

Abingdon and District Twin Towns Society



Newsletter

May 2026

Guest Editor: Brian Read

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From the Editor

Somewhat fitfully we have now emerged from winter and are enjoying spring. Our thoughts are now turning towards summer holidays and perhaps the odd visit to a twin town. But first, we look forward to the annual celebration of Europe Day on 9th May. Our meal together is always popular and is fully booked.

May also brings a wealth of cultural events in Abingdon as evidenced by the selective listing from Nick Marsh. One worth highlighting is the celebration on 16th May of the 850th anniversary of our own St Edmund of Abingdon who went on to become Archbishop of Canterbury. We learnt about his fascinating life from Anne Dodd who in July 2022 led members on a guided walk of places in the town where he is remembered. (There is a report on the website.)

The April evening meeting was very well attended. We heard about the background story to one of the town's treasures – the Little Basement Museum. We have a comprehensive report from Mars Street of Mike Russell's presentation.

Spotted on Facebook is the announcement from Schongau of the installation in the town centre of a twinning signpost. This splendid addition joins similar signposts in Colmar and Abingdon. Such signs certainly do increase awareness of twin towns among the local population.

Everyone who in the past has visited Sint-Niklaas will be amazed at the huge transformation of the vast market place in front of the town hall. We thank our correspondent Siegfried Waterschoot for pictures of how it now looks. Take an opportunity of a twinning visit to Sint-Niklaas and see for yourself!

Finally, Michael Matthews reminds us that on 17th April, Michael and Jenny Goode celebrated their sixtieth wedding anniversary. We express our congratulations! Jenny did so much work as chairman and they still keep an interest in the Society.

Brian Read

Forthcoming Events in 2026

Saturday 9 th May	Dinner to Celebrate Europe Day
4 th – 8 th June	Church Twinning Visit to Schongau
Thursday 2 nd July	Garden Party
11 th – 17 th July	Trip to Argentan for Bastille Day
21 st – 24 th August	Anniversary Visit from Argentan
Sunday 8 th November	Laying of Twinning Wreaths on Remembrance Sunday
Sunday 20 th December	Christmas Lunch

Other events in the programme are not yet scheduled, but they include a Wine Tasting, a Treasure Hunt and a Games Evening. The programme may also be found on the website at <https://www.abingdonandvaletwinning.org.uk/future.htm>.

The website also has reports, with pictures, of all twinning events going back to 2007. To save typing the full domain name, the address of the website may be shortened to <http://adtts.eu/>, or simply type adtts.eu into your browser.

Evening Meeting: The Story of the Little Basement Museum

Thursday 16 April 2026 – at Preston Road Community Centre

What links decoding the universe and the decoding of Abingdon's long history? The larger than normal number of attendees at the monthly meeting heard that the answer is the curiosity, drive and determination of Dr Mike Russell. Mike is a scientist who worked at Harwell. He is also a very practical man, who when asked to take along an object he had built to his university entrance interview took along a spectrometer he had built. Later when building his own house, he built a crane on an old car chassis 'to help with the heavy lifting'.



Mike's fascination with the apparent random dark lines in sheets of mica led to discovery that they were caused by cosmic rays that were able to penetrate the crystalline structure of the mica. Mike also worked on *quodons* - no I had never heard of them either, but apparently, they are to do with how electricity can be transmitted through crystalline structures without it being conducted through that structure. Mike's professional and indeed his private study may be said to have played a part in decoding the universe.

In the 1990s Mike bought part of a property in East St Helen Street that was to become the Waterline shop and later the Local Roots shop. There was a cellar beneath the shop that contained several tons of coal. Mike removed the coal and donated it to the local almshouses. Once the cellar was clear Mike was able to see that the original entrance to the property was below the current street level. Why was that he thought, who lived here then and how long have people lived in this locality?

Some of the wooden posts supporting the cellar roof were set on padstones, which appeared to come from the Abingdon Abbey. Dendrochronology dating of some of the timbers in the cellar suggest the timber was from trees cut down in 1500 with one sample even suggesting 1100.

In order to make the cellar more usable and before concreting the existing stone/gravel floor Mike decided see what was under the existing floor to see when people first began to live at this location. He dug a test hole 1m x 1m square about 1.3m beneath the existing basement floor level. He then proceeded to dig a borehole a further 1.3m down. The many items recovered are displayed in the museum and are arranged in the vertical order they were found. The lowest bits of ceramic were found at a depth of 1.2m and have been identified as iron age about 700 BC. Based on the average ground level rise in Abingdon the oldest find at the bottom of the pit suggests people have been living at this location for over 4500 years. This is supported by sedimentation analysis of the soil samples taken from that depth and columns of soil samples are again on display.

