

6TH SKIPTON INTERNATIONAL PUPPET FESTIVAL, OCTOBER 2015

EVALUATION REPORT

WEB VERSION

A report commissioned by Skipton International Puppet Festival.

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OUTLINE

Skipton Puppet Festival has been put together by Skipton Puppet Festival (company), formed in 2012 from an existing steering group. The aim of this report is to record and share information about what has happened at the 2015 Puppet Festival, with a view to using it to inform planning for future festivals, to identify achievements, mistakes and lessons learned.

The first festival took place in 2005; this is the sixth festival.

THE AIMS

The aims for the 2015 festival were to:

- Create a high quality cultural event in Skipton that provides access to puppet theatre for local people and visitors, expanding the audience for this art form by creating a high profile event of artistic excellence and national significance.
- Continue to develop the festival as one of the country's key events for puppeteers
- Enable children, young people and families to experience this rich and accessible art form, through free/donation/low-cost workshops and street performances.

THE EVENT

The festival took place between 2 and 4 October 2015 in Skipton, with satellite performances in the surrounding area before and after the main event. There were 2903 ticketed performance attendees, 540 schools and outreach performance attendees, and approximately 15,000 visitors to the festival including festival venues, hubsite and Puppet Parade over the weekend. The festival had sold 91% of pre-festival available ticketed seating by Wed 30th September; as seating in venues is often created specifically for the festival, capacity is estimated on a conservative basis and then increased according to actual capacity, for instance by adding another row of seats. Over 60% of the performance programme for the 2015 festival was free. Workshops were by donation and ticket prices for family events were kept to a minimum to increase accessibility.

KEY EVENT STATISTICS:

- 23 ticketed shows
- Five shows for school audiences: two performances at Ermysted's Grammar School, one at Glusburn Institute, one at Parish Primary School, and one at Water Street Primary School
- Three weekends of drop-in workshops prior to the festival, ten days of SELFA workshops prior to the Festival, and four different workshops run across the festival weekend
- A masterclass for twenty professional puppeteers
- An installation at Skipton Library
- A lively programme of street performances and free events at the Festival Hubsite
- A puppet parade featuring over 120 puppets.
- An exhibition of puppets at Skipton Town Hall to commemorate the 90th anniversary of the British Puppet and Model Theatre Guild

THE VENUES

There was no single main venue for the 2015 festival; the scale of the event requires that numerous spaces are used, with activity split into two halves: the free activities centred around the festival hubsite, whilst ticketed activity took place across four schools venues nearby.

ERMYSTED'S

Ermysted's school is based approximately 300 metres from the festival hubsite and, with an existing stage and lighting setup, makes an ideal venue for larger shows. The festival added to the existing technical equipment and installed a tiered seating structure. This gave the space a capacity of up to 150 when productions were located on stage, and 110 when located in front of the stage.

Ermysted's also hosted artists in the canteen space for meals, and provided an assembly point for the start of the Puppet Parade.

ST STEPHEN'S

St Stephen's School hall is located next to Ermysted's on Gargrave Road. As it has an entrance on to the road leading up from Gargrave Road to St Stephen's Church, access is very easy for audience members and for performers/technical staff. This is small and basic venue (capacity 50-80) without the facilities of larger spaces such as Ermysted's – for instance, there is no stage – but the intimacy was reported as a positive attribute by performers and audiences alike.

The programming here focused on simple shows for younger children; the hall was also used as an interactive shadow space.

JUDI DENCH STUDIO

This space, located within Skipton Girls' High School, is the best space of those available for smaller theatrical shows. It was also used on the Friday for school performances, and hosts the smaller scale international work that needs more technical back-up. The capacity is approximately 80. It was noted that we could use this space for a Sunday evening closing performance for the future.

SKIPTON GIRLS' HIGH SCHOOL - MAIN HALL

This space is most suitable for shows in front of the stage. The capacity is 150, with a rake for 90 people created from the school's rostra. The space is a basic hall with minimal technical infrastructure and companies performing here must be self-contained with regard to lighting and sound.

CRAVEN GALLERY IN SKIPTON TOWN HALL

This space hosted an exhibition of puppetry to commemorate 90 years of the British Puppet and Model Theatre Guild, alongside an exhibition to promote Yarndale, the annual yarn festival taking place the weekend before the Puppet Festival.

GLUSBURN INSTITUTE

There was one performance of Aladdin by Theater Aladdin here. The Institute charged £72 for use of the space. 93 children from Glusburn primary school attended.

OTHER OUTREACH VENUES

Upfront Puppet Theatre near Penrith hosted the first Outreach performance from the Icelandic company, supported by Highlights rural touring as an evening show preceded by supper. This went down very well and worked as advertising for the festival to a puppet-interested audience further afield.

The Boo in Rossendale hosted the second performance, which again promoted the festival to audiences one hour away from Skipton.

School Performances - Water Street School and Parish School in Skipton hosted outreach performances from the Bulgarian and Icelandic companies respectively.

Nelson Library - hosted a performance from the Icelandic company supported by Spot-On Libraries. This was not ideal as the space was very unsuitable and the audience very small. However those that did attend were extremely delighted with the show.

