



2020/2021 Annual Report

Tim Lince:- Lowther Gardens (Lytham) Trust

2020/2021 was a difficult year for Lowther as any momentum that had been built in the proceeding years was shattered by the shutdowns and partial re-openings as dictated by the government due to covid 19.

Periods of shut down:- March 16th – September 3rd 2020 (No internal events)
November 4th 2020 - May 23rd 2021 (No internal Public Events)

July 24th – October 31st External events in the park (Drive in Cinema, Theatre in the park)
Sept 3rd to October 31st (Very limited and poorly attended internal events)
December 14th – 30th 2020 (External Drive in Pantomime and Cinema).
January 27th 2020 – April 5th (Filming of Schools shows and Silver Stream in the Theatre)

In the weeks up to the first closure we started to prepare by purchasing the tools required for staff to work from home (Laptops etc) and thus when we were closed, we were in a relatively good position to continue to run the Charity and the operational company from a distance. Good housekeeping and financial management allowed us to move forward and budget for the closure without taking on debt.

Lowther had a small surplus from 2019/2020 and this enabled us to plan for the 12 weeks of potential closure.

1. The first part of the financial year was spent cancelling and rescheduling of dates. This also included contacting customers to change tickets and make sure we retained a high level of ticket deposits.
2. Once it was clear that outdoor events would be able to take place Lowther commissioned an 8-metre screen from China and applied for funding to purchase the Drive in Cinema equipment that would be required to move all our operations out of doors. Funding was received from the Windmill Community Benefit Society and equipment purchased and Lowther embarked on a two venue Drive in Cinema Operation on the 17th of July 2020 (Lowther and Mill Farm).
3. In early July 2020 Lowther embarked on training its own Social Distance Champions to safely manage all events staged by Lowther staff. It also rewrote all risk assessments and working practice documents for staff and volunteers. These documents are still in force at the moment and guide us on safe practice for all events in the theatre and park.
4. In July 2020 Lowther staged Lytham's first Ice Cream festival which successfully navigated the changing Covid rules and regulations and was enjoyed by all.
5. Lowther successfully gained grant funding from the "Theatres Trust" for the purchase of a thermal camera for the Theatre Foyer and this has proved a god send in the theatre's fight to keep the venue covid secure. It not only measures people's temperature but also notes who has come into the theatre without masks.
6. The Theatre box office was also moved to the front of the theatre to facilitate ticket purchases, Car Parking tickets and latterly the sale of refreshments and ice creams.
7. Late August 2020 saw the theatre stage another hugely successful Food and Drink festival. Both the ice cream festival and the food and drink festival were free events but raised money for the theatre through charity donations and stall fees.
8. In June 2020 we applied to the Arts Council for emergency funding but did not receive this as we were not in immediate danger of going out of business.
9. The Theatre management and finance team juggled with budgets and redrew them on a weekly basis to keep the venue solvent. Theatre staff were made redundant, and a core team retained to take the theatre

through the closure period.

10. In late August 2020 the theatre applied successfully for CR1 Arts Council funding which was intended to take the theatre through to successful reopening in 2021 and back to full operation by April 2021. The Theatre received £124K which was the amount applied for.
11. Lowther installed further covid secure measures including a thermal camera backstage, nano technology virus eliminating door handle covers and push plates, one-way systems, and enhanced cleaning protocols.
12. The theatre reopened in September, but many shows had cancelled due to reduced seating capacity and so the venue limped through the Autumn. The Pantomime producers pulled out of production due to uncertainty.
13. Lowther Trust took the decision to stage its own pantomime and working with the venue management engaged artists, set, script and directorial support.
14. Lowther successfully staged internally the first amateur production in the country using Covid protocols which was well received.
15. The outdoor October 2020 festival was cancelled on local authority advice and the theatre closed for the whole of November hoping that it would reopen for internal performances in time for the Pantomime. Unfortunately, this was not the case and rules were changed that did not allow the reopening of the venue internally until June 2021.
16. In December 2020 the pantomime produced by the Trust, rehearsed, and filmed for streaming and then moved to an outdoor location on the back of a lorry and staged as a 21-performance run of Drive in Pantomime.
17. The Theatre staged a series of outdoor Christmas concerts (Drive in) and streamed the Pantomime direct to schools throughout the country.
18. With the shutdown in January 2021, we were informed that filming and streaming could take place using professional artists and so Lowther set about turning its facilities into a film studio for the rest of the year.
19. With streaming to schools over Christmas we had built a close relationship with several establishments, and we filmed other educational shows for these schools and developed education packs to go along with the streams so that teachers had further work that could be passed on to children who were restricted to studying at home.
20. It also became apparent that care homes and vulnerable people at home wanted to connect with the theatre and through a chance remark on streaming the pantomime to one care home the "Silver Stream Service" was launched. This is a weekly programme of shows filmed in the theatre and streamed directly to care homes free of charge. After launching in early March with a single care home we had 581 care home rooms signed up for our weekly broadcast by the beginning of April.

