

Church Stretton & South Shropshire Arts Festival
Minutes of the Annual General Meeting 2021
Silvester Horne Institute, Tuesday 9th November at 7:30pm.

[Non-Trustees names redacted]

Present: 20 persons

Apologies for Absence: 11 persons

Alan Stockbridge chaired the meeting and welcomed the attending members and non-members.

The Minutes: of the previous Annual General Meeting held via Zoom on 27th October 2020 were accepted unanimously as proposed by Gloria Partridge and seconded by Kath Stephenson.

Matters Arising from the Minutes: none.

The Chairman's Report: was presented by Alan Stockbridge and is attached. This year we were able to have a Festival, albeit limited in scope by the Covid-19 pandemic. He thanked the volunteers who helped to put it on, and those who are leaving the committee. In particular, he presented Pat Gibson with flowers and thanked her for her huge contribution to the Festival over many years. He concluded by telling us that he was stepping down as Chair at the next committee meeting and as a trustee at the end of the year.

The Treasurer's Report: was presented by Andrew Robinson and is attached. With a grant from Shropshire council, good audiences at the outdoor performances and generous donations at the free concerts, the Festival completed the 2021 season by breaking even. Andrew thanked our previous treasurer, Eleanor, for passing on the accounts in very good order.

Appointment of Secretary: Joan Arnfield was nominated by Pat Gibson, seconded by [REDACTED] and approved unanimously.

Appointment of Treasurer: Andrew Robinson was nominated by Joan Arnfield, seconded by [REDACTED] and approved unanimously.

Appointment of Auditor: Ruth Whiting was nominated by Andrew Robinson, seconded by Kath Stephenson and approved unanimously.

Election of Committee Members: The following Trustees have agreed to continue on the committee for 2021-2022: Joan Arnfield, Sue Mitchell, Gloria Partridge, Andrew Robinson, Kath Stephenson, Alan Stockbridge (until the end of 2021), Claire Tocknell and Sandra Whitlock. [REDACTED]. They were proposed by [REDACTED], seconded by [REDACTED] and approved unanimously.

Any Other Business: Joan Arnfield pointed out that she attended every event in 2021 and thanked the 2021 Committee for producing a lovely festival in spite of all the difficulties. [REDACTED] expressed her pleasure with the outdoor events.

The meeting ended at 8:14 pm.

Signed: Date:

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

It gives me great pleasure to present in person – rather than on Zoom - my Chairman's Report for the Church Stretton & South Shropshire Arts Festival (the "Festival") for the Festival year 1st September 2020 to 31st August 2021. This has been my fourth year as Chairman and proved to be another 'roller coaster' in respect of external impacts upon the Festival and personnel changes within the Festival teams. But we staged a very successful, scaled-down Festival thanks to the significant hard work of a dedicated organising team and supporting volunteers, a Shropshire Council Grant and some good weather at the right time.

The support of the Festival Committee in such a difficult year has been greatly appreciated. So has the support & forbearance of my wife, [REDACTED], who endured my 'absence' for substantial amounts of time and an increased household burden. Sincere thanks to you all.

Organisational: Structure & People

Whilst computers and artificial intelligence have an ever- increasing impact on our lives, a volunteer organised and run Festival is very much a 'people business'. This needs some organisation and structure to work efficiently and effectively but we must never lose touch with the people who support and attend our Festivals, as well as those who play a part in its organisation and delivery.

As a Registered Charity and for general good order, we continued with essentially the same structure to our operations, ensuring full and open co-ordination between all the elements of our efforts. At the 2020 AGM the Festival Committee consisted of five Trustees, namely Pat Gibson, Kath Stephenson, Claire Tocknell, Eleanor Watters and I. In addition, the Festival Committee had three permanent guests, namely [REDACTED], Sue Mitchell and Sandra Whitlock. This left us starting another year without a Drama Director and a Technical Director and so I assumed temporary responsibility for Drama to ensure it was suitably represented in discussion and decision-making. We were also short of a Membership & Ticketing Secretary and a key Refreshments organiser with [REDACTED] having stood down with their imminent move to pastures new. (I talked about their valuable service in my Chairman's Report last year.)

The sub-committee (working groups) approach was maintained - to good effect – with some changes to the people in the groups. An ex-BBC trained engineer was still available to be our Technical Advisor and we had some other support but this was an area that needed to be 'beefed up'. In addition to the working groups, [REDACTED] again organised our Free Events and a few others had specific tasks, all of them linking with the(sub-)committees.

