Notice of the Annual General Meeting 2015

The 2015 Annual General Meeting and Friends’ Annual Lecture will be held on Wednesday June 10th in the lecture theatre of the Taylor Institution (next to the Ashmolean). The AGM will start at 5.45 p.m. The lecture will start at 6.30 p.m. Those wishing to attend only the lecture and not the AGM should arrive between 6.15 p.m. and 6.25 p.m.

The Museum in 2014

On October 1st Dr Alexander Sturgis replaced Dr Christopher Brown as the Director of the Museum. Dr Sturgis was previously the Director of the Holburne Museum in Bath where he was responsible for its transformation. Before that he had a distinguished career in the National Gallery.

We were always very grateful for the enthusiastic support that Christopher gave to the Friends, and we have made him and his wife Sally Honorary Life Members. In July he was awarded the Freedom of the City of Oxford in recognition of the great service that he had done for the city in developing the Ashmolean Museum. We welcome Xa, and very much look forward to working with him as our museum continues to develop.

2014 was a year of very good new exhibitions in the Ashmolean. The programme started in March with Cézanne and the Modern, which was very popular. It was followed by Discovering Tutankhamun in July, and the excellent Eye of the Needle embroidery exhibition, mostly from the internationally renowned Feller collection, which Michael and Elizabeth Feller so generously gave to the Ashmolean. The year closed with William Blake: Apprentice and Master, which ran from December 2014 to March 2015.

Our support for the Museum

In 2014 we can be proud that we were able to substantially increase our support for the Museum to £150,000, from £90,000 in 2013. Our increased grants covered a particularly wide variety of Museum needs. Grants were made towards two exhibitions: £10,000 for the very successful Eye of the Needle exhibition in 2014 and £29,500 towards the mounting of the Great British Drawings exhibition in March 2015. We provided £6,500 for a fluorescence microscope with camera for the Conservation Department, £5,500 for specialist protection equipment for the Eastern Art paintings and print collection, and £10,500 to help fund the Coin and Archaeological Identification Service.

We contributed to £25,700 to support the role of Assistant Keeper for Ancient Egypt and the Sudan, who played a major role in developing the Discovering Tutankhamun exhibition, and £27,850 towards the Museum’s Special Projects Officer. £7,500 was granted towards the cost of a definitive new
catalogue of the Museum's outstanding Worcester porcelain collection, and £13,000 to support the excellent Education Department's Summer Family Fun programme. We fully supported the two requests for funding of acquisitions: £3000 towards a Sévres porcelain tray in honour of Ian Lowe, and £10,000 towards the purchase of five albums of letters from Sir Edward Burne-Jones. This substantial list reflects our increased ability to support a very active museum.

Membership
2014 saw an exceptional increase in our membership, from 3,740 to 5,270. This resulted from a combination of a strong exhibition programme, greatly improved arrangements to pay for new memberships in the Museum, and the new and much better facility to join online. Around 30% of new members now join us this way.

This put a very considerable strain on our membership team headed by Catherine House, and I would like to thank them on behalf of all our Members for the magnificent job they did in keeping up with this rather unexpected rate of increase. Our volunteers worked in total for over 1000 hours to support the membership administration. If a few new members did not quite get the prompt service they expected I hope they will understand. A system of temporary membership cards helped spread out the data input, which made a big difference.

Activities
Our volunteers in the Activities team ran an excellent, varied and imaginative programme in 2014. 34 events and trips were organised with over 1,947 participants, a substantial increase on the 1,400 participants, with 31 events, in 2013.

The increase in our membership has required some rethinking of our programme, both outside and inside the Museum. We have concentrated on larger events and increasingly, where practical, run a repeat trip. This is not easy, as it has proved very difficult to forecast the demand for a particular activity and very often we have to make substantial financial commitments to a second trip before seeing how many might want to go on it.

We have built up our in-museum activities, particularly the very successful free previews and pop-up evenings, which have proved very popular. 1,481 members and their friends came to these, in addition to the 1,947 above.

Trips included visits to important London exhibitions, on Matisse, William Kent, Rembrandt and Ming, and to a wide and imaginative variety of other destinations including Laskett's Gardens, the Tower of London poppies, the Foundling Museum, Parliament, Rodmarton, the Birmingham museum and numerous others.

I am most grateful for all the hard work which our excellent volunteers, led by Ros Nicholas, put into devising, organising and leading such an excellent programme. The rapid rise in the number of our
members has created its strains, and I appreciate their flexibility in adjusting to a rather different pattern of activities as we go forward.

**Website information**

Details of the members of our Council, together with a copy of this Chairman’s report, the annual accounts and details of our 2014 grants are now, or imminently will be, on our website. (Go to the main Ashmolean museum page and click “Support us”, then “Membership” then “Charity”).

I would like to thank Colin Wyman, our Treasurer, for the continued sound state of our finances and financial controls, and Kay Symons, our Secretary, for her hard work and her support of our operations. The Development Office continued their enthusiastic support of all that we undertake and we are very grateful for their commitment, skill, and hard work.

**Conclusion**

I believe we can all take pride in the growing support that we give the Museum. We now have almost three times the number of members than before the new Museum opened, with a proportionate increase in our grants. Our Museum is flourishing with a strong programme of exhibitions, a greater involvement with University teaching, and a growing national and international reputation.

David Boyle  
Chairman  
March 2015

**Our plans and priorities in 2015**

- To continue to develop, strengthen and deepen our capacity to handle our increasing number of members, and to widen our capabilities, including an increasingly informative and useful website.
- To increase our communication with our members, particularly online, and to develop a clearer and easier to understand set of accounts.
- To continue to develop our in-museum Activities.
- To move to, or be ready to move to, a new IT base, including for ticketing, together with other parts of the university
- To continue to grow our membership so that we can, in turn, grow our support for our Museum
- Our policy is to make small fee increases, as appropriate, every two to three years, and we anticipate the next one will be at the start of 2016 (spread over the year on Members’ renewal dates).
- To develop a more up to date Constitution, in line with modern practice.