



The Arts Society Shrewsbury

The Arts Society Golden Jubilee Celebration Lecture
Saturday 19 May 7.30pm the Blackburn Theatre, Prestfelde School
Chairman's Welcome and Introduction

My Lord-Lieutenant, Madam Mayor, High Sheriff, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. As Chairman of The Arts Society Shrewsbury, I am delighted to echo the welcome extended to you by our President, Howard Franklin, to our Celebration of the Golden Jubilee of The Arts Society by kind permission of Mrs Fiona Orchard, Head of Prestfelde School.

In 1965, a young woman in her early 30s, Patricia Fay, placed an advert in her local paper asking if anyone would be interested in forming a Chiltern Antiques Group. So many people flocked to the talk that more chairs had to be found, and Miss DK Millington gave a lecture on Victorian Teaspoons. By 1968, 11 societies had been formed, and the National Association of Decorative and Fine Arts (NADFAS) was created – known by Harpers Bazaar as the National Association of Dragons and Fiery Spinsters.

Right from the start, Patricia Fay determined it was to be a serious organisation with first class lecturers to promote aesthetic education and study groups so its members could serve the community in due course helping in historic houses and museums. She made contact with the V & A Museum where the inaugural meeting was held and through whom she secured a list of lecturers which would soon become the Directory helping to give The Arts Society the national

status it enjoys still. Their knowledge, ability to communicate and professionalism made possible by the rigorous selection and evaluation procedure mark a gold standard in the world of the Arts today.

Smoking was only allowed in question time, and the audience was given permission not to wear hats and gloves, and to use first names. Men were not initially permitted but had crept in by the 1970s. Early members were comparatively well off women with children at school, help in the house and time on their hands. Tame Valley Society was set up to provide a suitable occupation for women who did not hunt. Patricia Fay's vision was always that members should not just see, but do. By 1973 Church Recording, Young Arts and Heritage Volunteering were all launched and are still integral parts of our societies today. Friendship and fun were part of Patricia Fay's vision, and day visits and tours were established, too. Shrewsbury DFAS was formed in 1982 and by 1984 the first society was founded in Europe with The Hague established in 1985.

In token of this, we are particularly delighted in the 40th anniversary year of the twinning, with its link to Sir Philip Sydney, to welcome a party of 10 from Shrewsbury's twin town of Zutphen whose generous hospitality we enjoyed in September 2016 when we went to Holland to study the Golden Age of Dutch Art. It was on this trip that we heard Jane Choy-Thurlow's talk to us on the Mauritshuis Collection the night before our visit there. We were so dazzled by her presentation that we knew immediately we had the focus of our celebration of the Golden Jubilee of the Arts Society. This was confirmed to us when we heard that Jane having been selected to guide the newly enthroned King William of the Netherlands on his

visit to the Royal Collection turned him down - because she had a NADFAS group booked in already. Clearly, he forgave her because at the end of last month, he awarded her the honour of Knight of the Order of Orange Nassau for her knowledge of Dutch Art History. Congratulations, Lady Jane!

In 2017 to mark the 50th anniversary, NADFAS was rebranded to be known as The Arts Society with its smart new monogram and easily identified Royal purple colour. The original young women in their 20s and 30s are now grandmothers. Their daughters are now going out to work, and with NADFAS being something to look forward to on retirement, there was a need to attract a younger generation by being more transparent, less elitist and embracing all the Arts. In a time of enormous social change, Patricia Fay's brainchild continues to thrive because what does not change is our thirst for knowledge and need for friendship in which the Arts are a vital part of lifelong learning for every member of whatever background, interest and ability. There are 387 societies in the UK and overseas and over 90,000 members stretching the hand of friendship and support for the Arts across the world.

It is run by volunteers with a passion for the arts, and over 10,000 of the national members donate their time to ensure the arts and heritage are supported at the grass roots, work of historical importance according to Sir Roy Strong. I am very grateful to my Golden Jubilee committee for all the support and generosity they have shown in planning this event, and I thank particularly Bob van Mook for forging the Zutphen link and Ceri Lewis for master-minding the social side of this celebration.

Sadly, Patricia Fay died aged only 46, and the Patricia Fay Memorial Fund was established to attract the young to the Arts. I am very grateful to our sponsors Lowe & Fletcher, Tanners Wines and Award Proud to Serve for backing our event tonight. Through their support, and having been inspired by, Callum Blee, the recipient of our Queen's 90th Birthday Young Arts Bursary through the generosity of Sir Algernon Heber-Percy, I am delighted to launch tonight The Arts Society Shrewsbury's Young Arts Golden Jubilee Bursary. Please ask any talented 18-25 year olds with a Shropshire connection and with a love of the Arts to watch our website during the autumn term for more information so that we can help their dreams come true. One of Sir Philip Sidney's sayings in his many writings was that it was better to aim high by shooting at the midday sun rather than a bush. We feel that this is the appropriate way for Shrewsbury to look forward to the next 50 years of The Arts Society.

Finally, the strapline of The Arts Society is Enriching Lives through the Arts. We hope that you will find your lives enriched this evening as I am delighted to invite our Vice-Chairman Deborah Yates to introduce our speaker.

1030 words

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May 2018