Mike has also found a well, constructed in the cellar which goes down to the present water table level 2.7m below the basement floor level and this can be seen. He also found a complete large pottery jar which when opened had a strong tobacco smell. A distinct motif on the jar appears on similar jars which have proved to be from Italy and originally contained olives.

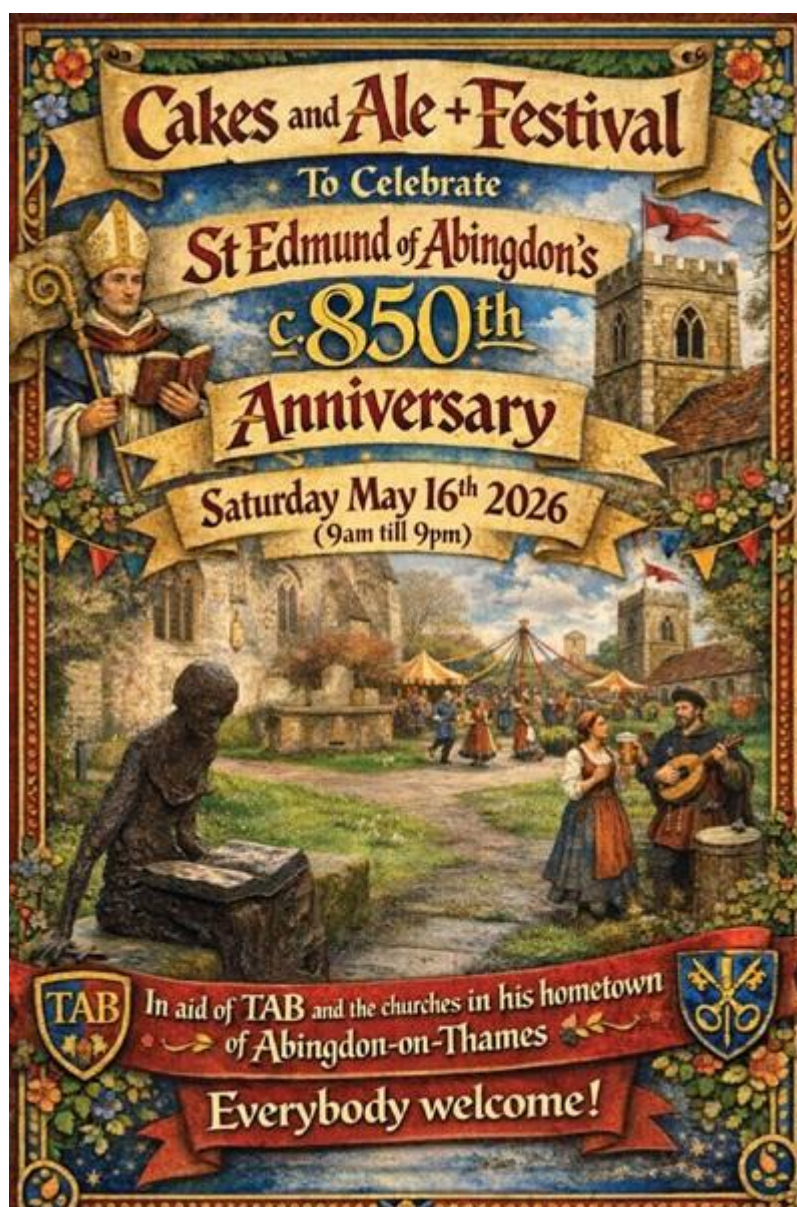
Mike's hard physical work in clearing the cellar, excavating the pits and boreholes and researching and cataloguing the finds helps confirm that people have been living in Abingdon for maybe 4500 years.



I have visited the museum and it is fascinating and I encourage others to visit it too. This may be easier now than in the past as I understand that in the future guided-visits may be arranged through Abingdon Museum at specific times.

Thank you to Norma and her team for the English wine and the buns. The buns were delicious and were another link to Abingdon's long history.

Mars Street



A Twinning Signpost for Schongau

The Facebook page for Stadt Schongau for 18th April has news of a new twinning signpost!



Here is a rough translation of the post:

“This lovely new signpost is situated in the middle of the Altstadt (Old Town). Due to current construction work in the Weinstraße, the beautiful new bench is currently placed next to the church instead of its intended location in front of the tourist information. The town explains that the five arms of the signpost point in the directions of Schongau’s twin towns: Abingdon, Colmar, Gogolin, Lucca and Sint-Niklaas. Each arm shows not only the name of the town, but also its coat of arms and the distance – a small but beautiful connection across borders.

