

## **WIMBORNE COMMUNITY THEATRE**

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

#### **Review of WCT Activities for the Year 2022 – 2023**



*The Cast of Ways of Seeing, March 2023*

This report covers activities between October 2022 and September 2023. This was another successful year in the history of Wimborne Community Theatre as we staged a new production, *Ways of Seeing* at the Museum of East Dorset, and participated in a major local community Arts event, *Glow Badbury* at Badbury Rings.

We also held various fundraising events, social activities and workshops. Our collaboration with Millstream Theatre continued and we launched our updated and newly designed website.

#### **Productions:**

##### **Ways of Seeing, March 2023**

*“Such a wonderful group of performers who are engaging in their ability to tell a story and very much draw you in as an audience. Can't fault it at all. So many possibilities that you can go down with immersive theatre like Ways of Seeing at the Museum of East Dorset.”*

*Ways of Seeing*, an inter-active multi-media show was the second production commissioned by the Priest's House Museum and Gardens, as part of the Museum's Revival project. The first, *Echoes of the Past*, marked the closure in 2019 before renovations began and this production was planned to mark the re-opening as the renamed Museum of East Dorset following refurbishment. However, the Covid pandemic and other plans delayed the project for almost three years. This production finally took place on March 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> 2023 with two evening performances and a matinee in the Museum.

For this project, in consultation with staff at MED, we chose and researched key items in the collection: Valentine's cards, the fresco found in excavations at the Roman Villa at Tarrant Hinton in the late 1960s and the black and white portraits taken by the early Edwardian full plate studio camera over a period of forty years.

The audience was taken in groups around the new Museum in true site-specific fashion, with scenes highlighting the key exhibits. The performance ended with an amusing film, *Searching for Echo*, produced by Millstream Theatre, who also performed one of the scenes. We invited Rowan Gotobed to be guest director working with Tony Horitz, a successful initiative for the group.

On May 20<sup>th</sup>, many of those who had taken part in *Ways of Seeing* gathered for a very enjoyable reunion tea party and to watch Alastair Nisbet's film of the production.

### **Glow Badbury – Almost Forgotten, September 2023**

*"You should all be congratulated on a magical production!  
I thought it was a really lovely blend. Well done all!"*

*Almost Forgotten* – The story of the Clubmen at Badbury Rings was performed by Wimborne Community Theatre and Millstream Theatre, with members of Palida Choir, on September 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023 as part of *Glow Badbury*, a large-scale arts project on Badbury Rings. It was produced by Emerald Ant, working with National Trust Kingston Lacy to create an exciting trail featuring 4 artworks and lanterns created by artists working with local school children and community groups. All artworks were inspired by the wildlife and ancient heritage of the Rings.

WCT was invited to create a new piece of theatre to portray the story of the Dorset Clubmen and the gathering of 4000 of them on Badbury Rings in May 1645 during the English Civil War.

In May, we invited local historian, Haydn Wheeler, to tell us about the history of the Clubmen in Dorset, and their proclamation, *Desires and Resolutions*. Haydn's in-depth knowledge caught our interest and imagination, and we ran a series of workshops exploring the themes.

With composer, Karen Wimhurst, we created two songs using the texts from the Clubmen's proclamation. Karen set these to music and rehearsed the songs with a new WCT choir.

Choreographer, Claire Benson, helped the group to move as an ensemble on the uneven territory of the Rings.

We rehearsed and planned the production from April to September, with Will Dowland joining us as Assistant Artistic Director. The Steering Group also undertook two visits to the site at night to check on how to make effective use of lighting and sound in the dark.

Clare and Hannah Small also ran a workshop in August 2023 from Clare's home to produce the flags used in the production.

### **Further Activities**

- **Additional Performances**

- We were delighted to accept an invitation to perform a short piece to open the Green Festival on October 15<sup>th</sup> 2022 .
- On 10<sup>th</sup> December 2022 we took part in the Save the Children Parade with a float as part of the procession through the town.
- On January 17<sup>th</sup> 2023, a group of us participated in the Wassailing event at Dean's Court at Sir William Hanham's invitation.

The river puppets from *Secrets of the Stour* proved particularly effective on these occasions to accompany a short performance.

- **Creative Workshops**

WCT invited two members of the group to share their skills with us in two workshops to help develop our expertise in these areas.

On October 11<sup>th</sup> 2022, Nichola Christie ran a session on voicework and on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2022, John Billington worked with us on characterisation. Both workshops were both inspiring and useful training for the group.

- **Christmas Social Evening**

Viv and Dave Arkell kindly hosted a very enjoyable Christmas social evening on December 17<sup>th</sup> 2022. Many thanks to them for their generous hospitality. The Christmas raffle raised £46.

- **Website**

The website was finally relaunched in September 2023. Gill and Barbara met many times over the year and also with Harry Andrews from Wimborne Business Systems Ltd. to produce a new look for the website. In spite of some initial glitches this is now up and running and is being used not only by the group but more widely, e.g. by schools to research community theatre.

We are grateful to the Valentine's Trust whose original grant enabled us to develop the new website.

- **Grants and Fundraising**

- We were fortunate that both *Ways of Seeing* and *Almost Forgotten* were funded by grants allocated by the Museum of East Dorset and Emerald Ant respectively.
- A further application to the Valentine's Trust to purchase a projector was successful and we were able to buy both a projector and some speakers with the £2000 awarded.
- Fundraising has been particularly successful this year and the Quiz held on the 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2023 raised £493 and was attended by around 80 people. Thanks especially to John Billington for being an excellent Quizmaster and also to Clare Small for organising the raffle and the buffet.
- The Skittles Evening was held on 9<sup>th</sup> November 2022 at Colehill Sports and Social Club and was attended by 22 people, raising £157.50.
- On 14<sup>th</sup> July 2023 we held a Games Evening for the first time and raised £217. The event had to be moved from Holt Green to Holt Village Hall because of torrential rain. In spite of this, 27 people attended, mostly WCT members.

- **Steering Group**

The Steering Group continued to meet monthly to plan events and projects, particularly the development of the productions, 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.

We also carried out an exercise in succession planning and were pleased that members were positive about the longer-term future of the group.

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

- **AGM**

The AGM to review the year October 2021 - September 2022 and elect officers was held at the Olive Branch on 17<sup>th</sup> April 2023.

The officers remained largely unchanged but Anna Hillman stepped down from the Steering Group and Tracie Billington-Beardsley was re-appointed to the Steering Group. We were

very pleased that Eva Jessop-Small joined us as the Young Person Representative. Sue Bullen took over from Viv Arkell 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 Wimborne Minster Views and News and other 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.

- **Future Plans**

We are currently planning our contribution to the town's D-Day activities to take place on June 6<sup>th</sup> 2024.

We will continue to work on Adrian Newton's project to produce a radio play based on shared anecdotes, memories and stories about previous WCT performances.

We are also in the early planning stages of a major future project planned for 2025 on the theme of Home which will reflect on the concept, meaning and experience of *Home*, particularly with reference to Wimborne and the current developments around the town.

We will be continuing to organise our fundraising activities, such as the Quiz, Skittles and Treasure Trail, and looking into other possible activities, such as another Games Evening or a Barn Dance.

With reference to responses received during the Succession Planning exercise, we have identified the need to recruit new and younger members particularly those who are willing to take on responsibilities within the group.

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Thus 2022 – 23 saw us maintaining our tradition of successful productions and associated activities. We are still enjoying close collaboration with Millstream Theatre.

We raised over £900 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*  
24.03.2024