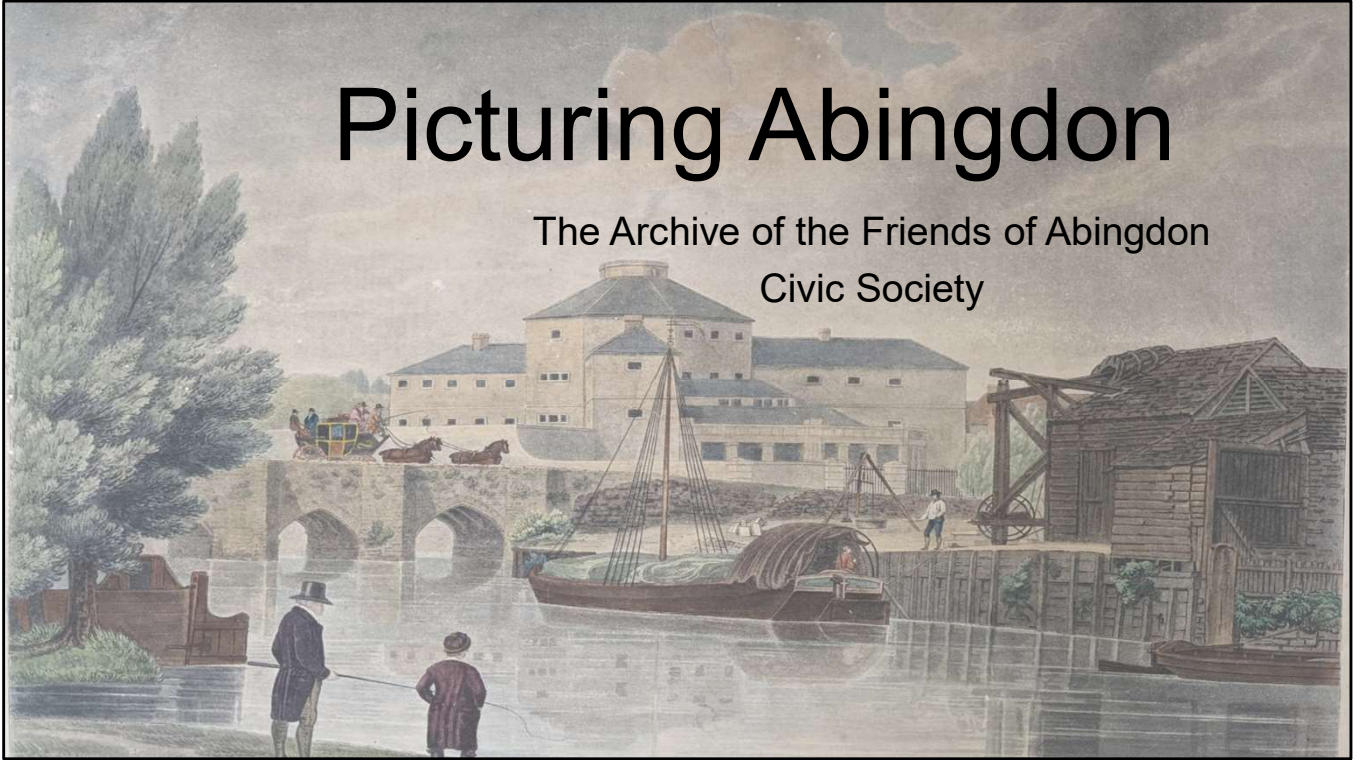


Picturing Abingdon

The Archive of the Friends of Abingdon
Civic Society



The Friends of Abingdon Civic Society is over 80 years old, and almost from the beginning has been gathering documents, pictures and records relating to its own history, and also to the wider story of Abingdon. Thanks to the work of local historians, including Dick Barnes and most recently Elizabeth Drury, that material has been gathered together and safely preserved. This project is about taking the next step, and making the material more accessible.

