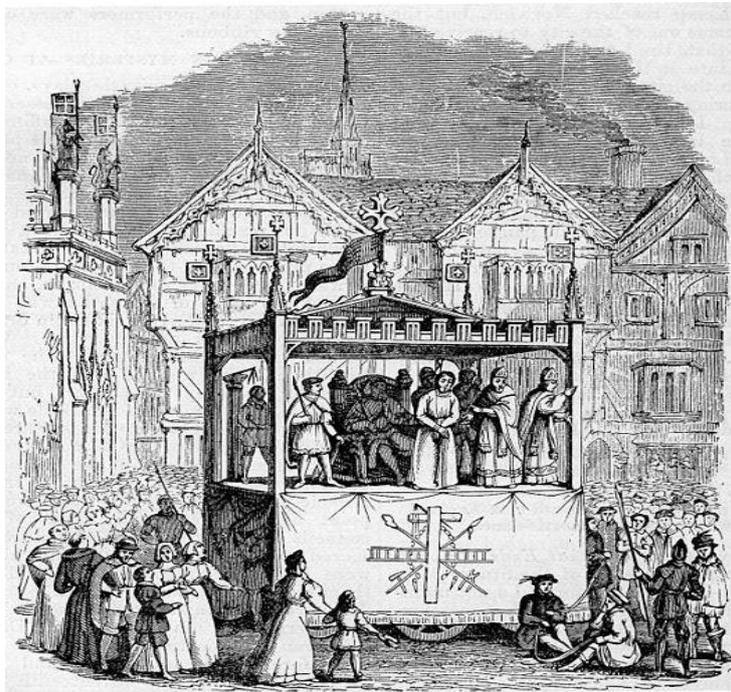




## **Abbey House Troupe Information Guide**



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## The Abbey Medieval Festival

The Abbey Medieval Tournament was first hosted in 1989 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. Starting off as a one day event, the Festival has grown to become a major event attracting many thousands of people annually. In 2012, the Festival drew a crowd of nearly 30,000 visitors and participants.

### The Abbey Museum of Art and Archaeology

28 Festivals later, the Abbey Medieval Festival continues to raise funds for the Abbey Museum of Art and Archaeology, to maintain and care for its remarkable collection that showcases the history of human endeavour and creativity. The Medieval Festival also helps the Museum fulfil its mission to provide quality cultural and educational experiences, and promote an impartial view of world history.

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

It is our ultimate goal that visitors should leave the Festival feeling as though they have experienced a realistic portrayal of medieval life.

### 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 1600AD.

## Festival events

The Abbey Medieval Festival runs over the winter/mid-year school holidays and consists of the following events:

### Medieval banquet

The Banquet is a ticketed event where patrons enjoy a medieval feast while being entertained with music, dance and theatre. In 2018, the Banquet will take place at St Michael's College, Caboolture on Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> June and Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> July.

### Kids Dig It! Medieval Family Fun

Typically hosted on the first week of the school holidays, the Medieval Family Fun week focuses on providing family friendly activities to teach kids about life during the medieval era.

### Medieval Tournament

The Festival calendar culminates in a weekend Medieval Tournament where patrons can enjoy a wide range of activities from jousting to battles, medieval dancing and music, and wander through the living history encampments. The Tournament weekend will take place on Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> and Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> July.

## The 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 event, and give volunteers a unique way to be involved with the Festival.

This group of volunteer performers—now dubbed the Abbey House Troupe—have the opportunity to perform medieval plays and dramatic retellings of history, as well as provide wandering entertainment relevant to the period of the Festival.

Due to the nature of the performances the Abbey House Troupe develops, and the rehearsal process undertaken, members are required to be 16 years and older to participate. No theatre or acting experience is necessary to join, we are all about encouraging people to give it a go.

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.

## 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, this venue is the primary performance space for scripted pieces.

## Medieval drama

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.

The House Troupe work with excerpts of Shakespeare's and in the past performed excerpts and monologues 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.

