

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT
TO THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
OF THE CHELSEA SOCIETY
ON 18th NOVEMBER 2024

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

I will begin by thanking the Society's Council members for their dedicated work during the year in helping to preserve and improve the amenities of Chelsea for the public benefit.

I am delighted that Amalia Cebreiro is continuing as a member of Council and has been re-elected, and that Paul Davis and Richard Jacques have been elected.

Mike Doyle retired from the Council in May, and I thank him for his contribution to the Society.

Dr. Sarah Ingham is not standing for re-election, after a stellar stewardship of the Annual Report, which she edited from 2016 to 2023. It is a great achievement, and will be a permanent record of her contribution. She is succeeded as editor by the Vice-chairman, Michael Stephen.

Turning to planning matters, we have heard the Vice-chairman's report on our efforts to save the houseboats on Chelsea Reach.

The next major battle is to oppose a development plan for the former St Wilfrid's care home in Tite St. The 44 care beds it provided are ignored in the proposed plan and the new building is predominantly for luxury flats. Even more important, they plan to build over the garden. We are working hard to ensure provision for the elderly, the preservation of this green open space, and the vistas which are part of the setting of the listed Tite Street artist's studios - part of the artistic heritage of Chelsea.

Sir Paul Lever leads on this issue as Chairman of our Planning Committee, which also comprises David Waddell, Jules Turner and Michael Parkes. They deal with most of the planning applications, and their report for the year 2024 will be published in our Annual Report.

Traffic continues to be a great nuisance. We have joined with other amenity groups to form CAST (Chelsea Alliance for Safer Traffic) and have been discussing with Transport for London safety measures at the north end of Battersea Bridge and on the Embankment. We understand that they will begin to implement improvements shortly. We maintain our principle of equity between streets, so that they all share the traffic loads as fairly as possible, while recognising that main streets have always been busier than the side-streets.

Turning to our programme of talks and other events, we have had a particularly successful programme this year, arranged by Gaye Murdoch and Michael Stephen.

In January Charles Moore gave a lecture on "The fall of Margaret Thatcher- A whodunnit!"

In February Paul Davis launched his autobiography "Mr Chelsea - A Life in Rock n' Roll and Architecture from The King's Road to Tokyo"

In early April Michael Stephen gave a lecture on “The First 10 years of the Chelsea Society” drawing on our Annual Reports for the years 1927-1937. It is envisaged that summaries of each of our ten decades will be published as a book for our Centenary in 2017.

Later in April, Lord Trenchard lectured about his grandfather, the first Viscount and Founder of the Royal Air Force.

In May we had a wine tasting with wines from Garzon winery in Uruguay.

On the 3rd June, Kira Charatan, the Archivist of the Cadogan Estate, gave a lecture about Sir Hans Sloane.

Earlier that same day we enjoyed a House of Commons tour arranged by our former MP, Greg Hands, whom we thank for his many years of service to Chelsea.

In June Guy Fairbanks gave us a guided tour of the places associated with the politicians and celebrities of Belgravia.

In early July Martin Vander Weyer, the Spectator columnist, spoke about his experiences of journalism and finance.

Later in July we held our Summer Party in the delightful garden at Auriens in Dovehouse Street.

In early September Prof. Matthias Strohn a Colonel in the German Army, and a lecturer at Sandhurst, spoke to us about “Germany’s role in the defence of Europe”

In late September members attended the London Sketch Club for the launch of their 150th anniversary book.

On 30th September the Vice-chairman represented the Society at the Installation of the new Rector of Holy Trinity Sloane Street, and 16th October I represented the Society at the unveiling on Dovehouse Green of the sculpture of the head of Oscar Wilde by Sir Eduardo Paolozzi.

On 21st October Sir Nicholas Lyons spoke to us about the history and privileges of the City of London, and his experiences as Lord Mayor.

On 4th November Robert Hardman spoke about his book on King Charles III and signed copies.

A week ago, on Remembrance Sunday, I laid a wreath on behalf of the Society at the War Memorial in Sloane Square, and many of us attended the service at Holy Trinity church afterwards.

Still to come!

On 20 Nov we will have a private tour of St Luke’s Church on Sydney Street, which is sometimes known as the Cathedral of Chelsea, and whose first Rector was the brother of the 1st Duke of Wellington.

On 9 Dec William Boyd will speak about his life as an author.

On 17th December we will hold our Christmas Party at Auriens in Dovehouse Street. The wine and canapés will be delicious, and as numbers are limited I would advise early booking.

In January we will welcome Viscount Slim, to talk to us about his grandfather, the Field Marshal who defeated the Japanese in Burma, and in February we will interview Tamsin Perrett, who has written a definitive history of the Cadogan family.

These and more events are always shown on our website, which is becoming an increasingly useful resource. In addition to news and events you can also find an indexed set of our Annual Reports, and an application form for membership of the Society.

Our well-attended talks make a positive contribution to our reserves, as well as being a very effective way to introduce new members to the Society.

As you will hear from the Treasurer, we are in a good financial position, but please remember the Society in your Wills, and remember to sign a gift-aid form so that the Society can benefit 25% more from your subscription at no cost to yourself.

In addition to the activities I have mentioned, we are working to establish a prize for high quality architecture, which respects the unique character of Chelsea. We echo Frank Lloyd Wright's observation that: "All fine architectural values are human values, else not valuable".

We are also working on other prizes, particularly those which could introduce younger members to the Society.

We now have more than a thousand members (1,115 to be precise). Please invite friends to our events, and encourage them to join us, because the stronger we are the better we will be able to protect the essential character of Chelsea. If your neighbours need help about a planning matter, get them to join the Society and our Planning Committee will help. 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. You may also like to wear the Chelsea Society lapel badge, which you can purchase at the back of the hall.

Despite inflation, our subscriptions remain £30 for individuals, and £40 for couples. As far as I can judge, that is roughly the cost of a round of drinks and a sandwich.

I am grateful to the Vice-Chairman for producing monthly newsletters by e-mail, and the half-yearly Bulletins. The next one will be posted out with the Annual Report early in the New Year. Also for managing the website and our presence on Instagram, where we now have 1,115 "Followers." Do become a Follower if you are not already

Volunteers are always welcome to help the Society in any of our activities, giving as much or as little time as you like.

There is always a risk that we will take Chelsea's rich heritage and its thriving cultural activities for granted, but we must continue to strive 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 maintain a good pace of life and enjoy where we live.

Let me conclude by quoting from

Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, who said that

"Architecture is the will of an epoch translated into space".

and Winston Churchill, who said:

"We shape our buildings; and thereafter they shape us".

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 this account of our activities in this the 97th year of our Society.