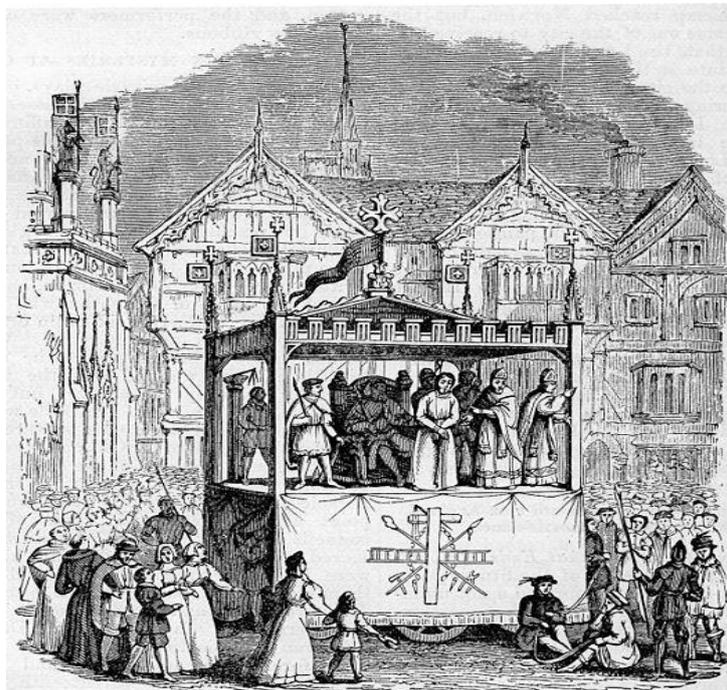




## Abbey House Troupe Information Guide





## The Abbey Medieval Festival

The Abbey Medieval Tournament commenced in 1988 as a fundraiser for the Abbey Museum of Art and Archaeology, one of Australia's premier collections of European and Classical fine arts and antiquities. Since then, the Festival has grown to become a major event attracting many thousands of people annually. **In 2012, the Festival drew a crowd of over 30,000 visitors and participants** with public attendance and enthusiasm staying strong ever since.

The Board of the Abbey Museum recognises that the success and growth of the Festival is because of the involvement and ongoing commitment of those who are dedicated to providing an authentic historical festival that is not only a cultural and educational event of an extremely high standard; but also a great experience for attendees.



Image: Lady Rosalie offering a favour to the Honour Guard (re-enactors) | Abbey Medieval Festival

The Museum Board sees the strategic development of the Festival and Abbeystowe as an important part of the Museum's future.

The Museum Board and the Festival Steering Committee are not only committed to entertaining the public through this event, but also to educating them. It is our ultimate goal that visitors should leave the Festival feeling as though they have experienced a 'realistic' portrayal of medieval life. To achieve this, a development plan has been implemented to ensure Abbeystowe – including props, tentage, clothing, equipment and entertainment – is all typical of the periods being represented.



## Time Period

The Abbey Medieval Festival has a specific time period and only accepts performances that recreate and represent the cultures of **Europe and the Middle East between 600 and 1600 AD.**

The Festival Committee's goal is to create an experience for the public where medieval history is brought to life, through sights, sounds and smells. All activities, costumes and displays by staff, groups/societies, performers, vendors and craftspeople involved with the Festival are required to be in keeping with this historical focus.



## Festival Events

The Abbey Medieval Festival runs over a week and consists of the following events:

## Medieval Banquet

The Banquet is a ticketed event where patrons enjoy a medieval feast whilst being entertained with music, dance and theatre. In 2016 the Banquet will take place on Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> June and Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> July.



Image: Lady Edith greeting banquet patrons | Abbey Medieval Banquet

## Abbey Medieval Tournament

The Festival week culminates in a weekend Medieval Tournament where patrons can enjoy a range of activities from jousting to battles, medieval dancing, music, drama and wander through the medieval marketplace and encampments. The tournament will take place on Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> and Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> July 2016.



## Abbey House Troupe

The Abbey Medieval Festival prides itself on being an event that brings history to life; and the Festival Committee recognises that drama and theatre was an important part of the middle ages. By forming a drama group of volunteer performers, the Committee aim to bring medieval theatre to life at the Festival as well as create an opportunity for the local community to get involved in the festival in a unique way.

This group of volunteer performers – now dubbed the Abbey House Troupe – have the opportunity to represent medieval drama by performing excerpts of medieval plays as well as provide wandering entertainment relevant to the period of the Festival.

