

## Chairman's Report for AGM 2011

Once again I am delighted to report that the society has had an excellent year. Our membership remains strong with a number of new members, and others intending to join for the coming year. We think particularly today of two members who would have wished to be with us, John and Pauline Clay who have not been well since the death of their daughter at Christmas. When I spoke to John in the week, Pauline was still in Carlisle but hoping to return to Keswick hospital shortly. I said we would be thinking of the today. Jenny has continued in the role of membership secretary with her usual care and attention for which we are most grateful. Our workshops have been popular and our talks well attended especially those relocated to the Friends' Meeting House when we rang round to advise of the change. That suggests to me that some people miss meetings unintentionally and perhaps it would help if reminders were routinely sent by e-mail as they were for this meeting. If you are happy to receive our correspondence also by e-mail on a regular basis, it would be a help the society financially and you have the opportunity to let Jenny know this when you fill in your membership application form today. Thank you Jenny.

I should like to thank Sue Stephenson for the excellent, well balanced programme which we have enjoyed in the year just ended. She was the one who bore the brunt of the weather this year when pipes in this building froze and burst. Thankfully we didn't have to miss any meetings and were back in here for the unbelievable "Covent Garden" workshop for which Sue persuaded Booths to provide the display. I hope you saw the picture in the Reminder. Many thanks, Sue, for all your support. I know that most people will find your new programme the main attraction of the day.

In connection with workshops, I should also like to thank Val who has worked diplomatically to try to please everyone, an almost impossible task when workshops are so popular. Thank you Val for your care and consideration.

It will soon be time to turn our attention to our May exhibition when we have Linda Furniss, a stalwart supporter from the Keswick Tourism Association to address the preview. Can we equal or even surpass the three exhibitions of last year when we sold well and had so many enthusiastic visitors? Of all our activities, exhibitions must create the most work for our committee, for our team of strong men and especially for Miriam who still managed to organize everything to the last detail even though in May last year she was in the throes of moving back home after the floods. Thank you Miriam for making it so easy for the rest of us.

One member of the team who fulfils a number of jobs is Sue Cumella. As well as providing refreshments, and making photographic displays, she has put together a very interesting programme of Summer painting days. I asked you last year if painting days were what you wanted in the summer but didn't receive a response for or against. I do hope that you will make Sue's efforts worthwhile by coming along. It is a great way to get to know other members and if you just want to socialise and not paint that's fine. Thank you Sue.

My thanks also go to Beryl whose cheery phone calls are full of good ideas. As press officer she has explored many ways of promoting this society and will in a minute be reporting on plans for future advertising. Thank you Beryl for all your innovations and efforts.

Our Christmas lunch was a very happy affair, one of the best we've had. It was a shame that many could not come but we have moved the date for the coming season which we hope will be more convenient for you. Thank you Jacquie for arranging it. But thank you even more for

last week's society trip to Paris. For me it was a dream of a holiday and I've been grinning from ear to ear ever since. I realise that you shouldered a lot of extra responsibility to make it possible. It was a tremendous success despite Virgin trains' best efforts! I only hope you enjoyed it as much as I did.

This AGM does not only bring to an end this year's activities but also the four year term of office of the chairman, secretary and treasurer of the society and we were committee members before that. I think for the three of us the society has just about become a way of life. I have been most grateful for the friendship, support and advice I have received from Madge and Alan over and above the contribution they have made to the society by their thorough and efficient execution of their individual responsibilities. We shall, of course, all be here for our successors for at least the next year, if they need us. On behalf of the society will you please accept these tokens of our appreciation. (Give tokens)

For myself I must say that I have felt most honoured to hold the post of Chairman. It has given me wonderful opportunities to meet people in the Art world and beyond. I have had the chance to work in a most supportive team, always willing to step in and help out a colleague in difficulties. It is this supportive culture that I think makes the society such a vibrant and warm organization. It is always healthy for a society to have a regular turn-over of management and I am certain that the new team will serve the society well. I look forward to their innovations. Certainly I set out with half formed ideas that I have not had the vision to develop or which have been shelved for the sake of routine activities. I have always felt that Keswick deserved an Art festival to rival Words by the Water and the county's Summer Music Festival. Perhaps that's something for you to think about.

