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Subject: Benjamin Franklin House - Countdown to Opening - 2 Months to Go!
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Left: Third Floor Stairwell before conservation
Centre: Third Floor Stairwell after conservation
Right: Imelda Staunton recording voice for Margaret Stevenson

Dear Friends,

The bronze scroll which denotes Benjamin Franklin's home at 36 Craven Street was erected by the London County Council in 1914. Though gray with age and the elements, it is considered one of English Heritage's famous 'Blue Plaques,' which identify where the great have once lived. In the last 90 years, those who strolled by, admiring one of the capital's best preserved Georgian streets, may have noted the plaque and wondered about Ben's purpose there. Wondering, even if they were about to enter through the front door when the House, during British Rail's possession, served first as a hotel in the days before the Second World War, and following, as a base for the now defunct non-profit, The British Society for International Understanding (until the structure became derelict in the 1970s).

Visitors will wonder no more when Benjamin Franklin House opens to the public for the first time, thanks to the effort of our Board and of so many, as an innovative museum and educational facility. This in less than two months time on the 300th birthday of one of the Enlightenment's more genial, generous, and accomplished figures. As they make their way to the Introductory Seminar Room with its video wall of images, which will set the stage for the Historical Experience, and place Franklin and the House in context, they will find an earlier Benjamin Franklin House plaque, yet one never before seen at 36 Craven Street.

As the story goes, when the nearby Royal Society of Arts in the 1880s decided to designate Franklin's tenure as a neighbour and champion for the better part of 16 years between 1757 and 1775, they put a beautiful terracotta disk in a wooden, black lacquered surround...on the wrong building. It was stuck fast and so affixed it remained until the 'wrong' residence was demolished in 1914. The original plaque was sheered from the side of the building and found its way to a warehouse in Hackney, East London. In my life with Benjamin Franklin House I've made many pilgrimages including one to find this artefact with Governor and Project Management Chair, Anne Keigher, a few years ago. The Museum of London, in whose hands the plaque now rests, will be passing it on to us to allow its display, finally, in the space for which it was intended.

* Latest Project News

The only remaining elements of conservation are final repair to the walls and ceilings in the original 18th century kitchen in the basement. Meanwhile, work on Student Science Centre construction continues apace with multimedia installation. Among the highlights of the latter is recording of most of the audio track for the Historical Experience. We were honoured to have 2004 Academy Award nominee for Best Actress, Imelda Staunton, play the part of Franklin's friend and landlady, Margaret Stevenson. She helped bring alive the script written by Pat Lower with Historical Experience designers, Event Communications (the script also received the blessing of Britain's famed Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts).

We were finally able to move our project office back to the House. Once more we must thank neighbours, Rod and Mina McManigal, for allowing us to set up shop in the basement of their wonderful home at 30 Craven Street for several months, which for nearly the same length of time during the early 19th century, was the haunt of controversial American statesman, Aaron Burr.

* Support

We are extremely fortunate the world's software leader, Microsoft, has donated all the software needed to realise the 21st century potential of our 18th century heritage site. This includes multiple copies and licenses of their latest products including Microsoft Office Project, Visio, and Office Small Business Server Premium edition!

Haworth, a stand-out in office furnishings, whose motto is 'Change by Design,' has agreed to provide the furniture for our Scholarship Centre and office needs. This equates to an in-kind donation of over £24,000!

* Press and Outreach

The House will be the subject of a story in the European edition of Time Magazine in December. There will be upcoming articles in Museums and Heritage magazine, The Lady magazine, and Britain's Sunday Times. The groundbreaking Student Science Centre, which Machinehouse Productions are creating at 36 Craven Street, was recently featured in the Yorkshire Post. Our plans are also highlighted on the VisitBritain website: www.visitbritain.com/corporate/presscentre/presscentrebritain/britaincalling/Nov2005/Attractions/benjaminfranklin.aspx.

Outreach activities this month included a presentation to the American Women's Club of London who have long fostered awareness of the project. And we are pleased to share a new feature at London's Royal Society of Medicine (RSM) on Franklin's fascinating medical work. Visitors can explore Franklin's concerns about diet, exercise, and moderation, his promotion of fresh air and ventilation, his advocacy of smallpox inoculation and electrical medical treatments. The free-entry exhibition runs until 27 January - to check opening times visit <http://www.rsm.ac.uk/franklin/index.htm>. Volunteers are being sought to make the exhibition more accessible. To find out more email the RSM's Ian Snowley at Ian.Snowley@rsm.ac.uk.

Americans everywhere celebrated Thanksgiving this month. As it seems nearly all topics can be associated with Benjamin Franklin it is worth noting Ben thought turkeys, typical fare on this holiday, the most auspicious of birds and suggested it, rather than the eagle, as a symbol for the new nation he helped create. However, he was not so reverent. He used turkeys to advance his electrical experiments, electrocuting them on the banks of Philadelphia's rivers in order to make tasty dinners for friends.

Besides good food, Thanksgiving is a time to give thanks. We give thanks to all of you for your constant interest and support.

With very best wishes,

Márcia

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