

# **The Royal Watercolour Society**

## **President's Report for AGM 20 April 2009**

At the start of my presidency I set out a list of objectives that I hoped would be accomplished. Each year I have updated the programme. There have been some successes.

My first plan was to effect an internal reorganisation. I suggested that the Council should be elected rather than appointed by rotation: Members should express a wish to serve and then stand for election. Each Council Member should be given an area of responsibility. In this I was guided by our late and much missed colleague David Gluck who was such a wise counsellor during his lifetime and such a generous benefactor to the Society

The workload on the President's shoulders had become too great and included a large amount of routine work. I asked Katy Marcou our Secretary to produce a standing calendar that showed what needed to be done on a regular basis. I believe that this calendar, that is a template that can be followed by our excellent staff, plus the reorganised Council and also the idea that a Gallery Liaison Officer could represent the Society at Joint Executive Committee meetings make the job of President lighter, allowing him or her to concentrate on new initiatives.

During my Presidency, Members of the Society and of the Council have done all the work, and it is my great pleasure to thank them now.

I set forth the identity and work of the RWS as the promotion of the language of drawing and painting and especially of Watercolour. I adopted Francis Bowyer's definition of watercolour as 'a painting in a water-soluble medium on a paper-based support'.

My programme focussed on the raising of the profile of the RWS in a number of areas.

A first step was to organise a Brochure to publicise the work and the identity of the Society. This brochure was beautifully planned and designed by Richard Bawden who then passed it on to the designer David Pocknell who set out the final design. Richard Bawden later designed and printed the most attractive Bankside Art Vouchers; we thank him for this.

Francis Bowyer and his son Dan had got the RWS website [www.royalwatercoloursociety.co.uk](http://www.royalwatercoloursociety.co.uk) up and running, and I asked

Francis to oversee the building of a wide and deep site by e.limelight, a website company based in Bristol. Visits to the website have leapt forward by nearly 300% in a year. The images and information that you send in can easily be loaded onto the site by Katy. Whilst we are on this subject, please could I ask you if at all possible to send in your submission forms for exhibitions well ahead of time, and then to send the information contained in them plus images of your work by email to the Gallery at [info@banksidegallery.com](mailto:info@banksidegallery.com). This will make much easier the work done on the sending in days. For the last two shows we are very grateful to Sarah Holliday who has photographed all of the works sent in. These images have all been uploaded onto the website where they are offered for sale. Added to this a large collection of images of Members' work will be kept permanently for sale on the website.

Recently Francis suggested a link with 'Just Giving', a charity fundraising website to raise many small sums in sponsorship for the Society. John Hale, who is Janet Treloar's husband, has generously worked to coordinate this, and we thank him for this work.

During my time as president, there has been a push to rebuild a mailing list. I asked John Doyle if he would look at this, and he set about it with astonishing energy, and hugely expanded our lists. I am very grateful to John for this, and also to Alison Musker.

I realised the need for a serious look at Friends organisations, and I needed to find someone, not a Member, who would chair the Friends. I asked Angela Bould, whom I had met on an RWS residential course a few years ago, and who had demonstrated a great ability for organisation, to do this. She put forward the idea of a regional Friends organisation based in East Anglia, to be run by her and her husband Aubrey and a committee. I discussed this idea at the Joint Executive Committee, and obtained the go-ahead. The RWS Friends in East Anglia was born, and it has gone on to be a great success. Membership climbed to about 150, including the Lords Lieutenant of each of the 5 counties of East Anglia. Exhibitions of the RWS were put on in Cambridge and in Norwich, and the RWSFEA put on exhibitions of their own pictures in Cambridge, Norwich, and there is a forthcoming one in Newmarket. They have organised courses in which a number of RWS Members have taught, including a residential course in Giggleswick in Yorkshire. It has been a great amount of work for Angela and Aubrey, and they have worked hard and generously. I have asked for them to be recognised by the Society by conferring Life Friend status on them. They stood down at their AGM in March and a new Chairman, Alan Noyes has taken over. I commend this organisation

to the RWS, and hope that it will be nurtured and encouraged into the future; it will bring a great deal back to the RWS. I would very much like further regional friends organisations to be set up. If this were to happen, there could, as David Paskett suggested, be reciprocal visits between regions, and the name of the RWS would be spread far and wide amongst people who would have otherwise not encountered us.

Once an RWS exhibition has been put on at Bankside, it seems a pity not to keep it as a collection and show it elsewhere. Accordingly, there have been shows in Norwich and Cambridge, as I mentioned, and also in Cheltenham, The Isle of Wight, Harrogate, Mumbai, the Nehru Centre and the Watercolour and Drawings Fair. Much of the work in organising these exhibitions was brilliantly done by David Firmstone, who also organised the amazing RWS trip to India where we met and worked with a group of Indian artists in most wonderful surroundings and visited breathtaking places. David Paskett took over the chairmanship of the exhibitions committee and continued its excellent work. I thank Neil Pittaway for his work in the area of Exhibitions and for his ideas about Membership. I thank Olwen Jones for her tireless work on the Exhibitions Committee and as Vice President in the first year of my presidency.