Maximilian Geiger, head of the Tourist Information and Public High School, is happy about the fact that the long-standing relationships will be integrated into the townscape in a visible and vivid way.

The signs invite you to pause, orient yourself and at the same time appreciate the international friendship that connects the town with its partners. A beautiful symbol of openness and connection that can now be discovered by locals and guests.”

Brian Read



Colmar



Abingdon

A Transformed Market Place for Sint-Niklaas



The building work and disruption seemed never-ending, but finally the fairly dramatic transformation of the famous market place (Grote Markt) in Sint-Niklaas is now completed! The works were largely finished and the space reopened last autumn just in time for the Peace (Balloon) Festival weekend. However, on Sunday 26th April 2026, the official inauguration of the renewed market square took place. Of the invited mayors of the city's twin towns, only those of Abingdon and Gorinchem (the Netherlands) were present. A huge crowd gathered in the sunshine for the ceremony.

Pictured are (l-r) Siegfried Waterschoot (who provided all the pictures), the mayors of Abingdon, Sint-Niklaas and Gorinchem, and Felix Vercauteren (twinning society chairman).



What's On in Abingdon in May

Here are just a few of the forthcoming events culled from Abingdon Town's events website, <https://www.abingdon.gov.uk/events>.

Click on the links for further information on each event.

And if any of you have an event you would like put in here – please let us know via the email link at the end of this Newsletter.

Nick Marsh

<p>1st – 3rd May 5:00 – 11:00 pm Fri and Sat eves 1:00 – 4:00 pm Sun afternoon</p>	<p>Abbey Buildings</p>	<p><u>Abingdon Beer Festival</u> Abingdon Beer Festival 1st - 3rd May 2026. From 5 pm - 11 pm on the Friday and Saturday evenings and 1 pm – 4 pm on the Sunday. £5</p>
<p>2nd – 9th May 10:00 am – 5:00 pm</p>	<p>Outside St Nicolas' Church</p>	<p><u>Oxfordshire Artweeks Abbey Group Exhibition</u> Five local artists showcasing recent original art, prints, crafts, cards and jewellery as part of Oxfordshire artweeks. Free</p>
<p>2nd May 12:00 – 6:00 pm</p>	<p>Abingdon Distillery, Coxeter House, Ock Street</p>	<p><u>Secret Rum Launch and Party Day</u> Come join us on Saturday 2nd May as we launch our new age statement rum that we are keeping top secret until launch day. The distillery doors are open to take a look around & our head distiller will be on hand to offer a tasting of our new rum. The bar will be open from 12 pm all day for drinks, featuring a short cocktail menu based around our new rum. The pizza oven will be on the terrace serving a special jerk chicken pizza. Free to attend, dog friendly as always. We hope to see you there to celebrate with us! Free</p>
<p>7th May 8:00 am – 10:00 pm</p>	<p>The Topsy Mercer, 22 High St. Abingdon</p>	<p><u>Awkward Actors present: How Awkward (Improv Comedy Show) Unscripted Laughs powered by your suggestions</u> Join us for a show of improvised comedy and drama with the cream of the Awkward Actors squad. Upstairs in the Topsy Mercer Show starts 8 pm Doors 7.30 pm Tickets £5 Book here: Based on your suggestions, you'll see scenes, sketches and stories, all made up on the spot, off the cuff, on the fly. Yes, it's unscripted spontaneity – and a uniquely exciting and hilarious show every time. Sign up to the Awkward Actors mailing list to receive further updates and more improv info here: https://mailchi.mp/impro/awkward-actors We hope to see you soon and, until then, stay awkward! £5</p>
<p>7th May 7:00 – 10:30 pm</p>	<p>St Helen's Church</p>	<p><u>Sam Carter & Jon Wilks Double Bill</u> Over the course of his fifteen-year career, Sam has earned a reputation for vivid, narrative-driven songwriting 'as penetrating as Richard Thompson's best work' (Uncut). A highly regarded instrumentalist to boot, Sam is renowned by many as "the finest English-style fingerpicking guitarist of his generation" (Jon Boden) and</p>

