

HEBDEN BRIDGE 
PICTURE HOUSE

Annual Report

April 2020 – March 2021



Town Mayor
Cllr Val Stevens

Chair of Picture House Committee
Cllr Dr Carol Stow

Picture House Manager
Rebekah Fozard

Hebden Royd Town Council

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Report from the Chair of Picture House Committee



A year ago, I wrote that ‘We look forward to the future and re-opening’.... little realising that the Covid-19 pandemic would mean we would only be open for a total of six days in the financial year 2020-21. Truly these have been exceptional times, not just for our local community but globally.

During this year we have been grateful that we had the financial support of the Town Council as well as financial reserves which we had previously built up and financial aid via the BFI Cultural Recovery Fund which enabled us to continue

our furloughed staff and ensure that we are in the best possible position as we once again look forward to the future and re-opening!

Currently the global picture for the cinema industry looks challenging as we slowly emerge from the pandemic, but Hebden Royd Town Council remains committed to ensuring that the Picture House remains at the heart of our community.

Cllr. Dr Carol Stow

***Chair of the Picture House committee 2020-
Hebden Royd Town Council***

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Report from the Picture House Manager



What a year for the Picture House, for cinemas across the nation and the for the world!

I little expected when we finished the 2019-20 financial year with our beloved Hebden Bridge Picture House closed due to the Coronavirus pandemic that we would be in exactly the same position, and in our third national lockdown one year on, at the end of the 2020-21 trading year.

During the month of April 2020, the last remaining cinema staff, myself included, were placed on furlough, as it became clear that the cinema would not be operational for some months.

We had no idea then that we would not trade again until October 2020, nor that it would not be until August that details of a national cultural recovery fund supporting independent cinemas would be announced by the Government. With the improvement in Covid-19 cases nationally over the summer of 2020 and the promise of grant support from the BFI myself and a core team of staff returned to the cinema in September to ready the cinema for a new way of trading again (and to continue the recovery of the stalls and downstairs areas following the February 2020 flooding).

The focus, leading up to our grand re-opening on Friday 30th October was on safety for staff and customers, and on sustainability. Much of my time was spent applying for four grants, all of which we were successful in achieving, to support our new safety measures, engage the community with our developing centenary Screen Heritage programme, develop our young audiences, and finally, via the major BFI grant awarded in December, sustain the cinema through a very disrupted period of trading with periods of closure and when open far smaller than usual audiences.

Together with Catherine, our Front of House Manager, we developed an extensive Covid-19 risk assessment and held Zoom return to work training sessions with staff members. We moved all ticketing online, using our ticket agent, TicketSource, and developed a socially distanced seating plan ensuring all customer groups were 2 metres apart from the next group, which reduced our auditorium capacity to around 25%. We worked on one-way systems, ensured our ventilation system went beyond the new requirements, and worked with Lisa, our Marketing Officer on clear messaging about how we would be operating and what customers could expect.

I worked once more with the ICO to develop an exciting film programme for October into December, and also booked in some alternative content events of theatre, ballet, opera and live music that had been recorded live in front of an audience. I put the pair of *It's A Wonderful Life* screenings on sale for Christmas Eve, a part of our Picture House annual programme that is well loved, and tickets for these screenings immediately sold really well.

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On the eve of our grand re-opening, news broke of a leaked plan to put England back into national lockdown with effect from the following Thursday. An announcement was made by the Prime Minister the same weekend, and after trading for just six evenings, screening two films and a recording of Uncle Vanya, we closed again on 4th November. This time, a core team of myself, the Front of House Manager, the Marketing Officer and the Head Technician remained working their part time hours, whilst the rest of the staff were furloughed. We were able to work on projects such as a thorough review of policy and procedures, risk assessments and manual handling checklists and develop the Picture House at Home programme of virtual screenings. Much time was spent on the specification for and procurement of a new box office system for the cinema, planning for the centenary year programme and celebrations and finishing the repair work to the inside and outside of the building at ground floor level necessitated by the Feb 2020 flooding.

At the start of the year we worked with the Friends of the Picture House on a new fundraising scheme to help cover the costs of the centenary programme and in April 2020 we launched the Centenary Patron scheme. The scheme (which the Friends of the Picture House kindly administered for us since all Picture House staff were furloughed for five months after its launch) raised over £3,000 in donations from 76 patrons. All of the funds raised will be spent on a tailor-made programme of special centenary events including curated film programmes, silent film with live music, an exhibition, talks, a display of one of our historic projectors, an oral histories listening post and a special extended Heritage Open Day in September 2021.

In winter, local restrictions prevented the re-opening of the cinema after the second lockdown ended in December and then in the new year a third national lockdown began, which persisted at the end of March 2021. In January I applied for the BFI for the ability to extend the use of the sustainability grant to the end of June 2021, helping us through the first quarter of the new financial year, and at that time we were asked to estimate our likely cinema re-opening date, which we gave to the BFI as Monday 30th June 2021, not wanting to be too optimistic about the ‘return to normal’ based on our experience in the Autumn and our over-arching principle that safety for staff and customers was far more important to the cinema and the council than profit.

