to Leicester on Monday 3rd July, a group of Friends of Tewkesbury Abbey ventured first to Leicester Central Mosque for a private tour hosted by Imam Shoaib Altaf. The Imam provided a comprehensive overview of the Islamic religion and the mosque's founding, shedding light on its evolution since its establishment in 1968 and highlighting the various facilities that make the centre an integral part of the city's Muslim life: two mosques, an Imam's residence, guest accommodations, mortuary and burial services, education facilities, community and lecture halls, as well as sports and gym amenities. Imam Shoaib Altaf expressed gratitude for the overwhelming support of mosque attendees who had collectively donated over two million pounds towards the total cost of the project. This visit not only provided a glimpse into the architectural and functional aspects of Leicester Central Mosque but also fostered a deeper understanding of the mosque's role in serving the community and promoting Islamic teachings. The Friends of Tewkesbury Abbey left with a newfound appreciation for the rich cultural tapestry woven into the fabric of Leicester's diverse religious landscape.



One of the prayer halls at the mosque

Continuing our exploration, the Friends then travelled just a few minutes to the Richard III Visitor Centre. This serves as a captivating museum, narrating the life of King Richard III and recounting the remarkable journey of the discovery, exhumation, and reburial of his remains between 2012 and 2015. Unable to

enter Leicester Cathedral due to ongoing restoration and renewal efforts, the Friends were treated to a private 30-minute talk in the Kings Suite on The Cathedral Church of Saint Martin, commonly known as Leicester Cathedral. The decision to renovate Leicester Cathedral stems from the need to enhance its flexibility and address inadequacies in its current spaces, driven by a tenfold increase in visitors, drawn particularly to witness the tomb of King Richard III. Our talk provided a unique insight into the challenges and aspirations driving the Cathedral's transformation, leaving us with a profound appreciation for the historical and cultural tapestry woven into its stones.



Listening to a talk at the Richard III Visitor Centre

The visitor centre is housed in a stunning Victorian Gothic revival building, last occupied by Leicester Grammar School, and strategically placed to offer views of the possible gravesite of the long-lost Last Plantagenet King of England. The remainder of the visit was based around the centre and after lunch a member of the Visitor Centre told the intriguing story of the King under the car park and then the group were free to explore the award-winning Visitor centre, a blend of great storytelling, beautiful design, and cutting-edge 21st-century technology. The centre eloquently unfolds the captivating and poignant tale of the king's life, death, and one of the most remarkable archaeological detective stories in history.

Our time in this meticulously curated space left us with a deep appreciation for the dedication

and ingenuity that went into bringing this historical narrative to life.

A full version of this report, with further illustrations, is available to Friends in the Friends only area of the Friends' website.

Rafael Bellairs, Chair of the Events Committee

Friends' Autumn Lecture, 4th October 2023: "Changing Churches" - Tim Jeffree

There was a very good attendance for the Friends' October talk entitled Changing Churches. We knew in advance that the talk was to be given by Master Craftsman Tim Jeffree, whose work we are familiar with since he made the magnificent Cope Chest which graces the Abbey. This chest was highly commended in the Furniture category of The Wood Awards, 2008. We were not prepared though for the journey he took us on when he described the variety of projects he has completed.



Interior doors for a chapel, under construction in Tim's workshop

We soon realised that the title of Changing Churches was well chosen as he showed us how he has constructed hidden spaces within old churches to bring them more in-line with modern expectations. From hidden, and soundproof, toilets to kitchen areas and even a café, shop and post office. All tastefully integrated into the churches, using beautiful woodwork. He removed old, restrictive, pews

and, with the addition of moveable seats, created a much more versatile and useful restyled space which has brought new life to St Philip & St James, Leckhampton, known locally as Pip & Jim's. In addition to his local commissions, Amberly and Tirley for example, Tim's work can be seen across the country.

We also heard about Tim's workshop which is located in an old outhouse in the grounds of Prinknash Abbey, a lovely setting. You can see a little of the workshop in the accompanying image.

The enthusiastically delivered, interesting and entertaining talk resulted in a large number of questions and answers which continued well after we had all moved on to enjoy refreshments.

Ian White, Vice-Chair of the Friends

COMING EVENTS

Tickets for these events will be on sale through the Friends' website, and at the Abbey early in the New Year, but please put the dates in your diary now.



Friends' Visit to Elgar's Birthplace Museum, The Firs, Upper Broadheath

Saturday 24th February 2024

9.30am to 1.30pm

Immerse yourself in the surroundings and music of Edward Elgar as Dr Roger Allen (piano) and John Parsons (violin) perform a short live recital of Elgar's music as part of this Friends' visit to The Firs, located in the picturesque countryside near Worcester. This modest cottage holds a special place in the heart of music enthusiasts and history buffs alike as the birthplace of Sir Edward Elgar, one of the most celebrated composers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Managed by the National Trust, The Firs is a charming place that offers visitors a glimpse into the early life and inspirations of the renowned composer.



The Fitzhamon Lecture

20th April 2024 at 7.00pm

"Ambition, Violence and Piety – the career of Robert Fitzhamon"

Professor Judith Green

"When William the Conqueror invaded England he seized the manor of Tewkesbury ... When William Rufus became king, he gave the 'Honour of Tewkesbury' to Sir Robert Fitz-Hamon, who had not only 'come over with the Conqueror', but was his kinsman and had married his niece Sybil. He was 'by the Grace of God, Prince of Glamorgan, Earl of Corbeil, Baron of Thorigny and Granville, Lord of Bristol, Gloucester, Tewkesbury and Cardiff, Conqueror of Wales, near kinsman of the King and General of His Highness's army in France'. Such was the great Norman soldier to whose piety and generosity Tewkesbury owes her abbey church."

Lionel Gough, from 'The Friends Concise Guide to The Abbey' (1948)

Tewkesbury Abbey Christmas Services 2023

Sunday 3 December
6pm Advent Carol Service

Tuesday 12 December
6.45pm
Schola Cantorum Carol Service

Sunday 17 December
6pm Christmas Carol Service

Christmas Eve
4pm Christingle
doors open at 3.15pm
11.30pm Midnight Mass

Christmas Day
10.30am
Christmas Day Eucharist

Sunday 7 January
6pm Epiphany Carol Service

Tickets are not required for any services.
Further details available at
www.tewkesburyabbey.org.uk