VENUE ISSUES

Whilst the schools venues do have AV equipment installed, this was found to be in a poor state, emphasising the need for the Festival to survey schools setups during the summer rather than during the week running up to the Festival.

The technical support role requires review as Mike Watson and team seemed overwhelmed at points especially during the setting up period of the festival.

Closer scrutiny of companies' technical requirements would be beneficial, as whilst some companies said they were self-contained, in reality this wasn't the case. This could be easily resolved through the distribution of a technical spec form sent to performers when booking them, as well as a list of the spec of the venue in which they will perform.

The mix of venues worked well – the loss of Skipton Little Theatre as a venue was not an issue in this festival as we did not find shows suitable for the space. It is unlikely that it will be available for future festivals if we keep to the first weekend of October, as this is too close to their Autumn production and the stage is usually occupied at this time with set building.

Venues would benefit from improved signage, for instance in the form of 'sticky feet' applied to pavements to guide visitors, as well as indications at the bottom of St Stephens' and Ermysted's driveways.

HUBSITE

This space hosted a giant marquee, an open air stage, the London School of Puppetry tent, the workshop Yurt, the workshop marquee, the Little Fawn caravan, the Kabaret de Poche tent, and all outdoor street acts/walkabouts as well as several food trailers, the festival Green Room and the festival box office. It is also the landing site for the Puppet parade on the Sunday.

LARGE MARQUEE

The main performance space at the hubsite was a very large marquee (15m x 20m) which was open on two sides. One end was blacked out, with a stage and simple tech setup. On the long closed side, the Festival Bar, stalls selling festival merchandise and Punch and Judy Fellowship paraphernalia. Seating nearer the stage was in the form of carpet tiles on the floor, bench rostra, then café tables towards the back of the marquee. The

open sides allowed for flexible capacity and flow of audience, though there was occasionally a conflict between audience volume inside and outside the marquee. Overall the space worked very well, particularly in contrast to previous festivals where marquees held closed ticketed shows; this open format created a better atmosphere and accessibility for hubsite audiences – who could flow between performances and open-air interactions. Having proved that the format worked, it can be used in more sophisticated ways for future events.

On Saturday evening we hosted an informal performance space with bar by dropping the marquee sides and heating the marquee with gas blowers. This functioned very effectively as an evening venue.

For future festivals a slightly lower stage would be better as some companies elected to perform on the floor to be closer to their audiences and others couldn't use it as there was not enough height.

OPEN AIR STAGE

An open stage offered further opportunities for audiences to watch free performances. Although the festival was very lucky with the weather and the rain cover for this stage was not needed, it visually ‘completed’ the stage area. Some low rostra benches would have helped in this area.

The overall look of the hubsite was much better, partly due to striped roofs on the marquees, bunting, improved signage, and flags, but it was noted that when the audience were not present the site still looked very much like a car park and that further opportunities exist to create a more celebratory look to the space.

THE YURT

This was used for drop-in workshops with a donation box for optional contributions.. Approximately 230 puppets were made in the Yurt over the weekend.

MELVYN RAWLINSON WORKSHOP MARQUEE

This was also extremely busy, with 415 puppets made.

Total hubsite workshop donations were £512.

BOX OFFICE

This space worked well. It was originally intended that the First Aid and Lost and Found would be located within the Box Office. At the event, a small gazebo was borrowed and erected just behind the Box Office tent; this offered visitors requiring First Aid some privacy.

FESTIVAL OFFICE/ GREEN ROOM

This space was a meeting and food point for artists, as well as being a central operations hub and volunteer liaison point. The mix of functions for this space created a convivial atmosphere between artists and the volunteer team. However, with artists wanting to use the space for changing and for storing costumes and other items requiring security, the space was soon overrun and chaotic.

After the 2013 festival, it was suggested that the green room area be expanded, so the 2015 space was larger; whilst the marquee is of a better size, it does require careful management in order to satisfy the needs of its many users.

KABARET DE POCHE

This was a small circus tent performing to an audience of 30. This was set on the canal side and worked well as a focal point and venue. Also in this space were the Punch and Judy/Don Roberto booths, a face painting stand, The Canal and River Trust information stand, The Peep show was located here and some walkabouts passed through.

LITTLE FAWN

This was a self-contained puppet theatre caravan seating 12, with three different 12 minute mini performances turning around over the weekend.

LONDON SCHOOL OF PUPPETRY

LSP had a tent at the Hubsite which functioned as both performance space and an enquiry point for people interested in their courses. Seven performers delivered 25 shows at the LSP tent, as well as four theatre-for-ones. The performances attracted an audience of 500.

It gave new LSP performers the opportunity to perform at a festival with their own tent, to understand the requirements of performance, to meet other professional puppeteers and to stay up-to-date by watching new shows.

SMALL BOOTH SHOWS ON THE HUBSITE

These included: Don Roberto, Punch and Judy from Hand to Mouth, The Peep Show from Prom Prom Productions, Plain Bob from Noisy Oyster, Festival from Mark Whitaker, Freakshow from Miaou Productions and some Theatre for Ones.

Walkabouts included: Ottfreidt the fire breathing dragon, Odille the Skeleton from Les Contes des Asphalt, Gran and Gramps "Never too Old" from Froliked, The Meanderthals from Noisy Oyster, VIP Puppets giant Giraffe and Baby, Emeline the Edwardian Lady, Skipton's Giant swaledales and the Lion from Juba do Laou.

