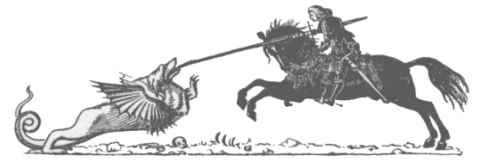


GUILD of St GEORGE



FROM THE MASTER, DR RACHEL DICKINSON

25th October 2022

Dear Companion,

It is with great delight and anticipation that I am writing on behalf of the Board of Trustees to invite you to the first in-person Guild of St George AGM since Ruskin's Bicentenary in 2019. We will be gathering as a Companionship on Saturday 19th November. This event at Glasshouse College in Stourbridge is generously hosted by our friends at the Ruskin Mill Trust. You will find both the programme for the day and the agenda for the AGM itself in the attached papers. We look forward to seeing many of you in person once again. Mindful of our global membership, it will also be possible to attend via Zoom.

The AGM has always been a very convivial occasion, a chance to meet old friends and new, to hear from your Board and to contribute your thoughts about the Guild and much else. Given that we have had this gap of two years, it is also worth reminding you that this is a chance for any Companions who have not yet signed the Roll to do so.

To ensure the smooth running of the day and quoracy, it would be enormously helpful if you could let Martin Green know asap if you will attend in person or online. If you are unable to attend and must send your apologies, then please nominate a proxy (the Master is the norm, but you can nominate another Companion). We also need to know if you would like to stay for the Companions' Dinner in the evening. You will find all the details of how to do this in the papers.

In the last year, your Board has devoted a good deal of time to the question of the Guild's resources, and I want to say more about this here, ahead of further discussion at the AGM. To put it bluntly, although we are not in any immediate financial peril, the Guild has limited financial resources and income. It has assets - art, land and property - that need consistent annual investment and good stewardship. We have long been in the habit of spending more than we generate in income, even in a year without special projects or events. We made a strategic decision to agree deficit budgets culminating in the bicentenary celebrations. Since then, we have been bringing the discrepancy down year by year, but we continue to spend more than we bring in. As a Board, we believe strongly that this general pattern must be changed, both as a matter of good management and to ensure that – as the Companionship of the Guild of St George – we can be a force for good long into the future.

In rough terms (and you can find the full accounts within the AGM papers), these are the current figures. Around 50 of our 320+ Companions worldwide make regular (monthly or annual) donations towards the Guild's work, while another 25 make irregular contributions. We are enormously grateful to all of you for this. With GiftAid (where relevant) this amounts to around £7,000 a year. Our investment portfolio (in 2021/2) generated £15,000 of income, our property

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rents currently raise just under £100,000 annually, and grants and sales of books and timber last year generated around £13,000. This amounts to an income of £135,000 p/a.

In this year of reduced activity we have spent an indicative £146,000 p/a on core costs:

- £35,000 supporting the Ruskin Collection each year (a fraction of the actual costs involved for the Sheffield Museums Trust),
- around £40,000 on general property repairs, maintenance and management (this is distinct from capital improvements which are part of our obligations as a landlord and can vary significantly; for example we soon must lay new waterpipes at Ruskin Land which we anticipate will cost around £60,000)
- £14,000 on woodland management and education
- £57,000 on staffing, insurance, accounts, communications, publications and general administration, and (a variable figure depending on levels of activity)

Activities that drew many of us to become Companions – such as exhibitions, projects, grants, partnerships and events of all kinds – require funding over and above this amount.

Although the discrepancy is not a large one, and we are always looking at where savings can be made, currently any gap is met by drawing down funds via sales from our dwindling investment portfolio. This is not a sustainable long- or even medium-term strategy. There continue to be growing calls on our funds if we are to hand on our assets in better condition, and of more accessible and productive use, than we inherited them, and there is little if any room for supporting new activities suggested or initiated by Companions.

My colleague on the Board, Peter Burman, has written persuasively about the very Ruskinian need for what he calls sound stewardship; as he says, it ‘requires constant vigilance both to care for all natural, material and cultural goods under our control and to influence others.’ Peter’s full text is included at the end of this letter.

