



FRIENDS OF THE WILSON, CHELTENHAM ART GALLERY & MUSEUM MINUTES OF THE 35th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

**Held in the Summerfield Gallery, The Wilson, Clarence Street, Cheltenham,
at 6:15 pm on 3 June 2019**

Present

- Councillor Roger Whyborn (Mayor)
- Laurie Bell (Chief Executive, The Cheltenham Trust);
- Sarah Cook, Sarah Robertson and Sophia Wilson (The Wilson);
- Niall Phillips (Guest Speaker);
- PJ Crook (President);
- Peta Hoyle and Dr David Wilson (Patrons);
- Adrian Barlow (Chair);
- David Addison, John Beard, Jaki Davis, Liz Giles, Mike Jenkinson, Sue Pearce, Robert Rimell, (Trustees);
- Martha Alleguen, Alison Ayers, Christine Barlow, Anne Bartlett, A Bateman, George Breeze, Helen Brown, Rose Crimes, Richard Crook, Pam Edmunds, Margaret Edwards, Irene Finlayson, James Gardner, Mary Greensted, Rosemary Harvey, Gillian Lunn, Mandy Jenkinson, Chris Jones, Douglas Ogle, Jenny Ogle, Alison Pascoe, Sue Reeves, Barbara Riccalton, Cecil Sanderson, Mary Southerton, Mary Stewart, Anne Strathie, Hilary Swan, Janet White, John White, Adrienne Wood, Steve Wood, Keith Woodman, Greg Worth (Members).

1. Welcome

The President, PJ Crook, welcomed everyone to the Friends' 35th AGM. She extended a particular welcome to the Mayor, Cllr Roger Whyborn; to Laurie Bell, Chief Executive of The Cheltenham Trust; to Sarah Cook, Sarah Robertson and Sophia Wilson from The Wilson; and to Dr David Wilson and Peta Hoyle, two of the charity's patrons.

She spoke highly of The Wilson and its volunteers. She had visited The Wilson just the previous day and she highlighted the warm welcome received and the enthusiasm and expertise of the volunteers in the exhibition *The Art of Selling Songs*.

She thanked the Trustees of the Friends for the events they organise and for all their hard work.

2. Introduction

The Chair, Adrian Barlow, opened the proceedings.

Laurie Bell, CEO of The Cheltenham Trust, welcomed everyone to the meeting, and introduced herself. She has been in post for a month, having taken over from Julie Finch. One of her initial focuses is how to make the Trust sustainable going forward. She looks forward to working with multiple groups, not least of which is the Friends. She was delighted that the Friends AGM is being held in The Wilson for the first time.

3. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from the following:

- Alex Chalk, MP;
- Councillor Flo Clucas;
- Councillor Dennis Parsons, Maxine Melling (Trustees, The Cheltenham Trust);
- Ann-Rachael Harwood (The Wilson);
- Margaret Austen, Edward Gillespie, Mark & Julia Hurrell (Patrons);
- Mark Holliday and Martin Renshaw (Trustees);
- June & Geoffrey Cox, James & Judie Hodsdon, Marjorie Imlah, John & Hilary Simpson, Jan Turner (Members).

4. Minutes of the 34th AGM held on 12 June 2018

The minutes for the previous AGM were approved. Proposed Anne Strathie, seconded Mandy Jenkinson, approved *nem con*.

5. Chair's Report for 2018-19

The Chair introduced his report for 2018-19, and a copy is appended to these minutes.

6. Treasurer's Report for 2018-19

The Treasurer presented the key points from the accounts. Income was very similar to the previous year. Expenditure was greater, by the amount of £30k of donations to The Wilson made during the year.

She thanked the previous Treasurer, Mark Holliday, and the Independent Examiner, Andrew Ellis.