Numerous other acts performed on the open stage and in the main marquee.

TOILETS

Three additional portable toilets were provided around the site to supplement the public toilets (which are locked in the evenings); the public toilets have been refurbished in the months prior to the Festival, and a combination of this, portable toilets, and the presence of a site 'housekeeper' hired by the festival ensured that these facilities remained in much better condition than during previous festivals throughout the event.

SECURITY

A security guard was present during the evenings from Thursday night to Sunday night to ensure the safety of the site. Despite this, three people disrupted the site late on the Saturday night, turning over tables in the Box Office before helping themselves to beer from the Festival Bar. They were apprehended by the police. The security guard stated that he had been patrolling around the back of the site at the point when the people arrived. A potential issue with a group of travellers arriving on the Coach Street Car Park on the Sunday night, before the site had been fully cleared, was managed through conversations with the police.

FIRST AID

First aid at the Hubsite was provided by Judy Probst, her daughter Laura, Brett Butler and two First Aiders from YorMed. At previous festivals a mix of paid for and volunteer first aiders was used. At this event we used two paid for providers to ensure full coverage.

HUBSITE ISSUES:

The 2013 festival had presented issues for the Production team in working with Craven District Council to ensure the safety and suitability of the Coach Street Car Park as a site; as a result of timely conversations and rigorous attention to detail from the Festival Team, the process has been smoother and the relationship has improved for the 2015 festival. Imran Rashid from Craven District Council has stated that the council are amenable to the Festival having the car park earlier than the Thursday lunchtime in future, if necessary. This would help with the set up, which has tended to be rushed and problematic as all venues including the hubsite have to be ready on the Friday of the festival.

The use of the hubsite as a landing site for the parade influences its layout and feel, which can have an impact on the aesthetic of the site at quieter times.

The presence of a housekeeper and more bins was very positive, but for future events it would be good to have a 'hygiene kit' on site including plastic gloves, a dustpan, broom and brush, and so on.

For future events the Festival should put up signs explaining that photographs are being taken, and inviting the public to share their images. It was felt that overall the festival signage was much better than in previous years; the large corex signs listing free events on each day were well used, and in future we will create more of these signs.

FOOD

AT THE HUBSITE

Food provision was from 'street food'-style catering vans. Caterers had been identified and approached, starting approximately six months before the festival, with the intention of avoiding 'burger vans' and providing a range of food options to suit all diets and palates. Many audience members praised the mix of food on offer, and vendors reported positive takings, even suggesting that the festival happens annually!

FOR ARTISTS

Food for artists at the hubsite was provided by Sheelagh Parker, with a selection of sandwiches, fruit, hot drinks and cake available. This was delivered out of the Festival Green Room, which was tucked away in a corner of the hubsite. Fruit was provided through sponsorship from Keelhams Farm Shop, and was particularly well received by artists and volunteers.

A line in the Artist Letter stated that performers would receive lunchtime food on the day they performed, but some performers were frustrated to discover that this did not include the Friday.

An evening meal was provided at Ermysteds canteen, which worked very well – the provision of a hot meal doubled as a networking opportunity for performers. However, there was one complaint about the standard of the vegetarian offer.

Breakfasts for performers not staying in B&Bs or other catered accommodation was provided by the Boathouse Café. This was reported as being of high calibre; the café feel very positive about the festival and are keen to be involved in future.

The Boathouse Cafe also provided a meal for performers who had already arrived on Thursday night. This was of very good quality and value.

The Swadford Centre hosted the ‘post-festival’ meal for artists and organisers, offering great hospitality and a fantastic spread of food. The only disadvantage was a lack of seating capacity.

BAR

The Festival bar was run by the Festival, as the Narrowboat, who had previously run the bar, was due to be refurbished. Beer was supplied by Dark Horse, a local brewery, and the bar reported excellent takings, running out of beer and wine by the end of the Festival. Running its own bar is very cost-effective for the festival as beer is cheap to buy and, selling at a comparative price to local pubs, a substantial profit was made. The festival paid for a bar manager who did an excellent job, supported by volunteers.

Performers were not offered beer tokens for 2015. There were no complaints. Overall, comments were received from many performers thanking the festival for the quality and quantity of its hospitality.

PROGRAMMING

For details of the full programme please visit <http://skiptonpuppetfestival.co.uk/page53.html>

MAIN SHOWS

23 ticketed performances in venues and 31 ticketed performances in mini venues (Little Fawn & Kabaret de Poche) at the Hubsite were programmed in total, of which five were suitable for adults, and most were aimed at families.

Particular successes included ‘The Table’ from Blind Summit, and Tof Theatre’s ‘Dans L’Atelier’.

SCHOOLS SHOWS

There were five schools shows prior to the festival. The shows were Metamorphosis by Bernt Ogronik, and Aladdin by Theater Aladdin. The shows were at a subsidised price of £3.50 per child but, as with previous years, booking was an incredibly slow and frustrating process.