## 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

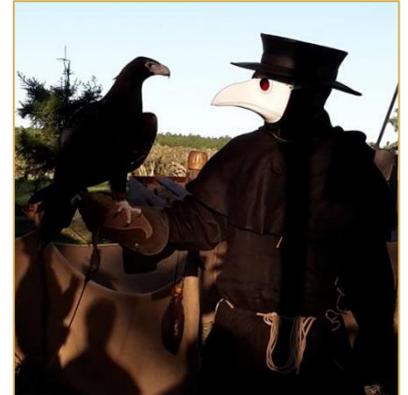
Roaming street performers are an important part of the authentic atmosphere we are aiming for at Abbeystowe; the House Troupe have created a list of roaming characters to add to the range of street theatre on display at the Festival.

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

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



House Troupe's resident Plague Doctor

## Costuming and props

The House Troupe Coordinator works with volunteers during rehearsals to determine what costumes and props are required for the Festival events. The Coordinator is responsible for sourcing and coordinating any creation of costumes and props, but may call on the assistance of the House Troupe every now-and-again.



House Troupe volunteers in their custom-made tunics

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. The team of costume makers kindly made the House Troupe their own tunic uniform in 2016.

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.

## The rehearsal process

### Pre-festival commitment

Unlike many other volunteering opportunities 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. Potential new volunteers who apply online to join will be given the opportunity to meet with the House Troupe Coordinator. During this discussion the Coordinator will discuss what it is like to be involved with the troupe, what opportunities are available and what the time commitment is for each as the time commitment required all depends on the volunteer's level of involvement.

This meeting isn't a casting session, volunteers aren't expected to audition; it is just a chance for them to decide if the House Troupe is suitable for them.

### Rehearsals

Existing members of the House Troupe come from inner Brisbane up to Woodford. Given the geographical spread of volunteers, in the past we have rehearsed at Pine Rivers Park in Strathpine—it's a free venue and is a good way to practice

performing in the elements since the Abbey Medieval Festival is an outdoor event. The suitability of this location is discussed when new members join to ensure we meet in the most convenient place for everyone.

Members will meet in February to start planning performances for the year, focusing on what they would like to submit for the Festival program. From there we start allocating roles and picking dates for rehearsals. The past few year's rehearsals have been held on Sunday mornings, roughly every 2 weeks until the last few weeks before the main event where we aim for weekly rehearsals.

### **Participating in scripted performances**

House Troupe volunteers who wish to perform in scripted pieces on the Pageant Wagon stage will rehearse the most—they could be dealing with Shakespeare or medieval cycle plays, so most of the first few weeks of rehearsal helps actors get comfortable with speaking the language and learning lines.

### **Participating in children's storytelling**

Due to the 'player's theatre' approach to the children's storytelling, having fun and making mistakes is encouraged—the more spontaneous the better. With that in mind, we don't rehearse these as much, just enough to make the players comfortable with the direction of the story and their cues.

### **Participating as a wandering character**

Volunteering as a wandering character will see volunteers attend a costume fitting and a couple of workshops before the event to flesh out their character, and plan any staged scenarios we may have in mind with other wandering characters.

### **Expectations of volunteers**

It may sound very daunting having to commit to rehearsals, but we appreciate that all members of the House Troupe (including the Coordinator) are volunteers—if members are unable to attend some scheduled rehearsals due to work, study, family, illness or even just to have a weekend off, that's more than fine. We work to each other's schedules, sometimes rehearsing without a full cast.

The crucial thing to be mindful of if you wish to perform in scripted pieces, you should be prepared to learn your lines for the main event.

At the end of the day, the House Troupe is about having fun, learning some history and drama, and getting involved in a wonderful event in a unique way.

## **Contacts**

House Troupe Coordinator: Megan Gansberg, [performance@abbeytournament.com](mailto:performance@abbeytournament.com)



House Troupe volunteers—curtain call for Shakespeare