



**FRIENDS OF THE WILSON, CHELTENHAM ART GALLERY & MUSEUM
MINUTES OF THE 38th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

**Held at Cheltenham Spa Bowling Club, 5 St. George's Place, Cheltenham
at 6:15 pm on 6 June 2022**

Present

- Councillor Sandra Holliday (Mayor);
- Councillor Max Wilkinson (Cabinet member for Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Wellbeing);
- Richard Gibson (Strategy and Engagement Manager, Cheltenham Borough Council);
- Kate Peden (Chair of Culture and Communities Committee, The Cheltenham Trust);
- Lisa Edgar (Head of Culture, The Cheltenham Trust);
- Sophia Wilson (The Wilson);
- PJ Crook (President);
- Mary Greensted, Peta Hoyle and Dr David Wilson (Patrons);
- Adrian Barlow (Chair);
- David Addison, John Beard, Jaki Davis, Liz Giles, Vanessa Graham, Judie Hodsdon, Ro Kaye, Sue Pearce, Connie Price and Rob Rimell (Trustees);
- and 47 other members.

1. Welcome

The President, PJ Crook, welcomed everyone to the Friends' 38th AGM. She had been worried about The Wilson – it seemed, she said, to be lying low like a sleeping giant. She made comparison with the Bristol Museum & Art Gallery, which had been closed for improvements and has now reopened and sparkles. She looks forward to the same for Cheltenham. It has been the Friends that have kept interest going during The Wilson's closure. She is sorry that the Friends will be losing our Chair, Adrian Barlow, along with trustees John Beard and Martin Renshaw, and sorry that The Wilson will losing Sophia Wilson who has been there for so many years.

2. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from the following:

- Alex Chalk MP;
- Councillor Victoria Atherstone;
- Darren Knight (Executive Director for People and Change, Cheltenham Borough Council);
- Duncan Smith (Trustee, The Cheltenham Trust);

- Laurie Bell (CEO, The Cheltenham Trust);
- Caroline Waller (Cultural Programme Manager, The Cheltenham Trust);
- Kirsty Hartsiotis, Ann-Rachel Harwood and Benedict Sayers (The Wilson);
- Laura Kinnear (Holst Victorian House);
- Margaret Austen (Patron);
- Martin Renshaw (Trustee);
- Angela Applegate, Alison Ayres, Dulcie Herrington, Mike Jenkinson, Julph Miers, Mary Clare Stewart, Hilary Swann and Philippa Taylor (Members).

3. Minutes of the AGM 2021 and matters arising

The Chair invited members to approve the minutes for the previous AGM held on 1 July 2021 and they were approved *nem con*.

He reported on questions that had been raised at the previous AGM.

- He had written to the Cheltenham Trust mentioning concerns expressed at the AGM.
- The frontage at The Wilson has now been improved.
- On the subject of the damaged stained-glass window in the Arts & Crafts gallery, he explained that the building is the property of Cheltenham Borough Council, and the window has now been repaired. However there remain some questions: whether it should be fully restored, and whether it should be put back into its original position – remembering that in that position it had to be covered up to prevent light damage to the Arts & Crafts collection behind it. Advice will be needed from people with curatorial expertise.
- The Gloucestershire Guild of Craftsmen has relocated to Montpellier.

4. Chair's Report for 2021-2022

The Chair began by thanking PJ Crook for her unflinching support of The Wilson and of the Friends over many years. He wanted especially to thank her for the support and encouragement she had given to him and to his predecessors as Chair. He presented his report for 2021-22, and a copy is appended to these minutes.

Sophia Wilson, one of The Wilson's curatorial team, had retired after working at the Wilson for some 32 years: and during his Report the Chair invited George Breeze (the former Director of Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum, who had originally appointed Sophia) to make a presentation to her. In response, Sophia thanked the Friends for their strong support of the work of the curators and of The Wilson as a whole.

