



A Short History of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation's UK Branch, 1956–2006

The history of the United Kingdom Branch of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation tells the story of a significantly successful venture. Since its establishment by the Board of Trustees in 1956, the Branch has made interventions in the arts and culture, in social welfare and in education that have had profound and long-lasting effects in Britain and beyond.

Calouste Sarkis Gulbenkian became a British citizen in 1902 and retained British nationality for the rest of his life. Between the two World Wars he was principally resident first in London, then in Paris, and conducted his business affairs from London. The Founder's will established that while the Foundation was to be permanently based in Lisbon, and would be governed by Portuguese law, its activities could be exercised not only in Portugal but in any other country that the Board decided. In view of his long association with the United Kingdom, it was only natural that the Board should establish a separate Branch in London. This Branch would have its own premises, and would be funded annually to administer grants in the United Kingdom and the British Commonwealth as well as to assist students coming to Britain on Foundation grants from Portugal, the Middle East and Armenian communities throughout the world.

The administration and governance of the United Kingdom Branch has always been the responsibility of a member of the Lisbon Board, normally resident in London. The London Trustee has the power to approve grants by the Branch up to a fixed limit; larger expenditure requires approval from the main Board, within an overall settlement decided annually by the full Board of Trustees in Lisbon. The Branch thus has a measure of autonomy that has enabled it, over the years, to take quick decisions closely informed by a local context.



The present London Trustee is Martin Essayan, a great-grandson of the Founder. The day to day administration of the United Kingdom Branch is undertaken by a small professional staff led by a Director, currently Paula Ridley, who runs the Social Change (previously Social Welfare) and Director's Programmes, and who is supported by three Assistant Directors: Siân Ede who is responsible for Arts, Simon Richey, who covers Education, and Miguel Santos, in charge of Anglo-Portuguese Cultural Relations. Since 1961 the offices of the Branch have been at 98 Portland Place near Regent's Park in central London.

Although not governed by English charity law, the Branch has chosen to behave as if it were a British charity and has adopted a policy of openness about its operations, areas of interest and priorities. Its chief mode of communication is the publication of a detailed *Annual Report* that provides information about the distribution of grants, explains current policy priorities and gives clear advice to potential applicants for funding. The Branch also has an active publications programme.

The establishment of the United Kingdom Branch – arts, education and social welfare 1956–1971

The objectives of the Foundation were defined in the Founder's will, but it was up to the first members of the Board, notably Gulbenkian's English legal representative, Sir Charles Whishaw, who became the first Trustee responsible for the United Kingdom Branch, to devise the structures that would make these achievable in the UK.

The history of the Branch between 1956 and 1971 is defined by the successive directorships of Allen Sanderson and James Thornton, and the brief directorship of Alexander Dunbar before he took over the running of the Scottish Arts Council. In the 1950s Britain was in a mood of post-war reconstruction and the Branch was still finding its way. Under the terms of its originating statutes the Foundation's activities encompassed a wide field, general charity, the arts, education and science; a field so broad that some practical limitations had to be determined. As Whishaw recalled: 'It did not take long for us to realise that in the world of science in the widest terms there would be virtually nothing we could usefully do.' Accordingly, apart from supporting a few scientific expeditions and other projects in the early years, science was put to one side until the 1990s, when the needs of what was now called the creative, as opposed to the industrial, economy called



for an exploration of the linkages between arts and science. ‘General charity’ proved to be too vague a category because, as an early *Annual Report* explained, ‘unlike central or local government, a private foundation cannot accept responsibility towards the whole range of human endeavour.’ However, there was plenty of scope within arts, social welfare and education and, over the years, they became a mutually supportive triumvirate. It is significant that by 1968 the term ‘charity’ – implying the straightforward distribution of funds to the needy – had been replaced by the phrase ‘social welfare’, which suggests a more collaborative and proactive approach designed to tackle the causes of need as much as the needs themselves.

