



## THE CHELSEA SOCIETY

### CHAIRMAN'S REPORT TO THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE CHELSEA SOCIETY HELD ON 24<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2014

1. Mr President, Vice-Presidents, Members of the Council, Members of the Society and Honoured Guests. It is my privilege to address you for the third occasion on the affairs of the Society in what has been another active year. Amongst our many distinguished attendees here this evening, I would like to welcome particularly our Vice-President: the Mayor of the Royal Borough, Councillor Maighread Condon-Simmonds. I know that the Member of Parliament for Chelsea and Fulham, the Right Honourable Greg Hands MP was also hoping to be here but he has been detained by Parliamentary business. In addition, I welcome our Honorary Vice-President David Le Lay.
2. It has been another extremely busy and very active year and in my view the Members of the Council have excelled themselves in relation to the time and effort that they have put in to the affairs of the Society. As I pointed out last year, none of the members of the Council receive any remuneration for their time and effort and we rely wholly on people who are prepared to give up their valuable time for the benefit of Chelsea.
3. This year, three very prominent and long standing executive members of the Council have decided to retire.
4. First there is Patricia Burr, the Hon Assistant Secretary since 2003 and a member of the Council for some 14 years. Patricia has been particularly involved in recruiting and managing our volunteers and, certainly since I have been a Chairman of the Council, I have been constantly surprised at her ability to cajole, encourage and occasionally perhaps even bribe supporters of the Society to act as volunteers at our events. I shall be returning to this theme a little later but without such volunteers the Society simply could not function and we owe Patricia (and her volunteers) a considerable debt of gratitude for that role. In addition she has arranged the annual meeting of Residents Associations with representatives of RBK&C which has proved an excellent forum for the debate of important issues affecting the Borough.



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Although sadly I was unable to attend this year's meeting, I have had only positive reports about it and it was, as you would expect, very effectively chaired by Terence Bendixson.

5. I remember that, when I was first appointed as Chairman of the Council, Terence told me that he was standing down as the Hon Planning Secretary and that I would need to find his replacement. As an incoming Chairman that is not what you want to hear, particularly in relation to a role which is so pivotal to the work of the Society. Somehow I have managed to persuade him to keep going over the last two or three years but I am sad to say that he has now decided to take the final curtain call. Terence has been a member of the Council since 1999 and has been our Hon Planning Secretary for the last 14 years. If you just think back over that period, you will understand that he has been involved in all of the most important planning issues that have come up in Chelsea this century. He has never been afraid to confront controversy and has always been very clear about what he believes is in the best interests of Chelsea as a place. We have not always agreed about that but he is passionate about Chelsea as a place to work, live and play. His contribution to the work of the Society and indeed to Chelsea has been immense. Fortunately, we do not lose him entirely as he is staying on as a member of the Council where we shall have the continuing benefit of his wise counsel.
  
6. To misquote Oscar Wilde, it might be said that to lose two long-standing executive members of the Council in one year can be regarded as a misfortune; to lose three looks like carelessness. Where do I start with Carrie Starren? Well I suppose to some extent in the same place as Terence. She also made it clear to me when I was appointed Chairman that she also would be standing down as the Hon Editor and I needed to find her replacement. Over the last couple of years I cajoled, persuaded and sometimes even begged her to keep going. Carrie might be said to be the "new girl" of the three in so far as she only became the Hon Editor in 2007 but her contribution to the Society since then has simply been immense. Her knowledge of the history of Chelsea and its people and places is extraordinary and she has been my first port of call whenever somebody raises with me some obscure (or not so obscure) point on Chelsea's history. She has delved into the impenetrable archives of the Society and reorganised and indexed them. She has produced the Society's Annual Report which by general consensus has improved every year. She took the brave decision in 2012 to put a picture on the front of the Report, something that simply had never been done before.



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Needless to say it was a huge success. And then there are the Exhibitions. I could list them all but then we would be here for much too long. I will simply mention this year's – Chelsea in the Great War. It was without doubt by far the best exhibition that we have ever put on. I will talk a little more about the exhibition later but it was Carrie's hard work and dedication that made it happen and into the incredible success that it was. Again, Carrie's love for all things Chelsea and her unstinting support for the Society and its work will be long remembered and of course sorely missed.