5. Financial Report for 2021-2022

The Treasurer, Liz Giles, presented the key points from the accounts for the year to 31 March 2022.

The accounts were approved and adopted *nem con*.

The Independent Examiner of the Friends' accounts, Andrew Ellis, is suffering from Covid-19 and has not been available. In his place Roy Collard has examined and approved the accounts.

She thanked the Independent Examiner. In turn Adrian thanked Liz for all her work on the accounts.

6. Elections

Vanessa Graham, Connie (Consulota) Price and Judie Hodsdon had been co-opted as Trustees during the year, and they were now elected to serve as Trustees, approved *nem con*.

Ro (Rosaleen) Kaye was elected to serve as Chair of the Trustees, approved *nem con*. In addition, Connie Price has kindly agreed to take on the role of Deputy Chair.

We are unsure whether our long-standing Independent Examiner, Andrew Ellis, will wish to continue in this role. The meeting agreed to defer appointing the Independent Examiner until we have further information. The Treasurer has ascertained that Roy Collard, who examined this year's accounts, would be willing to take over if needed.

We record our thanks to Andrew who has examined our accounts for many years.

7. Questions

None.

8. Any Other Business

From the floor thanks were expressed to Adrian for keeping the Friends together over his years as chair. Ro then made a presentation to Adrian on behalf of the trustees.

Close

The meeting closed at 7:30 pm.

After the meeting Lisa Edgar, Head of Culture at The Cheltenham Trust, gave a presentation on "Museums and the Pandemic 2020-2022". This was followed by a reception.

[v1 27 June 2022]

Chair's Report AGM 2022

Ladies and Gentlemen, Good evening, and may I at once add my welcome and my thanks to those of our President. No Chair could wish for a more discreet, generous and astute president than PJ, nor for a stronger advocate for The Wilson and for the Friends. I have always thought that one of the most important roles we as the Friends can fulfil is that of being advocates for Cheltenham's Art Gallery and Museum and, in trying to fulfil that role, we look to you, PJ, as our best example. I know I'm speaking for several of the Chairs who came before me, in acknowledging how much The Wilson and its Friends, and the town of Cheltenham and indeed the whole county of Gloucestershire, owe to you.

I am also delighted to welcome, from Cheltenham Borough Council, both the Mayor, Cllr Holliday and Max Wilkinson, Council Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Wellbeing. With those four responsibilities, I should say that the wellbeing of The Wilson sits squarely on Max's lap and almost as squarely on that of Richard Gibson, the Council's Strategy and Engagement manager, whom we also warmly welcome. From the Cheltenham Trust, we welcome, too, Lisa Edgar, our guest speaker this evening, and Kate Peden, the incoming Chair of the Trust's Culture and Communities Committee.

Everyone I have mentioned so far has a role to play in the present and future wellbeing of The Wilson and I am very grateful to you all for coming to this, the Annual General Meeting of the Friends of the Wilson. I am certain that the more closely the Friends can work together with, not apart from, the Council and the Trust the more effective we can be in fulfilling our constitutional aim, that is 'The Education of the Public through the Support and Assistance of the Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum'. That's how our original Constitution put it, back in 1984, and still puts it today in our constitution of 2015, revised to take account of the fact that management of the then recently renamed Wilson had been delegated by the Council to The Cheltenham Trust as one of five key venues, or locations or destinations which collectively became the Trust's portfolio.

My Report this evening will be in three parts. First, I shall review the Friends' activities and our progress in the past year towards meeting that founding aim of educating the public through our support of The Wilson. Next, I shall look back over the four years of my chairmanship, from 2018 when I took over from Hilary Simpson, up to now when I am about to hand over to my successor, Ro Kaye. Finally, I want to look forward and, in doing so, to share with you my hopes for how The Wilson will soon have re-established itself to become, and not for the first time, 'Cheltenham's leading cultural hub'. In between the second and third parts of my report, at the point where I turn from reviewing the past to looking forward to the future (with, I hope, what the Queen has recently called 'confidence and enthusiasm') I shall pause for a rather important Presentation – but more of that when we come to it.

