

**WIMBORNE COMMUNITY THEATRE
CHAIR'S ANNUAL REPORT**

Review of WCT Activities for the Year 2019 – 2020



This report covers activities between October 2019 and September 2020.

Wimborne Community Theatre was active for the first part of this period with a series of workshops and research activities. After the pandemic struck in March 2020, many events were cancelled or postponed and most activity went on-line. We were unable to stage any productions, notably the second part of the Priest House Museum's project to re-open the museum. However, we continued to develop the Rivers Project through research and creative activities.

We also held several successful fundraising events in the first part of the year to help finance the running of the group and support future projects but unfortunately were unable to run such events from March 2020.

Preparatory Workshops, Research and Development (Autumn 2019 – February 2020)

A series of workshops and meetings were held to explore ideas and themes for the Priest's House Museum Project Part Two and an event at the Wimborne Minster. Later, Covid restrictions led to the postponement of the Priest's House Museum production.

- On October 1st 2019, discussions were held with the Rector and Church Wardens from the Minster about a possible event to coincide with the Minster's 900 year celebrations. This would have been difficult due to building works at the Minster and budget issues.
- Millstream Theatre and Wimborne Community Theatre held a joint workshop on Saturday November 9th 2019 to explore key objects for the Revival part 2 production at the Priest's House Museum planned for July 2020.

Concurrently we started to develop the Rivers Project planned for Autumn 2021 through creative workshops and individual research.

- At the workshop on November 24th 2019, WCT members took part in a process of creative mapping, exploring ideas about the meaning special places have for us as individuals, globally and locally, and why.
- As part of the research and development phase about the role and associations of rivers in Wimborne, members visited the flooded River Allen on 25th January 2020, walking from Walford Mill to the town centre on the look-out for suitable locations.
- On Saturday 8th February 2020 we met to consolidate our thoughts on sites and themes and clarify an outline for the river project.

Activities from March – September 2020 (Post-Covid)

After the country went into lockdown in March, we were determined to continue our work and thus have used Zoom a lot! We also used the website and Facebook actively to collect contributions related to the River theme and to continue to engage members and maintain our profile.

- We created a soundscape of acrostic poems written by WCT members. Each acrostic was written by 5 people with each line beginning with the letters of the word 'Covid'. The focus was 'in the time of Covid'. After writing a line each person sent it to the next person, and so on. Finally, each piece was recorded by the person who wrote the first line and a soundscape was created by Adrian Newton, using recordings made in his garden (the dawn chorus, Thursday clapping, etc.).
- We set up a Facebook page for members to post their thoughts and creative reflections on the theme of rivers. These were added to the website and discussed by members at a creative meeting on Zoom.
- We started to collect community memories by inviting local people to tell us their stories through a page set up on our website. This is ongoing.
- On Sunday 24th May 2020 members took part in a commemorative reading of the original production Mrs J Puts Out Her Bunting, devised by Wimborne Community Theatre in 1995 as part of Wimborne's VE Commemorations, and performed in the Cornmarket, Wimborne. We welcomed back 10 of the original cast members as well as current members.
- We met with staff from the Village Green Café at the Allendale Centre to plan an event on 26th September 2020 to coincide with World Rivers Day to publicise the Rivers production and collect river stories from the public. We also arranged to have a stall at the Wimborne Folk Festival. Both these events were later cancelled.
- On June 24th 2020, Tony Horitz was invited by Neil Beddow, Artistic Director of Bristol-based acta (avon community theatre association) to talk about WCT's approach to community theatre and heritage in an online conference.

- We were invited to apply to the Dorset Performing Arts Fund for a grant to finance the Rivers project. Led by Gill, work on the bid has been ongoing.

Further Activities

Christmas Social Evening

An enjoyable party for members and supporters was held at Jeff and Barbara's house on 12th December 2019 which also raised funds through a raffle run by Clare.