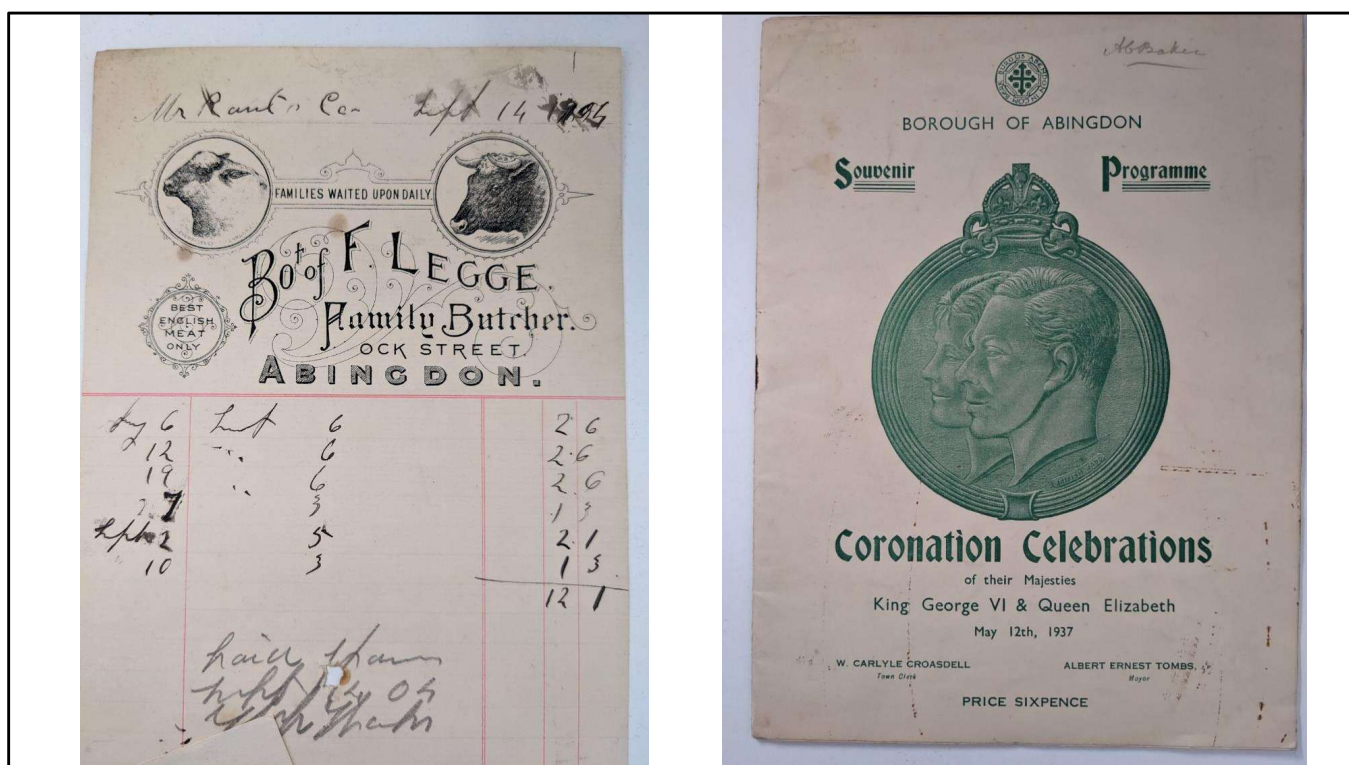


This is the storage cupboard where the material is kept, and as you can perhaps already see there is a real range of material. There are the Friends own minutes and files, which shed a fascinating light on the growth of Abingdon in the post-war period – there were a whole range of issues, from new housing estates to the creation of the Bury Street precinct

