

HEBDEN BRIDGE   
PICTURE HOUSE

# Annual Report

## April 2019 – March 2020



Photo by Rebekah Fozard

### Town Mayor

ClIr Dr Carol Stow

### Chair of Picture House Committee

ClIr Austen Warne

### Picture House Manager

Rebekah Fozard

### Hebden Bridge Picture House

New Road, Hebden Bridge, HX7 8AD

[www.hbph.co.uk](http://www.hbph.co.uk)

### Hebden Royd Town Council

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## Report from the Picture House Manager



Our eighth-year trading was going quite swimmingly until we hit the last two months of our financial year. In January our average audience per film / live arts screening was over 100 people, and at the end of January, the tenth month of our financial year, we'd opened 569 times since the start of April and served nearly 43,000 customers.

Our luck changed in February, with the weather. On 9<sup>th</sup> February the cinema was flooded, for the fourth time in eight years, as Hebden Bridge was deluged by Storm Ciara. Once more the stalls, the under-stage areas and our exit lobbies were under filthy water. This time water didn't breach the top of the front steps and enter the foyer, so the damage was less extensive than in 2015.

It is worth noting that the high water level of this flood, whilst being around 25-30 centimetres lower than the December 2015 flood, was noticeably higher outside the cinema than the high water level inside the cinema. The flood gates installed in 2016 and deployed on our lower level exits held back hundreds of tons of water, amounting to a 70 centimetre difference in interior water level. This saved tens of thousands of pounds worth of damage to cinema seating, carpets and interior décor.

The February flooding caused the cinema to be closed for 4 film screenings, a live arts event and an important hire of the cinema to the BANFF Mountain Film Festival. We re-opened after 4 days with the front half of the stalls out of bounds, only to have to close again and cancel 3 more screenings when preparations for Storm Dennis the following weekend necessitated full deployment of our flood gates once more, losing us three Saturday film screenings. Despite cancelling 9 openings and reducing our seating capacity in the Stalls by 43%, February was otherwise an excellent month with audience numbers again averaging 100 people per screening.

Our experience in 2015 with flooding made recovery this time around easier. Whilst the cinema was still under water the trusted seating and flooring contractors were contacted and invited to get started with replacement items and building recovery. Our amazing Friends of the Picture House and HRTC staff team swung into action and volunteered by cleaning up and heaving out all the damaged contents, enabling us to reopen for the weekly Thursday Elevenses screening. Conservation approaches taken in 2016 when repairing the building from the larger flood have paid off, and as the interior walls of the auditorium are plastered in lime, they are being left to dry naturally, before being repainted in 2021: the plasterwork remains intact. We had an important deadline to hit in terms of making the stalls comfortable and attractive and importantly back to full capacity: the second Hebden Bridge Film Festival, which was scheduled for the end of March 2020.

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Sadly, as Coronavirus spread quickly around the globe, we experienced a couple of weeks of declining audience numbers as public health advice to reduce social mixing was heeded, coupled with confirmed film titles being cancelled as distributors started to pull their wares from the market. Things came to a head on Monday 16<sup>th</sup> March, a week before the first national lockdown due to the declared Covid-19 pandemic, when our evening audience was only 4 people. It was clear that for the safety of our staff and customers we needed to close the cinema, and we made this decision the next morning, ahead of the Government closing cinemas in the UK later in the week and a week before the first national lockdown was announced. Our trading year ended abruptly early, and the process of staff working from home and being put on furlough began.

Before the cinema's operations were disrupted in later winter / early spring we had been enjoying an excellent year. In May 2019 we streamlined our cinema hire packages for off-peak bookings (times when the cinema is not ordinarily trading) and listed fees in a transparent way so that potential hirers could essentially work out hire costs easily and immediately. The following month we launched our children's Birthday Party packages, allowing the celebration of a birthday at our family matinee shows with reserved seating, a snack box, party bag, film entry and most excitingly, a trip to the Projection Box pre- or post- film to start the film or switch the projector off, all for £10 per child. The scheme was well received and the feedback from those who enjoyed birthday parties with us was excellent.

October 2019 saw the launch of a new Membership scheme, which has replaced the tired Picture This scheme. The new scheme incentivises Members to join for 3 years at a time, with reductions on the annual cost for those that do, reducing our administration burden. Perks include free cinema tickets, discounts on admission and kiosk purchases and our 'Film Lovers' bring-a-friend-for-free screening each month. Membership numbers in the first six months of the scheme have been very encouraging, and as the scheme develops more Member offers will be added.

We identified an opportunity to develop a new part time role to better support me in staff supervision and day-to-day operations, and in December, Catherine Lennox joined the team as our first Front of House Manager. Catherine is responsible for the Duty Manager and Usher teams, the Front of House operations and takes a joint lead in health and safety. Catherine has a wealth of experience managing teams and projects and has complemented the rest of the cinema's management team's experience very well.

We know as we head in to 2020/21 we face the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic and full recovery from the flooding. We also know that the cinema is well loved, and very well supported. Thank you to cinema staff, our Friends colleagues and councillors at Hebden Royd Town Council and our wonderful and loyal customers for all the practical help, support and good wishes. Here's to a brighter time ahead as we move towards our centenary in 2021.

***Rebekah Fozard***  
***Manager***  
***Hebden Bridge Picture House***

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## Report from the Marketing Officer



We have continued to engage in effective brand and marketing activity to expand awareness of the Picture House and help to increase the frequency of visits from our existing customers.

