

Thame Town Council visit to Skipton - 16 June 2014

Councillors from Thame made a fact finding visit to Skipton, Yorks Livestock market and Mart Theatre accompanied by a representative of Litton Property Group and the director of The Mart Theatre.

Cllrs Nigel Champken-Woods, David Bretherton and David Laver,
Sarah Woodward, Litton Property Group,
Clare Allen, The Mart Theatre.

Location

Skipton (also known as Skipton-in-Craven) is a market town and civil parish in the Craven district of North Yorkshire, England. Historically in the West Riding of Yorkshire, it is located on the course of the River Aire and the Leeds and Liverpool Canal to the south of the Yorkshire Dales, 16 miles northwest of Bradford and 38 miles west of York. At the 2011 Census, Skipton had a population of 14,623.

It was market day on the day of the visit and the town appeared to be thriving with no evidence of decline. There was a large street market with many visitors, large car parks which were full and at least 15 coaches.

For more information on Skipton go to <http://www.welcometoskipton.com>

Livestock Market

Skipton Auction Mart was built in the 1990s and is operated by CCM Auctions (Craven Cattle Markets Ltd). It is a traditional livestock market holding weekly Monday and Wednesday cattle and sheep auctions. There are also a variety of other auctions: machinery/furniture and poultry/fowl bi-monthly on a Saturday; sheep dogs quarterly on a Friday. Specialist breeding stocks sheep and Christmas prime-stock on occasional Fridays and Saturdays. The most expensive sheepdog in Guinness Book of Records was sold here in May 2013 (£10k)

There is a large car-park which is necessary as it is located on the outskirts of the town. The venue also has good toilet facilities and an on-site cafe (good bacon rolls).

Theatre

The Mart Theatre was created in the mid 2000's with Arts Council funding to create a larger theatre and arts venue in the town making use of the existing cattle auction ring. Arts Council funding was withdrawn due to the economic downturn but the Mart Theatre continues to operate successfully offering a varied programme of productions of about 40 per year and has a mailing list of 3000. It is run as a registered charity employing staff for each production as necessary. The Art Director draws a management fee from each production. The venue holds an audience of 300 and is well suited to music concerts and stand up comedians, which are the

mainstay of their productions. Larger shows can be accommodated with imagination, but the lack of theatre "wings" and back drops make stage production difficult. There is a large hall next to the Theatre which doubles as a reception/foyer/bar and meeting room although the decor and furniture are in need of updating. Amateur dramatic productions have been staged "in the round" with some of the level seating omitted.

Other Activities

There are a number of other, mainly farming associated, businesses located on the site and with whom the Theatre has a good working relationship.

Skipton Little Theatre is located in the town centre and has been the home of the Skipton Players since 1960. Seating a maximum of 72 people the theatre has a very friendly and personal atmosphere. The Players usually put on five plays every year.

Conversion to a Theatre.

The main auction ring forms a horseshoe shape with tiered seating (200) on three sides. At the open end of the horseshoe are two sets of roller doors either side of the auctioneer's rostrum. A high, sturdy steel barrier protects the viewers from the cattle.

For conversion the floor is thoroughly cleaned and disinfected, the steel barrier and auctioneer's rostrum are removed by fork lift and the staging brought in and positioned, again by fork lift.

Additional seating on the level is provided up to 100 as required by the production. A large black back cloth is lowered to cover the roller doors. The theatre lighting and sound system remain in place throughout, although minor adjustment need to be made to suite the various performers; (they have the best lit cows in the country).

The whole operation takes less than one hour both to remove and to re-instate.

Service Level Agreement (SLA)

The Mart Theatre have a SLA with CCM Ltd for which they pay a set figure each month and then have the right to all arts and community activities held on the site. The SLA also requires CCM to make all the changes to the auction ring to convert it to a theatre.

Other Arts/ Community activities within the SLA

A range of other activities are held on the site which help to make the theatre viable and make the site available to a wider audience.

- Regular caravan rallies organised through various caravan clubs make use of the hard standing and hall and toilet facilities. Up to 15 times per year.
- "Art in the Pen" is an annual event (running for 9 years) where "the sheep and cattle pens are transformed into mini galleries out of which artists exhibit and sell their original works of art". There were over 5000 visitors in 2013.

- “Yarndale” is described as a “creative festival celebrating all things woolly and wonderful”, Yarndale plays host to an impressive selection of talented and passionate exhibitors. The event brings together an inspiring mix of artisan yarns, fibres, haberdashery, kits, books, handmade garments and artwork for sale, as well as creative exhibitions, demonstrations and a full programme of textile workshops. There were 7500 visitors in 2013.
- Conferences and lectures may be held in the Hall and book launches are often held in the small auction ring within the pens.
- This is popular venue for Classic Car Rallies which make use of the car park and facilities.
- Furniture sales and antiques fairs are held in the "pens" and auction ring.
- The local Folk Festival has recently relocated to the site.
- Special events are also held, such as "Flock to Skipton" where artists were commissioned to paint life size portraits of sheep!

Learning points from the visit.

The theatre was shown to us "warts and all" and a number of points where the facilities could be improved were made. These are listed here to ensure that they are incorporated in any design for a combined cattle auction ring / theatre:

- The large hall needs to be at ground floor level to enable its use as a theatre reception foyer / meeting place /bar and for access as a stand-alone room with easy access to entrance and toilets.
- Smaller rooms (three/four) need to be provided adjacent to the Theatre and Main Hall. These can then be used as individual meeting rooms, break out rooms for conferences and as dressing rooms for theatre productions. At least two should have direct access to the back stage area.
- A chemical toilet disposal facility will be essential for horse box users and caravan / camping activities.
- Access to the main hall and toilets should be available directly from outside or secured from access to rest of building.
- Consideration should be given to the design of the cattle pen gates and hinges so that the gates can be readily turned into the pens or removed for the alternative uses.