7. And so I ask you to join me in thanking all three of them for all that they have done for the Society and for Chelsea. I know that they will all continue to support our work and I hope they will all remain closely involved in the affairs of the Society.
8. I will talk a little later about how we try to go about replacing these colossuses of the Society. In the meantime there are some bright rays of sunshine peeking out from behind the clouds as we welcome new Council members. Camilla Mountain and Patrick Baty, having previously been co-opted onto the Council are now elected and in addition you have elected Fleur De Villiers and John Doncaster. Each of them has an enormous contribution to make to our work and is extraordinarily well qualified to help us further our objects. They all will I know play a significant part in our future.
9. I also welcome Lindsay Kennedy who has been appointed as our new Hon Secretary. Following a distinguished business career, she has developed considerable skills in all aspects of governance and has a wealth of experience in operating in the voluntary sector. She will be taking on this role from Sarah Farrugia, although I am delighted to say that Sarah will very much be remaining at the forefront of the Society's work. Amongst other things, she will continue to work on expansion of the Society's activities and its communication with residents and businesses, the marketing of the Society and the continuing development of our social media.
10. Our membership continues to grow and it was reported to the last Council meeting that we now have 1,165 members. That is an extraordinary impressive figure and I very much



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appreciate the hard work of the Membership Secretary Allan Kelly and his team to achieve that.

11. Sadly however we have lost some prominent members during the course of the year. The Reverend Leighton Thomson, the former Vicar of Chelsea Old Church and a life member of the Society, died. Throughout his long tenure as Vicar of the Old Church, he always kept in close contact with the Society with whom he and his church had the most amicable of relations. We also lost Lord McAlpine of West Green, Lady Roskell and Lady Gunning.
12. Turning to more joyful matters, as usual we had in 2014 a very full programme of events, lectures, visits etc. This year, our lecture programme was very much focussed on subjects connected with the River.
13. On 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2014 Amy Concannon, Assistant Curator for British Art at Tate Britain, gave an interesting lecture entitled "*Picturing London's River: Artists and the Thames*". The Thames has inspired some of the greatest paintings ever to be produced in Britain and the lecture journeyed up and down the river of the 17<sup>th</sup> to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and featured the works of Canaletto, Rubens, Richard Wilson, John Constable before culminating in a focus on J.W.M Turner who was born streets away from the Thames.
14. As I am sure some of you know (not least because I referred to it in my Report last year), in 1829 the London publisher Samuel Leigh produced a panorama which depicted both banks of the River Thames between Richmond and Westminster in one continuous painting. The work covers about 15 miles of the Thames and is about 60ft in length. It was very popular in its day and since its publication this panorama has become a valuable record of the late Georgian riverside. On 24<sup>th</sup> February, David Le Lay gave a fascinating lecture, providing insight into the buildings along the Chelsea stretch, showing us how they used to look and how the remaining ones appear today. Elements of this great panorama are now available "on-line" and the link can be found on our website.



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15. Following his extremely popular talk last year, Robert Crouch returned on 31<sup>st</sup> March to tell us more about life on the River over the last 500 years since the first Act of Parliament with which Henry VIII tried to control the wherryman.
16. In April we had a visit to Vintners' Hall. The Vintners' Company is one of the Twelve Great Livery Companies of the City of London. Its connection to the River is through the Company's ownership of swans, shared with the Crown and the Dyer's Company. The Vintners have possessed a Hall situated between Upper Thames Street and the River Thames since the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The present Hall dates from the 1670s and we enjoyed a wonderful guided tour round the magnificent rooms. In one of the rooms we saw a painting by the late and much missed Julian Barrow.
17. The Summer Meeting took place on 29<sup>th</sup> May 2014 and we were privileged to be able to hold it in the wonderful State Apartments of the Royal Hospital again this year. It was a beautiful warm evening and we had a terrific turnout to enjoy champagne with splendid views and convivial company. We were joined by the Mayor and Mayoress.
18. In June our former Chairman and now Honorary Vice-President, David Le Lay hosted another of his guided walks entitled "Whistler's River". David has an amazing amount of local knowledge which is always as enjoyable as it is informative. The walk took us to look at the various houses in which Whistler lived and to hear about numerous incidents in his colourful life; it was a fascinating evening.
19. The Society's main event this year was our Exhibition entitled "*Chelsea in the Great War*" and took place in a marquee at Duke of York's Square between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> June 2014. We were very privileged to have Kate Adie open the Exhibition during an excellent party in the presence of our President. The Exhibition looked at the impact of the Great War on Chelsea, its residents and businesses. There were five display areas within the marquee covering (1) Recruitment (2) The Home Front (3) Life for Chelsea Residents (4) Chelsea Arts Club goes to war and (5) "Lest we forget". There was also an interactive component to the Exhibition with a PowerPoint presentation based on the five sections.