For your own interest this has now grown to 8023 care home rooms by the end of July, and it continues to grow in popularity. Funding for Silver screen equipment (Camera's etc) was through the Windmill Community Benefit society and sponsorship has paid for the artists fees and broadcast costs. Lowther has created a unique product that is nationally regarded as a first in this field.

1. Session Usage

There were 38 Community groups uses of the building during the shutdown year including staging the first Amateur performances in the UK and Blood donor sessions.

51 Live Professional performances during the year.

54 Cinema Presentations (Both Drive in and internal)

2. Traffic & Sales

There were 109 unique saleable public events in 2020/2021, in total £93786.60 worth of tickets were sold throughout the year.

3799 New and old customers.

2553 New Customers added to data base.

30.6 % of our customers came from the FY8 and 9.2 % PR4 postcodes. A good deal of the remainder of customers coming from much further afield. Lowther is continuing to attract from places such as Manchester, Leeds and

Newcastle and has recently embarked on publicising certain events across the North of England responding to customer location data.

3. Training completed by staff in 2020/2021

Lowther has continued investing in its staff and volunteers through training and skills development. To these ends in 2020/2021 it has completed the following formal training as well as on the job training conducted by senior management.

Induction Training:

Administrator X 1
Box office X 4 (Casual/ PT)

Full FOHM Training:

Social Distance Champions X 26

Volunteer Front of House Manager Training:

4 Volunteers
Front of House Staff Training X 38

Spektrix Continued Box Office Training:

Box Office Staff x 4
Theatre Administrator x 1
Volunteers x 3

Fire Alarm Training:

6 staff
4 Volunteers

EPOS Till Software Training:

Administrator x 1
Bar Staff x 4

Accounts Manager

Completed Institute of Financial Accountants Qualification (Grades: Distinction & Merit)
& Is now a fully qualified accountant. Further continued training will be undertaken

Administrator

Adobe Photoshop and "In Design" trained.

Box office/ Operation staff

Arts Award Training to deliver to young people.

Technical

Training in film editing and now Adobe Premiere qualified.
Pearl streaming operating system
JVC HD camera system
Film Production and Direction
Film Editing

4. Technically speaking

As we move the venue to zero carbon emissions, we are intending installing an LED intelligent lighting rig that can be focussed from ground level therefore improving venue safety as well as making us more efficient.

We have satellite broadcast to the venue and seen an increase of cinema presentations during the day maximising our throughput of events.

We can stream directly to the internet as well as record multicamera work. This will allow us to provide new services as we go forward.

The whole team have a can-do attitude as is displayed by a recent email.
Email from Francis Rossi's Management :-

*"Exceptional feedback from Francis and co at Lytham - everybody loves your place. It's not just the team, it's the warm welcome from all, the efficiency and the ease with which people can work. You really go the extra mile and it's noted. People are grateful.
They loved your place. Best venue, best team, warmest welcome and happiest event of the tour so far. Wished to pass on thanks. Your team does an exceptional job every time".*

5. Bar Matters/ Snacks

We have introduced drinks in the Foyer as well as the Theatre itself.
A licence has been applied and given for us to sell alcohol as on and off sales to the park.

2020/2021

Merchandise/ games/ car park £53,849.60 (£22,364 Car Park)

Bar sales 2020/2021 £18631.84

2019/2020 £171,189.41

2019 Profit - £100,325.13 @ 50% margin This is a 67% increase in profits from 2018

2018 Profit - £ 59,857.12

2017 Profit - £ 50,989.38

New tills allow us to track stock and flag potential sales areas that we can develop.
Challenge 25 is in place on the bar. All bar staff are given training on this and have signed to say they have received it.

