

## **Autumn TAS Sussex Area Forum, 5 October 2018**

### **Chair's Report and Website Report.**

#### **1. Personal and Team matters.**

TAS House now prefers to call each Area Committee the Area Team and each of our twice-yearly Area meetings is now an Area Forum. We will observe this change of terminology in the Area Team, but local societies can please themselves without offending me. I initially identified 51 matters on which I should report, then reduced this to 19 and finally to 11 headings. The first lesson of being Area Chair is that you'll be overwhelmed with paperwork, or more accurately with online communications of all sorts, the modern equivalent of paperwork.

I became Chair on 16 May and have attended two training sessions at TAS House, which included meeting the new national Chair, Julie Goldsmith, and other new Area Chairs from around the country. Training reflects the current priorities at HQ, one of which is the national decline in membership and another the drive to found new societies, two issues which are clearly related.

The Area Team has seen the departure of Phil Down, Pat McChesney, Penny Hill and Jane Hopkin. I'm sure we would all like to thank them for their excellent efforts over the last few years, many years in some cases. We welcome Diane Fuell as Minutes Secretary, Gill Baker as Young Arts rep and Lois Cope, who has added the role of Administrative Secretary to her existing portfolio as Area Coordinator for Education. Now I need to mention with sadness that Susi Beale our former Young Arts rep, and a lovely lady, died in May after a long illness which she bore with great courage. Phil Down, Jeanie Down and I attended the funeral to represent you all.

The Area Team is in need of new blood, notably and urgently a rep for Heritage Volunteering, and also a rep for Church Recording. More distantly we will need a Deputy Chair and a new Area Coordinator for Education. I will tackle individual societies about this in the near future. The role of Area Trainer has been suspended *pro tem*, as we feel that TAS House now has an adequate national programme in hand, however you may wish to raise this issue later today. Anyone who feels strongly that there should be Area based training must be prepared to organise it too. The HV and CR roles need not be onerous: they mostly consist of keeping up to date records of what Sussex societies are doing and attending some meetings at HQ in London to learn how local

volunteers can be advised on the best procedures to follow and the standards that are expected. The main qualification is to be interested and mobile.

The Sussex Area has a problem, which is also reflected nationally, that local societies don't report their full range of successful volunteering activities. This compromises efforts to project the role and significance of The Arts Society on the national stage. Area is not a policeman; its main role is to be a conduit of communication between local societies and HQ, and *vice versa*. I'll come back to this under the Website Manager heading.

## **2. Area data, TAS Societies Support Group and New Societies initiatives.**

Alan Bowden has kindly provided me with data on TAS membership in the Sussex Area. Since 2012, Area membership has declined by 5.4 %, somewhat more than the national average of 3.6%, and therefore a cause for concern. The overall figures disguise a range of changes in local societies varying from a gain of 16% to a loss of 28%. The causes of the overall trend are debated throughout TAS nationally, and we might want to consider them in this Forum meeting.

The Societies Support Group at TAS House, led by Angela Payne, are conducting audits of local society health in each Area. She and I had a long discussion about the Sussex Area, in which we agreed it was in relatively good stead. The problems besetting TAS Newick have been resolved by a merger with TAS Uckfield and Lewes, to form a new society known as TAS Uckfield, Lewes and Newick. I have not been involved in the negotiations but would like to congratulate both societies on achieving a happy outcome. For the moment the Area therefore drops to 23 societies, rather than 24. I am not aware of other local societies facing dangerous financial, venue or membership collapse.

Two officers from TAS House: James Wilkins the Membership Director and Julia Tibbs the Trustee responsible for new societies, have been following initiatives to start a new society in Chichester with evening lectures. So far, as I understand it, a taster lecture has been held (I attended it, with more than 100 others) and a prototype Committee has been formed. The terms for TAS House to recognise a new society are severe: a minimum membership of 170 and an annual subscription of at least £50. An initiative to start a new society in the Horsham neighbourhood has not progressed, but I have suggested that Crawley is currently unrepresented in TAS Sussex and might be fertile ground.

James Wilkins will investigate this. The town has a superb potential venue in The Hawth theatre. Area is not directly involved in such initiatives, except in an advisory capacity.

### **3. Jubilee Celebrations and Our True Gold**

The 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of NADFAS/TAS has quite exhausted me, however I am flattered to have been invited to so many local society events, and there is still one to go. If any events took place without me, please let me know, as I have to report our collective response to HQ. Overall, I think the response has been both good and varied at the local level, and the Team agreed that a specific Area event on 22/23 September was not required. In defence of this decision we can point to the Area sponsorship (with local societies) of the Young Craftsman of the Year competition at the South of England Show in June (£500 donated and considerably more by six local societies) and the Team decision to increase the value of our annual postgraduate scholarship at West Dean College from £3k to £4K, in addition to the second scholarship which we have already created as a one-off for the Jubilee Year.

### **4. Area Chair's Report to TAS House, April 2018.**

Phil Down's report was submitted on 30 April. It highlighted the success of the Area Special Interest Days, and the link between these events and the ability to fund Young Arts projects. Active Heritage Volunteering in the majority of local societies and Church Recording projects in almost half of our societies were also noted. In Young Arts, Area focusses its attention on West Dean College, leaving local societies to support projects in schools, where there have been some notable successes. Amongst challenges, the principal issues are declining membership, aging membership and the shortage of volunteers for committee posts at both local and Area levels.

