



## Report of the Trustees for the year ending 5<sup>th</sup> April 2023

### Purpose and objectives

York Mystery Plays Supporters Trust are a voluntary organisation committed to supporting the existence of the City of York's medieval Mystery Plays, working both independently and in partnership with city organisations who may produce or support productions of the Plays. The Trust is now in its eleventh year following its creation after the 2012 production in York's Museum Gardens and the consequent decision to create a community group whose purpose was to ensure that the tradition of community drama, awareness of and participation in this feature of York' cultural heritage was sustained. The Plays are in the ownership of York's citizens rather than a single organisation which creates both opportunities and vulnerabilities for the tradition, leaving the commitment of an organisation such as the Trust critical to the survival of the Plays.

The Trust's objectives are:

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

In this respect, the Trust has a clear mandate to operate as an organisation whose activities are wholly governed by benefit to the community. In supporting or producing the Mystery Plays the Trust seeks to create opportunities for people not only to see the Plays but to join in the creative and cultural activity, be that as actors, fundraisers, production team or stewards. The ethos of the Trust is one which commits to ensuring that access to productions is facilitated by its recruitment processes as well as its decision making, for example, on venues and pricing. The Trust's financial management works to ensure that membership fees of £10 per annum are affordable to the majority and that those fees, supported by donations, are used to sustain the administrative costs of the Trust (e.g. insurance, postage, web maintenance, members' meetings) while any surplus plus fundraising income is used to support Mystery Play productions. Despite the problems of rising costs, the Trust has maintained its £10 membership fee for adults as a measure of inclusion.

## Activities and achievements

In the period 2022-2023 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's principal means of communication remains its website, its newsletter and its use of social media. The Trust has continued to develop its use of Instagram, Facebook and Twitter and its YouTube site featuring YMPST productions and interviews. Co-ordination of social media activity is undertaken by a Trustee. During 2022/23 it also produced a new printed leaflet summarising the history of the Plays and including visuals of productions; this has been disseminated widely at events and in various venues in the city.

The Trust's e-newsletter is produced approximately every 6 weeks and is circulated to an audience of members and interested parties (some 1000 subscribers). In addition, a second audience consisting of city organisations, press and local churches receives specific news at appropriate times – e.g. featuring production details. The newsletter is overseen by the Chair of Trustees and a Trustee, the long-term editor having now stepped down from the role during the year.

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

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

Two productions took place in 2022-23. In June 2022 the Trust participated in the four-yearly pageant of Waggon Plays, hosted by York Festival Trust. A total of eight plays were produced, the Trust undertaking to perform *Noah's Flood*. Ten performances took place over Sundays 19 and 26 June. In accordance with its principle of open access, the Trust advertised for a director and held open auditions for cast members from the local community. Members of the crew (Wagon Master, stewards et al) were also drawn from the community. The Waggon Plays are in the main free to view throughout the city with some ticketed seats at an enclosed venue at Kings Manor. A video of the production was made available for the Trust's YouTube site.

In December 2022, the Trust produced its second *A Nativity for York*, held at the Spurriergate Centre in the city centre, a central location providing easy access for the majority. As for *the Flood*, interviews were held for the post of director, followed by open auditions. Ticket prices were maintained at an affordable level of £10 and £6 (under-18s) and 8 performances, each lasting 1.5 hours, were provided. A video of the dress rehearsal was created with subtitles for free posting on the Trust's YouTube site.

Promotional activities for both productions involved: press releases, radio interviews, leaflets and poster display, advertising in Visit York, the Trust newsletters and social media activity.

In March and September the Trust carried out important fundraising activities. A cafe and stalls at St Crux, a local charity venue, staffed by Trust members and volunteers, enabled

valuable funds to be raised, importantly providing another activity in which members could participate.

The Trust had hoped to support two independent initiatives focussing on Mystery Play production through the year, both aiming to involve community and under-represented groups. Unfortunately both initiatives were cancelled due to difficulties encountered by the organisers.

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

In furtherance of its aims, the Trust worked to maintain active networks within the city's artistic, business and religious groups. It held its annual meeting of stakeholders, those city institutions with an interest in the Mystery Plays, in September 2022. This facilitated opportunities for initiatives to be shared among participants. It was recognised that the economic climate meant it unlikely that a major staged version of the Plays would be created in the foreseeable future, leaving performance to be limited to smaller versions (such as the Nativity) and the four-yearly cycle of Wagon Plays.

The Wagon Plays created a direct link between the Trust and the city Guilds, specifically the Guild of Cordwainers who were the nominal host of *the Flood* production. This had the advantage of creating positive relationships and enhancing the Trust's visibility and credibility in that community. A further development took place following discussions with York Museums Trust leading to a positive outcome for future Mystery Play displays in the Yorkshire Museum. The Trust maintains a positive relationship with the Trustees of the Spurriergate Centre, a former church in the city centre, which has hosted several Trust productions and which is committed to maintaining its partnership with the Trust in the future.

