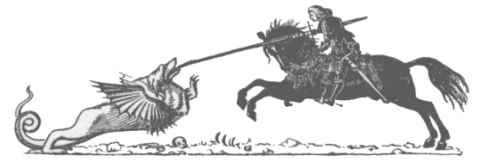


GUILD of St GEORGE



FROM THE MASTER, DR RACHEL DICKINSON

16th October 2023

Dear Companion,

I am delighted to write on behalf of the Board of Trustees to invite you to the Guild of St George's AGM, in **Sheffield on Saturday 25th November 2023**. We are the guests of our friends and partners at Sheffield Museums, home to the Guild's Ruskin Collection. 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, and mindful of our global membership, it will also be possible to attend via Zoom.

The AGM last year was a very convivial occasion, a chance to meet old friends and new, to hear from the Board and most importantly, an opportunity to contribute your thoughts about the Guild, Companionship and much else.

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.

Over the summer, some of you responded to our invitation to join one of three Companion consultations online, so that we could meet and talk about what Companionship and the Guild means to us. These were useful and heartening conversations, for which I am very grateful to all involved, and we will reflect on them at the AGM. They also already have led to several new initiatives by Companions, with likely more to come: Jo Whittle had the idea for a fascinating online discussion between five landscape painters, four of them Companions; and Judah Armani is leading 15 Service Design Masters students at the Royal College of Art on an Autumn project focused on Ruskin, as part of his Social Impact lab.

And, from a conversation I had with Companion Chiaki Yokoyama earlier this year, came a remarkable two hour session recently online, involving numerous Japanese Ruskinian voices talking about both the legacy and the current vibrancy of Ruskin's ideas in that country. Recordings of these events will soon be on the Guild's website.

The desire to hear from more Companions and Ruskinian voices also lies behind the programme for this year's AGM. Instead of a single keynote speaker, we will be hearing from a number of different voices throughout the day, with what I believe will be a fascinating range of subjects.

The charity for arts, crafts and the rural economy, founded by John Ruskin in 1871.

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When I wrote to you last year, it was to set out in plain terms the nature of the financial challenge facing the Guild if it was to be both a good steward of its assets for present and future generations, and also have a sustainable long-term future as a charity able to champion the work of its Companions and make a positive impact in an ever more complex world. Since then, as you all heard via a postal mailing and e-newsletter earlier in the year, the Board has decided, in alignment with Ruskin's original intention, that we should now introduce an annual subscription commitment for all Companions from the start of 2024.

As we said in that mailing, while we invited all Companions to subscribe to an annual or monthly financial commitment, we also offered the option of 'contribution in kind'. Among your responses – as well as many enthusiastic acceptances of these new terms of Companionship, and a few who have decided to relinquish their Companionship – we have had some beautiful statements of intent from Companions who do not currently feel able to pay the full, or any, amount, but are willing to make an annual commitment of what they are doing that is Ruskinian in purpose and intent, whether involving the Guild directly or not. If there are others among you for whom this is true, please do not hesitate to write and let us know.

That said, there are still many Companions from whom we have had no response, and this brings me to an important point. We are aware, after the richness of the Guild's funded public programmes and exhibitions in the run up to the Ruskin Bicentenary, and then the reduction of activity and enforced lockdowns of the pandemic, that there are now a sizeable number of Companions who do not engage with the Guild, are not reading our newsletters, responding to call-outs, expressing a wish to share their own work or concerns with other Companions or attending events online or in person. There is nothing wrong in this; lives and interests change and move on, but as a Guild we do want to have as good a sense as possible of what it is that Companionship means to each and every one of you, and so the introduction of the Subscription is an opportunity, we hope, to encourage more of you to be in touch, even if it is to say that you don't feel able to remain actively engaged. We value your previous association with the Guild, we'd be delighted for it to continue, but either way hope to hear from you soon.

We will write once more to all Companions, at the turn of the year, with the formal request for a 2024 Subscription, with the aim of making it as simple a process for everyone, existing generous donors included.

I said last year that we live in complex and challenging times, politically, economically and environmentally, and as I write, that truth has only come into sharper focus, with the terrible violence unfolding in too many parts of the world. There is, as our founder said, no wealth but life, and in that spirit, I hope to continue our Ruskinian dialogue with many of you on 25th November.

With all best wishes

Rachel

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Rachel', with a stylized flourish at the end.

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