



VINCENT HOUSING ASSOCIATION Annual Review 2009

VINCENT HOUSING ASSOCIATION LIMITED

Registered as an Industrial & Provident Society, the business of Vincent Housing Association Limited (VHA) is the responsibility of a Committee of Management which aims to ensure it is a socially, economically and environmentally responsible organisation and that its primary activity, Vincent House, is sustainable and financially viable. In accordance with the Association's objects any profit is either reinvested in Vincent House, used to develop associate projects or to help voluntary organisations or other social enterprises working with aspects of homelessness.

VINCENT HOUSE

Built in the late 1930s in the 'art moderne' style typical of the period, Vincent House has been providing reasonably priced medium and long term single bedroom accommodation since it first opened to residents in 1940. The House can accommodate up to 120 residents and visitors, some of whom stay for just a few weeks while others reside at the house for several months and even years. The House is also 'home' to about 25 employees, including the General Manager, Richard Tomkins, and his family.

Vincent House is constantly developing in response to its community and the changing world, which is demonstrated in the ongoing investment in the building, particularly the communal areas, the continual technological advances and the improvements to residents' facilities and services



Designed by The Learning Journey CIC (Resettlement)

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The front cover photographs are from the summer party 2008 and the 'Art Works' event 2009.

Published August 2009

Chairman's Statement

Report for financial year ending 30th September 2008.

Our AGM held on 19th March this year reverted to its traditional format; however, as 2010 is the 70th anniversary of the House opening to its first residents, it will give us an opportunity for a celebratory event next year!

The meeting began with this year's statement in which, as usual, I reviewed the financial side of our activities. We had sales of £1.34million in the year to 30th September 2008 which showed an increase of about 3%. This represented a slowing down compared to 2007 and 2006, but was at least an increase. There are widespread reports of declining occupancy rates in hotels across the world and while it has not affected us dramatically, there are some 'ripples' So when I say ".. has not affected us dramatically" I have to add a "yet". One of the reasons our turnover did not increase more is because the proportion of our income from residents increased relative to visitors. We charge more for visitors than residents, but residents stay much longer and make us less vulnerable to outside squalls.

Despite this slightly downbeat note on the sales side, our operating profit in 2008 was up substantially on the previous year. Part of this was due to the fact that in 2007 we had a disproportionately high spend on repairs and renewals and in 2008 a disproportionately low spend. Nonetheless, we were able to strengthen our reserves substantially.

This is fortunate because in the current year we are facing some financial challenges: maintaining the occupancy level at our

Geoffrey Roughton, Chairman, with Lord David Ramsbotham at the 'Art Works' launch in May 2009



historical levels is going to be more difficult and there are, as I said, already signs of this; energy costs in the current year are running at 68% above the equivalent period last year. and our income from interest on our cash deposits has fallen sharply. These things add up to a significant financial hole. We will be reviewing various options to deal with this. So although 2008 is our best year on record financially, 2009 is going to be very difficult. I hope it will not be as bad as the situation we faced during the last really serious recession in the seventies when our occupancy fell below 80%.

Turning now to other things: we have spent a fair amount on the new look lounge which was re-decorated in 2006 and which now also has new sofas and chairs chosen to match the art-deco style that Vincent House represents and which I described some years ago as Cunard. The House is well maintained and we may end up as a listed building! There is a continuing maintenance programme that has enabled the House itself to outlast many of the office and other buildings put up in such a rush thirty or forty years ago.

There is constant inspection and evaluation of aspects of the House, including Health & Safety audits, environmental health, etc. Like many businesses we have been beset by torrents of regulations, but I think we now have the measure of them and will survive in the more controlled situation in which we all now have to operate. Inspections by our consultants and by the local authority's environmental health officer passed as 'satisfactory' although some areas for improvement gives us something to work on.

