

The Craven Street Gazette

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN HOUSE • ISSUE 11 • 2005/2006

Nearly Open for Benjamin Franklin's 300th Birthday!

THE CULMINATION of a long-standing dream to open Benjamin Franklin House to the public is in sight! Our deadline is 17 January 2006, the 300th anniversary of Benjamin Franklin's birth. All our energy is devoted to this end and what a fitting tribute it will be to everyone who has ever taken an interest in this lovely, Grade I Georgian building in the heart of London – the world's only surviving Franklin residence – not least our Board, our many supporters, and, of course, Ben himself!

Since our last *Gazette* there has been a flurry of activity. Following the spectacular news in summer 2004 that our bid to Britain's Heritage Lottery Fund was successful for nearly £1 million, we set about raising the remaining £500,000 that would allow us to start the final phase of the project. This was made possible with contributions from numerous sources including £150,000 from a single US donor, while a low, fixed interest loan from the Architectural Heritage Fund eased cash flow.

Our primary task has been to conserve the derelict circa 1730s interiors, the preserve of Benjamin Franklin for nearly 16 years between 1757 and 1775. While exterior stabilisation of the building was achieved by the start of 2000 and the ground and first floor were conserved following, we began 2005 with three other floors and all services (including heating, cooling and electrics) yet to be done.

Our Project Management Team, led by tireless Board member Anne Keigher, an architect and interiors specialist, with architect Patrick Dillon and quantity surveyor Mike Burke, began a rigorous tender process overseen by Board member Ralph Quartano CBE, which resulted in the selection of Wallis as primary conservation contractor. Wallis, in business for 140 years, when 36 Craven Street was

RIGHT AND BELOW:
*Student Science
Centre: conservation
in progress.*

BELOW:
*36 Craven Street
construction
hoarding.*



Supported by the
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already an antique, has extensive expertise. They regularly work for English Heritage and Britain's National Trust and recently completed a landmark revitalisation of London's 18th century Christ Church, Spitalfields.

We were guided by our Conservation Plan with its goals of minimising the extent of repair work; retaining original material and using traditional methods wherever possible; and providing long-term rather than ad hoc repairs which need early renewal.

On a happy day in May, the Wallis crew arrived and began to prep the building for activity. They bandaged the ground and first floors and staircase in protective covering to ensure no damage where conservation work had already occurred. They catalogued loose panelling on the upper floors, which were sent to their joinery workshop in Maidstone, England for conservation. Following, they reassembled these 18th century wall pieces for the top floors: a real Georgian jigsaw puzzle! Scaffolding was erected on the chimney to carry out essential repairs and mechanical and electrical servicing proceeded apace.

We moved our project office to a back corner of the House but by July unexpectedly needed to move off site to give the contractors full access. Our Board Chairman, Sir Bob Reid and his wife Lady Joan Reid, also a Board member and the UK's leading Franklin expert, kindly allowed us to decamp to their

The year's conservation efforts reflect those humorously described by Franklin in his original *Craven Street Gazette* 235 years ago:

‘A project has been under consideration of government, to take the opportunity of her Majesty's absence, for doing a thing she was always averse to, viz. fixing a new lock on the street door, or getting a key made to the old one; it being found extremely inconvenient, that one or other of the great officers of state, should, whenever the maid goes out for a ha'pworth of sand or a pint of porter, be obliged to attend the door to let her in again. But opinion, being divided, which of the two expedients to adopt, the project is for the present laid aside.’



ABOVE:
Basement staircase ready for paint.

RIGHT:
A view to the roof from the Scholarship Centre.



dining room. But our generous neighbours, Rod and Mina McManigal, at 30 Craven Street (briefly home to controversial American statesman Aaron Burr in the early 1800s), offered free reign of their basement flat and we were but steps from the House by mid-August.

By the start of October, all 14 of the House's fireplaces had been restored. Where at the top of the building there had been open rafters – and a raft of pigeons – there are now ceilings with plaster prepared in the 18th style with lime and hair! A small wall section of original lathing on the top floor has been left un-plastered (covered by a perspex panel) in order to show the original construction. Wiring, the foundation of the House's modern infrastructure, has been installed with in-kind support from Lutron Technologies. And our paint expert, Patrick Baty, has advised on the colours for the upper floors as well as the glazing Franklin may have applied to his first floor parlour to increase light in a space where he most likely did much of his writing. All painting and decoration will be done by the close of autumn and the building, for the first time, will regain its 18th century lustre.