STREET PERFORMANCES

As mentioned under ‘Hubsite’, there were several street performances, programmed so that there was something for everyone, from a Portuguese take on Punch and Judy in the form of SA Marionetas ‘Don Roberto’ to the sneeze-ridden Meanderthals. The free street performances are vital in offering participation opportunities for people who might not otherwise be able to attend the Festival, and in creating a vibrant fun atmosphere at the Hubsite.

INTERNATIONAL PERFORMERS

Eleven International companies came to the festival from seven countries across Europe representing 30% of performers. The international aspect of the festival is a draw for the UK puppetry community as well as the general public – it provides an opportunity to see and be inspired by puppetry with a different cultural flavour without the expense of travelling abroad. The international element also attracts programmers, who view Skipton as a showcase event. The Belgian company Tof had a travel grant from the Belgian Embassy which demanded that arts professionals would be present in Skipton to see the show. Post-festival, they were sent a list with contacts of programmers who were present. Having contacted these people, Tof now have several invitations to return to the UK. This proves that Skipton is effective in showcasing work.

LOCAL PERFORMERS

Eight local companies were programmed: Lempen Puppet Theatre;; London School of Puppetry (North), Skipton's Giant Swaledales, Odd Doll, Froliked, Pete White - Suitcase Circus, Handmade Parade and Indigo Moon Theatre. This represents 22% of companies, and is a vital component in ensuring the Festival is inclusive in its programming across the range from the local to the international.

OTHER OBSERVATIONS

Feedback about the programme was largely positive, with a feeling that there was something for everyone. However, Festival directors felt that programming choice was limited by the amount of work seen and reviewed by directors. For the future we would like to ensure that more use is made of funds set aside to cover 'go and see' activities, to help in programming the festival. Highlights of the festival included work chosen in this way, and quality of programming could be improved if more work was seen.

FOR FUTURE EVENTS:

Whilst Pete White did a good job as MC for the Open Stage it was felt that this role could have been extended to cover more of the hubsite activity. For future events the Festival would benefit from a 'Festival Cryer' – a role that would be perfect shared between Pete White and Tony Liddington.

PUBLICITY

The publicity for the 2015 Festival once again took a multi-channel approach, using print, PR, social media, banner advertising, and email.

As the Festival had largely sold out before the main delivery of leaflets to schools, it can be agreed that the Festival's publicity is working.

PRINT

20,000 brochures were printed for the 2015 festival. These were distributed to tourist information centres and libraries across East Lancashire, West Yorkshire, the south Dales and Craven district, to local Skipton businesses, schools across West and North Yorkshire and East Lancashire, at events in the run up, and to the festival mailing list.

Approximately 250 A3 and 2,500 A4 posters were distributed, put up in shops and on noticeboards, around Craven district.

30,000 A5 festival flyers and 5,000 pre-festival workshop flyers were also distributed.

Feedback from schools prior to the previous festival suggested that many were moving from distributing print through schoolbags to online bulletins; however, when schools were telephoned for the 2015 event, this wasn't the case, as more schools than ever requested brochures or leaflets for each family. Through schools distribution, 16,620 brochures and 7,000 A5 flyers were distributed to local families.

1000 A5 and 100 A4 Rural Touring flyers were prepared for Bernt Ogronik's show 'Metamorphosis' in Nelson, Penrith and Rossendale.

ADVERTISING

The Festival has further scaled back its advertising spend, as there is little return on such an expensive medium; the only advertising was a 1/8 page advert in Harrogate Living. It is unlikely that the festival will advertise in print media at all in future.

SOCIAL MEDIA

FACEBOOK

the Skipton Puppet Festival Facebook page had been set up for the 2013 festival, and attained 521 followers. By the end of the 2015 festival this had grown to 1500 followers. Because posts can be 'shared' and links made, individual posts in the run up and particularly during the festival were able to reach far more people than this. The most popular posts were photos, and calls to action, e.g. the box office opening.

TWITTER

the festival gained a further 400 followers during the 2015 festival run up, resulting in 1,100 followers. The main Twitter traffic was retweets from other puppetry organisations.

Although it is not reflected in responses to the feedback questionnaire, social media is enormously useful in generating awareness – it can get people talking, even if it isn't the final tool in getting someone to take action.

As a live tool, social media share news as it happens, creating a buzz and supporting a sense of community. It is also free to use, which means that it offers a low-risk high-reward communications tool.

WEBSITE

The website was maintained and updated by Daniel Lempen for the 2015 festival. Because it is managed 'in house', it is fast and easy to update information.

The website used Google Analytics for the first time for the 2013 Festival.

The site had 7,180 visitors during the period 1st July – 5th October 2015, an increase over the 6,303 visitors during the period 1 July – 30 September 2013. The busiest day for site views was the Saturday of the festival. Of the total 10,111 visits, over half were on mobile devices (mobile phone/tablet).

Most visitors to the site looked at the Festival 2015 page (75%)

Traffic to the site mainly came from organic searches (e.g. via Google) or by typing the Festival URL directly into the browser address bar. Facebook was the next highest source of referrals, with 500 referrals.

EMAIL

The Festival uses Mailchimp to distribute information and organise its electronic mail lists; this enables them to monitor the success of specific mailouts, such as how many were opened by recipients, and whether recipients forwarded mails or clicked on links in the mails. Recipients are also able to unsubscribe from the mailing list, helping the Festival to comply with Data Protection laws.

