The Arts Society Honiton

Annual Report 2023/4

Chairman's report

The atmosphere at the Arts Society Honiton's lectures has really felt vibrant with audiences of over 100 at times. We have attracted some new members and I have been pleased to see the steady stream of visitors at our lectures. We have had a well-balanced lecture programme again this year with a wide variety of subjects. I would like to thank Janet for the amount of work which goes into the selection, booking and waiting at the station for the lecturer to arrive on the actual day and coping with the vagaries of transport links in the run up to that moment.

Please remember that you can each bring a guest to one of the lectures as part of your membership. This is an excellent way of showing people what we have on offer and maybe they will consider becoming members themselves. Word of mouth has been shown to be the best way of recruiting; we all need to help keep our numbers up to keep our society viable.

I am sure that the reports which Gill Thomas has written for the Honiton and Village News, which has sadly now ceased publication, have also stimulated interest, I thank her for these. Being able to get details in the 'what's on' section of the Midweek Herald has helped us reach a wider audience too.

Jane Yates our membership secretary will be pleased to accept renewals over the summer and this will help avoid queues in the autumn!

M-A Howe has been our secretary for many years and is standing down from this role. She is going to continue to her front of house duties and organise the lunches. Richard Howe, her husband and our treasurer is also stepping down. We are extremely grateful for the work they have done over the years for The Arts Society Honiton and Honiton Fine and Decorative Arts Society before it was renamed. Thank you M-A and Richard.

We have received nominations for the posts of Hon Treasurer and Hon Secretary, and will put these to the AGM in June, together with any others that may be received before the closing date. Amanda Preston, our assistant treasurer, has kindly agreed to stay on the committee for another year, and we look forward to welcoming a new committee member who has expressed an interest in joining the committee to arrange visits.

David Ward, Chairman

Treasurer's report

My Report written this time last year stuck a note of cautious optimism. We appeared to be emerging from the general slow-down caused by Covid and there was a sense of 'back to normal'. We were all very cautious about that. However I do think that we may now indulge in a bit of optimism. The indicators are all positive, consistently but not dramatically. Membership is up, costs are steady, attendance at lectures is strong, and visitors are flocking to them.

This is my last report as Hon Treasurer and it gives me great pleasure to be stepping down at a time when your society is enjoying a period of financial stability. I am grateful to the Committee for their support and understanding and especially to Amanda who has continued to be my sheet-anchor when the wind has risen. I look forward to continuing to attend the excellent lectures arranged by Janet.

Richard Howe, Hon Treasurer

Membership Secretary's report

We are continuing to rebuild our membership and I am pleased to report an increase in our numbers from 115 in 2022-23 to 128 this year, an increase of 13 in our membership. We have had continuing support from our core membership and new members have joined. This is encouraging progress compared to some societies which are suffering a decline in numbers. The scheme of enabling our members to invite one guest at no cost each season has proved popular and beneficial in that some guests have subsequently become members having experienced what the Arts Society Honiton has to offer.

We have considered ways to make the experience of joining our society an easier process and now offer these options:-

- Printed Application Forms can be collected whilst at a lecture and completed by hand
- Application Forms are sent to your inbox to print and complete by hand then hand deliver or post
- Application Form can be sent to your in box, you can click Reply and then complete the form on-line before clicking Send so that it comes directly back to me.

We also offer a variety of means of payment

- Debit/credit card whilst at the lecture
- BACS payment from home
- Cheque
- Cash

The vast majority of members use email which keeps everyone up to date with relevant information. It means that everyone can receive our Newsletter about forthcoming lectures and other items of interest. The emails also enable members to be notified about lunches and also to express opinions after lectures.

Jane Yates, Membership Secretary

Programme Secretary's report

We have had another very varied programme this season. Feedback so far from the lectures has either been excellent or outstanding with the talk on the Elgin Marbles being the most popular. It is a shame that due to ill health Stella Lyons was not able to give her lecture on Andrew Wyeth but I am very grateful to Geri Parlby who stepped in with her talk on "Fiction, Fallacy and Fake News", which was very well received.

Thank you so much for the very useful feedback which you continue to give. We now regularly receive the feedback form from well over 50 members after each lecture. Not only is this helpful for me but I am able to summarise your comments and send them back to Head Office in London who can monitor the performance of the lecturers.

Lecturers also give feedback on societies, and I attended an interesting meeting this spring where two local lecturers, Mark Cottle and Tim Mirfin spoke about what they would like from societies. Their main requests were good IT support, plenty of cups of tea with brief introductions and thanks from chairmen without their attempting to sum up the lecture which they had just given. They were very amusing and we look forward to welcoming them both back to Honiton in the autumn.

Looking ahead we have been asked by Head Office to try to engage some of the newer lecturers and I have tried to fit in one or two. They are all experts in their fields but you will appreciate that some of them are still honing their presentational skills.

Please keep your suggestions coming. You may have seen that our programme until June 2025 has already been published. I am having to book lecturers up to 18 months ahead so I am unlikely to be able to fit in any requests immediately but I do try to accommodate most over time. By overwhelming popular demand I have found a lecturer to speak about Banksy, so look out for that in the autumn of 2025.

Thank you all for your continuing support.

Janet Ward, Programme Secretary

Events Secretary's report

I took over the role of Events and Visits Secretary from Elizabeth Grey last summer knowing that it would be a hard act to follow. Last June members enjoyed a social evening at Old Rectory, Offwell with a glass of wine, or two, and canapes while chatting to other members, walking around or taking advantage of a guided walk around the lovely garden on an idyllic summer evening.

As I was new to the role I decided to put together a questionnaire to try and find out just what members are looking for from visits, and inevitably the results were very varied. To summarise, overall it seems that many prefer more local visits, during the day, with refreshments, often preferring the flexibility of cars but happy with coach, possibly car share, with attention to easy accessibility. There was also some in favour of longer trips, probably by coach to the theatre or art galleries further afield. A few mentioned overseas trips but although these have happened in the past there wasn't enough encouragement for me to look at this route.

I am currently looking into the logistics of a visit to Bowood House, Wiltshire, and hopefully, in the autumn a visit to Knightshayes, where I understand they have a collection of miniatures which will follow on from the talk on October 8th 2024.

Many attended our fun and interesting evening at Chilcotts in April, with a particularly interesting collection of Asian ceramics and an excellent quiz from Liz, whilst once again enjoying the canapes provided by the committee, and at this point a big thank you to the committee for all your help and support at both the summer social and auction.

Vanessa Smith, Events Secretary