

THE FRIENDS OF THE IVEAGH BEQUEST, KENWOOD

AGM

1 NOVEMBER 2020

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

As this is my last AGM before I pass the Chair to Dame Jenny Abramsky, I have extended the Report until the end of September to record the Friends' activities during this extraordinary period of COVID-19.

Leading the Friends for thirteen years has been an honour and a privilege and together we have achieved great things! I have been supported by a wonderful Council – all volunteers- who have formed a harmonious unit to ensure that Kenwood continues to thrive. We have developed a close working relationship with English Heritage which has proved incomparable, for which I thank them.

My Chairmanship has been vastly aided by outstanding Secretaries: Tina Kossoff, Christine Morgan and latterly, Mala Gole. Their humour and gentle reminders when I slipped off the administrative road, have enhanced my Chairmanship incomparably. It has been an immense pleasure to know and work with them.

2019 was an exciting and demanding year! Membership remained – and still remains - strong and steady, which is very pleasing. We are deeply appreciative of the support we continue to receive from our Corporate Benefactors, namely, the Pentland Group plc, Killik & Co and Julius Baer and also from our Rembrandt and Vermeer Friends.

The year 2019 marked the 350th anniversary of Rembrandt's death and having his penultimate *Self-portrait with Circles* in the Bequest collection, we marked the occasion with several highly creative and innovative events. In the Spring, English Heritage formed a partnership with the Gagosian Gallery in central London to showcase some of the most impressive self-portraits, including works by Freud, Bacon and Picasso. The exhibition, *Visions of the Self: Rembrandt and Now* ran from 12 April until 18 May and the Kenwood Rembrandt formed the centre of this internationally significant event. The accompanying exhibition catalogue included essays and information on the Kenwood collection and history. The exhibition was an outstanding success, with much coverage in the press and social-media. The Gagosian hosted a champagne reception for the Friends at the Gallery on 16 April which allowed Friends to explore the fascinating show, juxtaposing the Rembrandt with contemporary self-portraits. All costs were met by the Gagosian Gallery.

On 4 October the *Rembrandt #nofilter* display opened at Kenwood. This highly imaginative exhibition was devised by English Heritage's Curatorial team. The Friends were delighted to fund the exhibition, the first for some years at Kenwood, which continued the theme of exploring how old masters remain relevant to a contemporary audience. The Rembrandt was placed in isolation in the Dining Room Lobby and visitors were invited to take 'selfies' to form a photomosaic digital artwork displayed near the Rembrandt. The response was remarkable and attracted a great deal of media attention.

The mystery of the dual hemisphere world map in Rembrandt's *Self-portrait* was the topic of the Friends annual event on 15 October. Professor James Welu, Director Emeritus at Worcester Art Museum in Massachusetts explored their possible meaning to an audience of members and guests. A wine and canapes reception in the Upper Hall followed the talk. We are most grateful to the caterer, Searcys, for sponsoring the reception.

On 4 November, our Ambassador, Lord Melvyn Bragg introduced Sir Simon Schama who delivered a virtuoso talk on one of his most admired artists, Rembrandt. The capacity audience at King's Place, London was enthralled! The Friends were delighted to co-host this splendid evening with English Heritage.

In December, English Heritage began planning a complete restoration of the Brewhouse and Old Kitchen - much needed work. The Wall Paintings in the Brew House were in a particularly poor state, so the Friends decided to fund the project, amounting to over £12,000. The Wall Paintings are now restored and both the Friends and English Heritage are delighted with the result.

We are indebted to Peter Barber, Vice-Chairman, for his invaluable knowledge of Kenwood, which is a very valuable resource.

Our lecture series continues to be popular and attracted maximum audiences. Their success is due to Richard Ormond and Angela Cox devising such interesting programmes. Our Christmas lecture and party on 8 December was a great success!

Visits were fully subscribed throughout the year, which is due to Angela Cox's ability to select unusual and interesting venues. Under the guidance of Elizabeth Inglis, our Garden Tour Organiser, garden walks were well attended.

Membership administration remains in the highly efficient care of Helen Payne, who in addition to representing the Friends on the Landscape Forum, also sits on the Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee.

The Development Group continues to be effectively led by Sally Doganis, whose source of potential benefactors is invaluable to the Friends.

Nick Fielding oversees the Newsletter publication and the website design, which he undertakes with great care.

The range of our activities and commitments requires prudent financial administration and we could not be better served than by Treasurer, Ken Solomons.

COVID-19

The pandemic has had a profound effect on our cultural life. Kenwood was not exempt, and the house and estate were subject to lock-down from 23 March. The house and collection were meticulously looked after by the Curatorial and Operational teams of English Heritage and I would like to express the Friends' appreciation of their care and keeping us informed.

With the easing of lock-down, Kenwood returned to life! The house has re-opened from Wednesday to Sunday, 11am to 3pm, but it is necessary to book online prior to your visit. Limited catering is offered by the Brewhouse and Stewards Room. The Kenwood Bookshop is now open Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays from 11am to 3pm. The Mansion Cottage Garden Shop, opened since July, has been extraordinarily successful and profitable. Kenwood has also participated in the Open House Weekend 19-20 September.

The Friends were very pleased to offer a Zoom video platform to the Voluntary staff to allow them to hold weekly Spotlight lectures. We thank Helen Payne and Nick Fielding for this initiative which proved immensely popular with members and, together with the weekly infomail, ensured members remained engaged. As a consequence, membership levels have not diminished, which has delighted us! The Zoom talks are now hosted fortnightly by the Friends and are very popular. I would like to express my appreciation to those Council members who provided talks.

The months ahead will be difficult for everyone, but under the guidance of Dame Jenny, I am sure the Friends will prosper.

Christine Mathez-Davey BEM
Chair

30 September 2020