PR

Press releases – these were sent out at key points before the Festival: to announce the Festival, to promote family workshops, and before the Festival itself, predominantly to local press.

TV - Radio - Local radio station Drystone FM promoted festival events and interviewed the Festival's administrator prior to the open workshop weekends in September.

Listings – the festival was listed on several online and magazine publications.

BANNERS

Banners were sited at several locations around Skipton: Corex banners were placed at the A629/A65/A59 'Little Chef' roundabout, at Morrisons supermarket in Skipton town centre, at the Canal Basin in Skipton, and the Grassington Road roundabout. These are a key method of promoting the festival, according to feedback forms.

Immediately following the Festival, the organisers received a call from Craven District Council planning department to remove the banners as they contravened planning regulations; it was suggested to CDC that the council could offer managed event banner areas to support local events.

MUSEUM AND EXHIBITION

The British Puppet and Model Theatre Guild created a display of vintage puppets at the Craven Museum foyer, to commemorate ninety years of the organisation, for the two months leading up to the festival. The display puppets provided a promotional talking point for the festival for any visitors to the Town Hall. Approximately 17,500 people visited the exhibition.

BOX OFFICE

Harold Hoggarth ran the box office from his home in Barnoldswick. For the second time the Festival had an online booking facility, as well as a phone line. The online and postal box office opened on the 20th July. Calls to the festival box office were to a mobile telephone number, which ran between 9th and 30th September. Both methods allowed people to pay by cheque or credit card, and tickets were emailed out, or held for collection at the Festival Box Office tent or at venues.

Pre-festival, Harold ran two Ticket Saturdays in the weekends immediately preceding the Festival, where people could buy tickets direct from him at Craven Gallery in Skipton Town Hall. At the Festival itself Harold ran the Box Office with help from his daughters. On looking at the setup of venues and the seating arrangements, Harold was able to extend ticket availability for some shows so that some speculative visitors were able to purchase tickets on the day. The first show to sell out was Aladdin, which sold out weeks before the festival; it was decided to offer a second performance of this show, which also sold out before the Festival weekend.

Pre-festival ticket sales were £12,266.00, with a further £1,804.00 sold over the Festival weekend, making a total of £14,070.00. This included ticket money from the Kabaret de Poche and the Little Faun. Workshop

donations and bucket donations at the hubsite and parade totalled £1,694.10. Merchandise and bar takings totalled £2,464.58 – a total of £18,228.68

Tickets for ticketed shows were single price – there were no concession tickets. The rationale for this was that the festival itself is already heavily subsidised. Also, the job of the box office staff is complicated enough with so many different shows to sell, without offering multiple price levels for each ticket. This decision did not affect sales!

INSURANCE

Insurance for the festival was organised through Ben Pugh, who is both a Director and the festival's Production Manager. It cost £1590.00 from Chubb via Vista Insurance Brokers Ltd. The period of insurance was 29th July 2015 to 28th July 2016 for Employer's Liability Insurance and 25th August 2015 to 24 August 2016 for event insurance including public liability and directors' liability.

ARTISTIC DEVELOPMENT

As well as providing a platform for strengthening networks, the 2015 Festival offered a three hour masterclass for puppeteers, delivered by Bernt Ogrdnik: 'Zen and the Art of Puppetry'. This cost £20 per person; there were twenty spaces, all of which were taken. The masterclass was very positively received, with even the most seasoned of puppeteers reporting that they were able to take new tips and ideas from the session. Other networking opportunities for puppeteers arose through the Festival's tactic of inviting performers for the duration of the festival rather than just for the day of their performance; feeding artists both at lunchtimes and in a group environment at Ermysteds' canteen in the evenings; allowing access to shows; encouraging a supportive and friendly environment in which artists could see one another's work. Informal contact of this nature engenders new partnerships, collaboration and inspiration. See Appendix 6.

Artists were invited to pre-book shows for £1 per ticket, many simply turned up to performances and were allowed in if there was space. 250 artist tickets were paid for but we estimate that there were approximately 450 free attendances at performances. Artists were particularly keen to see Blind Summit's 'The Table', which was heavily oversubscribed despite the provision of additional tickets/seating. Tof Theatre's 'Dans L'Atelier' and Green Ginger's 'Outpost' were equally popular.

PARADE

The Puppet Parade was once again a tremendous success, and for many audience and participants was the highlight of the whole weekend. The theme was 'Legs, Wings and Tails', and the parade was delivered in partnership with Handmade Parade, based in Hebden Bridge, who specialise in processional puppets. The parade featured 120 puppets, including several 'hired in' puppets from Handmade Parade and the puppets made at workshops at Stepping Stones and via the Community Puppetmaking Bursaries, and at SELFA summer workshops. The Woodland Creatures created for the 2013 festival also came out once again. The parade lineup featured professionals, volunteers, musicians, members of the public and those who had attended puppetbuilding workshops.

The parade was delivered with the support of Skipton Town Council, whose staff manned road closures and co-ordinated the public safety aspects.

Costs included £1000 for the samba bands, and £7,120 to Handmade Parade.