WE NOW MOVE to instatement of the three key offerings of Benjamin Franklin House for which the conserved 18th century spaces provide the backdrop: the Historical Experience, Student Science Centre, and Scholarship Centre.

The Historical Experience, designed by Event Communications, will present the excitement and uncertainty of Franklin's London years using the rooms he inhabited for nearly sixteen years as staging for a drama which seamlessly integrates live performance, cutting edge lighting, sound and projection technology. The main character is Polly Hewson, daughter of Franklin's landlady who became a 'second daughter' to Franklin. Accompanied by Hewson, who will assume visitors are there to see Franklin on his last night in London when he had to leave or risk arrest, the visitor will experience a sense of the complexity of the man and the times in which he lived: food, health, botany, and daily living in the basement kitchen; social and personal relationships, musical inventions and political tension on the ground floor; scientific work, political triumphs and woes, and a hurried return to America in the face of the looming War of Independence on the first floor. The script for the Historical Experience will soon be recorded.

The Student Science Centre, the creativity of scientists at Machinehouse Productions, encompasses the Medical History Room (focused on the Craven Street bones, exposing young minds to scientific enquiry and life processes), the Discovery Room (to help students explore how 18th century discoveries link with 21st century science), and the Demonstration Room. The latter will feature tasked, hands-on experiments based on Franklin's London science. Children will carry out experiments with the House's Education Officer and other young scientists. These will encompass Franklin's work on canal depths, electricity and lightning rod design, and the Franklin developed instrument, the glass armonica, for which Mozart, Bach, and Beethoven composed. Dramatic, interest-catching audio-visual segments will support the presentations, enabling children to explore 'what if' questions such as 'what happens if lightning strikes a building with no lightning conductor?' Machinehouse will also be developing the video wall for the introductory Seminar Room in the basement.

The Scholarship Centre located at the top of the House will be a hub for study of the many subjects Franklin pursued. Thanks to support from the US Embassy London, scholars will have access to online services and the nearly 40 volumes of Franklin's writings annotated by our friends at Yale University's Papers of Benjamin Franklin. During his years in London, Franklin published his autobiography (1771), still hailed as a classic of modern literature.

The Scholarship Centre at the start of conservation.



After a competitive tender process and review by technologist and Board member Graham Nixon and multimedia advisors, Can Factory, we have selected Sysco to handle multimedia installation. The group, with experience in museum installations, will oversee the sensitive integration of the technology that will bring the Historical Experience to life, serve the Student Science Centre and the Scholarship Centre, and our office needs. It is not a small challenge given the limited space behind panning for cables, and the inability to use nails due to the House's Grade I status. Franklin, the so-called Father of Electricity, I believe, would have relished the challenge; he did after all say he was born 200 years too soon, and that something would be made of his pioneering investigations.

Please plan on visiting next year to see how, with your time, interest, and support, history has come to life at Benjamin Franklin House. Our best way to say – thank you.

Dr. Márcia Balisciano, *Director*

Benjamin Franklin Science Day

Students at Westminster City School in the Victoria area of London were treated to an exciting demonstration of Franklin science – and what led on from it – by scientist Dr. Bryson Gore, a charter member of the Benjamin Franklin House Science Advisory Group. All eyes were fixated as Bryson produced electricity and illumination with loud bangs, cracks and sparks!



Benjamin Franklin Science Fair 2005: Bryson Gore demonstrates Franklin Science to Westminster City School students.

New Education Officer

Ana Doria Buchan is Benjamin Franklin House's new Education Officer, a post made possible thanks to a grant from energy leader National Grid Transco. She will be responsible for: reaching out to the House's core constituency of inner-city schools, ensuring their visitation on our weekly student free day; web-based educational activities; and the annual Benjamin Franklin Science Fair, which will allow children to develop their own experiments to solve Franklin-related science problems.