Having come forward from our advertising efforts earlier in 2020, Gloria Partridge was soon brought onto the Festival Committee in view of her experience in organising other cultural events, her continued involvement in the Arts in Shrewsbury and her creative writing skills. During the year Gloria was co-opted by the Festival Committee as a Trustee. Gloria has proved to be a very committed and enthusiastic Trustee.

Early in 2021 our Treasurer & Trustee, Eleanor Watters, advised that she was moving back to the South of England as soon as arrangements could be finalised. This was a real blow as Eleanor's experience enabled her to swiftly settle into the role and to subsequently make some process improvements in discussion with Festival colleagues. Our search for a new Treasurer & Trustee eventually bore fruit and Andrew Robinson, also a qualified accountant, accepted the position. The process of changing signatories at our three Banks inevitably took many weeks and in the latter half of the Festival Andrew was fully operational. Andrew brings some different skills which will be a great asset moving forward.

A little later in the year, on having more time available, Sue Mitchell advised her willingness to become a Trustee. She was also co-opted by the Festival Committee. Since then, Sue has made an even greater contribution to Festival affairs. More recently Sandra Whitlock came forward expressing her willingness to become a Trustee and she was readily co-opted. Joan Armfield was co-opted as a Trustee at the same time, returning after a break from her earlier long stint as a Trustee.

Advertising to fill the specific Festival Committee vacancies and for those in our working groups has continued all year with some successes. At the very end of the Festival year Sandra Whitlock took on the role of Drama Director and has been enthusiastically researching & planning a Drama programme for 2022.

Finally in this section I have to report that Pat Gibson has now decided to stand down after 11+ years involvement in many areas most, if not all, as a Trustee. Originally sharing the Membership & Ticketing role with [REDACTED] – for which a split of the work proved very difficult to operate effectively – Pat has been heavily involved in at least Drama, Refreshments and as Secretary. She has been a dedicated and very hard-working Trustee, always supporting the team efforts and acting with much graciousness. We wish Pat a welcome rest. [REDACTED], too, as he stands down from his Photography role within the Exhibition team for which aspect has helped develop the focus and extent of exhibits. He has exhibited as well photographic and craft items.

Volunteers, Sponsors, Supporters and Friends of the Festival

Volunteers are also vital to the running and success of our Festivals. For the 2021 Festival – more on that later – we called upon the support of our year-round volunteers and the many volunteer helpers at Festival time. Very different roles were enthusiastically taken on and I thank every one of them for the part they played and their excellent support. A course was organised to (re-)train First Aid volunteers so that they had the required Certification. The presence of a First Aid team undoubtedly gave reassurance to everyone at events and their services were called upon on a few occasions. [One being to help ‘yours truly’ who had a serious nose bleed one morning before the start of a Free Event.]

Our sponsors have provided generous support over the years which has been much appreciated and a vital source of income. Despite our not seeking sponsorship monies again in view of the economic impact of the Covid-19 we had the pleasure of thanking a few of them for generously sending us monies. We do hope that our sponsors will support us again for our 2022 Festival. We do have a few Donors who also generously paid us monies and we hope they will also support us again. We did not need to approach many of our supporters who provide other benefits. Again, we hope that these businesses will provide future support.

The “Friends of the Festival” (‘Members’) arrangement has for many years offered the benefits of advanced bookings, price reductions and priority seating at School events. (Such ‘Members’ can also vote at our AGM.) This had provided for many years a substantial source of our ticket sales and Exhibition visitors. Alas we were unable to continue to offer the benefits in 2021 but many continued to pay their 2021 Membership Fee regardless which was much appreciated. During the year [REDACTED] took on the role of Membership Secretary to maintain the list of Members and deal with some membership enquiries.

Covid-19 Pandemic: Shaping the 2021 Festival

Having had to cancel the 2020 Festival, in the summer of 2020 reduced virus incidence rates enabled relaxation of lockdown restrictions. The Festival Committee undertook planning a 2021 Festival, for the Music & Drama programme inviting back the scheduled 2020 performers. Such arrangements were on a provisional basis. By the autumn the holding of large audience, indoor events looked very problematic but we hoped at least an Exhibition, and the Free Events could be held.

Shropshire Council approached us about a “Hotel & Leisure Small Business Grant” to help us get going again in 2021. We applied for a Grant to be used to stage an Outdoor Event which was normally unaffordable because of the substantial infrastructure costs involved with no purpose built or natural such local venue to hire. The Festival Committee was though still conscious of the impact of weather and so the huge potential range of financial outcomes. The Grant for £5,000 was successfully secured.

