

SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES OF LONDON

Anniversary Address by Paul Drury, President, 30 April 2019

A key role of our Society is to draw on the experience of our Fellows, to influence public policy relevant to the material remains of the past. So far, we have done this through the work of our Policy Committee, largely by reacting to consultations. But as I will explain, we now intend to take a more pro-active stance, beginning this summer with a discussion paper on the future of archaeology conducted for public benefit largely through the planning system.

But first, by way of context, a quick overview of the background. The past decade has not favoured the conservation and study of England's material heritage. There have been some spectacularly successful individual projects, of course, but intellectually, financially and organisationally the underlying trend has been negative. Confidence in the future health of the sectors that many of us represent, including university departments of archaeology, continues to diminish.

Provincial museums too are changing; not only suffering general reductions in resources as a result of the government's policy of public sector austerity, but also a concentration on their public-facing image at the expense of curatorial resources, constraining research access to collections. There has been a 36% decrease since 2006 in local authority conservation staff,¹ which stands proxy for a wider picture of resource cuts since the financial crisis of 2007-8.

Intellectually, the shift from progress to retrenchment followed slightly later, marked by the then government's decision, around the end of 2008, to abandon the Heritage Bill, published in April that year. A bill (I quote) '*designed to unify heritage protection regimes, allow greater public involvement in decisions, and place heritage at the heart of the planning system.*' It should have marked the transition to practical, rational reform of the legislation and policy, following a period of intense debate about what conservation of the historic environment meant, and who it was for, a debate reflected, for example, in the English Heritage *Conservation Principles*. In the event, the short-lived and clumsy *Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment* of 2009-10 bolted the values-based, conservation-planning approach onto the existing legislation and terminology. This was carried over in 2012 by the abbreviated policy guidance in the *National Planning Policy Framework*, itself revised in July 2018.

Through all these changes, the 'polluter pays' principle of archaeological provision in the planning system established by PPG16 in 1990 –substantially the achievement of our late past

¹ *The Tenth report on Local Authority Staff Resources*, October 2018, fig 1: <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/tenth-report-la-staff-resources/tenth-report-la-staff-resources/>

president, Geoff Wainwright – has remained intact, despite pressure to relax planning constraints to boost development, made manifest after the 2008 downturn and a recurring theme of national planning policy ever since. But archaeological policy has been sustained through the vigilance of the sector. We contributed to a common position, adopted and endorsed across the sector, which resulted in amendments to the draft 2018 revised NPPF that secured the *status quo*.

However, the framework for managing archaeology within the planning system established after 1990 is under severe strain, exacerbated by dwindling local authority resources to maintain Historic Environment Records as active databases and the foundation for authorities' role in curating the resource. Because the cuts have been geographically uneven, this has led to inconsistent application of the policy across the country, which tends to undermine the credibility of the system.² And the problem of the long-term curation of archaeological archives and research access continues to mount.

In the absence of a clear sectoral lead, we, as a body which does not have an institutional vested interest in the outcome, will shortly be setting out our vision for the future organisation of archaeological provision in England, based on our evidence to the 2016 Redesdale-Howell inquiry. We will be suggesting a rethink rather than ongoing piecemeal retrenchment, to make best use of scarce resources, focussed on realising the public benefit of archaeology through dissemination of knowledge generated by fieldwork.

We will be advocating:

- Historic Environment Records and curatorial services being set on a statutory basis (as now in Wales, and *de facto* in Scotland)
- Concentration in regional hubs rather than county teams, capable of sustaining a critical mass of expertise
- In centres which can promote research and dissemination of the outcomes of developer-funded fieldwork
- And with links to regional organisations, particularly universities.
- Logically, one would integrate Scheduled Monument Consent casework into the hubs.

During the year, we have also commented on a wide range of other policy issues, including the National Lottery Heritage Fund forward strategy, the AHRC strategic delivery plan, the future of the National Heritage List for England, and national infrastructure projects affecting Heathrow and Stonehenge. Among our Policy Committee members, I must particularly thank Stephen Johnson for keeping track of the issues and co-ordinating our responses.

² *The Tenth report on Local Authority Staff Resources*, October 2018, fig 2:
<https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/tenth-report-la-staff-resources/tenth-report-la-staff-resources/>

Our contributions to research, conservation and dissemination

This year, we offered £146,000 in research grants, including a generous ongoing donation by our Fellow Edward Harris (Fig 1). Overall this represents a significant increase over the previous average. We continue to address a wide range of disciplines, and more than half of our awards were for projects outside the UK (Fig 2).

