

## The Arts Society Chester Committee Report

It is an exceptionally long time since our last AGM held in October 2022 so there is a lot to report on. Therefore I have included with the report contributions from the individual committee teams outlining work, activities etc they have organised on behalf of the membership.

I will now provide a general overview.

This has been a busy and fruitful period. Following the possibility of closure of the society due to falling membership, financial viability issues and a lack of Committee officers several members stepped forward and we were able to form a new Committee and the Society was able to continue into 2023/2024.

This new Committee took on the challenge of making the society more attractive to possible new members, aiming to increase the membership to a minimum of 250 and so address the financial viability issue. We returned post pandemic to meeting in person which has helped us bond and gain in confidence and meetings are vibrant and proactive. Some positions are now shared which enables a team approach and shares responsibilities and workload.

During the summer of 2023, after studying what other successful Societies were doing, Alison Dawson, who came onto the Committee to do Website and technical administration, completely overhauled, and updated the website. She also devised a new colourful programme for members, which also served as a publicity leaflet saving valuable costs. It has been widely applauded and appreciated by many members, and also other Societies who have asked for copies. It has been given to prospective new members and distributed to venues across Chester. A new lecture programme for 2023-2024 was also swiftly organised by Val Shannon and the varied lectures have mainly proved excellent or outstanding.

Consequently, we have, despite a further fall in members at the beginning of the 2023-4 season, increased membership from 200 to 237 nearly achieving our set minimum target.

We have tried to improve the social side of the Society, particularly important for newer members and held a Christmas relaxed sandwich lunch between the Christmas lectures in December. Future events will be planned, and any ideas gratefully received.

A coffee morning was held in February for new members. Sue Heather, the Society Honorary President joined us and helped us at this, and it was an enjoyable morning.

There has been an excellent programme of visits and two outstanding study days planned by the Event's organisers; Madeleine and Pam, now joined by Eileen Warren who will sort the hospitality side.

The Committee has sent representatives to the NorthWest Area Spring and Autumn meetings where we have had valuable help gained ideas and networked with other Societies.

A huge thank you is due to the members of the Committee who have now retired, after many years keeping the Society going: Jenny Rogers stepped down from Chair in June 2023, after serving as Secretary and Chair and we thank her for all her hard work through this difficult period. Ann Ashton stayed on till December 2023 to allow a seamless handover to Kevin Barnett. Ann has been a tireless Committee member and a support to all. Kevin has since worked extremely hard on simplifying and modernising the accounts system hence the proposed change to the constitution.

Caroline Robinson , who had a productive and successful period as Community Arts Officer, also stayed till December 2023 to support the new team. Lea and Mary's projects are flourishing, as their report shows

Bruce and Ruth Lane, who had already served many years on the committee, valiantly returned to help us with the Membership Secretary role and have left this in excellent shape for Gillian Roe to take over next season. Ruth will retire from the committee but thankfully Bruce will continue for another year as a general member to help as needed.

I took over as Chair in June 2023. Unfortunately, I am moving to the South East and so cannot continue after this season. We will have a shared chair until a new chair takes over.

We hope further members will join us on the committee. Please approach us if you want to help in any way, even if it is not as a full committee member - it is rewarding and enjoyable and an opportunity to make new friendships.

Thank you to all members for your continuing support and we look forward to another great season in September.

Sheila Lister

Chair

Individual reports:

### **Community Art projects 2023/2024**

We are currently progressing with 3 very worthwhile projects.

Highfield Primary School – who will be decorating the boundary school fence with the pupils – this project has been funded 100% by Chester Art Society raffle ticket sales

HM Thorn Cross – Purchase of guitars for guitar lessons for the prisoners – this project is hopefully being funded 100% by Head Office Art Society.

Trena Cox - A project which is currently involving various charities to create and install daisy structures – this project has been funded by North Regional Office Art Society in the sum of £300 and the Chester Art Society £200 from raffle ticket sales.

We have recently funded an after school club for a year in Blacon, which included an Xmas Card for the Lord Mayor of Chester.

We also funded the Unity Centre for a display of various craft work including a sign showing Welcome in various languages.

We couldn't do any of this without the purchase of raffle tickets purchased by the Art Society Chester Members, for which we thank you for your generosity.

Lea McGee and Mary Carter Community Project Team

The Arts Society Chester

## **Events Report September 2023 – June 2024**

This has been a busy year with three trips, two social events and one Day of Special interest. The first trip, on 1st November, was to The Golden Mummies of Egypt exhibition at Manchester Museum. We had a very interesting, guided tour and time to view the mummies and other exhibits at our leisure.

On 20<sup>th</sup> March we visited the Shakespeare North theatre for a guided tour of the theatre, lunch and the play Richard, My Richard by Phillipa Gregory.

Our final trip will be on 4<sup>th</sup> June to Yorkshire Sculpture Park for a guided tour, free time to visit exhibits and lunch. We will have the opportunity to study works by Lelilah Babirye, Yukihiro Akama, Jonathan Baddock and Damien Hirst.

On 20<sup>th</sup> February we hosted 'A Day of Special Interest'. Dr Paul Roberts took us on a tour of the eastern and southern fringes of the Roman Empire. He is an outstanding lecturer and as a result all present enjoyed a memorable day that was amusing, informative and moving. For those who had been to 'The Mummies in Manchester' it was interesting to learn so much about the art of painted faces on mummies. The lecture on Palmyra was unforgettable.

The Committee thought it would be a good idea to introduce some events to help facilitate more social interaction within the Society. The first event was a buffet lunch between morning and afternoon lectures in December and the second was a coffee morning for new members in February.

Madeleine Lane, Pam Hamill and Eileen Warren: Events Organisers

## **Membership Team Report**

The membership renewal process has been actively managed, and the membership has grown from 200 to 237. Many thanks to everybody for this wonderful achievement. The membership numbers along with other measures such as gift aid returns have greatly addressed the concerns about the future viability of the Society.

Bruce and Ruth Lane: Joint Programme Organisers

## **Programme Report**

When I took over the role in November 2023, the programme had already been planned and bookings made by Fiona, my predecessor, up to June 2023. I was responsible for booking the 2023-4 speakers after consultation with Alison, Sheila and Mary, all of whom attended the 2023 Directory Day. I was unable to attend the event due to a prior commitment. Alison joined me as Joint Programme Organiser, responsible for technical support, input to the website, and for producing the current programme in record time last summer.

**2022-3 season:**

Only one lecturer, Alik Braine, had to cancel, in March 2023, because of an unanticipated hospital stay. However she gave us plenty of notice, and also suggested her colleague, Leslie Primo, as a rather expensive replacement! . His lecture on Vermeer went down well, and Alik is coming to talk to us on the subject 'Art is Dead: long live photography 'in November 2024.

All except one of the speakers between November 2022 and May 2023 were rated Excellent or Outstanding by our audiences. Our June Speaker, Caroline Holmes, who spoke about Cedric Morris, was rated Very Good. The wonderful Paul Roberts has of course already made a return visit.

**2023-24 season:**

So far, all our speakers have been rated Very Good/Excellent/Outstanding. Simon Whitehouse, who entertained us with a wonderful lecture on Oscar Wilde, has been invited back again. Speakers are booked up to January 2025 plus March 2025 and Sept 25. I hope to fill the remaining gaps after Directory Day on 16<sup>th</sup> March. A small group will meet to make the final selection for our next programme, hopefully completing bookings at least up to Xmas 2025.

Val Shannon: Programme Secretary