



Trustees' Annual Report for the year ending 5th April 2020

Purpose and Objectives

York's Mystery Plays were first performed by the citizens of York in the 14th Century. Today they are considered to be the oldest and best-preserved example of this style of medieval English drama.

The York Mystery Plays Supporters Trust was formed following a highly successful community revival of the Plays in 2012. Its aim is to increase awareness and understanding of the Plays' importance as part of York's heritage, and to encourage regular stagings of the Plays by and for the people of York.

The Trust's objectives are:

1. Disseminating historical and contemporary information about the York Mystery Plays including by operating a website;
2. Supporting and promoting the performance of the Plays by and for the people of York;
3. Working to make productions accessible to all, regardless of age, gender, ability, race or belief;
4. Developing strong working relationships with the arts and culture sectors to support public access to performances.

In setting our objectives and planning our activities the Trustees have given careful consideration to the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit.

Activities and Achievements

In the period 2019-2020 the Trust engaged in a number of activities to fulfil its objectives:

Objective 1: Disseminating historical and contemporary information about the York Mystery Plays including by operating a website.

The Trust continued to maintain its website - <https://ympst.co.uk> - providing up to date information about the Plays, notably in relation to its Christmas production of *A Nativity for York*, information on the Annual General Meeting (Chair and Treasurer Reports and the Annual Accounts) and retrospective information about the 2018 Waggon Plays.

Our e-newsletter was produced approximately every 6 weeks and issued to an audience of members and interested parties (some 1800 subscribers across the UK and abroad). Paper copies were also produced and posted to those without access to email. In addition, a second audience consisting of city organisations, press, and local churches received

specifically tailored news at appropriate times. The content and production of the newsletters is overseen by the Chair of Trustees and produced by a member of the Trust.

The Trust became a member of the City of York's tourist information service provider, Make It York (MiY). This enabled information about the Trust to be available on the MiY website and information about *A Nativity for York* to be promoted in city hotels, in the Visitor Information Centre, via email circulation and in the MiY Christmas on-line marketing brochures which are disseminated to both tourist sites and among city residents. Ticket sales for *A Nativity for York* were handled by York Theatre Royal, enabling information about the Trust to be available to residents and visitors

Objective 2: Supporting and promoting the performance of the Plays by and for the people of York.

The Trust's principal activity during the reporting period was the first of what is planned to be an annual production: *A Nativity for York*. A principal aim of this initiative is to ensure that annually a performance of material from the Mystery Plays takes place in the city, creating opportunities for people to participate in and see a production. The production took place in December 2019 and was staged in a former medieval church in the heart of the city centre, the Spurriergate Centre, during the Christmas Festival. A wide range of promotional activities took place to raise awareness of and interest in the Play: this ranged from standard advertising, leaflet distribution by volunteers, a members' social event and a public event, "Meet the Director", in September 2019.

Members and supporters took part in various fundraising activities through the year, notably two events at St Crux where a pop-up cafe and sale of goods raised nearly £2000 for the production. Together with grants received from two public bodies and private donations, income was generated which enabled the Trust to appoint a director, create a production team, audition and rehearse a cast from local people.

At the Members' Social in October, a presentation was made by academics from the Records of Early English Drama, identifying early references in medieval texts to the Mystery Plays. It was planned to follow this with a more in-depth workshop in 2020. One of the Trust's members gave a talk in the city on the Revival of the Mystery Plays in 1951.

Objective 3: Working to make productions accessible to all, regardless of age, gender, ability, race or belief.

Casting for *A Nativity for York* was carried out through open auditions and our director's terms of reference included gender-blind casting. As well as performers we also sought to engage people with other skillsets such as photography, costume and prop making and stage management. In addition, a team of volunteers managed front of house and refreshment services. About 50 people were involved in the delivery of the production. Fundraising allowed the Trust to charge a reasonable admission fee for a performance which lasted one hour. The Trust's strategy was to create a play which would be affordable to most, last for a period of time which might encourage a new audience and families as well as Mystery Play aficionados to attend, locate it in a centre accessible within the city and close to car parking or public transport. Seven performances were scheduled for during the day time or early evening, each with a capacity of 100; 540 people attended the

performances. Income from the production has been earmarked as funding for the next Nativity. The Spurriergate Centre where the production took place operates “a pay as you feel” basis for its daily cafe and provides food and support for the homeless or disadvantaged in the city. In accordance with this ethos, the Trust operated a pay as you feel system for its refreshments for all performances.

