

## **WIMBORNE COMMUNITY THEATRE**

### **CHAIR'S ANNUAL REPORT**

#### **Review of WCT Activities for the Year 2023 – 2024**



*Performance of "Let 'em Have It"  
in the Museum of East Dorset Gardens, June 2024*

This report covers activities between October 2023 and September 2024. Although we did not stage a large-scale production during this year, WCT was busy with various projects, such as producing a play for the D-Day celebrations, running workshops for a radio play and collaborating with Karen Wimhurst on the Black Lives Matter concert, *Voices of Freedom*.

We were involved in several local community events and started work on planning for our next major production on the theme of *Home*, including running a series of workshops.

We also held various fundraising events, social activities and workshops.

#### **Productions:**

##### **Voices of Freedom Concert, 24<sup>th</sup> February 2024**

WCT was invited by Karen Wimhurst to read poetry and key texts woven between songs by her choir, Palida, at the *Voices of Freedom* concert of new music performed at Blandford Forum Parish Church in Blandford. Rehearsals with the choir took place in Shaftesbury and Blandford on 12<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> February.

In 2023, Palida, alongside other choirs across the UK, jointly commissioned eight black composers to create new songs for an *a cappella* choir as part of a Black Lives Matter initiative. In the second half of the programme, they gave a Dorset premiere of many of these uplifting new works with WCT members providing the readings.

Cellist, Emily Burrridge, performed her solo work *Prayer for the Rivers*, originally created for Chartres Cathedral. She was also a featured soloist in Karen Wimhurst's new piece *Freedoms*, alongside soprano Abigail Fiddik and Palida Choir. Central to this work were lyrics by writer, Robin Walter, inspired by Roosevelt's Four Freedoms.

## **Into the Archive: A Radio Play, November 2023 – March 2024**

WCT members took part in a series of sound workshops led by Adrian Newton, who has frequently worked with us as sound designer on our productions.

Workshops took place at Adrian and Lynn's home in Colehill on 7<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2023, January 10<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> March 2024. The aim was to produce a radio play based on shared anecdotes, memories and stories about previous WCT performances, creating a collage of sounds from WCT's archive of over 30 years of original material.

In Adrian's words: *We are planning to produce a radio play about WCT, which will make use of the extensive archive of previous works. This is something different for WCT, and provides an opportunity to explore some new approaches, such as narration, improvisation and use of Foley sound.*

*Creating the play is a way of celebrating WCT and the amazing things it has achieved over the years, so there will be opportunities to reflect on previous plays and what WCT has meant to each of us, as well as the wider community. The workshops will be informal and fun, and participants will be invited to help develop the play as a collaborative process. Best of all - nobody will need to learn any lines!*

Extracts from *Into the Archive* are now available on the WCT website:

<https://www.wimbornecommunitytheatre.co.uk/into-the-archive-a-radio-play/>

## **Let 'em Have It, June 2024**

WCT was invited by Wimborne Minster Town Council to create a short piece of theatre to portray the story of the town's involvement in D-Day as part of events to commemorate the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Normandy landings. The play was directed by John Billington and researched and devised by WCT members in a series of workshops and rehearsals on 19<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> March, 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> May 2024 culminating in five performances on Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> June 2024.

*Let 'em Have It* was performed in 5 locations around Wimborne: at the Jubilee Gardens behind the Town Hall; the Royal British Legion; the Minster Green; the Museum of East Dorset and Willow Walk. We also added a performance at Streets Meadow Residential Home to entertain the residents, some of them in their 100s, who had memories of the time.

As well as reflecting on the impact on the town of this historic event, the performance told the true story of Frank and Betty Rattley, the parents of one of our members, Clare Small. Frank sailed to Normandy from Falmouth on June 6<sup>th</sup>, leaving Betty behind to continue her work in a munitions factory in Bournemouth.

The production was supported by a grant of £200 from the Wimborne BID.

## **Home Project**

Throughout the year we have been planning for our next major production on the theme of Home. WCT members began by exploring ideas about the concept of Home and what Home means for people living in the Wimborne area. Members completed a questionnaire and, in a workshop, brought along a precious object, told its story and its importance to them. Questions, such as *What does home feel like? What's it like for someone to move to a new house/town? How do you begin to feel a sense of being 'at home'?* were asked in the context of our home town of Wimborne, where the population is expanding, sometimes older properties are demolished and new home developments are completed.

- Further workshops explored these ideas and the Steering Group was active in looking for a suitable location for the production.

