

Friends of Cookham Abbey Trustees' Annual Report 2023

1 Introduction

This Annual Report on the activities of the registered charity Friends of Cookham Abbey (FCA) sets out the main activities undertaken by the Trustees of FCA in 2023 to carry out its charitable purposes for the public benefit.

2 Objectives and Activities - Public Benefit

The purposes of FCA are set out in its Governing Document, approved by the Charity Commission on 10 August 2023. FCA is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, registered in England and Wales, charity number 1204300.

The objects of FCA are, for the benefit of the public, to advance research, education and public interest in the archaeology and history of Cookham and neighbouring areas in the Thames Valley, including but not limited to, the investigation and preservation of historic land, buildings and artefacts.

The charity's main activities are

- to provide financial and practical support for the excavation of an Early Medieval (Anglo-Saxon) abbey in Paddock Field, Cookham. FCA provides financial support for post-excavation recording, analysis and conservation of finds and remains from the excavation;
- to develop and undertake a programme of public engagement, in order to get people involved in the archaeological research through education and outreach. The results of the excavation project will be of interest to many people: residents of Cookham and neighbouring towns and villages, historians, archaeologists, and students of all ages.

FCA achieves its objectives by purchasing services from companies and individuals, and the important contribution of work and time by volunteers. FCA does not own property: Paddock Field, the abbey remains and finds belong to the Parochial Church Council of Holy Trinity Church.

3 Achievements and Performance

FCA supported the 2023 excavation season in several ways:

- contribution to clearing an extended area for the excavation site, allowing the Anglo-Saxon cemetery to be further investigated;

- contributing to the lab analysis of skeletons from the cemetery. Some 20 interments have been recovered and taken to UoR for investigation. This will include assessment of biological sex and age at death, evidence of skeletal trauma and pathology, and radiocarbon dating. The skeletons will be assessed for potential for further scientific investigation which may throw light on their diet, migration and potential kinship connections. The data from individual skeletons will be examined in the context of grave type and location. Results will be available in Spring 2024. Visitors to the 2023 excavation were particularly interested to learn more about these early people of Cookham;
- conservation and analysis of mid-Saxon metalwork. These artefacts have to be cleaned and treated by specialist conservators to prevent deterioration. The metal artefacts recovered include tools and dress accessories which throw light on daily life in the abbey community. Conservation of a lead fitting has revealed an Anglo-Saxon runic inscription. This is evidence of literacy, and in this period, literacy was confined to monastic and royal communities;
- Identification of pre- and post-Saxon coinage and metalwork, which are evidence of activity on the field before and after the 8th-9th century abbey;
- contribution to staff cost for completion of post-excavation paperwork. The excavation process removes the archaeological evidence. It is therefore essential that thorough recording is done, so that the site can be understood by specialist archaeologists and the wider public;
- Trustees agreed to give financial support to Phyllida Shelley-Smith as Artist in Residence during the season. Financial support included payment for her time before and during the dig, cost of materials and a tent, and showing her work in the Maidenhead and Cookham Arts Trail (CAMAT) in September. Phyllida's installation, based on a design from Queen Cynethryth's coin, was engaging for many visitors, and over 30 people came to her scheduled art sessions. The Artist in Residence project is an excellent way to extend engagement with the excavation and its results.

The second main objective of FCA is to share knowledge of the excavation and its results, and to embed its findings and significance in local communities, during and after the dig season. In particular, we want to engage with groups and communities who may not be familiar with this period of English history, and who feel that archaeology is 'not for them'.

This aspect of FCA's aims has been developed and furthered by Sarah Parfitt, who was appointed as FCA's Community Engagement Manager in July 2023.

Following a tendering process at the beginning of the year, a website www.cookhamabbey.org.uk has been designed, launched in August and maintained by Richard Pow, a Cookham-based web designer. Richard has been extremely helpful in adapting the website to reflect comments by Trustees, visitors and partner organisations. He has also designed and supplied 2000 copies of FCA postcards, given to site visitors and displayed in Cookham shops.

Sarah's media experience and contacts proved hugely helpful during the dig season. Two media days were run, with involvement from national and local TV, radio and press. UoR Press Office noted 108 pieces of media coverage in August and September. Social media accounts (official and unofficial) had over 39,000 views.

Two Facebook pages have been set up. The first is a private group, run by Fiona Tattersall, supported by Paul and Sarah Seddon, with 477 members. The second is an open group, currently with 115 members. Both pages have been active during and since the dig.

A total of about 1,550 visitors came to the site, an increase on 2022. Trustees decided not to charge for tickets, but encouraged visitors to make a donation, either when booking online, or at the gate. Total donations came to £3,557, of which £2,887 went to FCA and £670 was given for student welfare. As in 2022, the majority of site visitors were locally-based (Cookham, Bourne End and Maidenhead area). Two senior undergraduates trained and supervised students looking after site visitors, and FCA made a payment to them. FCA also paid for employing a UoR undergraduate during the dig, who filmed progress, interviewed participants, and posted updates on social media for FCA and UoR.

Links with schools and community groups are an important part of this programme. Sarah and other Trustees are collaborating with Salt Hill VR, a virtual reality and digital skills company in Slough. Salt Hill has created a virtual reality tour of the dig. A trial experience ran in November, and was followed by a launch with the Maidenhead Young Archaeologists Club, and we hope to take this a step further by visiting three primary Schools in the Spring. We believe this mode of experiencing the dig and its finds, and learning about the area's past is an exciting way of engaging with new audiences particularly younger people, those who are not local, and those who may not be able to visit the excavation in the summer. Using VR is an important way of engaging with children and young people, who are used to this technology.

