



# THE CHELSEA SOCIETY

**CHAIRMAN'S REPORT  
TO THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING  
OF THE CHELSEA SOCIETY  
HELD ON 21<sup>ST</sup> NOVEMBER 2016  
AT CHELSEA OLD TOWN HALL**

1. Mr. President, Vice-Presidents, Members of the Council, Members of the Society and Honoured Guests. It is my pleasurable duty under terms of our Constitution to report to you on the affairs of the Society on what has been another very full and active year.
2. As in previous years I would like to start by thanking the Members of Council for the tireless work that they have contributed to the Society over the past year. I have made the point before that Council Members receive no remuneration for the work that they put in; their dedication is testament to their belief in the future of Chelsea and the role that the Society can play by fulfilling its principal Object to preserve and enhance the amenities of Chelsea. Their reward is simply knowing that they have played a part in that.
3. There have this year been quite a number of changes to the Members of Council and it is right that I should start by mentioning those; particularly welcoming our new members and saying a few words about the contributions made to our work by those who have retired.
4. I am delighted that Terence Bendixson, Fleur de Villiers and John Doncaster have all been re-elected to serve as Member of Council. Earlier this year Council co-opted Sir Paul Lever and Amalia Cebreiro as Members of the Council on the basis that each of them has a unique contribution to make to our work. Sir Paul had a long and distinguished career in the public service and has lived in Chelsea since 1993. He is actively involved in his local residents' association. Amalia has lived on the Cremorne Estate for a number of years and has been very active in campaigns to preserve that Estate and its community. It is important that all parts of Chelsea should be properly represented on Council.
5. I am also delighted to welcome Chris Lenon as a new Member of Council. As you will all know, Chris has been at the forefront of the campaign to oppose Crossrail 2 passing through Chelsea and is another long term resident of Chelsea. Both Sir Paul and Chris are already members of the Society's planning committee.
6. In my report last year, I mentioned that Lindsay Kennedy was standing down as our Secretary and Tom Martin as our Treasurer. I am delighted to say that we have been able to find replacements for both. Council has appointed Jennifer Grossman as our Secretary and Michael Illingworth FCA as our Treasurer. Jennifer lives in Chelsea and is a prominent campaigner in the fight to preserve its unique character. You have of course already heard from Michael; he has wide experience in managing the finances of private companies, housing and hospital trusts and other bodies. Most recently he has been working for St Luke's Church, Chelsea.



## THE CHELSEA SOCIETY

7. We have for some time been looking for a new Editor for the Annual Report and I am delighted to say that earlier this year Council was able to appoint Dr Sarah Ingham. She has had a distinguished career as a writer, researcher and adviser with several published works. She has been very much involved in local Chelsea affairs and is a prominent resident of Old Church Street.
8. Several Members of Council have stood down during the year and it is right that I should briefly pay tribute to the work that each of them has done. Sarah Farrugia was Vice-Chairman of the Council having previously been the Secretary. Last year I mentioned the contribution she has made to the modernisation of the Society during her term, particularly through her work on the website and our embrace of social media, and through the introduction of discussion groups as a means of enabling the Society to gauge the views of all Chelsea stakeholders. She remains deeply committed to the Chelsea community and will I know continue to contribute to that in other ways.
9. Paulette Craxford, who for a period of more than eight years has been responsible for organising the Society's events has also decided that the time has come for her to stand down. She has been a remarkable servant of the Society during her time with us and her organisation and presentation of a remarkable series of events over the years has done a great deal towards fulfilling one of the primary objects of the Society: to stimulate interest in the history, character and traditions of Chelsea. Lectures, walks, talks, visits and of course the summer meeting have all been within her remit and she has worked tirelessly to ensure that each and every event is a success.
10. Camilla Mountain was a Member of Council for only a relatively short period but during that time she has made a remarkable contribution to our work. Having assisted with the Exhibition on Chelsea and World War I in 2014, this year she took on complete responsibility for organising our Exhibition entitled "Royal Chelsea". I will say a bit more about that Exhibition later on but at this stage I would simply like to thank Camilla for the enormous amount of work that she did to make the Exhibition the phenomenal success that it was. In addition, she has undertaken an enormous amount of work in sorting out the Society's archives and has generally fielded many enquiries and questions from those who have shown interest in the history and traditions of Chelsea.
11. Gillian Best also stood down as a Member of Council during the year. In addition to her work as a Member, we are particularly appreciative of Gillian's fine work on "The History of Social Housing in Chelsea" a copy of which can be found on the Society's website. This work helps to demonstrate the importance of retaining the unique social mix of Chelsea, which is such an important element of its character.
12. Once of the saddest moments of the year for me was having to report the death of Leonard Holdsworth. As I said at the time, to me he epitomised the true "Man of Chelsea". He was



