

The Craven Street Gazette

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN HOUSE • ISSUE 13 • 2007/2008

A Successful Second Year!

WE HAVE FOLLOWED our exciting achievement of opening Benjamin Franklin House to the public on Franklin's 300th birthday in January 2006 with a second successful year.

We have now welcomed nearly 15,000 visitors to Craven Street! The majority came to see our unique Historical Experience which reveals Franklin's momentous London years through a drama blending live performance and cutting edge lighting, sound and projection technology. According to the 2007 London Travel Guide, we "bring history to life" and "more than a collection of artefacts... really give visitors a sense of what life was like here over 200 years ago."

Some 2000 children, primarily from inner city London schools, have now visited on our weekly student free day to explore Franklin's relevance in our time. They venture through the House's historic rooms with Polly, daughter of Franklin's landlady, and also uncover his London experiments in the Student Science Centre. They are encouraged to share his curiosity, to find the fascinating in the ordinary, and see how trying and testing can lead to pioneering discoveries.

Schools benefit from visits with our Education Manager, Ana Doria Buchan, who brings Ben's Travelling Suitcase, filled with Craven Street-related items, to the classroom for fun and stimulating lessons. We engaged a number of schools in our annual Benjamin Franklin House Science Day, held at the Royal Society (the premier British science institute, where Franklin was an early member), and in our Benjamin Franklin House Science Fair, which allows children to develop their own projects in response to timeless Franklin science questions.

The Robert H. Smith Scholarship Centre, featuring a full set of the Papers of Benjamin Franklin prepared by Yale University, was a buzz of activity with students representing disciplines from business to museum studies. An initiative of the Scholarship Centre is the Annual Benjamin Franklin House Symposium, which in 2007 featured the Nobel Prize winning scientist, Sir Harry Kroto, in association with the Eccles Centre for American Studies and the British Library.

After many years of outstanding leadership, Board Chairman, Sir Bob Reid, retired and was succeeded by John Studzinski. John, like Franklin, has polymathic

Right and below: Interpretations of Franklin and Creativity by young artists at partner London school, Surrey Square.



*Below left: A young visitor plays a note on our Franklin armonica during the Benjamin Franklin House Summer Family Day
Below right: Eager listeners at the annual Student Science Day*

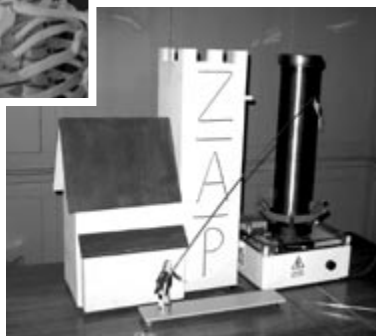




Images from the Student Science Centre:

ABOVE: The mystery of the Craven Street bones is revealed in the Medical History Room.

RIGHT: A 'key' experiment on lightning!



interests with accomplishments in fields ranging from banking to human rights. He is passionate about Franklin and his legacy and the great potential for Benjamin Franklin House.

We also welcomed a new House Administrator, Alice Kershaw, who helps ensure the smooth running of 36 Craven Street. And we continued to deploy our extensive marketing plan, directed by Kate Streeter, Marketing and Development Manager. Our goal is to expand awareness of the House and its many offerings. Developments have included: establishing a relationship with British train companies, who now offer their patrons discounted entry to the House; garnering local and international press, including air time on a US National Public Radio syndicated travel show; teaming with others, including Shakespeare's Globe Theatre on their 2007 American production, *We The People*, and establishing a network of other 18th century London museums like Dr. Johnson's and Handel House. We also improved the visitor experience by creating a new in-House Box Office and shop (our special House items are also available from www.BenjaminFranklinHouse.org).

Fundraising is a key activity to ensure we meet our operational needs. We were fortunate to receive a matching grant of \$150,000 from the Pew Foundation, supported by Mr. and Mrs. Robert H. Smith and the Benjamin Franklin House (BFH) Foundation, along with other gifts. By the close of our first financial year in March 2007, we were able to repay our one outstanding project loan to the Architectural Heritage Fund and begin year two debt free.

