

## Civic Pride – Beer and Benedictines

As regular readers of this column know, Abingdon has a wealth of history to be proud of. Two elements of this history – the Abbey and brewing - come together on 7-8 December in the third Abingdon Beer Festival at the Abbey Buildings.

At the core of the town's heritage is the great Abbey of Abingdon; in medieval times it was the sixth largest and one of the richest abbeys in the country with the church of St Mary almost the size of Westminster Abbey. It hosted many kings and queens including William the Conqueror who came hunting here and Henry VIII who visited 4 times. Abingdon was a far more important place than Oxford!

Brewing and malting has taken place at Abingdon Abbey for over 1,000 years, initiated by the monks for their own consumption - up to a gallon (8 pints) each a day. Shortly after the Dissolution the remaining buildings were developed as the Abbey Brewery, a major malthouse and brewery in the town, and beer continued to be brewed on the site for some 300 years until the brewery became part of Morlands in the 1860s.

The remaining Abbey Buildings are now a nationally scheduled monument and Grade 1 listed. In 1944 they were saved from demolition by the charity The Friends of Abingdon Civic Society, who have continued to own and maintain them for almost 75 years. Although the Buildings are wonderfully atmospheric and contain the only theatre in the town centre, the Unicorn, there is much to do to make them more accessible and functional.

These Buildings need to pay for themselves, so what more appropriate way to do this than by hosting a Beer Festival: the Abingdon Beer Festival is now in its 3<sup>rd</sup> year and is becoming a tradition of its own. It is organised with the support of the Loose Cannon Brewery, which is itself a revival of the Abingdon brewing tradition and profits go to the Friends of Abingdon charity, to support these medieval buildings.

The Friends are undertaking a project, partly funded by the Heritage Lottery, to realise a vision of making the Buildings secure for generations to come, more accessible, and useable for twelve months of the year; they will continue to provide a great venue for weddings, parties and activities including amateur dramatics, music and the Unicorn Cinema. The Friends also plan to create an exciting visitor attraction animating over 1,000 years of history for the benefit of the Abingdon community and to attract more visitors to the town.

The Festival is on 7 and 8 December from 6pm to 11pm - come along to enjoy good local beer, support the charity and find out more about the project and how you can support it in future.

Bryan Brown Chairman The Friends of Abingdon Civic Society