

Chairman's Report 2023-2024

Thank you for coming this morning and for your continued support.

At present we have 270 members. We would like to have more names on the waiting list so do please invite guests to our meetings and hopefully they might like to join us.

As always your Committee have worked tirelessly to organise our lectures, events, visits and days of special interest. My thanks to each of them for all the support they have given me and the Society. But today, of course, I must particularly thank Janet Carrington, our Treasurer over the last nine years. Janet has done a fantastic job and I can only admire the way she has kept the accounts, explained the details at Committee meetings, coped with banking queries and all with endless patience and a smile. Thank you so much, Janet.

Recently we were absolutely delighted and relieved to have a Society member offer to take on the role of Treasurer. Barbara Lane will be a valued member of the Committee, very many thanks Barbara, and welcome.

As Janet said, we also extend our thanks to our Financial Examiner, John Humberston, who is retiring after a number of years. In John's place we are very pleased to welcome David Mann. Many thanks to David, too.

It is always reassuring to arrive at the hall to find that Lee has put out the chairs and that Marion Oliver is preparing to serve your coffee. Our technical team arrive to set up for the lecture. Ian Locks, Ken Faulkner and Tony Heagren, with assistance from Graham Hayden, are stalwarts in facing any problems that come their way.

To all these helpers and to all of you who volunteer in any way, be it on one of our projects or answering a call to help with coffee, I extend my thanks.

This year's lecture programme, put together by Linda Cox, has been as varied and interesting as ever, from St Peter's Basilica to Banksy, Brunel and London Bridged. Diana Meteyard set up two popular and sociable days of special interest. We have also enjoyed an afternoon tea and Society visits, some actual and some virtual, devised by our visits organisers Gill Mann and Rita Bishop. Amongst others we have been to Maldon and to the British Museum. We have walked through Covent Garden and we have strolled virtually through Chelsea. We have recently returned from another great holiday, organised by Lis Goodwin, this time to Durham and the surrounding area, where we enjoyed a wonderfully varied itinerary in beautiful sunshine.

To keep you all up-to-date with what is happening in our Society, in Essex area and nationally, Susan Smith, with help from Elizabeth Nash, has been working on The Arts Society West Essex website. It is a wonderful platform. Please visit it and enjoy all the news items, articles and illustrated talks as well as our calendar of events and news of our volunteering projects.

BUT, once again, we are sending out a request for your help. We need someone who is willing to keep the website updated. The person would not necessarily need to be a member but we do need someone as a Digital Lead. It would not be an arduous task for somebody with skills in this field. Please tell us if you know someone who might be interested.

Our volunteers play a vital part in the charitable side of the Society and we do appreciate all your efforts. We have volunteers who knit and sew for the Christian Drama Resource Centre, some who have prepared rooms for Copped Hall Open Days, and one who conserves documents at the Quaker Library at The Friends' House

A team is busy working on the next consignment of 100 craft bags to be delivered to the food bank in time to be given to children for Christmas. This really is an ongoing project in which members make interesting and fun items for the children to enjoy.

Our very exciting news in July was that our Trails of Discovery Team, led by Diana and Hugh Meteyard and Elizabeth Nash, had won this year's group award presented by the Marsh Trust. What an accolade. The Marsh Charitable Trust donates prizes in various fields of charity work. Our team had not only completed various church trails and two garden trails at Copped Hall but had also encouraged another Society to start a trail. Diana and Hugh had also completed two Essex area trails at Chelmsford Cathedral. Many congratulations to everyone involved. Also in the summer The Arts Society elected a new Trustee Board and the CEO and COO resigned. Hopefully there will be new officers in post soon.

TASWE has sent various donations to local groups to support their work. We donated the proceeds of our coffee collection to St Clare Hospice at Christmas. During the year we have again donated a prize to the Essex Young Musician of the Year competition and have given display boards for use by Epping Forest Primary Schools Creative Network and Copped Hall. We have continued to support CDRC and VAEF Ace Activities as well as donating to the Gibberd Garden and Epping Forest Museum. We have also funded the craft bags from your donations.

Thank you all for renewing your subscriptions, and I hope you are looking forward to another year of inspirational talks and camaraderie. As I come to the end of my time as Chairman I would like to reiterate my thanks to the Committee. I have really enjoyed working with you all. The last three years has flown by. You as Society members can appreciate what vital support I have had from the Committee, not least from Valerie Locks, our Secretary who sends out the newsletters and our publicity, who has kept me on the straight and narrow when I have been tempted to stray. And also from others when I have dared to mention one of my "good ideas"!

I am delighted that Elizabeth Nash has agreed to take on the mantle of Chairman. She is following in the footsteps of Peggy, her mother, and I know she will be excellent in the post. She has a passion for art, a background in craft and design and is enthusiastic about growing the Society and introducing the latest technology. Elizabeth, thank you so much. I know you will have as much support as I have had, I wish you as much enjoyment and friendship as I have had, and as much fun as I have had.

Thank you all.