



Taunton Brewhouse – 2023 Annual Review

2023 has been a delightfully positive year here at Taunton Brewhouse and a huge refreshing change from the challenges of the pandemic years.

From start to finish, it has been phenomenally busy from theatre, music, comedy, family shows, studio performances, and our creative engagement programme.

It has been a pleasure to welcome so many new and familiar faces into our building and into our community. We have made new links with local charities, developed better working relationships with our local schools, and been thrilled with the volume of people who return, delighted to be back after the removal of the hoardings which restricted our frontage until November 2022.

Our amazing staff and volunteers have done themselves proud during this year, providing quality entertainment and opportunities for the people of Taunton and beyond. We recognise that our 100 plus strong army of volunteers are the backbone of our theatre and we really wouldn't be here without them. If you are ever looking for a fun, welcoming group of people and would like to give just a few hours a month, you would be welcome to volunteer at Taunton Brewhouse.

The Friends of Taunton Brewhouse are also to be recognised and thanked. Their gifts and donations enable us to deliver community events, develop new pieces of theatre, and renew and replace equipment. There are undoubtedly benefits to being a Friend of Taunton Brewhouse including ticket offers, exclusive pre-sale opportunities, discounts on food and drink, as well as Friend's specific events throughout the year. So, if you have a love for theatre and would like to support us, please do consider joining as a Friend and hearing more about our work.

As always, we thank all of our audiences for visiting and hope that you continue to enjoy coming for many more years to come.

Our year in numbers

In 2023 we had:

- 271 performances (seen by 37,897 patrons – a huge 37% increase on 2022)
- 127 screenings (11,108 viewers)
- 679 individual class sessions or community activities (4,202 participants)
- 2,005 visitors to our gallery exhibitions

In all, we calculated more than 77,000 unique visits to Taunton Brewhouse in 2023.

The highlight of the year was, of course, our winter production of *A Christmas Carol*, which was attended by 9,032 people including 34 local schools – a personal record.



Photography by Jack Offord



In May, we played host to comedian Jasper Carrott who played to over 1,000 across 3 nights.

We also continued to raise our profile within the community with appearances at the Taunton Flower Show, Taunton Pride, University Centre Somerset Fresher's Fair, Somerset County Cricket Club's Family Day, Taunton Carnival, and Taunton Winter Fest.

Throughout the year, we forged strong links with a number of local charities, including playing host to a quiz night fundraiser for St Giles Animal Rescue. Thanks to the generosity of our patrons, we were also able to donate 100 *A Christmas Carol* tickets to the Taunton Foodbank.

We began to meet with our charity partners more regularly and look forward to more events and projects in 2024 and beyond.

The story of 2023

As we took our tentative first steps into 2023, a pre-covid theatre world emerged. With audiences returning to their 2019 levels, and the major threat of the pandemic seemingly passed, we breathed a sigh of relief and congratulated ourselves for weathering the storm that has severely damaged the industry.

Funding, as always, remains a priority and a challenge. With changes in the district and regional local authorities, and the financial difficulties they are now facing, the team at Taunton Brewhouse endeavors to build a self-sustainable business model.

We are very grateful to our local authority contacts who have communicated their challenges to us honestly and reassuringly, and that they intend to continue supporting us to the best of their ability.

The staff team at Taunton Brewhouse has grown and evolved over the year, and we are proud to have a stable, dedicated, and enthusiastic group of people providing the theatre's services.

This report will show you how we have met our aims this year, and our impact in Taunton, Somerset, and the South West region.

Taunton Brewhouse – 2023 Year in Review

January

The Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra (BSO) brought in 2024 with their *New Year Viennese Gala*, closely followed by *King for a Day: The Nat King Cole Story* and TALON, who played to a full house. The Wayfarers Pantomime Society also returned with a gorgeous production of *Sleeping Beauty*, which drew in a huge and enthusiastic crowd.

February

February Half Term brought us our first family shows for the year. This included *Morgan & West Unbelievable Science* and *The Amazing Bubble Man* – both popular with Taunton crowds. We also had audiences with Brian Blessed and Eddie “The Eagle” Edwards, as well as top notch comedy from TV favourite Maisie Adam.