Ana most recently served as Education Officer at the Petrie Museum of Egyptology and as an English Heritage case worker; among other positions, she has worked as an arts editor for a major UK daily and as an events coordinator at the Royal Academy of Art. She holds a post-graduate diploma in museum studies from University College London and holds a Masters Degree in forensic archaeology from the same institution, working with Dr. Simon Hillson who has been cataloguing the Craven Street bones. These were found during structural repair to the basement, remnants of an anatomy school run by William Hewson, son-in-law of Franklin's landlady (Franklin helped Dr. Hewson get elected to the Royal Society – still Britain's most respected science body). In addition to her practical experience and credentials, she also speaks five languages!

New Funding

At the start of 2005 our largest US donor issued a challenge grant: if we could raise \$100,000 from US sources to our 501 (c) (3) organisation, the Benjamin Franklin House Foundation, we would receive an additional \$100,000. We are getting close and he has recently 'sweetened the deal' by raising the amount he will match to £100,000!

Our first funders to the work of opening Benjamin Franklin House to the public, the IEEE Foundation, have issued a new grant for nearly \$40,000 toward the costs of the Student Science Centre. Also contributing to this effort is repeat supporter, the US Embassy London!

Pro Bono Support

We are grateful for invaluable pro bono support, which we would be unable to afford otherwise. Hamid Rashidmanesh at top international law firm Morrison & Foerster, is our pro bono solicitor and has been indispensable for nearly five years. Joanne Lunt and Ian Clark of property solicitors, Pin-sentMasons, provided countless hours of their time; Lisa Lavia and Eileen Mercer of insurance company Marsh are providing essential PR support; Cisco and BT Skynet have given expert technology consulting, while our neighbours Rod and Mina McManigal have allowed us to use part of their beautiful home, a minute from 36 Craven Street, as a temporary project office.

Benjamin Franklin Endowment Fund

At the start of 2005, Chairman Sir Bob Reid announced fundraising toward a £1 million endowment to secure Benjamin Franklin House and its aims in perpetuity. To contribute (Friends of Benjamin Franklin House is a UK registered charity and Benjamin Franklin House Foundation is a US 501 (c) (3) organization) contact BenjaminFranklinHouse@msn.com or +44 (0)20 7930 9121; +44 (0)20 7930 9124.

Visiting in 2006

Our first full month of operation will be February 2006. The Historical Experience will take place Wednesday through Sunday, 10 am – 5 pm daily.

Booking information will be available on our website at www.BenjaminFranklinHouse.org from December. The Student Free Day in the Student Science Centre will take place each Tuesday (for scheduling call +44 (0)20 7930 9121) and the Scholarship Centre will be open by appointment.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN: DESIGN AND INNOVATION

On Thursday, 27 October 2005 at London's Royal Society of Arts where Franklin was first international member, we will use Franklin in his capacity as an innovator in fields ranging from science to music to explore the leading edge in heritage, architecture/industrial design, and science. With support from the *International Herald Tribune*, and speakers including Page Talbott, Curator of "Benjamin Franklin: In Search

of A Better World" for the US Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary, and American Institute of Architects Board Representative and Royal Institute of British Architects Member, Lester Korzilius, we will discuss such questions as: How can history be made interesting for a 21st audience? What is the state of innovation in buildings and products? Is nanotechnology the way forward and what's the implication for us?

New Website



In summer 2005 we launched our new website www.BenjaminFranklinHouse.org with the latest information about the House, its fascinating history, and helpful resources and links. Visit often!

Excellent Photography

The majority of the photos in the *Gazette* and on our website are the work of Michael De Guzman,

Benjamin Franklin House Artist in Residence, studying for a Masters Degree in Photography at London's Chelsea College of Art. Michael has been responsible for documenting the conservation of the House through print, digital and video images. He also serves as project coordinator, working with talented Rowena Tee, on the administrative aspects of the project.

Six Degrees of Benjamin Franklin

We are working with our colleagues at the US Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary, set up by Congress to celebrate the 300th Franklin birthday, on a UK Franklin Trail. It will begin at Benjamin Franklin House with stops throughout the British Isles frequented by, or associated with, Franklin. Contact us to find out more.



Opening Gala Celebration

Our **OPENING GALA CELEBRATION** will take place on Ben's 300th birthday, Tuesday 17 January 2006, at London's royal palace, The Banqueting House, with senior representatives of the British and American governments. There are still sponsorship opportunities for this prestigious and historic event.