	2019	2015-18 average
No of applications	65	78
No of Awards	33	34
Success rate	51%	44%
Average Value of Awards	£4,433	£2,947
Range of Values	£350-£14,940	£193-£10,500
Total value of awards	£146,291	£100,194

Fig 1 2019 Research and Travel awards compared to 2015-18 average

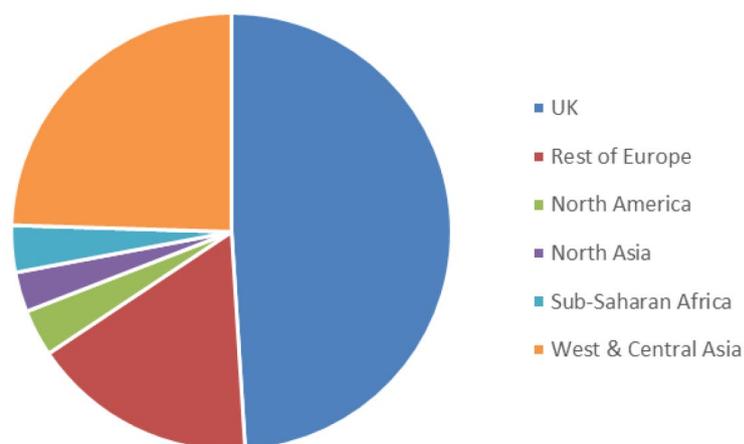


Fig 2 2019 Research awards by location of project

This has been first year during which we have been able to offer grants from the fund established by the legacy of Beatrice de Cardi, for continuing research in the region in which she was a pioneer, the Arabian Peninsula and Balochistan. We were able to make three awards totalling £35K out of a total of £50K available, an encouraging response in their first year, which I'm sure will grow as we continue to raise awareness of the fund.

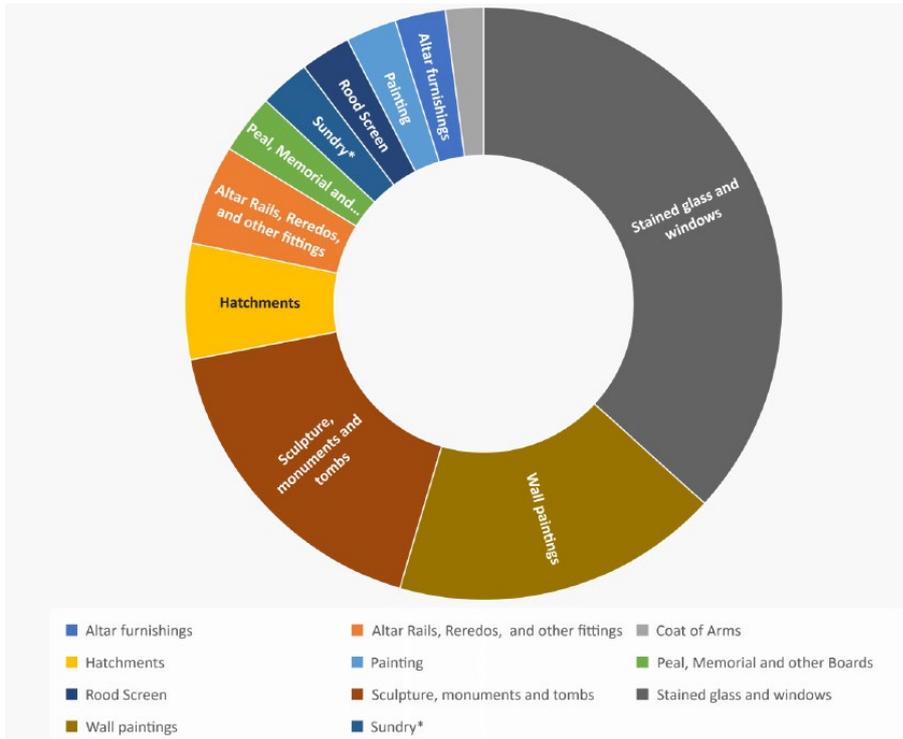


Fig 3 Morris grants by object, 2014-18

Here are cumulative statistics for our Morris Fund grants for conservation of decorative features in churches, by type of object (Fig 3) and by geographical area (Fig 4). They are limited to England and Wales, but awareness of them seems to be greater in some counties than others.