## THE CHELSEA SOCIETY

born here, primarily educated here, married here and lived most of his life here. He was a Member of Council for some twenty years and as such he never held back in expressing his heartfelt views about Chelsea. He was not one to compromise in his enjoyment of the finer things in life, proudly calling himself the last of the true champagne socialists of Chelsea. Quite simply he is irreplaceable and I will miss him enormously. He was a particularly impressive fundraiser. He was inclined to take out a potential sponsor for a long and very boozy lunch at his local before reminding his guest how much he had pledged to the Society. Most recipients of his hospitality were in no position to recall what they had pledged and simply accepted what he said. Chelsea has lost a great champion.

13. So I would like to thank the new Members of Council for agreeing to serve and the retired Members for all their considerable contributions to our work.
14. Chelsea is never static; indeed part of its charm is its vibrancy. It follows that as ever we have had a full and active year. That is particularly true for our Planning Committee; no part of Chelsea seems to have escaped difficult or controversial issues. The Planning Committee comprises a Chairman, Michael Stephen, and representative for each of the four Chelsea Wards of RBKC. Sir Paul Lever represents the Brompton-Hans Ward, Martyn Baker the Chelsea Riverside Ward, Chris Lenon the Royal Hospital Ward, and Patrick Baty the Stanley Ward. Paul Aitkenhead had previously represented Brompton- Hans Ward but sadly was obliged to stand down earlier this year for health reasons. I am glad to say however that Paul remains a fully active Member of Council.
15. I could not possibly in the time available begin to cover all the topics that the Planning Committee have dealt with this year. However a quick visit to our website will give you a very clear indication of how much work this Committee does and the breadth and depth of the issues that it is required to consider.
16. The issue of Crossrail 2 has of course dominated our lives over the last couple of years or so and will I suspect continue to do so for the immediate future. At the AGM last year the Society passed a resolution stating that it opposed the plans to build the Crossrail station and route in Chelsea. Following that AGM, the Council met and a motion was put that the Resolution passed at the Society's AGM should be adopted. That motion was duly approved. It follows that the Society's position is that it opposes a Crossrail station within, and/or the construction of an underground Crossrail line beneath, Chelsea. During the course of the year we have continued to put forward this case to those whom we believe will have influence over the final decision. In particular we have exchanged correspondence with TfL, the Secretary of State, The Mayor's Office, the GLA and others. Meetings have been more difficult to procure but we were able to meet with Councillor Tony Devenish who is our Member on the Greater London Assembly. Although the Government has indicated its support for major infrastructure projects, there is concern over the cost of some of these projects and in particular Crossrail 2 has been asked to find ways to make savings. The Society believes that a material contribution to such savings can



## THE CHELSEA SOCIETY

be achieved by not bringing Crossrail to Chelsea. At present TfL are preparing an updated business case and a robust funding plan before proceeding further with public consultation; it is unlikely therefore that we will hear very much more until next summer.

17. The Lots Road area seems to resemble one large building site, with large developments taking place on both sides of the border between Chelsea and Fulham. The Society has continued to try to ensure that these developments provide homes and work for the local community and maintain an acceptable visual landscape. A little further north, the proposed development of Chelsea football ground, although primarily within Fulham, is another project which is likely to have a significant impact on West Chelsea. Martyn Baker and Patrick Baty work tirelessly to ensure that the Society's voice is heard in this part of Chelsea.
18. The redevelopment of the Sutton Estate in Cale Street is another major planning issue because it goes to the heart of the Society's policy to maintain mixed community housing in Chelsea. The Society opposes the proposed development by Sutton primarily on the grounds that the current proposal fails to provide a sufficient quantity of affordable housing and does not produce new buildings of sufficient quality to justify the demolition of the existing Estate. I am glad to report that RBK&C has taken a similar view and Sutton's planning application has been turned down.
19. The loss of pubs is never far from our agenda, with the Queen's Head in Tryon Street again coming under threat. The Society has had a policy for many years of resisting the loss of pubs (and indeed shops, restaurants and similar amenities enjoyed by the local community) and will continue to fight for their retention.
20. The proposals for the Brompton Hospital have also progressed during the course of the year and representatives of the Society have attended meetings of the liaison group to make comments and recommendations as regards to those proposals. We will continue to do so.
21. The sale of Thamesbrook is another issue where the Committee has been very involved to ensure that a residential care home is retained on the site. In addition the Society has sought undertakings from RBK&C that the proceeds of any sale would be used to provide care in Chelsea for people who could not afford to live in the redeveloped Thamesbrook.
22. I could go on. The Society is quite properly consulted and we make representations on major policy issues including congestion charging, residents' parking, the privatisation of planning, Article 4 directions, changes of use, cycle ways, construction traffic management, basement development policy and many other issues. We are involved in revisions to local plans and amendments to conservation area policies. Generally we cannot involve ourselves in individual cases but we do so in those cases where we consider that they have a wider impact on the amenities of Chelsea; for example, the proposed extended opening



