

# HEBDEN BRIDGE PICTURE HOUSE

## ANNUAL REPORT

April 2013 – March 2014

Hebden Bridge Picture House is owned and managed by  
Hebden Royd Town Council



**Town Mayor**  
Cllr Karl Boggis

**Chair of Picture House Committee**  
Cllr Susan Press

**Other Members of the Picture House Committee**  
Cllr Boggis, Davenport, Fearon, Halewood, Hodgins, Yorke

**Clerk to the Council**  
Jason Boom

**Picture House Manager**  
Rebekah Fozard

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# Hebden Bridge Picture House Annual Report 2013-14

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## **A: Report from the Chair of the Picture House Committee**

Two years after Hebden Royd Town Council took over the Picture House it continues to go from strength to strength. Our first year was marred by the challenges caused by the flooding of 2012 but in 2013-14 the weather was kinder and we have been able to press on with our refurbishment plans in order to bring the Picture House in line with the best independent cinemas in the country.

Perhaps the most exciting development this year was the introduction in June 2013 of 'live streaming' from some of the most prestigious theatre, ballet and opera companies in the UK. We began with 'The Audience' (part of the National Theatre live programme) starring Helen Mirren in the role of HM The Queen, then Kenneth Branagh's performance as Macbeth, streamed live from the Manchester International Festival. In Autumn 2013 the live arts streaming season began in earnest and we were treated to David Tennant as Richard II from the RSC in Stratford. War Horse from the National Theatre in February was so successful there were two screenings as the first one sold out a month before the live broadcast date. Ballet and opera have also been popular, although not as well attended as the theatre events – contributing significantly to the fact that for the second year running the Picture House has showed an increased, modest surplus.

We have introduced the Living Wage for all our Picture House employees and under the guidance of Manager Rebekah Fozard the improvements programme has continued with refurbishment of the upstairs toilets and enlargement and refurbishment of the accessible toilet and baby changing area off the foyer, part funded by a grant from Hebden Royd Town Council. The balcony is now more in use due to the popularity of the live broadcasts and so it was only appropriate that the toilet facilities in the entirety of the public spaces within the building were brought up to a decent standard.

Throughout the past two years, we have endeavoured to retain the unique features for which the Picture House is locally renowned – particularly the 'Elevenses' Club on a Thursday – whilst developing new ventures, such as the monthly Parent & Baby screenings, which are growing in popularity. We continue to explore the possibilities for new varieties of special screenings and live events.

Thanks must go to the volunteers within the Friends Of The Picture House for their tireless efforts on our behalf - their Autumn Open Day & Poster Sale, Christmas raffle, Autumn quiz and sponsored Spring Clean have raised £1997.00. In September a group of Friends also gave up their time to help decorate our two dressing rooms, a task that was begun by a team of volunteers from HBOS in June 2013. Special thanks also to Rebekah, Town Clerk

Jason Boom and all the Hebden Royd Town Council employees (both at the Picture House and the Town Hall) who contribute to our success.

**Cllr Susan Press, Chair, Picture House Committee**

## **B: Report from the Manager**

By the end of the financial year I had been in post as Manager for nearly a year and a half, and whilst it often seems that there are still many opportunities for the Picture House to explore and lots of minor improvements to make to the running of the business, and to improving the customer experience, looking back on the 2013-14 year in order to write this report, it does feel like once more, as a team, we have this year achieved a great deal in terms of improvements to the building, the cinema's programme and our unique offer to our supportive visiting public.

### **i. The Building and Facilities**

This year's major financial investment and building project came in the form of the refurbishment of the three remaining public toilet facilities – one in the foyer, and the ladies and gents toilets in the balcony. Work commenced in July and took rather longer than expected, but was completed during the autumn, and we are now better able accommodate wheelchair users in the accessible toilet thanks to the removal of a wall and better space planning. We're also able to use the balcony area more readily, as the toilet facilities are now clean, modern, and the walls free from penetrating damp.

Our dressing rooms had the attentions of a local builder in Spring to deal with areas of plaster replacement where damp had penetrated, the addition of some new electrical installations to increase the usability of the space by visiting hirers, and removal of very heavily peeling paint ready for our teams of decorating volunteers to attach. First in June we had the help of a team from HBOS who gave the two dressing rooms and backstage toilet their first much needed coat of emulsion. Then in September a group of Friends of the Picture House gave up part of their weekend and finished off the painting of the walls and the glossing of doors and window frames to smarten up the space for all users.

We invested in the maintenance of windows to the rear of the property – repairing the wood and repainting the frames to the ground floor back stage extension of the building. At the front of the building our night time concertina security shutters to the front steps were removed for repair, sand blasting and repainting to enable many more years of serviceability.