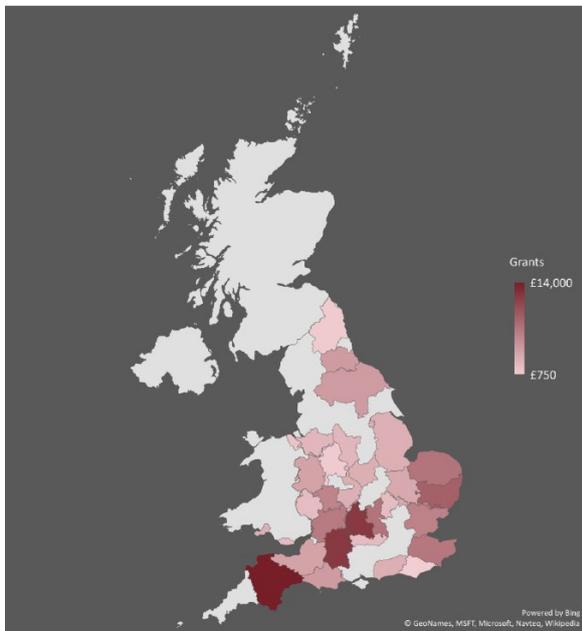


Fig 4 Morris Grants: total value by county, 2014-2018

Unearthing the Past is our annual research showcase at which grant recipients quite literally set out their stalls in our meeting room to engage directly with Fellows and the public. Visitors were fascinated to be able to talk to archaeologists and material historians on this informal, one-to-one basis. The event again coincided with *Burlington House Courtyard Lates*, when all six societies around the courtyard invited visitors to explore the theme of 'resources.' That event, and our participation in Open House London in September were particularly successful in showing people who we are and what we do. As a guide this year, I can say that there is a real public appetite for events of this kind.

In November we heard a paper setting out the emerging results from the six-year research programme on the 7th century Staffordshire Hoard. We will publish the hoard in September in our *Research Reports* series, to an exceptional production standard, the volume underwritten by Historic England. That will be followed on 1 November by a colloquium on the significance of the Hoard for future research and public understanding. And there will be a public lecture in June, helping to disseminate the results of the research to a wider audience.

Since we published in 1913 the first report of our Research Committee, on excavations at Wroxeter by J P Bushe-Fox, more than 50 volumes have made available the results of important contemporary archaeological excavation and research. I'm pleased to say that in a matter of weeks we will have over a quarter of our back catalogue of these Reports published on line, in open access through the Archaeological Data Service, with the rest to follow.

A well as our programme of ordinary meetings, we held two highly successful day conferences, in November on the Late Glacial Palaeolithic, organised by Professor Nick Barton, and in February on Secret Spaces: presenting a European perspective on medieval sacristies, vestries, treasure rooms and their contents. Both are available on line. We also held study days on the Winton Domesday and on our cartoons of the stained glass at Tewkesbury Abbey, made during its restoration in 1923.

Our apartments of course host many other events organised by Fellows and kindred societies. I particularly want to congratulate our Fellows Clare Gapper and Paula Henderson for organising their annual conferences on *New Insights into 16th and 17th century British Architecture*. The next one in January 2020 will mark the tenth anniversary of an unmissable, sold out event for all of us interested in the architecture of the period.

In February, we heard excerpts from *Mary's Hand*, a solo operatic performance by Clare McCaldin exploring the life of Mary Tudor, preceded by a talk from our Fellow John Cooper. The visual focus was Clare in a replica of the dress Queen Mary wears in our portrait by Hans Eworth. This was a good example of the potential of our collections to stimulate contemporary creativity, which will be a key theme of our Kelmscott project.

Unlocking our collections

An accompanying display of contemporary documents reminded me of the range and wealth of the wondrous things we hold - objects, manuscripts, prints, drawings and photographs. These, alongside our library, constitute probably the most important antiquarian and archaeological collection in the anglophile world. Our problem is that apart from the library books, with a few exceptions the collections are not catalogued in detail, nor appear in searchable form on line. In this we lag behind other major collections. But we are about to appoint a *Systems Manager: Library, Museums and Archives* to develop a new integrated database, which will initially bring together the contents of the existing catalogues.