## THE CHELSEA SOCIETY

hours for the McDonalds site in the King's Road, the threat to the very existence of the Sketch Club, and the use of Riley's Pub in the King's Road; the list is extensive.

23. As I say, you will find a full and detailed assessment of all the issues that we deal with on our website and I urge Members to look at that. If you have any comments or questions on the work that we do (or perhaps the work that we don't do but you think that we should) I know that the Chairman of our planning committee Michael Stephen would be delighted to hear from you. It only remains for me to thank Michael and his Committee for all their hard work and dedication.
24. Before I leave planning issues I would just like to mention the meeting that the Society arranged for the Chelsea Residents' Associations to have an opportunity to put questions to local politicians. The meeting was held at Chelsea Old Town Hall a fortnight ago and was attended by more than a hundred people, representing many of the Residents' Associations of Chelsea. The guest speakers were Councillor Nicholas Paget-Brown, leader of the Council of RBK&C, Councillor Tony Devenish, our member on the GLA and Councillor Tim Coleridge, the cabinet member at RBK&C for planning and transport. A full report of the meeting is on our website. It was a great success and provided an excellent opportunity for Residents' Associations to be able to raise issues of local concern with local government representatives.
25. Once again, I would like to thank our Membership Secretary, Allan Kelly, for all his work during the year. Our membership continues to rise which is a remarkable achievement for a local amenity society. That is due in no small part to the work that Allan does. I would also like to thank Michael Bach for the production of our Newsletters; again copies appear on our website. We are incidentally hoping that over time we can increasingly move towards electronic rather than paper communications as our primary means of communication with Members. It is very expensive for us to produce and post paper copies.
26. I will briefly mention again if I may Sarah Farrugia who produced last year's Annual Report and to thank her for it. As I say Dr Sarah Ingham is our new Editor and I know that she will also be happy to receive any suggestions from any Members for articles and other contributions.
27. I mentioned the cost of printing and mailing. As a charitable body we are very conscious of cost and want as much as possible of our funds to be used for charitable rather than administrative purposes. In fact, the accounts show that we are remarkably efficient at keeping down our administrative costs but we can always do better. We have a number of kind and very generous sponsors without whom some of Society's activities simply could not take place. We also have people who are kind enough to advertise in our Annual Report and that goes a long way towards meeting the cost of it. We will shortly be writing to a number of local businesses and others to seek financial support for this year's production.



## THE CHELSEA SOCIETY

So I do ask you as Members that if any of you want to advertise in the Annual Report or have any suggestions as to anyone else we can approach to help us meet the cost of producing it, please let Sarah know. Anything, however small, is immensely appreciated.

