

Montgomeryshire Youth Theatre/Theatr Ieuenctid Sir Drefaldwyn

charity no. 516040

registered address c/o Bron Cafnant, Llanfair Caereinion, SY21 0BP

Trustees' Report and Accounts ~ 01/09/09 - 31/08/10

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### 1. Introduction

The Annual General Meeting of Montgomeryshire Youth Theatre, held on 07/03/10, elected the following Trustees :

Jane Howells; Charlotte Durie; Jennifer Wilcox; Jacqueline Langston; Hugh Pitt; Jayne Gore; Jacqueline Goode. The Trustees are the Management Committee of the Youth Theatre.

Freya Boyes and Sophie Patch were elected as member representatives to serve on the Management Committee alongside the Trustees. At a subsequent meeting, the following officers were appointed :

Chair : Jane Howells  
Treasurer : Hugh Pitt  
Secretary : Charlotte Durie

At a subsequent meeting Iris Gordijn was asked to re-join the committee as a cooptee. The Objects of the Society (Montgomeryshire Youth Theatre) are as follows :  
- to foster and promote the education of young people, in Welsh and in English, in the appreciation and practice of Drama in all its aspects, and to co-operate with Local Authorities, Educational Institutions and Cultural Societies relating to the practice and presentation and study of Drama in order inter alia to promote better knowledge and more widespread interest in the practice of the performing arts.

In furtherance of these Objects, during the twelve months which are the subject of this report, Montgomeryshire Youth Theatre has engaged in activities and delivered a programme detailed in subsequent paragraphs.

### 3. Appointment of Trustees

The Management Committee of the Youth Theatre comprises its Trustees ( appointed annually at the Annual General Meeting), coopted members with specific artistic and other skills, and representatives elected by the youth members. They meet regularly throughout

the year, on a quarterly basis, with on-going contact outside these meetings between the Artistic Director and officers/individual management committee members.

New Trustees are apprised of their duties as Trustees, and the governing document and policies are used as points of reference in all decision-making.

#### **4. Policies and Practice**

The Youth Theatre operates under the following policies :

The Protection of Children and Young People;  
Disability;  
Equal Opportunities;  
Guidelines and Procedures for Health and Safety.

As part of the induction and/or training of any persons working regularly with the Youth Theatre, the provisions of these policies are made clear, and adherence to them a provision of engagement.

Although it has no written policy for the use of the Welsh language, the Youth Theatre attempts to work bi-lingually whenever appropriate, with its annual reports, and some publicity material, published in both languages.

#### **5. Finance and Fundraising**

The Youth Theatre enjoys the financial support of Powys County Council and Welshpool Town Council, these grants being listed in the end-of-year accounts which form part of this Report. Other income is received from membership and project fees, and box office returns. All artists working for the Youth Theatre are paid at agreed professional rates; however, a great deal of voluntary work by members of the management committee and others is essential to the viability of the organisation. The free provision of working and performing venues by Welshpool High School is again acknowledged with gratitude.

The Youth Theatre has a reserves policy of £2000. An annual budget is agreed at the first committee meeting of each year, and financial reports and updates are presented at each subsequent meeting.

Under the Charities Act 2006, now implemented, the ceiling of annual income requiring independent examination has been raised to £25,000. As the Youth Theatre's annual income is below this figure, independent examination is no longer required. However, the annual accounts, presented as part of this report, continue to be compiled (on an income and expenditure basis) according to the practices which have been followed in the past, as required by the Charity Commission.

## **6. Organisation and Membership**

A total of approximately 30 workshops were held throughout the year for each group, with additional rehearsals in production periods, at weekends and during holidays.

Membership levels have remained high throughout the year, with an average weekly attendance over the three groups of around 60 young people. During the year, working groups comprised Group 1, school years 5 and 6, Group 2 (intermediate) school years 7, 8 and 9, and the senior group from year 10 upwards. Numbers in each group remained stable throughout the year, with the largest group, seniors, having a membership of approximately 24. We were able, this year, to bring in everyone who was on the waiting list to their appropriate group, at different stages during the year.

Mindful of the financial demands on many of the families whose children attend on a weekly basis, with the increasing cost of travel, the membership fee was kept at £25 for a term's workshop attendance, including extra rehearsals in production periods: this sum is reduced in cases of hardship. This is considerably lower than any comparable organisation, and only possible because of the generous provision of facilities by Welshpool High School, and the carrying of many hidden costs (such as office space provision etc.) by the staff.

During the year, Welshpool High School found it necessary to withdraw use of the space which the youth theatre had occupied as a workshop for many years. However, a large storage space was created for the purpose of storing wardrobe, properties etc., for which we are most grateful. Many large set pieces and other material, including the lighting rig and lanterns, are now kept at the premises of the current director, and this cannot be a long-term solution.

## **7. Staffing and Volunteers**

The Youth Theatre was fortunate to have retained the services of Penny Jones and Ginny Graham, who worked regularly on a freelance basis as workshop leaders and directors.

The work of the music director, Iris Gordijn, continues to enrich productions, and Penny Jones has now taken overall charge of the wardrobe.

An important contribution to the work of the Youth Theatre is made by volunteers: Management Committee members and some parents provide invaluable front-of-house support during productions: some senior members assist in the work of Group 1: John Graham works on all productions as technical/lighting manager, and on set construction, with occasional assistance from James Graham. This high level of voluntary assistance not only enables the Youth Theatre to function by providing a wide range of experiences for its members, but also keeps down running costs, with only actual out-of-pocket and some travel expenses being paid.