But that is only the start of what we need to do. Once the digital platform is in place, we as Fellows need to contribute our particular expertise and enthusiasm to enriching the catalogues, which need to be illustrated – the online British Museum catalogue is in many ways a good model of what we want to achieve. And the *Unlocking our Collections* section of our website is a start. Cataloguing and digitising our collections will hopefully make more of this material accessible both to the community of scholars and the wider public.

Specific research by our staff and Fellows continues to be showcased in the library and hall, for example:

- Photographs mostly of castles taken by the young T E Lawrence cycling around France in 1907-8 (identified by our Fellow Bill Woodburn)
- Autograph music from two of our manuscript collections (compiled by Harriet Hansell, Library Assistant).

The latter certainly engaged the interest of our Royal Fellow, the Duke of Gloucester, who visited us in November, primarily to discuss our Kelmscott project.

To encourage researchers to use our collections, for the fourth year running we held a postgraduate open day, attended by nearly 50 post-graduate students and early career researchers. Break-out sessions led by Fellows became the most appreciated element of the day.

During the year we made loans to two memorable exhibitions in Norwich (our arch-topped portraits) and Peterborough (the Lindsey psalter and the Black Book of Peterborough). And we were very pleased to accept, through our past president Maurice Howard, the gift of a portrait of Charles Marsh FSA by L.F. Abbott, dating from the 1790s. As I noted [in the formal meeting], we have now raised the funds for its conservation, necessary before we can display it here in our apartments.

Burlington House

Now I must bring you up to date about our tenure here at New Burlington House, on which so many of our activities depend. In unison with the other four Courtyard Societies, we are engaged in constructive but confidential discussions about the future with our landlord, the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government, as the successors of the Office of Works, who completed these apartments for us in 1874.

Many of you will recall that we occupied rent-free until 2005, when a case was brought against us by the then government to settle our legal status. The action was stayed to allow for mediation, following which each society was granted a lease for 10 years, renewable 7 times. That was on the mutual understanding that the formula for calculating the rent would result in its slowly rising to market rates over 80 years.

Everyone I'm sure acted in good faith, but also in haste, since the court gave a narrow window for agreement. The government comprehensively repaired the exterior, by then in a poor state, and we and the other societies began to invest in the interiors – like the refit of this meeting room. Our Fellow Bernard Nurse wrote up the events in our *Journal*,³ and his concluding words that ‘the basis for valuation and rent could become contentious in the long term’ have been borne out, rather sooner than he perhaps imagined.