This time last year, we were just getting used again to the freedoms – some of them at least – that we had enjoyed before the Coronavirus pandemic struck. Although public buildings such as libraries and museums had been allowed to reopen from 12th April, social distancing regulations still remained and most of us were understandably nervous about dropping our guard and our facemasks entirely. It was an act of real faith to make arrangements for our first Friends' outing in July – to Highnam House and Highnam Church outside Gloucester – our first 'live' event since early March 2020. This event had been twice postponed because of Covid, so numbers on the coach were limited, social distancing was maintained and the outing was a great success, followed in September by a second outing, this time to Sezincote and Chipping Campden. The weather was glorious, the tour guide at Sezincote was exceptionally good, the gardens at their finest; it was, in a word, unforgettable. At Chipping Campden members had a choice of what they wanted to see. I never cease to be awed by the great East window of the parish church and was glad to be able to share my

enthusiasm for this finest of Arts and Crafts war memorial windows with those who opted to visit the church as well as Court Barn where Mary Greensted was our guide.

After this, our next outing was to the museum of Royal Worcester porcelain and Worcester Cathedral, with the option of a good browse through the Christmas market, which had just opened. This was an outing not without its challenges. A couple of days beforehand, a freak storm had dislodged a stone from the cathedral tower, sending it crashing through the south Choir aisle roof – as a result less than half the cathedral was accessible while further safety checks were carried out and the roof patched up. Then when it was time for the coach to leave, one of the Friends on the trip had not returned. The staff at the Porcelain Museum, who had looked after us very well both at the start and end of our day in Worcester, stayed on after the coach had left to help me search the museum and the surrounding streets. Eventually I had to report a missing person to the Police, who advised me to keep searching the Christmas market area. It was not until nearly 10pm that we were able to contact the errant Friend who had made their own way home but forgotten to tell anyone.

This episode prompted the trustees and the Events Group to review our procedures and disclaimers for such outings, and it prompts me now to say that we owe a significant debt of gratitude to the Events Group – to Sue Pearce, Martha Alleguen, Sue Reeves and Alison Pascoe – not only for all the work and enthusiasm they bring to planning, preparing and supervising our programme of talks and events but also for the time and professionalism they bring to acting as group leaders for our outings.

It is all too easy to assume that just because the tour leaders manage to stay cheerful, informal and apparently relaxed at all times, they have an easy job. Believe me, during the whole time an outing is in progress group leaders can never afford to relax, not until the last person has left the coach, safely.

I'm glad to say that so far the outings this year, 2022, have gone smoothly and been greatly enjoyed – first, the visit to Compton Verney to view the spectacular Grinling Gibbons exhibition plus the equally eye-opening retrospective on the career of the artist John Nash; secondly, just recently and by all accounts highly successfully, the two-night expedition centred on Coventry has shown there is a real appetite once more for extended trips of this kind, and the Events Group are already looking to arrange another in 2023.

This year is, of course, the 150th anniversary of the birth of Edward Adrian Wilson. Under normal circumstances this should have been the fulcrum around which The Wilson's programme of events and activities for the year would have turned – had its doors been open again by now, as a year ago we all hoped and expected. I have been reassured by the Trust's Head of Communications that 'The Cheltenham Trust has a comprehensive communications plan for The Wilson refurbishment including the opening date, and the programme for the opening weekend. This plan I understand is to be officially announced tomorrow, 7th June, and I'm delighted that our guest speaker this evening, Lisa, is going to preview some of these plans for us. The word on the street has it that the day of re-opening might actually be 23rd July. If so, this will be highly appropriate since that is indeed the exact anniversary of Edward Wilson's birth.

