**Anniversary Address**

**25 April 2024**

**Martin Millett**

First, I would like to thank you all for electing me as your President for a second term, it is a great honour to continue to serve. This is my third Anniversary Address as President, by my reckoning this is the 273rd Anniversary Meeting since our Royal Charter was granted in November 1751. It comes at a highly significant moment in the history of the Society as we have at last settled our dispute with the Government over our future at Burlington House. I will return to this momentous event and its implications for the Society in the second part of my address.

In general, the Anniversary Address provides the President with the opportunity to review and celebrate the achievements of the Society and to talk more broadly about the environment within which we operate. With this in mind, I will first look back over aspects of the achievements of the past year.

**The Society in 2023–24**

I do not want to repeat here what has already been said in recent messages to the Fellowship or in our annual report in *The Antiquary* which well illustrates the diversity and quality of activities over the last year, but I would like to briefly highlight some key achievements. As I discussed last year, the development of our new strategy took up a lot of energy in 2022–23. Following its adoption by Council just before the last Anniversary Meeting, there has been considerable further work undertaken by our staff on planning its implementation which has wide reaching consequences for our future operations. I have been immensely impressed by the way the transition has been handled by all concerned, and especially under the leadership of our Interim General Secretary, Memoria Lewis. Memoria brought skills and experience honed through leading a range of other organisations as interim CEO and her outsider's eyes and senses, as well as her cheerful enthusiasm, have been of immense value to the Society during her 11 months with us. In addition to work on the implementation of the strategy Memoria has also helped us move forward in the modernization of our Finance and IT support systems, again providing invaluable direction and advice. The Officers and Council are very grateful indeed to Memoria for her work over this period and have resolved to give her a life-membership as an Affiliate as a small token of the Society's thanks.

Alongside these this longer-term planning and development work, there have been other notable achievements during the year. The Library and Collections team have not only continued their excellent day-to-day work but have also undertaken the herculean task of preparing the paperwork for renewing our Arts Council Museum Accreditation. Anyone who has had anything to do with this highly worthwhile scheme will be aware that it nonetheless imposes a considerable burden on the staff involved and I would like to take this opportunity to thank Dunia and her team for their efforts on our behalf. Alongside this, the team has also been engaged in additional new work to support both our Open House events as well as a number of visits from Ministers and members of both Houses of Parliament whom we invited to visit in connection with the Burlington House lease campaign.

Following a successful application for funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund (at the end of 2022), the Society launched its *Sensing History* project during 2023. This has allowed us to open to the public on Fridays as well as to bring a wide range of groups of children and young people into Burlington House to be enthused about their material past. This work complements the outreach programme underway at Kelmscott Manor and I firmly believe that both programmes are key for the future of our subjects so I have been delighted to hear about the ways in which our young visitors have been excited by what we have to offer. Through this in the last year we have doubled footfall into Burlington House (3500 average) to 7000 including schools and community groups. I am particularly grateful to Dominic Wallis for his work in securing the funding for the *Sensing History* project. Dominic has equally been successful working with the team at Kelmscott Manor in securing funding for the restoration of the Tapestry Room there which includes both work on the conservation of the tapestries and their rehanging in the configuration as it was in Morris' time.

These highlights underline the dynamism, skill and dedication of all our staff, and in this context I am delighted to welcome Natasha McEnroe as our new General Secretary. Natasha joined the Society at the beginning of April from the Science Museum, where she was Keeper of Medicine. She brings with her a wealth of experience from a variety of museums and heritage organizations, and in delivering both capital and academic heritage projects. We welcome her as we look forward to a bright future as a Society.

Finally, before turning to discuss Burlington House, although I have already expressed the Society's thanks to those members of Council who are standing down today, I would like to make especial mention again of Heather Sebire who has completed two terms as Honorary Secretary, serving though an especially challenging period. Our Honorary Secretary takes special responsibility for our Library and Collections including Kelmscott Manor. Fellows only need to look at the achievements in these areas over the past 6-years to see just how much has been done. Heather has also been a great colleague and steadfast member of the officer team – I am personally extremely grateful to her.