Stylish new seating in the lounge



A view of the new furniture towards the bar



Website home page



Comfortable couches and tub chairs



Those of you who like looking at things on computers may already have seen our upgraded web site. We get a lot of visitors to our site – so called 'hits'. This gives us an opportunity to introduce Vincent House to a wider public and that may help us counteract any downturn in bookings. We have, as many of you are aware, spent a good deal of time and money creating brochures and other written material about Vincent House – in today's jargon it is called marketing collateral. This material will, I hope, help us get positive conversions from those who might be considering staying at Vincent House. The web site has been set up by a local IT consultancy, Notting Hill Internet Services, and with their help I hope we can extend its use internally. This may help us reduce the use of paper. I am keen to save trees.

I referred last year to some initiatives on things to do with the environment and told you about our carbon footprint which was 215 tons. Our aim is to reduce this and involves activities under the name (suggested by one of our night porters – George Bocian) "Project Butterfly". We are replacing traditional light bulbs; we have installed motion driven lighting in some places; we have set up recycling points; we are monitoring our consumption of energy and water on a daily basis. I regret that we have made less progress on these matters than I had hoped last year, but we all want to continue. Our aims are to not only achieve some savings in this area but to publish some information about our environmental activities on our new web site to encourage others. There is no shortage of ideas and I hope to tell you more next year.

We use our surpluses to help other charities in the area of homelessness. I am pleased to say that Carlisle House, the

wholly owned subsidiary of Vincent House, which owns a property in Yeading, Middlesex, was able to grant a new 10 year lease to Trinity Homeless Projects. Their activities, despite the present economic climate, continue to help disadvantaged people and thus avoid, in many cases, them otherwise becoming homeless. We are considering helping Stepping Stones, who lease Hope House in South Croydon from us, to improve their facilities which are geared to helping ex prisoners return to civilian life. We support Charity Bank with whom we have just over £200,000 on deposit. They invited us to help with a project in Harefield, Middlesex, which would have involved providing a top up loan of £100,000 over 10 years. The project went into abeyance, but it may be resurrected later this year.

We have maintained the diversity in our residents which now includes a wide range of nationalities and ages. We can claim to be international and that is one of the attractions of the House. This is something of which my mother would have approved as she was always keen that Vincent House should be welcoming to people from all over the world. We usually hold two main social events for residents each year. Last year as well as our traditional and popular Christmas party we held a summer party in the garden with an unusual musical accompaniment provided by the Ebony Steel Band Trust. I do not know how many of you can play the instruments made of steel barrels. It was clear after a brief lesson that it was not a skill I was likely to acquire! It added a buzz to the whole evening. At the Christmas party we had more conventional music with a jazz duo and a magician doing strange things with balloons. There is no doubt that these and other events, which are much appreciated by residents, contribute to the general friendly atmosphere for which Vincent House is well known.

Geoffrey Roughton has a lesson in playing the steel drums



Lord Ramsbotham addresses guests at the 'Art Works' event

Apropos of events, we decided to hold an event entitled 'Art Works for Vincent House' in May this year. (You can read about the background to this and a review of the event on pages 8-13)

In this year we have our work cut out to deal with the effects of the economic downturn and the other challenges to which I referred earlier. Our financial caution over the years will, I am sure, enable us to weather this downturn and emerge in good shape. But it will be hard work. We are fortunate in having a strong team actually running the House and once again may I, on behalf of you and the Committee, thank Richard Tomkins and all Vincent House staff who continue to work hard to make Vincent House the success it is.

Thank you for your interest, attention and support.

Geoffrey Roughton
Chairman 19th March 2009

* Please note that this is a slightly edited version of the statement delivered verbally by Geoffrey Roughton at the AGM on 19th March 2009. We are pleased to report that since then, the bookings for the Summer months have been very encouraging and there has been a high level of applications for the Autumn .

Art Works for Vincent House

We are sure that those of you who know Vincent House will agree that it has an unmistakable style that makes it a work of art in its own right. Last year we took a bold new step in the evolution of the House and decided to decorate the interior with works of art that complement and enhance this working and living environment. As a result, on Monday 27th April 2009, the corridors of Vincent House underwent a transformation with the installation of 'Art Works for Vincent House'.