The Friends' own programme for this anniversary year led off with an excellent Zoom lecture by the author David Elder about Dr Edward Thomas Wilson, the founder of the Cheltenham Museum – it is always worthwhile reminding ourselves and others that The Wilson is so named to celebrate both father and son.

If you were not able to hear David Elder's lecture, I hope you have by now been able to read his article in the current Newsletter about the good doctor. Indeed, his latest book is entitled '*He Went about Doing Good*': *The Life of Dr Edward Wilson of Cheltenham*. I commend this book and hope it will be on sale prominently in

The Wilson once it reopens. I was pleased, incidentally, that last week's live lecture by Nick Nelson (Head of Art at Cheltenham College) on Edward Wilson the Polar explorer, was well attended, and that the lecture's emphasis on Wilson as ornithologist and artist was much appreciated. This was held at St Philip & St James Church, Leckhampton, which has proved to be a very good venue for our talks this year, and we shall continue to use it until such time as we can once again hold our talks, events and, yes, our AGMs in The Wilson.

I have not yet mentioned what was in some ways the most significant event of the whole year for the Friends – the Reunion Reception held in the Pittville Pump Room on Thursday 7th October, by kind invitation of the Cheltenham Trust. This was certainly the largest gathering of the Friends during my four years as Chair: nearly 100 of you gathered to hear Loyd Grossman in conversation with Sue Pearce, discussing the importance of bodies such as Friends groups in helping to support and protect Britain's heritage. For several of you, those who had joined since March 2019, it was your first opportunity to meet other Friends and to hear our President, PJ Crook, emphasise the importance of the Friends as a community and in the community. I was very pleased, too, that the CEO of the Cheltenham Trust, Laurie Bell, was able to meet Friends face to face and to explain the Trust's present financial position, 2021 designated a year of Recovery after the struggle in 2020 to avoid insolvency following the peremptory shutting down of all the Trust's commercial activity; she also set out some of its future plans, both for The Wilson and for the Trust as a whole. I was very sorry to have to miss what I hoped would be a landmark occasion for the Friends, but I'm afraid my bout of Covid was as ill-timed as Prince Andrew's last week appears to have been providential.

I have one more thing to add about this past year. At the end of 2021, the idea was mooted by the Trust that we should agree a Memorandum of Understanding as a way of clarifying and re-setting the relationship between us. I was strongly in favour of this proposal, and I am glad to say that my fellow trustees were likewise supportive. So, too, was / is Cheltenham Borough Council; indeed Cllr Rowena Hay, the leader of the Council and Darren Knight, the Council's Executive Director of People and Change, have both made it clear that the Council would expect to be a co-signatory of any MoU between the Trust and the Friends of The Wilson, since it is of course the Council which 'owns' the collections on behalf of the people of Cheltenham. I wrote to Laurie Bell setting out the areas that we believed the document needed to address; Laurie thanked me for this and said that since the Trust's Culture and Communities Committee would be discussing a draft of the MoU at its February meeting, it would make sense for the Friends and the Trust to meet soon after that meeting.

Alas, there has been no meeting at all since that date, though I am grateful to the Council for recently offering to try and broker a meeting as soon as possible. I had hoped very much that the iterative process of agreeing the text of an MoU, mutually acceptable to the Trust, the Council and the Friends, would have been completed by the time I stepped down as Chair and, indeed, by the time the Art Gallery and Museum reopened.

I do understand the considerable pressures on the Trust to get the galleries reopened and to test out the exciting new café configuration, to launch the 'We are Creators initiative', to complete the long-delayed Reaccreditation process and to generate the momentum needed to ensure a sustainable future for the Wilson. The Friends understand all this; indeed we wholeheartedly support the Trust's commitment to the Wilson as Cheltenham's leading cultural hub; we have offered several times in the past two years to contribute both financially and in practical ways to the re-opening and towards generating the momentum of which I've just spoken. But I can only regret that in all this the Memorandum of Understanding has been sidelined – or so it feels – and the Friends of the Wilson likewise.