The arts, in particular, presented an area where the British government and other charities were doing little, and where traditional individual patronage was on the decline. At the same time, increased prosperity and leisure and higher standards of education in the UK were prompting broader interest and participation in culture. In its first twenty years, the arts took up at least 50 per cent of the Branch’s annual budget, and also offered an opportunity to establish the Gulbenkian name through fellowships and a number of landmark buildings, such as the Gulbenkian theatres provided at many of the new universities that were built during the 1960s, and galleries such as the Gulbenkian Museum of Oriental Art at the University of Durham (now the Oriental Museum) or the Gulbenkian Gallery at the Royal College of Art, which still exists. Within the arts the Branch found a firm line of direction in 1959 with the publication of its own specially commissioned report *Help for the Arts*, remembered as the Bridges Report, after the distinguished chairman of its investigating committee, Lord Bridges. This had been set up to advise the Foundation on the needs of the arts in post-war Britain, and to suggest ways in which the Gulbenkian could exercise its patronage in an area where it was much needed. The report not only proved to be the first of a series of highly influential studies of cultural policy that the United Kingdom Branch has commissioned or co-funded, but also set a pattern by which it would bring together a team of experts to investigate an issue, draw up a policy, and publish a report that would have an influence far beyond the immediate purposes of the Foundation.

The practice was to engage, network, enquire, deliberate, and then act; and it was repeated time and again. In the field of social welfare, the Younghusband Report, *Community Work and Social Change* (1968), had a profound effect in legitimating the emerging profession and practice of community work in Britain, and helped to crystallise a long-term commitment to supporting communities, especially the most vulnerable, to help themselves,



through, for example, such organisations as the Blackfriars Settlement, the Breakthrough Trust and the Family Trust. During the 1960s the Foundation gave important assistance in the form of start-up grants to fledgling charities that have since become major players: the Samaritans who provide confidential help to people contemplating suicide, and Shelter, the United Kingdom's foremost charity for the homeless, are just two notable examples.

The Gulbenkian Foundation has had a significant impact on the cultural infrastructure of Britain. Not only did the Bridges Report suggest innovations such as artists' residences (commonplace now, but then a radical idea) it adopted a nationwide, non-metropolitan outlook, leading in particular to the formation of Regional Arts Associations that created a coherent regional structure for the development of the arts in England and Wales. This established a long tradition of the United Kingdom Branch giving help to projects well away from the main metropolitan centres of influence. Between 1956 and the mid-1970s the Foundation spent the equivalent of more than £20 million (at today's values) on building theatres, arts centres and galleries across the United Kingdom. At this period, as part of its responsibility for helping organisations in the British Commonwealth, the United Kingdom Branch also contributed to similar arts-building and cultural and educational projects overseas. In 1964 the Foundation sponsored the first comprehensive international survey of contemporary art at London's Tate Gallery, *54/64 Painting and Sculpture of a Decade*, which was an enormously influential reflection of art in the post-war period, and substantially paid for the construction of new exhibition spaces at the Gallery that were to open in 1979.

Community arts and community action 1972–1982

In January 1972 a new Director, Peter Brinson, arrived at the United Kingdom Branch and stayed for ten years. In Britain, this decade was one of anxiety and depression following the optimistic, expansionist mood of the 1960s, and ended with the arrival of a Conservative government that was determined to change the relationship between the individual, the community and the state. Brinson was an aesthete with a profound passion for dance. He was also a radical, determined to act in the defence of values that came increasingly under pressure after the election of Mrs Thatcher as British Prime Minister in 1979. His watchword was 'community', and he made sure that the United Kingdom Branch's three programmes worked closely together



on that theme. The Foundation was no longer supporting the cost of new buildings, but instead put its energies into giving practical support to increasingly beleaguered groups by encouraging community arts, community enterprise, and self-education. At the same time, concerned by rising racial tension in Britain in the early 1970s, the Branch sought to provide the means for West Indian and Asian interest groups to come together for the first time to fight racism. The National Organisation of African, Asian and Caribbean People proved short-lived, but significant work was done in helping the independent Runnymede Trust, the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, and the government's Community Relations Commission.