With the BFH Foundation, an independent and active US non-profit organisation established to raise awareness and contributions in support of the House, we initiated an endowment campaign to ensure the long-term future of 36 Craven Street. It launched at the start of 2007 with a dinner in the Benjamin Franklin Room at the US State Department featuring government dignitaries, Franklin biographer, Walter Isaacson, and many friends. The US Ambassador to Britain, Robert H. Tuttle, and the British Ambassador to the United States, Sir Nigel Sheinwald, have agreed to serve as Honorary Co-Chairmen of the

campaign, given a boost by the Smiths who have pledged to match the first \$300,000 raised.

The House is an increasingly popular site for private entertainment – meetings, receptions, dinners, photo shoots and more – and is now part of prestigious venue promotion organisations like Locationworks, Unique Venues of London, and Georgian Locations. The beauty of 36 Craven Street's conservation was recognised with a commendation in the 2007 Georgian Group Architectural Awards.

We are grateful to our Board, staff, donors, including the Smiths, Annenberg Foundation and the Manoukian Charitable Foundation, among many others, our extensive network of volunteers, pro bono partners including Morrison and Foerster, and all who have contributed to the vitality of Benjamin Franklin House.

Dr Márcia Balisciano, Director

Join the excitement! Contact us at
info@BenjaminFranklinHouse.org.

2007 Event Highlights

- Benjamin Franklin House one year anniversary reception
- Celebration dinner in the Benjamin Franklin Room at the US State Department
- American Independence Day party
- Benjamin Franklin House Annual Symposium with Nobel Laureate Sir Harry Kroto
- *A Fresh Perspective on John Paul Jones*, Rt. Rear Admiral Joseph Callo
- *Benjamin Franklin and Slavery*, Lady Joan Reid
- Family Days: Summer and Holiday

Coming in 2008

- Benjamin Franklin House Birthday Lecture at the Royal Society of Arts
- Fulbright Scholar Lecture – *Franklin and the Antarctic*
- Launch of the Benjamin Franklin House Literary Prize
- Franklin Lecture Series, Lady Joan Reid
- Washington, DC Endowment Campaign Event



Outreach and Education

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN would surely have enjoyed the children's laughter that fills the House each Tuesday on our weekly Student Free Day when we are closed to the public and open to visiting school groups. But given the compact size of the Georgian spaces at 36 Craven Street, and the need to reach our wider community, we engage in a broad range of outreach activities.

This includes our annual **Benjamin Franklin House Science Day** at the Royal Society, which in 2007 featured three London schools: Streatham and Clapham School, Cayley Primary School, and Kobi Nazrul Primary School. More than 120 pupils took part in the fun and informative sessions which highlighted some of Franklin's most important investigations. Special guest, scientist Dr Bryson Gore, captured the children's attention with experiments that popped, illuminated, and crackled, showing how the great man's 18th century explorations have led to some of today's most important technologies.

The annual **Benjamin Franklin House Science Fair** involved students from the London boroughs of Newham, Southwark and Croydon, and took place at the Royal Society of Medicine. They grappled with a timely question which Franklin posed before them: How can we get more energy from less fuel? Franklin's response was the design of more fuel-efficient stoves; participants saw the remnants of one in his Craven Street Laboratory. All were prize winners but first place, as judged by a panel of scientists, was Curwen Primary School. (Second place finishers from Surrey Square Primary School also engaged with us on the art project, Franklin's Creativity, and had their masterpieces on display in the House.)

Outreach also included our annual **Benjamin Franklin House Symposium**, held in association with the Eccles Centre for American Studies at the British Library, which featured Nobel Laureate Sir Harry Kroto. Sir Harry was knighted in 1996 for his contributions to chemistry – with colleagues he discovered C60 Buckminsterfullerene, a new form of carbon. Franklin would have liked the association with such a kindred spirit. As Sir Harry has noted, "I have ended up a supporter



Above: Scenes from the 2007 Benjamin Franklin House Science Fair and Science Day

of ideologies which advocate the right of the individual to speak, think and write in freedom and safety, surely the bedrock of a civilised society." He took as his theme Science, Society and Sustainability: what science is, how people, the media, politicians and others perceive science and scientists, and some of the problems non-scientists have in understanding science and technology. He highlighted areas he sees as essential for future research including solar electricity and genetic developments, like seedlings that can fix their own nitrogen.

