

Civic Pride column - September 2022
Heritage Open Days
by Hester Hand, Friends of Abingdon Civic Society

The annual Heritage Open Days provide an excellent opportunity for towns to celebrate their heritage and Abingdon, as one of the oldest towns in England, has been an enthusiastic participant since 2003.

The national organisation suggests a theme for each year's events: the theme is not compulsory but provides useful prompts to look at the town's heritage from different angles. The 2022 theme is "Astounding Inventions and Innovations" and this is ideal for Abingdon, positioned as we are at the heart of an area of scientific and technological excellence.

However inventions and innovations go back a long way – after all, most things we take for granted now were new once! So our programme will be looking at some very different innovations and inventions, ranging from the introduction of running water and drains, to new brewing techniques; from wharves and locks to public libraries – and of course the contributions made in the 20th and 21st centuries by our local scientists.

There will be opportunities to see inside properties not normally open to the public, including a medieval Merchant's House, the 17th century Christ's Hospital Hall and a fine Georgian House. People will also be able to get a closer look at some buildings usually only open for specific purposes (such as churches) – see some of their fascinating features and find out about their histories.

This is a wonderful opportunity for us to use our wealth of heritage buildings to showcase other aspects of our history – right up to the present day. We will have a talk on modern science in a 15th century building, an exhibition about Victorian inventions in a house dating back to medieval times, and a Flower Festival in the 19th century Baptist Church.

And for those who prefer to explore in the open air, there will be heritage-themed guided walks and trail leaflets to follow in your own time. Also the opportunity to visit the site of the 19th Century Workhouse and find out about life there.

All of this and more will start with a talk on Wednesday 14 September; the exhibition opens on the Thursday, the Flower Festival starts on the Friday and the other activities are on Saturday and Sunday 17-18th. There will be events and activities for all ages, including children's craft activities. The weekend closes with a cavalcade of classic cars in the Market Place on Sunday afternoon.

For more information see <https://www.abingdonheritage.org.uk/>, pick up a leaflet from the Information Centre, Library or Museum or just come along to our Market Place Information stall on the Saturday or Sunday.