



RHODES ARTS COMPLEX

ANNUAL TOWN MEETING REPORT

PERIOD : APRIL 2019– FEBRUARY 2020

PLEASE NOTE:

This report reflects April 2019 to February 2020 with figures calculated for 11 months (this is due to the Annual Meeting taking place in March 2020).

FOOTFALL

Total estimated footfall for Rhodes is calculated at 131,854* which is currently 3,343 above last year's figure, we therefore anticipate reaching a record attendance figure by the end of the financial year.

*The footfall figure is an aggregate of all visitor attendances to activities held at Rhodes (Museum visits, classes, shows, bar, events etc.). While this gives a good qualitative indication of the overall use by the community it does mean that visitors who attend for multiple activities (e.g. come and see the pantomime and then go around the museum) will be represented more than once in the total figure given.

VOLUNTEERS

Currently our Front of House Team has the support of 54 volunteers who assist during performances and activities. Currently we have used 3600 hours of volunteer working time solely for auditorium activities.

With the launch of Hertfordshire Years of Culture, February's focus is on volunteering. We are actively promoting this on social media. Our aim for the future is to build on our volunteer base and expand the skills range. It is acknowledged volunteers will have a large part of play in the future sustainability of Rhodes post the Old River Lane Development and the new theatre. (See notes under The Future)

We have now increased our volunteer social events to four per annum will include a Summer Tea and Christmas Celebration.

MARKETING

Distribution

- Season brochure x3 per year 20,000 distribution.
- Cinema Brochure every 2 months 1,000 distribution in-house and local area

Social Media Statistics

Engagement is increasing with higher followers, reach and post clicks across all platforms. Performance levels are monitored weekly.

Rhodes Arts Complex	1 April 2019	29 February 2020	+/-
Total Facebook page followers	3250	3768	+518
Total Facebook page likes	3221	3688	+467

Rhodes Arts Complex	19 June 2019	26 February 2020	+/-
Total Twitter followers	2453	2512	+77
Total Instagram followers	779	1086	+307

Bishop's Stortford Museum	1 April 2019	29 February 2020	+/-
Total Facebook page followers	860	955	+96
Total Facebook page likes	838	921	+83

Direct E-shots

Rhodes Arts Complex Master subscribers for emails	1 April 2019	5 March 2020	+/-	Ave. open rate %
Subscribers	7,455	7,832	+377	19.5%

AUDITORIUM PERFORMANCES

42,218 tickets were sold during the stated period; 18,348 via the Box Office and 23,870 were purchased on line.

Promotion figures totalled 87 performances with audience numbers of 16,745

Private Hires using the auditorium totalled 31 hirers over 43 performances with audience numbers of 11,037.

Week long runs included:

- Bishops Stortford Musical Theatre brought 'Hairspray' to Rhodes and with sold out performances.
- Bishops Stortford Musical Theatre Seniors performed Jekyll and Hyde.

- PQA – Pauline Quirk Musical Academy now a resident drama group at Rhodes also performance High School Musical.
- Waterlane Theatre Group performed ‘Murder on the Nile’
- Contexture Theatre once again produced Write Here Write Now showcasing play by local amateur playwrights. Rhodes is a partner to this production alongside Hertford Theatre and Harlow Playhouse.

Other performances in the theatre include -

Twelve local dance/drama/music schools held their annual productions in the auditorium covering 23 performances. Five local primary schools participated in 15 performances of their end of term showcases to friends and family. Rhodes was also host to KStage2 Musical Festival which involved 12 local primary schools and in addition the Year Two Music Festival involving 16 local primary schools.

Learn to Live is now an annual screening on road safety, the initiative was held over three days consisting of six screenings attended by six local senior schools .

A new initiative for Rhodes being a two day project during February brought eight senior schools to the Rhodes Stage. Titled ‘School History Scene’ consisted of a school project which included work within the schools and two performances.

CINEMA/LIVE SCREENINGS

146 screenings of 105 films and live screenings were shown. Audience numbers for both cinema and live screenings totalled 6,982. Two new initiatives have begun Dementia Screenings and Mums and Babies Screenings.