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20. As part of the Exhibition, we had three lectures, the first of which was given by Anne de la Grange Sury. It included readings from the wartime diaries written by her grandmother, Georgina Lee, to her newborn son (Anne's father) who had been sent to his grandparents in Wales for safety. The second was a two-part talk; the first part given by Nigel Wilkinson of the London Irish Rifles Association, who talked the audience through the regiment's illustrious story. This was followed by the very entertaining Rob Fleming, of the National Army Museum, who regaled us with more stories of Chelsea and the war. Our third lecture was given by Dr Emily Mayhew, who spoke about her book *Wounded: From Battlefield to Blighty 1914-1918* which had been published in 2013 and had been short-listed for the Wellcome Prize. She spoke for 40 minutes, without a note, and gave a graphic description of how wounded soldiers were treated at the front line, and then at dressing stations and how those that survived were returned home through a slow process of ambulances, trains and ships.
21. Perhaps the most moving event of the Exhibition was the London Irish Rifles' return to their Duke of York HQ with the football that was infamously thrown out of the trenches at the start of the Battle of Loos. The football was accompanied by Alex Shooter, from the LIR Association, and ex-Chelsea footballer, John Hollins. That was an extraordinary (and very emotional) day.
22. The legacy of this great Exhibition is important to us. The Chelsea Physic Garden, The Mayor's Parlour and St Luke's have all had displays of boards from the Exhibition and we are in discussion with local schools to bring elements of the Exhibition and its story to the present younger generation. We are keen to build on this legacy and therefore any members with ideas to promote the Exhibition further or interested in being involved in sharing the Exhibition more widely are very welcome to get in touch.
23. The Exhibition was of course organised by Carrie Starren supported by Camilla Mountain and the rest of the team; Paul Aitkenhead, Jane Dorrell, Patricia Burr, Leonard Holdsworth (whose work in raising the necessary funds to enable us to stage the Exhibition at all was particularly impressive), Stephen Bartley, Dave Walker, Pippa Sharp, Sarah Farrugia and more than 120 volunteers from our membership. Together they made it possible. I also want to mention specifically Marsha Hayward who spent a substantial amount of her own time researching the



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fallen of Chelsea, which then became the interactive poppy display available to all who visited the Exhibition. Her involvement is a shining example of the sense of community and generosity that the Society actively seeks to encourage amongst its membership.

24. The Exhibition was a great success and arguably the best that we have put on. In my view, it showed the Society at its finest. The success of the Exhibition can be seen by the fact that we had over two thousand visitors over the two weeks. In addition, we sold many tickets for forthcoming events, received donations, made publication sales and recruited new members. Of course, putting on such an Exhibition costs a great deal of money and it would not have been possible without the very generous support of our sponsors, including in particular the Cadogan Estate, the Sloane Stanley Estate, Martin's Properties and Pemberton Greenish. In addition, we are immensely grateful to Knight Frank who sponsored our launch evening.
25. In July we were privileged to be invited to witness the Governor's Review at the Royal Hospital Chelsea. The Review is the rehearsal for the Founders' Day Parade when the Chelsea Pensioners parade and then take part in a march-past; it is an inspiring sight. The heavens unfortunately opened this year but we were revived by the very generous hospitality in the wine tent afterwards.
26. Also in July this year, members of the Society welcomed the contestants in the annual Doggett's Coat and Badge Race as they arrived at Cadogan Pier in Chelsea. As many of you will know, this race for newly-qualified Thames Watermen and Lightermen is thought to be one of the oldest continuing sporting contests in the world. This year, we were particularly honoured by the presence of His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh who was a guest of the Fishmonger's Company. The Fishmonger's Company have been responsible for organising the race since 1721 when the race was first contested. My wife and I had the great honour of being presented to His Royal Highness. The race this year was won by Harry McCarthy who comes from a family of Watermen.
27. I would like to thank Mrs John Everett who invited a number of officers of the Society on to her boat which was moored at Cadogan Pier in a perfect location to watch the finish of the race and for an excellent lunch, following conclusion of the race.