**Burlington House**

Turning now to Burlington House. As noted above, our success in negotiating a sustainable lease marks a key point in the history of the Society and so I would like to explore both the terms of the new lease and their implications. But before doing so it seems appropriate as Antiquarians to look back to the history of our tenure here especially since 2024 marks 150 years since we first moved-in. That move took place in late 1874, so the first Anniversary Meeting held here took place in April 1875. Looking back over the proceedings of the Society leading up to that move provides something of a sense of *deja-vu* as the negotiations over the move from Somerset House to Burlington House took over 20 years…

The Society had been granted premises in Somerset House alongside the Royal Society by King George III in 1776. However, with the growth of the Inland Revenue whose need for space at Somerset House was increasing, pressure grew from the 1850s for the Society to be relocated. Plans were developed for the courtyard of Burlington House to be built as a campus for a group of learned societies with the Royal Academy at the same time taking over the House itself (on a 999-year lease in exchange for refurbishing it). The societies moving into the Courtyard did so on different terms, effectively occupying their buildings on a grace and favour basis, paying no rent and with the government maintaining the fabric of the buildings. Such was the attitude to culture and science in Victorian Britain.

On the occasion of the 1875 Address, the then President, Lord Stanhope, was indisposed, so the Address was delivered by the Vice-President, J. Winter-Jones. His text is worth revisiting as it provides a brief account of the Society's peripatetic history prior to its occupation of Somerset House. It also describes how during the move to Burlington House, the then Honorary Secretary (Mr Watson) had taken personal charge of physically moving the library from Somerset House to Burlington House, suffering an accidental fall from a step ladder in the process, leaving him with a paralysed right arm for several weeks. (Shahina will be relieved to note that we no longer expect such work from our Honorary Secretaries.) Fellows will further be pleased to hear that the current President will also not be emulating his predecessor who, on that occasion, presented the Society with an portrait of himself.

Our occupancy of Burlington House continued on the basis established in the 1870s until the end of the twentieth century when the government's policy that all their land should be registered with the Land Registry precipitated a dispute over the nature of our tenancy. This dispute was only resolved in 2005 after a court case and arbitration which led to the granting of series of short-term leases which seemed to secure our position until 2085. The unsatisfactory nature of this resolution and its unaffordability gradually became apparent, and after attempts to resolve the matter by negotiation came to nothing we launched our public *Save Burlington House* *Campaign* in collaboration with the other Courtyard Societies.

In my Address last year I noted that we had opened negotiations directly with Ministers about the lease and that I was hopeful that we would be able to find an equitable solution. Working together with the other Courtyard Societies I am delighted to report that on 28 February 2024 we signed a Heads of Terms agreement with the Government and work is in hand to prepare the lease and other legal documents for signature. It would not be appropriate here to go into the details of what was a complex negotiation but I would like to share information both about the principles of the agreement and what this means for our Society. Before doing this, I would like to pay tribute to those who have brought the *Save Burlington House Campaign* to a successful conclusion. Our team, in addition to Andrew MacDonald whom I thanked earlier, comprised and the Presidents and CEOs of the other courtyard Societies, Vernon Hunte (of AprilSix) and Nigel Fox (of Capital Real Estate Partners). Their success built on the sustained campaigning led by my predecessor Paul Drury and our previous General Secretary, John Lewis. Without their work in building sound cross-party political support we would never have achieved anything. Similarly, we have benefitted from sustained and skilled support from a wide range of members of both Houses of Parliament, most especially our Fellows Tim Loughton, Sir Chris Bryant and Lord Cormack (as well as members of the government behind the scenes). It is particularly sad that Patrick Cormack died in February just days before the agreement was signed. At the same time, I would also like to acknowledge the constructive roles played by Matt Thurstan and Daan De Lange of the Dept of Levelling-up, Housing and Communities and Jon Millard (of BNP Paribas) who, from the other negotiating team, engaged with us constructively in the final stages of the discussions.

In outline the agreement grants the Courtyard Societies collectively a 999-year lease on Burlington House (on a peppercorn rent), for Antiquaries' share of which we the will pay £4.8m (25% up front, the balance over 10 years, which with interest amounts to *c.* £460,000 per year). We will collectively become responsible for the running and maintenance of the building and we have further agreed to invest in the building to bring it up to standard and make it sustainable for future. We have also undertaken to enhance public access to the buildings and our collections.

