

WIMBORNE COMMUNITY THEATRE

CHAIR'S ANNUAL REPORT
Review of WCT Activities for the Year 2021 – 2022



This report covers activities between October 2021 and September 2022. This was a significant year in the history of Wimborne Community Theatre as we celebrated 30 years of theatre-making.

It was also an extremely busy year for Wimborne Community Theatre as we gradually emerged from lockdown. Our major achievement was in staging two successful productions as part of our project *Our Rivers Run through Us: Timeless Stream* in October 2021 and *Secrets of the Stour* in July 2022. We were also able to resume fundraising, some social activities and face-to-face meetings. We developed our collaboration with Millstream Theatre and were highly successful in securing grants to enable our work.

Productions:

Our Rivers Run Through Us, Part 1: Timeless Stream

"I was really impressed by the clear ecological message and the way that this was conveyed so creatively with the use of the animal 'puppets', which were visually very effective."

Building on the ideas, research and planning we had put in place the previous year, we initially staged *Timeless Stream* centred on the River Allen at Walford Mill. The production was performed as part of the Green Festival in Wimborne on 21st and 22nd October 2021. It was well received, particularly the puppets made by Clare Small. At the end of each performance of *Timeless Stream*, the audience was invited to write their wishes for the future of the River Allen on a paper leaf which were symbolically floated down the river. Heidi Stellar also ran a workshop at which the crayfish for our production was created.

We collaborated with Adrian Newton and Lynn Davey who curated the Exhibition *Undercurrents* at Walford Mill, visited by 94 people who were also invited to contribute to the creation of acrostic poems.

The exhibition featured recordings of some of our creative writings and visual images as well as a film produced by Millstream Theatre. Adrian also mounted a workshop on Sound Fishing and compiled a Sound Walk along the river.

A message to express our concerns about the environment was sent to the Guardian and to the local MP, Michael Tomlinson, and to the COP conference being held at that time in Glasgow.

Our Rivers Run Through Us, Part 2: Secrets of the Stour

"I thought it was an absolutely wonderful show, a new concept in theatre and everybody absolutely loved it and joined in, perfect in every way, the acting, the puppets, costumes, all just wonderful."

On 6th, 7th 8th and 9th July 2022, *Secrets of the Stour* was staged along the banks of the River Stour near Julian's Bridge. Initially we were planning to work near Canford Bridge and held a well-attended exploratory walk along the route on 15th January 2022.

However, access proved too difficult and we were fortunate to gain the support of Sir William Hanham who offered us his own land at Dean's Court.

We explored the new site on another exploratory walk on January 30th and adapted our ideas to suit the new venue.

This became a very ambitious large-scale production which at times was challenging for the group, particularly towards the end when key members of the production team and cast were struck by Covid.

We drew up an extensive programme of workshops and rehearsals, some led by Joe Hancock, in order to prepare for it.

We benefitted from the expertise of the guest director, Joe Hancock, from *Burn the Curtain* theatre company who brought considerable experience of immersive outdoor events. *Burn the Curtain* provided practical workshops to create props and costumes. The community attended a Talisman Making workshop on 7th May 2022 and a Makers' Workshop on 8th May was attended by experienced artists who produced the puppets for the shrine scene. WCT members and Millstream attended a further workshop on 28th May to produce the masks and cloaks used by the river creatures.

Clare and Hannah Small also ran weekly craft workshops in May, June and July 2022 from Clare's home to produce more costumes and props.

Creative, Professional Artists' and Production Planning groups were also established and Karen Wimhurst played an important part in directing the musical element and forming a choir, which included WCT members. Heidi Stellar also worked with us on set creation and produced the seasonal shrines with Stewart Bullen.

We worked successfully with Rushcombe First School who presented a song and dance which enhanced the opening scene.

For the first time we used a marketing and projects company, White Sheep Projects, to work with us on ticketing, publicity, social media and production planning. We enjoyed working with them and they greatly reduced the workload for some WCT members.

We celebrated our achievements at a Tea Party on 18th September 2022 where we showed the film made by Alastair Nesbit and discussed future possibilities.

Further Activities

- **Additional Performances**

We were delighted to accept invitations to perform a short piece at various events, including The Queen's Platinum Jubilee on 4th June 2022 and the SturBiz Festival on 27th August 2022 in Sturminster Newton.

The river puppets proved particularly useful on these occasions and we promenaded them through the towns where we also performed a short piece with an adapted script to large audiences. The occasions also proved useful to promote WCT's forthcoming production.

- **Christmas Social Evening**

We were unable to hold a Christmas party this year because of restrictions around indoor activities but on 18th December, we invited members to accompany us on Adrian Newton's Sound Walk of the River Allen, followed by a pleasant outdoor lunch at the White Hart in Wimborne.

- **Website**

Major work has continued throughout the year to update the website. Gill and Barbara are currently working with Harry Andrews and Toby Williams from Wimborne Business Systems Ltd. to produce a new look for the website which is proving to be extremely extensive. It is now near completion and will shortly go live.

- **Grants and Fundraising**

We are very fortunate in having Gill to advise us on grant applications and successfully obtained grants from the Dorset Performing Arts Grant including a top-up grant, ACE, and Dorset Council without which we would have been unable to stage the two productions in the Rivers Project. The Valentine's Trust grant which Jeff dealt with has also enabled us to develop the website. A further application to the Valentine's Trust to purchase a projector has been submitted.

We resumed fundraising this year and were able to raise £222 from the Quiz held on the 10th November 2021. Thanks especially to Tony Horitz and Jeff Hart who ran the evening and also to Clare Small for organising the raffle and the Covid-friendly food.

The Skittles Evening planned for February 2022 was postponed until November 2022 due to Covid.

We held a successful Fundraising Treasure Trail around Canford School this year on 2nd September 2022 which raised £108.00. Thanks are due to Jane and Julian Skellett for compiling the challenging trail and Clare Small for providing the raffle prize of a splendid hamper.

- **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. We were sorry to lose Charlie Williams as the Youth Representative in September 2021 but delighted that he was about to embark on a new adventure doing a degree in London and wish him every success for the future.

- **AGM**

The AGM to review the year October 2020 - September 2021 and election officers was held at the Methodist Church Hall on 21st April 2021.

The officers remained largely unchanged but Anna Hillman was co-opted on to the Steering Group following Sue Bullen stepping down earlier in the year. Viv Arkell continued to act as Safeguarding Officer and Stewart Bullen as Membership Secretary.

The Steering Group enjoyed a celebratory dinner at the Wimborne Pig for WCT's 30th Anniversary on 25th February 2022.

- **Communication**

The website remains the main means of keeping members and followers informed of our activities and will be updated when the new look website goes live shortly. 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 will be fulfilling our commitment to the Museum of East Dorset to provide a dramatic celebration of the re-opening of the Priest's House Museum in 2023. This will take place on March 10th and 11th and will be entitled *Ways of Seeing*.

We have also been invited to participate in an event planned at Badbury Rings in late September 2023 and pending a successful bid from the organisers, will be planning our role in this.

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

Thus 2021 – 22 saw a resurgence of opportunities post-Covid. We enjoyed a closer collaboration with Millstream Theatre this year and also welcomed the involvement of several new WCT members as a huge asset to our company.

We raised £330 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. Thanks also to Ian Metcalfe for reviewing our accounts.

Jeff and Barbara Hart
Chair and Vice Chair of WCT
26.03.2023