We had a record-breaking number of people attend our cinema in February, with our Movie Monday screenings being the perfect cure for the winter blues. *A Man Called Otto* and *Empire of Light* were just two of the frontrunners this month.

March

March was all about Strictly! We welcomed both Vincent Simone with his *Tango Passions*, as well as Strictly lead singer Tommy Blaize who was accompanied by the National Youth Jazz Orchestra – a group of immensely talented young musicians.

We also faced the disruption of some essential electrical work in our building but kept the impact of this on our audiences to a minimum.

April

In April, we welcomed back Scummy Mummies for a popular two-night run, in addition to stand-up Danny Baker and *Britain’s Got Talent 2022* winner Axel Blake.

We were finally able to host the twice-postponed The Zombies, who joined us for their *Life is a Merry-Go-Round* tour, as well as introduce new work in our studio.

Tidal Tales Collective’s *The Oak, The Ash, and the Standing Stones* was a fun, modern, folk-filled family show with a gentle emphasis on global, social, and environmental health.

May

May brought us some excellent musical performances from *Country Superstars*, *Bye Bye Baby*, *Chicago Blues Brothers*, and *Liza Pulman Sings Streisand*.

We were thrilled to present *Godot is a Woman* in our studio, as well as *Rosalie* – both new pieces by regional artists.

And of course, we can’t forget Jasper Carrott who sold out three times over!

June

Thanks to a grant from Theatres Trust and a generous donor, we began work to renovate our studio floor, install new LED lighting, a new drop-down cinema screen, and purchase new, comfortable seating.



Before



After

June also saw a visit from former 80's pop sensation-turned man of the cloth-turned murder mystery writer Richard Coles. Despite facing parking challenges due to Lionel Richie's performance at the Somerset County Cricket Club, the show was a success and enjoyed by a full house.

For entirely different reasons, we were wowed by The Ladyboys of Bangkok, which just goes to show how diverse our programme is here at Taunton Brewhouse.

July

July was a month packed full of spectacular family shows including *Fireman Sam*, *Mog The Forgetful Cat*, *Splash Test Dummies*, to name but a few. We hosted our annual outdoor production at Castle Gardens, this year presenting *Peter Pan* by the wonderful Slapstick Picnic.

We also hosted an array of workshops and activities for all ages including some funded spaces by the Holiday Activities Fund (administered by SASP). This enabled us to welcome young people who would not normally be afforded the opportunity to come to the theatre and take part in a range of creative activities.

August

This month, we experienced the phenomenon of "Barbenheimer" with screenings of Greta Gerwig's *Barbie* and Christopher Nolan's *Oppenheimer* contending to be the most popular film of 2023.

We also continued to run lots of activities for families including graffiti workshops and a Youth Theatre Summer School.

Our second outdoor show of the year took place under the stars at Taunton's Castle Gardens with a two-part Shakespeare show. The incredible 440 Theatre, who will be returning to us again in 2024, presented their rendition of the Bard's *Macbeth* and *Romeo and Juliet*, both in just 40 minutes each.



Photography by Steven Haywood

September

After saying goodbye to the last of the summer sun, we said hello to London Classic Theatre's *Abigail's Party*. This was closely followed by *A Beautiful Noise*, in which the music of the incredible Neil Diamond was played to a full and enthusiastic crowd.

We were also serenaded with classic blues and jazz by the Pasadena Roof Orchestra and delighted to host The Three Degrees who shared with us their rich catalogue of hits.

Finally, who can forget an audience with *MasterChef's* Greg Wallace, which was paired with a delightfully sweet wine tasting event.

October

In October, we got up close and personal with 80s pop sensation Paul Young and magician Ben Hart, the latter of which wowed us with his mind-bending tricks.

We also hosted international comedy from Canada's Tom Stade and the UK's Seann Walsh, in addition to welcoming West End star Lee Mead for an evening of show-stopping hits.