We also broadened outreach through the Internet with videos on YouTube, a Benjamin Franklin House page on Facebook, and support from Google to improve navigation to our site at www.BenjaminFranklinHouse.org!

Franklin and Slavery

Joan Reid

THE YEAR 2007 marked the 200th anniversary of the abolition of slavery in Britain. Franklin and his views on the subject went through four periods: acceptance, ambivalence, atonement, and abolitionist.

There is no doubt Franklin advertised slaves for sale and rewards for capturing runaways in his Philadelphia newspaper. He was proprietor and the advertisements were good business. Very few people considered slavery unethical, especially as the unskilled or convicted lived under some form of bondage. Quakers were the first to feel guilty about humans owning others, and they exerted a strong influence on developments in Pennsylvania. Franklin was not in the vanguard of this initiative and he and his wife Deborah owned slaves for a number of years. Snippets on their wellbeing are sprinkled through Franklin's letters, but several years passed before he began to question the economic or other viability of slave ownership. The years 1730-1754 for Franklin were those of acceptance.

By 1757 Franklin had come to London with his son William and two black slaves, Peter and King. He had composed a will before leaving Philadelphia freeing them in the event of his death. These years constitute a long period of his ambivalence: his writings highlight the uneconomic future of purchased labour vis-à-vis wage-paid staff, rather than the humanitarian issues of liberty and equality. Yet his moral questioning of slavery was gathering momentum.

Many of Franklin's merchant acquaintances were part of the pro-slavery lobby, but gradually he moved toward supporting the anti-slavery activists among his dissenting and Enlightenment friends.

The 1772 Somerset Case, decided by Lord Mansfield, was key to his change of attitude. It is often wrongly supposed that this judgment outlawed slavery in Britain. In fact, the declaration of freedom it bestowed was limited to one slave, James Somerset. Somerset had run away from his owner, been captured and was to be taken back to the West Indies to be sold once more. With the help of anti-slavery activists, he applied to the courts claiming he should be declared "free" and not removed from Britain. The court agreed but also ruled that every case should be considered on its own merits, thus the remaining roughly 5000 domestic slaves in Britain were not set free. The case, however, raised public concern about the morals of slavery, and Franklin joined in the debate.

From 1776 until 1784, Franklin resided in France. Although caught up in endless negotiations between the colonies and the French foreign service, he became friends with France's Enlightenment thinkers. Alongside visions of liberty and fraternity, the French condemned slavery, abolishing it in 1779 and driving forward the European anti-slavery movement. For Franklin, this was his period of atonement, when he expunged his years of non-engagement: he could no longer juxtapose slavery with his



Advertisement for a slave auction, Charleston, 1769.

visions of equality. He now articulated his fear for slavery's long-term consequences on the united colonies.

He returned to Philadelphia in 1785. The War of Independence had been won and he was immediately appointed President of Pennsylvania. He also accepted the presidency of the new Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade. One of his last public acts was signing a petition to the Pennsylvania congress calling for a law to outlaw slavery. When he died in 1790, Franklin was a true abolitionist. Quintessentially pragmatic, Franklin reflected the fluctuating and polarising opinions of the day when the battle was almost won, he advocated change until death halted his belated leadership. It would take almost another century for a second drive toward essential liberty in the United States.



Benjamin Franklin House

We rely on voluntary contributions to achieve the potential of the world's only remaining Franklin home. Please contact us if you would like to get involved or know more.

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The Friends of Benjamin Franklin House is a registered charity no. 276066.

Information for US supporters is available from the Benjamin Franklin House Foundation at www.BFHFoundation.org

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