PANTOMIME

A change of panto company brought Sleeping Beauty to Rhodes audience numbers totalling 12,924 attending over 59 which included 18 local schools. The production received excellent reviews and audience feedback.

AUDITORIUM/ REGULAR HIRERS

As well as Rhodes extensive theatre and cinema programme the auditorium is hired on a regular basis to:-

NADFAS – who hold their monthly meetings attracting approximately 150/200 attendees.

Ceroc – monthly tea dances are held in both the auditorium and theatre lounge.

National Blood – blood donating sessions are held at once/twice monthly throughout the year subject to availability.

BSMB – Bishops Stortford Means Business Trade Show which has expanded year on year.

Rhodes held the Hertfordshire Jazz Festival for the first time in 2019. The event spanned over a weekend. Rhodes will once again host the Jazz Festival in October 2020 opening with Ronnie Scotts Band on the Friday evening. Food and bar facilities are available all weekend.

CONFERENCE HIRE

Both the Cedar and Linden rooms are used by local business for conference hire and by regular hirers facilitating classes and activities which include:-

- Carers in Herts
- NHS Trust
- Schools Appeals
- Grove Cottage
- Variety of local businesses/Solicitors/Estate Agents/ Care Providers
- Learning Disability Forum
- NADFAS Study Days

- Yoga Classes
- Phoenix Theatre Arts – Junior/Senior Drama
- Weight Watchers
- Adult Art Classes
- PQA Drama
- Ukulele Band

PQA (Pauline Quirk Academy) and BSTC (Bishops Stortford Musical Theatre / Juniors) are new hirers both hold their weekly classes in several areas at Rhodes covering drama/musical theatre and film. Both companies also perform showcase displays in the auditorium.

DANCE STUDIO/GILBEY ROOM

The Dance Studio is booked weekdays, evenings and Saturdays and the staff are proactive in working to fulfil any vacancies. Class and activity range include dance, exercise and drama, catering for all ages and abilities. Eight hirers currently occupy the space in varying time slots.

The gallery space has been renamed the Gilbey Room and has recently been decorated. Regularly used for meetings, including use as a polling station, as well as a hiring space for regular class activities. Eight hirers currently book the space which includes 'spinning classes'. Hiring availability is monitored weekly.

THEATRE LOUNGE

The theatre lounge is extremely well utilised and very popular with the whole community. Many customers make use of the space during the day either meeting friends or informal business meetings. Everyone is made to feel welcome.

The lounge is regularly hired for celebration events and wishes this offer could be expanded but is often restricted to the use of the auditorium.

Music in the Bar is still held fortnightly this is a free admission event and a showcase for local talent. Being programmed by a local musician we have been able to expand our offering. Programming has also responded to requests for musicians to play.

Regular hirers use the facility free of charge:-

- Methodist Church - weekly

- Mahjong - weekly
- Card Group - weekly
- Discussion Group -weekly
- Spanish Speak Group – weekly
- Philosophy Group – fortnightly
- Hummingbird Cancer Support – alternate Mondays
- U3A Bridge – twice weekly
- U3A Cribbage – fortnightly
- U3A Scrabble – monthly
- U3A Rummikub – monthly
- French Speaking Group – weekly
- Italian Speaking Group – weekly
- Latte Group - monthly

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Community involvement is a priority for Rhodes reflected in the activities held in the Complex.

Rhodes staff always adopt a ‘can do’ attitude and always willing to embrace any community involvement activities.

Two local choirs performed in the auditorium – Hearts and Soul Community Choir and We Love to Sing performances enjoying ‘sold out’ performances. Regular nights are made available to local charities the theatre lounge is hired ‘free of charge’. Events have included Breath Easy, musical evening for the Homeless Shelter, BSMT Quiz Night.

During the past year Rhodes have worked in partnership with the Town Council hosting the Mayor’s Fashion Show and Civic Dinner.