OBSERVATIONS FOR FUTURE:

For future events more planning is needed to give the parade landing a celebratory finale. This time the focus was on emptying the hubsite of giant puppets quickly, to avoid overcrowding and chaotic movement of puppets across carparks. In the event, these logistical problems weren't successfully resolved, and instead just resulted in a confused end to the parade. Retaining some large puppets on the hubsite rather than leading all offsite would help to retain the sense of spectacle felt by audiences as the parade lands; the presence of one of the rhythmically-driven samba bands would have added to the carnival feel. This would also be a good opportunity to use a compere in guiding audience response and final applause.

The hubsite remained busy whilst the parade moved through the town. In previous years the hubsite has gone quiet until the parade landed.

COMMUNITY PUPPETMAKING BURSARIES

The Festival secured funding from Skipton Mechanics Institute to offer 'Community Puppetmaking Bursaries'. The idea behind these was to offer community groups £100 towards the cost of constructing a giant puppet for the Puppet Parade. Despite promotion of the scheme in the local area, including press coverage in the Craven Herald, in the end only five organisations took up the offer: SELFA, Skipton Library, the Greatwood and Horseclose Community, Skipton Young Carers (who declined a bursary but still wanted to participate – they built a flying pig at the Open workshops over the weekends before the festival). Following SELFA's unsuccessful fundraising for schools workshops, it had been hoped that schools would apply for a share of the money, but none did.

Applications were invited from the local community, so a Camphill community from Dumfries who applied had to be turned down; the group built bird puppets and came to participate in the Parade anyway, later reporting that they'd had a brilliant time.

WORKSHOPS

The following workshops took place as part of the 2015 Puppet Festival:

LIBRARY WORKSHOP

Skipton Library held drop-in workshops for families to create a 'Very Hungry Caterpillar' (and fruit!) for the Puppet Parade. Takeup was very positive amongst families with younger children. In addition, the Library had a shadow puppet installation and meet-the-artist event featuring Indigo Moon Theatre, who were performing at the festival. This was part of their Fun Palaces event.

SELFA SCHOOL HOLIDAY WORKSHOPS FOR CHILDREN

SELFA exists primarily to support disadvantaged children and at risk families within the Skipton area by providing extra-curricular and curriculum-enhancing activity. Workshops were run over two weeks during the school summer holidays at Carleton Primary School, delivered by artists from Handmade Parade. As the puppetmaking at these workshops was just one aspect of a wider range of activity for children to choose from, fewer puppets were created than in previous years, with less engagement by the children. The puppetmaking activity felt diluted within more general activity.

PRE-FESTIVAL PARADE WORKSHOPS

These ran over the two weekends preceding the festival, and were run by Kerith Ogden and Fran Siervogel from Handmade Parade at the Stepping Stones community nursery in Skipton. Families were invited to create puppets to participate in the Festival Parade. Over 60 puppets were made in these workshops, which were attended by approximately 120 people – more than double the number who attended in 2013. These workshops were very successful both by output and satisfaction levels amongst participants.

GREATWOOD AND HORSECLOSE COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS

The Festival held conversations with Harriet Stevenson of Craven District Council/Yorkshire Housing about offering workshops for the Greatwood and Horseclose community, which is slightly geographically and socially isolated from Skipton; the area is also identified as an area of need. The plan was for workshops to engage community members via the community centre. ; Because the group required support in the cost of both workshop artists and materials, they applied for a support grant for the artist, and the Festival supplied funding for materials through the Community Puppetmaking Bursary scheme. . In the end, despite publicity from Yorkshire Housing, very few people attended the workshops and only four puppets were created, so the intention of offering positive engagement was not the success that might have been hoped.

FESTIVAL HUBSITE DROP-IN WORKSHOPS:

Vanessa Card puppetmaking in the Yurt

Professor PopUp (Melvin Rawlinson) In the workshop marquee

These were drop-in workshops in tents on the Festival Hubsite, free to all but with optional donations. Between them the two drop-in workshop leaders estimate that over 680 puppets were made.

Vanessa's workshop only ran on the Saturday, with the intention of participants using their puppets in the parade on the Sunday; in reality, this didn't happen as participants took away their puppets on the Saturday. In hindsight, it would be good for any hubsite workshops to run over both days of the festival.

VIRPI KETTU ANIMATION WORKSHOPS

Master animator Virpi Kettu ran stop motion animation workshops on the Saturday and Sunday of the festival; whilst the venue, in one of the rooms upstairs in the Swadford Centre, was slightly 'off the beaten track' for many festival visitors, thirty families participated in the workshops. This was a little gem hidden within the festival. The atmosphere was lovely and calm, and children enjoyed a concentrated session making and animating with Virpi. The rough edit of the film was shown in the Kennett barge, moored by the hubsite, on the Sunday, and can be seen here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U-MqpSn_6QI

BLACK CAT THEATRE DROP IN SHADOW HOUSE WORKSHOPS

On the Saturday and Sunday afternoons, Black Cat ran drop in shadow puppet sessions. Whilst it was intended that the sessions be drop-in, most participants arrived at the start of the sessions and stayed for the duration. Volunteers supporting the workshop on the Saturday brought their families to attend the workshop on the Sunday, confirming the quality of the experience for all.

Overall, the diverse range of workshops available meant that there were opportunities for everyone to get involved.

