

Governance Review – Honorary Roles

Following approval by trustees of the main governance review paper in December 2025, this paper considers appropriate honorary roles for use by the Friends. **Simon Evans** has drafted this paper with input from Rachel Morley.

The paper follows the request to recommend to trustees an appropriate structure for honorary officers (such as patrons, ambassadors, vice-presidents, etc), and how such roles should be most effectively deployed. These are not trustee roles.

The recommendations of this paper are as follows:

- The title Vice-President (VP) should continue, but be reserved for individuals (such as retiring trustees) who do not fulfil the criteria for the new Patron role described below. This is consistent with the recent appointment of Philip Gray as a VP.
- The roles of President and Ecclesiastical Patron would be unchanged.
- There should be a new role of Patron which would be offered to a limited group of people who not only support the Friends' activities, but have sufficient profile to leverage that support both publicly (for example, through press comment and social media activity) and privately (for example, to Government).
- Potential candidates for the Patron role are discussed below. Ideally, they would be appointed around the same time – for reasons described below.

Vice-President role

Following the death of Andrew Saint, the only VPs are Hugh Johnson and Philip Gray. Hugh Johnson has no recent or current connection with the Friends and his role as VP should be politely terminated – but delaying this so that Philip is never the sole VP.

It is recommended that the VP role should continue, and be reserved for individuals who make, or have made, a major contribution to the Friends, but would not fulfil the criteria for the new Patron role. Tenure in the role should be restricted to five years, unless the trustees approve an extension. Overall, there may be four to six VPs.

Retiring trustees should be considered for a VP role. This should not be automatic, but only conferred where the trustees consider that the individual has given exceptional service to the Friends and can continue to provide support in the VP role.

We think it unlikely that any of the candidates mentioned below for the Patron role would be appropriate for a VP role. Trustees are asked to consider potential candidates for the VP role.

Other existing honorary roles

The roles of President and Ecclesiastical Patron would not be changed. But consideration should be given as to whether these individuals should be encouraged to become more active public advocates for the Friends.

New role of Patron

The starting point here is that the Friends have not taken advantage of individuals who support us and who would be able, through their own public profile, to leverage that support in some way. The leverage might be through their own press and social media content, or through influence on Government, the Church of England or within the heritage sector.

(Alternative titles have been considered for this role. The main alternative would be “ambassador”, which is widely used by social media influencers and often involves a short term, transactional relationship. Whilst recognising that both titles are used in the charitable sector, the title Patron is preferred – as being more suitable for the Friends.)

The intention is that Patrons would be well-known public figures who can use their public profile and influence to support the Friends – and to leverage that support as described above. The recommendation is that a group of around six to eight Patrons be identified from a shortlist. They would be appointed around the same time – mainly because a potential Patron may be interested in who the other names are.

There would be no “job description”, but simply an acknowledgement that they would seek to support the Friends – and raise its profile – through their own activities, and would be happy for the Friends to record their Patron role on its website and in our social media activities. For example, they might:

- provide quotes for press articles or marketing materials;
- share or support our online content;
- record a clip on why saving churches – or a particular church - is important;
- occasionally come to an on-site event.

This may lead to further involvement, for example an interview or “favourite church” in one of our publications.

In making Patron appointments, we would seek an appropriate gender and age balance, with complementary backgrounds within the group. The common feature is their public profile. As an exception to the public profile criteria, one place could be reserved for a Church/ heritage sector “name” who would give public or private support to the Friends.

Their “reach” should be across England and Wales, but it would be desirable to have one or two names with a discernible Welsh connection.

We would want the role to be non-political and largely non-denominational. Care would need to be taken to avoid the risk of adverse publicity through the Patron’s other activities.

The role would be unpaid, but perhaps with a small expenses budget. Tenure in the role should be restricted to five years, unless the trustees approve an extension.

Potential candidates for the Patron role

Trustees are invited to put forward names. However, as a start, the following names are suggested. There are more than eight here - but there are likely to be some rejections.

Rowan Williams – no biography is needed. It is perhaps unlikely that he would accept the role because of his involvement with the NCT, and other commitments.

Sir Simon Jenkins – again, no biography is needed. Despite the issues last year, Rachel has met him on several occasions to discuss the Friends' work, and believes that he would accept a Patron role.

Sir Charles Saumarez Smith – again, no biography is needed. He is known to several trustees, and is a long-standing supporter of the Friends. It is thought he would accept a Patron role, but perhaps on a delayed basis in view of his involvement with Vanburgh 300 events.

Tom Holland – popular historian, best known for *The Rest is History* podcast. Rachel knows him, and he has indicated that he would accept a Patron role if offered.

James Marriott – Times journalist and increasingly a public intellectual. Rachel knows him, and it is possible that he would accept a Patron role. At 34, he is younger than other names.

Ken Follett – author with a Welsh background, although he lives in Hertfordshire. Simon Evans knows him.

Cerys Matthews – prominent Welsh musician and broadcaster, and President of The Welsh Countryside Charity (formerly the Council for the Protection of Rural Wales). No known contact with our trustees, but there is an obvious fit with our Welsh activities.

Helen Castor – history author and broadcaster, with strong academic background. Simon Evans knew her at Cambridge.

Other names, but where we have no known contact at trustee level, are:

Philippa Gregory – author.

Olivia Colman – actor (though her campaigning for Palestine should be noted).

Michael Sheen – actor and prominent advocate for Wales and its culture and social causes. He recently launched the Welsh National Theatre with his own funding.

Mark Hedges – editor-in-chief of Country Life.