To find out more call us on 020 7930 9121 or email BenjaminFranklinHouse@msn.com.



Franklin and Innovation: his famous stove

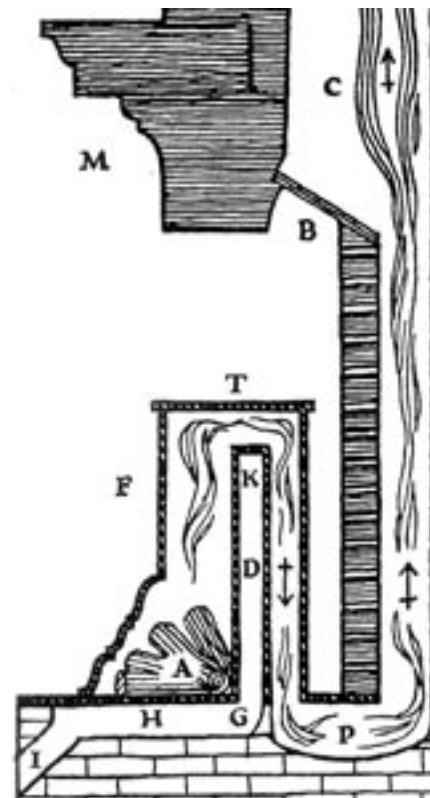
Joan Reid

FRANKLIN IS WELL KNOWN for his 'inventions', although a more accurate description would be 'innovations', because, apart from his work on electricity, he usually developed an existing product, rather than invented a new one. One of the most famous of these was his work on a new kind of fireplace.

The Pennsylvania Stove, also known as the Franklin Stove, was an effort to combine the efficiency of the Dutch Stove, with the open fireplace preferred by the British. There were many Moravians and Dutch in early Pennsylvania who heated their homes with a central stove covered in tiles, which hid the sight of the fire, heated the stove in its entirety, and circulated this warmth round the room. The British, however, preferred an open fireplace in the wall of the room, which, when alight, sent most of the heat up the chimney and only warmed a small area of the room. Franklin tried to combine these two systems into a closed-in, wall-mounted fireplace which had an open fire, and pushed the hot air through a rear metal cabinet and around the room, thus increasing fuel efficiency. The remaining smoke then exited by the chimney. While he never registered the design, he did have it manufactured by a Pennsylvanian blacksmith and it became quite popular.

He was always redesigning this fireplace and there are many diagrams of his improved ideas, with increasingly complicated baffles behind the fireplace that circulated and directed more air. He even had one such design made in London for one of his fireplaces in Craven Street, and he was keen to show off the technology to visitors. (We discovered the remnants when undertaking conservation work on the first floor!) He had been appalled at the smoke pollution in London from the countless chimneys on houses in narrow crowded streets. With proper marketing it might have been a goldmine.

Sadly, there was one crucial fault with many of his fireplace designs. They did not work. For one thing, the fire had to be set into the wall with a chimney, and the rear hot air cabinets meant that chimney sweep could not access the chimney, nor could a more modern brush; being able to clean the chimney was essential. Next, the circulation of extra hot air needed an input of cool air from the room, so that the fireplace had to have a sub-floor level through which the cool air could enter. Most of the houses in London had basements, which prevented the ground or other floors from having access beneath the floorboards. Finally, the outer



surface of the metal parts of the fireplace became so hot to touch, they were a danger to anyone who came too near.

Still Franklin persevered with the concept, and many took it up after his death, thus there are still a great many modern stoves describing themselves as the Franklin, or Pennsylvania Stove. Maybe one of these is the answer to all Franklin's fireplace problems.



Benjamin Franklin House

The Friends of Benjamin Franklin House is a membership organisation responsible for opening 36 Craven Street to the public. We rely on voluntary contributions to achieve the potential of the world's last remaining Franklin home.

If you would like more information about the project and how you can join us, please contact: Benjamin Franklin House, 36 Craven Street, London WC2N 5NF.

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The Friends of Benjamin Franklin House is a registered charity no. 276066 and is supported by Benjamin Franklin House Foundation, a US 501 (c) (3) organisation.