



**Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Swan Theatre Company  
held at the Swan Theatre, 138 Park Street, Yeovil on Tuesday 25 April 2023, starting  
at 7.30pm**

**Present:** James Kneller, Andy Taylor, Elaine Taylor, Graham House, Dick Bennett, Geoff Kneller, Beryl Snadden, Robert Graydon, Ann Lee, David Hallett, Liz Stallard, Sally Matthews, Alison Maynard-Griffin, Mike Stanley, Mark Payne, Andrew Middleton, John Curry, Brian Williams, John Cooke, Pax Cooke, Claire Walford, Sheila Driver, Ann Cook, Judith Baker, John Crabtree, Judith Payne, Andy Hastie, Richard Jones, Lynne Bennett, Ed Butcher, Rachel Butcher, Patrick Knox, Joe Wainwright, John Stirzaker

**Apologies for absence were received from:** Terry Skedgell, Olivia Spall, Roger Chadbourne, Pauline Dagnall, Annetta Broughton, Vicky Hallett, Beryl Garton, Ann Rigby, Tanya Ogden, Trisha Perry, Jim leFeuvre, Diane Law, Liz Holloway

1. **The President**, Beryl Snadden, opened the meeting by welcoming all present and congratulating the membership on their hard work and success in all aspects of the Company's productions throughout the past year
2. **Minutes** of last year's meeting had been circulated to all members and were approved unanimously.
3. **Functional reports**
  - a. Artistic Manager – **Robert Graydon** presented his report, noting the encouraging return of members wishing to direct plays and confirming the continuing approach of his team to promote a diverse range of productions
  - b. Marketing Manager – **Adrian Harding** presented his report, noting the welcome return of audiences and early ticket sales, and reminding members that early booking was now becoming more important if they were to obtain tickets on favoured nights. He drew attention to the opportunities presented by forthcoming double jubilee year of 2026
  - c. Facilities Manager – **James Kneller** presented his report, commenting in particular on improvements to the theatre over the past six years, which had established a firm and secure environment for both members and audiences

4. **Alison Maynard-Griffin** presented the annual accounts and responded to questions.
  - a. The adoption of the accounts was proposed by Brian Williams, seconded by James Kneller and approved unanimously.
  - b. The appointment of Teresa Rodber of Read Accountants as examiner for the next financial year was proposed by Alison Maynard-Griffin, seconded by Graham House and approved unanimously.
5. **Mark Payne** presented his Chairman's review of the year, welcoming the return of "reality" in the theatrical world, and noted the favourable financial position of the company facing a future where we would continue to expect the uncertainties of increasing costs, particularly in the field of energy. He looked forward to a future for the Swan in which a diverse range of productions would "challenge the creative juices" of the membership
6. **Election of Officers and Committee Members.** Andy Taylor, Returning Officer, confirmed the reappointment of Mark Payne as Chairman and Graham House as Secretary, and the election of Mike Stanley as Artistic Manager and Dick Bennett as Facilities Manager, all unopposed. There was no nomination for the post of Treasurer.

The meeting closed at 8.30pm

Full reports as presented to the meeting are annexed.

Graham House

**Secretary, Swan Theatre Company**

May 2023

**ARTISTIC TEAM REPORT**

It seems only recently that the Swan was forced to close our doors on the opening night of 'Night Must Fall'. And perhaps it comes as a surprise that this was over 3 years ago. Happily we were able to open to the public again just over a year later and since then we have been able to return to our regular programme of 6 in-house productions a year, without a single break. This represents a huge achievement in terms of the effort, dedication and vision of all the many Swan members we need to crack out a successful production. But it has not been without cost; our core membership increasingly find themselves asked to do more. 6 shows a year is an ambitious objective and early on in the easing of the COVID crisis I had my doubts about whether it was achievable in the longer term. People were less confident in coming forward to volunteer, our audiences dwindled and were reluctant to commit to buying their tickets early. This was not a situation peculiar to us; my trips to visit other amateur groups in the county revealed very similar problems, as did the experiences of our Little Theatre Guild friends nationwide. We were all a bit freaked out by what the pandemic put us through. Priorities changed, we got out of the habit of going out, we reserved our funds for other contingencies.

