

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT
TO THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
OF THE CHELSEA SOCIETY
HELD ON 13th NOVEMBER 2023

Mr. President, Member of Parliament for Chelsea, Chelsea Councillors, GLA Councillor, Representatives of other Amenity Societies and Churches, Honoured guests, My Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen.

King Charles's Coronation in May was a great occasion, and Chelsea celebrated with parties, both large and small.

On a sadder note, on 11 June the 8th Earl Cadogan, one of our Vice-Presidents, died. He was a real Chelsea character, best displayed in his funny and self-mocking speeches, and he was warmly admired for his church and charitable work. It is with great pleasure that I announce that the 9th Earl Cadogan, has agreed to be a Vice-President of the Chelsea Society in place of his late father.

Yet again we meet in times of war and great suffering, and in comparison we have only minor problems here in Chelsea, but it is those local problems we seek to resolve, as this is our purpose as a Society.

I therefore thank the Officers and Council members for their dedicated work during the year in preserving and improving the amenities of Chelsea for the public benefit.

I am delighted that Michael Bach and Julian Turner are willing to continue serving the Society and have been re-elected.

It is very good to be able to welcome Marina Murray as a recently co-opted member of Council who has been elected today. She ran a successful campaign against major basement developments, and has taken an active interest in the proposal to redevelop the Marks & Spencer building on the Kings Road. We also welcome the recently coopted Paul Davis, a major contributor to the architecture of Chelsea, who will give important advice and support to the Planning Committee.

We remember with great sadness Council member Fleur de Villiers who died in February. She contributed greatly to our deliberations over many years, and her obituary will be in our next Annual Report.

Sir Paul Lever leads the Planning Committee as Chairman, and is also the member for Brompton-Hans Ward. Martyn Baker and David Waddell deal with Chelsea Riverside Ward; Jules Turner for Royal Hospital Ward, and Michael Parkes, for Stanley Ward. The Committee itself deals only with the most significant planning applications.

Despite our reasoned opposition, we were unable to prevent the grant of permission for the demolition and reconstruction of the Marks and Spencer building, though it is some relief that there may be a M&S in the new building when at some time in the future it is completed. We were disappointed that despite the massive level of public opposition to the scheme, including a petition with thousands of signatures objecting to it, the Council's planning committee, two of whose members represents a Chelsea ward, approved it.

Meanwhile, the King's Road and local residents will once again face major disruption from building works and heavy lorries. In view of that, our Planning Committee Chairman has written to the Mayor of London saying that we believe that the arguments against the demolition and damage to Chelsea's heritage and townscape are compelling, and hope therefore that the Mayor will use his authority to overrule the permission.

We lost Thamesbrook care home years ago, and then St Wilfrid's on Tite Street closed. On the latter site the estate agents handling the sale are marketing the property in a way which encourages developers to think that they can build a large block of flats over the whole site, including the garden. We are working hard to save this green space, and the open vistas which are the essence of the Tite Street artist's studios - part of the artistic heritage of Chelsea. We also want any new building to respect the architectural heritage of Tite Street and to include some provision for the accommodation and care of the elderly.

We still have not received a straight answer as to why 3 and 4 Durham Terrace came tumbling down, and have requested more details.

Object 2.3 of our Constitution is: "seeking the abatement of nuisances".

We are experiencing unabated thefts from shops in Chelsea. Staff at supermarkets tell me that blatant stealing is an everyday occurrence, with many repeat offenders responding aggressively when challenged. Recently I witnessed one such offender screaming abuse at a staff member, but the current management advice is that staff should avoid confrontation. Staff have been threatened with hypodermic needles. There is a perception that stealing

is now tolerated by the courts, and that the Police are useless. Theft is more than a nuisance: it is an affront to shop staff and to the shoppers, and a direct challenge to a peaceful society.

Another serious nuisance is the double impact of building work. First the noise and dust of the actual work, and second the semi-permanent disruption of our streets and pavements caused by work being strung out for years on end.

Traffic continues to be a great nuisance. Transport for London, responsible for major roads and all traffic lights, do whatever satisfies their loudest lobby, and RBKC seems to have few options available. We maintain our principle of equity between streets, so that all share traffic loads as fairly as possible, while recognising that main streets have always been busier than the side-streets.

We have an active events programme for our members, and I would like to thank Gaye Murdoch and Michael Stephen for a particularly successful year.

In January 90 members heard Mark Galeotti talk about Putin's wars.

In February almost 100 members heard Gen. Sir Nick Carter, Chief of the Defence Staff 2018 – 2021, talk about "The global strategic context in an era of constant competition and conflict in the light of the war in Ukraine."

In March we visited the former Carthusian monastery of Charterhouse in the City, and had a buffet lunch and a tour of the buildings.