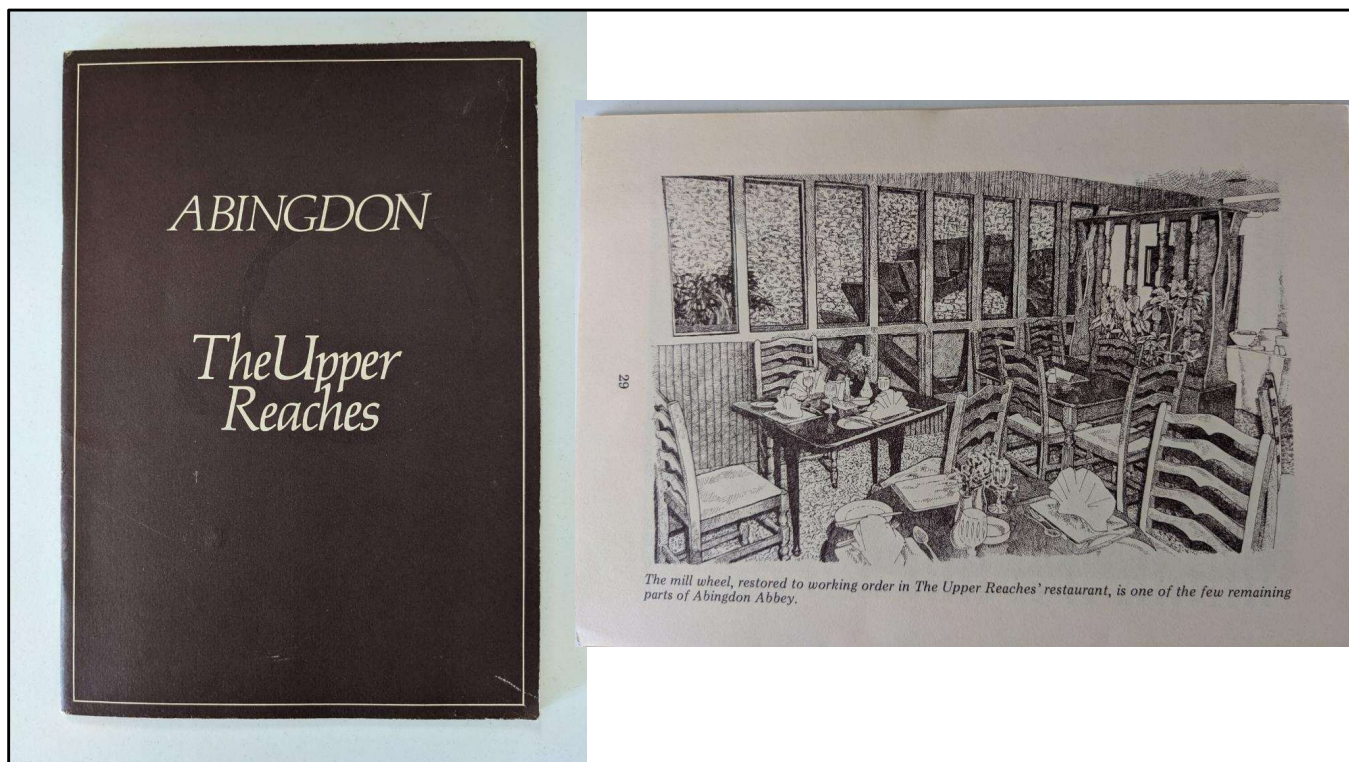
*If Abingdon were Avignon,
And Berkshire were Provence;
And if for softly running Thames
The Rhone's turbidity
Went rushing perilously on
How different things would be!
The Queen's Hotel might well become
L'Hotel du Midi*



It also includes more quirky material such as this calendar for 1959, published by the Friends, which reproduced a poem from Punch comparing Abingdon and Avignon



The Archive also includes publications of all kinds: books, leaflets, programmes, newspaper cuttings, billheads and flyers



Including this leaflet produced for the Upper Reaches Hotel in happier times

Mr Dicky bets Mr W.
Ballard 2 bottles of wine to
one, That Lord Palmerston is
not the next Premier
May 25th 1859

1859	August	September	October
	1 11 18 25	1 8 15 22 29	6 13 20 27
Widdowson	X X X X	3 3 X X	3 3
Rendell	X X X X	X X X X	3 3
Payne	X X X X	X X X X	3 3
Dickens	X X X X	X X X X	3 3
Ballard	3 3 3 3	3 3 3 3	3 3 3 3
Ken. Mc	3 3 3 3	X 3 3 3	X 3 3 3
Karristew	3 X X X	X 3 3 3	X 3 3 3

Mr W. Ballard bets Mr P. Payne one Bottle Port Wine that Napoleon the first died May 5th 1821
Mr Payne contends that he died Jan 1825 or '7
May 1859 Mr Payne loses that the Duke of
Mr Dicky bets Mr W. Ballard 2 Bottles Wine
to one, That Lord Palmerston is not the next
Premier May 25-1859 J Dicky Loses

