



## **Taunton Brewhouse – 2025 Annual Review by Vickie Robbins – Executive Director**

2025 has been another fantastic year for Taunton Brewhouse with so many new and repeating visitors. It's so wonderful to hear the feedback from our customers when they have seen a show they enjoyed or taken part in an activity that leaves them feeling inspired.

In January we were delighted to welcome Gideon Amos MP and Darren Henley, Chief Executive of Arts Council England, to show them our spaces and discuss the challenges and opportunities that regional theatres face. Many thanks to Gideon for encouraging and facilitating this visit.

During this year, we also took time to reflect on our activities, our mission, aims and objectives and spent several days in workshops developing our new five-year strategy which is officially launched in April 2026. It was a huge collaboration between staff, trustees, and volunteers and took into account the views of our visitors and beneficiaries. Our new mission is:

**We are a home for bold, brilliant and inclusive artistic and creative performance and participatory experiences.**

This mission is something that our whole team embrace and can feel proud to be a part of. It in no way detracts from our charitable aims which are:

**The advancement of education for the public benefit through the promotion and encouragement of the performing arts, the creative arts and the visual arts.**

Rather, we feel that our new mission reinforces our charitable aims by reiterating the feeling of being a home for all these wonderful activities.

Our work in the local community continues and in 2025 we were honoured to receive a community impact award which reinforces the value of the work that we do. Thanks to an Arts Council grant, we were able to share our winter show, *The Nutcracker*, with members of our community who wouldn't normally be able to access theatre, including those from the refugee communities and low-income families. We will continue to build relationships with charities who represent these community groups to ensure that the value of creative arts is felt by everyone.

Our creative engagement programme has taken a huge leap forward in 2025 with so many new workshops, classes, and groups. Across all age ranges and demographics, we aim to offer something for everyone. Our summer gallery space "The Imaginarium" inspired by the wonderful "Museum of Marvellous Things" performance enabled families to come along and create, invent and explore at a very low cost – something that we are passionate about.

Our staff and volunteers are, as always, the hardest working, collaborative and committed group of people. I often hear feedback from customers, incoming performing companies, and visitors which showers the team with praise and gratitude. It is my privilege to work alongside these people. Our staff team has had some changes this year due to staff members moving on to new and exciting roles. We are sad to see them go but pleased to have been a part of their career journeys. In the same vein, we have welcomed some amazing new members to our team and look forward to working with them in the future.

In the challenging financial landscape and with Somerset Council continuing to face their financial emergency, our business model has had to change through 2025. Our resilience through these changing times can be assured. We are extraordinarily grateful to our patrons who have made donations to our charity throughout the year. These donations enable us to continue to support community work, create opportunities for learning and new artistic work, and to support the modernising and improvement of our facilities. As we move forward into 2026, we have taken a new lease from Somerset Council, the owners of our building, and will take on the full maintenance and repair of the theatre. This is an exciting development and with the financial support of Taunton Town Council, we will have the autonomy to make even more improvements to our facilities.

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 2025 we had:

- 297 performances (watched by a total of 46,845 patrons)
- 71 screenings, including National Theatre Live and Royal Ballet & Opera (9044 viewers)
- 591 individual class sessions or community activities (5,425 participants)
- 2,680 visitors to our gallery exhibitions
- 5,425 other visits from community groups, hiring visitors and special events (non-ticketed)

Our winter production in 2025 was “The Nutcracker” written especially for our stage with newly composed music. The endeavour was a creative masterpiece and enjoyed by many hundreds of people from school groups, families and our local community partners. We were delighted, with the assistance of Arts Council England funding, to provide nearly 1,000 free tickets to low-income families, refugees and members of the global majority community, who otherwise might have felt excluded from our theatre. We also worked with local schools to create some amazing pieces to fill our foyer and the “Sugar Plum Fairy World” in our gallery space.

Once again, we would like to thank Taunton School for their sponsorship of this event.



(Photo credit: Jack Offord)

We continue to enjoy working with our community, our creative partners, our Town Council and our other regional creative organisations to make Taunton a vibrant and engaging place to live.

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

## Taunton Brewhouse – 2025: Year in Review

### January

The year opened, as it often does, with a sold-out performance of BSO's New Year Viennese Gala. This was closely followed by the traditional Wayfarers Pantomime Society which was watched by a record breaking 2,600 people.

We welcomed back Chicago Blues Brothers this month as well as starting our new season of Royal Ballet and Opera screenings with "The Nutcracker".

Our gallery played host to the Bridgwater and Taunton College Foundation Arts Degree Show, which is always very inspiring.