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28. In September we had two visits to The Thames River Police Museum in Wapping Police Station. The Thames River Police was originally set up in 1798 and is the world's oldest organised police force. The Museum has an amazing collection of items, but it was the talk given by their curator Robert Jeffries which brought so much of its history to life.
29. In October we were delighted to have Peter Murray return to speak to us. He explained how London is seeing an explosion in the number of tall buildings as the capital's population increases and investors pour money into London real estate. There are more than 230 towers over 20 storeys in the pipeline, which will have a significant impact on the London skyline, streets and public spaces - particularly on the south bank of the river at Vauxhall which will be very visible from Chelsea.
30. All these events have two things in common. First, they are wonderful examples of how the Society strives to fulfil one of its aims: to stimulate interest in the history, character and traditions of Chelsea. Secondly, they are all primarily organised by our Hon Events Secretary Paulette Craxford. I do want to take this opportunity to thank her and her team of helpers and volunteers who not only organise all these events but also ensure that they run smoothly and effectively.
31. At the beginning of this month, we held the annual meeting of Chelsea Residents Associations with representatives of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. It is an opportunity for local Residents' Associations to raise planning and other issues which concern them. This year we were very fortunate again in having on the panel the cabinet member for Planning Policy, Transport and the Arts, Councillor Timothy Coleridge and the Executive Director for Planning and Borough Development, Jonathan Bore. A number of interesting and stimulating topics were raised (some of which I will come back to) and discussed. The Society is particularly grateful to both Tim Coleridge and Jonathan Bore for answering so fully all the various questions that were put to them.
32. Planning issues play an enormous part in the Society's work and we face many serious and significant challenges to the future of Chelsea as a place. In the context of this report I can



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only touch on some of the most important issues; many of them are long running (in fact, I think I mentioned all of them last year) and are likely to continue to affect us for several (and in most cases many) years to come.

33. Basement excavations continue to be the bane of the life of many residents, not only in Chelsea but in many other London boroughs. In September an Inspector assessed the “soundness” of the Council’s new policy (to limit such excavations to one basement floor and to a maximum of half the garden) which it is very much hoped will bring this long saga to a something close. The new policy being proposed is less than we would have hoped for but is a considerable improvement on the current position. There is some optimism that, notwithstanding significant opposition by basement contractors and other developers, the inspector will uphold the new policy. In the meantime, the Council is deferring decisions on large new applications and is to be commended for doing so.

34. In a moment I will talk a little more about Chelsea’s long tradition of providing decent and affordable homes for the poor. One of the main such providers, Affinity Sutton, believe that their Estate in Cale Street is no longer fit for modern purpose and wants to redevelop the site. This proposal would involve selling at least part of the site for high-end residential development and using the proceeds from that sale to build new affordable housing in place of the current buildings. Institutions in Chelsea seeking to realise some of the value of their sites in Chelsea (a value that is driven by what appears to be an inexhaustible demand for the provision of ever grander and more expensive houses and flats as investments rather than homes) is becoming a common feature of this Borough. To try to regain some control over this phenomenon and in order to preserve and improve our precious stock of affordable homes, the Society is urging the Council to consider buying out the private part of the Sutton Estate using funds from its central reserve and/or from the capital contributions to affordable homes made by developers that are held by the Tenant Management Organization. The Society remains committed to the provision of affordable homes on this site. Chelsea does not need more “Buy-to-Leave” houses; it does need more homes for people to live in.