An area of focus, to develop our communication efforts, was to update the Picture House website, working with a local web developer. We now have an improved responsive design – better for mobiles, tablets and desktop computers. The home page now includes a programme calendar, so customers can access information easily, therefore improving the customer experience and we streamlined all of our website pages.

Whilst delivering and marketing a strong programme of film and events throughout the year, other promotional activity included campaigns to launch our new membership scheme and cinema hire packages, outlined in the manager's report.

In 2019, we were keen to explore collaborative partnerships with local businesses and were delighted to launch an advertising and sponsorship scheme, enabling businesses to advertise in our brochure, website and on-screen slides.

We also implemented incentives including Summer Screen Sundays to thank our customers and encourage cinema-going at off-peak weekend screenings. A free hot drink or £1 off an alcoholic drink was offered when buying a cinema ticket for a Sunday evening film. This incentive is under review for the coming seasons when we reopen.

We've welcomed increased engagement on all three social media platforms with goals to improve our engagement and follower rate. We now have 5458 followers on Facebook, our key social media platform, which includes an increase of 2285 (over double last year's growth).

The number of Twitter followers is continuing to grow, and we now have 3853 followers. This platform enables us to work and communicate within the wider film industry, which has been particularly useful during the coronavirus pandemic. Instagram is continuing to grow and is popular in connecting us with the local community and visitors to Hebden Bridge. We now have 1835 followers, an increase of 31% from last year.

Our email marketing campaigns continue to be an effective form of communication helping us to reach our customers directly. Our mailing list audience is now 3,412 and continues to grow.

Changes were also made to our printed brochure. With rising printing costs and our commitment to working to reduce our carbon footprint and printed paper waste, we reverted to an A3 programme format, which received great feedback in the community.

**Lisa Murdoch**

**Marketing Officer**

**Hebden Bridge Picture House**

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## Report from the Town Clerk



The Picture House has once again had to face the challenge of flooding this year. It strangely feels very normal to us and I would like to start off this year by thanking staff, subcontractors and our insurers who have helped us once again to reopen so swiftly. The Picture House Manager goes into this in greater detail as you will have seen. Rebekah handles much in these situations and without her persistence, even as water subsides, and her experience it would take much longer to reopen.

However, the Coronavirus Pandemic is not something we were prepared for and it will be interesting to see how trading, or perhaps lack of it, in 2020/21 is affected and how the Picture House is supported and how it supports its staff, customers and suppliers. With these I would like to include also the two shop units attached to the Picture House whose rent is ringfenced to fund and support the cinema. These important businesses rent is invaluable to the Picture House and we would hope that in addition to supporting us you too realise their importance and frequent them.

### **2019-20 financial performance summary**

Despite a period of closure the Picture House again generated a small surplus. The flood and the associated claim affected the Picture House's year end results due to our method of accounting but we again achieved our goal of meeting all costs, investing where needed and providing a first class service for the patrons of the Picture House. Our reserves remain appropriate and we have restricted funds to support major works to the exterior of the building and to technical equipment within. Revenues have remained similar at the box office and the kiosk but we are managing our stock levels better and have worked to increase our margins in the kiosk. New contactless card payment machines and modern tills have helped this and we are confident that we will expand on this further.

This year's interruptions came at our busiest time and the coronavirus pandemic has obviously had an unprecedented effect on everyone. To still generate a small surplus really is a credit to the Picture House, even if it took hold towards the end of the trading year. We feel that the hard work of the past and the reserves we have accumulated will stand us in good stead during this period however long it may last. During lockdown we intend to consider our building, facilities, equipment and offer to ensure that when we reopen that our centenary year will be one to remember, as well as cherish being able to be together in the Picture House once more.

More detailed financial information is available from Hebden Royd Town Council.

**Jason Boom**  
**Town Clerk**  
**Hebden Royd Town Council**

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## Comment from the Town Mayor



As a town council we are unusual in that we run a cinema. We are perhaps even more unusual in these challenging times in that we run a successful, much loved, financially viable cinema which is both geographically and emotionally at the heart of our local community.

2019-20 financial year was, as exemplified by the Picture House Manager's report and the figures from the Town Clerk, a successful year for us.

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic central government imposed a national lockdown in March 2020 – I am proud that we closed a week earlier than this, having taken the decision that protecting the health of our staff and local community was paramount.

We look forward to the future and re-opening, knowing that we have an important role to play in our local community.

***Cllr. Dr Carol Stow***

***Mayor of Hebden Royd 2019-20***

***Hebden Royd Town Council***

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## Acknowledgements & Thanks

For their continued dedication and commitment, we thank the staff of the Picture House and those who support the Picture House at Hebden Royd Town Council; their commitment and energy remain central to the cinema's continuing success.

David Sin at The Independent Cinema Office and his programming team continue to receive our gratitude for their excellent advice and help in putting together an enjoyable and diverse film programme each month, and assisting with special events.

Film Hub North and the UK Cinema Association also continue to provide support and assistance to the cinema.

Thanks are always due to the Committee of the Friends of the Picture House for their constant fundraising, clean ups, support, questioning and continued enthusiasm. Their regular committee meetings to discuss cinema issues, hear from the Manager and develop ways to enhance what the cinema offers through their own schemes, such as the Making Friends group, really brings so much value to the cinema's core operations.

As always, sincere appreciation too 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.

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