We've made some investments in our lighting too – outside our rusty and electrically inefficient poster (quad) frames to either side of the front steps needed replacement, and we purchased two new state of the art 'quad light boxes' with one of these being paid for by the Friends of the Picture House with money raised through their various fundraising efforts. We replaced the exterior lighting to the front of the Picture House so the steps are now properly flood lit at night with low energy, long life LED bulbs. We have plans for the coming year to replace the main auditorium ceiling lights and the foyer ceiling lights with very long life, low carbon footprint sealed unit alternatives, which will also remove the need for manual replacement of the ceiling bulbs in the main auditorium – quite a feat given the vast ceiling height. As part of this work new dimmer units will be invested in.

## **ii. Public presentation**

Digital presentation, installed the previous year, has enabled us to programme over the last year as widely as we did 5-10 years ago, as all current releases are now made available digitally, whereas by spring 2012 very few were being made available on the older 35mm film technology, which is why it was imperative to upgrade to digital projection. Sadly the national (and international) stock of 35mm prints of older releases seems to be diminishing as prints are destroyed by distributors, meaning that opportunities for using our retained and working 35mm projector have been few and far between, even when screening classic films.

This year we have been hosting public information slides during our cinema intermissions, spreading important messages from Calderdale Council in partnership with the Police, and from the Council's fostering and adoption programmes.

On the staff front, over the past year we have appointed a Bar Manager on a casual basis, to run our live event and special screening bars from our foyer, and in August 2013 we welcomed two new Duty Managers to our excellent front of house team. Behind the scenes, the Projection department was further strengthened in December with the appointment of a fourth Technician / Projectionist.

## **iii. Public offering**

Our first year of running a modest bottle bar from the kiosk has been successful, and we have encountered no problems with any disruptive customer behaviour as a result of alcohol being available before evening and weekend teatime screenings. Alcohol serving times before films are a mere 45 minutes, encouraging customers to buy just one drink to enjoy with the film. Bottled white, red and rose wine, beer, cider and pilsner have all been on offer from the kiosk and we've had a very positive reception to our decision to source our beer from the close to home Bridestones brewery who supply us with their Pennine Gold and American Pale Ale.

We've developed our Hire Package further during the year with a special committee of the Council being convened over the summer to produce a visible statement on our hire process, which was passed at Full Council in October 2013 and governs how all hire applications to the Picture House will be treated by the Picture House Manager, Programmer and Town Clerk. The resultant document 'Hire Policy and Booking Process' can be downloaded from our website, along with our hire prices, terms and conditions, and technical information pack, all of which received a timely overhaul and updating this year to become more commercial and transparent.

Hirers during the year have included Hebden Bridge Arts Festivals, three local primary schools, various charities hosting special film nights, commercial music promoters (both The Magic Numbers and Turin Brakes played the Picture House in the Autumn), an independent film director hosting his film's premiere here and the sponsors of an adventure motorcycling film bringing it to a bespoke Yorkshire audience.

In June we launched our online booking service, hosted by ticket agent [wegottickets.com](http://wegottickets.com), which has been used to sell advance tickets for live broadcasts and

special film screenings. About a quarter to half of all tickets for these events are now being bought by customers online. We also invested in a thermal ticket printer to enable advance tickets to be sold to personal callers at our cinema box office, which has proved very popular, as there are no booking fees for purchasers on paper tickets.

As a result we increased our Box Office opening hours by half an hour per screening, so the Box Office is as a general rule open for 1.5 hours (45 minutes before a film starts and 45 minutes afterwards) as well as immediately after our very popular Elevenses screenings. Customers who were disappointed not to get tickets to February's live broadcast of War Horse, which sold out a month previously, have learned the necessity of buying tickets in advance for the most popular of the alternative content events to ensure admission – theatre has proved the most well attended genre of live broadcasts we've trialled this year.

Unfortunately, we are not able to offer reserved seats within the cinema (a repeating enquiry from customers) for a variety of reasons: our seats (all being recycled from various venues) are not sequentially numbered; we have no computerised Box Office system to deal with allocations; and as we sell in both paper and online format this would necessitate dividing the numbered seats up between the two ticket outlets, meaning only half the seats would be available via a particular purchase route. However, following on from customer feedback from our early live broadcasts, we now sell the Stalls seats first before making the Balcony seats available, as most customers prefer the Stalls, and so those who book early are rewarded with a guarantee of being able to be seated downstairs for the performance.

#### **iv. Programming improvements**

Whilst the digital projector inevitably made programming easier this year, the reduced number of children's / family films being released (and the more stringent terms on which distributors would allow us to 'rent' these films – demanding longer film runs on higher percentages) made programming the weekend and school holiday matinee films more tough this year, and in this area we noticed a small drop off in audience numbers. Consequently, we looked to bring back some family classics, and had success with our winter weekend afternoon screenings of Disney favourites such as The Jungle Book and Mary Poppins.

We've been more flexible with our weekend teatime screenings too – adding and removing these from the programme as we've needed to in order to add in soft subtitled screenings, accommodate hires of the building, and cope with a weekend where two big releases have vied for our attention. Some weekends therefore have enjoyed teatime screenings on both days, but on other weekends, we have avoided risking 'splitting our audience' by screening a film twice in one day.