As a result of the Board’s deliberations, we have concluded that we need to become better at generating income, from individuals, from grants and partnerships and from project-based fundraising where relevant. This is necessary both to support our core annual activity and slowly to build our financial resilience for the longer term. That is why, in a recent e-newsletter and again here, we are asking any Companions with financial, accounting or fund-raising expertise (or who know of others beyond the Guild with these skills) to consider offering these in service to the Guild. Allied to this, we are still seeking a Treasurer with such financial/accounting experience to join the Board. If you can help, let us know so that we might have a conversation about how you could contribute in this area to support the Guild.

In addition, the Board is setting out three intentions, which we look forward to discussing in more detail on the day of the AGM.

- The first is that within five years, we intend to set a budget for the Guild that does not involve drawing down funds from our portfolio; all planned expenditure beyond our income will be supported by fund-raising, grant applications and partnerships that enable us to access a wider range of funding sources.

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- The second is that we will choose projects each year to be supported by appeals; the first such appeal will be to support the aspiration of the Sheffield Museums Trust to conserve and digitise (for subsequent public use) the rarest manuscripts in the Ruskin Collection, something you will hear more about on November 19th.
- The third is to introduce, on a voluntary basis at this stage, an annual subscription for Companions. To that end, in 2023 we are requesting of every Companion that you pay a modest annual subscription of £25 as part of your commitment to Companionship and to this principle of good stewardship. Our existing donors among you already contribute at least this much, and your generous contributions remain welcome and much needed, but we want to broaden the support from more Companions in building the Guild's future capacity to be a force for good in the world.

Ruskin himself always intended that Companions would make financial donations to support the Guild's existence, as well as contributing their time and talents. Today, in asking the same of our modern Companionship, we hope it will also energise more Companions to engage in an active relationship with the Guild, so that it reflects your interests and concerns and can best support what you would like to achieve as a result of being a Companion.

As I set out these intentions, I am acutely aware that we live in complex and challenging times, politically, economically and environmentally, and that many people are needing to husband their resources with special care. That, in a sense, is true of the Guild also, which is why we want to share our deliberations with you all now, and discuss them further at the AGM. As ever, your thoughts, ideas and contributions will be very welcome.

With all best wishes as we work together as fellow Companions,

Rachel



Peter Burman

GOOD STEWARDSHIP - A RUSKINIAN NARRATIVE

Ruskin has himself given us a compelling narrative of stewardship. In 'The Lamp of Memory', one of *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, he wrote: 'God has lent us the earth for our life; it is a great entail. It belongs as much to those who are to come after us, and whose names are already written in the book of creation, as to us; and we have no right, by any thing that we do or neglect, to involve them in unnecessary penalties, or deprive them of benefits which it was in our power to bequeath.'

His definition embraces the idea that the earth belongs as much to our successors as to us; that we should exercise sound trusteeship by looking after what we hold whether it be natural or cultural heritage, or any other aspect of Mother Earth; and that we should not rob our successors of the plenitude of beauty and interest which is theirs as well as ours. In architecture, we should encourage and promote the use of traditional materials which are long-lasting, if looked after properly, and are therefore sustainable.

In our care and respect for the natural world, for growing things, we should not recklessly exploit them but take tender care of them, avoiding excessive exploitation. Through our policy on the environment, we have committed ourselves to a stronger awareness of carbon dioxide costs, leading to better evaluation of the impact of everyday activities; we know that we have the knowledge and motivation to reduce our emissions whether on an individual, community or organisational basis.

Our behaviours often will need to change. At a practical level we need to ensure that our investment portfolio acknowledges and supports our commitment to sound stewardship; we need a never-failing programme of regular maintenance of our buildings, both to preserve their cultural value and to enable their continuing use as key assets in our Guild strategy; our Ruskin Collection equally requires knowledgeable curation, documentation, interpretation and appropriate levels of access according to the best professional practice; sound stewardship requires constant vigilance both to care for all natural, material and cultural goods under our control and to influence others.

We recognise that many aspects of stewardship are mundane and unseen, but have their place in the rich tapestry of responsibilities of the Guild: we have to embrace and balance the occasional tensions between replacing a window frame or pointing a wall, using traditional materials and skills, against the more obvious and spectacular steps needed to put on a big exhibition of works of art, some of which may need conservation and repair. All our responsibilities are embraced by this wide-ranging view of what constitutes stewardship.

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