

HEBDEN BRIDGE PICTURE HOUSE

Annual Report April 2016 – March 2017



Town Mayor

Cllr Anthony Hodgins

Chair of Picture House Committee

Cllr Nigel Yorke & Cllr Carol Stow

Picture House Manager

Rebekah Fozard

Hebden Bridge Picture House

New Road, Hebden Bridge, HX7 8AD

www.hbph.co.uk

Hebden Royd Town Council

The Town Hall, St George's Street, Hebden Bridge. HX7 7BY • Tel 01422 842181

info@hebdenroyd.org.uk • www.hebdenroyd.org.uk



Report from the Chair of the Picture House Committee



Looking back at last year's report from the previous chair of the Picture House committee it is unsurprising that the focus then was on the damage done to the building by the floods of Boxing Day 2015. That report ended with the comment that although there was no surplus to report there was confidence that the Picture House manager and her team, working with the Friends of the Picture House, had plans to increase audience numbers and return the cinema to surplus.

That confidence was well placed and I am delighted to report that audience numbers have indeed increased in 2016 -17 and we are once again able to report that the Picture House has generated a financial surplus.

The start of this financial year saw the continuation of the work to repair and restore the cinema after the flooding. The long-planned refurbishment of the foyer finally took place and it was re-opened in June 2016 complete with the original clock, rescued from a store room and refurbished thanks to donations from the Friends and from Julia Turpin.

With the fabric of the building now in fine shape, attention turned to re-building audience figures and investing in the equipment used to show films and for live events. A variety of initiatives have seen audience figures steadily increase and the total number of attendances in the year 2016-17 is higher than in any year since the Picture House was taken over by Hebden Royd Town Council. This has resulted in a healthy financial surplus being generated, allowing us to invest in a new sound processor and to replenish the reserves we used as part of the post-flood refurbishment. The Picture House Manager and her team are to be commended for all their hard work.

We look to the future with continuing optimism but also with an awareness that we still have important areas and resources which need replacement and modernising. We are now making plans with regard to the temporary stage we use for some live events and to the lighting rig. We intend to make sure that the Picture House maintains its position both as one of the best independent cinemas in the UK and as a well-loved jewel of the local community.

Cllr Carol Stow

Chair Picture House Committee 2016-17

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Report from the Picture House Manager



The year started with the prospect of refurbishing the flood damaged foyer, kiosk and toilet, whilst continuing to trade every day and minimise disruption to the customers. We started with extremely low audience numbers in the first quarter; the worst performing of any quarter since we began trading in April 2012. April to June 2016 saw just 3,000 customers a month, which was even lower than the previous quarter straight after the flood, despite our stalls seating and heating being in tip top condition. With a combination of marketing, incentives and special offers and support from the Friends of the Picture House the audience numbers rose in Quarter two to 4,700 per month, then to 5,350 per month in the third Quarter, reaching a very pleasing 6,000 per month by the end of the financial year.

In response to disappointing custom at the start of the year the Friends of the Picture House produced an information leaflet about the cinema and handed that and our monthly programme out in town and at local railway stations over the summer months in order to encourage customers to return and the engage with new customers.

Tying in with this we launched two customer incentives: Bring a Friend for free, for customers to bring someone new to the cinema as a 2 for the price of one, and Loyalty Cards for off peak films and Live Arts events, which have proved a hit amongst regular customers. We also had a 50p per ticket price rise, the first price increase in 2 and a half years, but we not only maintained our concessionary £5 ticket at that price, we also expanded its reach to include all full time students and all those under the age of 26. At the same time Picture This members were given £1 off each cinema ticket instead of the previous 50 pence, and the number of screenings it related to opened up to include the ever popular Elevenses. Finally, as the year drew to a close, we scrapped our Family Matinee ticket of 3 for £15 which excluded single parent families and did not benefit those attending without children, and replaced it with a £5 flat ticket price for all family matinee (early afternoon) screenings, amounting to a £2 reduction to the usual adult price of £7. Live Arts prices have been maintained since spring 2013 when the broadcasts were introduced.