Many readers of this Review will know that since its creation 70 years ago Vincent House has been offering reasonably priced residential accommodation. Owned and operated by Vincent Housing Association (VHA), the House expresses the ideals of a small group of closely associated people and is a thriving pioneer of social enterprise, which has now become an increasingly important part of the economic and social fabric of our society.

In keeping with its traditions, VHA selected The Learning Journey (TLJ) in the summer of 2008 to carry out its commission. TLJ is itself a social enterprise focused on helping ex-offenders to resettle successfully after prison through delivering professional services in art, design and media (see www.thelearningjourney.co.uk).

To ensure the art works reflected Vincent House's origins, TLJ set out to build the exhibition by creating a collection of images taken from the art, advertising, pottery, textiles and graphic design of a period spanning 20 years either side of the opening of Vincent House in 1940, from the 1920's to the early 1960's. The main aim was to complement the Art Moderne style of the House whilst giving the interior a more inspirational and interesting look. TLJ sampled more than 300 pieces from 80 artists and 100 poster designs

Display for the launch of Art Works for Vincent House



Nigel Prior (Stepping Stones Trust) and Tom Linton (VH resident)

Carolyn Sims (The Charity Bank) and John Ross (Harefield Parochial Charities)



Lyn Hopkins (VH resident) and Barbara Campbell (local councillor)



including the store of posters in the archives of the London Transport Museum to represent what Londoners of this period would have encountered on a daily basis. The finished collection now displayed in the corridors of the six upper floors of Vincent House, comprises 63 prints from this body of work and a further 63 original decorative panels inspired by works from the period, interspersed with the prints to heighten the impact. The decorative panels, which are hand painted onto canvas, were all newly created by one of the artists at TLJ.

The Launch

To celebrate the installation of 'Art Works for Vincent House' it was decided to stage an exhibition. We contracted Bridport Exhibition Services who together with TLJ transformed the lounge into a professional looking art gallery. The exhibition was launched at a special event hosted by the Committee on Wednesday 13th May 2009, which was extremely successful and attracted many new contacts to the House from a range of organisations. It was opened by former Chief Inspector of Prisons, Lord David Ramsbotham who spoke persuasively about the value of schemes that help offenders rehabilitate and how they help reduce re-offending rates which in turn is a huge benefit to society. The event was complemented by a selection of delicious canapes prepared and served by Beyond Boyle, another social enterprise providing training in catering and hospitality to vulnerable individuals.

The exhibition, which also featured a display of a few pieces of art by prisoners (some ex-offenders and some still in prison), was open to residents and visitors from Thursday 14th May until Friday 29th May. During that time many people visited and admired the pieces of art on display as well as taking great interest in the exhibition. Prints of some of the art works have since been sold, including a couple of the original paintings.

A comprehensive guide was produced for the exhibition and it has proved to be a very interesting read as it blends the story of the project with detailed background on the art movements from the early 20th Century through to the 1960's. Copies are still available from Reception at Vincent House — as are prints and greetings cards featuring the original decorative panels (see details at the end of this feature).

The Learning Journey... Getting started

When so much has already been achieved it becomes ever more important and challenging to not only maintain the standards, but to improve upon them. 'Art Works for Vincent House' was conceived out of the desire to develop in a way that mirrored the House's principles. The entrance, reception and dining rooms on the ground floor of Vincent House are notably furnished and decorated in a style reflecting the period it was built and TLJ was determined to maintain the House's style when in the summer of 2008 it started work on the permanent art exhibition for the residential corridors.

The approach

Vincent House feels very secure and reassuring yet it was conceived and built in, and has survived, tumultuous times. It was started in the social ferment of the 1930s when mass unemployment and international conflicts preceded World War Two – indeed, building was completed in late 1939, a few months after war was declared and, after some delay, the House opened its doors to its first residents in spring 1940. Since then Vincent House has developed and matured through political, social and economic change encompassing the Cold War, the rise of individualism, feminism, the impact of new technologies and deregulated market forces.

