**THE HARRY SUNLEY MEMORIAL PROJECT**

**Registered Charity1166561**

**OPENING KENILWORTH ABBEY GATEHOUSE TO THE PUBLIC**

The ruined 'Tantara' Gatehouse in Abbey Fields, Kenilworth (Warwickshire) is the most significant standing building of the Augustinian priory (later abbey) of St Mary, founded in 1119.

Rebuilt in the time of Prior Henry Bradway (1361-75), the Gatehouse was an imposing two-storey building controlling the inner court of the monastery. After the Suppression of the monastery in 1538 the upper storey and almost all the surrounding buildings were destroyed, but much of interest still survives on the ground floor, including two internal chambers. They were once a well-appointed porter's lodge; the lost rooms above were probably accommodation for an important monastic official, such as the bailiff. The surviving structure was in use as a cottage in the 17th and 18th centuries, but had become a picturesque ruin by the time the graveyard of St Nicholas's church was extended around it in 1885. It is a Grade I listed building and a rare survival of a gatehouse of the Augustinian monastic order.

The project has been named in honour of the late Harry Sunley FSA, who was the authority on the Abbey until his death in 2011. Harry was a former Clerk to Kenilworth Town Council, past President and Chairman of Kenilworth History and Archaeological Society and past Chairman of the Kenilworth Abbey Advisory Committee. He had always hoped to see the Gatehouse chambers opened to the public and their contents properly displayed there, and these are now the ultimate aims of the Project.

The main works identified to achieve these aims are to strip out the existing metal storage racking in both chambers to expose the original walls and floors. The carved stones and boxes of floor tiles displaced by this operation will be rehoused on a new mezzanine platform in the inner chamber, where there was a mezzanine floor in the Middle Ages. Some of the heavier objects will be stored on a new set of shelves underneath the mezzanine, and also in a new specially made octagonal storage and display table in the outer chamber.

The freeing-up of space in both chambers should also allow us to exhibit properly large objects such as the 14th-century stone effigy of Prior John Salle (currently stored in the Barn) and the old stile from the Gatehouse passage. It will also be essential to bring mains electricity to the Gatehouse, to provide power for lighting.

To open the Gatehouse to the public would considerably extend the attraction of the Abbey site and encourage more visitors to Abbey Fields. Visits would take place on the same basis as the current summer opening of the Barn by volunteer stewards from Kenilworth History and Archaeology Society, and on pre-booked guided tours. The Gatehouse and the Barn together also have considerable potential as an educational focus for school groups on aspects of medieval monastic life.