Film rental charges (being the percentage of Box Office revenue that is paid to the distributors of the films) have been on the increase across the industry, hitting single screen cinemas particularly badly, as we have no option to 'bump' a poorly-performing film into a smaller screen for the remainder of its contracted run as multiplexes can and often do. Accordingly we often have to wait a few weeks to take a film at an affordable percentage and on acceptable terms – terms other than a commitment to screen it for every single screening over 7 days (these are often the terms on which films taken on

release date are offered to cinemas). This means that programming for the cinema is a continual balancing act, particularly when you consider that the cinema seats a total of 490 people and so the overheads are large. We calculate we need an average of over 80 people attending **each** screening in the year to cover our running costs.

We've continued with our Parent & Baby screenings once a month, and as word of mouth works in our favour, we're finding the popularity of these Tuesday morning events is on the increase. Over the coming year we'll be looking at what other improvements we can make to our weekly and monthly film schedule to best serve our audience.

#### **v. Planned Projects**

We have two major projects planned for the coming financial year: the refurbishment and redecoration of the cinema foyer and kiosk area, and the replacement of main front of house area ceiling lights.

Shortly, the foyer redecoration and front kiosk area refurbishment will commence, with a new painted colour scheme, new curtains (to the front and auditorium doors, by the kiosk and the office stairs), a new flooring scheme and new kiosk counter top and front, to make a smarter and brighter first impression to customers. We've recently invested in 5 smart multi-functional waste and recycling bins, which are already in evidence in the foyer and auditorium, and which encourage staff and customers alike to recycle cans, bottles, paper and cardboard such as the popcorn cups.

The Friends of the Picture House have offered to fund the re-wiring and re-hanging of an original art deco glass clock, which once hung to the side of the cinema screen in the auditorium. This will be situated in pride of place in the newly redecorated foyer.

The Friends have also (for later spring 2014) scheduled an Open Day and Poster Sale and a decorating morning to tackle the tired staff seating and rest area at first floor level, which, once the decorating is completed, will also benefit from a new vinyl floor installed by the Picture House.

The kiosk stock room and bar stock room will have a minor overhaul with the provision of sturdy built-for-purpose racking in each area, re-fitting and strengthening of existing shelving, and the re-hanging of doors to enable ease of access and storage of stock – this is expected to be completed in the summer of 2014.

***Rebekah Fozard, Manager, Hebden Bridge Picture House.***

## **C: Report from the Town Clerk**

After a successful first year the Picture House has now settled into a confident routine. The principals adopted continue to be adhered to and strengthened.

The programme remains wide and varied and the successful introduction of live event streaming complements the cinema-graphic offering and has been well received.

All members of staff at the Town Council have benefited from the council becoming an accredited Living Wage Employer, one of the first Town Councils in the country to achieve this status, and we continue to employ and recruit local people. New staff have joined us at all levels and we hope that they will remain with us for a long time to come.

The building has benefitted from further investment, this mainly driven by a surplus from trading, and complemented by contributions from the Friends of the Picture House. The Town Council continues to support the Picture House with funding for clearly defined capital projects, this year the upstairs facilities received much needed investment.

As mentioned, the Picture House needs to generate a surplus to reinvest but it continues to serve the whole community, available for community use and open minded approaches.

### **2013-14 performance summary**

The Picture House has financially benefitted greatly from the introduction of live streaming, the larger cash contribution for each admission has seen turnover rise. Stability with the advertising streams and tenants of the Picture House have increased the contributions of income from those areas, a rise of approximately 40%. The introduction of Licenced Sales has bolstered revenue in the kiosk a rise of 12% overall but the perception that all cinemas are expensive needs to be challenged. I believe the Picture House offers value for money in all areas and we need to support the kiosk to make the Picture House viable.

The Picture House has again been affected, as has the whole industry, by sporting fixtures reducing audience numbers and the good weather last year had a negative impact at weekends and during the school holidays.

Expenditure, as is always the case, needs to be closely watched. As mentioned earlier the distributing companies of many of the films are increasing their charges and this applies to the Live Streaming which has from the outset charged high rates of royalties. We must be mindful of this and this is one of the two costs that contribute the most to the Picture House's ability to generate a surplus.

Staffing costs have increased with the role of a permanent Picture House Manager being fully felt for the first time. The Living Wage Policy has driven costs but the decision to give all staff who work for the Town Council a fair rate of pay is viewed to be important and justifiable.

As a publically accountable body financial information is available to all and should there be an interest to consider this information further it is available from myself at the Hebden Bridge Town Hall.

### **Acknowledgements**

For their continued knowledge and support the staff of the Picture House remain invaluable. The departure of the long standing programmer, Jonny Courtney, will be a particular loss, we wish him every success for the future.

Friends of the Picture House for their fundraising and continued enthusiasm.

...and finally to the many regular visitors to the Picture House, old and new, who continue to make the Picture House a vibrant venue, long may it continue.

***Jason Boom, Town Clerk, Hebden Royd Town Council***