35. The Brompton Hospital redevelopment is indeed a sorry saga. Everybody wants the Brompton Hospital (and indeed all the great medical institutions of Chelsea) to thrive in



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Chelsea and to be modern and successful. The Society was far from convinced that the proposals originally put forward by Brompton (again selling part of their investment portfolio for development) was either desirable or wholly necessary to fund the modernization of the hospital. Furthermore the Brompton Hospital appeared adamant that it was not prepared to sell its Fulham Road wing to the Marsden Hospital who are desperate to acquire it to expand their own facilities. It seemed to the Society quite extraordinary that two of the great medical institutions of Chelsea could find themselves at loggerheads and unable to find a solution. Earlier this year, at a full meeting of the Council, the Brompton Hospital's supplementary planning document was withdrawn. NHS England has subsequently become involved and a report is expected from them at the beginning of next month on the issue of the demand for services from the two hospitals. A new supplementary planning document is likely to follow at some point in the New Year based on the concept of having a world class medical cluster in Chelsea. The Society has agreed in due course to hold a public debate on this development proposal; in the meantime we will continue to work not only with the hospitals but also with the residents' groups and other interested parties to secure a viable outcome for these great medical institutions.

36. Crossrail 2 is an enormous transport project which is likely to have a significant impact on Chelsea, whatever the eventual outcome of all the various consultations being undertaken by TfL and others. Although the public consultations show that there is within the Borough significant support for the Crossrail 2 line to pass through Chelsea on its route from Clapham Junction to Victoria, there is understandably much less agreement as to where a station should be situated. TfL has recently published its most recent update on the safeguarded route, which includes the proposal for the line to come through Chelsea with a station on the site of the present King's Road fire station. The results of the most recent consultation can be found on the TfL website. In the early part of next year, we are likely to see the safeguarded route being finalised. Subject to further consultation, and of course funding, work would start in 2020 and the present intention is for the new underground line to open in 2030. The Society believes that the principle of the new line passing through Chelsea with a station in the King's Road can be justified but that acceptance is subject to strict conditions as regards the unconditional preservation of Dovehouse Green and the height, size, design and uses of the buildings to be constructed over any new station.



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37. In my report last year I mentioned the two major redevelopments planned which affect the two remaining cinemas in the King's Road; the Curzon by Chelsea Manor Street and the Cineworld on the corner of King's Road and Old Church Street. During the course of this year the planning applications for both those redevelopments were refused; in the case of Cineworld the refusal was upheld on appeal. The Cineworld site is now the subject of a fresh application.
38. In addition of course there are many other issues that will affect us here – the potential expansion of Heathrow Airport, the Thames Tideway Tunnel, Earl's Court, Battersea Power Station, Chelsea Barracks and the horrendous number of skyscrapers planned for our skyline. The list is long and ever growing and the challenges do not become any easier.
39. In the context of these great projects, it is worth perhaps reminding ourselves what is the purpose of the Society and how we seek to achieve that purpose. Our principal object is to "preserve and improve the amenities of Chelsea". We are required to do that by (amongst other things) seeking to encourage good architecture, town planning and civil design, the planting and care of trees and the conservation and proper maintenance of open spaces. As I have said before, we are not simply a residents association and we do not exist to represent vested interests. Our role relates to Chelsea as a unique place, a place with an extraordinary history and tradition but nevertheless a place that has always embraced change that reflects that history and tradition. Clearly people play a huge role in developing a sense of place and despite many cynics I remain encouraged that Chelsea is still a place where there is a thriving and close community. If you talk about Chelsea, I suggest that you immediately develop a clear image in your mind as to what it is and what it stands for. But as I say a place cannot exist without its people and its people must feel that sense of place and want to work together to preserve and improve it. Furthermore, that is not just the people who live here but also those who work, who play or who simply come to visit.
40. I set this out because it is important to understand how the Council and the Executive Officers approach the difficult task of responding to all these challenges. Our duty is to further the Objects of the Society and to take decisions that we believe will achieve that. We are



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responsible for the day-to-day work of the Society and we are given the power to take such action as we think necessary to perform our duty. Many of the decisions that we are required to take are not easy and there are legitimate differences between, not only the general members of the Society but also members of the Council, as to what is the right course of action. A number of these projects are huge, have lengthy timescales and will have a significant and lasting impact on Chelsea. In addition, they are likely to bring significant disruption to life and work in the Borough whilst they are implemented. However, ultimately, we have to judge these issues against the Objects that are set out in our Constitution.

