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A Nativity is not just for Christmas

Just because Christmas Day is now over for another year does not mean the Nativity scene has been forgotten. Bath Abbey is delighted that it will continue to display its unique Nativity exhibit, designed by local students, until Candlemas on Thursday 2 February.

Last year the Abbey ran a competition with Bath Spa University to create a Nativity with a difference for the Abbey's beautiful Birde Chapel. Because the Abbey attracts thousands of visitors from all around the world, they wanted a three dimensional -artwork that would communicate the Christmas story to an international audience and that would work within the space of a chapel principally dedicated to private prayer.

First, second and third year students from Bath Spa University's Three Dimensional Design course competed in teams to design a contemporary artwork for display in the Abbey's Birde Chapel. The chosen winner, 'Nativity Mobile' presents the characters of the Nativity story and their relationships with one another and with Christ at the centre. It is in the form of a mobile, with suspended, gently moving figures.

Stephen Girling, one of Bath Abbey's vicars, said: "We have been delighted to be part of this partnership with Bath Spa University and have been very impressed with the way the students have very creatively responded to the challenge.

"All five entries which were presented to a team from the Abbey were all really strong in their own way. Students, some of whom were amazed for the first time by the beauty of the Christmas story, chose a wide variety of materials and methods. We chose the winning piece, 'Nativity Mobile' as it surprised, captivated and inspired us."

Charlotte Evans, one of the winning students from Bath Spa University, said: "We all really enjoyed working with the Abbey and finding out more about the story of Christ being born. It was a real challenge to capture the Nativity story in a physical form especially as it is received individually and is unique to each person. As a group, we felt an abstract aesthetic would work best and would allow modern contemporary audiences to engage with it on a personal level.

"The installation day was a proud moment for us, when we finished and saw the Mobile moving in the Abbey's Birde Chapel, it felt surreal. It created a wonderful atmosphere and complemented the space beautifully."

Julia Keyte, Course Leader, Three Dimensional Design, at Bath Spa University said: "The Mobile Nativity is conceptually based upon movement, both metaphorical and physical. It is a kinetic

sculpture that is linked to birth and delicately responds and acknowledges presence of people in the space.

“The aesthetic is symbolic of the story of the nativity and visually represents the story as more than the birth of a child, it is the birth of a new era and infinite meaning to many people. The work demonstrates how a traditional story can be modern and allows the various cultures that visit the Abbey to identify and resonate with the scene.”

The exhibit was installed just before Christmas and will be in place until Candlemas, Thursday 2 February.

Bath Abbey is open seven days a week for visiting (Mondays 9.30-5.30pm, Tuesdays 9am-5.30pm, Saturdays 9am-6pm and Sundays 1-2.30pm and 4.30-5.30pm) with regular services on weekdays and Sundays. For more information please visit www.bathabbey.org

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Caption: A contemporary take on the traditional nativity by Bath Spa Uni students including L-R: Darcy Tudge, Charlotte Evans and Jon Ransley

Notes to editors:

For further information please contact Elaine Teh, Communications Officer, on 01225 303320 or eteh@bathabbey.org.

About Bath Abbey

Bath Abbey is a flourishing Church of England parish church which technically serves a small city centre parish (Bath Abbey with St James). This parish has a small residential population and primarily consists of commercial properties; and most of the regular congregation and the 692 people on the electoral roll live in other parishes or come from outside the city of Bath. The Abbey holds daily services of morning or evening prayer or Holy Communion; and the standard pattern of Sunday worship is for five daily services attended on average by 630 people. Special services at Advent, Christmas and Easter are well attended; and many local organisations hold annual services in the Abbey. The Abbey has four choirs: Men's, Boys' and Girls' choirs support worship in services; whilst Melody Makers is a choir for younger children which performs in concerts in the Abbey once a term and at other events in and around Bath. The Abbey runs a successful Schools Singing Programme, an outreach activity which supports singing within local schools and holds regular workshops and concerts in the Abbey. The Abbey welcomes approximately 400,000 visitors annually and is open daily all year round; many of these visitors being families and school parties. Apart from being a place of prayer, worship, weddings and funerals, the Abbey has an important role as a visitor destination, a performance space (for audiences anywhere between 10 and 1,000), a general civic space and an exhibition space. www.bathabbey.org

About Bath Abbey's Footprint

The £19.3 million Footprint project aims to carry out essential repairs to the Abbey's collapsing floor, install a new eco-friendly heating system using Bath's unique hot springs as a source of energy and enlarge capacity by creating 200sq metres of new facilities to fulfil the Abbey as a place of congregation, equal access and hospitality. A programme is also planned to record and interpret the Abbey's 1,200 years of history and this iconic church for millions of visitors including educational visits.



www.bathabbey.org/footprint

The Footprint project is supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund www.hlf.org.uk

About Bath Spa University

Bath Spa University is where creative minds meet. Offering a wide range of courses across the arts, sciences, education, social science and business to 7,000 students, the University employs outstanding creative professionals, which support its aim to be a leading educational institution in creativity, culture and enterprise.

Based in stunning countryside just a few minutes from a World Heritage City, Bath Spa University ensures its students graduate as engaged global citizens who are ready for the world of work. In fact, 93 per cent of graduates find themselves in work or further study within six months. www.bathspa.ac.uk