

THE FRIENDS OF THE IVEAGH BEQUEST, KENWOOD

AGM
25 APRIL 2021

This is my first AGM report since taking over as Chair from Christine Mathez-Davey in November. I would like to thank Christine for all the support she has given me in educating me about the intricacies of the Iveagh Bequest and in introducing me to colleagues at English Heritage.

Since becoming Chair, COVID has dominated all our lives and its impact on the Kenwood Estate has been profound. For much of the time the House has been closed and since the end of December the Brew House Café and the Bookshop have also been closed. Despite these challenges English Heritage have kept the estate open and continued opening the Steward's Room. It is good to see the Brew House reopening this month as the number of people continuing to enjoy the wonderful landscape of Kenwood has continued to grow.

Throughout the present lockdown the Friends have continued to work with the volunteers and the Online Talks, which have been running throughout the year, organised and recorded by Nick Fielding and Helen Payne, have been fantastic. The volunteers have a huge knowledge base, and it has been one of the benefits of lockdown that this series has been such a success. Special thanks for our lecture programme must go to Angela Cox and Richard Ormond. They are a great partnership, sharing their knowledge and creating a lasting legacy. Some lectures have had as many as 150 attendees which is remarkable.

Our website has been upgraded and improved. My thanks to Nicholas Fielding and team. The additional pages include more on the history of the Iveagh Bequest, an updated list of our past funding projects, and a Blog. I know from my own experience how complicated changing websites can be. It is our interface with our members and the wider public who we want to understand and appreciate the wonderful House, art gallery and landscape that is available for all. Nicholas also produces our regular twice-yearly newsletter and Helen has produced a weekly email over the last year which has kept us informed of the many changes, in response to government policy, that have been necessary over past few months.

During the past few months English Heritage have refurbished the toilets next to the Brew House. They are a great improvement and much needed.

Friends Membership over the past year has remained steady and we continue to receive support from our Corporate Benefactors, the Pentland Group plc, Killik & Co

and Julius Baer. We are very grateful. We are also grateful to our Vermeer and Rembrandt Friends, Chris Carter, Elizabeth Meek, Kip Meek and Jenny Abramsky for their support.

This past year has been very challenging for English Heritage. Their main source of income, tickets sales at all their properties except Kenwood, dried up as a result of the combination of lockdowns and tier restrictions. They have received help under the government's Cultural Recovery Fund, which is good news, but we recognise these are unique times and EH face serious financial challenges for the foreseeable future.

The Friends want to support the Kenwood curatorial team where possible. The Council has decided to give a grant of £25,000 for the restoration and improvement of the display of the miniatures collection. In addition, we are looking to support the improvement of some of the picture lighting in the House.

It is only six months since the delayed AGM 2020 in November. I am very grateful for the tireless work of Mala Gole our Secretary, and Helen Payne, our membership administrator, who have guided me through my first few months as Chair. I am in awe of their knowledge and dedication. Ken Solomons, our Treasurer has kept a tight hand on our finances and that has enabled us to make grants to EH which we hope will help in their recovery.

The enthusiasm of all on the Council has been wonderful to see and I want to pay tribute to our Vice Chair Peter Barber who will be standing down this year, Peter has immense knowledge and expertise which has been an invaluable resource for us all. I know Peter will remain an active member and will return when his other commitments allow.

Everyone I have met at English Heritage are anxious to work with us to achieve our shared aims. We all share a love of the place. I want to thank them all for welcoming me and briefing me in great detail. I have found that invaluable.

The magnolias have been magnificent this year. The daffodils have carpeted the slopes. The rhododendrons and azaleas are beginning to flower. We have so much to look forward to as the estate and House come back to life.

Jenny Abramsky
Chair