41. We are encouraged by our Rules to look for members of the Council who have expert knowledge and experience of matters which are relevant to our Objects. We do try to do that and I am constantly impressed by the skills that our Council members have and demonstrate. However, we can always do with more. So what are we looking for? We want architects, planners, designers conservationists, historians; to name but a few.
42. We continue to keep in touch with our members through our newsletters, produced by Michael Bach. Our latest Edition (No 40) has just been published. Many of the issues that I have covered in this Report are dealt with in greater detail in the Newsletter, which of course is also published on our web-site. We work hard to improve the web-site and welcome feedback and comments as to how we can achieve that. Even if you do not have a Twitter account, you can follow the Society's Tweets on the website; you may find them rather absorbing. Also, the pictures that are posted by the Society on Instagram, often with excellent informative commentary, on the sights and scenes of Chelsea are well worth looking at. Some of you I know will not have the slightest idea what I am talking about but I suggest that you ask your children and grandchildren. You will find that there is a whole new world of communication out there which might just give you a pleasant surprise.
43. The work that our Hon Planning Secretary and his team is required to take on is growing ever more extensive and complex. I have mentioned this evening some of the larger projects that we are dealing with but there are many others lesser applications and issues that we look at. Our new Hon Planning Secretary Patrick Baty wants to expand the team so that we can do more. The intention is that we should develop the Planning Committee with additional



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representatives from each of the four wards within Chelsea - Brompton & Hans Town, Stanley, Chelsea Riverside and Royal Hospital - particularly to help keep an eye on the planning cases in their immediate area. We are looking for candidates so I would ask anyone here who is interested in doing this (or indeed knows anyone whom they consider would make a suitable candidate) to put their names forward. A recent survey of the geographical spread of our membership in Chelsea shows that we are well represented in each of these wards so I am confident that we will be able to find the right people. The work is not particularly onerous and although knowledge of buildings or planning would be ideal, it can be done by anyone with an interest in their neighbourhood. Would anyone who might be interested please contact Patrick Baty.

44. In addition, we have recently met with and are hoping to bring onto the team a person with considerable experience in environmental matters and issues of sustainability.
45. Another area where we are looking for help is the position of the Hon Editor. The Annual Report has been published annually since the founding of the Society in 1927 and, as all of you will I am sure know, it now forms part of the history of Chelsea. Our former Editor, Jane Dorrell has very kindly returned, following Carrie's retirement, to edit the 2014 Report but she has made it quite clear that this is for one year only. As Jane says in the latest Newsletter, the role would suit someone with perhaps a background in publishing or journalism.
46. We also have a constant need for volunteers to help with: the web-site and social media, liaising with local schools; our events; selling cards and publications; answering historical questions; maintaining our archives and developing our Exhibition in 2016. The only qualification that you need to have is to love and care about Chelsea. If you have that qualification, please be in touch with Sarah.
47. Last year, I mentioned that the Society had commissioned Gillian Best to prepare and submit to us a Report on the evolution of social housing in Chelsea. The Chelsea Metropolitan Borough was one of the earliest boroughs to provide significant social housing and the four major philanthropists in this field – Peabody, Guinness, Sutton and Lewis - all built estates in the Borough which continue to exist to this day. The Report will review the history of social



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housing in the Borough, its development and the prospects for the future. It will include interviews with those involved in the sector and with residents of the estates. We can only plan the future by understanding our past and this Report will contribute significantly to this debate. We expect to publish the Report – to be entitled “From Hovel To Penthouse” – in the early part of next year.

48. Next year, we will also have the usual set of winter lectures in February and March – the dates can be found in our latest Newsletter – and we hope to arrange a number of visits to places of interest. There will not be an Exhibition in 2015 but we will be preparing for another major Exhibition for 2016 on a significant feature of Chelsea. We will also arrange a public meeting to consider the plans for the Royal Brompton Hospital, probably following publication of the new supplementary planning document. It will be another busy year.

49. I want to end by thanking you all for your continuing support for the Society and the work that we do. We could not do it without you. The Society is in rude health and we will continue to do our best to fulfill the objectives entrusted to us by Reginald Blunt when he founded the Society in 1927.

50. Mr President, this is the Chairman’s Report for 2014 in the Chelsea Society’s 87<sup>th</sup> year.