

## Chair's Report, 2010 (for the AGM in April, 2011)

I can't pretend that we planned it this way, but 2010 proved to be a year of crossing continents for the Arts Centre. We had theatre, films, music, food, stories, folk dance and classes from Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Mexico, France (even *Bonjour Tonton* for the Under Fives when small people crawled about the studio speaking in tongues) Spain, Japan and the United States. *And* a trip to Berlin. I mean, why would you visit the big city down the road when the world comes to Crediton?

Of course, we have catered for domestic tastes as well. Peter Hamilton will highlight some of our excellent fund-raising events later in the evening. We have continued to host a range of classes – no fewer than eight each week in the visual arts. The Portrait Club proved so popular that two different groups now meet each week. The two book clubs and the creative writing class thrive, there are classes in Praying Mantis Kung Fu and Tai Chi (we're a *Martial Arts Centre* too!). And it's so good that Jez Taylor's two youth theatre groups do so well, both during term time and in half-term projects.

Two particular events were rather different. The 20<sup>th</sup> March saw the official opening of our refurbished foyer, kitchen and green room when we showcased many of the activities which happen at the Centre. Among the full house were councillors from Devon, Mid-Devon and Crediton Town Council. We could not be more fortunate in our local representatives – they actively help us in many ways and their support is essential. The grant for the foyer, with the help of Councillor Nick Way, came from DCC's 'Investing in Devon' Fund. Mid-Devon CC, despite the severity of the cuts they face, managed to sustain the level of their grant to us – listening not only to Councillor David Nation and the Centre's arguments but those of several Friends who wrote strong letters and attended meetings in Tiverton. Our own Town Council has committed to an annually renewable grant in addition to the backing they give to events in the Square such as the Food Festival and Christmas in the Square.

We also tried to blend information with entertainment at a second out-of-the-ordinary meeting in November. Called 'It's What We Do', it gave us a chance to celebrate exactly that with Friends and our newly established Business Partners. Geoff Fox will say more about our Business Partnership scheme later.

So many people make this place work, and they deserve our thanks. First, our three part-time employees. Pamla Powlesland, our tireless and uncomplaining cleaner. John Downes, equally tireless and hardly-ever complaining, who now doubles as caretaker and lighting technician extraordinaire. And Rosemary Stephenson, our Administrator. A brief acknowledgement of her work here can do no justice to everything she does, way over and above the call of duty. For example, she has increased the rental of our buildings – invaluable income – to the point that the committee twice had to meet at the Crediton Inn because there was no room at the Centre. She is constantly good-humoured (as far as I know), positive and seemingly immune to panic. Which is just as well.

So, many, many thanks to Pamela, John and Rosemary.

The committee would not want me to single anyone out (I hope), but I should note that David Treadaway has decided to resign from the group, not least because meetings clashed with his commitment to the Crediton Women's Running Network. In the foyer, there is a discreet plaque recording that Dave (RIBA) designed the refurbishments which have made a huge difference to the Centre. And just today, only a year to eighteen months late, the Arts Centre banner has been re-erected in a new site - a tribute to David's perseverance. 'The rest is silence' on that one.

I must mention also that Paul Cartwright moved out of the Chair and into the Treasurer's seat last July. Which is why I am giving this report, since I agreed to be Acting Chair through to this AGM. Paul served as Chair with patience, tolerance, humour and imagination for four years. As if that were not enough, Paul and Daphne planned and led the October half-term trip to Berlin; how many small Arts Centres run trips to European centres of culture every other year? It's amazing. I tried to think of a parallel to Dave's plaque for Paul, but somehow the photographed-oak-planking-vinyl floor covering in the small studio just doesn't cut it as a memorial – but Paul was one of the team steered by Tim Harris which secured the grant to carry out this much needed work. Many, many thanks, Paul, Tim and Rosemary. (*It says here, 'Thunderous Applause – or there ought to be'*)

Our working parties and sub groups have been as busy as ever. I hope you like our new-look brochure – we think it a great improvement. We hope too you may have visited our new website – and here I must especially thank Natalie Barnard, a professional designer from Cheltenham, who has given her services free of charge. We like to think of her and husband Tom as 'our Cheltenham Branch'. The committee has planned a new system so that duties now carried out by the Chair can be shared around. And we have plans for further improvements to our buildings.

Events which occurred since Christmas belong to next year's report. But I would like to note that this January's 'Turning of the Year' was attended by more people than ever and – so connoisseurs of the event tell me – it was as good as any. This event somehow reflects the Friends - all that you give and do as well as enjoy. The collection of £211 was the highest ever – and Turning of the Year isn't even a fund raiser! And on that occasion, the bar receipts were £298, and no report would be complete without a mention of the regular bar team of Keith Jeram, Mike Boston and Pat Laver, now joined by John Downes and supported by sundry volunteers throughout the year. Not only do they contribute a great mood of geniality to any event, but also a substantial amount of money.

That's a good place to end – not so much with the bar, but with *yourselves*, the Friends, since this is indeed *your* Arts Centre. More about developments with the Friends from Naomi Wright shortly, but, for now, thank you.

Cleo Heard  
Chair

