

TOADS THEATRE COMPANY
Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on Monday 30th October 2023

Apologies for Absence:

Glynis & Bob Tame, Maggie Campbell, Andrew Bell, Rob Newman, Brenda Hutchings, Nichola & Stephen Aldridge, Maureen MacDonald, Jean Roberts, Jean Strong, De White, Gill Poore, Andy Killen, Adam Clark, Fi Humphreys, Daniela Hopkins, Roger Heath, Martin Sharp, Carol Pryce, Alison Lee, Colin Baker, Rona Perry, Jo Neagle, Alec & Di Stokes, Jim & Thea Redman, Lloyd Bickham, Heidi Pyburn, Janet Downer, Julie Robson, Lorraine Boundy, Sheila Buddle, Ben Tisdall, Rachel Field, Stewart Molyneax.

Present (names taken from the signed A.G.M. attendance register):

Anna Reynolds, Nicola Margetts, Jill Pettigrew, Alistair Conquer, Sherry Dudley, Julie Hancocks, Andrew Kenyon, John Miles, Nick Hewlett, Wendy Lockyer-Walters, Ben Field, Mary Quiriaqi, Elizabeth Moyes, Chris Robson, Joy Book, Jason Davey, Bevis Taylor, Suzy Miles, Jim Pettigrew, Nathaniel Margetts, Jaqueline Tarney, Anne Jordan, Joy O’Gara, Jon Manley, Mary Singleton, Steve Wreford, Adele Reynolds, Chris Mitchell, Paul Davenport, Peter West, Andrew Pryce, Alan Hargreaves, Roy Winbow, Chris Clift, Linda Ewing, Liz Day, Reg Bale, Julia Bale, Barbara Hobbs, Nicola Opie, Miles Opie, Cora Gant, Margaret Kirk, David Hancocks, Oliver Taylor, David Warren.

1. Acceptance of Minutes : Anne Jordan proposed that the minutes of the A.G.M. held on Monday 24th October 2022 be accepted as a true record; seconded by Margaret Kirk; agreed by all and signed by the Chairman, Anna Reynolds.

2. Matters Arising:

There were no matters arising.

3. Chairman’s Report:

Thank you all for attending this year’s AGM. It’d be pretty pointless without you! The bad news is you’ve got me for another year. The good news is that you’ve *only* got me for another year! We’re still emerging from the restraints of Covid and it’s good to see that audiences are at last feeling confident enough to come back to the theatre, which is good news for us. The Agatha, Dad’s Army and Baskerville were all incredibly successful. Hopefully, our recent presence on social media will help give us an increased public awareness resulting in an even bigger increase in ticket sales.

I’m pleased to say that membership numbers are slightly up from this time last year and we welcome all those who are new to Toads. We’ve increased our number of professional one -nighters, thus attracting audiences from further afield, many of whom have never been to the Little Theatre before! I just love hearing those words ‘well I’ve lived in Torbay for years and I never knew this was here’. We also managed to book the Teignmouth Players production of ‘Two’ for one night as a bit of an experiment. It turned out to be extremely successful, with an audience of over 100. As a result we hope to invite other amateur groups to bring a production to the Little Theatre. We’re now hiring out the theatre for various activities, bringing in more income and opening up the theatre to the wider community. As a result of the increased number of performances, including professional one nighters, it means that we have a heavier reliance on volunteers to man the various duties. The stage managers, the props and wardrobe teams, the technicians, the set builders, FOH, bar and coffee shop volunteers...you are the hidden people. You don’t get any applause, accolades or pats on the back, but you’re our mainstay, our foundation, and without you all we simply wouldn’t be able to offer such a large number of productions, many more than any other amateur group in this area. For a long time I’ve been aware of confusion about duties among FOH volunteers. Who does what, when and what time! I’ve made several attempts to try to clarify duties and unfortunately have probably made things worse! Consequently I’m going to hold a meeting with all FOH volunteers and then we can discuss everything that has been simmering for several years. You can all have your say and hopefully we can come to a mutually satisfactory decision about FOH duties. I’ll be sending out an email after the AGM.

The meeting will probably be held on a Sunday afternoon. Please try and attend if you can. I haven’t mentioned the maintenance team! It’s hard to put into words exactly how much they do. They’ve had many challenges this year and my heartfelt thanks go out to this hard working team. Last year, as you’ll all remember, we had huge problems with the heating that had everyone tearing their hair out. Heating an old building like this with stone walls and high ceilings is not a job for the fainthearted. but a dedicated few, managed to find the problem and begin to update the old and dilapidated system, luckily before we had to resort to giving out free hot water bottles and blankets to our audiences. Peter West tells me that the repairs are still ongoing. The updating of fire safety regulations, replacing old and sometimes dangerous wiring, fly tower inspections etc are just a few of the increasing maintenance issues. Nicola will, I daresay, give more details as to the enormous cost of maintaining this theatre.