There are two categories of performance available for volunteer actors to participate in; Scripted Performance and Wandering Entertainment. Volunteers of the House Troupe can choose what performances they would like to participate in; this determines the time commitment required in the lead up to the Festival.



Image: House Troupe volunteers rehearsing on Pageant Wagon stage | Abbey Medieval Festival 2015



## Scripted Performance

Each year the House Troupe develop short medieval plays and other scripted pieces to perform as part of the Abbey Medieval Tournament program. Some suggested pieces include excerpts from cycle plays, morality plays, Shakespeare, commedia dell'arte and storytelling for children.

In 2015 the Abbey Medieval Festival introduced the 'Pageant Wagon' – a new stage for various dramatic and musical performances. The House Troupe will manage this stage and it will be the primary performance space for scripted pieces.

## Medieval Drama

A very brief history - the Catholic Church inspired and sponsored the beginnings of theatre in Medieval Europe by creating dramatic performances of biblical events to educate the significant illiterate population. These performances evolved from liturgical drama, which was enacted as part of the liturgy of Catholic Mass, to troupes of actors performing scripted play cycles on pageant wagons.

Partly due to low literacy rates, majority of surviving medieval drama texts come from the late middle ages (14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> Century). The Abbey House Troupe will be able to choose from number of cycle plays including the York Pageant cycles, *The Wakefield Second Shepherds' Pageant* and the Morality Play *Everyman*.



## Shakespeare and the early Renaissance

Whilst Shakespeare's work are regarded as being part of the Renaissance rather than the Middle Ages, many of his works were published in the late 1500s meaning they fit the time period of the Abbey Medieval Festival.

In the past, the House Troupe have performed excerpts and monologues from Shakespeare's works both on stage and as wandering pieces. Being such a well-known and enjoyed playwright, the House Troupe will continue to explore ways of presenting Shakespeare's works.

## Commedia Dell'Arte

Commedia Dell'Arte is a form of street theatre which originated in Italy during the 16<sup>th</sup> Century where troupes of professional players would improvise comedic performances based on skits or scenes. These performances would take place on temporary stages in city streets or market places with some of the better troupes performing in court for nobility.

These performances would use stock characters which each possessed a unique mask. These masks generally had exaggerated and strong features that represented the primary characteristic of the character.



Image: House Troupe volunteers in Commedia Dell'Arte mask | Abbey Medieval Festival 2013

The House Troupe has access to the following masks:

- Arlecchino
- Columbine
- Pantalone
- Capitano
- Dottore
- Brighella
- Scaramouche
- Tartaglia
- Pierrot
- Pulcinella

Commedia Dell'Arte was generally improvised however there is a variety of scripts available online that can be used.

## Storytelling

The Abbey Medieval Tournament is attended by families with young children and the Festival Committee endeavour to include entertainment for them in the program. Using a narrator with a cast of characters the House Troupe bring to life popular children's tales such as Robin Hood and the Golden Arrow, St. George and the Dragon and The Sword and The Stone.



## Wandering Entertainment

Roaming street performers are an important part of the authentic atmosphere we are aiming for at Abbeystowe; the House Troupe have created a list of roaming characters to add to the range of street theatre on display at the Festival.

Along with providing entertainment and photo opportunities, these characters can show festival goers a glimpse of what life would have been like in the middle ages. The list of characters includes:

- Black Plague Victims
- Black Plague Doctor
- Leper
- Troubadour
- Herald
- Farmer
- Merchant



Image: House Troupe volunteer | Abbey Medieval Festival 2015

Performers interested in wandering entertainment will be able to develop a character as well as work collaboratively with other characters to create staged interactions.



## Costuming & Props

The House Troupe Coordinator works with volunteers during rehearsals to determine what costumes and props are required for the Festival events. The House Troupe Coordinator is responsible for sourcing and coordinating the creation of costumes and props.

The Abbey Medieval Festival has a group of volunteer costume makers who have created a stock pile of costumes over the years. The House Troupe is able to borrow select items from the costume collection. Volunteers who would like to use their own costumes must have them approved by the House Troupe Coordinator.

The House Troupe has managed to create a small collection of props since 2013; however this continues to grow each year.



## Expectations

Unlike many other general volunteering roles at the Abbey Medieval Festival, volunteering as part of the House Troupe does require a level of commitment in the months leading up to the festival. In February/March each year, orientation sessions are hosted for new members, these sessions are designed to give new members a chance to learn about the Festival, the Troupe and ask questions to determine whether joining the House Troupe is suitable for them. The level of commitment required for individual volunteers will depend on their level of involvement; this will be discussed in further detail during the orientation sessions.



## Contacts

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