Mr E. Harris bets Mr E. Payne a Bottle Wine
that Mr. James Polk was elected April 23rd 1845
Mr Harris ~~loses~~ Wins J Dicky Loses

Mr E. Harris bets Mr E. Payne one
Bottle Wine that the President's Hospital
Governors who hold leases were dis-
qualified from acting from the present time
Aug 18-1859 E Harris Loses

There are some older documents. One of the most unexpected is the register of the Rising Sun social club, which begins in the 1820s and, amongst other things, records some of the members wagers with each other.



And perhaps most engagingly there are photographs, from the C19 to the C21. There are several hundred, probably more than a thousand in a wide range of formats



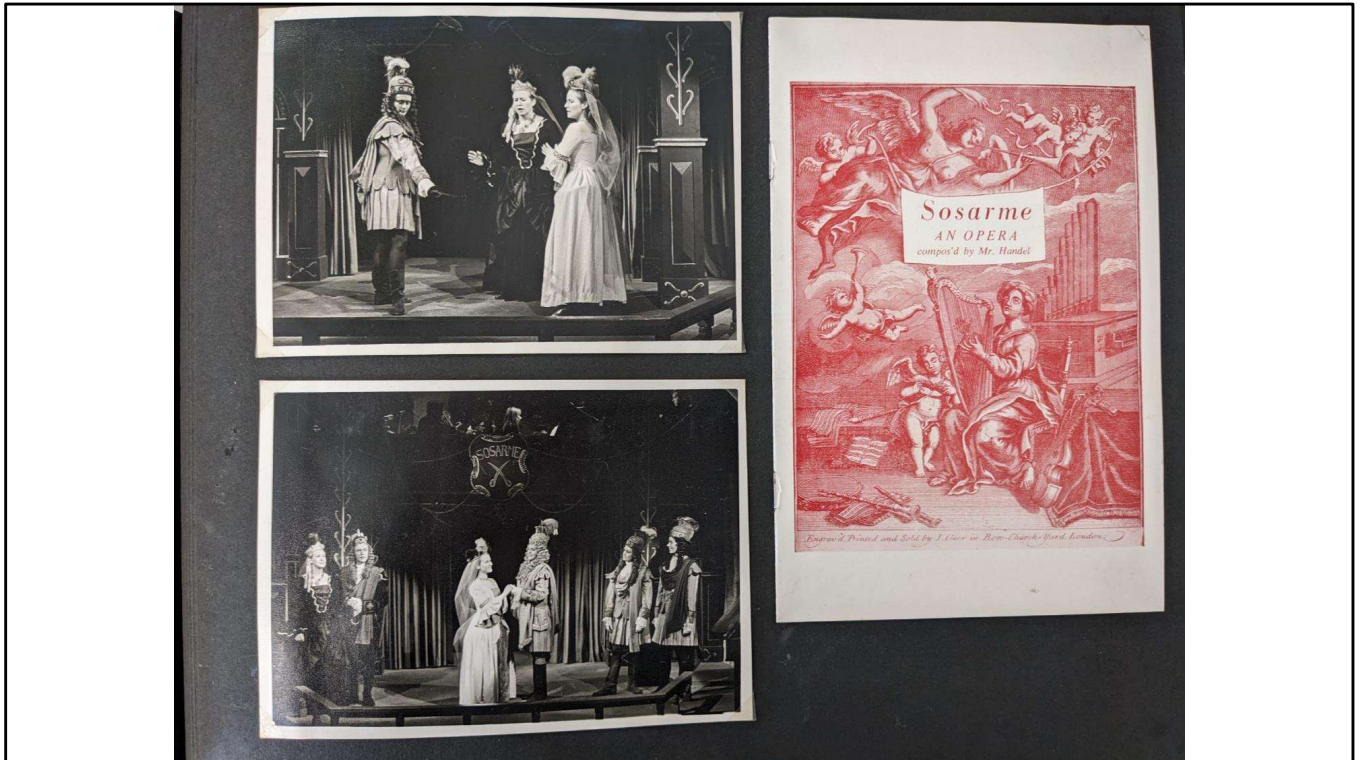
There are many photographs of the Abbey buildings, because of the Friends' responsibility for their care – for example this view of Thames Street