7. Accounts for 2018-19

One comment was raised from the floor. The annual accounts provide an accurate description of the charity's finances and they meet the requirements of the Charity Commission. They don't include the details of the various donations made to The Wilson. It was suggested that if this information was added it would show even more clearly how the Friends are helping The Wilson, and could help motivate people to become Friends; perhaps it might be included as a note with the accounts. Adrian Barlow said the committee would consider how best to take this forward.

The accounts were approved and adopted. Proposed Anne Strathie, seconded Jaki Davis, approved *nem con*.

8. Appointment of the Independent Examiner

Andrew Ellis was re-appointed as the Independent Examiner provided he is willing to undertake this role. Proposed, Jenny Ogle; seconded, George Breeze; approved *nem con*.

9. Election of Trustees

David Addison, Liz Giles and Robert Rimell had been co-opted as Trustees during the year, and they were now elected to serve as Trustees. Proposed, Adrian Barlow; seconded John Beard; approved *nem con*.

10. Any other business

None.

Close

The meeting closed at 7:02 pm.

Following the close of the meeting, Sarah Robertson from The Wilson introduced guest speaker Niall Phillips. Niall is a partner and architect with Purcell consultants, the Bristol-based group commissioned to produce the feasibility study for the Phase 2 Development of The Wilson, in conjunction with Image Makers and Focus. Niall described the current progress on the feasibility study, which is being paid for by the Friends.

Points included the following. Funding is tight at present, and redevelopment proposals need to be ready for when funding becomes easier. The feasibility study is defining the context and constraints and exploring the options. The Wilson has great collections, and much of the material in store is of a quality that could be eagerly displayed if only there was room. The current layout of Wilson has a disproportionately high amount of circulation space relative to gallery display space. A major question will be the extent to which the space currently occupied by the library can be linked with The Wilson. A comprehensive Phase 2 Development would need substantial funding and have a long lead time and potentially it could be delivered in stages. Ahead of this, early quick-wins are possible.

Several points were made from the floor.

- a. The Mayor hoped that it will be possible to see the Cheltenham tram that is currently in store.
- b. The Wilson's entrance, with its smoked-glass facade and formal desk, present a somewhat forbidding appearance: the entrance from the street ought to be more inviting. Niall agreed that such changes could be quick-wins.
- c. It would be good to have more things that visitors can touch, for example reproductions of Arts & Crafts chairs that people can sit on.

In conclusion to the evening, the Mayor said he was impressed by the vibrancy and health of the Friends – and also many other local groups. He thanked Niall Phillips for coming to give us an informative and challenging talk which opened our eyes to what could be done.

Refreshments, kindly sponsored by The Cheltenham Trust, were served in the Summerfield Gallery and the newly-reopened Roof Terrace.

[Draft 17 June 2019]

CHAIR'S REPORT FOR 2018-19

Introduction

This is my first Report as Chair of the Trustees of the Friends, and I must begin at once by paying tribute to the work of my predecessor, Hilary Simpson. I knew Hilary's would be a hard act to follow; but although, as Deputy Chair, I had worked closely with her from 2015 onwards I have been humbled to discover just how much day-to-day work the job entails. More humbling still, I have come to appreciate just how much time is committed to the smooth running of the Friends by so many of the other trustees and, indeed, by volunteer Friends who are not members of the Committee of Trustees. All of them deserve our grateful thanks.

Membership

There are currently 567 members of the Friends, including Life members, Honorary members and Patrons. As of last week, we are still waiting for 38 members to renew their membership, and our indefatigable Membership Secretary, Mike Jenkinson, has contacted them all in the past week to encourage them to waste no time in renewing. I do hope that if any of you are among the 38, you will take heed and take action without delay! We need all the members we can get – and more. If every current member were able, in the course of this next year, to recruit one more member (better still, one more couple), then our ability to support The Wilson now and in the future would be greatly enhanced.