28. We have as usual had a very full programme of events and lectures and visits etc including two very special events. At the beginning of February our Honorary Vice-President David Le Lay presented a lecture entitled "Five Things Whistler Did for Artists". Whistler was not just one of the most outstanding painters of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century he was also an important figure in the development of art and its place in society. He believed that art – how it was valued and the way it was displayed – was both crucial and central to any civilisation and he campaigned for this throughout his life.
29. At the end of February we had a talk from Geoffrey Matthews, the secretary of the Chelsea Arts Club on the history of this great Chelsea Institution. It is an iconic part of Chelsea and the history of the Club is a captivating one.
30. The final lecture of our winter/spring series was entitled "The Duke of Wellington at Aspley House" and was given by Alexander Allin. The talk focused on the personal side of the Duke, his family, and the social circle around him. We also heard how Aspley House and the surrounding area of Hyde Park Corner had changed over the years.
31. The Summer Meeting was held on July 12<sup>th</sup> at the charming Petyt Hall next to the historic Chelsea Old Church. As always of course the unpleasant weather of the day cleared wonderfully for the evening and we had a good attendance of Members who made full use of the lovely courtyard garden. We were particularly pleased to welcome the Deputy Mayor and Mayoress and also one of our Vice-Presidents Greg Hands MP and his family.
32. The Doggett's Coat and Badge Race was held on July 20<sup>th</sup> and we were able to watch the end of the race and welcome the competitors to the finish in Chelsea. We were extremely grateful to Andrew Moffatt for inviting a number of members of Council to watch the conclusion of the race from Cadogan Pier.
33. At the beginning of August we had a visit to the Royal Opera House for a tour of the backstage area of this world renowned theatre. Members saw various workrooms which were producing scenery or costumes for current productions and were also able to view the extraordinary backstage technology for moving entire sets.
34. On September 19<sup>th</sup> the leading Thames archaeologist, Dr Fiona Haughey, once again led a guided walk on the foreshore of the Thames. The visit included a talk by Dr Haughey and Mike Webber on the history of the river and its foreshore through the various ages.
35. On September 24<sup>th</sup> members visited the Travellers Club in Pall Mall. The Club moved to its present clubhouse, designed by Charles Barry, in 1832 and the principal rooms still retain many of the original features with examples of furniture and fittings designed by Barry





## THE CHELSEA SOCIETY

himself. The tour was conducted by Douglas Stoffberg and members were fascinated with wicked tales about the host of travellers and iconic figures who had been members there.

36. The autumn lecture was given by Dr Fiona Haughey when she told Members about the history of the foreshore of the Thames. To add to the fascination of the talk, she brought with her a number of artefacts from various periods, all of which had been discovered on the foreshore.
37. After the success of last year's Hugh Krall exhibition in Cadogan Gardens, the Heatherley School of Fine Art (where Hugh Krall trained) arranged for the private view of his exhibition to be shown again. Hugh lives near the Thames in Chelsea and the images created over a number of years showed how the river had changed over recent decades.
38. On October 31<sup>st</sup> there was a visit to The Faringdon Collection. This art collection in Brompton Square is a hidden gem which very few people know about. We were delighted that Lord and Lady Faringdon allowed Members to visit their home and see the works that were displayed around the charming house. The collection was mostly assembled by the second Lord Faringdon who succeeded his grandfather in 1934. The present Lord Faringdon has continued the family tradition of collecting and has also undertaken major refurbishment of his London home.
39. All these events, meetings and visits were immaculately organised by Paulette Craxford; most of the lectures and all the walks and visits were sold out and were universally enjoyed by those who attended them.
40. I mentioned that this year also saw two very special events. The first was the Society's Exhibition held in a marquee at Duke of York's Square between 13<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> June entitled "Royal Chelsea". The Exhibition was a resounding success. The total number of visitors was just over 2,600. Interestingly 35% were from Chelsea, 35% from the rest of London (particularly Fulham, Battersea and Pimlico) 10% from the rest of the UK and 20% from the rest of world. The display started with the Mercian king, Offa, who had a palace in Chelsea and included Elizabeth I romping in Cheyne Walk and Prince Charles cavorting in Duke of York Square. We learnt about a gaggle of royal mistresses, a colony of royal artists and a doctrine of royal physicians. The exhibition was a particular hit with children; quizzes were handed out, the answers to which were all on the boards. Some 100 children filled in the quiz and their only reward for doing that was a Chelsea Society pencil. Local teachers should be particularly impressed by the interest level of their charges. We had visits from the choir of Hampshire School and also a Royal Hospital Day when In-pensioners attended, splendid in their familiar scarlet uniforms and chatting with our visitors whilst guarding the Sovereign's Mace. Teenage police cadets handed out flyers outside Sloane Square tube station making an appreciable difference to our marketing. Peter Jones had a large poster of the exhibition in their window. Particular thanks are due to the Cadogan Estate who not only allowed us the use of the running track at Duke of York Square to stage the exhibition



## THE CHELSEA SOCIETY

but were also one of our major sponsors, along with Sloane Stanley, Pemberton Greenish, and Martins Properties. Without them the exhibition would not have been possible. I should also like to mention the volunteers who attended the exhibition every day. It is a true testament of the dedication of our members that so many are prepared to give up their time to work for Chelsea and to promote the Society's objects.

