



## **Taunton Brewhouse – 2024 Annual Review**

Wow, what a year 2024 has been. So busy here at Taunton Brewhouse, almost busier than ever before! It's a thrill to see the theatre and community spaces being in use at levels that exceed the pre-Covid years.

We continue to welcome visitors to our performances and creative arts workshops and classes – both new and old. Our work with local charities such as Taunton Foodbank, St Giles Animal Rescue and Arc continues as well as making new partnerships with Somerset Sight, Moorvision, Deafinate and many others. It is our privilege to offer our physical spaces as well as our encouragement to support their important work.

We hosted TYCA again this year with an estimated 3,000 visitors in one day as well as being one of the leading partner spaces for Taunton Together in September.

Our Youth Theatre, which has grown and evolved over the year, now welcomes many more young people and provides the opportunity to grow their confidence and their talent. We were proud beyond measure when a group of Taunton Brewhouse young people took part in NT Connections at Worcester Theatre in March and again excelled themselves in an especially developed, brand new piece of drama entitled "A Traipse Through Time" for the Taunton Together festival.

I continue to be astounded by the dedication, determination and passion of our wonderful staff and volunteer teams. It is an honour to work alongside them and a joy to see their enthusiasm. I was especially proud that we won a Bristol, Bath and Somerset Tourism award for our work dedicated to the older community members. In presenting the award, our staff and volunteers were particularly commended for their warm welcome.

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 work and to help us renew and replace equipment. There are undoubtedly benefits to being a Friend of Taunton Brewhouse with discounts on tickets, exclusive pre-sale opportunities, discounts on bar and food plus 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.

We are eternally grateful for the support and funding received from Somerset Council and Taunton Town Council.

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

### **Our year in numbers**

In 2024 we had:

- 256 performances (watched by a total of 51,074 patrons another massive growth of 35% on 2023)
- 94 screenings, including National Theatre Live and Royal Ballet & Opera (8,553 viewers)
- 718 individual class sessions or community activities (4,981 participants)

- 3,630 visitors to our gallery exhibitions
- 10,381 other visits from community groups, hiring visitors and special events (non-ticketed)

In all, we have calculated almost 80,000 unique visits to Taunton Brewhouse in 2024

Our winter production in 2024 was “Pinocchio” created and delivered by some amazing West Country regional creatives and performers, including a 16 strong team of young people in the youth ensemble directly from our local community. We again welcomed many school groups who delighted in the fun and engaging performances.

We’d like to thank Taunton School for their sponsorship of the youth ensemble. Their financial support helps us provide opportunities for young people to be a part of this magical experience.



(Photo credit: Jack Offord)

We feel very much part of our community and have enjoyed working with local partners, creatives and organisations to help raise the profile of Taunton and the enjoyment of its residents.

**Vickie Robbins**  
**Executive Director**

**The story of 2024**

2024 remained a challenging year for funding but Taunton Brewhouse has established itself as a creative and community hub in Taunton whilst weathering the financial difficulties hitting our local authority and the cost-of-living crisis being felt by many.

We endeavor to support our region's residents and provide low-cost entertainment and opportunities to make creative arts accessible to all.

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## **Taunton Brewhouse – 2024: Year in Review**

### **January**

We welcomed the new year with Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra's New Years concert which has almost become a tradition here at Taunton Brewhouse.

Wayfarers Pantomime Society played to over 2,300 people over 9 performances of "Dick Whittington".

Our ever-popular Movie Monday strand kicked off the year with two screenings of BAFTA Award winning "Wonka" followed by some excellent National Theatre and Royal Opera House performances on the big screen.

### **February**

February felt like the month of Magic, Dinosaurs and Science with Garth Marengi appearing closely followed by Dinosaur Adventures and Ministry of Science Live.

And for their Taunton Brewhouse debut came Dazzling Diamonds – Comedy Variety Drag Show which proved highly popular.

### **March**

March was definitely a musical month with The History of Rock, Mercury, The Drifters and Back to Bacharach all receiving excellent houses.

Dom Joly returned to a full house with his Conspiracy Tourist show.

And our very own youth theatre gave a preview of their NT Connections production of "The Periodicals" (pictured)



### **April**

We had some sell-out comedy shows in April with Rosie Jones, Matt Chorley and Tommy Cannon all appearing.