- Site visits were made to the old law courts/police station in the town but this venue ultimately proved unsuitable.
- The community was consulted through a survey available on the website which has had a good response.
- A flyer about the project was also distributed to residents on one of the new estates.
- Gill Horitz put an enormous amount of work into a bid for funding to the Arts Council.
- A coffee morning was organized for October 2024 to gather views from the local community.
- Production and Creative Groups were set up to develop the project.

This work is ongoing and the production is planned for the summer of 2026

### **Further Activities**

- **Additional Performances**

- We were pleased to accept an invitation to perform a short piece to open the Green Festival on October 14<sup>th</sup> 2023 .  
Planet Wimborne supported this with a grant of £100.
- On 9<sup>th</sup> December 2023 we took part in the Save the Children Parade with a float as part of the procession through the town.

The river puppets from *Secrets of the Stour* were called into use again for these events.

- **Reunion for Almost Forgotten**

On 10<sup>th</sup> February 2024 those involved in the *Glow Badbury* production in September 2023 met for tea and cakes at the Methodist Church Hall in Wimborne. We shared memories and watched videos of the event and the WCT/Millstream performance of *Almost Forgotten*.

- **Christmas Social Evening**

Gill and Tony Horitz kindly hosted a very enjoyable Christmas social evening on December 16<sup>th</sup> 2023. Many thanks to them for their generous hospitality.

- **Website**

The website was relaunched in September 2023. Subsequently Gill Horitz and Barbara Hart met over the year and also with Harry Andrews from Wimborne Business Systems Ltd. to sort out any glitches and make revisions to the contents. They continue to update the website regularly with news and posts about our activities. The new look website has been well received and complimented for the breadth of its content and how easy it is to use.

- **Fundraising**

- Fundraising has been fairly successful this year.
- The Skittles Evening was held on 16<sup>th</sup> November 2023 at Colehill Sports and Social Club and raised £157.50.
- The Quiz held on the 29<sup>th</sup> February 2024 raised £389.10 and was well attended. Thanks especially to John Billington for acting as an excellent Quizmaster and also to Clare Small for organising the raffle and a ploughman's supper which was enjoyed by all.
- On 12<sup>th</sup> July 2024 we held a successful Treasure Trail in the town, compiled by Sue and Stewart Bullen. Fourteen teams took part and the event raised £232. Thanks to Sue and Stewart for a challenging and original trail.

- **Steering Group**

The Steering Group continued to meet bi-monthly to plan events and projects, as well as to ensure that the group's administrative affairs were in order, dealing with matters such as finance, insurance, risk assessments and Safeguarding.

Sue Bullen, our Safeguarding Officer, undertook an extensive exercise to revise our policy and procedures in this area. Most of the Steering group and some other members now have DBS certificates and the revised documents are available on the website. Many thanks to Sue for all her work to achieve this.

The Steering Group relies heavily on Tuppy Hill's hard work and we would like to record our gratitude for this.

- **AGM**

The AGM to review the year October 2022 - September 2023 and elect officers was held at the Museum of East Dorset on 15<sup>th</sup> May 2024.

The officers remained unchanged. Sue Bullen continued to act as Safeguarding Officer and Stewart Bullen continued to act as Membership Secretary.

- **Communication**

The website remains the main means of keeping members and followers informed of our activities and the new look website is updated regularly. Regular *Mailchimp* newsletters are also sent out and members are emailed with relevant news and dates of specific events.

Regular press releases have been picked up by the local media and articles have appeared in the Blackmore Vale magazine, the Stour and Avon magazine and Dorset View. We continue to develop our social media presence through Facebook and sharing posts with local Facebook pages to increase our reach to the local community. We are grateful to Tracie Billington-Beardsley for her help and expertise in this area.

At a national level, an article, *The Remembered Earth: Imagining Landscape through Community Theatre* by Gill Horitz, was published in National Drama, Summer 2023, which examined the impact on audience and actors of making theatre in the local landscape.

- **Future Plans**

Our main focus will be on the planned production of *Home*, and in securing funding for this.

We will continue to organise our fundraising activities, such as the Quiz, Skittles and Barn Dance, and to look into other possible activities, such as another Games Evening.

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Thus 2023 – 24 saw us mount several performances on a smaller scale and start work on the next major project. We have strengthened our community involvement with projects such as the *Voices of Freedom* concert, the Green Festival, Save the Children Parade and the D-Day celebrations.

We raised around £800 to help finance the group and we are grateful to supporters who come along to events and fundraising activities. However, we will continue to look for new fundraising opportunities to cover ongoing expenses.

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. Thanks also to Ian Metcalfe for reviewing our accounts.

*Jeff and Barbara Hart*  
*Chair and Vice Chair of WCT*  
25.04.2025