As time progressed large, indoor events became impossible to hold. Church Stretton School was also unavailable to consider for holding our Exhibition. So, focus turned to the Free Events and three Outdoor Events. An ‘Outdoor Events Team’, reporting to the Festival Committee, was established at the beginning of 2021, taking on an incredible amount of work to organise Outdoor Events with minimal experience. This team of five Trustees was joined by [REDACTED] whose experience from organising trade fairs and enthusiastic efforts were very beneficial. For the Ticketing, the service provider “TicketSource” was used and proved to be very efficient though the set-up work was

substantial. In April the Festival Committee gave the ‘green light’ to proceed with the scaled-down 2021 Festival that triggered signing all the contracts.

To deliver the Festival there was still much to do including finalising ‘social distancing’ arrangements & signage, a comprehensive Shropshire Council ‘risk assessment & reporting’, reduced publicity (no Brochure) but still trying to reach at least the immediate local community, planning the roles of volunteers at events, obtaining volunteers to assist and much more. More people on the Festival Committee (who were not in the Outdoor Events Team) were involved in all the support work and special thanks must go to Andrew Hall for his invaluable help with the risk assessment and reporting.

Despite the Covid-19 pandemic ██████████ managed to find excellent performers and organists for the Free Events. These events also required more planning and enhanced organisation to cope with ‘social distancing’ requirements and TicketSource was used for the bookings, cancellations and re-bookings with some notable support from the Festival team.

2021 Festival: Outcome

All the Free Events were well-received and ran very smoothly. Those who attended welcomed the chance to go to live events again and the total of the small individual donations made reflected this opportunity. It was greater than even the donations in 2019 a most welcome though unexpected outcome for the organisers.

Kath Stephenson booked good weather for the Festival Outdoor Events and this actually arrived for the days ordered - a far different outcome to the delays many experienced with their on-line delivery requests! At least the four weekends either side of the mid-Festival weekend had some very poor weather days. The Saturday night was sold out and there was a very large audience on the Tuesday afternoon. The latter was very heartening as it was a Family Show but was still attended by many older age couples who thoroughly enjoyed the experience. All three events were very well-performed, with Illyria’s “HMS Pinafore” on Saturday night quite outstanding.

Despite the huge range of financial outcomes for this Festival, from a very substantial deficit to a modest surplus, the financial result was a small surplus which the Festival Committee considers an excellent outcome in the circumstances. The Treasurer’s Report will say more about the financial result when I at last finish talking. It means that our “Emergency Fund” remains intact enabling the Festival Committee to continue to operate as in the past, booking events and being able to withstand a notable financial deficit should some calamity occur.

2022 Festival

The dates for the 2022 Festival were established a while ago as 23rd July to 6th August 2022 – our normal fortnight – with only Exhibition collections on the morning of Sunday 7th August 2022. But we have recently managed to obtain access to the wonderful venue at Concord College on Saturday 13th August 2022 at which the final Festival event will be held. The Festival Committee decided this was an opportunity that could not be missed!

To proceed with a 2022 Festival, considerations have included:

- Filling vacancies on the organising committees – fortunately, at the last minute a few more people have offered their services but there is still the need for more helpers and efforts will continue to find people and/or alternative solutions.
- ‘Social distancing’ – the need for ‘social distancing’ has been assumed to be incredibly unlikely next summer.
- Venues not available – alas there is no guarantee that Church Stretton School will be available because of the most likely need for required building works & repairs during the 2022 summer holiday break. However, St Lawrence Primary School has agreed to our hiring various rooms for our Exhibition, St Laurence’s Church is available and we have secured the Silvester Horne Institute for a number of days.

It is believed that we will find willing helpers to run events and that audience demand will again be high.

Compared with 2019, a slightly reduced programme of Music & Drama events is currently being finalised and booked. There will be a couple of free evenings and the very labour intensive Tea Time concert will not feature. But there will be plenty of variety on offer and the return of acclaimed performers at recent Festivals.

The Art, Crafts & Photography Exhibition will return and be held at St Lawrence Primary School, its venue in the early days. Creative use of various rooms will enable a substantial volume of exhibits and a number of the ever-popular Workshops.

Free Events will again feature with a range of Coffee Concerts & Organ Recitals arranged by [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. The details of these are booked later in the year and will appear on the Festival website in the Spring.