Objective 4: Developing strong working relationships with the arts and culture sectors to support public access to performances.

The Trust works to maintain active networks within the city’s artistic, academic, business and religious groups. It organises and funds an annual meeting of these stakeholders, which is recognised as a unique opportunity for different organisations with an interest in the continuation of the Plays to meet to share and discuss relevant issues. The meeting in 2019 saw an expansion in the participation in the meeting through inclusion of the city’s Universities. The incoming Dean of York Minster also signalled his support and intention to become a member of the group. A significant outcome was the agreement to develop active liaison with York’s business and tourist organisation with a view to improving the city’s supporting infrastructure for production of York Mystery Plays.

Financial review

The Trust’s total income for the year was £11,228, of which £1,343 were restricted funds donated specifically for the production of A Nativity for York. This is roughly double last year’s income, the increase being primarily due to ticket and refreshment sales from *A Nativity for York*.

The main sources of income were: ticket and refreshment sales (£5,126 net of expenses); two St Crux sales (£1,969 net of expenses); grants from the York Common Good Trust and the Feoffees of St Michael (£1,250); individual donations (totalling £1,033) and membership subscriptions (£970).

Total expenditure was £6,931, the majority of which was related to our production of *A Nativity for York*. This includes £1,827 for venue hire, £1,506 for set props and costumes, £900 for publicity, £500 director’s fee and £467 fundraising costs. The Trust’s general administration costs (excluding insurance) were £389.

The Trust’s funds at the end of the year were £8,132 with no outstanding liabilities.

Accounting and reporting by charities

The Trust’s main area of expenditure is its annual Nativity production, performed for the first time in 2019. The production was funded entirely by fundraising and donations, with the intention that income from ticket sales and refreshments for the 2019 production would form the core funding for the 2020 production and that this model would repeat in future years. This ensures that if a future production were to run at a large loss, the financial viability of the Trust would not be at risk.

Fundraising in future years will primarily be in support of the Trust’s other activities, such as the Wagon Plays which occur once every four years, and developing new initiatives, as well as augmenting the core funding for the Nativity.

Structure, governance and management

The Trust has been a Charitable Incorporated Organisation since December 2017 and is a registered charity number 1176113.

Temporary contact address whilst Coronavirus lockdown restrictions are in force: 14 Moor Lane, Copmanthorpe, York YO23 3TH.

Website: www.ympst.co.uk

The Trust has no paid employees and does not own property. It is run by a management committee of Trustees who meet monthly but carry out the majority of their duties in their own time and from their own homes.

The Trust determines its priorities for meeting its objectives through its planning and meeting processes. At the beginning of each year the Trustees hold a business planning event. During this, the previous year's aims, objectives and financial performance are reviewed and evaluated, and actions, activities and funding agreed for the forthcoming year(s). Progress against the Plan forms part of the agenda for monthly meetings thereafter. Any changes to the activities and timescales in the Plan are subject to agreement by the Trustees. The content of the Plan is disseminated to members and supporters via the newsletter and members are invited to volunteer their participation as appropriate.

The Trustees at the start of 2019-20 were: Linda Terry (Chair), Maurice Crichton (Secretary), Philip Turner (Treasurer), Gary Bateson, Anna Briggs, Colin Lea, Ged Murray, Simon Tompsett.

During the year David Denbigh was co-opted onto the management committee and will stand for formal election as a Trustee at the next AGM.

The Trust encourages members with an appropriate skillset to consider putting themselves forward for Trustee positions. Members seeking to join the Committee as a Trustee are advised to meet with the Chair to discuss the requirements and commitment needed for the role: this involves not only their personal aspirations but also an understanding of the time commitment required; an identification of the skills they can offer; and their fitness (as a Fit and Proper Person) to undertake the role. Applicants must complete an application form detailing the above, along with a signed declaration of financial probity, for consideration by the Trustees. References may also be taken up if appropriate. Applicants who meet the criteria may be co-opted onto the Management Committee during the year. All recommendations for new Trustees must be approved by the members at the next AGM. Trustees are subject under the constitution to a given period in office and are required to step down at the appropriate time. The Trust has a timetable for managing this to ensure that key skills are not lost when long-serving Trustees retire.