At first sight this looks like an enormous sum for the Society to raise, but this should be set against the present rent (which is increasing annually on an escalator) and currently stands at about £220,000 per year. As with all property purchases, we *are* acquiring an asset, no longer simply paying money out as rent. Furthermore £4.8m represents excellent value (at today’s prices the same would buy you a 4-bedroom flat off Berkley Square). But we also need to understand that we will have to pay our share of the annual running costs and there is a backlog in maintenance which we will need to fund. Further work needs to be done on assessing the latter but our initial estimate is that £10+ million will need to be spent on the whole courtyard over the next few years. I will return to the issue of costs and fund-raising in a moment, but I think it is important first to explain our vision for the future of Burlington House in the context of our strategy. The acquisition of the lease is *not* an end in itself, but is one of the means through which we can deliver the outward-looking strategy that I outlined in my address last year and on which we have made great progress in the last 12 months.

As presently configured we have inherited a building originally designed in part as a residence and in part as a library and meeting space, gradually adapted over time. It has served us well for 150 years but, it now needs to be reconfigured for the present century and this must be done in an exemplary manner as befits a Society that is concerned with our heritage. We have a vision for the Society's building to become *the* natural place for people from our sector to come together, both formally and informally, when they are in London. This partly happens already with other societies meeting here and with use of our library, collections and archives. But it can and should be much more. This needs careful design around following conceptual reconfiguration. The ground floor should become our outward facing space, for meetings, lectures, displays and exhibitions with full provision for public access. The First floor and a refurbished basement would then be for use by Fellows and researchers with enhanced library space and informal meeting facilities alongside a Fellows room (where you can have a coffee and talk). This would leave the Upper floor for administrative and staff use alongside secure collections space. Throughout, we must aspire to create facilities that are of the highest quality for meetings and lectures (with state-of-the-art IT, virtual-meeting and projection facilities). These must be made available for organisations within our sector (at affordable cost) but must also be used to generate income from others users outside our sector. In this way Burlington House needs to serve not only the Fellowship but the wider sector and the interested public, becoming *the* centre for our whole community when in London and a showcase for the whole of our sector.

Funding this will require us to raise money for three distinct strands: first, the lease purchase; second for cross-courtyard building improvement/investment (roof, windows, energy sustainability); and third for internal works to improve our own apartments.

In broad terms we will be looking to the Fellowship for the lease purchase and we will need to collaborate with the other Courtyard Societies in raising external funding (from public bodies, grant-making trusts and foundations) for improvements to the building. To be effective, we will need to continue to work hand-in hand with the other Courtyard Societies so that we are able to raise funds from outside bodies without conflicts occurring. These aspects need further work and development, so I do not have any more to say about this now except to recall how the Kelmscott Manor project enabled us to bring in £6 million of inward investment of this kind which shows that we can achieve this. In this context it is also vital that we continue to develop public facing activities as laid out in our strategy. Our ability to engage the public will be critical to raising external funds to improve the building.

In terms of lease purchase, we are looking to the Fellowship in the first instance, since showing that we can help do this ourselves should encourage outside donors to help fund improvement to the building. Our strategy for the purchase is as follows

• In terms of the initial payment of £1.2 million (25% of the purchase price), we are enormously fortunate to have received a legacy of *c.* £1m from the late Anthony Emery FSA and we have also already received pledges/gifts amounting to £60,000 from other Fellows. Council will be considering how best to commemorate Anthony Emery's generous legacy at its next meeting. This means we will be able to cover the bulk of the up-front payment (especially if we take into account the sum we would have paid in rent anyway).

• To raise the funds for the remaining 75% (£460,000 per year for 10 years) we have agreed the principle (1) that for the time being, future legacies will be used towards the cost of the purchase of the lease (where the terms of the bequest allow this), and (2) that we should not fund the lease purchase from our existing free reserves as Council is determined to protect our long term financial sustainability. Hence any money that we do have to draw from our free reserves to cover the £460,000 a year will be treated as a loan to be repaid.

• We will be establishing a campaign group from within the Fellowship to steer the fund-raising to cover the remaining 75% of the purchase price, and our hope is that we will be able to encourage as many Fellows as possible to contribute in some way, however modest. Just as an illustration, the annual sum needed every year for the next 10 years amounts to about £153 per Fellow per year for 10 years (which equals £127.50 per year + Gift Aid, or £10.63 per month + Gift Aid). When broken down in this way, the target looks achievable. We are aware that not all Fellows will be willing or able to contribute, but I do hope that many will want to support us in any way they can.

Securing our future at Burlington House provides us with the means to control our own destiny. The purchase of the lease and the refurbishment of the building is a 10 year project – once achieved the Society will be even better-placed to continue to build on its long tradition of promoting research into our past and communicating this to a wide public. I do hope that as many of you as possible will join me in helping secure a new future for the Society.