### February



This February we shared the month of love with St Giles Animal Rescue by hosting "Paw-lentines" where we were visited by many, many dogs having a lovely time playing in our foyer and enjoying treats and doggy ice cream.

We also welcomed back Ministry of Science with their exciting family show. And we were delighted to host Director Caroline Corrie with a Q&A session after a screening of her film "Shalbourne"

### March

The honoured guest of the month was celebrity chef and TV presenter Prue Leith who delighted audiences with her anecdotes and was extremely charming during the meet and greet afterwards. Pictured here with her former colleague and our very own chair, Val Hammond, who also received a Taunton Town Council civic award for her long contributions to the creative arts in Taunton.



## **April**

In April we welcomed the American Four Tops and the a heartwarming performance by Lucy Fleming and her husband, Simon Williams, who recounted the love story between Lucy's parents, Peter Fleming and actress Celia Johnson, told through the actual letters they sent to one another during WW2.

Our youth theatre once again took part in National Theatre Connections, this year performing "No Regrets" at Taunton Brewhouse and Exeter Northcott theatre.

## **May**

May brought the prehistoric era to Taunton Brewhouse with "Dinosaur World Live" which was hugely enjoyed by audiences young and old.

We also welcomed back 16 artists from Northern Contemporary Dance with their annual "Verve - Triple Bill" production.

## **June**

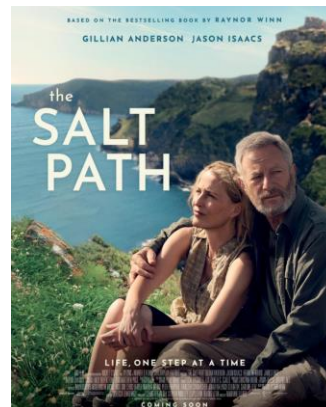
Double bills seemed to be the thing in June with two performances from Scummy Mummies and another two shows from The Shoddy Detective. So good, we had to have them twice!

The Worst Princess put in a weekend appearance to entertain our younger visitors and cinema lovers were treated to The Penguin Lessons, starring Steve Coogan, and NT Live: A Streetcar named Desire.

## **July**

Locally filmed "The Salt Path" was so popular with our audiences that we had to show it three times in one very busy Monday in July

We also welcomed the acclaimed talents of West End Magic as well as Gavin and Stacey's very own Matthew Horne in Conversation.



## **August**

The Museum of Marvellous Things, that inspired The Imaginarium in our gallery, brought us puppets, storytelling and the opportunity for our young audience to interact with the performance.

Castle Gardens played host to our summer outdoor presentation of 440 theatre company's double production of Macbeth and Much Ado About Nothing. Fortunately, the weather was kind to us this year.

And who can forget the powerhouse of entertainment, John Cleese himself who graced our stage and entertained two packed houses with industry stories and anecdotes with a huge amount of hilarity and charm.

Our studio theatre hosted Musical Theatre Summer School facilitated by Rest End Ltd teaching an enthusiastic group of young people the music and choreography of "Hamilton"

Finally, as always in August, we took part in the ever-popular Taunton Flower Show.

## September

In September, we were delighted to host Somerset Opera with their modern take on “Cesare”. This kicked off a wonderful month of music including ELO Again, Money for Nothing, Some Guys Have All The Luck, 80’s Mixtape, Purple Zeppelin and Twist and Shout – to name but a few.

We didn’t miss out on our comedy with Dom Joly making a welcome return, Rosie Jones and Mark Steel.

Our gallery was honoured to host the World Art Games exhibition – an international group of artists coming together to share cultures and art forms. This coincided with the second annual Taunton Together event which attracted thousands across the town and Taunton Brewhouse hosted some amazing performances on the TYCA stage.



## October

During October, local homelessness charity Arc held a special event on our main stage to note National Homelessness Day with a screening of “I, Daniel Blake” followed by a Q&A panel including experts and ex homeless persons. Truly inspiring.

Following his major success on strictly come dancing, Chris McCausland sold out three back-to-back shows on one day, quite some endeavor for any performer.

We also screened the final of the Downton Abbey series of films “The Grand Finale” as well as “The Roses” featuring Oscar winning actress Olivia Coleman and double Oscar nominee Benedict Cumberbatch.

## November

Taunton Thespians returned with “The Woman in White” a Victorian mystery that brought a plot full of atmospheric drama, and fascinating characters.

We also hosted the first Cafe Concert with Southern Sinfonia, in the Westward Room, which presented three exceptionally talented strings players and was thoroughly enjoyed by those who attended. We hope to have more of these concerts in the future.



