



Report of the Trustees to Frome Festival's AGM

8th March 2021

The Board

The members of the Board of Trustees were: Susan Date (March 2020 – January 2021,) Hugh Deed (Vice Chairman,) Andy Jones (from March 2020,) Bob Morris (until January 2021,) Lockhart Murdoch (from March 2020,) Gail Norris, Simon Norris, Dara O'Hare, Mick Randall, Gavin Rea (Chairman,) Rick Rycroft, Roger Southard, and Jeremy Towler (Company Secretary.)

Bob Morris stood down as Chairman having been in post since 2005. His contribution to the Festival cannot be overestimated. His inspired leadership, strategic awareness, and wise counsel had all helped to make the Festival the success it is today. Both Bob and his wife, Marjorie – mainstay over the Sponsorship Team for many years – were created Vice-Presidents in recognition of their outstanding service. Bob retired from the Board in January 2021.

We were sorry to lose Theresa Clark who retired after many years of loyal and enthusiastic service, including supervision of the Festival's stewarding arrangements. She was awarded Honorary Life Membership of Frome Festival.

Lockhart Murdoch, Andy Jones, and Susan Date were elected to the Board at our 2020 AGM. Susan Date retired in January 2021 with our thanks after a second stint on the Board.

Board Activities

The Board met six times during the calendar year 2020. As well as the Trustees, Board meetings are routinely attended by Martin Dimery, our Creative Director, and Margaret Perry, our Treasurer.

In January the three-year agreement with Frome Town Council (FTC) to provide a grant of £10,000 per annum expired. The maximum amount available under the new FTC scheme was £8,000 (in the event we received an award of £6,000.)

A surplus of £5,674 in the financial year 2018/2019 (November -October) was recorded.

In March we held a brief meeting to approve our accounts immediately before the AGM. This turned out to be the last meeting during the year at which we were able to meet in person.

The April meeting (using ZOOM as with all subsequent meetings) noted the momentous decision, made in early March, to cancel the 2020 Festival because of the Covid-19 crisis. Both Martin Dimery, and Beverly Jones, General Manager, were placed on furlough.

Consideration was given to the financial implications of the cancellation including the refund of sponsorship payments. We agreed to formalise a Reserves Policy, and a fund-raising sub-group was formed to address the anticipated shortfall in revenue resulting from the cancellation.

In June the Board agreed to launch an Anniversary Appeal. Hugh Deed was appointed Vice Chairman.

The notable success of the Anniversary Appeal was recorded at the September meeting. Over £5,500 was raised (before Gift Aid) and this went a long way towards ensuring the future of the Festival. A quiz, organised in July by Gail Norris and Roger Southard, was a great success.

It was also noted that Frome Town Council was reviewing its process for awarding grants.

Despite the uncertainty caused by the Covid-19 crisis there was cautious optimism about holding a Festival in 2021 (July 2nd – 11th) and preparations were going ahead.

We are most fortunate to have a dedicated cadre of Trustees, often working in small groups behind the scenes, who contribute so much to the success of the Festival. We are always willing to consider nominations for the Board from individuals, especially those with interest and expertise in the Arts.

The Festival Office

We retain an office in the Market Place, with the generous assistance of Eyetech Opticians. It is there that the planning of the Festival takes place under the charismatic leadership of our Creative Director, Martin Dimery, with the capable assistance of our General Manager, Beverly Jones.

It is a testament to their enthusiasm, imagination, and hard work that they are able to put together such a varied programme year after year working part-time with only modest remuneration.

The Office also serves as the hub for the administration of the Friends scheme and the Sponsorship Team, both of which bring much needed revenue to the Festival.

The accounts are impeccably maintained by our Treasurer, Margaret Perry, who provides valued advice about all aspects about the Festival's finances.

Covid-19 and beyond

The year, inevitably, has been dominated by the cancellation of the Festival because of the Covid-19 crisis. At the AGM on 9th March 2020, there was optimism that the Festival would go ahead, but within a week it was clear that our 20th Festival, which had been so eagerly anticipated, would have to be cancelled. This was the first time that we had been unable to provide Frome with a Festival since its inception in 2001 and it was a bitter blow. The dismay felt by the people of the Frome reverberated throughout the Town, and we were heartened by the messages of support we received and by the gratifying, sometimes overwhelming, response to our Anniversary Appeal. It is clear that the Festival means so much to so many people.

The early decision not to proceed proved beneficial in that we were able to cancel events without penalty, and avoid expenses, such as advertising, programme printing etc. Sponsorship money was returned where requested, but several sponsors generously allowed their contribution to be held over until next year.

Frome Festival enters 2021 with a healthy bank balance and plans are well in hand to proceed with a Festival this July – all being well.

But the future funding of the Festival remains a concern. We relied until 2019 on the stability provided by Frome Town Council's generous and welcome three-year agreement to provide £10,000 per annum. Although we understand that the Council needs to support many organisations within Frome, and acknowledge that their continuing support recognises the importance of the Festival to Frome Town, the reduction of our grant to £6,000 in 2020, especially with no guarantee of future funding, remains a real concern.