Website

Throughout the year there was ongoing work on the website, particularly to record our activities during periods of lockdown. The acrostic poems developed during this time were posted and development of the Rivers project continued through members providing creative contributions related to water. The community was also invited to contribute their stories, thoughts and memories on the rivers of Wimborne. There was a positive response. Gill and Barbara met several times in the year to review and update the content and continue to post news of our activities regularly on the website. We were in communication with Harry Andrews from Wimborne Business Systems Ltd. to help us with improvements and developments to the website, such as linking new posts on the website to Facebook. Harry has continued to provide an invaluable source of help and advice both in person and through email contact.

Fundraising

The first part of the year was successful regarding fundraising but no events were held from March to September.

- We held a Quiz Evening on 6th November 2019 at the Colehill Sports and Social Club which raised £313.80. We are grateful to Tony Horitz and Jeff Hart for stepping in and hosting this event and to Clare Small for organising the buffet and raffle.
- The Skittles Evening was reinstated after a year's absence at the new venue of the Colehill Sports and Social Club on 12th February 2020. This year no food was provided and although the event was successful, it only raised £135.
- Hannah Small also raised funds through selling face masks made from surplus WCT material.
- Our annual Treasure Trail planned along the banks of the River Stour was originally planned for 26th June 2020 but was postponed due to the Covid lockdown. Alternative dates for the autumn with social distancing measures in place also had to be cancelled. Thanks are due to John and Tracie Billington-Beardsley for compiling the trail which we hope to run when Covid restrictions are eased.

Steering Group

The Steering Group continued to meet monthly to plan events and projects, particularly the development of the Rivers Project, as well as to ensure that the group's administrative affairs were in order, dealing with matters such as finance, insurance and Safeguarding. The meetings were held via Zoom after lockdown was imposed in March with the one exception being a real-life meeting at Clare's house on 2nd September 2020.

AGM

Last year's AGM to review the year October 2018 – September 2019 and elect officers for the following year was not held as planned on 23rd April 2020 because of the exceptional circumstances of lockdown. Members received copies of the Annual Report and accounts.

The Steering Group remained unchanged, with additional support from Stewart Bullen on membership and subscriptions.

Communication

The website remains the main means of keeping members and followers informed of our activities.

Regular Mailchimp newsletters are also sent out and members are emailed with relevant news and dates of specific events.

We have worked on developing our social media presence through Facebook. Posts are also shared with Wimborne Minster Views and News and other local Facebook pages, which vastly increases our reach to the local community. A closed Facebook page WCT Creative Thinking was set up for members to record their creative ideas on the theme of rivers. Later Facebook, as well as the website, was used to collect memories and stories from the wider community.

Our PR has also been successful to some degree. Mags4Dorset published a piece on our activities during the pandemic and Jeff took part in an interview on Forest FM about the Rivers Project. In September John and Tracie Billington-Beardsley were also interviewed on Forest FM to publicise the planned Rivers Trail and outline our progress with the Rivers Project.

Future Plans

In the Covid world of today, planning is difficult. However, we will continue to develop the Rivers project in the hope that it can be performed in the Autumn of 2021. We also hope to extend our on-line and social media presence to further engage members and encourage new supporters.

Thus 2019 – 20 was a challenging year with events and activities postponed or cancelled. For part of the year, the group was unable to meet except on-line. However, we have managed to sustain the group and continue activities in the hope of better times ahead.

It was also a year marked by sadness with the death of Chris Dowdle. Chris was an invaluable part of Wimborne Community Theatre for 25 years and will be greatly missed by us all.

We raised close to £450 through two events to help finance the group and we are grateful to supporters who come along to events and fundraising activities. However, we need to increase our efforts and look for new fundraising opportunities to cover ongoing expenses and make up the shortfall experienced due to Covid.

Our thanks are due to several key people who continue to promote and develop the group's work, in particular Tony and Gill Horitz. Also, Tuppy Hill, our secretary, and Adrian Williams, our Treasurer, who manage the affairs of the group extremely well and also thanks to Ian Metcalfe for reviewing our accounts.

Jeff and Barbara Hart
Chair and Vice Chair of WCT
21.03.2021