



## Report of the Trustees for the year ending 5<sup>th</sup> April 2025

### Purpose and objectives

Founded in 2012 as a voluntary community group, York Mystery Plays Supporters Trust (YMPST) continues to fulfill its main purpose of continuing and supporting the performance tradition of the city's medieval Mystery Plays. The Trust views its role as significant in ensuring continuing performance, awareness and enthusiasm for this historic tradition.

The Trust's objectives are:

- Disseminating historical and contemporary information about the York Mystery Plays including operating a website: <https://ympst.co.uk>
- 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.

YMPST operates as an organisation run by the community for the community. Accessibility is a key principle upon which the Trust operates: creating opportunities for participation in or viewing the drama and for people to attend talks or similar events about the Plays. This principle is exemplified by its recruitment processes, decisions on ticket pricing and the accessibility of venues chosen. Despite rising administrative costs, the Trust has maintained its membership fee at £10 per adult member aiming to make membership as affordable as possible and seeks to supplement its financial position through other fundraising activities and donations.

During the period of this report, the Trust engaged in a number of activities in pursuit of its objectives:

### Activities and achievements

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

The YMPST website is regularly updated to include information about current or forthcoming productions in the city and promotes opportunity for involvement as well as providing details of the Trustees and key documents.

A six weekly newsletter, edited by two Trustees, is circulated to 1000+ supporters. This is a priority communication method for advertising director posts, audition dates and opportunities for participation or ticketing information. The newsletter not only promotes YMPST activities but any related activities in the city and beyond (eg. Chester Mystery Plays).

Social media play an increasingly important role in disseminating information with Facebook and Instagram routinely used. The Trust has moved away from X (formerly Twitter) and is using Threads and Bluesky. The YouTube site now has a range of previous productions which are free to view and are accessed by students nationally and internationally for study purposes. Three productions were added to the YouTube site during the period of this report.

The Annual General Meeting was held on Zoom on 5 February 2025 to facilitate access to members beyond York. The guest speaker following the formal agenda was Dr Alan Heaven, Artistic Director for the Wagon Play Festival in 2026.

**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.

The reporting period saw a range of activities following the period of consolidation in 2023/4, all of which aimed to bring opportunities for development, participation and for the introduction of new audiences to the Plays.

The Trust appointed Dr Tom Straszewski as mentor for an initiative involving three novice directors. Finding directors is an increasing challenge in amateur theatre. The aim of the venture was to give three individuals the chance to run a short production, supported by an experienced mentor and two producers from YMPST. Three postgraduate students were appointed after interview to direct one of three Plays from the Creation Cycle of the Mystery Plays. The Trust negotiated the use of three venues in the Micklegate area of York, two performances of each play taking place and with audiences moving between the venues.

*The Creation for York* took place on 1 June 2024 to sell-out audiences. Tickets were priced at £10 for the three plays. This met the objective of individual development but also of the establishment of new relationships with the staff of the three venues and performing to both new audience and Mystery Play aficionados.

The Trust took the *Creation* production on 15 June 2024 to Hartrigg Oaks, a care and residential village in New Earswick, York. This formed part of the home's 25th anniversary celebration. Over 100 residents came to a free performance of the three plays.

In 2023/24, the Trust researched the possibility of touring its annual Nativity production with the aim of reaching new audiences in the suburban areas of York. Negotiations resulted in three venues being identified: the medieval Tithe Barn at Nether Poppleton, St James the Deacon in Acomb and St Oswald's in Fulford. An open advertisement led to the appointment of a director and the consequent decision to stage a total of 7 performances between 29 November and 6 December 2024. Auditions for cast resulted in both new and experienced players and a more diverse company than the Trust had achieved in previous productions.

Data from audience booking information demonstrated that 25% of those attending had either never seen or heard of the Mystery Plays prior to the production. The relationships established between the production team and the venues were vital to the success of the venture: raising awareness locally, participation in promotion and joining as Front of House volunteers. The experience proved invaluable for undertaking a future tour. The Trustees' conclusion post-production, having obtained feedback from the venues and the cast and crew, was that the initiative had served to fulfil many of the Trust's stated objectives. It is likely that this model will be pursued in 2025.

Two major fundraising events took place in April and August 2024 when the Trust held its sale and cafe at St Crux in York, resulting in some £1400 for Mystery Play funds. As grants become more difficult to access due to the national financial position and costs of rehearsal premises increase, events like St Crux are critical to the Trust's finances. The events are also wonderful opportunities for members and supporters to work together.

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

The annual Stakeholder meeting of the principal arts and cultural organisations in York took place at the Spurriergate Centre on 10 October 2024, hosted by the Trust. It was an opportunity for the vision for the 2026 Wagon Play festival to be shared and resulted in both the City Council and the main tourist organisation, Make it York, committing to supporting the project. The Trust had invited Ben Pugh, author of a commissioned feasibility study into the potential for a major staged version of the Cycle to be produced, to present the findings. It was evident that the significant costs meant it unlikely that a major production of the Plays would take place in the foreseeable future but that other options were to be considered. Publication of these options is awaited from the commissioning group who were originally responsible for the 2012 production which took place in the Museum Gardens.

