

Good morning everyone and welcome to our annual AGM. How time flies.... It does not seem possible that I have had the privilege of being the Chairman of this vibrant society for four action packed years.....

However it is true and as always we have had an excellent year. I seem to remember this time last year stating that I hoped none of you ever realised how close to panic we had been. Well this year I think the swan came close to drowning on a couple of occasions. Never before have we experienced a lecturer cancelling at short notice or being stuck in traffic – this past year we had three!!! So our Risk Assessment for that contingency is now well honed.

The reason that we cope with these slight emergencies is all down to the excellent committee that runs this society. I am not singling out anyone by name but would like, on behalf of all of you, to thank them for the efforts they have put in this year to ensure the smooth running of WWDFAS. I would also like to thank all those other helpers without whom WWDFAS would not operate so smoothly – our “tech team”, web master, chair organisers, coffee team and car parkers. You do a wonderful job.

At this time as I reflect on the past year I like to remind myself of the excellent programme of lectures and visits we have enjoyed and ask myself what was my favourite. A difficult choice as we have had such riches but I came away from Brian Stater’s lecture on Restoration Dramas: how some of Britain’s best loved buildings were saved from destruction with a new viewpoint as to what we really mean by authentic restoration. It was fascinating, as was our Special Interest day with John Benjamin.

Our visits continue to be thoroughly enjoyable, if not as well as attended as in the past. This year we visited Blenheim Palace, where the focus was not quite so much on the splendours of the palace, but rather on the retail opportunities and the Watts Gallery on a gloriously sunny day. Our overnight visit to Brighton and the foreign visit to Vienna were full of interesting museums, galleries and buildings as well as excellent company and conversation – thanks must go to Paula Herne and Pamela Wood for the stress and angst of arranging these visits and managing to return with the same number of members as we set out with. Today we have been collecting deposits for the Visit to Amsterdam in April 2018 and to date have 16 people signed up. Do think about joining us – they are always fun and informative.

During the last year Young Arts continued to work with Aylesbury Young Offenders Institution trying to get the planned project to create murals for the Prison College off the ground. Unfortunately, due to changes in personnel and pressure on prison services generally, this venture had to be shelved for the time being. However, there was good news; after 3 years without art classes in the college, these were brought back into the curriculum at the beginning of 2017. There is now a thriving art group at the prison and we are helping it by supplementing the limited resources it has. One of our members has very generously donated paints for the classes and we have purchased, sketch books, pencils, posters and art books with funds raised for the prison by our society. We have also passed on articles donated by members for still-life drawing classes. There have been several students gaining qualifications this year. Also, two young offenders have received Koestler awards and their paintings have a chance of being chosen for display at the Koestler Exhibition of prisoners work at the London South Bank Centre this autumn. In fact since Carol gave me this report their work has indeed been on show.

Our second project this year was working with special needs children in High Wycombe. In 2016, two schools amalgamated to become the new Chilternwood School. To celebrate its first year, the school held a carnival on May 19th with the theme *Under the Sea*. During the preceding week, Young Arts volunteers from our Society happily helped the children create hats, masks, sea creatures and a decorative banner to commemorate the event. Both volunteers and children had great fun and it turned out to be a truly glittering occasion with sparkles everywhere! The carnival ended with a very enthusiastic singing and dance display by all the children, wearing the creations they had made themselves. Working with these children proved to be challenging but very rewarding and everyone involved was full of admiration of the children's spirit and their teachers' dedication.

The current Heritage Group Project is the treatment of Outsized Parish Record Material which is lying loose, dusty and unboxed on the shelves of Aylesbury County Hall. The records cover periods from the 1550s to the present day and the documentation is wide ranging, with Records of Baptism, Marriages and Burials, Constables' Accounts, Special Committees and Tithes. To date 505 items have been cleaned and wrapped and this hefty project is now drawing to a close. Although membership of the group is healthy, new recruits can be assured of a warm welcome. In June the Heritage Group enjoyed an outing to the historic and interesting St Katherine's Convent at Parmoor for a talk and

slides, followed by a delicious summery lunch in the Convent's Blue Drawing Room.