Two opportunities came along, partly I believe as a result of our raised profile. They were the taking over of the former Singer and Friedlander Watercolour Prize – now renamed the RWS Sunday Times Watercolour Prize, and the sharing of the Turner Watercolour Prize with the RI. These two events have helped to establish the RWS's gallery, the Bankside Gallery as the undisputed centre for watercolour in Britain and indeed in the World. The holding of the RWS Sunday Times exhibition, the most prestigious annual watercolour event, has provided a huge amount of publicity for the Society and helped greatly in our work of gaining greater recognition for our medium.

In the negotiating of this event, I am again very grateful to David Firmstone, and more recently to Fay Ballard, Janet Treloar, Wendy Jacob and David Paskett.

I made it one of my aims to examine links with the RI and other watercolour societies, and see if ties between them can be strengthened. The opportunity of the Turner Watercolour Prize was an excellent way towards this. The Prize had been awarded at the RA Summer exhibition, but with fewer and fewer watercolours accepted by the RA, it was decided to remove it from the RA and transfer it to the RWS and the RI. This meant that a group of RI members selected an RWS member's work at the Spring Exhibition, and we did likewise at their exhibition. The comradely feeling that

this engendered and the increased prominence of the RWS at Bankside prompted Ronald Maddox the RI President to approach Angela Parker and me with the idea of an RI exhibition at Bankside, This will take place next year. This year, for the first time in nearly 180 years, the two societies will join in a shared exhibition in August here at Bankside. This show will last for two weeks here, and it will then transfer to the Mall Galleries for a further fortnight. I believe that this cooperation will increase the awareness of watercolour as a medium, and enhance the profile of the RWS. I would also like to see links made between us and the Royal Scottish Watercolour Society, a number of whose members we share, and perhaps the Irish watercolour society too. I had some correspondence with Avery Maples of the Tennessee Watercolour Society who saw our website and wanted some guidance about the definition of watercolour.

I must thank David Brayne who has been an excellent Treasurer and a great support in many ways. The office of Treasurer is a very difficult one but David has filled it with great ability and thoroughness. David also had the idea for the Poet and the Painter Exhibition, which he curated and which was such a very fine exhibition.

The Archive and Collections Project has been a very fine success, and this has been due very largely to Trevor Frankland's enthusiasm and determination. We now have a fine new Archive Room where all the written archive of our Society is kept. There are plans well advanced for the provision of another room to house our Collections of pictures. There is a new false wall at the end of the Gallery that provides valuable extra storage space and undiminished hanging space that is there because of Trevor's energetic activity; a great achievement – thank you.

For many years Bill Mason, who is a friend of the Bankside Gallery, worked quietly away in the Archive, sorting documents into intelligible categories. He did this so quietly that many of us were unaware of his presence or activities. We are most grateful to him for this dedicated work, and in recognition I have conferred Life Friend status on him.

I must also thank Wendy Jacob and Trevor for their work on the RWS Laws. The Laws need continuous revision, and a new set has just been finalised, dated March 2009. These are available to all Members and Associates on request. The Laws define our Society; they have been handed down to us by our forebears in the RWS, and a great deal of thought has gone into them.

Our exhibitions have been hung by Annie Williams and the Hanging Committee, who continue to do an excellent job. Each show looks more beautiful. Thank you.

I thank Janet Treloar, our Vice President and Salliann Putman for the organising of the Social events of the Society, days like today, which are so important to us as a group of people. Thanks also to Janet and Salliann for sharing a most successful and enjoyable Friends course with me in Cornwall.

I have asked Janet Treloar and her husband, John Hale, and Richard Bawden and his wife Hattie to represent the RWS at the Buckingham Palace Garden Party on 6<sup>th</sup> June. I hope you have fine weather and a grand time.

I thank Paul Newland, Bill Henderson, Simon Pierse, Janet Treloar and Liz Butler for taking on the educational side of the RWS, organising courses and talks. This is vital to our charitable status and is one very tangible way that we can spread knowledge and understanding of watercolour.

The other person I should thank is my partner Sue, who like the wives of my predecessors – Dorothy, Glyn, Elizabeth, Jane, Olwen give their support without being, in many cases, directly involved with the Society. Sue has been particularly supportive and encouraging.

I have much enjoyed working with Angela Parker and the wonderful staff here at the Bankside. Angela has by her ingenuity and hard work overseen the rescue of the Gallery from the dark days of 2005 to the healthy state of today. Thank you Angela, and thanks to John Thirlwell and Anthony Leigh and the Board of Bankside Gallery Limited.

One of the most pleasing aspects of the raised profile of the Society is the number of fine new Members who have joined us. We welcome them with open arms and in their arms and hands rests the RWS and its glorious future.

I have enjoyed being President. I joined the Society in 1975, and it has been good to me. I have enjoyed putting forward some ideas and seeing them come into reality, and in some way repaying a debt of gratitude to the Society. I now plan to slip away to the far west of Cornwall and disappear over the edge of the World.

**Richard Sorrell. President RWS. April 2009**