

HEBDEN BRIDGE 
PICTURE HOUSE

Annual Report

April 2015 – March 2016



Town Mayor

Cllr Karl Boggis / Cllr James Fearon

Chair of Picture House Committee

Cllr Nigel Yorke

Picture House Manager

Rebekah Fozard & Richard Brown (April - July 2015)



The Town Hall, St George's Street, Hebdens Bridge. HX7 7BY • Tel 01422 842181 • info@hebdensroyd.org.uk •

www.hebdensroyd.org.uk

Hebdens Royd Town Council



Report from the Chair of the Picture House Committee

It is now 4 years since the asset transfer which saw Hebden Royd Town Council take over the management of Hebden Bridge Picture House. This time last year we were delighted to report that the turnover had increased to almost £400k, and, thanks to the hard work of Manager Rebekah Fozard and her team, the business was improving in all areas.

This trend of growth continued at the start of this financial year, with income and attendance figures broadly up on 2014-15. It was expected that we would be presenting another successful set of accounts in this report, as the first eight months of the accounting period indicated that we were building on the financial success of the previous year.

And then on Boxing Day, along with hundreds of other businesses and houses along the Calder Valley, the Picture House was hit by the worst floods the area has seen. The depth of the water at the front of the auditorium reached 5ft and every single seat on the ground floor was contaminated by flood water. The boilers, toilets, under stage area and the foyer were also hit, in fact very little of the ground floor survived unscathed.

The Picture House staff together with Hebden Royd's Town Clerk Jason Boom, members of the Picture House committee, the Friends of the Picture House, cinema supporters and people who just wanted to help got involved with the mammoth task of cleaning up. Remarkably, the Picture House only had to cancel eleven screenings. Audiences were advised to bring a blanket whilst the heating was repaired in January and watch from the balcony while the downstairs of the auditorium was unusable. The Picture House is a business and the show had to go on and I would like to thank everyone who helped make that possible during those difficult days at the end of last financial year.

Cleaning up was just the start. The cinema is a Grade II listed building and there was a huge amount of work to be done to restore it to its 1920s glory, but out of crisis comes opportunity. We recognised that the difficult redecoration of the auditorium (with its immensely high ceilings) was entirely possible while the downstairs was without seating. Other improvements were identified and carried out as part of the post-flood restoration. I am full of admiration for Rebekah and Jason who worked tirelessly to source appropriate suppliers and materials – you can't buy 300 art deco cinema seats at the local DIY store – and on behalf of the council and our local community, thank them again for their commitment.

Hebden Bridge Picture House is one of the best independent cinemas in the UK, but audiences in the first part of 2016 have not yet returned to their pre-flood levels, even following the re-opening of the stalls before Easter. This has resulted in a considerable loss of income, not just in ticket revenue but also in kiosk sales and we are sadly not able to report a surplus for 2015-16. However, I know that Rebekah and the Picture House team, together with the Friends of the Picture House, are working in a number of ways to address this issue and we are confident that audiences will improve as word spreads that the Calder Valley, Hebden Bridge and the Picture House are all very much open for business.



Report from the Manager



Prior to the floods, the year had been going very well. Audience numbers were up, our programme was developing with the introduction of unique strands for Saturday teatimes (classics, cult, 35mm and Friends of the Picture House Presents), and our wide range of live broadcast screenings continued to prove popular.

In November we offered all staff the option of permanent hours, and as a result now have all four of our main roles of Duty Manager, Usher, Projectionist and Cleaner staffed throughout the regular screening week by staff with guaranteed permanent

hours, being paid as a minimum hourly rate the real Living Wage. In March we recruited our first Head Technician, and we were delighted when Ben Gwilliam, previously a cover projectionist for us, was successful at interview. Ben has made some great improvements to the projection department and the technical capabilities of the cinema already. In March we advertised for a Duty Manager and two Ushers to join our front of house team – and in April we welcomed Cat as Duty Manager, and Sally and Lorna as Ushers.

Whilst continuing with the development and costing of our foyer and kiosk refurbishment the fire detection and alarm system used throughout the building was identified as being in need of an upgrade. Planning for this inevitably delayed the implementation of the foyer upgrade, so work on the foyer and the fire alarm replacement system thankfully had not been commenced prior to the flood on Boxing Day. We were able to have a new addressable fire alarm, staff pager system, much enhanced detection system and magnetic door controls for the fire exits installed in January and February.

Since Boxing Day I have worked largely on project managing the flood refurbishment work, liaising with the loss adjuster and around a dozen contractors to try and put the cinema back together again in a sympathetic manner, cost effectively, and as soon as earthly possible. From the immediate decision to lose one of our two dressing rooms in order to relocate the boiler room above the level of all previous floods, to quickly researching and commissioning bespoke seats for the stalls of the auditorium to overseeing urgent yet necessarily cost effective repair of the barrel vaulted 11 metre high ceiling it has been a rollercoaster last quarter of the trading year. Luckily I have been supported by some great professionals.