A new prestigious event for Rhodes was hosting The Independent Community Awards in association with ‘The Indie’ newspaper. Invited guests enjoyed buffet and wine pre presentation. A panto preview with our panto cast ‘Sleeping Beauty’ was enjoyed by the audience.

A focus for 2020 is the Hertfordshire Year of Culture which Rhodes is involved in the partnership with a range of monthly activities and events throughout the year.

SCHOOL HOLIDAYS

During school holidays we have shown 20 children cinema screenings with many promoted as Kids for a Quid. 32 children performances have taken place in the auditorium.

In conjunction with the live performances and screenings in the auditorium the we hosts activities in the museum. (See notes on Museum Activities)

Pop School and Boom held annually are weeklong productions ending with a staged showcase involve up to 50 children with ages ranging from four – fourteen years of age. Rhodes is in negotiations with a new company to bring a further week long activity into the Complex.

REFURBISHMENT COMPLETED DURING 2019/20

The focus during 2019 was to complete the final phase of the front of house area. The link area is now completed with an installation of our music heritage project – See note on Museum Music Heritage Project.

The Gilbey room has been partially refurbished due to be completed in April 2020. The dance studio has been redecorated and refurbished.

THE FUTURE

Rhodes successfully submitted an application to the Town Council for future funding of £255K for the next four years 2020-2024. This application was approved subject to £70K restricted funding on capital items and on the basis this figure will reduce to £100K on the opening of the new theatre within the Old River Lane Development.

Rhodes staff and trustees have been working towards the new business initiative of Rhodes once the new theatre is operational. The Trustees have announced Rhodes will remain 'open for business' with reduced funding. A revised business plan is under development. The parties involved in the ORL development, the Bishops Stortford Town Council, East Herts District Council and Rhodes Trustees have agreed the future use of Rhodes business activities will complement the new programme of activities and performances in the new theatre.

A Business Plan 2020 – 2025 will be submitted to the Rhodes trustees during 2020 for approval.

BISHOPS STORTFORD MUSEUM

OVERVIEW

The last year has been another busy and successful one for the museum team. Following the refurbishment of the bar area (reported on in the 2019/2020 annual town report), museum staff have been involved in rolling out the retro heritage theme across the remainder of the foyer and link areas. As well as providing a unifying theme for the ground floor public areas, this has given us the opportunity to raise the profile of the museum by incorporating further heritage elements into the main traffic areas (please see “Front of House” below for further details).

Another significant development has been the recruitment of a Learning and Outreach Coordinator. Although a fairly new post this has had a major impact on the museum’s capacity to deliver educational activities for schools, community groups and museum visitors. We have also seen a continued increase in the amount of volunteer support given to the museum with the existing collections focussed team being bolstered by an increasing number of volunteers helping with front of house and outreach activities.

There have been several archaeological excavations carried out in the local area in the last 12 months. The museum has been in dialogue with the field units involved, discussing the results and making arrangements for the long term deposition of the archives and objects from the digs.

It is pleasing to be able to report that the museum is not only ending the current year in an improved position from 12 months ago but that, as a result of this work, we are poised to make the next 12 months even better.

COLLECTIONS CARE & DEVELOPMENT

Over the last 12 months great progress has been made by the museum’s collections volunteers following the outfitting of our new store. As well as enabling ongoing improvements to be made in the storage conditions for objects through re-boxing and condition checking, the volunteers have continued to improve our documentation with 42,354 objects, including several previously un-listed archaeological archives, now included on the museum’s MODES database – that’s an increase of nearly 7.5 thousand from last year’s figures. Documentation and collections care are fundamental elements of the museum maintaining its accredited status so this is a very real improvement for us and one that the volunteers are rightly proud of.

We are also continuing to make improvements in our display collections care regimes. This includes the gradual replacement of all original documents on display (and therefore at risk of light damage) with high spec facsimile copies with the originals being re-housed in archival boxes. We have also started to replace our existing halogen/fibre optic case lights with new low UV emitting LED lights, this improves the visitor experience whilst improving our collections care.