November

During the penultimate month of 2023, our studio saw poetry and comedy from Henry Normal and Nigel Planer, as well as brand new drama *we were promised honey!*, which left audiences with a new vision of the future.

December

As Christmas rolled around, our festive activities proved extremely popular with free family workshops funded by Taunton Town Council. Children were able to enjoy quality time with their families while making paper birds and beats, which were then proudly displayed as part of our Christmas exhibition in the gallery.

Our sustainable winter wonderland was filled with magical cardboard Christmas trees and an incredible Santa's grotto, with materials kindly supplied by local company RH Fibreboard.

Running alongside our exhibition was a Visit Father Christmas experience, and throughout the month our Santa was visited by over 240 families before he travelled back to the North Pole to prepare for the big day.

We also opened our doors for the annual Warm Spaces project which runs until the end of February 2024. This fantastic initiative provides everyone with a warm and welcoming space to connect with others, make new friends, and feel part of the community. We hosted a number of creative activities as part of this campaign, including a craft, knitting, and puzzle clubs, as well as providing subsidised hot meals.



Gallery exhibition

And if that wasn't enough, our studio became a breeding ground for chaos with the adorable children's show *Five Little Christmas Monkeys*. Developed in collaboration with early-years numeracy specialists, this festive production encouraged curiosity about numbers and counting through playful humour and music.

And of course, taking centre stage was our magical adaptation of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. Celebrating the 180th anniversary of its publication, the show brought more than 9,000 visitors to Taunton Brewhouse, including many local schools.

It was a huge success and became our most successful winter production ever!

Taunton Brewhouse's vision is:

We imagine a future where people and communities are liberated through artistic expression, becoming connected and considered equal.

Our mission is:

Since 1977, Taunton Brewhouse has existed to welcome people locally and globally, to enjoy and participate in a liberating programme of bold and brilliant artistic and creative experiences that inspire and transform our individual and shared experience of the world.

Our organisation's values are:

Welcoming

We value open hearts, open minds, and welcome all to Taunton Brewhouse.

Bold

We value bold artists and bold ideas, inspiring locally and globally.

Collaborative

We believe meaningful collaboration can change the world. We work together to create, play, and learn.

Resilient

We are committed to remaining Taunton's enduring centre for creative excellence.

Our themes for 2021-2026 are:

- Environmental sustainability
- Access and inclusion
- Beyond the Brewhouse
- Learning

Our AIMS are:

Artistic Programme

To deliver an artistically authentic programme that showcases the best touring work and contemporary performance using our base in Taunton as a springboard to the wider region.

Creative Engagement

To empower young people and enrich the communities of Taunton with creative experiences and meaningful participation that engenders a lifelong relationship with arts and culture.

Celebrate Taunton and the South West

To champion and platform the creative community of Taunton, Somerset, and the South West, and partner with others to further activate regional artistic excellence.

Organisational Development

To seize all opportunities to optimise the revenue potential of our brand, our organisational structure, and our built space as a social enterprise that supports our charitable aims.

Audience Development

To understand and reach all potential audiences in Taunton, Somerset, the South West, and beyond to ensure everyone experiences the value of the Brewhouse in their lives.

Here's how we did it:

Artistic Programme

We continue to attract high quality performances to our stage, and throughout 2023 our audiences enjoyed a broad range of entertainment including music, comedy, family, drama, and new work from emerging artists.

We brought to our stage several fascinating individuals including Sir Ranulph Fiennes, Ray Mears, Julia Bradbury, and Rev. Richard Coles.

Our National Theatre, Royal Ballet, and Royal Opera House event cinema screenings have grown in popularity over the last year with more of our patrons enjoying these transmissions than ever before.

Movie Mondays also provide a wonderful opportunity for people to come together to enjoy a film, hot drink, and biscuit for just £5. There is also the option to enjoy a post film lunch. These are particularly popular during the colder months.

Creative Engagement

Our LEARN programme continued to grow with weekly classes, workshops, short courses, and summer schools.