In 1976 the United Kingdom Branch published two important reports. One, by Naseem Khan, *The Arts Britain Ignores*, addressed the cultural issues linked to the racial tensions Britain was experiencing. The other, *Support for the Arts in England and Wales*, and known by the name of its Chairman, Lord Redcliffe-Maud, showed how far Britain's cultural infrastructure had developed since the Bridges Report of 1959 – and how much further there was still to go. Due to changed economic circumstances, in the 1970s the Branch was no longer in a position to support major new initiatives on its own, and it increasingly found itself working with other agencies to achieve common goals. In spite of its more limited financial reach it had a substantial impact in the field of dance, virtually creating the contemporary dance scene in Britain, funding commissions for choreographers and composers, as well as experiments with new technologies. Throughout its existence the Branch has had a commitment to encouraging contemporary artists of all kinds, from Benjamin Britten in the 1950s, to the young Portuguese artists featured in this century's annual *Atlantic Waves* festival. It has also maintained a strong tradition of encouraging the vocational training of artists of all disciplines.

It was during Brinson's directorship in the 1970s that the United Kingdom Branch's offices in Portland Place became known for their hospitality. This was a means of influencing politicians and forming alliances with other agencies. It was also during Brinson's time that the *Annual Report* became an important vehicle for communicating the Foundation's ideas and principles. The Branch adopted a policy of being as transparent as possible about the approach that it takes to applications for funds, and has shown care for successful and unsuccessful applicants alike.

Some of the Branch's influential publications have already been mentioned, to which should be added Lord Boyle's *Current Issues in Community Work* of 1973 and Lady Seear's *Community Business Works* of 1982.



In 1978 the appointment of a Literary Editor led to a substantial expansion in the United Kingdom Branch's publications programme; the Branch has not only put ideas into practice, but also put practice into print, thus ensuring that the lessons learned from the hundreds of time-limited and experimental projects with which the Gulbenkian has been involved are not lost.

The final report with which Brinson was associated as Director was in the field of education: Professor Ken Robinson's *The Arts in Schools* of 1982. The Branch had long fought to support the presence of art and artists in schools, and this report served to moderate the technological ambitions of those planning the new British National Curriculum that effectively prescribed the content of teaching in state funded schools. *The Arts in Schools* became a key document for those resisting the exclusion of imagination and creativity from education, and eventually helped reshape government thinking on the issue.

Political change: from Thatcherism to New Labour 1982–1999

The year 1982 was one of significant internal and external change for the United Kingdom Branch. Although it continued its work in the UK and the Republic of Ireland, responsibility for activities in the British Commonwealth was transferred to Lisbon. At the same time a new Anglo-Portuguese Cultural Relations Programme was launched. In accordance with its founding statutes, the United Kingdom Branch has always looked after the interests of Gulbenkian staff and visitors in Britain, those studying on Gulbenkian scholarships, and those in the UK for medical treatment, but it was felt that more should be done for the Portuguese community in Britain, and for the promotion of Portuguese culture.

There were also important changes of personnel in 1982. Sir Charles Wishaw retired as the Board's London Trustee, and was replaced by Mikhael Essayan, QC, grandson of the Founder. L.C. ('Kim') Taylor became the new Director. As a former teacher, Taylor had a particular interest in education, and the United Kingdom Branch was much involved in the debates leading up to the Education Reform Act of 1988, shifting its attention from older students to early childhood and the under-18s. There was considerable synergy between the activities of the Education Department and the Arts Department, where the long-standing commitment to training led to investment in such neglected areas as the development of circus skills. The



Foundation also made a substantial contribution to the development of Public Art – a response to the perceived decay in the public realm – to sponsoring large-scale outdoors events, and to the new field linking the benefits of access to the arts in public health. The Social Welfare Department worked hard to ameliorate the effects of local government reorganisation on the voluntary sector, and of the substantial growth in poverty, unemployment and deprivation during the 1980s. The need for regeneration following the industrial restructuring of the decade was reflected in many of the Branch's activities in the 1980s. From the pioneering establishment of community workspaces in Scotland, to addressing race relations in inner cities, to a body of work concerning community communications, the priority was to find ways of encouraging people to help themselves. In contrast to mainstream political thinking – which saw solutions coming either from the free market or from the state – the Branch sought answers by helping people to work together and to organise themselves. Yet recognition of the prevailing political orthodoxy of the times is implicit in the title of *The Economic Importance of the Arts in Britain*, a highly influential report initiated by the United Kingdom Branch, and published by the Policy Studies Institute in 1988.