In September a periodic electrical installation inspection of the stage lighting system, power supply and dimmer racks, coupled with mounting concern about the structural integrity of the stage post-flood, and the ageing theatrical equipment resulted in the stage area behind the screen being declared unfit for use. The lighting rig was decommissioned on safety grounds and the power supply cut off. The cost of replacing the stage floor, electrical supply, drapes, pulleys, lights, dimmers and lighting desk was estimated to be £100,000 to £150,000, with no obvious source of funding to meet this cost. An analysis of cinema hires was conducted: 24 out of 56 hires since April 2012 had relied on the stage and the three most frequent bookers, the Arts Festival and two schools would lose out the most if the stage was lost. The value of hires to the business is negligible, with many hires breaking even whilst costing lost cinema revenue, but as a community venue it was felt necessary to preserve access for hirers needing a stage at a proportionate cost to the business, and a solution was found.

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Hebden Royd Town Council determined to award a grant for the electrical installation needed to power four new lighting bars within the auditorium, to illuminate a variable size pop up stage situated in front of the cinema screen, including the distribution board, lighting desk, the bars, the wiring and the dimmers. The new stage measures up to 6 metres wide by 3 metres deep and has allowed Arts Festival and school productions to resume, albeit on the new stage, so we continue to be a venue available to the whole community. Work was completed in time for an Arts Festival event in March 2017.



*The refurbished foyer, photographed in June 2016
Photo by Sarah Mason Photography*

I am particularly grateful for the activities of the Friends of the Picture House over the past year which have included two movie poster sales, a very successful Christmas raffle, summer leafletting, hosting monthly 'Friends present...' film screenings with free film-themed home baked goodies, and an autumn external clean up. The most impressive activity of the Friends' year was the publication in November of the wonderful and meticulously researched history of the cinema, 'Hebden Bridge Picture House: The Life and Times of a Local Treasure' written by Secretary of the Friends Kate Higham, and her father, Ray Barnes. 1,000 paperback copies were produced and these are for sale in various bookshops, from the cinema's website and in the cinema foyer for just £10 each.

The Friends donations to the cinema over the year totalled £5820.80, specifically gifting us money for 10 red velvet folding chairs for use at the back of the auditorium and for staged events, the outside cinema time sign board refurbishment, the chandelier and wall light foyer lighting, a new kiosk mirror, cinema advertising banners, the summer campaign leaflets, the new foyer upholstered bench seat for patrons, and framing a gifted Martin Parr photographic print of the foyer in 1976 for display in the newly renovated foyer. The Friends also received a 2000 Euro donation from Saint-Pol-sur-Ternoise, our twin town in France to help with the post flooding cinema restoration.

Our year improved as the building refurbishment was completed and as custom increased, and we finished the year in a comfortable position, looking forward to launching a campaign to restore the balcony seating and flooring area in the year ahead.

Rebekah Fozard, Manager
Hebden Bridge Picture House

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Report from the Marketing Officer



Efforts continued throughout 2016-2017 to effectively deliver our marketing processes and procedures whilst looking at ways to boost attendance after the floods of 2015.

We implemented incentives including Bring a Friend for Free and Film Fanatic Loyalty Cards to thank our customers and encourage cinema-going at alternative film genre screenings throughout the week.

We were keen to explore collaborative partnerships in 2016 to help discover new audiences within the region and beyond and were delighted to work with the inaugural Yorkshire

Silent Film Festival, a Yorkshire wide celebration of silent film with live music taking place throughout the month of July, 2016 including three screenings here at Hebden Bridge Picture House.

Throughout October Hebden Bridge Picture House celebrated women in film, showcasing a collection of iconic films, past and present, highlighting women's contribution to cinema; culminating in a one day film festival in October, the 'Women in Film' Festival.

To promote the Women in Film Festival we ran a giveaway for a month's cinema pass, asking our customers for films directed by women to help shape the Film Festival and also promote our partnership with F-Rated, a new film rating which highlight films made by and featuring women.

