**Petworth Society Annual General Meeting 2023**

**Chairman’s Report**

After some difficult pandemic years and the retirement of the three people who have led the Society for decades, it is very good to be attending the 47th Annual General meeting of The Petworth Society, and to be doing so face-to-face.

The year saw the retirement of Miles Costello from Society activities. Miles has been significantly responsible for, not only the Magazine, but also the Book Sales, two of the core offerings of the Society. We are extremely grateful to Miles for the considerable time, thought and dedication he has given to the Society over the years and for helping to build two enduring offerings that command so much loyalty amongst members. At the AGM we will be recognising this with a special presentation.

Miles’s retirement left us facing some challenges. With the helpful intercession of Lord Egremont though, we have secured a new and excellent editor for the Magazine in Andy Loukes. Andy is Curator of the Egremont Collection at Petworth House and has a stellar background in the art world. We are very grateful to Lord Egremont and to Andy. I’m sure those of you who have read Andy’s ‘maiden edition’ of the Magazine in March 2023 will agree, he is a fine successor.

We also secured the future of the Book Sales thanks to Sarah and Mike Singleton backed by some of the existing Book Sales team. As a consequence of their taking up the mantle, the Book Sales have continued seamlessly, following the new quarterly schedule established the year before. During the year the Sales brought in robust revenues which, as before, went helpfully towards supporting production of the Magazine. We also reduced the cost base of the Sales by selling the van, which was approaching the end of its useful life.

The year 2022 -2023 was our first full year unaffected by pandemic conditions. We were, at last, able to resume activities in a more normal and unfettered way.

We held a number of events. These ranged from a Big Band concert to talks about Brewing in Petworth and Perspectives on Petworth through the Eyes of some Famous Artists. We enjoyed guided walks including Miles Costello’s traditional ‘Gog Walk’; a tour of some of Petworth Park’s ancient trees with Gerald Gresham-Cooke; and an exploration of archaeological findings with Henry Wakeford, also in the Park. We have also supported third party events including the Coultershaw Beam Pump Open Day; the Petworth Antiques & Fine Art Fair in the Park; and the Rottingdean Heritage Society’s William Nicholson exhibition.

In terms of the running of the Society, we were sorry to see Nick Wheeler stand down, as planned, from the role of Treasurer, and Gemma Levett from the role of Membership Secretary. We thank them again for their great service to the Society. We welcomed Mike Mulcahy, Flo Churchill and Phil Stephens to the committee. We are grateful to Phil Stephens and to Mike Mulcahy for taking over the roles of Treasurer and Membership Secretary respectively. Unfortunately, due to work constraints, Flo Churchill has since stepped down.

The new website has been working well under Sarah Singleton’s diligent Webmastership. You can now join the Society through the site as well as see details of forthcoming events and buy tickets. Our programme of adding email addresses to the member pages continues. These will enable us to send members reminders and notices, which we hope will be helpful. We looked at investing in membership management software, but concluded that we could not justify the cost given our relatively straightforward needs.

The Society remains in good financial health as set out in the Treasurer’s report. We have found the introduction of Paypal and contactless payment to be most helpful.

Last but certainly not least, last year, the committee took the decision not to compete with a busy Christmas event period (or the dark days and December weather), but instead to hold its annual event in the summer. In the June 2023 edition of the Magazine, you will find a ticket flyer for the Petworth Society’s Summer Party to be held on Friday 30 June, 6:30-8:30pm in the Courtyard of Petworth House. The Petworth Town Band will be playing and there will be a talk, in situ, illustrating the workings of the historic kitchens. I do hope we will see you there, then.

Alexandra Soskin

Chairman

16 May 2023