I hope that when my successor stands up to give her Chair's report this time next year she will be able to speak not only of a highly successful first year for the reopened Wilson, but also of an MoU agreed and signed by the Friends, the Trust and the Council, an Understanding leading to a genuine partnership in which the role of the Friends and our value to the Wilson will be fully recognized and articulated.

I want now briefly to look back on the four years of my chairmanship. It began almost immediately with an urgent request from the then CEO of the Trust for the Friends to underwrite for twelve months the salary of one of the curatorial team. We were warned that if we could not help the Trust in this way then one curator would be made redundant before the end of the summer. This was a difficult decision for us, and the trustees were not unanimous in supporting my recommendation that we should agree to make this commitment. Their argument – that if the Trust could not afford to pay its staff, then it should be looking to the Council and not to the Friends – was entirely reasonable.

However, I believe paying to retain the curator concerned was the right decision. To have lost one of The Wilson's most valuable human resources, an experienced curator with an unrivalled knowledge of key areas of the Museum's collection, would have been immensely damaging in both the short and longer terms. Nevertheless, we did make one important stipulation in agreeing to underwrite this salary: that our agreement to do this was not to set a precedent, and the Trust was to understand that we would not entertain future similar requests. At that time, of course we had no idea that the Pandemic would strike within two years.

The other important event of my first year as Chair was the launch of the Feasibility Study into options for what – ever since the latest extension of the Art Gallery and Museum that opened in 2013 – had been called the Phase 2 redevelopment. Again, the Trust had asked the Friends to fund this study (at a cost of £35,000) and this we had been pleased to do since any funding for further development of the kind projected would demand that a full Feasibility Study had been undertaken first. This Study, leading to what became known as the Purcell Report, was an excellent example of co-operation between the Friends and the Trust. We were fully represented on the working party that oversaw the Study's progress, and indeed, my agreement as Chair was required before each phase of the study was completed and payment for it released. You may remember in fact that the lead architect of the Purcell Report, Niall Phillips, was our own guest speaker in 2019, the last time we were able to hold our AGM in The Wilson.

I am pleased, too, that we have been able to make some significant additions to The Wilson's collections during my time as Chair: again in 2019, we were able to purchase both a key letter from George III about his forthcoming visit to Cheltenham in 1788 (this letter had previously been only on loan) and also a wonderfully indiscreet letter from Queen Charlotte about that same defining visit to Cheltenham. This letter had unexpectedly come up for auction and, with the approval of the Trust, I was able to bid (successfully) on behalf of the Friends for this item. These two letters subsequently featured in a special exhibition in the Open Archive, curated by Anne-Rachael Harwood, and you'll recall that we held a special – and specially enjoyable – Reception in the Summerfield Gallery which included a screening of the film, *The Madness of King George*, and a private view of the Open Archive exhibition. I should mention in passing that the Friends had also paid for the fitting out of the Summerfield gallery to be a pop-up cinema and we had paid for the upgrading and fitting out of the roof terrace leading off from the gallery. I hope very much that this will be soon reinstated as part of the re-opening.

Of course, the most significant acquisition by far that the Friends have been able to secure for The Wilson during the past four years is the Angelika Kauffmann portrait of John Rushout, 2nd Baron Northwick. He was, as you'll remember, one of the greatest British art collectors of the 18th and 19th centuries and the man who,

by opening his collection to the public in Thirlestaine House, made Cheltenham as famous for its art as it had previously been for its Spas.