Across the country Friends organisations are having problems maintaining or enlarging their membership. When our membership renewal season for 2017-2018 ended in July last year, the final figure stood at 554. I hope very much that this year's figures will have shown that we have not suffered a further decline. We had a successful and enjoyable New Members' Coffee Morning in March, and it would be good to have enough new members in the coming twelve months to justify two such events - as has happened on occasion in previous year

Supporting The Wilson (i)

Our Constitution states that the aim of the Friends is 'the education of the public through the support of The Wilson, Cheltenham's art gallery and museum'. I should like to say something here about the nature of the support we provide.

First there is the tangible – that is financial – support. In the two and a half years between January 2017 and now, the Friends have committed over £66,000 to supporting The Wilson; a formidable sum, and one that by the end of the summer will have topped £70,000. Where does this money go? Well, on acquisitions for a start – of which the most important purchased in the past year by the Friends have been the autograph letters written by King George III and Queen Charlotte in the weeks leading up to the celebrated visit to Cheltenham in 1788. These are small pieces of papers but immensely valuable additions to the physical record of Cheltenham's history: the 1788 Royal Visit was, after all, the signal for Cheltenham's rapid rise as one of the country's most sought-after spas.

As important as acquisitions (though less headline-grabbing) is the work of curating and conserving the collections we already possess. I say we, because the collections of The Wilson are held in trust for the people of the town by Cheltenham Borough Council. In the past couple of years the Friends have paid for the conservation of an Edward Wilson sketchbook and we have already committed ourselves to paying for the conservation of a large and very significant album of Wilson's paintings and drawings during the coming year. At the present time this album is too fragile to go on display, and it could be argued that in the current

financial climate money spent on such conservation work is even more urgently needed than money spent on new acquisitions. It is always invidious to single out names, but here I must pay tribute to the curatorial staff of The Wilson – to Kirsty Hartsiotis, who gave members an inspiring tour of the Museum's Chinese ceramics for our Chinese New Year special event; to Ann-Rachel Harwood, Sophia Wilson and Caroline Waller, and to Sophie Wardell. All of these, and the other members of the curatorial and programme team, do work which we as the Friends need to continue to support.

The function of any Art Gallery and Museum is to exhibit its collections as fully as possible for the education, enrichment and enjoyment of the public – 'public' being defined as widely as possible. For this reason the Friends have also been glad to fund the external signage designed to attract visitors to The Wilson, and to pay for the re-design and re-display of the former World Cultures Gallery, now the World of Wonders Gallery, successfully attracting young and very young visitors into the Museum. More recently we have contributed towards the cost of creating the 'pop-up' cinema here in the Summerfield gallery, an experiment which is still in its early days but is already proving successfully in attracting new faces (and younger faces, I'm glad to say) through The Wilson's doors.

Broadening the scope of The Wilson's appeal is of the greatest importance, and all museums and galleries are in the business (I use the phrase appropriately) of increasing their income by making their spaces available for hire. For this reason I am very pleased that we have been able to realise a long-planned ambition to upgrade and furnish the Roof Terrace. It should soon become one of the most enjoyable and accessible roof-top spaces in Cheltenham – on a good day, a real sun-trap with lovely views across the Minster towards the Cotswold hills.

Hilary Simpson reported last year on our commitment to funding the Phase 2 Feasibility Study for the future development and sustainability of The Wilson, and we have earmarked £35,000 to meet the whole cost of this. I am pleased to say that the Friends are fully involved in contributing to, and monitoring, each stage of this study, and I am delighted that Niall Phillips from Purcell is here this evening to talk to us about how the Project is developing.

Hilary also reported on the much more contentious decision the Trustees took last year: to underwrite, for one year only, the salary of one of The Wilson's part-time curators subject to reassurances from The Cheltenham Trust that the post would be secure after our interim funding of it had ceased. This was not the kind of commitment Friends of a Museum and Art Gallery are usually asked to make, but personally I am very glad we were asked, and were able, to say yes. The loss of such a post this time last year would have done incalculable harm to The Wilson's reputation and, in the longer term, to its proper care, custody and promotion of its collections.

