**Mayor's Address**

**Town Meeting 21 May 2018**

Ladies and Gentlemen, I’m pleased to report on some of the activities with which I’ve been involved since our Town Meeting on April 10th last year, some 150 events from which I’ll pick out just a few items.

On St George’s Day April 2017, we had another well attended Civic Service at which we were pleased to welcome the newly installed High Sheriff of Oxfordshire, Miss Jane Cranston, for only the second event of her year of office, together with many townspeople representing voluntary and statutory organisations in Faringdon and also civic dignitaries from all over Oxfordshire and from Highworth. At the end of April, we welcomed a party from our twin town of Le Mêle-sur-Sarthe in France for their annual visit which included an enjoyable soiree in the Pump House Project.

In May we had our Mayor Rocks disco in aid of the Place Children’s Centre here in the Corn Exchange, my thanks to Al Cane, and at the end of May a small party from Faringdon went to our twin town of Le Mêle-sur-Sarthe to celebrate the 50th anniversary of their twinning with Falkenstein in Germany. We were cordially welcomed together with 136 visitors from Germany, and friends from the Czech Republic, to a weekend of events. We presented the people of Le Mêle with a water jug depicting the White Horse made by the Uffington Pottery and I laid a wreath at the Le Mêle War Memorial.

The major event of June was the awarding the Freedom of the Vale of White Horse to the 7th Battalion, The Rifles in Faringdon. We saw a spectacular parade by the Rifles and their band with only a brief shower of rain.

In the July the rain again tried to dampen the spirits at Folly Fest but it didn’t succeed in spoiling the enjoyment of the large crowds in the town centre over the three days of music and entertainment. We also commemorated the 100th anniversary of the start of Passchendaele, the third Battle of Ypres.

October saw the first of the very well attended Science and Faith lectures in the Corn Exchange organised by the Reverend Dr Steve Bellamy vicar of All Saints’ and the second of our Mayor Rocks discos in aid of the Place. We also visited Le Mêle-sur-Sarthe with the Twinning Association who presented a cheque from the proceeds of a concert held in the Catholic Church for the victims of Hurricane Irma on the island of St Martin.

In November we had a well-attended Festival of Remembrance and Remembrance Day and in December, the Nativity Play in the town centre was a truly memorable spectacle not just for the camels, but for the sheer quality of the production.

March 6th saw the 800th anniversary of the market charter and the start of a year of celebrations. March also saw the inauguration of YoCO, that’s Youth Challenge Oxfordshire, a scheme proposed by the High Sheriff to help disadvantaged young people develop their lives through joint projects with the ultimate aim of a trip to the Nasio Project in Kenya to help AIDS orphans. And, my most challenging task took place: to explain the history of Faringdon to 90, five-year olds here in the Corn Exchange as part of a local history project.

In April we had a fine example of Faringdon’s community spirit when 70 people turned out for a litter pick one Saturday afternoon. We also had another well attended Civic Service at which the High Sheriff completed her year of office, and again welcomed many townspeople and civic dignitaries from Oxfordshire, and the Mayor of Swindon, to celebrate the work of our organisations in Faringdon.

At the end of the month eleven of us made the trip to Falkenstein in Germany for the return leg of the 50th anniversary of the twinning between Le Mêle-sur-Sarthe and Falkenstein at which we presented them with a picture of Faringdon done by a local artist.

*Funding for the Town Team Co-ordinator has been withdrawn by the District Council and we are considering the future of the monthly Saturday markets and hoping to replace them with events to entertain and attract people into the town centre.*

*The Abingdon Citizen’s Advice Bureau is now offering a twice weekly surgery in the Pump House complemented by the Wantage Independent Advice Centre who have a fortnightly session on Thursdays.*

The Pump House Project goes from strength to strength. I have been a regular attender at the Wednesday morning Community Café and heartened to see the range of activities involving people of all ages and abilities and especially those with difficulties.

Now the sewage treatment works has been upgraded we’ve seen the start of the building that will increase the population from its current 8,100 to over 11,000. There will be a boundary review to bring the new houses on Coxwell Rd and the end of Fernham Rd into Faringdon.

Finally, I’m pleased to say that The Place is now up and running; it’s been a long haul to get the funding and management organised but it has been another fine example of Faringdon people working together, my thanks to the Town Clerk for all her hard work on this and other matters.

M L H Wise
21-5-18