

*From the Master,* Dr Rachel Dickinson

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Dear Companion,

We meet – sadly, but inevitably, online – for our AGM on Saturday 21st November. I am therefore writing to you all with a paper copy of the agenda, the AGM attendance form, the Zoom link you will need to join the meeting, and our annual contribution / donation / Gift Aid forms. Please, can I ask that you let our administrator Martin Green know (by email at accounts@guildofstogeorge.org.uk or via the enclosed paper form) if you plan to attend the AGM or require a proxy. This is doubly important when we are gathering digitally in order to ensure we meet our legal obligations.

Ruskin was committed to helping preserve the environment. On Earth Day 2020 (22nd April) the Guild became a signatory of Culture Declares a Climate and Ecological Emergency, and published a new Guild environmental policy. To reduce our carbon footprint, we have decided not to print hundreds of copies of our AGM papers, but to place digital versions of the Guild accounts and papers on our website. All those of you who receive our email news will have been sent links to these, and to digital copies of the enclosed forms, on 2nd November. We are sending paper copies just to the 14 Companions who do not use email; for the rest of you with access to the internet, feel free to print off your own copies at home if you need to.

You will see from the enclosed agenda that we have pared things down so that our AGM meeting is scheduled to last just a little over two hours. Many months of online meetings have taught us that any longer becomes exhausting and off-putting. For that reason, this year there will not be a Ruskin Lecture from a single speaker. Instead, the Director of The Ruskin at Lancaster, Companion Sandra Kemp, will spend a few minutes introducing an online event that they and the Guild will co-host in the spring of 2021, when a handful of speakers will respond to one of Ruskin’s Lecture Diagrams, chosen by Sandra from the collection at The Ruskin. Given the significant contribution the Guild made to the purchase of the collection for the nation in 2019, we had hoped to hold this 2020 AGM at Lancaster. It is clear that we cannot do that this year, but we look forward to doing so in future. Meanwhile, we are keen to present a collaborative event that celebrates the riches of The Ruskin’s holdings and its synergies with our own, and we look forward to letting you know more soon.

We will also hear from the five recipients of our 150th Anniversary Companion Grants, as they embark on their respective activities. We look forward to their return at our 2021 AGM to report on the outcomes and impact of their work.

Those of you who receive our e-newsletters will know that we recently put out a call for interest and expertise from within the Companionship for a new director to have oversight of the Guild’s finance and fundraising endeavours. If you missed the deadline of 31st October but would still like to express an interest, do please get in touch with Martin Green by email (above) as soon as possible.

This vacancy on the Board arises because Chris Harris has decided to step down from the Board after 10 years as our Director of Finance. Chris has contributed an enormous amount in that role, guiding us through a considerable expansion of our activities, not least the investment in our Sheffield and Wyre projects and the exhibitions to celebrate Ruskin’s bicentenary. He has also been a steady and reassuring presence in all our Board discussions and on behalf of the Board I want to thank him for all that he has contributed.

On the matter of farewells, I would also like to acknowledge the contribution Companion Tim Selman has made to Ruskin Land in his time as Director of the Wyre Community Land Trust. His vision and hard work have brought many good new things to the Wyre Forest for which we are very grateful.

Ruskin founded the Guild to be an active organisation, a network of involved individuals working in community. Contribution is a word we use a lot when we think of the Companionship. So many of you give of your time, your expertise and your enthusiasm, and some of you also kindly make a financial contribution when and if you can. As we do each year, I would like to add my voice to the invitation for this to be something every Companion commits to; the Guild cannot do good things that make lives better without the support of each of you, in whatever ways you can. The accompanying forms invite you to state what your contribution over the next 12 months will be.

At the AGM we will share some of what we hope to achieve in 2021. Given the year we have all experienced, with the inevitable reduction of activity, there will be a much slimmed down edition of *The Companion*. Issued in the spring of our 150th year, this will look to the past, but also the future. We will then review how best to record and reflect in 2022 on the activities of the birthday year.

We are working with our friends at The Big Draw to see if it will be viable to hold a John Ruskin Prize in the autumn of 2021 or soon after, with the ambition to ensure that it has a strong craft element to it. At the time of writing, our creative producer Ruth Nutter, author of our new Handbook *Paradise is Here*, is working with the Board to develop a programme of activity for the year; we look forward to sharing our vision, and inviting your participation, for this at the AGM. As always, we will be looking for external funding and partnership to realise all our plans.

In the Autumn of 2021, we hope to hold our 150th AGM in Birmingham, and trust that we will be able to meet in person. As soon as we have a date and a venue, we will let you know. In the meantime, given this year’s meeting has to be online, I do hope it means that our international Companions will feel able to join us in a way that has not been possible before. I have already heard from Companions in India and the US that they intend to take part. How good it would be if we ended this year of dislocation and isolation by gathering in greater numbers than ever before!

Hoping to see you on-line at the AGM and looking forward to working with you as a fellow-Companion,

Dr Rachel Dickinson, Master of the Guild of St George