Now before I sit down I have a very pleasant duty to perform. Some months ago the Committee decided to confer honorary membership on three of our number who over a long period have supported the society and continue to produce wonderful contributions for our exhibitions. I thought you would like to know a little about each of them, so with their help, I have put together three little life stories. So here they are – in alphabetical order:-

**Tom Price** was born to Welsh parents just after the first world war in Wadsley Bridge near Sheffield. He had a happy childhood there before moving to Liverpool, where he won a scholarship to the grammar school and from there went to Liverpool University to read English Language and Literature and take a Dip. Ed. By this time he was an avid climber and mountaineer. His studies were interrupted for six years by war service in the Royal Navy in small ships: minesweepers, anti U-boat patrols and combined operations. He finished as lieutenant R.N.V.R. in command of a rocket firing assault ship.

While teaching English at Workington Grammar School, Tom by now a family man, took time away as a member of the South Georgia Survey Expedition of 1955-6 which produced the definitive map of the island. For seven years he was the bowman of the Workington Life Boat. Between 1961 and 8 he was the Warden of the Outward Bound Mountain School at Eskdale and incidentally leader of the Eskdale Mountain Rescue team. 1968-79 saw him in the West Riding of Yorkshire first as an Inspector of Schools and then as Dean of Students at Bingley College.

During his lengthy retirement Tom has led groups trekking in France, Austria, Sweden, Finland, Peru, Canada, USA, India and the Himalayas and also in the Lake District as well as working for Outward Bound abroad.

Tom never studied art but it has interested him all his life. He says it keeps him watching and noticing and appreciating what he sees. In his mind he is painting all the time. But what enables him to persist in the problems of trying to paint is the occasional feeling of having created something even though “a poor thing but mine own”. He felt much encouraged by the Keswick Society of Art’s decision to make him an honorary member. (Presentation)

**Eileen Witherington** began life in Finchley, moving to Whetstone, Barnet in 1934. She attended a small private school and then Woodhouse Grammar School which closed on the outbreak of war. Following Pitman’s secretarial college she was employed by Edinburgh Assurance Company (which was evacuated to a big country house near Whetstone) and then she worked for Prince Line Shipping Company in the City of London where she became secretary to the Managing Director. Eileen married Herbert in 1947 and they had three children.

While living in Sunderland Eileen worked for the Sunderland Probation Service, the WRVS and the Sunderland Samaritans. She also studied with the Open University gaining an Honours degree. Her recreation in her younger years included tennis, walking and painting.

It was in 1978 that Eileen began long distance walking with a trek to Everest Base Camp. Walks in South Africa, America and Europe followed, culminating with a walk from Land’s End to John O’Groats.

In 1999 she undertook John Blockley’s water colour correspondence course and then from 2000-2004 she studied oil painting with the Open College of Arts under the tutelage of David Morris. (Presentation)

**Herbert Witherington** was born the youngest of three brothers in a family of strong Methodist traditions. Life was also dominated by cricket. He was educated at Tunstall prep school before going on to Cambridge first to the Leys School and then to Emmanuel College. He entered the family business on Newcastle Quayside in 1945 before marrying Eileen in 1947. Their two daughters and one son have given them seven grandchildren and seven great grandchildren.

Also in 1947, Herbert became a fully accredited Preacher in the Methodist Church. He was actively involved in preaching for over 60 years and I was privileged to hear him before he retired and can testify to what an inspiration he was. He played cricket for Sunderland in Durham Senior League, his highest score being 148 not out.

The shipping business developed from the old fashioned coal trade to a very sophisticated general cargo operation entitled the Gracechurch Line. Herbert was the chairman of this and also other shipping companies. This kept him very busy and involved a lot of travelling to the Mediterranean. It was after ill health persuaded him to retire in 1985 that he and Eileen began their long distance walks which enabled them to raise large sums for Christian Aid and introduced them to book publishing.

Painting has become Herbert’s great passion since he was declared too old to play cricket and he says that he is dependent on his paint box to keep him out of mischief now that his walking days are over. After over 50 years in Sunderland they decided it was time for a new start and moved across the country from NE to NW. Unfortunately after many years of happy walking and climbing here in Cumbria, Dr Parkinson came to live with them and spoilt their plans, but in spite of him they have spent some of their happiest years here beneath Blencathra. (Pres)

After those fascinating stories, I call upon the treasurer to give his report.