

Chair's Report – Friends of Kenwood AGM 1 April 2022

Over the past year, as the country learnt to live with COVID, we have seen the gradual opening up of the House and the Estate. Things are not yet normal, but we have hopes that, by Easter, opening times will be restored and restrictions lifted.

Since my last report in April 2021, despite Omicron, the Friends continued to work with the volunteers. They are vital for the future success of Kenwood.

Our Sunday lectures have continued on zoom. They have been a remarkable success. Special thanks must go to Angela Cox and Richard Ormond for engaging a wide range of lecturers and thanks also to Helen Payne and Nicholas Fielding who managed the series throughout the year. Our online talks are available on YouTube. The recorded talks continue to be a lasting legacy.

The improved website, with additional pages has enabled the Friends of Kenwood to reach more people and to keep our members fully informed. Credit is due to Nicholas Fielding for his tireless work on keeping the site up to date and for producing our regular newsletter. Credit must also go to Helen Payne who continues to keep us up to date on social media, and on government policy and English Heritage plans.

Council has been in intensive discussions with English Heritage about its long-term plans for the House and Estate. We are aware of the serious challenges facing English Heritage due to the impact of COVID. The significant loss of revenue from overseas tourism is likely to continue for at least another year. The main source of income for EH comes from tickets sales and revenue from their shops and cafes. So, as I said last year, EH will face substantial financial challenges for a number of years.

The Friends have supported EH in a number of ways this year. Our most visible contribution has been the funding of the new lighting in four rooms including the Music Room and the Dining Room. We are grateful to all our members who donated to our appeal, and particularly to the Bryan Guinness Charitable Trust, the most significant donor to the project. We are delighted with the result. Pictures that were seen in gloom now reveal their true lustre. I hope you agree the new lights are discreet and effective. The new lighting project has given EH the opportunity to rehang pictures in both wings.

The Friends have also supported curatorial events including the London Stone exhibition. And our grant for the conservation of the Miniature Collection is being used for the restoration of some of the collection and of the Lady Cohen Collection acquisition and for improvements to the display.

We are very pleased to be supporting English Heritage in developing a new Masterplan for Kenwood. Consultants have been hired after a tender process involving 5 consortiums. The Friends will be contributing a substantial proportion of the cost and will be playing a central role in developing the vision for the next decade. The Consortium led by Blue Sail will consult Friends, volunteers, and the wider community. I do hope you will all play a part. They hope to report to the Trustees of English Heritage by the end of September.

I am very grateful to Mala Gole our Secretary for all the hard work she has put in over the past year. Mala is tireless in her commitment to FOK and without her enthusiasm and dedication we could not make the impact we do. The same is true of Helen Payne, our membership administrator. Both Mala and Helen have been my guides and supporters throughout the year.

We are so lucky to have Ken Solomons as our Treasurer. Ken has understood the complexities of legacies, of bank accounts, and above all has kept a tight hand on our finances that has enabled us to make the grants we have to EH.

The Council has also been ably supported by the work of Sally Doganis, Mark King and Jerzy Kierkuc-Bielinski, who have given their time and expertise.

Our portfolio of Corporate Benefactors, Julius Baer, Killik and Pentland Group Plc, and our Rembrandt and Vermeer Friends have continued their generous support; we are most grateful.

Everyone we have worked with at English Heritage have appreciated the spirit of our partnership and we look forward to an even more productive relationship in the coming year.

The early spring has seen rhododendrons in bloom in February! The Camelias were also early and magnificent this year. The magnolias are now out and are as magnificent as ever. Let's hope for a glorious Spring and Summer as the House and Estate return to normality.

Jenny Abramsky
Chair