Plus, to welcome the Easter break, we had lots of wonderful workshops including Pom Pop Bunny making, Sun Printing and Mad Hatters crafts for the family.

We rounded off the month with the heartwarming "The Lion Inside" lion a beautiful story above bravery perfect for the whole family.

## May

May half term brought us “The Tiger who came to Tea” which received almost 1,000 visitors.

It also brought back contemporary dance performance “Verve” and the returning “Johnny Cash Roadshow”.

There were also new Returning to Art classes including Calligraphy and Lino Printing.

We also hosted the celebration of all things youth arts and culture at the well-attended TYCA festival.

Finally, we officially became dog friendly in our cafe and bar with special dog ice cream available too!



## June

June seemed to be mostly solo performances from Sex Pistol, John Lyndon, Comedian, Tom Davis, performance poet, John Cooper Clarke, and children's TV presenter turned novelist, Fearne Cotton.

But we mustn't forget the amazing Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club who always delight.

## July

After a sellout show in February, Britain's Got Talent's Viggo Venn returned in July to another packed auditorium.

We were treated to drama with “The Massive Tragedy of Madame Bovary”, music from “Tina's Ultimate Rock Show”, Exhibition on Screen – Vermeer, NT Live: Present Laughter and Freud's Last Session featuring Anthony Hopkins and Matthew Goode on the big screen.

## **August**

August, being school holidays, is all about families and young people. We hosted our both our visual arts and musical theatre summer schools as well as turning our gallery space into Camp Brewhouse – a free play space for all to enjoy. Our workshops made mini owls, woodland creatures, birds and beasts and willow animals.

Pictured: Musical Theatre Summer School learning the dance and lyrics from SIX the Musical with West-End SIX performer, Monique, herself.



## **September**

In September, as autumn drew closer our stage was a powerhouse of live music from Dire Straits tribute “Money for Nothing”, The Power Ballads show, Beyond the Barricade and the Tiger Lillies.

We also had some interesting work in our studio including Lizzy Hardingham and Pillow Fite as well as People’s Show 145 – The Diviners.

At the end of September, Taunton Brewhouse took part in the town wide Taunton Together and hosted two extraordinary live bands as well as a performance by our own youth theatre. We were joined in Somerset Square by many of our local sports clubs which brought a new audience to our venue.

We took part in Heritage Open Days during September and opened our doors to people who were interested in the workings of the theatre as well as the heritage of the old Brewers House.

## **October**

October was an exciting month with a very mixed programme. Basil Brush’s adult show was Unleashed onto our main stage to much hilarity.

We also had a Very Hungry Caterpillar who was visited by over 550 people and Little Red Riding Hood in the studio – two very different family shows.

Who could forget it was Black History month which was commemorated by “Celebrate!” which was an evening of African and Caribbean music and dance accompanied by delicious Caribbean food provided by local restaurant Islands.

Finally, the critically acclaimed “The Brief Life & Mysterious Death of Boris III, King of Bulgaria” brought the month to its conclusion.

## **November**

Lucy Porter made her welcome return to Taunton early in November which was closely followed by Taunton Thespians production of “Dracula” which was much adored.

We prepared for Christmas with workshops that made needle felted reindeer and robins, a festive paper craft evening and a willow reindeer workshop too.

We also welcomed back “Dear Zoo” – the classic family story for young people.

## December



As we prepared to show “Pinocchio” on our main stage, our gallery space was turned into Pinocchio’s Enchanted Forest using the cardboard trees supplied last year by RH Fireboard and decorated during the autumn term by local schools.

Father Christmas made his return and thrilled family groups with exclusive visits.

We once again opened our doors for the annual “Warm Spaces” running end of February and welcome lots of visitors daytimes to sample our subsidized home made soup and enjoy a warm welcome from our front of house staff and volunteers.

And then it was time for the big show “Pinocchio” which was a riot of colour with a live band, brand new music and vocal performances and a modern retelling of the classic story. We welcomed back many school and family groups, provided audio described, BSL translated and relaxed performances and filled the main auditorium with fun and laughter.

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## Our main strands of work are:

### Artistic Programme

Taunton Brewhouse continues to attract high quality performances to our stage, and over 2024 comedy, music and family shows continued to be particularly popular as well as visits from major stars such as Martin Fry, John Lydon, Dom Joly and Joe Wilkinson who all played to packed houses.