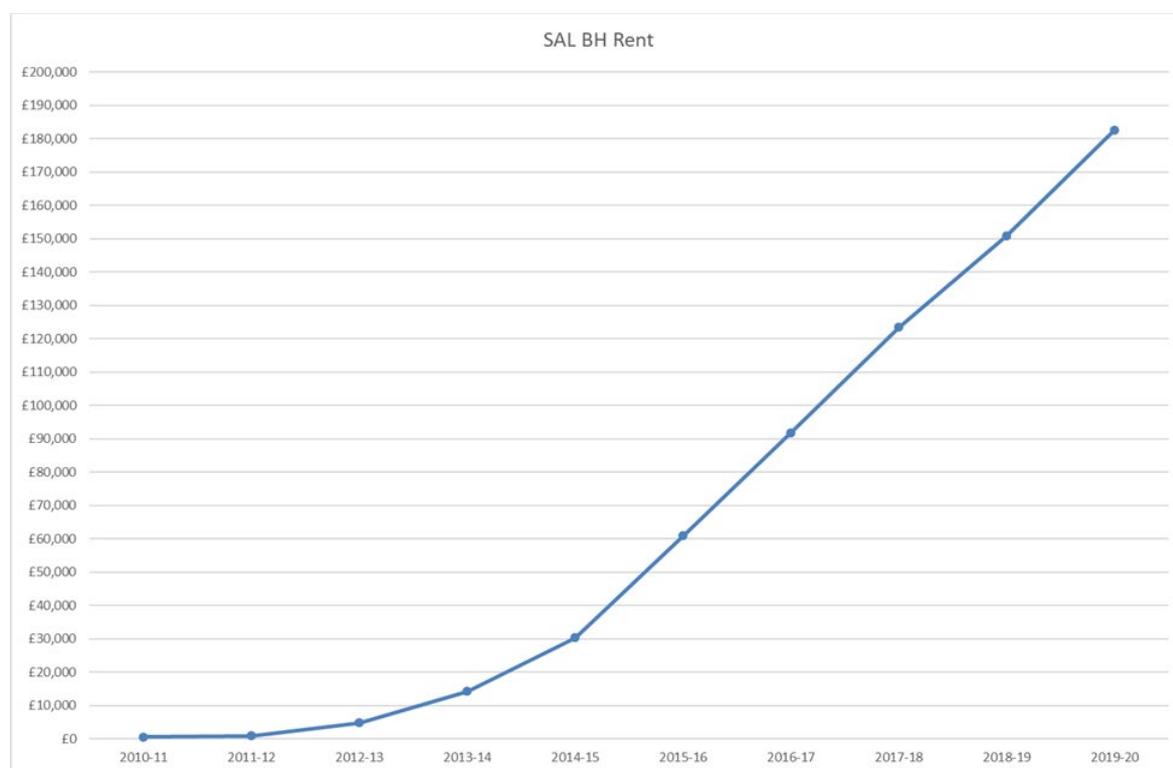


Fig 5 SAL apartments in Burlington House: Rent paid, 2010-11 to 2018-19

³ Bernard Nurse, 'The Burlington House Case, 2004-5', *Antiq J* **86** (2006), 390-401.

As the graph (Fig 5) shows, from 2011-12 the rent began to rise exponentially, primarily because the market value of property in this prime area of Central London grew more rapidly than anyone anticipated, with the influx of foreign investment a key driver. An arbitration concluded in 2016 clarified the interpretation of the basis of calculating the rent contained in the leases, although with no advantage to the societies. I won't attempt to try to explain it, but it is a 'circular, self-sustaining' formula, highly geared, though I doubt that anyone realised that in 2005. The arbitration also established that the societies had no right to dispute the assessments at each review, unless they were 'wholly unrealistic negligent exercises of judgement.' A hiatus followed the arbitration, and only this month was the second 10-year lease completed, and the rent demands for the years since the arbitration issued. They are shown in Fig 5, and although higher than the sums we had accrued, all have now been paid up to the end of March.

The completion of the 2015-24 lease by the Society protects our legal status under the 2005 lease, to occupy at a rent which, however large £180, 000 per annum may appear to us, is still only a fraction of current market rents in this location. As I said earlier, we are in constructive discussions with government about securing our future here, although their nature must for the present remain wholly confidential. But I would be failing in my duty as chair of the trustees of a charity not to set out the position as it has emerged during the past few weeks. And I think that you will understand that until this matter is resolved, our long-term aspirations to remain at, and invest in, Burlington House, to make it better fit the needs of the 21st century, must remain on hold. Indeed since 2012 the uncertainty over the rent has prevented us from making strategic plans for the Society's future insofar as they are dependent on Burlington House, hence our focus on public engagement and the Kelmscott.

