

The View from the Chair

by Anthony Wilder

2019 Chair's View in the Rear-View Mirror.

Yes, this 'View from the Chair' will be my last as I have now completed three years as your Chair so this is an opportunity to glance in the rear-view mirror!

One of my hopes was that RGA would be able to reach out and consolidate links with other organisations, notably the University and the Museum, for the benefit of all our members.

Our links with the University's Institute of Education was already well established when I took over, as we had staged two exciting exhibitions there and had built up a good rapport with Gill Hopper and her colleagues. You will remember from last year's report that this had all received a severe setback when the University was concerned that the campus' non trading status would be compromised. With patient and persistent negotiation, and goodwill on both sides, a solution was found just in time for the 2018 exhibition to go ahead. This was a very good thing as it was our fifth show, it was very well received and the Vice Chancellor, Sir David Bell was on hand to open it. This exhibition with its associated workshops now seems secure for the future.

The next major exhibition after this was our Royal Berkshire Hospital show which was well received and thanks to Hilary's undercover work, Bayer gave us a donation of £250 effectively matching our percentage from sales so the hospital benefitted by approximately £500. Sadly, as expected, we have not been invited to hold an exhibition there in 2019, but we hope 2018's fundraising for them will help us to hold a show there in 2020, our 90 th birthday year!

All the hard work with last year's Pop-up at the Museum, together with the Big Draw in the autumn, paved the way for our Annual Exhibition to be held there for the first time in a number of years. Elaine Blake found that she had a gap in her exhibition schedule and was delighted when we offered to fill it! We started with a pop-up over the half-term week with small works on the wall for sale and family-friendly activities featuring a 'medieval' banquet. This was brilliantly organised by Lorna Webber, who headed up a new workshops team, encouraged by Clive Duncan and ably assisted by Sadie Brockbank and Lynda South. This was followed by our 89 th Annual Exhibition which featured 163 works plus sketchbooks and other items. Everything submitted was displayed and it made a stunning show – it was very well received and it was a fitting climax to Hilary's time as our hardworking Exhibitions Secretary.

The need to find a solution to the problem at the University spurred us on to transform the RGA from

a Registered Charity into a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). You will remember that our lawyer,
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Alison MacLennan, attended last year's AGM which voted to do this. Since then she has been working hard to bring it about and at the time of writing, the Charity Commission have just completed the process of registration. This new structure means that Councillors and Officers have more legal protection and will be able to serve RGA with increased confidence.

Apart from links with the Museum and the University, contacts and opportunities for some of our members to exhibit work with other commercial and business venues in the town have also happened during the year and we are seeking to develop productive relations with other art-based groups in Reading.

I have been very impressed with the lively and imaginative programme which Earley Painters and RGA Fridays provide for our members and the wider public. These activities continue throughout the year and in the warmer weather, Summer Painting Days make a welcome addition to the programme.

In last year's report I mentioned the increased pressure which all this expanded activity had placed on your officers. To meet this challenge we have been extending the idea of establishing support groups for each officer. In some cases the officer will be able to delegate some of the tasks to named members of the group, while still being responsible to the Council for all the activities. For this reason you will see that the members of these support groups for 2019–20 are listed in your AGM paper work although they do not need to be formally elected. For that reason I have not listed them here but we are all hugely grateful to them for being willing to help RGA in this way.

While on the subject of 'thank-yous', several officers are standing down this time including Hilary Parkinson and Jane Somner. Hilary has put a huge amount of hard work, time and thought into her task as Exhibition Secretary, mounting far more shows than she might have expected when she took on the role two years ago. Jane has also worked very hard not only as Vice Chair, where I have found her support particularly valuable, but she has also made an indispensable contribution to the publicity and communications group. Thank you both!

Looking ahead, there will always be challenges as we seek to present to the public the high quality of work which our members produce in an increasingly wide range of media and styles, both to be enjoyed as well as for sale. But I am sure that the hard work that your Councillors and Officers have put in, over the last two years particularly, will have paved the way for a smooth

run into our ninetieth birthday year in 2020.

Anthony Wilder

Retiring RGA Chair