PARTNERSHIPS

As in previous years, the Festival approached Skipton Extended Learning For All (SELFA) with the intention of collaborating on summer holiday workshops and schools activity targeting Skipton primary schools. SELFA were unsuccessful in securing funding that would have enabled this activity, so the collaboration was scaled back to interaction through SELFA's school holiday workshops, which were delivered by Vanessa Card, Sue Walpole and Kerith Ogden.

Another partnership with Pioneer Projects, which would have seen workshops taking place in West Craven also fell through because of unsuccessful funding applications.

ACCESS AND DIVERSITY

The Festival is programmed to ensure access for the local community, regardless of people's circumstances, and to recognise and consider diversity within our local audiences.

Working with SELFA means that children and families who might experience barriers to involvement in arts activity are able to participate.

The Festival Hubsitie offered numerous free performances, meaning that those on a low income could participate in the festival and enjoy puppetry.

All venues were wheelchair accessible.

The diverse mix of people enjoying the Festival over the weekend was testament to the success of this inclusive programming and planning.

Some comment has been noted that the festival should represent diversity more in its programming choices. However, after discussion, the directors agree with this but also feel that the priority in programming should be focused on quality and interesting puppetry. An additional consideration is that the Festival is a small team delivering the event, and would require significantly increased administration support to deliver more complex international programming, in order to navigate the additional demands presented by the UK Borders agency.

VOLUNTEERS

A festival of this nature could not happen without volunteer support. For the 2015 event a total of 46 volunteers gave their time; this figure does not include those offering bed and breakfast accommodation to artists, or distributing flyers in their local area. The 46 volunteers gave approximately 469 hours of support.

Volunteers were recruited from previous festivals, via word of mouth, and from social media. Volunteers came from as far afield as Glasgow and East Grinstead to participate. Tasks included activities such as stewarding on the doors at performances, carrying puppets in the parade, and collecting donations at the Hubsitie.

Feedback from volunteers indicated that they enjoyed being able to participate in the event; many praised the Festival's clear briefing and volunteer co-ordination.

Volunteers at the 2015 event were offered performance tickets at £1 in exchange for completing four hours of work; this became confused between whether volunteers were entitled to a single £1 ticket, or a £1 ticket for each four hour block.

Andy Glen, one of the Festival Directors and an experienced Volunteer Manager, performed as a dedicated Volunteer Co-ordinator for the 2015 event, which significantly improved the delivery of this area of activity.

Audiences commented on how helpful and friendly the volunteer team were.

ASSESSMENT OF QUESTIONNAIRE

An assessment questionnaire was distributed at festival venues and was also available online as a SurveyMonkey questionnaire.

2000 questionnaires were printed, of which around half were handed out, mainly at ticketed performances, with 214 respondents (190 on paper, 24 via SurveyMonkey (half the amount of the previous year))

Key findings:

- 96% of 2900 allocated seats were sold – the same proportion as in 2013.
- 63% of attendees saw two or more shows.
- 38% of people travelled up to 15 miles, 35% travelled between 15 and 50 miles, and 27% travelled over 50 miles.
- 42% of attendees heard about the festival via word of mouth.
- 96.5% of attendees either loved or enjoyed the festival
- 97% of people said they would return in 2017 – up from 94% in 2013.
-

This year we included two new questions: 41% of respondents said that this was their first visit to Skipton Puppet Festival, which indicates that the festival is still attracting new audiences. More significantly, 80% of respondents said that they came to Skipton especially for the Festival, which indicates that it is a real draw.

- The total estimated audience for the 2015 festival was 17,688 performance attendees, up approximately 2,500 from the previous festival.

MERCHANDISE

Following the creation of T-shirts for the 2013 Festival, for the 2015 event the offer was extended to include mens, women's and children's T-shirts in several colours. Unfortunately these did not sell as well as hoped, so the Festival did not break even. The design does not mention 2015, so they can be sold at future events. The Festival also had bags printed, used as artist information packs and sold to the public alongside the T-shirts. The bags proved more popular.

PUPPETS FOR SALE

In response to demand at the previous festival, opportunities to buy puppets were created at the Hubsite. Little Fingy, who sell handmade knitted finger puppets from a knitting-covered ice cream van, proved a huge hit at the hubsite, and would be a welcome presence in future. A woman selling knitted larger puppets within the marquee space was, by contrast, a less enthusiastic presence and will not be invited to return. The British Puppet and Model Theatre Guild and the Punch and Judy Fellowship also had stands with various paraphernalia, information and puppets for sale.

REVIEWS/PHOTOGRAPHY/FILM

A selection of reviews can be found in Appendix 3.

The festival was photographed by Craig Shaw of Blu Planet Photography (photos here:

<http://bluplanetphoto.co.uk/skiptonpuppet2015>) (in a paid role as Festival Photographer, which means the festival now has a range of quality images to use in future publicity material), and Malcolm Stoney (photos here: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/mfsphotography/albums/72157659524335696>)

FUNDERS

Arts Council England
Skipton Town Partnership
Skipton Town Council
Skipton Mechanics Institute
Craven District Council
Goethe Institut
Craven Trust

SPONSORS

Keelhams Farm Shop
Spot On Rural Touring
The Inter Group
Stepping Stones
Handmade Parade
The British Puppet and Model Theatre Guild
Rendez Vous Hotel
Reid Moffatt Accountants

COMPANIES AND PERFORMANCES

Please refer to the Festival Programme at
<http://skiptonpuppetfestival.co.uk/SPF%20Festival%20Brochure%202015%20web%205.85MB.pdf>

PARTNERS

The partners of the 2015 Puppet Festival are:

- SELFA
- Skipton Town Partnership
- Handmade Parade
- Craven District Council
- Skipton Town Council
- Stepping Stones II Project

THE FESTIVAL TEAM

Skipton Puppet Festival became a limited company in June 2012. It is non-profit-passing.