		<p>has been described as having a 'killer voice' by Ivor Novello-winning musician Nitin Sawhney. Jon Wilks is a singer, songwriter and acclaimed fingerpicking guitarist whose work is rooted in English folk traditions, memory, and place.</p> <p>Doors at 7 pm, music at 7:30 pm. £15 - £17</p>
<p>9th May 10:00 am - 2:00 pm</p>	<p>St Agatha's Churchyard, Brightwell cum Sotwell</p>	<p><u>Brightwell cum Sotwell Spring Fair – in a churchyard</u> Come and enjoy a traditional Spring Fair in glorious Brightwell cum Sotwell. White Elephant Stall (for vintage favourites and bargains), a huge selection of books and wonderful children's toys. Test your skills at golf and quoits, try your luck at the bottle tombola or buy village-grown plants. After energy on the bouncy castle, why not sit down with an ice cream, a cup of tea and homemade cakes and watch your adventurous teddy bear sail down on a parachute or zip wire from the top of the church tower. Leave your devices at home and have fun! Bring coins for pocket money and cards for everything else. The essential addition? Glorious spring sunshine. Entrance £2; under 12 free. All proceeds go to our churches. Considerate street parking only or the number 33/33A bus and a stroll.</p>
<p>9th May 6:00 – 8:00 pm</p>	<p>St Michael's Church</p>	<p><u>Wantage Academy Brass, Caritas Children's Choir, Wantage Youth Brass Concert</u> Wantage Academy Brass and Caritas Children's Choir return to St Michael's for another concert in this popular series, this year accompanied by Wantage Youth Brass. This is a fund-raising event for The Abingdon Bridge (TAB), TARIRO – Hope for Youth in Zimbabwe and St Michael's Church. Tickets are available online, https://www.trybooking.com/uk/FYLI, and at the door. Adults £12, concessions £10, 16 & under free.</p>
<p>11th May 8:00 – 10:00 pm</p>	<p>Methodist Church Hall</p>	<p><u>Abingdon Astronomical Society</u> Abingdon Astronomical Society are having a meeting tonight at the Methodist Church Hall, Dorchester Crescent, OX14 2AH. There will be a short AGM, followed by a talk by Dr Lee Macdonald (History of Science Museum Oxford) titled 'Royal Observatory Greenwich 1881 to 1939'. The meeting starts at 8.00 pm and ends at 10.00 pm with a tea break in the middle. All welcome. More details at www.abingdonastro.org.uk.</p>
<p>14th May 6:00 -7:00 pm</p>	<p>Abingdon Library</p>	<p><u>Rebecca Wait author event</u> Rebecca Wait, author of the critically acclaimed <i>The View on the Way Down</i>, <i>The Followers</i>, <i>Our Fathers</i> and <i>I'm Sorry You Feel That Way</i> will be introducing her latest work: <i>HAVOC</i> – a darkly witty tragi-comedy described by <i>The Guardian</i> as: "Gleefully macabre... a plot so deliciously thick you could stand a spoon up in it." Join us and discover why Rebecca Wait is one of the most exciting voices in contemporary fiction. Includes an audience Q&A and book signing. Tickets £2, including a free welcome drink, available from the library, call 01865 815005 or email abingdon.library@oxfordshire.gov.uk.</p>

