

TEST VALLEY ARTS FOUNDATION CHAIRMANS REPORT 2019/2020

As I mentioned in my last report – the Board wanted to do something bold, exciting and really dynamic in the Test Valley. We decided to go forward with a wonderful Festival **“TEST VALLEY 2020” – Borough of Culture**. So much of 2019 was taken with planning for this – raising funds, producing a programme, launching new initiatives, developing partnerships – as our ambition was to have something going on in the Valley on every day in 2020.

Our partners included the Borough Council, BeWiser, Chapel Arts Studios, Hampshire Cultural Trust, the Arts Council England, Hampshire County Council, Forum Publications, Andover Radio, Stockbridge Arts, The Romsey Festival, The Garden Gallery in Broughton, The Lights and The Plaza in Romsey. So on a rainy evening in Stockbridge on the 16th January 2020 we launched the programme – over one hundred people crowded into the Grosvenor Hotel in Stockbridge.

Most of the organisations involved joined us as did senior Councillors from our two local authorities. Both Councils have generously supported this ever increasing project - £ 50 K from Hampshire County Council and Test Valley Borough Council supporting local projects; the Arts Society has also been very generous in awarding funds. Rebecca Maddox our 2020 organiser together with Sue Messa our Development Officer and most of the TVAF Board were on hand together with members of the Micheldever Brass Band to get the ball rolling! Real excitement and expectation was around with new ideas and opportunities coming forward on a daily basis.

Our website was to be the vehicle for the Festival; it was put together by Forum Media to great acclaim. It was easy to use, accessible, up-to-date and above all FUN. It's still going strong!

In the programme we had included everything from small village based activities to gala evenings in Andover and Romsey. A Garden Party at the Garden Gallery in Broughton together with a Monologue Project, a Choir 'Eisteddford' Festival, Test Valley Arts Trail as part of the August Open Studios programme and many more outdoor events including a fantastic street celebration 'Test Valley Celebrates' in Andover High Street and at The Lights were all in the pipeline.

So things started in early 2020 slowly, quietly and in March 2020 a Borough wide newspaper which carried the major events went to every door in the Test Valley. We were happy, excited and full of expectation!

Then Covid 19 hit!

All stop!

We were stuck.

BUT – many of our partners started to think creatively – The Hampshire Cultural Trust launched Culture On-Line. Chapel Arts Studios had 'Virtual' exhibitions. Zoom and Skype were the new watch words with many new ideas and initiatives taking place. Our Video Tapestry project supported by TVBC was able to start planning – more of that in next year's Annual Report.

The Board has tried to keep in touch by email – enthusiasm still in full flow.

Given the work planning 'Test Valley 2020 - The Borough of Culture' we have had to put everything on hold. The subsequent need for lockdown and the tragedy of the virus has/is a huge blow to all of us. We are hoping that as things return to the new normal we will still be able to do something in 2020. We are still debating if we should wait and do the whole thing again in 2021 – so please continue to watch this space!

During the year we continued to support local organisations and artists, for example – the Michelmersh Silver Band – they go from strength to strength winning awards all over the country; we supported, Kate Jackson with 'Romsey:The Movie', the Andover Loft Singers, Romsey Chamber Orchestra, Andover Young Musician and Kaz Trinder's Plastic Trees project. The Bus of Many Things and local artists were at the Eastleigh Mela, Trout n About and the Romsey Show together with many other local events. Chapel Arts Studios is now a registered Charity, with a set of energetic Trustees and its Chairman Mark Courtice supporting David Dixon and the increasing group of Associate Artists – the projects are now both in the Test Valley and beyond. They have a comprehensive website which is both entertaining and informative.

This last year was not the very best for me – I had some ill health - hence I am once again very grateful to ALL our Trustees for their excellent support and help. Our Vice-Chairman Crescens George resigned during the year due to pressure of work – his help support and link with BeWiser was really valuable – that partnership continues today. His interest in photography and his support for encouraging young people to be creative is a warm and continuing legacy. I am indebted to our Treasurer John Dumper for his efforts and dedication and Sue Messa who makes sure that the Board is well supported and continues to innovate.

I want to conclude by thanking both our local authorities Test Valley Borough Council and Hampshire County Council for their continued investment in us the Arts, Culture and Heritage. Their enlightened investment particularly in difficult times is crucial to ensuring that the quality of life in our Borough and the County of Hampshire continues to improve and flourish.

Yinnon Ezra MBE MA FRSA

CHAIRMAN Test Valley Arts Foundation