In the same year Kim Taylor retired as Director. His successor was a former Member of Parliament, Ben Whitaker, who remained Director until 1999. Taylor and Whitaker both took a particular interest in the Branch's activities in Ireland, both sides of the border, where few other foundations were active during the most troubled times for the island. Whitaker also had an enthusiasm for museums.

Children, who suffered especially from the deprivations engendered in the 1980s, continued to be a priority for the Branch. In 1991 the Social Welfare Department under Deputy Director Paul Curno published a report, *Taking Children Seriously: A Proposal for a Children's Rights Commissioner* (a new edition was published in 2000). This began a long struggle for the recognition of children's rights at senior government level that was only concluded in June 2005, when a Commissioner for England was finally appointed. Violence against children, whether bullying by other children or any of the degrees of harm inflicted by adults, from smacking onwards, became a major concern for the Branch, and its reports and enquiries – among them, *One Scandal Too Many* (1993), *Children and Violence* (1995), *Effective Government Structures for Children* (1996) – had a significant effect on policy and public opinion. When it drew attention to the plight of children obliged to act as carers for their disabled parents the Foundation



showed that it was once again able to recognise a social need that the public authorities had overlooked.

The Education Department under Simon Richey gave substantial support to anti-bullying strategies in schools – in 1992 the United Kingdom Branch sent ‘bullying packs’ to every school in the country – and was also concerned to help children in the care of local authorities succeed at school, a need that was widely acknowledged but had not hitherto been acted on. It commissioned a framework for the teaching of personal, social and health education in schools, and piloted in the north-west of England a project concerned with educating young people for parenthood, publishing its report, *Tomorrow’s Parents*, in 1997.

The arts strand of the Education Programme was influenced by the Branch’s enquiry into young people’s cultural activities, published as *Moving Culture* in 1990, which celebrated young people’s capacity to create their own cultural forms. The Programme also mounted a successful campaign to restore a universal right to public funding for dance and drama students, co-funding a nationwide enquiry to which the government swiftly responded.

In the 1990s the United Kingdom Branch, having been much concerned with the inner cities in the previous decade, turned its attention to the unrecognised social deprivation that existed in the British countryside. The Arts Department managed an exemplary and innovative scheme to stimulate small-scale, largely non-professional rural arts activities, which ran until 1996, funding some 200 projects and involving seventeen agencies. Having brought out the material value of investment in the arts with the 1988 report, *The Economic Importance of the Arts in Britain*, in 1997 Branch redressed the balance by helping to fund the think-tank Comedia’s examination of the social, as opposed to economic, benefits that flow from cultural activity, in the report *Use or Ornament? The social impact of participation in the arts*.

Siân Ede, who became Arts Director in 1995, continued the community theme in a Participatory Music programme, a term coined by the Foundation to describe non-professional music-making in all its forms. The Branch’s commitment to artists, and their need for time for research and development, as opposed to performance, was renewed by its Time to Experiment scheme, and Ede developed a new strand of work, encouraging artists to engage with the technical and cultural possibilities offered by science. *Strange and Charmed: Science and the contemporary visual arts*, published in 2000 is representative of the more ambitious publishing that the United Kingdom Branch has undertaken since 1998.



Anglo-Portuguese relations

Relations between Portugal and the United Kingdom have always been an important part of the Branch's work. It has, throughout its existence, acted as a home-from-home for Portuguese students in Britain. The need to find long-term accommodation for visiting students and others led to the creation of a Student Welfare Department, which in 1978 became the Portuguese Affairs Department. The Department not only had to oversee the pastoral care of students sponsored in Britain (in January 2005 there were 38 on Gulbenkian Scholarships), but also to manage the many professional exchanges between London and Lisbon, and meet the needs of the Gulbenkian Orchestra and Gulbenkian Ballet Company, as well as facilitate medical visits to London by people sent by the Foundation's Health and Social Welfare Department in Lisbon.