Happily, I believe we are now coming out of that difficult period and things are returning to normal. This time last year we were pretty confident we had the remainder of our programme sorted for 2022, but anything beyond that was unsure. This year I am really pleased to be able to report that we have at least 5 offerings on the table for 2024. This is truly an amazing leap forward and something I was confident would happen when the World returned to something resembling normality. Directors have been more enthusiastic in coming forward to head up productions, some new faces and some old ones – and this is really good news. Our aim on the Artistic Team is, and always has been, to offer as diverse a range of plays as our resources allow. We need plays that challenge us and entertain our audiences. We need plays that will sell well and keep the money flowing in and we need plays that will make people think and ensure our artistic programme reflects what is happening in contemporary theatre. Our reputation allows us the luxury of doing this. Our recent audience survey produced a healthy return in terms of numbers. This showed that people care enough about us to respond. A lot like what we do, a lot felt we didn't get the balance quite right. If I look back on the last couple of years I might be persuaded to probably with the latter view. However, I am confident that we have made the best choices for the Swan with the material we have been offered. Directors have been thin on the ground and to keep the theatre open we perhaps have not been able to present the variety of plays we would wish to in normal times. But looking at the schedule of shows since our last AGM, the list is impressive - 'Go Back for Murder', 'The Thrill of Love', 'The Unexpected Man', 'Let It Be Me', 'Glee and Me' and 'The Hollow'. We have also hosted 2 Civic Players productions and a Yeovil Youth Theatre production and numerous NT Live, Yeovil Cinamateque and others.

Going forward this year, Adrian Harding's original play 'Stepping on My Shadow' is in the final stages of rehearsal, my production of 'Crown Matrimonial' is cast and will hopefully attract healthy audiences who hook into this year's royal theme. Liz Stallard will direct 'A Brief History of Women' by Alan Ayckbourn in September and we welcome back Geoff Kneller to direct Alan Bennett's 'Habeas Corpus' in November. Later in July we will also have a series of classical music concerts, the brainchild of Mike Stanley. This is a new venture for the Swan but one that will enhance our standing as a venue for high quality entertainment in the world of local arts. Like many of us, I have a love of

classical music and am particularly enthusiastic about it. It will help to keep us fresh and relevant in a competitive arena and I urge you to support it.

As I stand down from this role, I ask those of you who would like a go at directing to come forward please. There are plenty of us who can help you, be it selecting a suitable play, organising your team or helping you with the job of getting the best from your cast. To be at the helm of a Swan production can seem daunting. It is a responsibility, certainly, but you will be supported through it and few things can compare with the thrill of seeing your vision come to fruition on opening night. It can be magical, so do give it some thought.

I wish to thank my team of Ann Cook, Sarah Ambrose, Rachel Butcher, Sarah Nias, Graham House, Roger Mumford and Mike Stanley for their enthusiasm, their time, and the experience they have brought to the Artistic Team. I wish whoever takes over this role the very best of luck and stand ready to assist from the Wings if required.

**Robert Graydon**

## **Swan Theatre AGM – Marketing report, 25<sup>th</sup> April 2023**

### **Adrian Harding, Marketing Manager**

Last year I reported that we were almost back to normal after the cautious post-Covid year, and this year, I am delighted to report that normality has now returned. We have seen good-sized audiences at all of our shows in the last year, even the more adventurous ones. We are pleased about that, as they were all excellent productions which attracted glowing praise from the audience and critical acclaim from the experts.

The more obviously popular shows with high name recognition have achieved sell-outs on most nights. Agatha Christie's *'The Hollow'* was a complete sell-out two weeks before opening night, which was unprecedented in living memory and left many potential audience members disappointed. Ticket sales for our May production are already at 70%, with Thursday Night all but sold out, and still two weeks to go until opening night. If you haven't got your tickets yet for your preferred night, please ensure that you do so now to avoid similar disappointment. We are certain that *'Crown Matrimonial'*, in Coronation Year followed by Ayckbourn's *'A Brief History of Women'* and Alan Bennett's *'Habeas Corpus'* will be similarly popular, so please remember to book early.

We haven't seen a return to large group bookings yet, which is a shame, but we seem to have attracted a lot more newcomers to the theatre which has reduced our previous near-total dependence on just loyal Swan regulars. We appreciate the support of our loyal followers, but they alone are not enough to fill the theatre for six nights, and we need to be fishing in a much bigger pond.

Also, not all of our productions currently attract a Charity Night sponsor. This demonstrates that local Charities are not always aware of a good source of potential revenue and a good night out in return for minimal effort by themselves. Certainly, the two Charities who shared the opening night of *'The Hollow'* did very well out of the initiative. So, if you know of Charities who would like to generate income at absolutely no financial or reputational risk to themselves, please put them in contact with us so that we can work together for mutual benefit on future productions.

One very popular marketing initiative this year has been the Swan Season Catalogue, listing all the Swan Live Productions, NT Live screenings (for 6 months), and even those of our partner organisations such as Cinematheque and The Yeovil Civic Players. Our members seem to have welcomed having a full year's notice of our entertainment programme, so that they can plan to attend well in advance. We intend to continue with this.

