

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT, AGM 2018

2018 marks the founding of our organisation and all that has grown from the seed planted by a pioneering group of housewives in the Chiltern Hills 50 years ago. Today we're an international charity with our branches reaching throughout the UK, into the Channel Islands, spreading into Mainland Europe then across to Penang and down to New Zealand. There are 90,000 members in 387 Societies with thousands more in our associate organisation in Australia; we're delighted that their National Treasurer, Felicity Mauger is with us today.

Inevitably as we approached our Golden Anniversary, we've been planning celebrations but there's also been time to reflect on what we've achieved - and look forward to what we want to accomplish in years to come.

We started life as the Chiltern Antiques Group, then in 1968 the first 11 Societies became NADFAS, then last year we became The Arts Society. To date 84% of Societies have changed their name – that's 5 out of 6 already. This includes, our Number One Society, Chiltern – Patricia Fay's own Society – I was delighted to hear that particular news, it would have been inconceivable to me that they wouldn't share the same name.

This January, for the first time in my 3-years Chairmanship, almost the whole Board was overnight in London on the same day with no extra meetings – betwixt the Board Meeting and the Launch of our Jazz Exhibition at Two Temple Place. By extreme good fortune, this coincided with Chiltern Society's Patricia Fay Memorial Lecture and the start of Florian's fund-raising Running the Arts project - and we were all invited down to Buckinghamshire. As anticipated, the lecture was excellent but, more than that, we were overwhelmed by the warm welcome we were given – that inclusiveness and generosity of spirit is a huge part of what we members value.

At last year's hubs, when we first introduced the new name we promised that even though we'd look and sound a little different, we would still retain those same core values.

- We'd still offer the same quality of experience in education and conservation.
- We'd continue to enable access to our unrivalled Directory of excellent lecturers
- We'd continue to support our Societies to discover and connect to the arts and to each other.
- We'd ensure that heritage has a future through conservation and preservation
- We'd continue to support the skills of tomorrow's artists and makers.

And we have been true to those promises:

We have more lecturers in the Directory than ever before – and an even wider range of subjects – we've responded to our members' interest in all aspects of the Arts along the

spectrum. This year 38 new lecturers have been recruited and there are now well over 3,000 topics on offer. 4,100 lectures have been given and 850 study days – 83% were rated outstanding or excellent. But Societies' imaginative programmes only happen because of all our dedicated volunteers and your commitment is the key to The Arts Society's success. On behalf of all your members I thank you.

Our Volunteering arms are expanding all the time:

More Church Recorders are recording the past, safeguarding it for the future – there are currently 2,300 volunteers. They will work in any place of worship – all denominations and all religions. Their efforts continue to add substantially to the 1,800 Churches already registered.

Over the past years, Church Trails have moved beyond places of worship; they became Children's Trails, then there were trails for people with dementia and other community projects; they've recently developed into Trails of Discovery to reflect their wider reach. It's hoped these will grow in the future – maybe creating Trails for Historic Houses or between local artworks. The possibilities are as endless as the imagination.

There are even more members committed to Heritage Volunteering with 1,700 volunteers worldwide, helping to conserve and protect the artistic and cultural heritage within their local communities. They're helping in museums, galleries and historic houses – anywhere they can make a difference.

Then, of course, more Young Arts Projects. Young Arts have been part of our DNA for over 40 years. I met recently with Lady Anne White, who was with NADFAS at its very beginning. Anne originally formed the Junior Museums Club in London and still speaks enthusiastically of the formation of junior groups in 1972 with the guidance of June Fenwick. Support for Young Arts is as relevant today as it was then. Projects funded range from the performing arts, through musical experiences and workshops to enabling the young to create their own works of art.

The skills and dedication of our outstanding volunteers are respected throughout the Arts world. In these days of constraints on Arts funding, their knowledge and skills are more necessary than ever before – without their involvement many museums, galleries, historic houses and archives couldn't survive.

When I go to external events to talk about The Arts Society – it surprises me that the least known of our activities are our Grants schemes. Last year our volunteers donated half a million hours of their time for the public good – if we were to apply the recognised financial value to their time given – it would amount to £7.5 million pounds.

In addition to the grants given at Society and Area level over £100,000 was awarded in grants from the Patricia Fay Memorial Fund and this year there is lots of fund-raising to increase

that to an even more impressive total. We continue to support tomorrow's creative artists and makers and we'll see evidence of that later when dancers from the Central Ballet School perform for us and we hear about Alex Bishop's custom-made, hand crafted guitars.

I began by saying the Golden Anniversary should encourage us to look forward to what we want to accomplish in years to come. As I've said before the members are the lifeblood of this charity and a key objective for the Board is growth – through traditional Societies and through innovative ways to communicate with new audiences.

Since I became Chairman in 2015, 10 New Societies have been created – we have a winning formula and we can and should add more. We want more people to have access to the experiences we all enjoy through our Societies. From cave paintings to Canaletto to Canary Wharf, Art has been around us and part of life for thousands of years. For The Arts Society, the belief that the Arts are essential to enriching people's lives will always be at the very heart of who we are.

Picasso said: "Art washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life". The Arts are for Everyone. The Arts Society is here for everyone. At the end of this afternoon I shall be handing over the Chairmanship and I shall take that message with me; I hope you will too.

**June Robinson, Outgoing National Chairman
May 2018**