In 2023 these included:

- Youth Theatre – With four age groups, our Youth Theatre returned in 2023 and has since doubled in size.
- Contemporary dance and ballet led by dance practitioner Tabby Somerfield.
- Willow weaving led by local artist Amanda Webb.
- Cardboard Animal and Bird Workshop with creator James Lake.

Celebrating Taunton and the South West

Taunton Brewhouse remains a prominent fixture within the town and our regional community. We took part in the Somerset Dragon launch event in the summer, celebrating a brand new sculpture installation in the town centre as well as the annual Taunton Carnival and Winter Fest.

We also launched a new networking project with our local charity partners and supported St Giles Animal Rescue by hosting a fundraising quiz night. One of our greatest achievements

of 2023 was working with Taunton Foodbank to enable 100 of their clients to attend a performance of *A Christmas Carol* – an experience they might not otherwise be able to access.

Once again, we visited the Taunton Flower Show, University Centre Somerset Fresher's Fair, Somerset County Cricket Club's Family Day, and Taunton Pride.

We also provided rehearsal space for research and development of new theatre pieces in our studio and provided advice and guidance to local, up-and-coming theatre companies.

Our gallery played host to community exhibitions from Bridgwater and Taunton College, Queens College, Bluebirds Theatre, TYCA, Somerset Art Gallery Trust, and Chandos Society of Artists.

In addition to this, we also hosted local community theatres including the Taunton Thespians and Wayfarers Pantomime Society.

Organisational Development

Over the course of 2023, our team solidified with internal promotions and very few staff leavers. Consistency is key and we have found that this is beneficial not only for internal morale, but for our relationship with customers and business partners.

Our aim is that the amended staffing structure will be a foundation on which to grow the business and charitable endeavors of Taunton Brewhouse.

Internal and external communication remains an extremely high priority for the team. With funding challenges going forward, we will focus on reassuring our staff, volunteers, and the public, as well as shouting our successes from the proverbial rooftop.

In 2023, we welcome two new board members, Andrew Samuel, and Camilla de Bernhardt Dunkin, to Taunton Theatre Association Ltd.

Andrew Samuel is a former Technical Manager for Taunton Brewhouse. He built and maintained our event management system (EMS). Andrew was rewarded with a BEM for services to the community during the pandemic for assisting in setting up a Facebook group supporting vulnerable community members.

Camilla de Bernhardt Dunkin is a highly respected governance and policy expert and currently works as the Director of Practice for the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny.

We are incredibly grateful for their support, as all our trustees voluntarily give their time to support the organisation. We have many other volunteers, spanning Front of House, Marketing, and Technical, and are so thankful that they continue to give their time and generosity to support to us. The value of our volunteers cannot be quantified but we recognise that they form the glue behind a lot of what we do.

Audience Development

Once again, we delighted audiences with new pieces of theatre and gave our studio space for these to be developed and performed. Some of our highlights included:

- *Godot is a Woman* (Silent Faces Theatre)

- Moscow Drug Club (World jazz and folk band)
- *Rosalie* (Pleasure Dome Theatre Company)
- *The Oak, The Ash, and the Standing Stones* (Tidal Tales Collective)
- *we were promised honey!* (YESYESNONO)

We also lent our studio to the local Opera group, Popera, for a week's research and development for their new show *The Magic Flute*, and to Tidal Tales Collective for development of *Stars and Sails*, which was later presented to an audience.

What are we working towards in 2024?

Here are just some of our highlights for the year ahead:

- Hosting more 'foodie' events including summer BBQ's, Christmas parties, and corporate event catering.
- Growing our comedy programme to attract top-name comedians.
- Developing our LEARN opportunities and seeking funding, where possible, to make these free or heavily subsidised for the benefit of our community.
- Working with our charity partners to bring strength and collaboration to the charitable organisations local to Taunton Brewhouse, and to celebrate all of the amazing work being carried out in our county.
- Seeking funding for improvements to our facilities, particularly the Main Auditorium and lighting systems.
- *Pinocchio* – A Taunton Brewhouse production and our Christmas show for 2024.



Artwork by Rebecca Pitt