Our NT Live screenings have proved very popular, attracting a sizable audience, many of whom are coming to The Swan for the first time, and are then being encouraged to return for our Stage performances. *'Prima Facie'* sold-out completely, and several others, including *'Much Ado About Nothing'*, *'Jack Absolute Flies Again'* and *'Good'* came close to full capacity.

Fresh entertainment in the Swan Calendar now includes The Swan Music festival in July. This will give us four days of top-quality live classical music performances from a world-renowned chamber orchestra, *The Cirrus Quartet*, at a fraction of the cost that one would expect to pay in the larger cities. We are certain that a theatre-going audience will be excited to sample world-class music at the Swan, and in reciprocation, Classical Music devotees may become regular visitors to The Swan on Theatre nights. Details are on the flyers in the foyer.

If you hold strong feelings about how 'The Swan' promotes its image and manages to spread its message more widely, please give some thought to getting more closely involved. We are always on the look-out for new ideas to design our posters, and to put these posters in shops, entertainment centres and libraries close to where you live. Fresh initiatives are always welcome to ensure that we don't miss a chance to let people know who we are and what we are offering, provided that they are constructive, practical and effective. Promoting Swan Plays is no-longer a case of just hanging a banner across Middle Street. If you can help, please let me know, tonight, or by emailing the Swan.

We have a great programme of entertainment in place for the rest of the year and, looking further forward into the future, we are starting to plan for an exciting 2026. That year, just two and a half years from now, marks the Platinum Jubilee of the Yeovil Dramatic Society, and the Golden Jubilee of our theatre, celebrating 50 years of live performances in this building. An old derelict pub gave its name to the organisation which the YDS became, namely The Swan Theatre Company.

We look forward to the coming year with confidence and optimism. We know that you will enjoy our selection of plays and look forward to welcoming everybody back into the theatre as often as they can to experience the super-high standards of quality entertainment which we aspire to achieve.

Please do what you can to share the love and invite previous regulars and newcomers to enjoy our drama as much as we all do.

## 2023 AGM – Facilities Report

After 6 years on committee, I have decided to step down as the Facilities Manager, so I look back not just on the last year, but the last 6. I came to committee rather unexpectedly following the sudden and sad passing of our dear friend Alison, so I was co-opted.

The place was in pretty good shape when I came into post, but as ever there are always things that need doing. Over the recent years we have made a significant number of improvements and invested quite a lot of money. In many of these cases we were able to take advantage of the Covid lockdown that meant we had to close our doors for the first time ever, but also we were lucky in securing some grants towards these costs.

We replaced the roof with a new GRP that is guaranteed for 30 years, we fitted a new Gas Heating and Hot water system (thanks to Colin), we fitted a new ventilation system, we re-wired half the building, replaced some of the floor in the Foyer and relayed the one in the Green Room, and we also redecorated the Foyer and Bar. We have also replaced the stage rigging with winches, and then in this last 12 months we replaced the tab track with a new electric system, we've done lots of little maintenance jobs done and most recently we have made repairs to the ceiling over the stage and improve the working lights here and in the workshop. And lastly you will have noticed that we have made a start on refreshing the outside of the building and Graham and Annetta, supported by the committee continue to evolve ideas on how to take this forward – and as I now step back I look forward to seeing these come to life.

The Covid Period did give us the opportunity to get lots done which was great. but I am more pleased that now these things can once again retreat into the shadows and our drama is once again front and centre!

Of course most of this was not done by me – so as usual my main task tonight is to thank those people that have helped, and in many cases lead these efforts. And again I thank them not just for the last year, but the last 6. There are almost too many to name, but not quite so I have to thank Dick, Jim Lefeuvre, Mike Robbins, Graham House, Mike Robbins, Annetta, Adrian Harding, Mark Payne, Geoff Kneller, Mark Rudd, Mike Stanley and Mikey Foulerton, Ed Butcher and probably many more that I have failed to mention. And I also want to thank many more people that have helped with general cleaning and tidying – Judith, Mary Buckle and also Andrew Middleton who looks after the bar, but also helps with many other 'housekeeping' tasks along the way.

I have always felt that we are extraordinarily lucky to own our own theatre outright, and we have this wonderful facility and home. It is of course important to keep the place functional, safe and a pleasant place to be, and that takes not just money but an awful lot of time. Without that time given by a small cadre of volunteers then we would not have this theatre.

The good news for the Swan is that I hand over to Dick, so I know the place will be in good hands. Please continue to support him as you have me and step forward to help. For me I will return to the back benches (or the back row in this case) where I will continue to be involved and enjoy our productions.