41. The second extraordinary event of the year was the cricket match held at Burton Court on September 7<sup>th</sup> as part of the celebration of the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Chelsea Arts Club. The Arts Club, which has a well-established cricket team, challenged the Society to a match; so far as I know the Society had never fielded a cricket team before but of course the challenge was accepted. It was a magnificent day. I am delighted to say that there were a number of Members who proudly stepped forward to play for the Society and all performed magnificently. Of course we lost - but then it would have been very rude to have beaten the Arts Club on their birthday. Members attended the match in great numbers as did Members of the Arts Club. They were treated to the remarkable sight of our President, John Simpson, running between the wickets (something which I think he had probably not done for very many years) and during the tea interval we enjoyed a parade by the Arts Club's "Unshrinkables". The Arts Club provided alcohol and music and we were blessed with warm sunshine and perfect conditions. It was a day that brought out all the best in Chelsea and it concluded with the presentation of a large birthday cake from the Society to the Arts Club. Pemberton Greenish once again stepped forward with sponsorship to meet the costs of the day and added to the crowds with their own guests.
42. All these events are an essential ingredient of the Society's objects. We are required to simulate interest in the history, character and traditions of Chelsea and we do so. Long may that continue.
43. At the last AGM I undertook that Council would review the current Constitution and Rules of the Society to see whether it was appropriate for any amendments to be made. It had been suggested that there had developed a perceived problem with communication between Council and the Members. Council accepted that it was important that, when taking action to promote and further the charitable Objects of the Society, Members should feel that Council were aware of their views on important issues.
44. I believe that the amended Constitution which the Members have today adopted will effectively address that issue and will otherwise ensure that the Society will be truly fit for purpose as it faces the challenges of the twenty-first century.
45. At the end of this AGM I shall stand down as Chairman of Council. It is the end of my second term and I always feel that two terms of anything is quite long enough. It is time for somebody else to take on that role. The power to appoint the Chairman lies with the Council and they have appointed Dr. James Thompson as my successor with effect from the end of this meeting. James has been Vice-Chairman of the Council over the last few





## THE CHELSEA SOCIETY

months as we have worked together on the transition; hopefully rather more successfully than the Obama/Trump transition appears to be. James, who is already known to most of you here, has been a long term resident of Chelsea and a staunch promoter of its values. He and I share an absolute passion for this place; I was delighted to learn that he like me had been married in Chelsea Town Hall, albeit not at the same time nor indeed to each other. James has of course been Chairman of the King's Road Association of Chelsea Residents for many years; he will I know continue to lead the Society forward in fighting for the whole of Chelsea.

46. It has been an honour and privilege to have been the Chairman of this great Society and to have been able play some part in ensuring that the Society fulfils its primary objective to preserve and improve the amenities of Chelsea. During my time as Chairman, I have learnt an extraordinary amount about this place and met some fascinating Chelsea characters, many of whom I know will remain friends in years to come. As Chairman, I have attended three major Society Exhibitions; six Summer Meetings; something over 30 lectures and talks and visited many areas of Chelsea which I am not sure previously I knew existed. I have been consistently impressed by the extent to which people here really care about this extraordinary and unique area of London and how much time they are prepared to put in to preserving it. It is very special. I made the point before that the membership of this Society is increasing and we really should be very proud of that; there are not very many amenities societies that can say that. We remain extremely active and well supported.
47. We have within this Borough (and by that I mean the historic Borough of Chelsea) a perfect mix of varied architecture, great institutions, an iconic artistic heritage, unique and quirky businesses and an extraordinary social mix. It is a precious and delicate combination which must be preserved and the Society must continue to take a leading role in that aim.
48. We are not a residents' association nor are we a trade association although we must recognise the valuable contribution made by the many associations in Chelsea in relation to their immediate locality and their particular interests. The Society must however maintain an independence of thought and ensure that it makes decisions that are for the public benefit of whole of Chelsea and the entirety of its community. It has always done so and I am confident that under James's stewardship it will so continue.
49. I want to thank you all for your kindness and support over the years of my tenure. We have not always been able to agree on everything but then I look upon disagreement and debate as being entirely healthy. What I am proud to say is that, although we may have sometimes disagreed on the route, we have never argued over the destination, which is to ensure that we preserve and improve the amenities of Chelsea as a place for the benefit of all those who live, work or simply visit here.
50. Mr President, this is the Chairman's Report for 2016 in the Chelsea Society's 90<sup>th</sup> year.