Following the re-organisation of responsibilities between London and Lisbon in 1982, the Branch launched a major new programme to nurture Anglo-Portuguese Cultural Relations. Two principles were clearly articulated: there would be a requirement for co-operation between the two countries and a need 'actively to create new cultural interactions'. The first allocation of grants went to universities and to assist Portuguese communities in the UK, but very soon there was an opportunity to give the programme a new momentum and a fresh focus.

1986 marked the six-hundredth anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Windsor between Portugal and England. The treaty, which created a military and political alliance and a free trading area, is the oldest diplomatic agreement between any two countries anywhere in the world. Cultural exchange between the two countries has deep roots as well. Three of Portugal's most eminent modern writers, Almeida Garrett, Eça de Queirós and Fernando Pessoa, all had English connections, and have been published in English translation with funding from the United Kingdom Branch.

In anticipation of the celebrations of 1986 a new Anglo-Portuguese Foundation was established in 1984, with Gulbenkian support, whose first task was to organise a year-long festival, 'Portugal 600'. The joint patrons of the new Foundation were the Portuguese Ambassador and the Duke of Wellington. The organisation went on to produce a regular magazine, *Cultura*, and began an important publishing programme in association with Carcanet Press, *Aspects of Portugal*, covering academic studies of Portuguese history and culture, and Portuguese poetry and fiction in English translation. The Branch nurtured cultural relations in other ways as well, by buying works



for the Foundation's collection of contemporary British art, housed in its Modern Art Centre in Lisbon, by establishing the first ever Portuguese translation prize, by organising artist exchanges, and by promoting contemporary Portuguese culture through concerts and exhibitions.

In July 1999 a further reorganisation took place. The Anglo-Portuguese Cultural Relations Programme, previously overseen by the Director Ben Whitaker, merged on his retirement with the Portuguese Affairs Department, under a new Assistant Director, Miguel Santos, a graduate of Lisbon University and a former arts administrator and music specialist. There was an immediate 50 per cent increase in the grants budget; the number of grants doubled, and their scope widened. Two radical innovations followed that breathed new life into the Programme, the first being the creation and distribution of a CD called *Exploratory Music from Portugal*. It and the annual series of recordings that followed succeeded in introducing Portuguese musicians to a wide UK audience.

The next step was to give the British public opportunities to see and hear the music live. So began, in 2001, the first of the annual *Atlantic Waves* festivals involving more than thirty artists. Taken together, these initiatives have put Portuguese music into the mainstream of British culture, and have helped to promote the careers of Portuguese performers. A vivid example is Mariza, a singer of traditional Fado music who visited the UK in 2002 under the auspices of the Foundation. In 2003 she won a BBC Radio Three World Music Award and is now enjoying global celebrity. She returned to the *Atlantic Waves* festival in 2006 with a concert at the Albert Hall. The first steps have been taken to extend the model used in the case of music into other art forms, with a dance festival in 2004 and 2005.

The new century

In 1999 Paula Ridley succeeded Ben Whitaker as Director of the United Kingdom Branch and introduced considerable internal changes, reducing administrative costs and refocusing the Branch's priorities. At the start of the new millennium the Branch made a major public statement with the establishment in 2002 – for a period of five years – of the largest arts prize in Britain, the £100,000 Gulbenkian Prize for Museums and Galleries. The prize shows continuity as well as innovation however, for museums have been a long-standing interest of the Foundation. The first four years brought to the fore winners who demonstrate the wide range of activity within



museum practice: worthwhile work for young offenders at the National Centre for Citizenship and the Law, Galleries of Justice, Nottingham; a striking piece of contemporary landscape art by the international architect and cultural commentator Charles Jencks at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art in Edinburgh; a vigorous and moving experience of British industrial history at the former Welsh coalmine, the Big Pit in Blaenafon; and Brunel's ss *Great Britain*, the world's first great ocean liner.

The United Kingdom Branch has always pursued a policy that it will only support initiatives for a few years, after which it is intended that they should be taken over by a longer term funder, thus releasing resources for further innovation.