VOLUNTEERS

We currently have 20 active volunteers who are involved in many aspects of the museum’s operations and provide essential extra resource for our operations.

Areas that the volunteers have assisted us with include:

- Cataloguing of new acquisitions.

- Working on our retrospective documentation and collections care work plans.
- Oral History gathering.
- Development and delivery of themed history walks.
- Improving storage regimes currently employed at the museum's stores and archive facilities.
- Delivering talks.
- Hosting holiday activities and craft sessions.
- Reminiscence sessions.

It is important to stress that much of the development work being carried out in the museum is dependent on the work of the volunteers and that their contribution is helping to underpin many of our wider activities. The contribution made by volunteers working on digitising the museum's original documentation records, repackaging objects and sorting queries is an essential part of the work needed for the museum to retain its status as an Accredited Museum. Volunteers are also making an increasing contribution to our front of house activities, helping us to provide story sessions for pre-school children and their carers, holiday activities, themed group meetings in the bar, reminiscence sessions in local care homes and supporting our work with local schools.

FRONT OF HOUSE

The arrival of our new Learning & Outreach Coordinator has had a significant impact on our front of house activities. As well as continuing with our regular activities (talks, walks, museum trails & tours, pre-school story time, ArtSpace exhibitions, adult craft workshops etc.) we have introduced a new schools Pantomime teaching session that has proven very successful and our holiday craft sessions have continued to grow in popularity with over 50 participants per day joining us for our most recent half term sessions. We are now also able to offer a facilitated reminiscence visit for local care homes and dementia support groups. Our largest single event of the year was the Fairy Fair in August which was a day long whole building event.

In addition to our more usual activities, this year has seen us working with the wider Rhodes team on upgrading the public areas in the reception/foyer and ground floor link, continuing the heritage theme established in the bar by the inclusion of the "Rhodes Map", a graphic representation of the history of the town, in the reception and the past performers display, celebrating Rhodes musical heritage, in the link area. A temporary display to compliment the link display was held in the ArtSpace to coincide with Alan Goldsmith's "Lollypops and Moptops" 1960 music celebration in February. This has proven to be a highly popular event and has helped to raise the profile of the project overall.

The ArtSpace has featured the following exhibitors:

- Bishop's Stortford Museum - Fairy Art
- Bayt Middle Eastern Culture
- Bishop's Stortford "Scribblers" (Writers group)
- Michael Cook - Pen and Ink Sketches
- Bishop's Stortford Baptist Church
- Bishop's Stortford Museum – Sleeping Beauty
- David Cooper – Retrospective
- Bishop's Stortford Museum – Rhodes 1960s music project.

The ArtSpace is also regularly used by our visitors as a quiet alternative to the main bar area for meetings and has been used by the Bishop's Stortford Scribblers, The Rhodes book club, The family history society and the U3A games groups as well as many individual visitors.

General visitors to the museum*	8,708
Additional museum users**	<u>2,470</u>
Total visitors/users	<u>11,178</u>

* This reflects the number of people who have actually visited the museum's display areas.

** This reflects people who have made use of museum services provided outside of the museum's two main public display areas. These activities include talks, walks, craft activities, visits to schools, partnership events, facilitated community events (e.g. Take me back Tuesday) and reminiscence activities.

SUMMARY

The past 12 months have once again shown continued growth in visitor numbers at Rhodes.

Our emphasis as always been on customer care for which we received extremely positive feedback from our visitors. The hard work, dedication and commitment of the Staff and Trustees enables Rhodes success to flourish and continue.

Moving forward our enhanced theatre programme offering a wide range of performances for the whole community is a solid base for further growth in audience numbers. New initiatives have included Dementia Screenings and Mums and Babies Screenings.

The museum initiative and future business plan will focus on the local community in both outreach and visitor numbers to the Complex and museum resulting in a firm and solid base for the future stability of Rhodes.

The staff and Rhodes Birthplace Trust will continue to offer excellent entertainment and community facilities for the residents of Bishops Stortford and the surrounding areas.