## 8. Workshop programme

A full programme of weekly workshops was held. Group 1 met regularly for two and a half terms, closing with a "showing and sharing" event to which their parents were invited. Group 2 began the year with skills workshops, which gradually moved into a rehearsal schedule alongside the senior group. It is clear that they learned a lot and benefitted greatly by this enhanced experience. They then had a full term of workshops during the summer. The senior group, once out of production, had half a term of skills workshops in the summer. Attendance at all workshops was extremely high, with most members never missing a single meeting.

## 9. Productions, Performances and other events

This year saw an innovation in the work of the youth theatre. Its major production was a staging of Ibsen's great poetic play, *Peer Gynt*, and for the first time the intermediate group also took part, playing children, wedding guests, small trolls, street traders, and providing the stormy sea for the shipwreck scene. With a cast of around 36, this was one of the largest the youth theatre had had on stage together. People with long memories may recall that this play was staged by the youth theatre many years ago, before any of this year's cast was born. This re-staging was very successful, with strong performances from an experienced cast, combining outstanding individual performances with vigorous and imaginative ensemble work. Original music by Iris Gordijn, played live by members of the cast, enhanced this production. It was performed to large audiences in Theatr Clera for three nights, and received a glowing review, published on the Powys Arts Forum website, to be found at [www.powysartsforum.org.uk](http://www.powysartsforum.org.uk).

During November 2009, a **stage combat workshop weekend** was organised for the senior group. Led by Keith Wallis, this was a most enjoyable event, during which a large group of senior members learned basic stage combat skills, with some development, from a highly experienced tutor. These skills were drawn on in the subsequent production of *Peer Gynt*.

During the summer term, a large group of senior and intermediate members, with some family members as well, enjoyed a trip to the Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester, to see a first-rate and highly enjoyable production of Shakespeare's early comedy, *A Comedy of Errors*.

Members of both groups 1 and 2 worked together on a **Play in a Weekend** during the summer term, during which they spend two days of intense activities devising and performing a highly enjoyable play, based on a theme of time travel, played to a large audience of families and friends.

The year was rounded off by the **summer project**. A group of the most senior members worked with Ginny Graham on a dramatisation of some of Edgar Allan Poe's dark and mysterious short stories. Under the title of *The Masque of Deception*, this atmospheric

and disturbing play was performed at Montgomery, Llandinam, Hirnant and Welshpool during the first days of September. Although the performances were strictly beyond the time limits of this report, the creative process took place during July and August, so it seems invidious not to note that all four performances were highly successful, playing to full houses at the three smaller venues, and to a sizeable audience in Theatr Clera, Welshpool. Performances were acclaimed by audience members, and the experience of the cast, and its director, during the whole process was both enjoyable and valuable in terms of enhanced performance skills and expertise.

## **10. Collaborations, Publicity and Networking**

Due to its longevity, the youth theatre has built up over the years not only an enviable reputation (it is considered a major youth arts provider for North Powys by the Arts and Culture Department of Powys County Council), but a large number of, mainly informal, relationships with other relevant bodies. Ginny Graham is Chair of Powys Arts Forum, and in close contact with the arts officers at Powys County Council. During the year she was a member of the advisory group to PCC on its revised Youth Arts Policy. Long-time relationships with TAsC (Traditional Arts in the Community), Arts Connection in Llanfyllin, and of course Welshpool High School have been maintained.

The youth theatre has made its resources available to the school, and to other organisations, mainly in terms of lighting and wardrobe.

The Youth Theatre enjoys good press coverage for all its events. However the main vehicle for publicity (apart from dedicated press releases and other material in connection with different events) is now the website ([www.mytheatre.org.uk](http://www.mytheatre.org.uk)) which is regularly updated with news and information, and contains a vivid archive of pictures, as well as past reports etc. This is handled on behalf of the youth theatre by Philip Freeman.

The youth theatre is a member of the National Association of Youth Theatres, though it must be noted that this is an England-based organisation, funding by Arts Council England, and appears to do very little as far as youth theatre in Wales is concerned. During the year, Ginny Graham did make approaches to the representative from Wales on the board of NAYT, but these received minimal response. It is a pity that the inclusive nature that this national body showed in its early years has now disappeared, and that there is no voice for youth theatre in Wales.

## **11. Conclusion**

This report comes at the end of a full and interesting year for the youth theatre, its members and its leaders. The quality and range of the work is undiminished, and the demand for membership is equally high. It enjoys an enviable reputation for the professionalism of its attitude, and the experience that it provides for a large number of young people. There is no comparable organisation within the area. The success of many of

its past members demonstrates the value which they place on their time with the youth theatre: to quote Chris Cookson (a long-time member now enjoying success as an actor and musician) in a recent newspaper article: "I would say Montgomeryshire Youth Theatre is the foundation that everything else has been built on." But this success goes beyond the many who are now working in performance professions; the confidence which the vast majority of members gain from working collaboratively within a creative team enhances their personal development, as they grow into adulthood.

In an increasingly difficult financial climate, with uncertainties about how high the arts (youth arts in particular) will be on national and regional agendas, the youth theatre will have to take great care to preserve all that is best about it in coming years, should funding become more difficult to obtain. However, it has the strength of its track record and reputation to sustain it, as well as an active management committee, and leaders who believe passionately in its value, and there is no reason to doubt that it will continue well into the future.

At the end of this year, Ginny Graham, its long-term director, is retiring, having spent the past twelve months handing over the administration and cultural direction to Penny Jones, who has worked for the youth theatre for the past five years, and whom we are confident will carry the work forward with energy and expertise. We are fortunate to have recruited Lucy French, a new performing arts teacher at the high school, to work alongside her. Together they will provide a first-rate team to take Montgomeryshire Youth Theatre forward into the future.

*Jane Howells*  
*Chair*