



Chair's Report

39th AGM, 2nd October 2019

It does not seem so very long ago that I wrote last year's report, and on reviewing it I was pleased to see so many promises fulfilled: our 50th Anniversary celebration at West Dean College last September was a glorious and enjoyable day; we have a smart new lectern; Bury C of E Primary School has a lovely new arts studio, opened in June; the first round of Dr. Andrew Edney Bursaries has been awarded; and we have sponsored a performance for children as part of the Petworth Festival. We have also, in conjunction with other Societies in the West Sussex Area, doubled our contribution towards the studies of two West Dean College students for the coming year. So much good work done!

Yet these are just bonus activities. Our monthly lectures remain the backbone of our Society and the primary reason why our membership remains strong. Talks have once more ranged far and wide across countries, centuries and disciplines. Two of them received a clear score of 'Outstanding' on the basis of your feedback, the highest we can award. I am so glad we were able to reschedule for August the lecture on Opera we had to cancel in April due to a small fire in the Hall. The Special Interest Days, one on the Silk Road, the other on the Art and Architecture of the American West were both excellent and well-attended. We spent a blustery November day on our pre-Christmas coach trip to Brighton and sunnier times at Chartwell, in London and Whitchurch, all fun and inspiring days out.

Your 2019/20 programme is now complete and a short preview enclosed for your information. As much as possible, we have taken on board your suggestions. Please bear with us if your request has not (yet) been included. We have to book speakers two years in advance in order to ensure we get exactly who and what we want. Do keep your ideas coming; this is *your* Society.

The fun doesn't stop there, however, because no sooner have we recovered from the 50th anniversary celebration of the Arts Society as a whole than another important milestone presents itself: The Arts Society South Downs turns 40 next year! I am truly blessed to be presiding over both... We will mark the occasion with a summer evening event and have engaged Andrew Graham-Dixon, the well-known art historian, art critic, journalist and broadcaster to speak to us on the subject of his most recent in-depth study, Caravaggio. The talk will take place in the lecture theatre at Midhurst Rother College and will be ticketed, open to the public and followed by drinks and canapés as the sun sets in a cloudless sky (also booked!). The date to save in your diaries is Wednesday, the 29th of July 2020. As members you will of course have priority for obtaining tickets, at a reduced price.

Filled by joy and anticipation at this exciting news as you now undoubtedly are, you will, I calculate, mind less if I announce a long-overdue increase to our membership fee from the £40 it has remained for several years to £45. The fee for visitors to our talks will also rise from £5 to £6. This is due to an increase in lecturers' fees. You may recall we were able to keep your contributions down for the past year only by using some of Andrew Edney's generous gift to our Society. We cannot keep using those funds for the day-to-day running of the Society, as this would be neither sustainable, nor in keeping with the remit of the Arts Society as an organisation which supports art and craft-related activities in the community, which, as you know, we have also done. A little more detail here:

The refurbishment of the Bury Primary School arts studio was completed in June and celebrated with an Open Day, during which attendees were also treated to an impromptu musical rendition by the children. Many thanks to Sally Cosby, who spent

many an hour in that room, creating a charming South Downs landscape to match the view from the windows.

The Dr. Andrew Edney Bursary we have established with Chichester-based charity Outside In attracted eleven applications when it was launched in April. Three artists were selected to receive £500 each. One of them is vision impaired, the other two have autism. Our thanks go to Tuema Pattie for agreeing to represent our Society on Outside In's selection panel for this first, ground-breaking year.

Along with other Sussex Arts Societies, we sponsored Samuel Matthews, a budding furniture maker and restorer, to study at West Dean College last year. His comprehensive report, which you can read on our website under *News*, describes his projects and the great variety of skills he has learnt, ranging from computer aided design to gilding. He was even able to join a one-week study visit to Vienna.

While I mention our website: congratulations to all those of you who continue to visit it, or who have at least a firm intention of doing so in the near future. Let me draw your attention in particular to the *Feedback* icon on the home page (password: Fittleworth), which allows you to comment on lectures. You can also find and print out booking forms for excursions under *Visits* and see photos of past events in the *Gallery*. Do take a look!

The parking situation at the Hall continues to be challenging due to the sheer volume of traffic and number of cars and is now the subject of discussion by the Parish Council in consultation with the Hall Committee, the Primary School and the Community Shop. As the largest Hall user, we need to be particularly careful not to upset the residents and park thoughtfully on village roads. It is accepted that we generally do so, but we are asked to be mindful of accessibility to residents' driveways and visibility at junctions. Please take extra care; there is no easy solution. Apologies for the less than ideal situation.

We will again see changes to our committee this year. This will not be news to you, as I have been quite vocal on the subject of becoming involved and putting your hands up. We are delighted that some of you have answered my siren call, but there is still space at the table for more, so don't be shy! We are fortunate indeed that Nicky Donker, Pauline Gow, Hilary Maddock, Jane Allison and Julie Rudkin have all agreed to stay on in their respective roles of Special Interest Day Coordinator, Programme Secretary, Membership Secretary, Visits Coordinator and Publicity and Marketing Coordinator. We are, as ever, appreciative of our Technical Team, who never fail to coax picture and sound from an occasionally reluctant system and thank them for their continued support. Lois Wright and Kay Hughes are standing down from the key roles of Treasurer and Society Secretary after four and two years respectively. We thank them for their first-rate contributions to the team and wish them well for future ventures.

My sincere thanks go to all our stalwart helpers, both those in positions on the committee and those who help us out time and again in various ways in the kitchen, at the booking table and with gorgeous flower arrangements. We couldn't do without you, and you are very much appreciated.

Here's to an entertaining and enlightening new lecture year 2019/20!

Susanne Haywood
Chair