More details will feature on the Festival website www.strettonfestival.org.uk over the coming weeks.
And Beyond

For the Festival to continue to thrive going forward, able recruits will need to be found to fill important roles on the Festival Committee, within the year-round supporting teams and just before & during the Festival. This will undoubtedly continue to be difficult as various organisations have also experienced increasing problems finding volunteers.

Since the 2019 Festival a few hosts are not now available to provide accommodation for performers. It is good fun for the hosts and greatly appreciated by the performers who can enjoy a more relaxing intimate & social atmosphere. We shall be searching for more hosts over the years.

Whilst this summer Festival fill quite a niche in the local entertainment marketplace, complacency must be avoided and changing preferences of our audiences taken into account in programming. There is also the to keep track of major successful developments because, if nothing else, they can impact upon the available monies to spend on the Festival. Yet greater usage of social media will be required for recruitment and publicity purposes. There is an ever greater need to work with other providers of Arts & Culture events in the community to ensure cohesion and cross-benefits from our different activities at different times.

And Finally

At the first Festival Committee meeting after the AGM the Chairman for the year is elected by the Trustees. I shall not be seeking re-election for various reasons and indeed at the end of the year I shall stand down as a Trustee.

As I move away from the various roles of the last 6+ years, I do so in the knowledge that I have learnt a great deal, worked with many wonderful people all committed to producing the best possible end result for the community and met many lovely other people along the way. There will be a very committed team at the helm and I wish them and the Festival every success in the future - long may the Festival continue and challenge individuals' boundaries with new experiences.

Alan Stockbridge
9th November 2021

TREASURER'S REPORT

Good evening

It gives me pleasure to present my first Treasurers Report with the draft preliminary results for the Church Stretton Arts Festival for the year ended 31 August 2021. You should have a copy of the draft receipts and payments account and statement of assets and liabilities for this year. These figures are still subject to review and agreement with the independent examiner, Ruth Whiting of RLW Accountants, who has been engaged to fulfil this role. Ruth has also confirmed that she would be happy to be appointed in this role for 2021/22. Later in the agenda, we will be seeking approval from members to appoint Ruth Whiting of RLW Accountants to continue in her existing role.

With the Pandemic still prominent in everyone's lives this year was always going to make things more complex, but the reduced programme of events was very much appreciated at this difficult time. Overall, our total income from the 3 outdoor performances and coffee morning events generated £19,083.74. In terms of expenses, the programme was delivered at a cost of £18,822.08. Therefore, even though it has been a challenging year, I am pleased to report that we made a provisional surplus of £261.66.

This year our ticket sales income was £8,785.57. In 2021, 220 people attended our ticketed performances. The main differences of those items of expenditure this year compared to the past were in respect of the cost of putting on outdoor events. The cost of Fencing (£1,230), Security Staff (£1,305.36), toilet hire (£1,224), stage hire and PA system (£1,860) and a generator (£315.75). Again, this year, we provided a great range of performers as part of our Free Concerts offering. The donations received at these events were £2,409.00, which was a welcome increase on the £2,239.60 achieved two years ago.

Our other sources of income continue to make significant contributions to our funds with the main contributors being from a Shropshire Council Grant of £5,000. The Festival was fortunate to receive sponsorship monies again as we indicated that we didn't expect support in view of the economic situation caused by the pandemic (£1,260). We continue to be very grateful for the contribution and support our sponsors provide. Gift Aid and the Small Donations Scheme always provide an extremely useful contribution to our income sources. In 2021, there is a provisional figure of £339.30 though is likely to grow once my review is completed.

The surplus this year has been added to our reserves and the Charity now has reserves of £39,973.89 in aggregate. A decision was taken to deem £30,000 of these reserves as the Emergency Fund. The cost of event insurance should the Festival have to be cancelled is very expensive (and to date no partial cover alternative has been identified). Therefore, in the unforeseen circumstances that the Festival had to be cancelled, funds would be available to meet any liabilities or costs that we were unable to mitigate.

With our cash balances at the year-end, £23,010.00 was held in an interest bearing easy access account with Virgin Money, and the balance of £16,848.85 held in our current accounts with Barclays Bank plc and TSB Bank plc. Since the previous year end, we have transferred £12,000 from our Virgin account to the Barclays account to ensure cash flow for the 2021 Festival. A substantial portion of the monies in the current accounts with Barclays and TSB will likely be re-invested back into the Virgin Money account for six months to earn some interest. That concludes my report but I would be happy to answer any questions.

9 November 2021