

THE ARTS SOCIETY CAMBERLEY

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT TO THE 36TH AGM, 23 OCTOBER 2019, ON BEHALF OF THE COMMITTEE

The past year has been a successful one for our society. We have had an excellent and well-attended programme of lectures, a special interest day, visits near and far and we have continued to support arts in the community. Membership has increased, we have had better engagement with members and simpler procedures have been introduced. None of this could have happened without those who organise our activities, so I would like start by thanking sincerely our committee members and volunteers, who have enabled this.

Our lecture programme has covered a diverse range of the arts with high quality speakers, with attendance notably higher this year. Sally Kettle and Mariejan Crear put that in place, booked and liaised with our lecturers and ensured they were welcomed. We had one unfortunate bump in the road at our March lecture, beyond our control and due to sad and unprecedented circumstances. It was a one-off and the rest of our programme has been very well received indeed. Our special interest event on Bellini's Rome was an excellent and popular morning.

The 2020 lecture programme is in place and full details are on our website. Leaflets will be available shortly. The lectures span the range of the arts and we have taken care to engage the best Arts Society accredited lecturers. We also have a special interest morning in May, on Raphael and Michelangelo: Rivals in Rome, on the 500th anniversary of Raphael's passing. We are looking at options for a further special interest event in November.

We introduced new arrangements for complimentary refreshments before the meetings, which has helped members and visitors engage with each other and we have seen greater interest in the notice board of events, run by Sue Donovan, and in the very popular ticket desk staffed by Diana Lummis and Liz Carrington. There's been a benefit with the new arrangements but a few cons too, so we will keep them under review.

Our visits to destinations both near and far, organised by Uta Barnhill, have been popular, especially those to London. Uta is planning a wide range of visits for next year, including two more to London.

For the first time since 2011, membership has not only stopped falling but has increased, from 162 to 170. This is most encouraging as increased membership not only helps the society's finances but gives us the confidence to hold more visits and special events as well as enabling a more vibrant atmosphere at meetings. We have also seen more visitors at our lectures. Sheena Cowell has continued most effectively to ensure that our membership administration has run smoothly and that new and potential members are welcomed; she has also led our participation in events such as CAMFEST.

Our finances have improved this year, with more members and with costs being held. However, we still made a loss, although much smaller than last year. Increasing our membership and registering as a charity are the two measures that would enable us to sustain our society for the foreseeable future. A year ago, we developed a plan to increase membership numbers and engagement. It draws on best practice from across The Arts Society. Over the past year we have begun to implement that plan and we have already seen the promising results of increased membership and greater participation in visits and events. Complementing that, registering as a charity would enable us to claim Gift Aid on members' subscriptions, ensuring the long-term future of the society.

Ray Drury took over as Treasurer this year and immediately improved our financial governance and streamlined our financial management, introducing the ability for members to make payments by bank transfer and also paying our invoices that way where possible. We continue to seek ways to make our administration simpler. Ray ensured that we collected 3 years of outstanding administration fees from The Arts Society for processing their Gift Aid forms, a welcome windfall for us. He did this while also stepping in at short notice as our new projectionist, introducing the popular and informative monthly members' emails and doing the preparation for our registering as a charity, subject to approval at the AGM.

We have stepped up our publicity efforts this year, to the limit of available volunteer effort and funding. Volunteers distribute flyers for lectures and events across the community and we have participated in community events. Our website has been revamped to provide both a resource for members, with plenty of relevant material on the programme, news, events, forms and so on but also as a source of information for potential members and visitors. We have achieved a higher profile than before and have welcomed more new members and visitors this year. I would like in particular to thank our current members, as recommendations from members has again been the most effective form of recruitment. I am also pleased that The Arts Society nationally has agreed to provide us with some support on publicity materials.

Following the excellent Spring Magic exhibition of art by local schoolchildren in 2018, the Young Arts effort this year has focused on preparation for the next Spring Magic in March 2020, to be held at St Peter's Church, Frimley. Helen Gregson and her team of volunteers have been hard at work putting it all in place and we will have 16 schools participating.

Heritage work by our volunteers has continued, contributing to staffing the Heritage Gallery in Obelisk Way, working on the Roy Francis collection of photographic negatives from Surrey Heath Museum, making a computer record of St Peter's Churchyard, recording material at RMA Sandhurst and the restoration and maintenance of textiles at Guildford Cathedral. Volunteers have also contributed to West Surrey Area projects.

We have held six committee meetings this year, covering both routine business and taking forward our plans for developing the society. Our work is limited by the gapping of key posts and we urgently need more members to come forward to help, both as committee members and also as volunteers who can help in many ways, both on a continuing basis and for one-off tasks. I must thank Pat Knowles who, despite having retired from the committee, helped me by taking the minutes at almost all our meetings, succeeded by David Richards at the end of the year. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Mariejan Crear, Liz Carrington and Sally Kettle, who are retiring from the committee at the end of their terms of office, after many years of service to the committee and our society.

We have had a successful year, with an enjoyable, high quality programme of lectures, events and visits, increased membership, improved finances and financial management. The efforts of our committee members, volunteers and members generally have all been essential to achieving that. Further increasing our membership and registering as a charity are now the key to ensuring our long-term future so that we can continue to deliver what we are here for: an exciting programme of lectures, visits and special interest days, Young Arts and supporting arts and heritage in the community.

Peter Starkey
Chairman, The Arts Society Camberley
On behalf of the Committee