The Fellowship

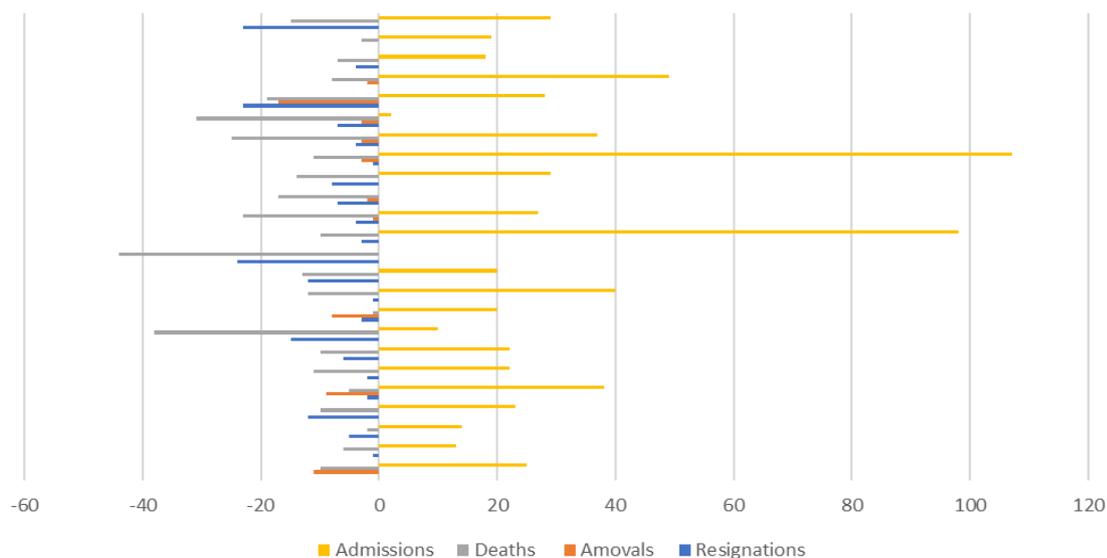


Fig 6 Fellowship gains and losses, by quarterly council meeting, 2013-19

Turning now to the Fellowship, we hold incomplete data on the age of Fellows, but there is a consensus that we are skewed towards the high end of the scale (myself included!). I think this is an historic rather than a current problem, not least because through the past year of ballots and admissions, I have noted what seems to be a reasonable demographic (and gender) balance. We can see from Fig 6 (which covers the period from 2013) the extent of annual 'churn': deaths, resignations and amovals for non-payment compared to admissions.

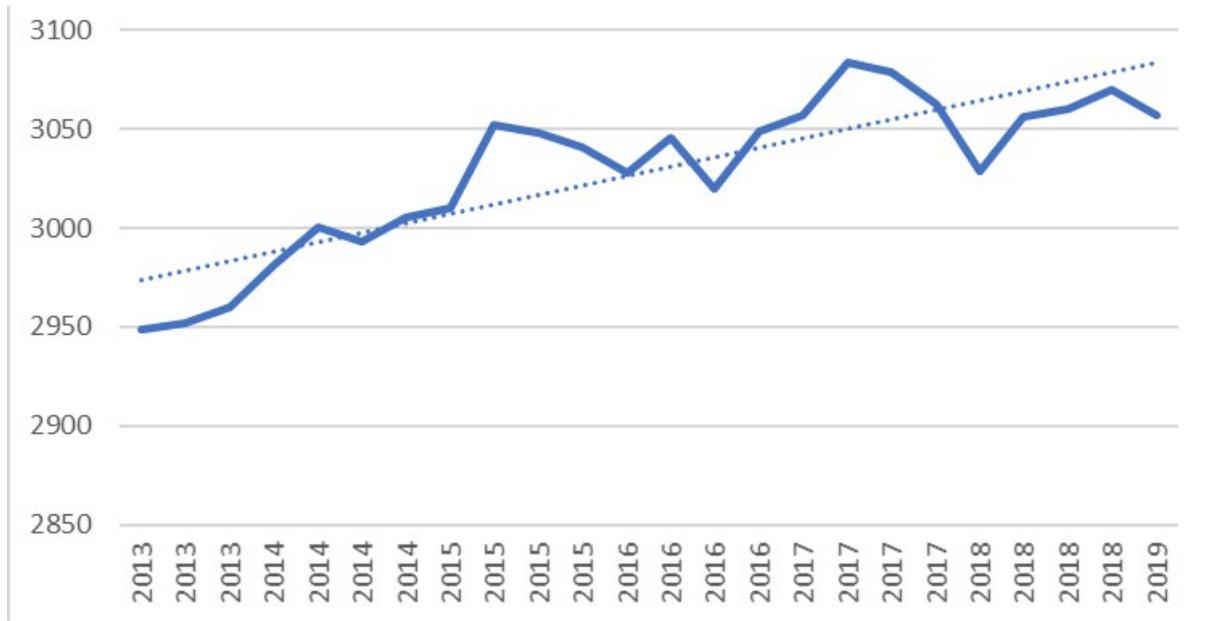


Fig 7 Total Fellowship, June 2013 – March 2019

Whereas this next graph (Fig 7) shows the net position. One can suggest (the dotted line) an overall trend of very slow increase; but one might equally or better interpret the data as a steady rise to mid-2015, and a levelling off at around 3060 Fellows thereafter.

For some time, indeed sporadically over the past century, it has been evident that the number of Fellows at current subscription levels is not in itself sufficient to sustain the services the Society offers. Even allowing for the decline since the death of optimism in 2008, the number of people employed in the understanding and care of our material heritage remains historically high. There are undoubtedly many potential recruits who meet our criterion of *excelling in the knowledge of the antiquities and history of this and other nations*, but pressures on their income have probably never been greater. I've urged Fellows to look around their circle, their workplaces, and actively seek out and put forward appropriate colleagues, particularly younger colleagues, for election; but that alone will not, I think, adequately address the issue.

