

# C I R C U M S P I C E

NEWSLETTER 44: SPRING 2012

## CHAIRMAN'S VIEW

2011 was a roller coaster year for the PMSA and I hope you will see, now we are in 2012, the benefits of a great deal of hard work by our Trustees.

After a period when we needed to consolidate I am pleased that this edition of Circumspice will give a full run down of all the activities we are involved in. If there is one area where we have not been so active it has been in our communication with members. Hopefully this edition will make amends and also whet your appetite for the future.

You will read of the activity we have been undertaking on all fronts and realise that we now have a sound plan for the future. Keeping the PMSA running long term and fulfilling its original aim is what we are all seeking to achieve in what is a very challenging financial climate for all organisations like ours. I feel that we have a very capable team working on a range of fronts to ensure that the PMSA is seen as the leading one for public sculpture.

I hope you have by now received the latest edition of the Sculpture Journal; an edition which I think may well become a collector's item in the future, so hold onto it! You will also read in this edition of other publications and a range of activities that we fulfil to protect public monuments and sculpture. Theft is in the headlines a great deal lately and we have been instrumental in setting up a joint network with the police to consider how to protect and combat theft. As we know theft has been for artistic value in the past but more these days it is to realise a paltry amount in metal sales.

I hope that this edition will make amends for a recent lack of contact but equally I hope that you will be inspired to engage with the PMSA in 2012, renew your membership and join us for more talks and visits.

*Peter Brown*

Chairman

sculptors in an informal atmosphere. We are hoping to organise more events with the Royal Society of British Sculpture and also give announcements of their exhibitions. Indeed a full set of events and talks is being developed at the moment and we shall look forward to telling you about them in the next newsletter.

## MEMBERS' NEWS

It is with much sadness we report that a stalwart of our Association and one of our earliest members, Ann Thompson, has died.

Ann was a Trustee, who for many years held the post of Hon. Membership Secretary. She maintained the membership records meticulously, in fact as one Committee member commented recently, "Our records have never been so well kept."

A good friend of our founder Jo Darke, Ann was the sort of committed Trustee all societies long for, working diligently, seldom missing a meeting whatever the weather and always turning up cheerful and positive.

It is perhaps because she was such a modest and



unassuming person that we knew little about her apart from her interest in sculpture and monuments, but I think others who remember her will be as fascinated as I was to learn a little more about her life. Born in Leeds in 1933, Ann's family moved to London shortly after her birth, where she attended the Royal College of Music specialising in the violin and the harp. She then joined the BBC where she was responsible for organising concerts. Around this time she developed an interest in archaeology and it was on an archaeological trip to Denmark that she met her future husband, Michael. In 1974 they removed to Cardiff when Michael was appointed Inspector of Ancient Monuments for Wales. On his retirement they settled in Cambridge, where incidentally Ann had been evacuated during the war. Here Ann returned to her music, playing the violin as a member of the Cambridge Philharmonic Orchestra and joining the Cambridge Sinfonietta, where now playing the viola she became leader of the orchestra.

Her family is unsure when Ann first became interested in public monuments, but recall that in her early twenties she started purchasing postcards of public monuments, which eventually became a collection of hundreds, and that she catalogued them in a scrapbook leaving spaces for her own photographs, which she took touring around the countryside in her Morris Minor van. It was perhaps this collection that led her to Jo and the PMSA.

Ann played a valuable part in the running of the PMSA for many years and she will be greatly missed. We extend our condolences to her husband, Michael and her daughter, Elizabeth.

*Joanna Barnes*

## SCULPTURE IN THE NEWS

*Monuments to Fryderyk Chopin*

Vice-President, Professor Andrew Ciechanowiecki has drawn our attention to the activity of the Polish Heritage Society, which over the last year has been instrumental in erecting two public monuments to the composer

and pianist, Fryderyk Chopin. The monuments which commemorate the 200th anniversary of the Polish composer's birth in 2010 were not actually unveiled until 2011.

In May 2011 the Duke of Gloucester unveiled the bronze statue of Chopin by the Polish sculptor, Bronislaw Kubica outside the Royal Festival Hall on the Southbank. It is an imposing abstract design with Chopin's head emerging in rather surreal fashion from folds of bronze drapery



Bronze, monument to Chopin by Bronislaw Kubica, unveiled by our President HRH the Duke of Gloucester on the Southbank, London in May 2011. Photograph courtesy of Dr. Marek Stella-Sawicki.

and is not in fact a new monument, but a freshly restored old friend. Rescued from neglect in storage, it was taken to Poland and restored there by the Polish figurative sculptor, Robert Sobocinski, who is renowned for his monument to the Polish Armed Forces in the National Arboretum.