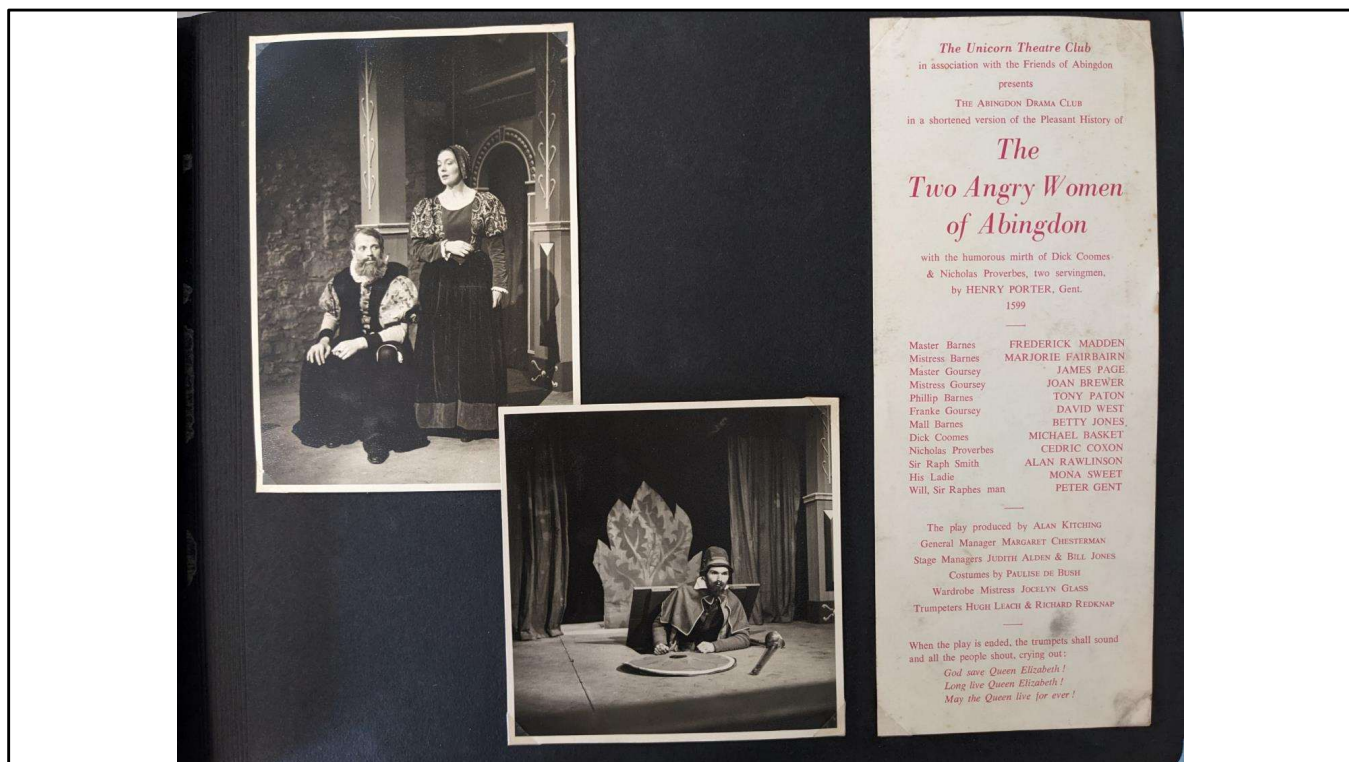
And this view of the Abbey buildings from the north, taken before some of the later buildings were cleared away



These photos were taken during a programme of repairs carried out in 1894. The photographer was Harry Redfern, who went on to design the Board School in Bostock Road



There are also photos of the many events the Abbey has hosted. These include a wonderful record of the theatrical productions put on in the Unicorn from the 1950s onwards. These included pioneering revivals of baroque opera which attracted national interest.