### **5. Advisory Council meetings in April and June, and the national AGM day in May.**

Sussex Area was represented at the April ADCO by Phil Down and at the national AGM by David Bignell. At the April meeting the main issues were declining national membership, the need to revive Church Recording at local society level and the lack of diversity in the makeup of local societies. In June, the reasons for membership declines were explored in greater detail and the roles of Areas and Area Teams discussed. HQ has to some extent formalised the SWOT analysis protocol in steering the Society forwards (Strengths,

Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats). The Supporter Programme and the Two Temple Place Jazz Exhibition were reported as notable successes.

Improvements to the national TAS website continue to be made slowly.

Sussex Area was well represented at the Jubilee Service in Westminster Abbey, which 1800 people attended. At the national AGM held later in the day guest speaker Matt Hancock (the Culture Secretary) emphasised the power of digital technology that was now available to The Arts Society and in contrast Sir Roy Strong strongly condemned reductions in state spending on the arts and the decline of art and history teaching in schools. A positive note was struck by retiring national Chair June Robinson, pointing to the overall growth of volunteering projects and an increase in the number of accredited lecturers and lecture titles. The incoming Chair, Julie Goldsmith, gave a confident speech promising a bright future for the Society. We also learned that TAS is now in financial equilibrium and that the 2020 AGM will be held in Malaga, Spain.

## **6. Kirdford 2018.**

Local society Chairs or their representatives attended an informal seminar and lunch in Kirdford on 1 June. There are no formal minutes, but edited notes are available from the Area Chair. Topics discussed included GDPR, the use of clickers at monthly lectures, Trails of Discovery, Training at Area level, declining membership, and support for West Dean College and the South of England Show. An initial suggestion that the second scholarship at West Dean introduced for the Jubilee year should be made permanent was replaced by an agreement that a better approach would be to increase the value of the existing scholarship from £3K to £4K. This was preferred because it would allow Area to retain greater reserves against any future collapse in Study Day income.

## **7. Young Arts: West Dean College and West Sussex Music**

West Dean College is keen to strengthen links with The Arts Society and a number of discussions have taken place over the course of the summer. The Area Team considers that investment in the College, which trains students to graduate and postgraduate qualifications in the practical fine arts (and especially conservation skills), thereby launching them into professional careers which have a highly significant potential national impact, represents excellent value for money. This will be further discussed at the Autumn Area Forum. The Area Chair was also invited to the summer concert given by West

Sussex Music, an organisation which coordinates music (and especially instrumental) teaching in schools, held in The Hawth theatre in Crawley. Choral and orchestral groups are trained to a high standard and many students go on to professional careers. A notional donation of £50 towards the cost of the event was made by TAS East Grinstead. It seems appropriate to discuss further whether Area should encourage local societies to support West Sussex Music with small donations, in part to acknowledge that the fine arts include music. A parallel organisation exists in East Sussex, which will be approached a little later in the year.

### **8. Trails of Discovery (formerly Church Trails, then Childrens Trails)**

Sussex Area currently has no Trails rep, and in the past there has been disquiet about the sclerotic supervision and registration of Trails by TAS House. However, the whole activity is being reinvented under the leadership of Pauline Stewart. This will involve a much wider brief, to include synagogues, temples and places of historic interest in addition to Christian churches, and the approval process will be simplified and liberalised. More detailed notes are available from the Area Chair.

### **9. Area Training Sessions**

Sussex Area currently has no Trainer, following the retirement of Pat McChesney. TAS House appointed a new Training Officer, Shivani Mahida, in 2016, who has expanded the portfolio of courses held in London and at other hubs outside the capital. The current list can be seen at

<https://theartssociety.org/members/training-and-information-days-calendar>

In the circumstances, and with an ongoing shortage of volunteers for the Area Team, it seems sensible to suspend Area training sessions for the time being.

However, the Area Information Day will continue, and the next session has been booked for Friday 1 March 2019 at Clair Hall in Haywards Heath.

### **10. The Autumn Forum**

The visiting Trustee on 5 October will be Jacqui Varley. Her background is in Adult Learning in the Arts Sector and across government, with emphasis on disadvantaged and disabled young people. In particular, she wishes to promote diversity in active participation in the Arts across all ages, abilities and communities.

## **11. Area Website and Communications within Area**

The website is <https://sussex.nadfas.net/>

The Area Chairman is managing the website *pro tem* and receiving training from Jane Hopkin and TAS House. Improvements are being made gradually, with the objective of it becoming an up to date repository of active volunteering projects as well as an accurate link to local societies for prospective members. To see current progress, please look at the Young Arts page under the Volunteering tab, edited jointly with Gill Baker.

A surprisingly large number of enquiries about membership and volunteering are made via the Area Website, so it is important to keep contact details and links to individual websites for local societies up to date. It is encouraging that 20 out of 23 local societies now maintain a website of their own. TAS House can host local websites and provide assistance in setting them up, if necessary. Contact the Membership Director, James Wilkins, in the first instance.

The Website Manager needs to be informed about local society news, events and volunteering projects. In most cases a brief text and one or two photographs will suffice. If the flow of information is good, the Area Website can serve as a record of local society activities, to some extent obviating the need for some of the duties of volunteering reps on the Area Team, given that these posts are now so hard to fill.

David Bignell  
Chair, TAS Sussex Area  
3 September 2018.