

Southend Sorcerers' Society
President's Annual Report
2020-22

In light of the pandemic, this is the first AGM we've actually managed to stage for a few years, but its good to get back to some sort of normality even though it means that as a committee we now have to catch up with what's been going on with the club since the last virtual AGM in 2020.

That year we issued reports and accounts from all the committee members and proposed that we simply continue with the existing committee in view of the lockdown - this proposal was approved with 37 email votes from the membership, all in favour.

By April 2021, the club had hardly met in person at all and it was clear that things had pretty much ground to a halt as far as club activities were concerned. In view of that situation the committee decided to propose a full postponement of the AGM and to simply carry on as normal until things improved. The other decision made at that time was to delay collecting subscriptions until October 2021 at which time the plan was to ask for half a year's subscription. Both proposals were approved by the membership.

In the meantime, the committee worked hard to keep a schedule of online activities going on in an effort to keep members engaged. We staged speed dating sessions, a string of lockdown lectures all of which are now available on the club website, and even a cut down Christmas fun night. These sessions received a mixed response with one lecture only attracting as few as 8 participants. Luckily a lot of the lectures were provided to us free of charge, and we were really grateful to the dealers and performers who gave their time up to provide content at a time when we really needed it.

Sadly, when October came round and we asked for a 6 month subscription as planned, a lot of members, including some established people and most of our junior section, decided not to renew. It was really sad to see this happen, especially since we'd tried so hard to keep things moving during lockdown. It seems that our club is not the only one to be affected in this way however - the lack of meeting and performing opportunities has simply encouraged former enthusiastic magicians to look for other interests. My hope is that, with it being subscription time again, as many members as possible will decide to stay with us and re-kindle their interest in magic and the club. Time will tell.

That brings me on to the Dixon shows. We've had 9 very successful years at the theatre and although the primary goal has never been about making money, there's no doubt that the income has helped club funds enormously. After paying a deposit for our tenth anniversary shows during 2020, the pandemic meant that we couldn't run them last year or the year before. So we're now planning to hold them during August this year. However I have some concerns that I need to voice before we go much further with the plans.

First, in spite of repeated requests for members to indicate if they want to be involved with the shows, I've had very little response. We have five shows to fill and there's a real possibility that we may have to run the same show every time or even ask for acts from other magic clubs - something we've never had to do before. Second, the Cliffs Pavilion is under new management and they've changed their marketing approach for the smaller shows like ours. Whereas before we used to benefit from a third page pictorial advert in their brochure, this has now been reduced to a single line of text.

Yet we still have to pay the same fee. Basically what this means is that we've lost our main advertising platform so we'll need to rely on our own efforts to encourage ticket sales.

With these issues playing on my mind, I need to ask the membership if they seriously still want to go ahead with the shows - and if so, to firmly commit to helping out with both the content and promotion for them.

My own view is that we should go ahead. If we cancel we'll lose our deposit. But at present it feels like a risk that may end up costing us dearly. In the past 9 years of producing these shows I've never had any concerns like this before.

Moving on to another, more heartwarming, topic, I'd like to take the opportunity to thank everyone who has helped to keep things going during a really difficult time. The committee have continued to meet online to discuss issues and we always do our best to work in the best interests of the club. Richard, Ryan and Tracy have been brilliant and carried on regardless of everything going on around us. It's really sad that Tracy has decided to stand down this year and she'll be terribly missed in her role as Treasurer. Over the last 5 years she's done so much to move things forward - managing the annual dinners, modernising the whole banking and accounts process, writing policy documents we needed for things such as child protection, and of course writing the club's 40th anniversary book. I know that everything will be in perfect order for whoever takes over, but my heartfelt thanks go to her and the rest of the committee for everything they've done and continue to do.

We've had precious few shows to perform at during the last couple of years, but it's comforting to know that the Dream Team and people like Andy Smith, who do so much to support our shows, are always waiting in the wings ready to get back to work. Their contributions are always so much appreciated and invaluable. Recently we've completed three show bookings and it's been superb and encouraging to see things start to get back to some sort of normality.

Finally, thanks go to all our members who have continued to support the club and what it stands for, even in spite of all the uncertainty over the last couple of years. I have no doubt that we have a tricky few months ahead of us with a reduced membership and increasing costs, but it's encouraging that just in the last couple of weeks we've had potential new members contact us, who have heard positive things about our society.

As always, the committee will continue to do their very best to uphold the values of the club, but we can only do that if all our members continue to be supportive and passionate about their contribution towards making it work.

It is your club - so please make the most of all the opportunities that membership opens up for you, and let the committee know if you have any ideas or thoughts about how to enhance things even more for everyone.

Adrian Fox
President