Conclusion

The Skipton model works and so from what we saw we must consider that the use of a market auction room and facilities is compatible with that of a theatre, provided that it is designed in from the start.

Auction Ring (showing rear seating)



Art in The Pen publicity card

ART IN THE PEN	
28-29 JUNE 2014	16-17 AUGUST 2014
CARLISLE Borderway Mart Montgomery Way Carlisle CA1 2RS	SKIPTON Skipton Auction Mart Gargrave Road Skipton BD23 1UD
10am - 4pm Admission only £2 Free for children under 16 Free car parking	
Website: www.artinthepen.org.uk Tel: 01756 709666	
Facebook: www.facebook.com/artinthepen Twitter: @artinthepen	
Painting Sculpture Jewellery Ceramic Photography Glass Print Textile Discover something amazing and original - take it home!	

Typical Theatre Offerings

theMART Theatre.org.uk

01756 709 666

Sat 05 April

7.30pm

£15/13 Concs



Aly Bain & Phil Cunningham

Scotland's best loved traditional musicians! Aly Bain and Phil Cunningham have toured together since 1988 to packed concert halls all over the world. They recorded their first album 'The Pearl' in 1994 and followed it with many more highly acclaimed albums including 'Five and Twenty' to celebrate their 25th Anniversary and two 'Best of' collections. The pair have won the BBC Radio 2 Folk Awards – BEST DUO Award and been nominated in the Scottish Traditional Music Awards for 'Live Act of the Year'.

Aly was a founder member of the 'Boys of the Lough' and his passionate fiddle playing has also found its way onto recordings by the likes of Eddie Reader and Richard Thompson. He was responsible for launching 'The Transatlantic Sessions' TV series in which both he and Phil continue to feature. Accordion player Phil has been named as one of Scotland's 25 most influential people and his mastery of the instrument has led to him working with the likes of Mark Knopfler, James Taylor, Rosanne Cash and Midge Ure.

“ They are simply the best traditional musicians you are ever likely to hear ”
- Mike Russell, The Glasgow Herald

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Hal Cruttenden



Following stand out performances on Live At The Apollo (BBC1), Let's Dance For Comic Relief (BBC1), The Royal Variety Performance (ITV1) and Mock The Week (BBC2), Hal is being strongly tipped as the next big thing.

Hal's comedy is simultaneously warm and catty, straight and camp - it's a lovely mix that made him a regular guest on John Bishop's Only Joking (Sky1) and led to not one, but two sitcoms being produced this year.

'On the edge of great fame'
- **Fest**

'His best stand up show to date'
- **The Telegraph**

'An absolute joy to watch'
- **The Scotsman**



Josh Widdicombe

Star of Channel 4's 'The Last Leg', BBC1's 'Live At The Apollo' and 'Mock The Week', Josh Widdicombe returns to the road touring his brand new show. The last twelve months have been incredible for the Edinburgh Comedy Awards Best Newcomer nominee 2011, with 'The Last Leg' being commissioned for two series after its success during the Paralympics Games. Josh also picked up the coveted Saturday breakfast slot on XFM and his much-loved show features regularly in the iTunes Podcast Top 10. Widdicombe is fast becoming a TV regular with appearances on BBC1's 'Mock The Week', Channel 4's '8 Out Of 10 Cats', Channel 4's Comedy Gala in aid of Great Ormond Street Hospital' and 'Stand Up The Week'.

www.joshwiddicombe.com / twitter: @joshwiddicombe



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Trip Adviser Reviews



“Great!”

Reviewed 14 January 2014

I've been to a couple of productions here and its always been good, just what you expect from a theatre in an auction mart, nothing extravagant, just somewhere to go and see some pretty awesome people on stage: the drinks are pretty reasonable too, but maybe not the crisps.... also its either absolutely red hot in there or freezing cold! Just bear that in mind

“Great place just on our doorstep”

Reviewed 27 April 2014

Seen a few comedians and plays here over the years and never been disappointed. Once you get over the aroma of the cattle there are some great shows here and at very reasonable prices. It's warm and they provide some cushions for the seats! Good value drinks at the bar too! I feel very lucky that it's just on my door step. Plenty of parking for those that need to drive.

“Unique”

Reviewed 23 January 2013

A unique theatre experience in a livestock auction mart... Loved it and especially Art in the Pen. Diversification at its best with an exciting programme of events

“Great venue”

Reviewed 20 January 2013

We saw a fabulous Hull Truck Company performance of Jekyll and Hyde here. The cattle market is turned into a very atmospheric performance space- very unusual. Queuing to go and reading notices about sheep dip and fencing was certainly different. Really imaginative production and a good evening out

Big thumbs up!”

Reviewed 26 April 2012

There is something for everyone at this theatre – comedy, plays, singers, stuff for families, couples, kids shows they even have a film night. You should check this place out for a great value night out. After all there really is nothing like this theatre, don't be put off that it is used for a cattle market by day – it adds to the experience and is just like a standard theatre at night, expert lighting and such a lovely relaxed ambience. Great mixed crowd of young and old, big thumbs up! Very professional, fun, great value for money. We watched a comedy show – Clever Peter they were spot on and Horse & Lois too. Fantastic night out. Cannot recommend this place enough!