Discussions took place with researchers at the University of York to explore creating visible links in the city to the Plays, possibly in the form of a software application to a guided walk. This initiative may well be progressed in 2023/2024.

#### **Financial review**

Our total income for the year was £6,784 and our total expenditure was £9,954. We had carried forward £13,099 from 2021/22 and finished the year with a balance of £9,929.

Our main expenditure during the year was on our two productions: our Wagon Play, *The Flood*, which cost £2020; and our Nativity which cost £5,224. We receive no ticket income from the Wagon Plays but did receive two grants - £620 for wagon maintenance carried forward from the previous year and £500 from the Cordwainers' Guild as sponsors of our production. We received no grant income or sponsorship for our Nativity and ticket sales were disappointingly low. Ticket and refreshment sales for the Nativity generated a total income of £2,918 resulting in an overall loss of £2,306 on the production

Our other main sources of income were fundraising (£2,149), subscriptions (£680), and general donations (£323). Total income was £3,700 lower than in 2021/22 mainly due to a lack of grant funding and a reduction in income from subscriptions and fundraising.

Apart from our two productions our main areas of expenditure were: fundraising £707 (mainly venue and van hire plus catering costs for St Crux fundraising sales); insurance £357; events £241.45 (venue hire and refreshments for stakeholder and member events); miscellaneous expenditure included Visit York membership (£234), production of promotional leaflets (£155), Zoom subscription (£144), and repayment of a £500 grant from the Ernst & Young foundation which they paid twice in error in the previous year. The cost of maintaining the website, including the renewal of domain names, was £137.

Total expenditure was around £1,400 higher than in 2021/22. £500 of this is accounted for by the Ernst & Young repayment. Beyond this a general increase in costs (particularly in venue hire) meant that our two productions in 2022/23 (Wagon Play and Nativity) cost a total of £7,245 against £6,450 in 2021/22 (Passion and Nativity).

### **Accounting and reporting by charities**

The Trust's main area of expenditure (and income) is intended to be its annual Nativity production, performed for the first time in 2019. This 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 subsequent years. This ensures that if a future production were to run at a loss (as happened in 2021 with the cancelled production and 2022 with poor ticket sales), the financial viability of the Trust would not be at risk. As we were unable to stage a production in 2020, that funding was carried forward to 2021 and, as the 2021 production was cancelled, to 2022. Poor ticket sales for the 2022 production mean that only a limited amount of funding is available to be carried forward to a future production so this funding model is currently under review.

Not all of the Trust's productions or activities generate income; for example the Wagon Plays, which took place in 2022. The Trust therefore aims to budget to carry forward sufficient funds to cover the main activities planned for the upcoming year. Budgets and plans are reviewed by the Trustees throughout the year.

### **Structure, governance and management**

Trust has been a Charitable Incorporated Organisation since December 2017. and is a registered charity number 1176113. It is governed by its constitution.

Its official address is: York Theatre Royal, St Leonard's Place, York YO1 7HD.

The Trust has no paid employees but may pay a nominal fee to the director of its productions. It does not own or rent property. The Trust is run by a management committee of trustees who carry out the majority of their duties in their own time and from their own homes.

Trustees at start of 2022-2023: Linda Terry (Chair), Maurice Crichton (Secretary), Philip Turner (Treasurer), Gary Bateson, Anna Briggs, David Denbigh, Simon Tompsett and Janice Barnes-Newton..

Members seeking to join the Committee as a Trustee are advised to meet with the Chair to discuss the requirements and commitment needed for adoption as a Trustee: this involves not only their personal aspirations but an understanding of the time required (e.g. to attend monthly meetings, to undertake work outside those meetings), 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 with a signed declaration of financial probity for consideration by the Trustees. If the Trustees feel the applicant meets the criteria, the applicant can be co-opted during the year; recommendation by the Trustees of those applicants must be carried out at the next AGM for members' approval of the applicant. 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 by long-serving Trustees retiring during the same period.

The Trust determines its priorities for meeting its objectives through its planning and meeting processes. The trustees meet for an annual planning day, usually in March, to review the Trust's performance over the previous twelve months and develop an action plan for the coming year. Trustees then normally meet every month; meetings are held in a cost-free venue (often a committee member's home) to ensure the most efficient use of administrative funds. Trustees are expected to attend routinely. Work outside the meetings can be continued via email or by special meetings.

Members are kept informed of the Trust's activities via regular newsletters published at approximately six-weekly intervals and are encouraged to attend the AGM, which this year was held on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2022 by Zoom to facilitate access for members outside York and outside the UK. Trustees' email addresses are also freely available to enable members to raise issues and make suggestions.