The Chopin monument was originally unveiled by the Duke's late mother, HRH Princess Alice, Duchess of Gloucester at the same location in 1975. At the time *The Daily Telegraph* commented, "Its austerity is in tune with the buildings around it, but it has sufficient references

to direct human connotations to evoke an immediate response, providing an admirable foil to the surrounding buildings." Having remained in situ for about ten years, it was moved into storage for its protection during the development works on the Southbank and was never reinstated. The Polish Heritage Society, together with the Polish ambassador to the UK campaigned for its restitution.

The monument was originally presented to the UK government in 1975 by Poland in recognition of our countries' mutual support during World War II. Inscribed as a memorial to the 250,000 Poles who fought under British command "for your freedom and ours", it was paid for by public subscription, contributions coming from Polish people living in the UK and from Poland. The ensuing fiercely fought competition for its design and execution was won by the little-known Polish sculptor, Bronislaw Kubica.

Although aesthetically the statue has met with mixed reviews, which may partially account for it languishing in storage, it has huge symbolic significance. The original monument had an urn attached which contained earth taken from Chopin's birth-place at Zelazowa Wola (lost together with its base while in storage) and as *The Polish Heritage Society* points out for Polish people Chopin's music is regarded both as the highest expression of patriotism and an emblem of their country's historic struggles.

There is a similar theme of Poland's struggle for survival to be found in the second monument to Chopin, commissioned by the Chopin Memorial Monument Committee and the Polish Consulate from the Poznan-born, Robert Sobocinski. It was unveiled last year, in September, outside Centurion House on Deansgate in the commercial district of Manchester, a gift to the people of Manchester from the Polish community.

The monument rests on a 2m high sandstone plinth and is the largest statue of the composer outside of Poland.



*Bronze Monument to Chopin by Robert Sobocinski outside Centurion House, Deansgate Manchester. Photograph courtesy of Dr. Marek Stella-Sawicki.*

It shows Chopin sitting at a grand piano looking across at his lover and muse, Amantine Lucile Aurore Dupin, better known to us under her pseudonym as Georges Sand, the novelist. An eagle in flight is carved into the work a symbol of Poland for over a thousand years and also a battle scene symbolising Poland's fight for freedom. In addition, the bronze includes material dating from 1831 the year of the November uprising by the Poles against the Russian Empire. The monument celebrates the composer's one and only visit to Manchester in August 1848. By this time, however, Chopin was in poor health and was alarmed when he arrived to find he had an audience of over one thousand, consequently the ensuing concert was not a particular success.

This monument too has attracted some criticism. Jonathan Schofield at Manchester Confidential, for example, derided the modelling of the muse's waving arm which he found "twig-like". He also commented that the back of the monument presents a blank aspect to the passer-by and that the location is cramped. Nonetheless, the Manchester Chopin monument represents an

important symbol of the friendship between Poland and the UK.

While both these monuments have been challenged by some on aesthetic grounds, they are exemplary in fulfilling other valuable functions of monuments - commemoration and symbolism - and in helping to humanise our urban centres.

Symbolism is both powerful and paramount in Antony Gormley's cast iron chair entitled *Witness*, which was unveiled in December 2011 on the piazza outside the British Library on Euston Road, London, where it joins Sir Eduardo Paolozzi's *Newton* and Gormley's own eight boulders of granite, *Planets*. *Witness* was conceived to celebrate the 90th birthday of English PEN. The charity holds an annual event each year, "the Day of the Imprisoned Writer" when writers all over the world commemorate colleagues who have been persecuted for their work. At the event an empty chair represents a writer who could not attend because he has been imprisoned or detained against his will.

Gillian Slovo, PEN's President in England commented



*Witness by Antony Gormley, cast iron, British Library, London*

that *Witness* is "...a sculpture that plays on the symbolism of PEN's empty chair. It will stand as tribute to, and reminder of, those writers who, because of censorship and tyranny, are not free to go to any library either in their country or in ours."

The British Library, the UK's National Library was regarded as the ideal location for the statue. Gormley himself acknowledged that "This is a place of witness"