I spoke about this acquisition at last year's online AGM and wrote about the painting in last summer's *Newsletter*, so I shall not rehearse the details again now. However, our ability as Friends of The Wilson, to help secure this important painting for the town during the paralysis provoked by the pandemic, and to have done this by raising £50,000 in grants (including £10,000 from our own funds) within less than a month, and by ensuring in the process that neither the Cheltenham Trust nor Cheltenham Borough Council had to contribute a penny to the purchase price; all of this was something that should give us, as The Friends of The Wilson, a real sense of achievement. This could not have been done, however, if Laurie Bell had not agreed to our acting as agents to try to secure the painting. I shall always be grateful to her for this. She and I have exchanged many emails over the past three years since she became CEO of the Trust, but I particularly treasure one she sent – after the purchase was safely achieved – to me and to Kirsty Hartsiotis thanking us for what we had done and assuring us that the picture should have 'pride of place when The Wilson reopens'. I can't tell you how much I'm looking forward to seeing this picture for this first time.

Kirsty, you'll remember, was the curator who undertook to come out of furlough (a cost met by the Friends) and write (against an impossibly tight deadline) the detailed and persuasive grant application to the Art Fund for a grant of £24,000 without which this picture would never have come to Cheltenham. Kirsty was also of course the curator of what I have no hesitation in calling the highlight exhibition during my time as Chair – the Ernest Gimson exhibition during the winter of 2019-2020.

The Reception and private view we were able to arrange on February 24th – to thank Kirsty, The Wilson, and the Cheltenham Trust for making this show possible – was almost the last Friends' event in the Art Gallery and Museum before the first Lockdown a month later. Not quite the last; three weeks later an afternoon lecture about Ruskin and Venice, held in the Friends' Gallery, gave us all I think a real sense of the Friends at home. And that is a feeling I hope we can recapture before long, when The Wilson reopens.

Collections and their curators matter. No museum or art gallery can survive without them. Curators don't just care for the collections, they care about them, and we need to thank them for doing so. I have mentioned (all too briefly) Anne-Rachael, and I have mentioned Kirsty, but there is a third member of the Collections team to whom I want to turn now. Sophia Wilson retired last month after a career at The Wilson spanning 32 years. A record? I don't know, but I think it's likely. I wrote about Sophie's departure in the latest *Newsletter*, and I made the point that curators build up not just expertise but also knowledge; with their departure, therefore, there is always a danger of that deep knowledge of a museum's collections and of a museum's aims and values being lost. For Friends whose memory of the Art Gallery and Museum goes back to the 1990s and beyond, Sophie is always associated with the Costume Collection that used to be displayed at Pittville Pump Room. I wrote about that in the January *Newsletter*.

I belong to the generation of Friends who have never seen the Costume Collection, except for a few individual items displayed from time to time in the Museum, but the collection still exists and is carefully conserved and items from it are often loaned to other museums. And Sophie has been responsible for it all. But not just that, for more than twenty years she has been the person with overall responsibility for almost all the exhibitions, in-house and external, that have been put on. Many she has curated herself. Her contribution to The Wilson and to the cultural life of Cheltenham has been exceptional and, strictly speaking, irreplaceable. I am delighted to say that the trustees have felt it fitting to Mark Sophia's retirement by making a presentation to her on behalf of you all. So before I conclude my own Report, I'd like to invite

George Breeze, who as Director of Cheltenham Art Gallery at the time was the person who appointed Sophia to become a curator here in the first place, to make the presentation at this point.

[*Presentation to Sophie Wilson*]

'Let your last thinks be all thanks'. So said the poet WH Auden at the end of this life, and my last thoughts as Chair should nearly all be thanks too. I want first to thank my fellow trustees – those who were already on the committee before I became Chair, and those who have become trustees in the past four years.

John Beard was Secretary during the whole of Hilary Simpson's four-year term, so he has more than earned the right to step down, with the thanks of us all. No committee can thrive without a good secretary and John is one of the best I have ever worked with.