In the Arts Programme, in place of the long-running, all-encompassing Research and Development programme, which ran for ten years, a new priority The Arts in Public Spaces has been introduced for urban or rural projects which are particularly imaginative and unusual. The Arts Department's reputation for encouraging arts practitioners to engage with science has been established by its recent innovative publications: *Art, not Chance: Nine artists' diaries* (2001), *Science, not Art: Ten scientists' diaries* (2003) and *Wild Reckoning: An anthology provoked by Rachel Carson's 'Silent Spring'* (2004). This award-winning poetry anthology reflects a new change in grant-giving and publishing. The Arts Director is currently working with major science institutions, such as the Natural History Museum, the Science Museum, the Royal Society and the Royal Society of Medicine, to create special arts programmes with a view to consolidating such activities into eventual arts strategies for these organisations.

The 1997 Labour government's comprehensive commitment to education prompted the Foundation to consider whether it still had a role to play in the field of education. Its solution was to focus on the most needy children, those whose difficulties were especially entrenched and therefore difficult to reverse, as well as pockets of educational innovation overlooked by government. The Education Department has attempted to get to the root of many children's difficulties by helping their parents – particularly the disadvantaged – develop better parenting skills. This commitment has found expression most recently in the Department's establishment of the PIP project (Parents Information Point), where parents have the opportunity to attend brief information sessions on child development and to learn about local support for parents from the voluntary sector. The Education Programme has also helped children and young people who have been excluded from school and placed in Pupil Referral Units or Learning Support Units to develop their



personal and social skills through creative activities. Two recent publications – *Creating Chances* (2004), and *Serious Play: An evaluation of arts activities in Pupil Referral Units and Learning Support Units* by the National Foundation for Educational Research (2005), are important contributions to the literature on this subject. New priorities are Human Scale Schools and Cross-cultural Schools.

In the field of Social Welfare (renamed Social Change) the Branch continues to help communities to help themselves. Some issues that the Foundation has been active in promoting for decades have started to flow into the mainstream of official practice. In 2002 the Department for Trade and Industry adopted community enterprise as a part of government policy and produced a major report. This was followed in 2003 by the Gulbenkian's own publication *Social Enterprise in Anytown*, by John Pearce, an early advocate of community enterprise. The United Kingdom Branch has always been interested in new organisational models and ways of doing things and in the same year published the Public Management Foundation's *Public Interest: New models for delivering public services?*, as well as funding the Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations' *Replacing the State? The case for third sector public service delivery*. The sector's concern with issues of capacity building has been followed through with grants explicitly aimed at increasing capacity. The Social Change Department also currently gives serious consideration to the problem of financial literacy, and to environmental issues, as well as supporting programmes for the elderly. Its publication *Rethinking Families* (2004) considers the relationship patterns that are replacing those of the traditional nuclear family. *Understanding the Stranger: Building bridges community handbook* (2006) looks at initiatives across the UK that aim to mediate between local host communities and asylum seekers and refugees.

The United Kingdom Branch works both practically, as an organisation that has had to adapt to the shifting currents of public policy, and intellectually, as one that has consistently supported experiment in the arts, self-empowerment in the community, and innovation in education. It has achieved its aims by developing procedures of investigation, action and publication, but one key to its success has been an ability to bring people together, and to bridge the gap between, on the one hand those who take decisions about policy and funding, and on the other the deprived in society and those who seek to help them on the ground. In other words it has embraced both ends of a problem, providing funding to give practical help to the most disadvantaged in society while bringing together leaders of the



community to apply influence and experience in order to change attitudes and, sometimes, legislation. The list of organisations that the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation's United Kingdom Branch has nurtured from their earliest days is both extensive and impressive, but in addition to direct interventions, the Branch has, on many occasions, acted as a catalyst. It has been a provoker of ideas, and has used often quite small grants to launch schemes that, once proven, have become part of mainstream thinking. The United Kingdom Branch has always been interested in *people*: those who need help and those who can make a project work, as much as in artistic, social or educational theory. It is through partnership, as well as leadership, that the Branch has so successfully exercised an influence far greater than its direct financial capacity might imply. Entrepreneurial themselves, the staff have sought out the 'social entrepreneurs' who have wanted to create new organisations, influence government policy, and change ideas.

Written by Robert Hewison, cultural historian, critic and arts correspondent for *The Sunday Times*, and John Holden, Head of Culture at the think-tank Demos.

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