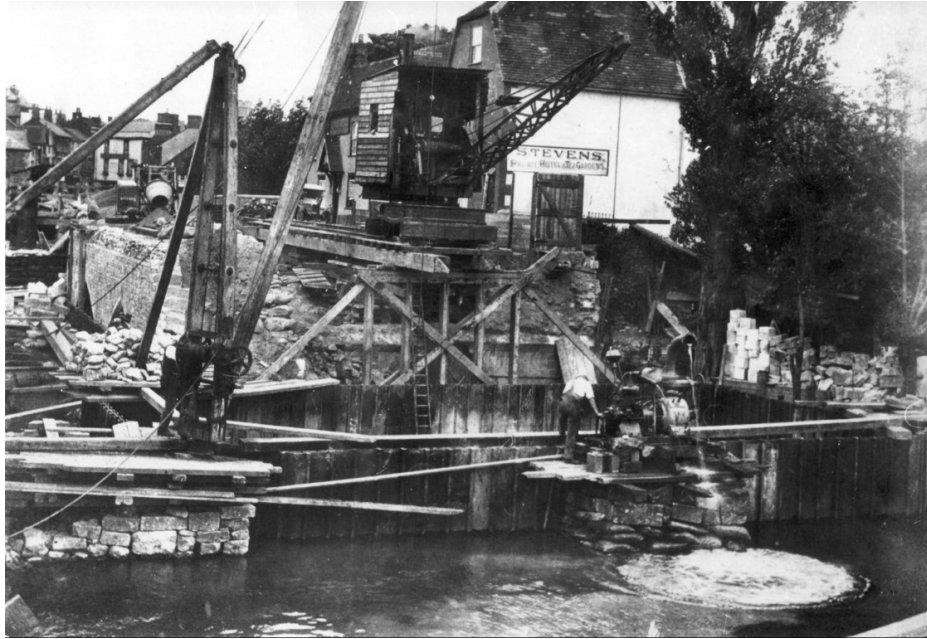
As well as a revival of “The Two Angry Women of Abingdon”



The Archive also has plenty of photos of Abingdon as it grows and changes – for example these views along the river and from the top of the brewery tower looking towards Albert Park



Here is the Abingdon carpet factory – a previous occupant of the Upper Reaches site



And here is Abingdon Bridge in 1927, in the course of its reconstruction



These prints show the Market Square in the late C19/early C20. The Corn Exchange and the Queens Hotel were demolished to make way for the Bury Street precinct, while Queen Victoria has been exiled to the Abbey Gardens



And here is West Saint Helens Street, looking north in the 1930s



Many aspects of Abingdon life feature, from the gardens of the Long Alley almshouses to a regatta before the first world war.



So what do we want to do with this wealth material?

Firstly we want to create a detailed catalogue, giving each item a unique identifier so that we can properly manage and reference the material going forward.