In precise terms, we have spent in the past financial year £30,500 supporting The Gallery and Museum. This is of course significantly more than our annual income. As you will hear and see shortly, it has contributed to a deficit of £11,000 in our income and expenditure account. That deficit will be covered by the transfer of funds from our General Reserve. I believe it is right in times such as these that we should not hesitate to draw on this Reserve, which exists for no other purpose than to enable us to meet our stated aim – the education of the public by the support of The Wilson – to which I referred earlier.

Supporting The Wilson (ii)

I want now to stress some of the less tangible but no less significant ways in which the Friends support The Wilson. Volunteering is perhaps the most important way, and the range of opportunities available – as Gallery stewards, conservators, cataloguers and transcribers for instance – was enthusiastically spelled out

for us at the New Members Coffee Morning by Polly Gannaway-Pitts, who co-ordinates volunteering across The Cheltenham Trust's different locations. I am pleased to say that two of those standing for election as trustees tonight, David Addison and Robert Rimell, are both deeply engaged as volunteers with the life and work of The Wilson.

The relationship between the Friends and The Cheltenham Trust is, I believe, critically important at this time. We welcome senior staff from the Trust to attend part of each of our committee meetings, and the discussions we have there are friendly but frank. I hope we can fulfil the role of critical friend effectively, especially now that the Feasibility Study is trying to establish what the priorities for the future need to be. We said goodbye to Julie Finch, The Cheltenham Trust's Chief Executive Officer, at Easter, and I should like to acknowledge here her appreciation of the Friends' support for the Wilson. Now we welcome most warmly her successor, Laurie Bell, of whom I think it can be safely said she will not be slow to make her mark. I was pleased just now to hear Laurie describe her ambition to turn The Wilson into 'a destination of choice'. Much more than just a venue, a space which people can be persuaded to hire (important as this is), our Art Gallery and Museum exists to display ions and present exhibitions we want the public to visit from choice – and to keep coming back to visit anew.

PJ Crook, our President whose support we value so highly, spoke at the start of this meeting of the importance of making people feel welcome when they visit The Wilson. Now there are two possibly unexpected members of staff whose work I should like to celebrate on your behalf. I'm referring to Laren Bonanos and Shannon Meade, whose infectious enthusiasm for The Wilson and its collections is shared with all the visitors they meet, greet and escort around the galleries. After our Spring New Members' Morning, one of you said to me, 'If only those two could be permanently on the door welcoming visitors and taking them round, you'd soon double the number of Friends of The Wilson'. A heartening comment indeed, and one that should give us all pause for thought.

One other person I must name is Sarah Cook, Manager of The Wilson and Corporate Manager at The Cheltenham Trust. Sarah has worked closely with the Friends over the past three years and more; this year she has been responsible for pushing forward such projects as the Pop-up Cinema and the Roof Top Terrace. She has helped us greatly with bringing activities such as our Monday lectures back into The Wilson and has personally overseen all the arrangements for this evening. This includes the catering, and I think it is testament to our present relationship with The Cheltenham Trust that they have kindly sponsored the refreshments we are about to receive – at least when this AGM is over.

Friends' activities

It is on our programme of outings, talks and special events that we rely for revenue to supplement our income from subscriptions. Our aim is always to make a surplus on these events. However, I'd want to say that even if they only barely cover their costs they should still be regarded as a success if they give you, the Friends who go on our outings and attend our events, a sense of pleasure and satisfaction at having enjoyed something really rewarding. Whether we are talking about the Christmas Wine Tasting event at The New Club, or the first lunchtime talk held in the Friends' Gallery, or the outing to Cliveden and Cookham to visit the Stanley Spencer Museum – these are events that live happily in the memory.

