

President's Address for 2023-4 Friends of York Art Gallery AGM March 2024

There have been many things to look back on with pleasure during 2023. Attendances were up; there was a distinguished series of exhibitions and the Friends' activities programme has been more varied than ever before. The 75th anniversary of the establishment of the Friends in 1948 was celebrated by a garden party in Heslington, generously hosted by George Smith and Brian Withill in their lovely garden and a lecture by Tristram Hunt, Director of the Victoria and Albert Museum was given at the Tempest Anderson Hall. But overhanging all this are the financial problems for the Gallery which will not go away. Indeed, as we enter 2024, we can expect more financial constraints.

But before we sink into a slough of despond let us look on the bright side. Since January 2023, Kathryn Blacker has taken over as CEO of the York Museums' Trust. She has established good relations with the Friends and we look forward to continuing our constructive relationship. In April 2023, Beatrice Bertram returned as Senior Curator and under her sure and cheerful hand there have been a series of excellent exhibitions, notably *Bloom* which ran from June to October 2023. We can look forward to a special exhibition in May 2024 when the National Gallery will lend Monet's *The Water-Lily Pond* to the Gallery.

The Committee of the Friends have continued to do outstanding work. Charles Martindale, as Chairman, has been tireless in promoting the relighting of the Burton Gallery and the stairs. The Gallery is being advised by Heritage Consultants Purcell, and it is expected that work will be completed by May 2024. This has been supported by a £20,000 grant from the Friends of the Gallery. Moira Fulton and the Events Committee have been extraordinarily diligent this year in providing eighteen events for the Friends, including a four-day visit to Glasgow supervised by Dorothy Knott. Sue Smallpage has maintained and slightly increased membership of the Friends so it stands at over 700 at the end of 2023. Ron Clayton has continued to organise the *Artwork of the Month* talks at the Gallery and Anne and Paul McClean have provided crucial support as Website Officer and Treasurer respectively. John Roe has continued as Secretary and Jeanne Nuechterlein maintains our close links with the Art

History Department at the University of York. Professor Jim Sharpe has done outstanding work as Newsletter Editor over the last few years, though sadly he had had to stand down recently due to ill-health. We wish him a speedy recovery. To these and all members of the Committee goes a heartfelt vote of thanks. The Friends' Committee has never been in better shape.

But the financial circumstances of the Gallery continue to give concern and the Friends support is vital. This is not just the money, but also the support that the Friends give to the artistic life of York and area. The membership of over 700 Friends is witness to that support and helps to make York an important artistic centre for the whole region. We can look forward to 2024 with a measure of optimism but this does have to be tempered by an awareness of the financial realities facing our Gallery.

Peter Miller
President
Friends of York Art Gallery

December 2023