The possibility of a membership or Associate Fellowship has been discussed intermittently in Council at least as far back as the 1920s. You will recall that the creation of additional classes of Fellow or member was facilitated in the 2015 revised statutes. Council has again been

discussing the possibility of a membership scheme, which in part could build on the loyal following our public lectures have achieved. But the other Courtyard Societies hold similar public lectures, and we are planning better to integrate our public offer. So the idea of a joint Friends of Burlington House Courtyard has been floated which could be large enough quickly to become self-sustaining.

Whatever the outcome of that debate, I do think it is time for us seriously to consider an Associate Fellowship, aimed especially at younger scholars and early career researchers, priced to match their pockets while still making a net contribution to our core costs. That is a personal view, but I do want to see the route to Fellowship being perceived across our varied disciplines more as climbing a hill than scaling a cliff. And to make better use of our resources, fund the services we provide without seeking to raise Fellows' subscriptions to levels that would be seen as inaccessible to many. And above all ensure that our apartments can further develop as a place where like-minded people want to come to meet, study or find a quiet place to write. The Fellowship will of course be consulted about any proposals which emerge from ongoing debate in Council.

Kelmscott

Finally, I want to turn to Kelmscott, to end on a matter for celebration. Some 90% of the funding is now in place for our £6m project *Kelmscott and Morris: Past, Present and Future*, at a property where thankfully we do own the freehold!

Alongside our General Secretary and the Kelmscott team, my predecessor Gill Andrews deserves our particular thanks for her continuing personal commitment to the project, not least her work on our successful application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund. As does Peter Cormack's expertise and commitment as our Honorary Curator of Kelmscott. Recently he has been exploring William and May Morris' Icelandic connections, and so helping us cement a long-standing friendship with the Icelandic government through their Ambassador in London, who with his team visited Kelmscott in October.

The NHLF grant of £4.3m is I think the largest single donation the Society has ever received. We have raised the balance from a wide range of donors, including many Fellows, as noted earlier this evening. Particular thanks for this are due to Dominic Wallis, our Development Officer, and to the Kelmscott Campaign Group chaired by our fellow Martin Levy.

But there is more to do, immediately in raising £0.5m to support public outreach and engagement. Kelmscott already generates a modest revenue surplus, which should increase in the future. But to ensure that the place is truly self-sustaining in the long term, we intend to develop a *Kelmscott Futures* fund to provide for ongoing investment, and to meet the costs of future long cycle maintenance.

We are now able to proceed with the capital works which will bring the buildings and their services into sound repair, including addressing problems which have built up since the major repairs we undertook after the house passed to us in 1962. We will also improve the visitor facilities, provide education and exhibition spaces and space for an artist in residence.

Planning permission and listed building consent for the project were granted in August. We completed the new lease of the extended car park from the Church Commissioners at the beginning of this month, so Kelmscott can be cleared of parked cars on open days. Those steps paved the way for NHLF to give us formal permission to start – and so begin to draw down grant money!

In anticipation, our architects, Architecton, had begun working up the detailed designs, which are now being finalised and cost checked. We will go out to tender in the summer and the first phase of work will start in September, with overall completion by May 2021.

The house will close early this year, at the end of August, to allow us to decant the contents prior to repair; and we will take the opportunity this presents in the summer of 2020 to mount a *Kelmscott Manor Treasures Exhibition* here at Burlington House.

Our over-riding theme will be how Kelmscott influenced Morris, for he made few changes, and the agricultural buildings adjacent that he appreciated were not actually in his demise. In future visitors will be able to participate in a practical demonstration of our own dynamic engagement with the past, which takes as its starting-point the very reasons why Morris himself loved Kelmscott's unpretentious antiquity and rural tranquillity.

History, art, architecture, archaeology and ancient landscapes are the academic disciplines at the heart of our Society. They and Kelmscott inspired William Morris, and Kelmscott we hope will continue to inspire future generations.

And a reminder that the last Fellows' Day before closure will be on 20 June. Do come and learn more about the transformation to come.....

Finally I must thank our Officers (Stephen Dunmore, Chris Scull, Heather Sebire), Members of Council, Committee Members, our general secretary John Lewis and all our staff and volunteers at Burlington House and Kelmscott, for their unfailing hard work – and for enduring me crashing around asking why do we do this? and can we do that?

And it has been a pleasure, over the past few months, to get to know and work with our colleagues from the other courtyard societies. If all goes well, we have laid the foundation for working much more closely together in the future.