



## **IPSWICH ARTS ASSOCIATION**

### **CHAIR'S REPORT, ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING - Thursday 16 November 2023.**

First, can I explain and apologise if my report this year is a trifle patchier than in previous years. As many of you know I have had to spend some time in hospital in the summer this year, having been carted off there by ambulance. The consequences have meant that much time has been spent visiting various outpatient clinics: a joy which still continues. The consequence is that, whilst meetings and other IAA activities have taken place as scheduled, I could not play as much an active part as I would have liked.

However, I can report that the Executive of Ipswich Arts Association has met regularly during the year and has always been quorate. We have been joined in these meetings by various Councillors of Ipswich Borough Council, and by Mark Whiting who has progressed through a number of roles at IBC.

Before I move to the substance of my report, I would like to place on record our thanks to Ivan Gilson. Ivan was for many years, the Vice-Chair and Treasurer of IAA and was involved in the organisation of Ipswich Music Day's Classical stages, as well as playing a major role in the various enterprises in which IAA engaged, including the Ipswich Charter Hangings. He has not enjoyed the best of health and made a decision earlier this year to move from his house near Ipswich to be closer to his daughter in Reading. We thank him for his enduring willingness to be involved over decades.

I also want to record my retrospective thanks to Mary Hollis who passed away recently. During her time as a Trustee of IAA she served in many enterprises, not least in giving ideas about speakers for the Ipswich Town Lectures. Her knowledge resulting from her role as a professional librarian were always valuable. Her funeral takes place very shortly.

The past two years have been for many organisations, including IAA a period of transition with new colleagues joining us and finding more about their role in this enterprise. I appreciate that sometimes the reasons for the way we work can be somewhat opaque: not least our names. The fact that it is what it is results from history. Before IAA there was a predecessor organisation – the Association of Ipswich Music Societies of which I was Deputy Chair. That morphed into IAA with a wider remit to include all forms of arts activities. The word "Ipswich" referred to the, then, fact that most member societies were based in Ipswich and would be eligible for grants from IBC and other benefits. Things changed with funding restrictions, and whilst that is still partly true, it is not the intention to be exclusive

and we encourage groups that are located outside of the Borough to join, and this has happened.

So, to my report: and I would like to start by thanking the Officers and Trustees of Ipswich Arts who have done much to support me during this past year. To Mary Odam and Sandy Lloyd, Secretary and Treasurer respectively of the Association, my thanks. And they also go to the Trustees who have worked in so many different ways together with the volunteers involved in many of our activities. I know how difficult it has been for many groups to get people to volunteer and I have “lost” a number of friends who disappear in a cloud of dust when I was able to get around the local patch- they turned tail lest I asked them to do something.

As is usual, I asked the trustees to identify some strategic targets which would guide us during the past 12 months. These plans followed on from the 7 points identified in the previous year, most of which had been met. For 2023 the plan was slightly less demanding but has still raised issues for us at times. The points included were

**1. Recruit a co-ordinator for Ipswich Town Lectures before June 2023.**

I can report that a new Trustee, Chandra Grover volunteered to “shadow” Vera Rogers as Ipswich Town Lectures Co-ordinator, and will be taking over from Vera when she steps down in December having managed the programmes for 23 years. To her and to Chandra I would extend my thanks.

**2. Recruit a Publicity Officer for the Association.**

Here we have singularly failed and I would like to return to this matter in a moment.

**3. Deliver on Ipswich Music Day commitment.**

This was achieved through the work undertaken by Christine Pearce and her colleagues. We had four Classical Music Stages and each was well attended.

**4. Bring forward points from 2022 that are still relevant.**

These included the Implementation of the revision of the IAA website and its re-design; to review the extent to which local schools could be further engaged with the Charter Hangings; working with the Suffolk Organists Association, re-engage with the plans for restoring the Corn Exchange organ, and, finally, closer engagement with Ipswich bodies involved in development of the town (such as Ipswich Central).

I can report that on some of these outstanding points, we have made progress; for example, the website is used a great deal and we are indebted to volunteer Paul Smith in maintaining its relevance. There is future work to be done and that is the subject of continuing discussion. Chandra Grover has also been developing IAA’s presence on social media.

The state of the Corn Exchange organ remains of concern to us. Unfortunately, further steps were delayed by the loss of one of the prime movers who left Suffolk to live in the USA. The work needed in the next stage of retaining the organ as a good working instrument will cost a considerable amount and the topic has been resurrected at a recent Trustees meeting.

As far as the Town developments are concerned, we have been approached by a number of organisations to seek our views: most recently about a development of housing and public amenities on the outskirts of Ipswich and about street musicians. On a slightly different subject, I have been approached by a number of music organisations seeking advice about publicity and about selecting new conductors.

May I now make specific comment on some of our activities over the past year?