Martin Renshaw and I became members of the Friends at more or less the same time – indeed, we first met at a New Members evening held in what will now be the new Irving Community Gallery but was then the mezzanine annexe to the café. He has been in his time both Newsletter editor and Membership Secretary, and for the past two years he has combined both roles as he has continued to be in effect the business manager and assistant editor to Alex Boulton. Alex has proved to be an excellent editor, as I have said in the latest *News Update*, where I've had to announce the sad news that she will have to give up after the September issue. Alex and I and all of us owe Martin a special vote of thanks for everything he has contributed to the Friends, especially – from my point of view – during these difficult past two years.

Jaki Davis has now completed six years as a trustee – a role she has combined with being a senior trustee of the Cheltenham Trust too. Her role in acting both as a link and also, from time to time, in helping each Trust to understand the other's point of view has been invaluable, and I want to think John and Martin and Jaki on your behalf for all they have done for the Friends.

No Chair can sleep easily without having complete confidence in his Treasurer. I have been very fortunate to have worked with two excellent treasurers – first Mark Holliday and, for the past three years, Liz Giles. If I say that our accounts are in excellent order – as I hope you'll agree very shortly – and that Liz has a gift for making the accounts clear enough even for me to feel confident I have understood them fully, that is intended as high praise. I'm very grateful, Liz, for your support and your ability to speak your mind without making me quake in my boots too badly. To all the trustees, indeed, I owe a great deal – and so do we all.

But as I indicated earlier there are others without whom the Friends could hardly function at all. This is especially true of the Events Group, led by Sue Pearce, but each of its members contributes in very special ways as individuals too. Sue Reeves has for a long time been in charge of distributing the newsletter by post – a much more complex operation than it may sound – and is also one of our team of group leaders for outings; Alison Pascoe works with Martha Alleguen on bookings for talk, outings and events, and I am always glad to hear appreciative comments about their helpfulness to members who have questions or problems with their bookings. I have never heard a single complaint about this aspect of the Friends' work. This in itself is cause for gratitude to them for the work they do on our behalf.

I must add a special thanks at this point to Martha Alleguen. Two years ago, it became clear that since we could no longer meet face to face we needed to be able to communicate with members more regularly than just three times a year via the *Newsletter*. Hence the monthly *News Updates* which I have written, and not one of these would have appeared without Martha's editorial skill and her excellent eye for page layout. She has never complained (to me at least) when I have been late with sending her my copy and has always been

able to send out the final MailChimp within twenty-four hours. My admiration is as great as my gratitude is deep.

There is one other group, some of whom are here this evening, whom I wish to thank publicly for support that they give privately, and that is our patrons. Originally the title of patron was one intended as a way of recognising significant donors to The Wilson. I am pleased to say that the patrons with whom I deal most regularly are long-standing members of the Friends who bring particular skills and backgrounds to their role which often – and behind the scenes – is to act as advocates for the Friends and to help with particular issues. Collectively and individually they are great ambassadors for The Wilson and for the Friends, and I want to say clearly that their support has often been a great help to me while I have been Chair.

But as I now leave the chair, and hand over with every good wish to Ro Kaye I have a last word to say to the Cheltenham Trust. I look forward very much to the reopening of The Wilson and I am confident that the Friends will be warm in their appreciation of the café, the new community gallery and the rehung displays. I look forward very much to hearing that the promised Memorandum of Understanding has been agreed and signed; this will ensure that our relationship with you and with Cheltenham Borough Council really has been re-set as a genuine partnership.

And since all partnerships must be based on trust, please trust us; don't marginalise us; let us work together. There is a great deal of goodwill towards The Wilson and The Friends are one of the main conduits for that goodwill. Our collective memory back a long way; we believe strongly in the importance of The Wilson and its collections; we have, too, a strong attachment to the history of The Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum. But we want, at the same time, to look forward; we want to work closely with the Cheltenham Trust once again to ensure The Wilson recovers rapidly from its prolonged closure and moves ahead in ways that give the people of Cheltenham and beyond much to be proud of, much to cherish, and much for which to say thank you.



Adrian Barlow
Monday 6 June 2022