

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR 2005

My report this year is one full of hope for the future and my general message is we can achieve a great deal by working together.

Despite announcing at last year's AGM I would not be standing as Chairman, I have, as I said in The Blurb, used my prerogative as a woman, and changed my mind! Thank you for showing me your continued support.

During the years as your chairman, I have worked very hard to open communications between the Committee and the members. We have tried to keep you informed on developments by issuing regular newsletters, regular joint societies meetings etc. Unfortunately there are still occasions when communication falls down. I would like to apologise if members feel they are not fully informed. It has been decided we will publish an outline of items discussed at our regular meetings. I hope this may help to keep members more up to date on all that is going on. However, I would also encourage you to ask questions of me or the other Committee members. We are not always aware that you are not happy about something, or that you have heard a rumour about this or that. Most times, it has been proved that gossip is often initiated by a half heard remark or a misconception. Talk to me, write to us, anything but we need to work together, we would welcome your support. This is an elected committee so you know you always have a way to change things and to make a difference.

During the last year, the Committee has formed a new sub committee, the Strategic Management Team whose remit has been to draw up a working document for change and improvements for the entire complex. This was partly because of the possibility of receiving funding from the sale of the Axiom and partly because in order to survive we must extend and improve the facilities of the Playhouse. We have identified 6 areas for these proposed changes, in no particular order:

- Refurbishment of main auditorium
- providing disabled access to 1st floor and also increasing technical capacity and diversity of use of existing rooms 3, 4 and the dungeon
- easier access to ground floor for disabled theatregoers and members alike and also to improve fittings and furnishings for a more comfortable environment for members and patrons.
- extending accommodation for rehearsal rooms/studios and exhibition rooms on the 1st floor with current roof raised to provide this space. This would provide large soundproof area, which could then be sub divided if needed.
- enclosing ramp from workshop providing 2 storeys.
- increasing the size of the box office and relocating toilets for theatre goers.

Ten years ago, we were thrilled to be able to report the signing of the new 25 year lease. However now, of course, there is only fifteen years left. Thus we have begun to make enquiries in order to negotiate a new longer one, giving us the security of tenure we need plus the viability to seek funding.

In August, we employed Simon Young on a fixed 6 months contract, to investigate the feasibility of employing a Theatre Administrator full time. His remit was to define the role and to investigate the funding of the post; to look into the marketing of the complex; to undertake general administration of the complex and finally to increase the occupancy of the Playhouse during the day. Towards the end of the contract, it was decided, that although the Committee had agreed to fund the cost of the salary for six months, regrettably it could not justify creating the post of administrator with its commensurate higher salary at the present time, as the outside funding for the post, either

directly or indirectly, had not been achieved to date nor conceivably in the future. However, we will be taking into consideration any recommendations from Simon's report.

We have seen changes in the last twelve months in the running of the Box Office.

- Emlyn Attree Williams, our steadfast dependable Box Office Manager, decided to re-locate to London. We wish him all the best for the future and offer our sincere and hearty thanks for all his hard work and loyalty to the Playhouse over the years he was with us.
- Anne Chandler took over the part time post for five months but she was offered a full time position with her other employer which was impossible for her to refuse.
- As you all know we are now employing Paul Scott in the role and my thanks go to him and Mary for their hard and highly efficient running of the Box Office on your behalf.
- More recently, we have employed Kerry Newman to work in the Box Office on a rota basis for Saturdays and the occasional evening. She has settled in well and is proving her worth.

During the past twelve months we have lost a long time member of the Theatre, Derek Edwards. Derek was at one time the Bar Manager for the Playhouse and in more recent years a valuable supporter of Theatre Studio. Many people will miss him.

Last year I told you that the bar rota would be manned by societies. Unfortunately this has proved difficult for some of them and so we are going to try to return to a system, which was operated many years ago.

Some people enjoy running the bar, but others really do not. The idea is that a small nucleus of members would be on a permanent rota, either monthly or bi-monthly, and would undertake the manning of the bar throughout the year. This means A N Other and partner for instance, would cover, say, the 1st Thursday of every, or every other, month. Yes, it would mean either 6 or 12 duties a year by those people but it was felt that this would be a more reliable system. It does mean we are reliant on gaining enough people to do this but those members who really can't face bar duty are then not forced to do so. I hope you will consider this idea favourably and help us to keep the bar running efficiently and profitably. It has been mooted that an increase in bar prices may allow us to pay staff £10 a session with the idea money may be the answer. However, it is more than likely the increase in prices would not cover this cost sufficiently. However, if none of this works, we may have to consider the possibility of closing the club bar – how can we keep it open without the volunteers to run it? This must be the last resort as, without the bar and its revenue, the complex will have great difficulty in surviving at all. It really is up to the membership! Any suggestions, please, on a postcard!

This summer 2006 we had hoped to refurbish the auditorium – seating, redecoration, etc. However, with the uncertainty of the Axiom funding, it was felt imprudent to invest a large portion of our own money into this project with no certainty of other monies available. It has been decided therefore to limit the work in the auditorium to extending the stage-left 'sound' balcony to the proscenium, removing the existing ladder and knocking through to SM corner. This is much safer than the current situation where, during a show, it is unsafe coming down the ladder as there may be patrons walking underneath. It will also allow access to the balcony for people who are uncomfortable climbing the ladder.

It would appear that indeed the Council have agreed to award us the £200,000 but we await confirmation and to learn what this will mean to us in real terms. It is hoped we will be able to use this as matched funding to complete some of the proposed changes and improvements to the facilities of The Playhouse.

This autumn we are introducing a completely new format for our hanging card, which Simon Young and Paul Scott devised. A draft form will be unveiled at the next Joint Societies. We will give it a big launch and along with the new style posters, this may improve our image and help to increase audience figures. We are also looking into other ways of marketing The Playhouse and its productions more effectively, benefiting both The Playhouse and its societies. One possibility **may** be to hire a professional marketer on a part time basis in order to raise our profile.

In conclusion, I feel we are entering another exciting period of change, moving The Playhouse into a new era. Please come forward if you feel you would like to help in some way – bar duties, front of house duties for outside bookings, decorating, cleaning up, joining the committee or just supporting all the productions put on at The Playhouse. The more bums on seats, the more money societies get, the more money The Playhouse gets and the more we can achieve together. Let this year and the coming years see us working together and achieving great things.