I want here especially to thank Anne Bartlett who has been responsible for organising a wonderfully varied and original programme of outings over the past three years, enabling us to boldly go where few have gone before. How often does one get to visit a private house which has no fewer than five Bellinis in the first room one enters, or where the veil worn by Mary Queen of Scots at her execution is framed and hanging in a narrow passageway? Led by Anne, we had the opportunity to see these and so much more on the

Friends' recent foray into deepest Somerset. Our Events team, co-ordinated by Martha Alleguen and very ably supported by Sue Reeves, Alison Pascoe, and Martin Renshaw, have provided the publicity and administration behind all the outings, Sue Pearce's series of lunchtime talks and the special events. I confess this was an area about which I knew all too little before becoming Chair, and I have been duly chastened to realise just how much time and hard work it all involves.

Communications

A number of you have told me how much you enjoyed the latest Newsletter, edited unobtrusively and punctiliously but with real style by Martin Renshaw. The Newsletter appears three times a year but would never reach you at all were it not for Sue Reeves' team of dedicated envelope packers who expertly collate the various inserts and ensure that each envelope is pressed firmly to ensure it goes through the franking system at the correct price for its weight. We are grateful for such behind-the-scenes expertise, and grateful also to the University of Gloucestershire for generously allowing us access to their franking and posting system. This saves the Friends both time, inconvenience and money.

In addition to the Newsletter, though, we are increasingly relying on email to keep in touch with you especially when new events are announced in the months between the Newsletter's publications. Over 80% of Friends are now happy to receive emails and to make bookings online, and this figure is rising rapidly. Of course, we need to cater still for those who can't access email, or prefer not to, but this does entail significant additional time and money. Where possible, we would urge those who can't access the internet to ask a friend who does have email to act as a 'buddy' for them, receiving email on their behalf and passing on the MailChimp messages.

Farewells

Sadly, we have to say a number of farewells and thank-you to retiring Friends. I am only the most recent in a line of Chairs who have been very grateful to Mike Jenkinson for his work as Membership Secretary and for his incisive and forthright contributions to all the debates that go on around, and away from, the Committee room table. Much missed is an overused phrase but it is one that will certainly apply to Mike, and I am uncomfortably aware that after a year of searching, his are shoes that have yet to be filled.

Happily I do not have to say the same of Mark Holliday; for though his cheerful and reassuring presence at our meetings will certainly be missed, and though his restructuring, management and presentation of our accounts has been beyond praise, Liz Giles has already taken over from Mark and I am completely confident that the role of Treasurer, upon which the survival of the Friends absolutely depends, is again in good hands.

I have only just said how much we owe to our Events team but, alas, earlier this year Amanda Slayton-Joslyn stepped down; so, too, is Anne Bartlett about to do; and Martha Alleguen also. This is a melancholy roll-call indeed. In thanking them most sincerely for all they have done for the Friends in the past two or three years, I must at the same time appeal to members to consider volunteering to replace them. I cannot overstate the importance of this aspect of our work and I must not understate how much we all owe to Amanda, Anne and Martha. Only last year, Hilary in her Report described the Events group, combining Trustees and other Friends, as a resounding success. I hope it won't be long before we can rebuild such a successful team.

Conclusion

I do not want to end on a dispirited note. Over the year – as I hope I have shown – the Friends have made a very significant contribution to the well-being of The Wilson, and have done so in a variety of ways. I believe that this contribution is greatly appreciated by the staff of The Wilson and, increasingly, by The Cheltenham Trust. We have made, and continue to make, a difference; and this is something to celebrate. So you will shortly be receiving, by MailChimp, an invitation to a Reception here in the Summerfield Gallery and on the Roof Terrace at 6:30 pm on Thursday 11 July. There will be drinks and refreshments, a screening of Alan Bennett's *The Madness of King George*, starring Nigel Hawthorne and Helen Mirren, and a private view of the two royal letters purchased by you, the Friends and now on exhibition in the Open Archive. I do hope you will come: the evening is for members only, and you do need to book your place – but it is free: you should not have to pay to come to your own party. Another cause for celebration!

Adrian Barlow
3 June 2019