We ended the 2020-2021 financial year having been open for trade for just 6 days. This was a difficult year. A cinema without customers and a film programme just isn’t the same, and whilst we survived the year and were able to use our down time very successfully, we missed the heart and soul of the business: our audiences.

We head into the new financial year hopeful of a fuller house and a fuller film programme, and ready to celebrate one hundred years of Hebden Bridge Picture House, starting in July.

Rebekah Fozard
Manager
Hebden Bridge Picture House

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Report from the Marketing Officer



Our mission is to celebrate cinema and filmmaking in all its diversity and to bring the community together through the medium of film. Despite only trading for 6 days during the 2020-21 financial year, I feel we still delivered this to the Picture House community.

In times of social distancing, technology and the internet provided us with a much-needed connection with our audience and we continued to engage with the community on our website, social media platforms and via e-newsletter.

The safety of our audience and staff was the main priority when we reopened and clear communication via our digital marketing tools was vital in explaining key changes to the Hebden Bridge Picture House experience.

Whilst we were closed for the second time, as the second national lockdown became local restrictions in December (which prevented us from re-opening when other cinemas were able to), we were delighted to partner with UK distributors, who also needed our support, to launch our Virtual Picture House at Home programme. This is an online offer bringing an exciting selection of films, including new releases, for you to enjoy from the comfort of your home. Whilst our priority is to be able to show you films on the big screen, we felt it was important to provide this platform to our audience whilst our doors were closed, as well as offering a service for those who are unable to visit us when we reopen.

This year has shown us the importance of community more than ever and that shared experiences are vital. Here's hoping that next year and beyond, Hebden Bridge Picture House once again becomes a place for us all to come together.

Lisa Murdoch
Marketing Officer
Hebden Bridge Picture House

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Report from the Town Clerk



This section of the annual report usually focuses on the financial performance of the Picture House. It is a section that has in the past highlighted prudent financial management, the steady improvement of facilities at the Picture House and our financial objectives for the future. We have been proud of the progress made during the Town Councils tenure at the Picture House and having dealt with another flood, in early 2020 it was going to take something out of the ordinary to halt the Picture House's progress and its security.

2020/21 saw the Picture House only open for 6 days as a result of the Covid 19 Pandemic.

The uncertainty that we all faced was tempered at the Picture House by the accumulated reserves as a result of our prudence in previous years. However, without the Job Retention Scheme, CMBC grant support, and then later in the year, safety grants to help reopen and the Cultural Recovery Fund the Picture House would have faced real hardship and difficult decisions. Rebekah Fozard the Picture House Manager must be credited for her leading role in securing many of these awards.

The Town Council's prime concern - the wellbeing of its staff - was achieved as a consequence of these measures and it has been able to build towards its reopening. Town Council Staff who worked throughout the Covid 19 Pandemic have to be thanked for their arduous work and diligence that ensured furloughed staff were paid, the cinema remained in good condition, enquires were dealt with, suppliers were paid, and the public were kept informed. I would usually expect to see these types of thanks in the acknowledgement section but the impact their work had on the financial position of the Picture House cannot be understated. I would like to thank them for making certain that there was a Picture House to come back to. Senior Picture House staff have been working since the start of new year to prepare for the re-opening of the cinema later this Spring.

It will take time to return to that solid financial footing and certainty of the past 9 years, I am confident that it will and the principles that were adopted in 2012 will continue to apply and hold the Picture House in good stead.

I hope next year to be able to discuss with you the numbers relating to our trading and the return to full houses once more, in the meantime the accounts remain available for inspection at the Town Hall.

Jason Boom
Town Clerk
Hebden Royd Town Council

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Acknowledgements & Thanks

Hebden Royd Town Council wishes to thank the following for their support during the 2020 to 2021 trading year:

For their financial support of the Picture House through the closure of the cinema due to the Covid-19 pandemic: the architects of the Job Retention Scheme, Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council, the British Film Institute, Film Hub North and the tenants of the Picture House shop units

For their support of the Picture House in other manners: the core staff of Hebden Royd Town Council who kept the cinema business going when all cinema staff were furloughed from April to September; the Friends of the Picture House who kept meeting regularly during the cinema's closure, to discuss ways to support the cinema and to work with the Manager to plan the centenary events and celebrations and for their support of our sanctuary seeking friends at St Augustine's Centre when the Making Friends visits could not go ahead; our core team of valued contractors who've worked to repair and maintain the cinema post the February 2020 flooding and in readiness for re-opening in October 2020, and the Independent Cinema Office who waived their fees and yet carried on supporting the Manager and Marketing Officer with advice and programming for the time period in which the cinema was the ultimately closed during the second national lockdown.

Finally, we wish to thank the patrons of the cinema for all of their support and kind enquiries, in which the support from the community for this cinema has shone through: from heaps of positivity on social media, the 80 people who paid to join the Centenary Patron scheme, people rushing to buy cinema memberships as soon as they were on sale again, those who sponsored seats, and the purchasing of online tickets in droves when we announced the re-opening of the cinema in October. The cinema would be nothing without the support of its customers from the Hebden Royd area and beyond.

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