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**Subject:** Benjamin Franklin House - Last 'Countdown' Message  
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Left: Benjamin Franklin's 300<sup>th</sup> birthday cake at the opening Gala  
Centre: The Lord Mayor of Westminster experimenting with the musical glasses in the Student Science Centre  
Right: Foreign Secretary Jack Straw and Ambassador to the Court of St. James's, Robert Tuttle cutting the ribbon to formally open Benjamin Franklin House

Dear Friends,

One week ago I wrote to say UK Foreign Secretary Jack Straw and US Ambassador to the Court of St. James's Robert Tuttle unveiled a precious heritage asset, the only surviving home of Benjamin Franklin as a dynamic museum and education facility.

The 1730s building served as the first de facto American Embassy, seat of Franklin's mission over nearly 16 years to keep Britain and America one under the Crown. Though unsuccessful, he planted durable seeds of a 'special relationship' that is a source of strength for both nations. It was a fitting tribute to Anglo-American Franklin, father of the US State Department, that two senior representatives of both governments came together on the steps of this practical, work-a-day Georgian residence which will speak of the past to future generations.

#### \* A Grand Celebration

Polly Hewson, lead character in our museum-as-theatre Historical Experience, daughter of Benjamin Franklin's landlady (and Franklin's second 'daughter') wrote after his departure from Craven Street: "They all of them talk of you, and are now full of the thought of celebrating your birthday."

And so we were. On 17 January 2006, guests from across the UK, the US and beyond – over 350 of them – gathered at London's Banqueting Hall for a celebratory dinner and a most special 300th birthday party. Highlights included a Franklin Trumpet Voluntary arranged by well-known composer George Fenton, performed by the London Brass; delicious early American cuisine from William Norris; Franklin armonica master, Alisdair Malloy, who performed a piece written by Mozart for Franklin's amazing instrument; and Gala sponsor John Studzinski of HSBC who gave a superb introduction to Ambassador's Tuttle's erudite remarks. There was even a grand tiered birthday cake.

#### \* Successful First Days

In the days since, some 150 members of the public have ventured to the House. In the largest extant Franklin artefact they have discovered the rescued original interiors have not a level angle among them. They have become immersed in our primary offering, the Historical Experience, and so must you too. It is unique and engaging using the 18<sup>th</sup> century spaces where so much took place as stage, blending live interpretation, leading edge sound, lighting, and visual projection to tell the rich story of Franklin in London in his own words. Tickets can be booked from our website [www.BenjaminFranklinHouse.org](http://www.BenjaminFranklinHouse.org).

Indeed, no dead hand of history here but also a Student Science Centre that will inspire young people through the science of Franklin's London years, when he explored everything from canal depths to daylight savings time, with the Gulf Stream thrown in for good measure. They will also learn about the Craven Street bones, remnants of an anatomy school run by Polly's husband. Outreach will bring American and British children together through the annual Benjamin Franklin Science Fair, giving them a chance to free their imagination and a common platform for discussing their shared history. Tuesdays we are only open to schools and our first groups are booked through March.

So too a living Scholarship Centre as a focal point in Europe for study of the myriad subjects with which Benjamin

Franklin was associated, with a full set of the Papers of Benjamin Franklin from Yale University. From that hub at the top of the House we will foster modern, Enlightenment symposia, news of which we will share with you in due course.

Benjamin Franklin House will draw visitors from Britain, America and farther afield. It marks the start of a kind of Franklin renaissance over the year ahead, mirrored across the ocean in the efforts of our colleagues at the Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary, created from the pen of President George Bush. Details for an opening year concert in association with the US Embassy will be forthcoming. A new Franklin Centre at St. Andrews University, which gave Franklin one his first honorary degrees, opened last week thanks to our Chairman and his wife, Sir Bob and Lady Reid. And expect this year a Franklin trail of sites throughout the UK of importance to Franklin, a major exhibition at the British Library and much more.