<p>16th May 9:00 am – 9:00 pm</p>	<p>Various locations in Abingdon</p>	<p><u>Cakes and Ale + Festival in honour of St Edmund of Abingdon's 850th Anniversary.</u> On Saturday 16th May there will be a special Festival in honour of St Edmund of Abingdon's 850th Anniversary. We wish to raise his profile in his hometown and also raise funds for TAB (The Abingdon Bridge) and St Michael's Church restorations. Please click <u>here</u> for the 'pick and choose' programme for the 16th and the QR code for the ticketed events. As you see we have created a very full and wide-ranging day for the town to enjoy. On Sunday 17th May we will close the celebrations with a special Choral Evensong for St Edmund of Abingdon. This will be held at St Helen's Church at 5.30pm on Sunday 17th May.</p>
<p>16th May 3:00 – 5:00 pm</p>	<p>St Michael's Church</p>	<p><u>Romantic Piano Music in the Church</u> A recital performed by Marcus Gabriel Ecseghy, an acclaimed young German concert pianist, featuring Beethoven's Appassionata Piano Sonata No. 23 in F minor, Op. 57 and a selection of ballads by Chopin. Ticket price of £15 includes refreshments (tea and cake). The recital is part of the Cakes and Ale Festival.</p>
<p>18th May 7:30 – 9:30 pm</p>	<p>Long Furlong Community Centre</p>	<p><u>"The Road to Peace is Paved with Headstones", stories behind the names on Abingdon War Memorial</u> Beyond the cold stone of the Abingdon War Memorial lies a tapestry of lived experience, individual sacrifice, and the profound impact of war on our local community. Join us for a moving and insightful talk as Dick Richards peels back the layers of history to reveal the stories of the people behind the names.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refreshments: Tea and coffee will be available. • Raffle: Join in for a chance to win a prize and help support the society. • Easy Access: There is a large free car park directly adjacent to the hall. • Open to all: Visitors and non-members are warmly welcomed for just £5 per person. <p>Booking Information: Advance booking, via the Events page on our website <u>Berksfhs.org</u>, for members and non-members is appreciated but not required. Non-members have the option to register and pay online in advance. If you prefer to pay on arrival, please note that we can only accept cash payments at the venue.</p>
<p>18th May 8:00 – 10:00 pm</p>	<p>Methodist Church Hall</p>	<p><u>Abingdon Astronomical Society</u> Abingdon Astronomical Society is having a 'Beginners Meeting' tonight at the Methodist Church Hall, Dorchester Crescent, Abingdon, OX14 2AH. All welcome. Details can be found at <u>http://abingdonastro.org.uk</u>.</p>
<p>23rd May 11:00 am – 12:00 pm</p>	<p>Abingdon Library</p>	<p><u>Blood Women Poetry Book Launch</u> Blood Women is a love story. These poems introduce us to wonderful people using the most remarkable substance known to the human race: blood. Stephen Paul Wren's stunning collection features 15 poems about family, heredity, and love. Lesley Curwen's collection Permanence, published in December 2025, is a</p>

		<i>collaboration on microplastics with Stephen Paul Wren. Book your free ticket with Abingdon Library on 01865 815005</i>
<i>28th / 29th May 7:00 pm – 9:30 pm</i>	<i>Amey Theatre</i>	<i>9 – 5: The Musical Abingdon & Witney College presents 9 to 5, with music and lyrics by Dolly Parton and a book by Patricia Resnick, based on the iconic 1980 hit movie. Set in the late 1970s, this laugh-out-loud story of friendship and sweet revenge in the Rolodex era is outrageous, thought-provoking and even a little romantic. Pushed to breaking point, three female co-workers, Violet, Judy and Doralee, hatch a daring plan to take on their sexist, egotistical, lying, hypocritical boss. In a hilarious turn of events, they live out their wildest fantasy: giving him the boot! While Hart remains "otherwise engaged", the women take control, transforming their workplace into a thriving, equal-opportunity dream. £10 - £16</i>

Twin Towns Calendar for 2026

Here we wish to list festivals and events in our twin towns that may be of interest to potential visitors during 2026. Do now please tell us about all the major events for each twin town this year! Use the email link at the end of this Newsletter.

<i>Ongoing</i>	<i>Argentan</i>	https://en.normandie-tourisme.fr/hidden-gems/argentan/events-in-argentan/
<i>May 2026 onwards</i>	<i>Colmar</i>	https://www.tourisme-colmar.com/en/whats-on
<i>Ongoing</i>	<i>Lucca</i>	Calendar of Events
<i>Ongoing</i>	<i>Schongau</i>	https://allevents.in/schongau/all
<i>May 2026 onwards</i>	<i>Sint-Niklaas</i>	https://www.ontdeksintniklaas.be/en/see-and-do
<i>May 2026 onwards</i>	<i>Thames, Coromandel Peninsula</i>	https://thecoromandel.nz/events/events-calendar/

Hosts Wanted

White Horse Homestays are short of beds for both adults and students who are coming from Europe for 10th to 14th May. If any readers might be interested in hosting, then contact **Hilary Lombard** (hilary@whitehorsehomestays.co.uk) on 07780 685562 or 01235 520780. The pay is £26 per student per night.

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Non-members of the Society are also welcome to receive copies of this monthly newsletter. Just email your request to newsletter@adtts.eu. Back copies are also available on request.

The deadline for copy for the next newsletter is two days before the end of the month. Please send contributions to newsletter@adtts.eu. (No publication in August)

The Society's website is <https://www.abingdonandvaletwinning.org.uk/>. This address may be abbreviated to <http://adtts.eu>.

The programme may be found on the website at <https://www.abingdonandvaletwinning.org.uk/future.htm>.

The website also has reports, with pictures, of all twinning events going back to 2007.

Membership

To join the Society, apply to the Membership Secretary, Rosemary Jardine. See the [membership page](#) on the ADTTS website for forms and contact details.



April in Abingdon