TLJ set out to express this context by creating a collection of images taken from the fine art, advertising, pottery, textiles and graphic design of a period stretching 20 years either side of the completion of Vincent House in 1939: from the 20s to the 60s. TLJ researched and collected more than 300 samples of work from 80 artists and 100 poster designs before selecting 63 prints in conjunction with the management of Vincent House. It drew on a similar range of art and design to create the 63 original art works for the decorative panels. The wide range of artists and designers included Paul Cezanne, Pablo Picasso, Lyonel Feininger, L S Lowry, Marcello Dudovich, Tamar De Lempicka, Susie Cooper, Clarice Cliff, Piet Mondrian, Victor Vasarely, A M Cassandre, Marc Chagall, Paul Klee, Wyndham Lewis, Edouard Benedictus, Henry Moore and Henri Matisse as well as commercial sources including Poole Pottery, Cunard travel posters and the London Transport collection.

Richard Tomkins, General Manager of Vincent House,
selecting the images with a TLJ artist



Dominic Murphy
Founder of The Learning Journey



The thinking behind the selection

The posters and prints have been selected to represent what might have been seen at the time. The period from 1925 onwards marked an increasing tendency towards advertising and the development of the graphic artist as a profession. Although many artists had produced posters and designs they had mainly been confined to theatrical events. With the advent of mass production and the machine age came marketing and design. There had always been fabric designers and illustrators as well as interior artists but little was seen by the general public until the period shortly before World War One and after it.

The expansion of international travel led to sharing of ideas and styles in a much more rapid way. The period we now know as Art Deco was a coming together of artists, architects, designers, manufacturers and sales professionals. The styles were the subject of large fairs and conferences resulting in pattern and style books that were shared across the world and impacted on all aspects of daily life in a way not seen before. However posters and advertisements were not anything like as pervasive as they are today; no massive billboards and hoardings on streets. Occasionally large enamelled tin signs advertised products, but they were intended to be more or less permanent. There was little changing of adverts as we see today. The expansion of large billboards and hoardings owes much of its existence to World War Two when bomb sites were fenced off and destruction hidden from view.

In London (as in Paris) one of the key factors in the expansion of advertising was (and still is to this day) the transport system. We are fortunate that London Transport has had a policy for over 100 years of commissioning art works and posters and that they have retained and enhanced this collection and made it available to the public. Some of the world's finest artists have contributed designs and commissions to the archives. They represent exactly what the Londoner of 1939 would have come across on a daily basis and also give a flavour to the times. The London Transport archive is a unique history of British graphic design.

There were many other artists and designers who contributed across the world, most notably in France and the United States of America, reflecting their dynamic social change. The selection of posters and designs was aimed at giving a feel for the times to residents and visitors.

Art in ferment

The central years of 1939 and 1940 set us firmly in the historical framework of Modernism and Post-Modernism. Modernism is loosely defined as that period which followed the Impressionists (1870s to 1890s).

The Modernist period marked a significant change in the development of the visual arts. Prior to this it was fairly easy to see how one approach to art (painting and sculpture) had followed another in a linear progression. Art was mostly still about representation of the world in a realistic, studied, representational manner.

The Impressionists, for all their revolutionary fervour, did much the same but with the difference of the injection of the personal view of the artist. So a painting of a bridge was still recognisably a painting of a bridge but in a way that conveyed atmosphere and feeling rather than (or in addition to) academic analysis of the bridge as a form.

It was really the Post-Impressionists who sparked the revolution in the way artists worked. There were many important figures amongst them: Georges-Pierre Seurat, Vincent van Gogh, Paul Gauguin, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Franz Marc and Paul Cézanne and it is with Cézanne and Franz Marc that our Vincent House story begins. Cézanne because his approach to work led directly to Cubism and the immense shift that it promoted and Marc because his work spanned and was deeply affected by the First World War and led to the Expressionist movement.

It now became very difficult to separate one movement from another. The development in Fine Art was no longer linear. All sorts of new ideas and ways of painting were spinning out from the international community of artists. Initially centred in France the expansion was exponential across Europe and into America.

The early part of the 20th century was, therefore, an exciting time for artists. The new freedoms that were afforded to them as a consequence of throwing off the shackles of representational art gave rise to many new groupings and movements or 'isms' as artists fed off each other and agreed or disagreed or found new developments in their thinking and their work.