### \* So Many Thanks

We would not celebrate except for the extreme generosity of so many: thank you to the Heritage Lottery Fund who brought hopes and plans to fruition; Mr. and Mrs. Robert H. Smith in whose honour you will find at 36 Craven Street, the Robert H. Smith Study room in the Scholarship Centre; our Canadian friend Craig Dobbin; John Studzinski who believed in the project from the beginning and continues to lend support; the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers Foundation who claim Franklin as the father of electricity; and so many others listed in the Gala commemorative programme, attached.

There you will also find our project management team and advisors – including our architect Patrick Dillon and Quantity Surveyor Burke Hunter Adams; our pro bono supporters Morrison and Foerster and Marsh; Historical Experience and Student Science Centre designers Event Communications and Screenhouse Productions – all of whom have made sure we stayed on time, on budget, executing the highest standards of conservation while creating something that would be groundbreaking and enduring as a legacy to one of history's great figures.

Staff have been resourceful and indispensable – moving in, around and out of Craven Street at a moment's notice, with no discontinuity in delivery or cheerfulness, including clever and creative administrator Rowena Tee and our dedicated Education Officer Ana Dora Buchan. Michael De Guzman, project coordinator over several years, has been our right and left hand, with no task too large or small, lending his tremendous talent as a photographer to the video and photodocumentation of Benjamin Franklin House from derelict to today, with an exquisite patience in the face of past winters with no heat, crumbling ceilings, and an exacting director.

Our board have lent expertise in every possible area – from historical research (Lady Reid) to finance and IT (Alistair Johnston, Graham Nixon, Ralph Quartano), fundraising (Gay Huey Evans and Tony Morgan), and communications (Sandra Chalmers) – providing the governance and strategic direction that made opening possible. And it was our founding Governor Lady Bessborough who first established the charity.

Among the board is our very own superwoman, Anne Keigher, to whom we owe a debt of gratitude: Treasurer, Project Management Team Chair, architect, design consultant, she sets a benchmark for excellence and commitment. ([Click here for a word from Anne.](#))

And surely if there is someone who deserves the adjective Franklinesque it is our Chairman Sir Bob Reid in his unflinching belief, calm, and wit, his insightful, rapid ability to see the salient point, finding always the inventive and positive solution. He has taught me and us all so much.

### \* Noteworthy Benjamin Franklin House

Print and broadcast media have featured Benjamin Franklin House in this exciting month. In addition to the links below, the House starred on BBC television and radio, CBS radio, Associated Press and regional newspapers throughout the US. The NY Times travel section highlights the 'new' 36 Craven Street this weekend.

CNN:

<http://www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/europe/01/17/franklin.london/index.html>

Sunday Times:

<http://property.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,14049-1988512,00.html>

24 Hour Museum:

[http://www.24hourmuseum.org.uk/nwh\\_gfx\\_en/ART32208.html](http://www.24hourmuseum.org.uk/nwh_gfx_en/ART32208.html)

AP news item, Chicago Tribune:

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/chi-0601180073jan18.1.2642078.story?ctrack=1&cset=true>

Time Magazine:

<http://www.time.com/time/europe/tga/article/0,13005,901051226-1142191,00.html>

Seven years ago I wrote to Sir Bob to tell him he could stop looking for an executive for this project. Benjamin Franklin said "Perform what you ought." I, who am born on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, who as Franklin, am a proud Anglo-American, knew it was my calling. It has been an honour to be involved with this project and those associated with it. Its fulfillment is that of a dream. "Perform without fail what you resolve' is something that Franklin also said. With your help, that is what we have done.

The new task is operationally putting Benjamin Franklin House on firm footing ensuring that all uses of the House are fully subscribed (the Historical Experience, Student Science Centre, and Scholarship Centre, along with evening entertainment, lectures and the like) while raising a £1 million endowment to secure the future of the building and its aims in perpetuity. Though our countdown to opening has reached a successful conclusion, there will be quarterly updates on the progress at Craven Street.

With best wishes and immense appreciation,

Márcia

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If you do not wish to receive these briefings; would like to add someone to the list; have a question; or want to make a contribution: email [BenjaminFranklinHouse@msn.com](mailto:BenjaminFranklinHouse@msn.com)

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## Attachments

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Files:



**Gala\_Programme.pdf** (561k)