Following the buoyant report on the continuing work being undertaken on 'Church Records' within our region, it is pleasing to add that the Record for St Nicholas, Ibstone was completed during the year; indeed, its presentation will take place on Sunday 29th October. The group is now active in St Peter and St Paul, Ellesborough – the local Parish associated with 'Chequers' and the incumbent PM of the day! A PR opportunity in waiting?

The members of the Theatre Group were very sad to learn of the recent death of Lorna Maskell who, for many years, had run the Group so very excellently. At her funeral it was said she was a "force of nature" who will "leave a Lorna shaped hole in our lives". In November 2016 Theatre Group members visited the National Theatre to see "*The Red Barn*" based on a story by Georges Simenon and adapted for the stage by David Hare, starring Mark Strong and Elizabeth Debicki. In February this was followed by another visit to the National Theatre to see a modern dress version of "*Hedda Gabler*" starring Ruth Wilson and Rafe Spall and produced by Ivo van Hove. The highlight of the year was a visit in June to the RSC at Stratford to see "*Cleopatra*" starring Josette Simon who gave a mesmerizing and extraordinarily physical performance in the title role.

As this is my last Chairman's report I have been looking back over the last four years - at the highs and lows..... One of the most definite highs was the celebration of our 40th anniversary. To see so many members and past Chairman enjoying a superb afternoon tea in the glorious sunshine was a memory to be cherished. As to lows – well not too many thank goodness but recently the convolutions regarding that elephant in the room – rebranding - comes to mind. As you will be voting later in this meeting as to whether to change the name of West Wycombe Decorative and Fine Arts Society to The Arts Society West Wycombe I thought it appropriate to say a few words on the matter. We have known for some time that a change of name was being investigated for a couple of reasons. It was felt that the title did not clearly convey to "outsiders" what we were about and also we were no longer a national but rather an international organisation. So last March the new name was launched and adopted at the National AGM in May. After much discussion it was decided that we would vote to adopt the name of The Arts Society West

Wycombe at today's AGM. Considering our history as one of the oldest societies in NADFAS this was not an easy decision but what finally made the decision easier was the fact that in the future societies that have not become part of The Arts Society could lose the support from HQ. That could mean, amongst other things, losing the use of the Directory of Lecturers and insurance support. This would make the running of our society MUCH more difficult. So I hope that you understand the reason behind today's vote. We will also be voting to alter the data protection clause in order to bring it in line with new legislation.

And so this is it – the last time you will have to listen to me at the front of the hall. As I hand over the reins to my successor I would just like to thank the committee for their support and hard work mixed in with lots of laughter – maybe somewhat hysterical at times. But I would also like to thank every one of you – the members of this society for your friendship and encouragement. I can honestly say I have thoroughly enjoyed the last four years. There have been many excellent meetings and visits, interspersed with good company and friendship. Our committee meetings are always fun – if a little long at times and I have enjoyed working with everyone who has been on the committee in the last four years. I would also like to thank Gill Mortimer-Biggs, our President, for her constant support over the last year and also Ginnie Brudenell who was the preceding President.

Several long standing members of the committee are retiring today, Loiz Bale who has masterminded the programme for longer than I can remember, Pamela Wood who looked after the finances for five years before moving on to organise the very enjoyable foreign visits and Barbara Bedford who has fed and watered us at Autumn Lunches and Special Interest Days. Thank you for all your efforts – I know your expertise will be missed but you will now be able to just sit back and enjoy all our events.

Finally, I would like to wish Christine all the best as my successor – I only hope that you have as much fun as I have had. We are a vibrant, friendly and active society which will continue to thrive under your leadership and with the support of your hard working committee.

Thank you every one it has been a pleasure and a privilege to be Chairman of WWDFAS.

October 18th 2017

