

THE FRIENDS OF THE IVEAGH BEQUEST, KENWOOD

AGM 15 APRIL 2018

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The past year has been extremely eventful! A growth in membership and Life Members has been recorded, which is very pleasing. We have maintained our portfolio of Corporate Benefactors, namely Aberdeen Asset Management, the Pentland Group plc, Killick & Co and our Rembrandt and Vermeer Friends: we are deeply appreciative of their continued support.

The year has been marked by several conservation projects in which the Friends have been involved. At last year's AGM, I reported that a legacy had been received from the Dinah Abel Bequest. It was agreed with Mrs Abel's Executor to put the £5,000 gift towards the restoration of Volume I of the Andover Album, with the Friends contributing a further £400 towards the bespoke storage boxes. Work has now been completed and together with the already restored Volume II, these rare and exquisite 18th century drawings can be displayed.

The Friends also contributed £3,000 for the conservation of Reynolds' *Venus Chiding Cupid* and a further £3,600 for x-rays, infra-red photography and a slip frame for the Weenix painting of the *Family in a Mediterranean Seaport*

As previously reported, the Friends funded ten extremely handsome new Obelisks in the Brewhouse garden to replace the dilapidated 1999 originals. On 14 June, we organised a small summer party to celebrate their installation. We feel the Obelisks add considerably to the visitor

enjoyment of the Brewhouse Garden. We are pleased to have initiated the project.

The highlight of the year was undoubtedly the *Russian Interlude* evening on 23 October which celebrated the residency of Grand Duke Michael Mikhailovich and his family from 1910 to 1917. Grand Duke Michael was the second cousin of Tsar Nicholas II, but his morganatic marriage to Countess Sophie von Merenberg, deemed illegal under Imperial law, forced the couple to live abroad and they eventually settled very happily at Kenwood. The Friends were privileged to be joined by His Royal Highness, Prince Michael of Kent and Sacha, Duchess of Abercorn, the great grand-daughter of Grand Duke Michael and also by other family members. It was wonderful to have such a gathering at Kenwood and we were delighted to be able to share our celebration with them. Following the drinks reception, Julius Bryant, our Guest Speaker, gave a lively talk about the family's time at Kenwood. The evening was made complete by a splendid concert of Borodin performed by the Solem Quartet. We are most grateful to Searcy's for sponsoring the reception.

Just before Christmas, English Heritage informed us that it was undertaking an internal restructure to enable self-funding by 2023, which would come into effect from 1 April.

What is being proposed for Kenwood is the replacement of the current, full time Curator by a Curator covering Marble Hill House, Chiswick House and Kenwood. The post holder would be based at English Heritage's central London office. The Friends do not support this proposal and submitted a paper in January to Anna Eavis, English Heritage's Curatorial Director, arguing the case for the retention of the

full time Curator post. We recognise that certain internal restructuring is necessary to achieve self-funding and, whilst we remain fully supportive of English Heritage in its aim, the Friends consider that Kenwood holds a unique position within English Heritage properties' portfolio and one which requires a special approach. The Iveagh Bequest at Kenwood is not only an internationally important art collection, but one of the most important gifts to the nation in the 20th century. A part-time Curator would be unable to maintain the level of research required to develop initiatives to enhance and promote the collection. Kenwood's future would be put in jeopardy by allowing it to become stale with opportunities missed and a probable decline in visitor numbers. Ms Eavis has agreed to review the position in the Autumn. Although this is welcome, we feel that Kenwood remains vulnerable so we will take our argument to Sir Tim Laurence Head of the English Heritage Trustees. We, will, of course, keep members fully informed.

Our concern does not distract from the great pleasure the Friends have in working with Dr Allison Goudie, Kenwood new Curator of Collections. We very much hope that her one-year contract will be extended beyond October.

Our lecture series continues to be immensely popular, attracting capacity audiences and remains a major benefit of Friends' membership. The quality of the speakers was outstanding and we are extremely grateful to Richard Ormond and Angela Cox for devising such excellent programmes.

The unexpected snowy weather in December did not prevent some stalwart members from attending the Christmas lecture and party and from enjoying the occasion.

Visits were fully subscribed throughout the year, which was due to Angela Cox's unerring ability to select unusual and interesting places. The visit on 1 February to the historic Royal College of Arms was a new venture - our first evening visit with guided tour, wine and supper – proved to be immensely popular and we hope to arrange similar evening visits.

Our garden tours, which are skilling organised by Elizabeth Inglis, continue to attract members.

In addition to her highly efficient care of Membership, Helen Payne is also very effective as our landscape guru and sits on the Landscape Forum, the Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee and the Heath and Hampstead Society.

Administration and financial prudence remain in the sure hands of Mala Gole and Ken Solomans.

Our Newsletter and Website are under the competent direction of Nicholas Fielding.

Congratulations must go to Lesley Barnes and the Events Group for their meticulous planning of the *Russian Interlude* evening and for the outstanding organisation on the night. The Events Group is also now assisting with visits, for which I thank them.

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

Just before I complete my Report, 2018 marks the 90th Anniversary of the Iveagh Bequest. The Friends will be celebrating in style on 3 October with an evening reception and will be joined by our Patron, Lord Iveagh and

Lady Iveagh. Invitations will be dispatched during the summer, but please note the date in your diary,

Enormous support is provided by English Heritage staff and on behalf of everyone, I would like to thank Sam Cooper, Kenwood General Manager and his team of staff and volunteers and to the Curator, Dr Allison Goudie.

The enthusiasm of all my Council colleagues is outstanding and I thank them for their tremendous support. The Friends have a demanding year ahead, but I am certain that we will achieve much together.

Thank you!