Surprisingly, whilst numbers inevitably plummeted after the floods, it was January, when we had no heating on at all, when we had the best monthly attendance numbers of this (overall poor) last trading quarter. Whilst our audience figures were below average for this time of year we weren't immediately worried by the drop in numbers, and assumed some were put off by the balcony's cramped and tired seating. The heating was restored during the last week in January and the stalls re-opened on Friday 25th March, but audience numbers do not reflect our return to standard seating and heating yet.

The overwhelming support of colleagues, councillors, the Friends of the Picture House and our loyal and returning customers has given me the strength needed to manage the cinema during these difficult times. All we need now is for our customers to flock to support us once more.

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Report from the Marketing Officer



Throughout 2015-2016 we have continued to deliver our marketing processes and procedures in an effective way as well as implementing new strategies, including giveaways, surveys and customer incentives, to understand our audience more and to promote our new products.

Production of the monthly programme is now entirely in-house from copy to design and layout, allowing a speedier turnaround and more flexibility with last minute programme changes. Circulation of this printed programme has risen steadily over the year.

A key development during the year was the launch of four new Saturday Teatime Screenings (Teatime Classics, Reel Film Surreal Reels and Friends Presents) which offered an opportunity to engage and attract new audiences to the Picture House. We introduced this new strand of screenings with Surreal Reels (funded by the BFI) and as part of our Halloween Film Festival, which was promoted in Yorkshire and beyond via radio, print and social media.

Amongst other key areas of marketing activity was to promote our film and live events programme to a wide variety of key contacts in the print, online and broadcast media as well as effective distribution of brochures, flyers and posters to maximise coverage in an effective and targeted way.

Social media has proved particularly effective in reaching large and sympathetic audiences after the floods, and Twitter and Facebook was used heavily by both the cinema and the Friends of the Picture House firstly to draw in volunteers to help with the clean-up and then spread the message of positive progress and being open for business.

The floods also gave the Picture House a positive platform to discuss the business on national radio with the Manager speaking on BBC Radio 4 and BBC Five Live in the new year.

Lisa Murdoch, Marketing Officer, Hebden Bridge Picture House



Volunteers helping at the cinema on 27th and 30th December 2015, post the Boxing Day floods

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Report from the Town Clerk

I wrote last year about the increasing confidence at the Picture House, how hard earned surpluses were growing and these reserves gave the Picture House a secure view of the future. Thank goodness our prudence and careful financial management had been not just talk. The events of the 26th December 2015 will remain with me personally for many years but following the initial 'fire fighting' I reflected and felt confident about the opportunities that laid ahead for the Picture House as a result of the hard work put in by so many.

I talked about continuing to invest in the building and we have done that, hand in hand with the renovation work, in many cases the opportunity being given to do long-overdue redecoration and minor structural work. Our reserves may well be heavily depleted but they were there to be used in this type of event and we now have a first class venue in a significantly improved structure; the business plan that was in place gave us the confidence to press ahead with quick decisions that were right for the Picture House.

2015 - 16 performance summary

Up until Boxing Day 2016 revenues were rising across all elements of the business, with expected rises in the generated surplus at year end. Obviously this growth has stalled, revenues have fallen dramatically as audiences have, in a reaction to compromised facilities during remedial works and the altered mind set of those 'going out' in Hebden Bridge. Perhaps the message that the Picture House was still open had not been communicated well enough but in these testing times it was an easy mistake to make. Costs rose rapidly due to the required additional staffing to operate safely from the balcony and need for investment to take advantage of the access in the auditorium. Strong trading surpluses were soon eroded but our historical surplus has allowed us to invest in the building further.

Our staff costs continue to be consistent with expectations, again the Living Wage providing additional financial security for those employed at the Picture House. Pension Auto Enrolment will also soon be upon the Picture House, associated costs have been estimated and we hope they too are accurate.

I hope by the end of 2016 - 17 the Picture House will return a surplus, and I feel confident that this will be the case. Should you wish to examine the financial information further this is available at Hebden Bridge Town Hall.

Jason Boom, Town Clerk, Hebden Royd Town Council

Acknowledgements & Thanks

For their continued support, particularly during trying times in the new year, the staff of the Picture House and those who support the Picture House at Hebden Royd Town Council remain invaluable.

The Independent Cinema Office for continuing to provide advice and help and for putting together an enjoyable programme for so many deserve praise; David Sin there deserves particular mention.

Thanks to the Friends of the Picture House for their fantastic volunteer mobilisation in the face of the flood, their constant fundraising, support, questioning and continued enthusiasm and immense gratitude to all of the other people who volunteered their time or lent us their dehumidifiers, mops and radiators in the early days of our recovery.

Once again, appreciation to the many regular visitors to the Picture House who continue to make the Picture House a vibrant venue, particularly those who braved the cinema in the cold month of January and made the most of the Picture House being open when much of town was closed.

We thank Rogue Robot Visual Industries for their gift of their skills in making films to help promote our teatime screenings and the Friends of the Picture House.

We also thank Alan Gardner, local Historic Building Surveyor of Alan Gardner Associates, for all of his pro bono historic building advice in the flood aftermath, and pass on our gratitude to all the contractors who have worked with us to put the cinema back together in 2016.