With a grant from the UoR's Impact Project Fund, FCA commissioned an opinion survey from visitors to the site. The results are encouraging, giving an indication of people's understanding about the period and archaeology, before and after their visit. The survey will guide the development of our public engagement programme, and gives valuable baseline against which Trustees will be able to measure our impact and demonstrate the public benefit given by the charity.

4 Financial Review

A statement of accounts for the period ending 31 December 2023 is in preparation and will be submitted to the Charity Commission.

A budget of £10,000 was agreed in the Business Plan for 2023 to support the excavation project. Trustees agreed expenditure of £5,000 for the Artist in Residence project. Against this total of £15,000, actual/committed expenditure has been £15,350. This figure includes some expenditure committed in 2023 but not paid until 2024. Costs associated with the public engagement programme amounted to £6,564.

FCA spent £2,520 for legal advice on its application for Charity Commission registration. The development and launch of the website cost £4,554.

Total Income for the period 2022-23 was approximately £29,0000. Significant elements of income included:

- net income from a gala dinner in April, with a guest presentation by the historian Dr Janina Ramirez - £7,400. Over 200 members and guests attended this successful and enjoyable evening. Trustees are very grateful to the individuals and local businesses who donated auction prizes;
- donations from visitors to the excavation - £3,600;
- Mrs C Boyd Roffey generously donated £1,000 after visiting the excavation, and has promised a further donation of £2,000 towards the cost of lab analysis of skeletons in 2024;
- University of Reading Impact Project Fund contribution to CEM post - £3,000;
- Louis Baylis (Maidenhead Advertiser) Trust - contribution to CEM post - £1,000;
- Prince Philip Trust - contribution to CEM post - £1,000
- Cookham Festival 2022 - £1,000.

We are grateful to all donors for their sponsorship, and interest in our work.

At the end of the 2023 financial period, FCA had assets (cash) of £9,841. FCA does not own land or other physical assets, and has no loans.

Some income was given for specific projects, such as the Community Engagement Manager post. Income not given for a particular purpose (“unrestricted”) is used at the discretion of Trustees to achieve FCA’s objectives for public benefit.

Trustees received no payment or expenses from the charity, apart from reimbursement of expenditure for small (‘petty cash’) items incurred for the charity.

FCA Trustees have agreed financial policies on expenditure. The Trustees as the managing body have to agree items of expenditure over £2,500. For items below this amount, the Officers (Chair, Treasurer and Secretary) can jointly agree the expenditure, with the proviso that it is reported subsequently to all Trustees. Trustees cannot agree items of expenditure which would reduce the charity’s net assets to less than £1,500. Payments from FCA’s bank account have to be authorised by two of the Officers.

As a registered CIO, FCA will be able to reclaim Gift Aid from HMRC for donations (future and for 3 years retrospectively).

The Trustees will agree a Business Plan each year, setting out action to achieve its objectives, and how these will be funded. Donations are a key element of FCA’s financial planning, and there is an element of risk associated with this. Trustees’ decisions are based on their reasonable expectations and past experience of donations and other income.

The Trustees believe that the charity should be regarded as a going concern.

5 Structure, Governance and Management

The Trustees, who manage the charity, are:

Gabor Thomas (Chair)
Paul Seddon (Treasurer)
David Mudd (Secretary)
Mandy Brar
Mike Bryan
Mike Copland
Shez Courtenay-Smith
Mike Howard

All acted as Trustees for the whole of the period ended 31 December 2023. Phyllida Shelley-Smith was a Trustee until she was appointed by Trustees (8 June 2023) as Artist in Residence. The Trustees act as individuals, not as representatives of other organisations. The periods of office and arrangements for appointment of Trustees are set out in FCA's Governing Document.

FCA's Governing Document was agreed by the Charity Commission when registering the charity on 10 August 2023. Any changes to the Governing Document require the prior agreement of the Charity Commission.

At the end of the period FCA had 120 members.

6 Reference and Administrative Details

FCA's application to be a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) was approved by the Charity Commission on 10 August 2023, and has been entered on the publicly-available Register of Charities, with the Registered Charity number 1204300. The approval, and related Charity Commission guidance, requires the Trustees to operate the CIO solely for the public benefit.

FCA's registered address is 17 Chantry Rd, Maidenhead, Berks SL6 1TR.

FCA's bank is:

CAF Bank Ltd
25 Kings Hill Avenue
Kings Hill
West Malling
Kent ME19 4JQ

CAF Bank is a subsidiary of the Charities Aid Foundation.

FCA has close working partnerships with the Parochial Church Council of Holy Trinity Church, Cookham, and the University of Reading, and where appropriate has written agreements with these partners. FCA has a working relationship with Our Community Enterprise C.I.C. (OCE), a Community Interest Company which provides FCA with advice on grant applications to voluntary and community sector organisations. FCA makes written contracts with OCE for individual work projects.

FCA has no employees. The Community Engagement Manager and Artist in Residence are contracted for their services.

7 Declarations

The Trustees declare that

1. in managing the charity, the Trustees have had regard to the guidance issued by the Charity Commission on public benefit;
2. there have been no serious incidents/problems which have caused/could cause significant harm or loss to the charity or the people it helps.

The Trustees declare that they have approved the Trustees' report above.

David Mudd
Secretary
15 May 2024