The Learning Journey display at the exhibition



Display featuring information on the decorative panels



'Art Works for Vincent House' features some of the most significant of these movements with artists and works selected to provide just a flavour of what was appearing in the galleries and exhibitions across the world and particularly in Europe.

The Decorative Panels

Ideas for the panel designs were drawn from advertising, travel, architectural designs and decoration, fabric and wall covering designs, pottery here and in Europe, interests in animalia, abstract and geometric designs, classical themes as interpreted by the designers of the period (Greece, Egypt and Rome), Cubism, floral abstractions, and an interest in transport. The work of Edouard Benedictus, Edward Seguy, Auguste Herbin, Clarice Cliff, Susie Cooper, The Poole Pottery, Charles Catteau, Marcello Dudovich, Kasimir Malevich, Abram Games and many other designers and artists provided inspiration for the panels. All of the work has been produced by a Learning Journey artist who has painted each image in a way that reflects its influences and origins, but with a highly individual style and modern feel.

The panels have been painted in artist's acrylic paint on stretched canvas which has been primed with several coats of acrylic gesso. Each panel is 24 inches by 36 inches and all have been designed in the vertical (portrait) format.

Prints of the decorative panels and greetings cards are available from The Learning Journey and can be ordered through Reception at Vincent House. Prints are 21cm x 30cm and can be purchased for £30 mounted (30cm x 40cm) or £55 framed. Further details are also available at ask@thelearningjourney.co.uk. Copies of the accompanying guide are also available from Reception.

Decorative panels displayed in the residential corridors



Some of the 63 original designs



And a few other things.....

Carla Gets Married and Promoted!

Just about everyone who comes to stay at Vincent House knows Carla Soares who has worked on Reception and Front of House for many years, but they are now having to get used to her new married name of Carla Soares Hester! We featured Carla in our Annual Review 2007 shortly after she had been promoted to Front of House Supervisor. Carla originates from Brazil and first came to London to study as well as work. She married long term boyfriend Neil Hester who works for the BBC in February this year and is very happy with her life in London and expects to continue working at Vincent House into the foreseeable future. She was also recently promoted to Front of House Manager, so 2009 has been a memorable year for her!

New Look Lounge Furniture

Geoffrey Roughton's statement on pages 3-9 refers to the new look sofas and chairs in the lounge which were selected with the help of Norman Reid of LB Contracts who has been working with the House since the early 1990's sourcing furniture and interior design. It was decided to give the lounge a fresh look by introducing varying shades of green, aubergine and claret offset by touches of ivory, which has proved to be a perfect complement to the mellow golden tones of the décor which was repainted in 2006. Whilst retaining the Art Moderne feel with neat tub chairs and elegant Italian style sofas, there are also some new roomy couches that look invitingly comfortable. The scheme will soon be enhanced by some new rugs and occasional tables to complete the stylish new look.

Carla Soares Hester with Estela Tomkins



Debbie Loynton Administration Manager

Management Changes

As stated in the Chairman's Report, Richard Tomkins continues to thrive as General Manager and the House is performing well, despite the economic challenges. However, as with any business there have been some personnel changes in the past year and as a result it was decided to create a new post of Administration Manager. The recruitment process was undertaken with the professional help of Peter Flower, Vincent House's HR consultant, and led to the recent appointment of Debbie Loynton, who previously worked for Sodexo, a contract catering company. With the increasing amounts of paperwork and administration in the 21st century, we are sure that Debbie's skills will be highly appreciated by everyone at Vincent House and we wish her well in her new role.

Additional information

Web site addresses for the organisations that we work with and support and where you will find interesting information about their activities:

www.beyondboyle.com
www.bridportexpo.co.uk
www.charitybank.org
www.nottinghill.biz
www.steppingstonetrust.org.uk
www.thelearningjourney.co.uk
www.trinityhomelessprojects.org.uk
www.steppingstonetrust.org.uk

Comfortable new couches in the lounge





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