We have a wonderful new technical team, David Warren and Ollie Taylor. They've hit the ground running and were put to the test in a big way for Baskerville...100 cues did I read?? They have begun to help update old wiring and lights.

Devon Young People's Theatre, run by Heidi Pyburn, is going from strength to strength and plans are afoot to make the Little Theatre into a LAMDA exam centre. Please continue to support these young people who are the future of our theatre. Last month we celebrated Toads' 40th year of being in this theatre, and what a celebration that was. It was good to see many original members and listen to their memories. This year Jill Pettigrew steps down from the committee. Jill joined the committee in 2012 and became secretary the following year. That's 10 years as secretary. I want to say that you get less for murder, but I think that's an exaggeration! and as if being secretary isn't enough, Jill also performs and directs. Thank you for your unfailing loyalty and hard work Jill. You can have your life back now! We are also losing Sherry Dudley, John Miles and Alistair Conquer from the committee. I'd like to thank them for their hard work and support. Some people are very quick to criticize. It's easy to criticize but harder to make *constructive* criticism. We welcome ideas about how to improve the way the theatre is run. If you feel that you have something to offer, please come and join us on the committee. There will always be things we could do better, but belonging to a committee is hard. The buck stops with us. Sometimes it feels as if we're damned if we do and we're damned if we don't, but rest assured that we work very hard to maintain the success of our beautiful theatre. Please let's all continue to be the strong team that we are.

4. Treasurer's Report:

After two years of losses (2022 deficit was £41,390), there is a surplus of £13,127. Although this is good news, it is quite small and there are a large number of maintenance issues which will need to be carried out (roof slates, rolling programme of fixing and/or replacing boilers (3), adaptations to enable annual inspections of fly tower equipment etc). **Income:** Ticket sales increased a lot in the financial year to 30 June 2023 and from July to October this year they have been excellent and it is hoped that this is a continuing trend. Patrons seem to be putting the worries of Covid lockdowns behind them. For the time being there are no plans to increase our ticket prices especially in view of the current cost of living pressures – we want coming to the Little Theatre to remain an affordable and enjoyable evening out. The Theatre Club subscription for tickets for a whole season at a discount will also stay in place (to be adapted if the number of performances in a season change). Revenue has increased from sales in the bar and coffee shop.

There has also been increased revenue from various hire activities – room hire, wardrobe and props hire.

Expenses: The expenses of maintaining and running the Little Theatre remain high, partly because of it being a very old building but one which gives us a very attractive and almost unique venue. There has been a greater focus on managing costs, getting alternative quotes when suitable and now on planning ahead to create a business budget.

Thanks – the maintenance committee for their focus on keeping everything going and also getting the best value for money, Alistair Conquer and John Miles for their work in keeping the film club and Wednesday club going – both provide entertainment as well as income, the set build and technical teams for professional results on a limited budget and for their assistance in forward planning, production directors and stage managers for keeping additional costs as low as possible while still achieving great production results, wardrobe and props teams for increasing revenue from hiring out items Jon Manley, Jacquie Tarney and Joy Book for keeping the bar and café going so well, both of which provide a lot of additional income, all members for your financial subscriptions but, more importantly, your ongoing commitment to carrying out voluntary duties to keep the theatre live. Lastly – are there any questions?

Questions: Andrew Pryce asked if costume hire charges had been raised since the last AGM. Maggie Campbell, who is the wardrobe lead, has done so, but exact charges were unknown. Peter West said that some hirers have been disappointed with this. Jill Pettigrew said that some hirers are also registered charities and a balance needs to be achieved. Ben Field asked what 'Charitable Activity Costs' referred to, as this figure had increased considerably. Nicola said that the accounts have been presented differently this time, due to her using an updated accounting system and these are CineMundi/social events £136, costume hire £115, direct expenses £15, programme costs £2,620, royalties £13,433, scripts £1,765, set build labour £6,700 and set build materials £2,060.

Peter West proposed that the accounts be accepted and David Hancocks seconded. All agreed.

6. Financial Policy:

This is required by the Charity Commission and Alistair has been responsible for ensuring that we are compliant. It is to ensure that risks are being managed. Two points had been highlighted for discussion: "Managing trustees not to have pecuniary interest – not paid for services in any way though can be reimbursed for expenses incurred". This would preclude some members from standing, due to their professional employment involvement with the theatre. The other point "a stock take of wardrobe and props" would be extremely difficult. Unfortunately, members had not had access to this document on the website, so were not in a position to agree or suggest amendments to the document. This could be done now at an EGM or with a quorum via an online poll.

7. Trustees Annual Report:

Alistair has done an excellent job compiling this. It will be on the CC website and members have had access to it through the members' area of Toads website. He said that there were two changes: Pg 4 "The charity made a small profit of £13,127" and Pg 7 "Alan Tanner resigned as Treasurer on 1st October 2022." The acceptance of the report was proposed by Lynda Ewing, seconded by Joy Book and agreed by all.