The Event Cinema strand including Exhibition on Screen, National Theatre and Royal Opera & Ballet brings huge London performances to our theatre in an immersive and up close view.

Our Movie Monday offer continues to attract huge audiences in the colder weather. This contributes to a reduction in social isolation and has become a wonderful community engagement experience. In November 2024 we were fortunate to win the Age Friendly category at the Bristol, Bath and Somerset Tourism awards for our work with older people.

### Creative Engagement

Our LEARN programme grew again in 2024 reaching nearly 5,000 participants throughout the year.



*Brewhouse Youth Theatre* – The weekly classes continued to thrive, and we added musical theatre summer school in 2024

*Contemporary Dance, Ballet & Street Dance* – All classes grew during 2024

*Returning to Art* – short courses held during the year with local artist Lynee McKay

*Many young people workshops were held especially during school holidays*

### **Celebrating Taunton & the Southwest**

In 2024 we took the work of Taunton Brewhouse outside our walls once again with TYCA, Taunton Together festival, Theatre in Castle Gardens, Taunton Flower Show, Taunton Pride, Somerset Cricket Club family fun day as well as much more.

We continue to promote the amazing work of our local and regional charities, supporting them with fundraising and communications. This year we raised money once again for the families of Taunton Foodbank to come and see Pinocchio and we supported both Arc and St Giles Animal Rescue with their fundraising quiz nights.

We celebrated our volunteers at a summer BBQ and were honored to receive a visit from the High Sheriff of Somerset whose theme for the year was volunteering. He was delighted to hear about all the amazing work of our volunteers and presented a special award to our chair Val Hammond for her significant voluntary contribution to the theatre.

We work in close partnership with Taunton Town Council Arts and Culture working group and all of the other amazing cultural and artistic organisations in our town. We aim to support the council's Arts and Culture strategy and help them achieve their aims and objectives.

Our gallery played host to community exhibitions from Climate Action/Bridgwater College, Bridgwater and Taunton College Student Exhibition, Brewhouse Costumes and Props exhibition, local artist Gillan Soloman, Chandos Artists, TYCA, Campe Brewhouse, Somerset Art Weeks, G7 Artists and Southwest Society of Botanical Artists.

We have hosted local community theatre including the Taunton Thespians and the Wayfarers Pantomime Society as well as played host to Taunton School production of "The Adams Family"

### **Organizational Development**

2024 showed some small changes in the staff team including new box office staff and technicians joining us as well as some internal promotions for staff who have shown extraordinary development in their roles. Our Artistic Programme Manager, Will, left in September to pursue a career in law and we were joined shortly after by Vic Hole and Kim Burnell who take the role on a job share basis. Their passion for artist and audience development as well as the local creative community and enthusiasm for fundraising will be a huge asset to the team going forward.

We continue to be incredibly grateful to our trustees voluntarily giving their time and breadth of knowledge in support of the organization. We have many other volunteers, from front of house, marketing and technical, and are so thankful that they continue to give their time and support to us. The value of our volunteers cannot be quantified but we recognize that they form the glue behind a lot of what we do.

## Developing New Work

### Some of our highlights included:

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

*Right of Way* (A semi-autobiographical performance documenting a challenging walk of the South West Coast Path whilst battling grief and exhaustion)

*A Night at the Opera* (Bluebirds Theatre Company)

*The Diviners* (People Show)

*Bright Places* (A three woman show about the challenges of living with MS)

Our studio has also been used regularly throughout the year for intimate folk music sessions, community dance performances and the development of our NT Connections and Youth Theatre performances.

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What are we working towards in 2025?

- **Lots more lovely Curry and Comedy events**
- **Brewhouse fundraising quizzes on a regular basis throughout the year**
- **Doggy social events with St Giles Animal Rescue**
- **Seeking funding to make our LEARN programme affordable to all**
- **Aim to bring more drama and dance to our main stage**
- **Participating in local and regional events such as Taunton Together 2025**
- **Working with partners to bring creativity to the forefront of Taunton community**
- **Seek funding for the creation of new theatrical works with local creatives**
- **Seeking funding for improvements to facilities, particularly the auditorium and lighting systems to make them more efficient**
- **Christmas 2024 – “The Nutcracker” – a Taunton Brewhouse production**