We've been testing how best to do this with a small group of volunteers

Unique ID	CatRef1	CatRef2	CatRef3	Scan Ref	Location	media	Format	Date	Caption	Creator	Dimensions (cm)	Notes
	ABA2	1	0					1896	Series of photos of Abbey Buildings taken by Harry Redfern during 1896 repairs			
A00150	ABA2	1	1		Box 21	audio-visual	B/W photo print		Checker exterior	Harry Redfern	24 x 29	Shows derelict shed and lumber. Mounted on board.
A00151	ABA2	1	2		Box 21	audio-visual	B/W photo print		Checker exterior	Harry Redfern	22.5 x 28	Copy of A00150. On card.
A00152	ABA2	1	3		Box 21	audio-visual	B/W photo print	1896	Abingdon Abbey during the repairs in 1896	Harry Redfern	24 x 29	Checker exterior
A00153	ABA2	1	4		Box 21	audio-visual	B/W photo print	1896	Checker exterior	Harry Redfern	22.5 x 28	Copy of A00152. On card.
A00154	ABA2	1	5		Box 21	audio-visual	B/W photo print	1896	Checker exterior	Harry Redfern	24 x 29	slightly wider view of A00152
A00155	ABA2	1	6		Box 21	audio-visual	B/W photo print	1896	Interior view into West Checker from East Checker through opening in wall	Harry Redfern	24 x 29	Mounted on board
A00156	ABA2	1	7		Box 21	audio-visual	B/W photo print	1896	Checker interior	Harry Redfern	22 x 28	Copy of A00155. On card.
A00157	ABA2	1	8		Box 21	audio-visual	B/W photo print	1896	Interior of West Checker looking south	Harry Redfern	24 x 29	Mounted on board
A00158	ABA2	1	9		Box 21	audio-visual	B/W photo print	1896	Interior of West Checker looking south	Harry Redfern	22 x 28	Copy of A00157. On card.
A00159	ABA2	1	10		Box 21	audio-visual	B/W photo print	1896	Exterior view of Unicorn yard looking south	Harry Redfern	24 x 29	Mounted on board
A00160	ABA2	1	11		Box 21	audio-visual	B/W photo print	1896	Exterior view of Unicorn yard looking south	Harry Redfern	22 x 28	Copy of A00159. On card.
A00161	ABA2	1	12		Box 21	audio-visual	B/W photo print	1896	Exterior view of Unicorn yard looking east	Harry Redfern	30 x 23	Printed on card
A00162	ABA2	1	13		Box 21	audio-visual	B/W photo print	1896	Exterior view of Unicorn yard looking east	Harry Redfern	29.5 x 24	Mounted on board
A00163	ABA2	1	14		Box 21	audio-visual	B/W photo print	1896	Exterior view of Unicorn yard looking south	Harry Redfern	28 x 21	Printed on card
A00164	ABA2	1	15		Box 21	audio-visual	B/W photo print	1896	Exterior view of Unicorn yard looking south	Harry Redfern	29 x 23	Mounted on board
A00165	ABA2	1	16		Box 21	audio-visual	B/W photo print	1896	Interior view of Undercroft looking south	Harry Redfern	29 x 23	Printed on card
A00166	ABA2	1	17		Box 21	audio-visual	B/W photo print	1896	Interior view of Undercroft looking south	Harry Redfern	29 x 24	Mounted on board
A00167	ABA2	1	18		Box 21	audio-visual	B/W photo print	1896	Interior view of Undercroft looking north	Harry Redfern	27 x 22	Printed on card
A00168	ABA2	1	19		Box 21	audio-visual	B/W photo print	1896	Interior view of Undercroft looking north	Harry Redfern	29.5 x 24	Mounted on board
A00169	ABA2	1	20		Box 21	audio-visual	B/W photo print	1896	Interior view of Undercroft looking south-east	Harry Redfern	28.5 x 23	Printed on card
A00170	ABA2	1	21		Box 21	audio-visual	B/W photo print	1896	Interior view of Undercroft looking south-east	Harry Redfern	29.5 x 24	Mounted on board
A00171	ABA2	1	22		Box 21	audio-visual	B/W photo print	1896	Interior view of Lower Hall looking east	Harry Redfern	28.5 x 180	Mounted on board
A00172	ABA2	1	23		Box 21	audio-visual	B/W photo print	1896	Interior view of Lower Hall looking east	Harry Redfern	27.5 x 23	Printed on card

We've made good progress – here is a section of the spreadsheet we have been creating.

And then we want to make the photos and the other documents more accessible, so that they can be shared and enjoyed by everybody in Abingdon. We're going to be looking at how we can do that through the Friends of Abingdon website.



But alongside that we need to do more research on the items on the collection, to better understand what we are looking at and to provide some context. The location of some photos are as yet unidentified, for example, and for many more we only have very approximate dates. Detective work on the content of the pictures – from shop frontages to costumes and car number plates - can help us be much more precise

Just to take one example, these 2 photos are part of a larger series, apparently taken at the same time, documenting frontages along the High Street. We think they were taken in the 1960s or 70s, but work on directories and peoples memories ought to help us narrow this down, and perhaps suggest why they were taken in the first place.



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And besides the photographs there are plenty of other parts of the collection which would repay work. There are cinefilms for example, where it would be great to see the content researched, digitised and described. And there are newspaper cutting and manuscripts which would become much more accessible and useful if we could transcribe them.

And we hope that if we can make our collection more accessible, then we can link up with some of the other photographic collections in Abingdon and create a wider portrait of the town over the last 150 years

So there is plenty of scope for different kinds of contribution, and I'd love to hear from anybody who would like to help