Ann Cloke, Chair of the Charter Hangings sub-committee reports:

- St Peter's by the Waterfront was open for the summer season from the beginning of May to the end of September 2023 on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. The Charter Hangings are also on display at many of the events that take place at St Peter's throughout the year. Additionally, this year, town walks that focus on Tudor Ipswich and Thomas Wolsey, as part of the Wolsey 550 celebrations, have taken in St Peter's and participants are given an opportunity to look at the Hangings.

- Summer visitor numbers were up again this year and nearly back-to-back to pre-Covid levels:

2023 May – Sept, 897

2022 May – Sept, 695

2021 July – Sept, 407

2019 May – Sept, 1072

IAA was asked to find volunteer stewards for Tuesdays. It was more challenging to find enough volunteers to cover this year and so we plan to discuss the issue with the Ipswich Society, who cover Thursdays, to see if we can find a way to increase our numbers of volunteers for next year.

Isabel Clover gave a series of three talks at the Ipswich Institute in April, a talk to an over 60s group at Gainsborough Community Library in August and two talks at St Peter's in September, as part of Heritage Open Days. She has already been asked to talk to the Ipswich Society next spring. Ipswich Institute is considering asking her to do a further series of lectures for them.

St Peter's continue to sell Charter Hangings merchandise and this summer we sold a number of books and packs of postcards at the Ipswich Institute, on a sale or return basis. Ann is hopeful that we will be able to do this again next year. The Hold has just requested 10 packs of postcards. However, whilst overall, sales of books and postcards were up on last year, sales have increased year on year. Even if levels are not as they were when sold at the Tourist Information Centre was operating:

2018-2019: books - 53 / postcards - 91

2021-2022: books - 18 / postcards - 21

2022-2023: books - 23 / postcards - 34

The Charter Hangings sub-group have kept in touch over the year by email and held face to face meetings in St Peter's in May and October.

### **Ipswich Music Day.**

This took place on Sunday 2 July 2023, and IAA managed four Classical stages in the venues we have used for many years: Bethesda Baptist Church, The Mansion, the Masonic Hall and St Margaret's Church.

Christine Pearce reports that the events staged by IAA were a success with five new groups taking part including Suffolk Youth Jazz. There were increased audiences year-on-year in three of the four venues.

Again, we are grateful to the volunteers who acted as stewards or introduced the programmes.

### **Lunchtime Town Lectures and Concerts.**

Like the Charter Hangings, the Town Lectures were an initiative taken by IAA and launched in 2000 as one of our millennium projects. They have continued now with the Concerts added, for 23 years. The 2023 programme was generally well attended, although audience numbers have never totally recovered post-Covid.

\* Very unusually, three events (one concert and two lectures) could not proceed as advertised due to illness on the part of performers/speakers. However, replacements were found at short notice - sincere thanks to Trianon soloists, Pat Grimwade and Joy Bounds for stepping in.

\* The main focus in 2023 was to find someone to take over from Vera Rogers as co-ordinator of the lecture programme. Chandra Grover volunteered to take on the role and together with Sue Wallace-Shaddad and Mary Odam have come up with a fresh and interesting 2024 programme. The leaflets have been printed and are being circulated.

## **Publicity.**

Each week many of you know that I have produced a column for the East Anglian Daily Times reflecting the work of IAA. This column gets put up on the IAA website a few days later, and many groups are taking the opportunity to send me material because there is a relatively sure guarantee that the events will appear in print.

However, I do not and cannot manage the Publicity side of IAA and we are missing this pair of hands ensuring that our existence and work is not always as evident as it could be.

I have repeatedly asked for a volunteer and singularly been unsuccessful. With the work that Paul, Chandra and I already undertake, it is not a big ask for someone to give a few hours each month to promote the work of IAA (for example, ensuring that the IAA banners are displayed at relevant events, helping distribute printed materials and so on).

I ask again if this could be considered a priority because we have now been without such a person for over a year.

As I reported earlier the role of Social Media Rep has been filled by Chandra Grover and since May there has been considerable activity to promote and raise awareness of member events as well as the charter hangings.

A new IAA Instagram account has been opened. The page currently has 174 followers and all listings are automatically shared to the IAA Facebook page. Facebook followers total 374 with listings reaching 2,630 readers in the last 28 days, of which there were 1,547 in the last 7 days.

Finally, can I thank those friends and colleagues who nominated me to Making Music which resulted in my being awarded the Lady Hilary Groves award, one of Making Music's major awards. The Award Ceremony (held by Zoom, in October represented over 2,000 organisations that belong to Making Music with a reported 300,000 individual members across the UK. The award I understand is framed and waiting for me. The prestigious award The Lady Hilary Groves award is given each year to a musician- professional and non-professional - recognising the outstanding contribution that an individual or organisation has made to the musical life of the UK. The prize honours the remarkable contribution of Sir Charles Groves (husband to Lady Hilary) to both amateur music, as a former president of Making Music, and to British musicianship and composition. It was launched to mark the renowned conductor's 75th birthday.

Chris Green, Chair IAA  
November 2023