

Dear Friends,

I have the best news to share: work is happening on site! Final conservation of Franklin's 1730s London architectural gem is now underway. The original 18th century interiors will be rescued in order to realise our long-standing aim of creating a Historical Experience that brings history to life; a Student Science Centre that will use hands-on experimentation with Franklin's London science to inspire young people to think, question, and test; and a Scholarship Centre that furthers Franklinian Enlightenment ideals such as reason, invention, and democracy.

**\* Spotlight on Conservation: What's Next**

After a rigorous tender process, overseen by Benjamin Franklin House Governors Anne Keigher and Ralph Quartano CBE, our Board selected Wallis as primary contractor. Wallis, begun 140 years ago when 36 Craven Street was already an antique, has extensive conservation 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.

On Monday, 16 May, the Wallis crew arrived and began to prep the building for activity in the weeks and months ahead. They have put up protection on the ground and first floors and staircase to ensure no damage where conservation work has already occurred. In anticipation of their arrival, we consolidated our project office to a far corner of the ground floor accessible through an interior courtyard, while Wallis set up headquarters on the first floor, now home to site manager Taffy Watts. According to his Wallis colleague, Steve Bradley, at any one time there will be 6-8 craftspeople in the House, including specialist carpenters.

This week the Wallis team have continued site readying and have also begun to catalogue loose panelling on the upper floors, which will be conserved by their joinery workshop in Maidstone, England. And there will soon be scaffolding on the chimney to carry out essential repairs. Meanwhile, mechanical and electrical servicing will proceed apace.

As stated in our detailed Conservation Plan prepared by our architect Patrick Dillon, we adhere to the following principals of conservation:

- 1) minimise the extent of repair work
- 2) retain original material wherever possible
- 3) use traditional methods and materials wherever possible
- 4) provide long-term rather than ad hoc repairs which need early renewal

36 Craven Street is exceptional given that it retains a high degree of authentic features, with relatively few later alterations. These include original floorboards, original ceilings, including 14 original fireplaces, which all help to explain our Grade I listed status. All work done in the House has been approved in advance by the City of Westminster (our local planning authority) and English Heritage (the national organisation responsible for listed buildings).

Later changes to the building fabric, however, such as the lengthened windows with their two pane sashes on the first floor, have not been reversed. Showing how the House has evolved over time is a valuable element of the conservation plan. The aim is to use original techniques as much as is feasible. For example, where ceilings must be reinstated, they are created using hair-reinforced lime plaster on timber lathes. Missing panelling components are constructed using eighteenth century joints and procedures. The incorporation of modern services within the structure is being achieved with minimal impact on the original fabric.

More news on progress in the building next month!

#### **\* Other Famous Craven Street Residents**

Our Ben (1706-1790) was attracted to Craven Street given it's proximity to the seats of power - the City of Westminster, home to George III and Parliament, and the City of London, the financial heart of the capital. Franklin lived here for the better part of sixteen years between 1757 and 1775, but he's not Craven Street's only famous past resident.

This month, Charge d'Affaires at the US Embassy, David Johnson; Dr. Celina Fox, heritage expert and author; and other dignitaries paid a visit to our neighbours, The Humphreys, at 25 Craven Street who run the Concordia Foundation, to see English Heritage unveil one of its famous Blue Plaques in honour of Herman Melville (1819-1891) who spent two months on the street in 1849. The great author and adventurer's most famous work is Moby Dick.

According to our neighbour, Rod McManigal, who hails originally from California, Aaron Burr (1756-1836), Vice President in the Jefferson administration and the man who killed rival Alexander Hamilton in a duel, lived at his house at 30 Craven Street for a time. According to Woodrow Wilson, Burr had "genius enough to have made him immortal, and unschooled passion enough to have made him infamous."

German poet Heinrich Heine (1797-1856), whose lyrics inspired such composers as Mendelssohn, Schubert, and Schumann, lived at 32 Craven Street in 1827.

#### **\* Fundraising Update**

Work in the House, now underway, would not be possible without the generosity of our supporters, including the Heritage Lottery Fund, who have contributed nearly half of our total project costs of nearly £3 million (encompassing Phase I exterior stabilisation completed in 1999 and Phase II interior conservation and presentation of the House now in process).

This month we received a donation from CHC Helicopter Corporation of £200,000 thanks to an approach made by our Chairman Sir Bob Reid to his counterpart Craig Dobbins. This gift will seed a £1 million Benjamin Franklin Endowment Fund, announced in my January email, to secure the future of the building and its aims.

We are still working on meeting the \$100,000 US Challenge. We must raise \$100,000 from US donors in order to receive a gift for the same amount from a prominent US supporter. If you can help, please let us know!

We can receive \$ cheques made payable to Benjamin Franklin House Foundation, our US 501 (c) (3) affiliate - all donations are tax deductible for US tax payers, or £ cheques made payable to Friends of Benjamin Franklin House, sent to the address below.

**\* Book Now!**

Email us to hold your place at the 2005 Benjamin Franklin House Symposium, 'Benjamin Franklin, Design and Innovation' - **Thursday, 27 October** from 4-9 pm at London's Royal Society of Arts, 8 John Adam Street, just around the corner from Craven Street. We'll be using Franklin and his contributions to design and invention, as a jumping off point for a contemporary discussion featuring inventors, architects, scientists and more.

We can also hold your place for our black-tie opening Gala celebration at London's Banqueting Hall, **Tuesday, 17 January 2006**, 7:30 pm, Franklin's 300th birthday! Formal invitations will be sent within the next 6-8 weeks. Email us to find out about sponsorship opportunities.

Thank you, as always, for your support!

With all best wishes,

Márcia

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