Other promotional activity throughout the year included a competition inviting our customers to create an eye-catching original image of our beloved cinema to adorn the cover of Friends of the Picture House, The Life and Times of a Local Treasure, a book about the cinema's history.

We've welcomed increased engagement on both social media platforms with goals to improve our impressions and engagement rate on both platforms. We now have 3173 likes on Facebook up from 984 with daily activity taking place. The number of Twitter followers is continuing to grow and we now have 3285 followers. Email newsletters have changed from a monthly to a weekly format promoting weekly listings, new events and the monthly brochure, to encourage cinema-going throughout the month. The main mailing list database size has increased steadily to 2761 in 2016-2017.

Lisa Murdoch, Marketing Officer
Hebden Bridge Picture House

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Report from the Town Clerk



It's now five years since the Picture House was transferred to the control of Hebden Royd Town Council and reflecting on that time I would say the decision taken in early 2012 was without doubt the correct one.

Starting out with little more than a commitment from the Town Council to invest in the projection equipment of the Picture House we now have a facility that the staff at the Picture House have worked really hard to improve and develop.

If I could share some of the images taken in early 2012 you would see that the change has been amazing. Thank you to all those involved; staff, contractors and of course our customers.

2016 -17 financial performance summary

Having depleted the Picture House reserves in 2015 - 16 to support the post flood recovery works it was important that we started to work towards generating an appropriate financial buffer for the Picture House once more. This year saw a trading surplus in excess of £50k, the best performance since the Town Council took responsibility for the Picture House. Ticket sales and improved kiosk sales increased revenue and careful management of expenditure again meant this has been possible. This has been added to the Picture House War Chest for the future.

We have still invested in the building, a grant of £20k from the Town Council has delivered an improved kiosk, significantly improving the front of house and have plans for further improvements to projection, specifically the 35mm projector and the sound system.

I have no doubt the Picture House will continue to attract strong audiences and enhance its strong reputation locally and regionally with its carefully selected range of Films, Live Arts and Special Events leading to a continued strong financial footing.

Should you wish to examine the financial information further this is available at Hebden Bridge Town Hall.

Jason Boom, Town Clerk
Hebden Royd Town Council

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Acknowledgements & Thanks

For their continued support, over a year of wavering custom and further post-flood challenges, we thank the staff of the Picture House and those who support the Picture House at Hebden Royd Town Council; their commitment and hard work remain invaluable.

Once again, we owe David Sin at The Independent Cinema Office and his team our gratitude for continuing to provide advice and help and for putting together an enjoyable and diverse programme each month.

Thanks to the Committee of the Friends of the Picture House for their constant fundraising, support, questioning and continued enthusiasm. Their regular committee meetings to discuss cinema issues, hear from the Manager and concoct ways to enhance what the cinema offers together with their monthly film screenings (with delicious baked goods and friendly welcome) really enhance the Picture House beyond being just a venue to watch films.

We thank Rogue Robot Visual Industries for their gift of their skills in making films to help promote our teatime screenings and the Friends of the Picture House and updating these every single month, and thank too Sarah Mason Photography for gifting us a half day photographic session to improve the look of our marketing, website and other communications with a fabulous set of photographs of our cinema to use as we please.

We also thank the contractors who worked on the cinema's foyer and kiosk last Spring, completing the work to an exacting timetable and a high standard, including but not limited to P&D Builders, Kat Heu specialist plasterwork, Paul Ashton Electricals, Wood & Wire, Rishton Floorcraft, Factorylux Lighting and John Lambert (North West) Limited.

Once again, sincere appreciation to the many regular visitors to the Picture House who choose the Picture House above other cinemas, continue to make the Picture House a vibrant space and organisation, and provide ideas and feedback on what we do. We'd be lost without you.



View of the newly refurbished auditorium from the balcony, revealing the original balcony seating, now ripe for renovation.

Photo by Sarah Mason Photography.

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