

## Notes.

### THE FRIENDS OF ABINGDON.

IN towns and cities all over the country, lovers of the past, planners for the future and those who feel the greatest present need to be the recovery of a sense of community, are coming together in Civic Societies, and it is fitting that in Berkshire a lead in this direction should have been given by Abingdon—the ancient county town.

A Society known as *The Friends of Abingdon*—a name which means exactly what it says—was formed in May 1944. The inaugural meeting was addressed by Mr. Walter H. Godfrey, F.S.A., Director of the National Buildings Record, who spoke of the town's great architectural treasures and the enterprise of its former burgesses, but deplored a recent decline in its beauty and seemingly in its civic pride. His speech was followed by a unanimous decision to form a Society with the following aims:—

- (a) To arouse in all people of Abingdon and neighbourhood a lively and practical interest in the town and its setting.
- (b) To help to preserve what is best worth retaining amongst its old buildings and to encourage new buildings worthy of its civic tradition and character.

Some sixty members were enrolled—a number which has now risen to over two hundred, and a Committee of ten was elected with the Mayor (Councillor J. L. Etty) as Chairman and Mrs. Liversidge, prime mover in calling the meeting, as Vice-Chairman. It was agreed to affiliate the Society to the Central Council of Civic Societies, and subsequently Mr. A. T. Loyd, Lord Lieutenant of Berkshire consented to become the first President. His death so soon afterwards has been deeply regretted and the Society is fortunate to have found a successor in Sir Ralph Glyn, Bart., M.C., M.P. for North Berks.

During the year the members have held three General Meetings, shewing concern about what is to happen to vacant sites and a desire that all new developments shall consort with the old and be for the lasting good of the town.

As a first effort at preservation, the Society decided to save from threatened demolition some old cottages adjoining the former Abbey of Abingdon, which up to its dissolution in 1538 had dominated the neighbourhood for over eight hundred years. After examination by Mr. Godfrey and a survey by the Ancient Monuments Department of the Ministry of Works, the cottages have been purchased.

Besides the main Gatehouse, the only recognized remains of Abingdon's great Benedictine house were "The Checker" (or Exchequer) with its famous thirteenth-century gabled chimney and the adjoining "Long Gallery." The former was the Abbey's central Counting House and the latter, added in the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, was doubtless for the accommodation of the clerks attached to each monastic official. Now "the cottages" are found to consist of a fourteenth-century building which appears to have been an earlier series of clerks' offices, and a fragment of the Abbey's thirteenth-century Granary. It therefore appears that the newly-acquired property and the other remains are closely related to each other and together furnish a unique example of the business range or accountancy department of a medieval monastery.

The *Friends of Abingdon* are anxious to get the whole group of buildings under the Society's control, to put them in good repair, accommodate a caretaker and make them easily accessible to the public. With all this in view they are launching an Appeal.

To have set on foot this enterprise is no mean achievement for the Society in its first year; but much remains to be done. There are blemishes to remove from Abingdon, much restoration and planning for the future to be undertaken, and above all it is necessary to create an informed public opinion so that the towns-people may choose to make for themselves a fairer place to live in, and go down to posterity as true Friends of Abingdon.

Membership of the Society is by no means confined to people of the immediate neighbourhood; all who are in sympathy with its aims are welcomed as members.

A.C.B.

Berkshire archaeologists can hardly turn a deaf ear to the Appeal for the restoration of the Abbey Buildings of the former County Town, and as war conditions limit the number of personal appeals that may be sent out, will readers of the Journal kindly note that contributions may be sent to the Honorary Secretary, Miss A. C. Baker, 28, Hilltop Road, Oxford, who can supply further particulars. Subscription forms are inserted in the Journal.

Our Council have agreed to send a donation of £2 2s. od. in response to the Appeal.—*Ed.*