Later in March we started our own book launch series, with Angela Levin's biography of Camilla, now our Queen, which reveals how she transformed her role and established herself as one of the key members of the royal family.

In April, 20 members visited the Chelsea Arts Club, and were given a master class in the history of the Club and the art works in the building by Geoffrey Matthews, the Club Secretary.

A week later, members made a visit to Mercer's Hall, with beautiful portraits and a very fine Chapel.

Later that same day we had a meeting for residents about traffic in Chelsea.

In May we visited the College of Arms, had dinner in their fine rooms, and looked in detail at their magnificent collection of coats of arms.

On a sunny June day we visited Spencer House, whose rooms reflect the eighteenth century fashion for classical Greece and Rome, with gilded furniture and fine collections of paintings.

In September, 101 members spent an evening with Bill Wyman, who was launching his book on Chelsea, and who happily answered the many questions put to him about his intimate knowledge of Chelsea, and of his decades with the Rolling Stones.

In early October Viscount Trenchard hosted a tour of the House of Lords, and we were able to progress through the settings for the State Opening of Parliament.

The following week we staged our first play: a recreation of the wartime correspondence between Celia Johnson (of Brief Encounters fame) and her husband Peter Fleming (Ian Fleming's brother), serving in the Far East. Their daughter Lucy read her mother's letters (found in Tedworth Square) and her husband Simon Williams read her father's letters back home.

Yet to come, on 27 November there will be a talk by Lt. Gen. Sir Simon Mayall (Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff (Operations 2009-2015) on the current strategic military situation, with particular reference to the Middle-East.

Our best-attended talks support the more specialist meetings, and overall make a positive contribution to our reserves, as well as being our most effective way of recruiting new members.

Anyone who joins us will find much to inform and entertain them, and at every event our members have contributed personal knowledge, sometimes not known even to the speaker.

Once again "Chelsea in Bloom" was a marvel, and we hope to give a Society Prize next year for the best exhibit.

We are very pleased that the Cabman's Shelter by Albert Bridge is now back in use as a café. We saved this little building from dereliction and secured its listing.

We are very concerned about the removal of the traditional houseboats on Chelsea Reach and their replacement by very large box-like floating structures. We contributed to the cost of a legal opinion that RBKC is perfectly entitled to control the size and appearance of boats, and this issue will be the subject of a Motion for Resolution after my report.

Yesterday, Remembrance Sunday, the Society laid a wreath at the War Memorial in Sloane Square, and many of us attended the service at Holy Trinity church afterwards.

We are in a good financial position, and over the past 7 years our total funds have risen to £91,746. Nevertheless, as registered charity, we would like you to remember the Society in your wills, and to sign a gift-aid form so that the society can benefit even more from your subscription at no cost to yourself. We have some here today at the back of the hall.

We now have more than a thousand members (1,115 to be precise). Please invite friends to our events, and encourage them to join. If your neighbours need help about a planning matter, get them to join the Society. We have some recruitment leaflets here today, so please take some with you to give to friends or family members. They don't have to live in Chelsea. Also, please wear the Chelsea Society lapel badge which you can purchase at the back of the hall.

Last year we noticed the sharp rises in our operating costs, but did not raise our subscriptions. Now we believe that to meet these costs it would be prudent to raise subscriptions by £5, so £30 for individuals, £40 for couples.

The Annual Report under the editorship of Dr Sarah Ingham, continues to flourish, and it serves as a valued historical record of our activities.

I am also grateful to the Vice-Chairman, Michael Stephen, for producing regular e-mailings, and half-yearly Bulletins; for helping to organise our events; and for managing the website and our presence on Instagram, where we now have more than a thousand Followers.

Volunteers are always welcome to help the Society in any of our activities, including helping with the refreshments at events like this AGM. You can give as much or as little time as you like.

The statue of Oscar Wilde by Sir Eduardo Paolozzi continues to take shape, and we will be helping to raise the remaining funds. The plan is to locate it on Dovehouse Green.

There is always a risk that Chelsea's rich heritage and its thriving cultural activities will be taken for granted, but we must continue to strive by our own efforts to respect the past and to ensure that anything we build, in stone or in community spirit, is of good quality, and able to stand the test of time. Above all, we must enjoy where we live.

As Queen Katherine Parr wrote in 1547 "By what means the time is so well-abbreviated I know not, but weeks be shorter in Chelsey, than in other places!"

Chelsea is unique, and we aim to keep it so. The Society will continue to preserve and improve Chelsea, to be enjoyed by all who live, work and play here. May it delight them all.

Mr. President, it gives me great pleasure to present to you this account of our activities in this the 96th year of our Society.