The directors are:

Diana Bayliss – Chair of Directors. Diana is a puppeteer and artist, running Black Cat Puppet Theatre and delivering workshops in schools.

Lizzie Allen – Lizzie and her partner Simon Hatfield run Bradford-based Freehand Theatre.

Diana and Lizzie are working puppeteers and, as such, keep the festival informed about work they have seen, and fulfil the role of festival scrutineers from the perspective of artists and the artform.

Liz and Daniel Lempen – puppeteers for over twenty five years, running Lempen Puppet Theatre. Since 2005 Liz and Daniel have led on artistic programming, management, marketing, development of outreach and project activities , and delivery of the festival in detail.

Ben Pugh – Ben is an experienced production manager. Since 2005 Ben has acted as Production Manager for the festival. With his extensive experience, he has managed and guided the festival on professional matters such as Health & Safety, event delivery and best practice.

Andy Glen – Andy has extensive experience in the voluntary and community sector. Andy joined the team in 2012 as a retired professional with extensive experience as a manager in the voluntary and community sector. He has since acted as Volunteer Co-ordinator for the festival, developing the breadth and depth of volunteer engagement and value.

Harold Hoggarth – Harold has performed puppet shows for children, including Punch and Judy, and has run box office functions for Colne Muni. He is now officially retired. Since 2005 Harold has managed and run the box office function for the festival.

Clare Daněk – the festival's administrator, with arts administration experience across a range of contexts. As with the 2013 event, Clare has worked in the role of Festival Administrator, working approximately two days per week from March 2015. Her responsibilities have included fundraising applications, marketing activities and promotion of the schools programme, as well as general festival administration and support.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Skipton Puppet Festival is now one of the most long-established and popular festivals of puppetry in the UK. Judging by audience feedback and responses at the festival, it is clear that our audiences enjoy the event, and that this is why we have a loyal and growing audience base.

From artists' feedback, they value the support given by the festival,, the inspirational meeting point, hospitality, opportunity to come to Skipton both to see work and to be seen.See Appendix 6

Having created such a successful and popular event, and knowing that it is valued by audiences and artists alike, it would be very frustrating if the team could not take the next step to ensure the future of the Festival.

However we are a very small team delivering a large event, which has grown rapidly over the last ten years. Despite the undeniable success of the event, the directors feel that it is unsustainable in its present format. Four of the eight directors are working puppetry companies, touring and managing their own work. The various tasks of delivering the festival, which increase in density in the months preceding the event, are too demanding in time and focus, and risk destabilising puppeteer directors' livelihoods. After every festival the puppeteer directors, the Lempen in particular, have suffered as the festival workload means they have taken their focus away from finding and creating work, and consequently find themselves with not enough in their diaries to sustain them. Instead of being artists, they have become festival administrators. Whilst Skipton Puppet Festival has been set up as an artist-led event, and as such is a labour of love, the growth of the event

has meant that delivery is now more than the artists can manage without increased strategic and administrative support. In its current state the festival is fragile and, arguably, unsustainable. It therefore needs more stable infrastructure in the form of more paid professionals within the team to reduce the burden on individuals.

Another factor in making this festival harder to deliver is that there is currently no established performance venue within Skipton and therefore, in setting up the Festival, every venue must be created from scratch; the festival team do not have the personnel, professional structure and systems of a venue to rely upon for support, in contrast to most other performance festivals.

The Festival needs increased buy-in from partners within Skipton, such as Craven District Council, as it is a significant asset to the town, delivering positive experience to local people and positive benefits to the local economy, whilst also attracting visitors from near and far;

The Directors agree that the event could probably survive another edition in its current form, but unless it is restructured, it is unlikely to survive beyond the next edition in 2017.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE:

Approach local organisations and authorities to seek strategic support to help keep the festival alive. Future staffing: the administration role should be supplemented by additional posts, including an outreach role focusing on community workshops, outreach performances and the schools programme, and a Finance Manager/Bookkeeper: both of these roles have previously been undertaken in an unpaid capacity by Liz and Daniel Lempen.

There is money in the budget for the directors to undertake skills development; to date, whilst some of this pot has been used to enable directors to see work, some money still remains, and will be rolled into the next financial year. It has been agreed that the directors need to see more work to be able to programme this festival to the best of their abilities.

THE FESTIVAL IN NUMBERS

Volunteer hours: 664 (this does not include innumerable hours of unpaid time given by directors in the development, production and delivery of the event)

Workshops delivered: 20

Puppets created: 771

Commissions undertaken:

Performers: 86

Audience: 17,688 (based on number of attendees for each performance)

Of which ticketed: 2,903

Schools performances: 5

