



CHAIRS' REPORT 2019/20

Katharine Odlum
& Julie Thomas

Looking back to October 2019 and the start of last year seems like looking back at another world. What a complete change of life from then to now.

We started our new year in October 2019 with a highly successful drinks party welcoming our new members at the recently refurbished Rausing Building in Malmesbury. It gave the committee a chance to meet new members in a lovely setting with time to socialise.

Our two Special Interest Days were their usual success. The first was held in November 2019 at the Sherston Congregational Church where we met for three lectures on Genre painting in the Dutch Golden Age. Sophie Oosterwijk, the Dutch lecturer, informed and educated us in a very entertaining way.

Our second Special Interest Day in February was on the 'Art of Colour in Garden Design' when Timothy Walker held us spellbound while he went into detail and used the example of planting design at the Oxford Botanical Gardens in ways to bring colour into our gardens. Both days were beautifully organised by Anna Montague-Jones and we send her our huge thanks.

Thanks to the organisational skills of our Visits Secretary, Biddy Hadfield, we visited Bristol in January and had a very entertaining time at the Bristol Old Vic and then after a delicious lunch we walked to the New Room, John Wesley's chapel.

We managed to hold our last lecture in March and then Covid stopped everything. Our planned trips to Thenford and Broughton Castle in June and then to Sezincote and Bourton House in July had to be cancelled and all our monthly lectures halted. These visits have been postponed to later this year and our trip to Holland has also been postponed until after Easter 2021 – we hope!

I ended my tenure as Chair at the end of July and Julie Thomas took over – what a baptism of fire she has had but I knew when I met her that she would be a wonderful Chair and so she has proven to be. Julie has had a steep learning curve to ensure that she has the knowledge to lead us into the virtual world of Zoom and Webinars, words entering our everyday vocabulary for the first time. Julie will now take over from me to let you know of past events in 2020 and future plans.

Well, what can I say! I must start of course by thanking Katharine for the wonderful job she has done as Chair of our Arts Society for the last 5 years. Our reputation as a friendly, welcoming society is down to her leadership and I am honoured to be taking over from her. She thankfully agreed to stay on as Vice Chair and I couldn't have managed without her and the rest of the amazing committee who have rallied round and embraced this strange world we currently live in. The context of Covid 19 has impacted on all Arts Societies and after the committee took the decision to cancel the lecture programme for April, May, June, July 2020 we buckled down to what we should do next.

Committee members have:

- Engaged by phone with all members during Spring 2020
- Run a successful membership renewal programme (total membership currently 184)
- Used Mailchimp to keep in touch with members and promote all online opportunities
- Run a successful members' visit to Bourton House Gardens (18 August 2020) in line with social distancing and on a self-driving basis
- Run Zoom drop in training to ensure Zoom capable members (19 members took part)
- Delivered monthly Zoom lectures from September onwards – from Paris' absinthe fuelled café culture to the Genius of Beethoven
- Planned and delivered monthly virtual tours/experiences additional to the lecture programme
- Marketed opportunities offered by HQ such as the Live Lunchtime Lecture series
- Updated our website - theartsocietyofmalmesbury.org.uk – for which many thanks Tony Hadfield
- Stayed in touch with non-Zoom members
- Started planning for safe return to Crudwell Village Hall – for which thank you Jean Robinson

The above has been enabled by extensive engagement with and support from The Arts Society HQ which has helped us to maximise our knowledge and understanding of Zoom and the potential that it offers us as an affordable, effective tool in the current context and potentially as an adjunct to our core offering into the future.

I want to note and thank the lecturers and speakers who have risen to the challenge of Zoom and online speaking and provided us with the usual expected high standard of knowledge, expertise and insight. In some of those early preparatory phone calls, they were as nervous as us! I would also like to thank Lesley Auden for the fantastic programme she has put together for us as Programme Secretary over the last 5 years and Denise Gibson, who has taken over as Programme Secretary and has 'juggled' the programme to ensure we have lecturers who are comfortable with Zoom as well as planning forward in the absence of a 2020 Directory Day.

As you can see, your committee has achieved a lot and I thank all of them for their commitment and support. I haven't got space to mention them all here by name but must note that our treasurer, Alan Hopkins has modelled numerous scenarios for us, Judy Little has admirably managed our membership including welcoming new members from Cirencester and Maggi Stamp Loshak has stepped back from the committee having long been a valued member of it. I know the work of the committee has been happily done because the feedback we get from you our members is so fantastic. From the phone calls supporting our proposed direction of travel to the lecture feedback and emails we receive we know how much members enjoy being a part of this wonderful society and now let's look forward to life becoming more normal as we get properly into 2021.

Next steps

We are holding a virtual AGM on Tuesday 9 February as we were obviously unable to hold our usual AGM in October and we will do all the usual 'business' then, however we would also like to explore with members whether in a post Covid world we should exactly return to normal or expand our core offering slightly to include different options which could be:

1. Lectures in the village hall + Special Interest Days + Visits (return to Normal)
2. As Option 1 + also make live lectures available via Zoom (for those unable to attend on that day)
3. As Option 2 + Virtual tours programme @ e.g. £5 per virtual offer

Note: Options 2 and 3 could help with current car parking capacity and may help with membership recruitment and retention, however there is still lots to explore re wifi speeds etc at the village hall.

We will use the 'polling' function in Zoom as part of the AGM and test out your thinking on these options.

If you have any questions for Katharine or me, please do not hesitate to get in contact, or ask us at the AGM on 9th February at 1.40pm.

With very best wishes for a happy, safe 2021

Your Chairs

Katharine Odlum & Julie Thomas