8. Nomination of Life Members:

Anna said that the committee were proposing Jill Pettigrew for Life Membership after 10 years service as secretary. This was proposed by Julia Bale, seconded by Margaret Kirk and agreed. Jill was therefore made a Life member and thanked everyone.

9. Election of Independent Examiner:

Nicola Margetts proposed that Peplows of Newton Abbot remain as Independent Examiner. This was seconded by Peter West and agreed.

10. Nomination of Officers and Committee Members

Nomination for Secretary: Julie Hancocks' appointment had been proposed by Nicola Margetts and seconded by Linda Trewin. There being no other nominations, all were in favour and Julie was duly appointed for a 3 year term.

Nominations for Committee for 23/24: Andrew Kenyon and Paul Davenport had been proposed and seconded. There being two nominations for six positions, all agreed and they were duly elected to the committee for 1 year. In view of the fact that a quorum of five is required for committee decisions, Anna said that the new committee would need to co-opt some members in order for it to function adequately.

11. Any other business.

- **Approval of Revised Constitution**

Alistair reported that the current Constitution lodged with the Charity Commission dates from 2007. There have been changes and reversals to it since that date, but these have not been formally recognized and accepted. The revised constitution has been available for members to peruse on the website members area and a query received from Andrew Pryce about 8.3 "all involved in a production should be fully paid-up members". This has not always been the case if an actor has had to be invited from outside to fulfill a specific role. There will be an addition to state that this is at committee discretion. Alistair proposed that the new constitution be accepted. Liz Day seconded this and all agreed.

Anna thanked Alistair for all his work.

Alistair thanked Alec Stokes and Jean Roberts for finding the title deeds and explained the role of the four custodian trustees. Two new ones have stepped up to fill vacancies. Thanks go to Jon Manley and Nichola Aldridge for agreeing to do so.

From the floor, Linda Ewing thanked the committee for their work during some difficult years.

The meeting closed at 8.20pm

Jill Pettigrew (Hon. Secretary)

October 30th 2023

Minutes accepted as a true record

Signature.....Date.....

Open Forum

Toilets: Margaret Kirk said that she'd heard there were plans to update the ladies toilets and asked for confirmation. This is the case, and the maintenance group are currently obtaining quotes for refurbishment and repairs. Adele Reynolds asked how often the back stage toilets are cleaned as there are often spiders and woodlice in them. John said that he would look into this and ask the cleaner Jodie

Margaret Kirk asked if the two toilets adjacent to the stage and kitchen could be converted to one unisex toilet with a hand wash basin. This could be difficult to do, not only because of the space but also the need for minors in productions to have separate toilet facilities, leading to great pressure on the stage door toilet with cast, crew and rehearsal people.

Coffee Shop Prices: Suzy Miles said that she didn't want to step on Joy's toes, but feels that we are undercharging for tea and coffee. Coffee is £1.50 and tea £1.20. It was said that the cups are small, unlike in many cafes and the coffee is not specialist. Jon said that as we don't pay wages as other theatres do, we can keep prices lower than in other venues for the benefit of our patrons. This applies to the bar too, though prices have increased. There is a profit margin of £1.50 on every ice-cream sold now.

Heating: Peter West said that one boiler has a water leak and one cannot be used. Engineers should be visiting on Wednesday to put one back into service and the second one too if parts arrive in time. The main boiler is 10 years old and out of guarantee, but will probably remain in service for the next 5 years. We should hopefully soon revert to the situation we had in March of this year.

Hand Gel: Paul davenport said that with the upsurge of Covid, patrons are asking for the two hand gel dispensers to work. They are either empty or the batteries don't work. Margaret Kirk thought that the supplier should be contacted. There are refills in the box office. For the maintenance group to look at.

Alarms: Peter West said that we will soon have an audible alarm system in the theatre.

FOH : Anna will shortly be arranging a meeting for FOH volunteers. This will probably be on a Sunday.

Polling Station: Andrew advised that electoral services have been approached to see if the theatre could be used as a polling station for the area. It would be a source of extra revenue. The decision rests with the Chief Executive. A review is due to take place after the next election.

Dark Weeks: There will be no productions in January and February 2025 as some essential work needs to take place, which will include changes to lights and wiring and rigging inspection. A date for a youth production or possibly one with the DYPT and adult members is a subject for discussion.

24/25 Season: Plays have been read, Suzy Miles has a play reading group. The new season will be announced soon. The plan is for 2 weeks in August and a 2 week Agatha. The G & S Society are not coming in July, but have been invited to bring a concert. The hope is to have a Toads production instead, which will bring in more revenue. Jon said that the committee should be aware that casting and getting volunteers for FOH, the bar and coffee shop is a problem during the Agatha, and people, not just finances should be considered. Joy said that Grandparents who have been on childcare duties over the summer, often take holidays in September.

The forum closed at 8.55pm