6. Volunteer Hours.

2020/2021 has been a difficult year and our volunteers have had to adapt to the different rules and conditions for work. Please note that this is only based on the recorded duties, the friends and theatre volunteers provide a great deal of ad hoc work outside of our standard arrangements. Volunteer duties have included:-

- FOH Duties
- Box Office
- Technical & Operations

Throughout the year the Volunteer force and Social Distance Champions have saved the theatre:-
in 2020/2021 **£ 66,856.00**
In 2019/2020 **£163,401.20**

7. Marketing Report.

Lowther has continued in 2020/2021 to develop its digital marketing and has hired a new marketing officer to lead the organisation out of the pandemic closure. With the addition of streaming cameras and the Park View cameras we are able to deliver content to a much wider reach. Contact with care homes and schools with streaming has also brought much sought-after marketing opportunities.

8. Park Matters

Lowther Gardens (Lytham) Trust have continued to work closely with FBC through a grounds-based SLA. In 2020/21 the gardeners presented Lowther at its best with regard to planting and general upkeep. Pathways were repaired, drainage survey completed and regular meetings with park operatives have allowed a more joined up development process for the gardens. The Park Volunteers did a fantastic job with both the herbaceous border and the planting of the woodland paths at both the south and north entrances. We had lighting repaired and replaced and added other electrical points around the park that would be needed if we are to follow development plans. We also fitted park cameras that allow the public to view the park 24/7 on live view.

Lowther are also proud to have brought in substantial outside investment to resurface the tennis courts and bring Padel tennis to Lowther Gardens. This is in partnership with Will to Win who provide Padel tennis to the royal parks in London. This new investment revitalises an area of Lowther Gardens that has been sadly neglected and become unusable. Plans are underway to revitalise other areas during this current winter period.

9. In conclusion

Lowther Pavilion and Gardens grew exponentially in our previous financial year of 2019/ 2020 and made £106K surplus to reinvest through the charity before depreciation. **If it had not held these reserves, it would have certainly not had managed to survive the pandemic closure** and would have suffered a similar fate as venues at Southport, Preston, Halifax etc. Unfortunately, the list is too long to mention here, but suffice to say there are many venues that will not reopen or have not managed to provide any significant cultural output during the last 18 months. One doesn't have to look too far down the coast to see examples of the different way in which venues handled the pandemic. Lowther has had a mantra of "Being Open Today!" and all the staff and the volunteers have worked together to deliver the highest quality of service that was possible, realising that cultural endeavours provide so much welcome relief for mental wellbeing. This has been seen both in the park and through the dynamic offerings that the Lowther has been able to run. The Company maintained its policy of ringfencing ticket advances, protecting the organisation from not being able to refund tickets for cancelled events (as noted by the demise of Preston Charter Theatre, Southport Theatre and other theatres that have had to close and go into liquidation due to Covid 19). The Theatre has budgeted and re-budgeted often on a daily basis as the rules changed and altered our earning potential and this still continues to this day. Reserves have obviously now been spent getting us to where we are, but Lowther is prepared and ready to grow out of the crisis when public confidence returns, and the industry has product that the public wish to see.

There is no doubt this is a changed market and Lowther will be affected not only by the general feeling in the country but also the lack of workers that are available for hospitality and entertainment. Lowther has built a national reputation with its care home streaming, schools support during the pandemic, training of Social Distance Champions (its programme was rolled out to other theatres to help them open), safety measures (which had major tour and music producers visiting from London to see it in operation), through to being the first theatre to stage outdoor performances, internal amateur work, and the range of festivals we safely staged last summer. In the last ten years Lowther has grown from staging occasional tribute acts and amateur theatre to being a 52 weeks of the year operation that is raising the profile of Fylde across the country, bringing much needed tourist revenue to the area (as is demonstrated by audience profiling) and providing a cultural resource to the residents and visitors alike. In addition, it is attracting investment into the park and the theatre that will allow us in partnership and support from Fylde Borough Council to invest in facilities for the future. It must be remembered that public "wellbeing" is going to vitally important as the country moves forward and Lowther delivers this both through the gardens and the theatre. With investment in the park and the theatre's much needed redevelopment the Trust can ensure it can provide Fylde with facilities for the next generation. We look forward to working with Fylde Borough Council in 2021/2022, opening the theatre fully in a post pandemic world, delivery of the redevelopment project for the theatre and park and providing the region with an iconic cultural space for all generations. Through the SLA, Fylde Borough Council ensures the community use of space at Lowther and supports the Trust in providing first class facilities.

10. Correspondence, compliments, and complaints have been previously submitted.

11. Accounts

There is a delay in completion of the finalised accounts due to having to have the land and the buildings revalued. Draft accounts have been supplied to Council Finance officers for checking. The surplus / deficit will be adjusted by the amount of depreciation resulting from the change in valuation and full audited accounts will be made available as soon as possible.