2024/25 was a positive year for the development of new networks for the Trust. The Creation and Nativity performances, undertaken in new venues, resulted in new relationships being formed. These also resulted in requests from other organisations in the city centre and suburbs for YMPST to perform there. These options will be considered by Trustees at the 2025/26 planning event.

#### **Financial review**

Our total income for the year was £8,901 (compared to £3,220 in 2023/24) and our total expenditure was £7,019 (£2,386 in 2023/24). We had carried forward £10,763 from 2023/24 and finished the year with a balance of £12,645.

Both income and expenditure were significantly higher than in the previous year, primarily due to our putting on two major productions in 24/25 compared to just one small production in 23/24.

The Creation cost £1,830 to stage and generated an income of £1,757 from ticket and refreshment sales (a loss of £73). The Nativity cost £3,460 to stage and generated an income of £2,904 (a loss of £556). During performances of the Nativity we held a bucket collection for UNICEF which raised £60. The most significant cost for both productions was venue hire for rehearsals and performances. For The Creation this accounted for 38% of the budget and for the Nativity 43%.

Our other main sources of income were all up on the previous year: fundraising £1,810 (compared to £1,413) mainly from two St Crux sales, subscriptions £700 (£590), and general donations £1,493 (£230) which included one very generous donation of £1,000.

Apart from our two productions our expenditure was broadly similar to 2023/24. The one exception to this was our insurance costs where hiring a van to transport costumes and props led to an increase from £249 the previous year to £498.

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

Originally the Trust's funding model for productions was that the income generated by one production should cover the bulk of the costs for the next one (the exception being the Wagon Plays which generate no income for the Trust). However, increases in production costs (particularly venue hire for rehearsals and performances) combined with our desire to keep ticket prices affordable mean that we now expect most productions to fail to cover their costs. Touring productions are especially prone to making a loss as not only are we hiring multiple venues but in moving out of the city centre we are taking a gamble with audience numbers. We therefore need to ensure that we have sufficient reserves (topped up by fundraising and grant funding) to continue to cover such losses and fund productions such as The Wagon Plays which generate no income.

Each production is allocated a budget which is managed by a trustee who acts as producer and works with the director of the production to ensure the budget is adhered to. Any changes to the budget need to be agreed in advance by the committee.

Not all of the Trust's activities generate income so budgets and plans are reviewed regularly by trustees throughout the year. A financial report is a standing item on the agenda of trustees' monthly meetings.

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

YMPST has been a Charitable Incorporated Organisation since December 2017 and is a registered charity, Number 1176113. It is governed by its Constitution and its official address is York Theatre Royal, St Leonard's Place, York YO1 7HD.

The Trust has no paid employees but may pay fees to directors of its productions. The Trust is run by a management committee of Trustees who carry out their duties in their own time and from their own homes. Trustees during 2024-2025 were: Linda Terry (Chair), Simon Tompsett (Secretary), Phil Turner (Treasurer), Gary Bateson, Anna Briggs, David Denbigh, and Janice Barnes-Newton. Mark Comer, Emily Hansen and Tristan Heaven were elected as new Trustees at the AGM. Gary Bateson stood down as a Trustee, his tenure having been completed.

Members seeking to join the Committee are advised to meet with the Chair to discuss the requirements and commitment needed; this involves not only their personal aspirations but an understanding of the time required, an identification of the skills they can offer and their fitness to act as a Trustee (as a Fit and Proper Person). Applicants are required to send in an application form together with a signed declaration of financial probity for consideration by the Trustees.

If successful, the applicant can be co-opted during the year and a recommendation by the Trustees of the applicant is carried out at the next AGM for members' consideration and approval.

Under the terms of the Constitution, Trustees serve a given period of office and are required to step down at the appropriate time. The Trust's timetable for managing this process ensures that the skills of long-standing Trustees are not lost at the same time.

An annual business planning day enables the Trust to review its activities and determine its priorities and strategies for the forthcoming period. This also enables the Committee to review its policies and ensure that appropriate measures are in place for the safe and effective management of the Trust and its activities. During the period of this report, Janice Barnes-Newton was approved by York Council as a chaperone to enable the Trust to more easily involve those aged under-18 in productions. Committee meetings normally take place monthly either on Zoom or in person. Meetings are held in a Trustee's home to ensure the most efficient use of administrative funds. Decisions taken at the Planning day are reviewed as part of the monthly agenda. Members are informed of the Trust's plans for the forthcoming period either by the regular newsletter or by email. Trustees' email addresses are available on the website for members to raise issues directly; otherwise issues can be raised or suggestions made at the Annual General Meeting.