In our gallery, we presented “Art to Unwrap” giving our workshop facilitators to sell some of their work as early Christmas presents. Very tempting it was too!

## December

“The Nutcracker” hit our main stage to huge acclaim in December and was visited by several thousand people including school groups who enjoyed its festive tale of bravery and loyalty. With relaxed, BSL and audio described performances, we welcomed many from our local community and beyond.

In the studio, we hosted “A Winters Tail” a beautiful show for early years and also held Storytime with the Sugar Plum Fairy.

With our gallery turned into the glorious Sugar Plum Fairy World we challenged family groups to complete the Christmas Quest to help Father Christmas find all of the missing reindeer bells.

And we won’t ever forget the fantastic decorations in our foyer space created by local schools, with cake and donut sculptures made to complement the gallery fairy world. Supported by Arts Council England, this project engaged 10 local schools and provided continued professional development opportunities for art teachers.

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### **Our main strands of work are:**

#### **Artistic Programme**

Our Programming team successfully build a balanced programme of music, comedy, drama, dance, family shows and cinema to ensure there is something for everyone. With new work being developed and presented in our studio theatre, we aim to engage audiences whilst supporting up and coming creatives.

Taunton Brewhouse now attracts big name comedians as well as celebrity guests as part of our “An Audience With” strand. Our reputation in the industry as a comfortable, efficient and engaging space means that we have no end of offers of work to share.

Cinema has become one of our most popular areas of work with Movie Monday’s attracting audiences wishing to be entertained or challenged and provides a thought-provoking experience. Combined with our commitment to Warm Spaces through the colder months, we welcome individuals, groups and families to a social space in the darkest of months.

#### **Creative Engagement**

Our LEARN programme engaged almost 5,500 people in a broad range of activities with something for everyone. From visual arts, crafts, music, dance and writing workshops our programme stretches across many genre and provides inspirational opportunities throughout the year.



*Brewhouse Youth Theatre – We now have five age groups, from 5 years through to 19 years*

*Tiny Dancers through to Street Dance*

*Many, many Art workshops and regular classes*

*Plenty of workshops and masterclasses for young people during the school holiday*

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

We very much enjoy working with our community and, alongside Taunton Town Council, helping to deliver the cultural strategy for Taunton. In the summer months, we took part in the Taunton Flower Show, Somerset Cricket Club family fun day and presented a huge range of entertainment at Taunton Together Festival in our very own Somerset Square.

Our partnerships with St Giles Animal Rescue and Arc continue to build but this year we have also developed new relationships with RAFT, Taunton Welcomes Refugees, Cultural Links and Community Council for Somerset Village Agents. These ongoing relationships will help us deliver services and provide opportunities to the whole community.

We provided space in our studio for the development of new creative work from Komedia Entertainment, Over The Wall and Tidal Tales Collective. We also presented inspiring new pieces from Simeon Walker, Joe Wells and Frederic Gheung with a comedy night all in French. We also began our Gentle Open Mic series hosted by the wonderful Max.

Despite a roof leak in our gallery which was rapidly repaired, we were able to host Bridgwater and Taunton College Foundation Art Degree exhibition, Quantock Landscape Partnerships, Chandos Art Group, Somerset Art Gallery Trust and the World Art Games. Additionally, we had individual exhibitions from local artists Jo Sargisson and Ros Cuthbert.

We especially love when our spaces are used by community groups for their performances. Wayfarers this year brought us “Beauty and the Beast”, we hosted a young farmers performance day, Taunton Thesians delivered “The Woman in White” and MAD Hub CIC were “Dancing through the Decades”

### **Organizational Development**

As previously noted, a small number of staff left Taunton Brewhouse for exciting new opportunities and we have replaced these with wonderful new colleagues including Rob Heath who joins us as Technical Manager, Lucy Franklin as Programming Administrator and Charles Johnston as Technician.

We do find, however, even after leaving our employment many of our previous staff return in some capacity such as freelance practitioners, chaperones, duty managers or volunteers. This is a testament to everyone's love of Taunton Brewhouse and desire to continue to be involved.

I cannot stress enough how grateful we are for our volunteers, of which there are well over 100. From front of house, bar, technical and maintenance this amazing band of people give their time freely and willingly. Let's also not forget our trustees who also volunteer their time and energy in the governance of the charity and the support of the staff. All our volunteers are the glue that holds the Brewhouse together and so a HUGE thank you from all of the team.

### **Developing New Work**

Absolute highlights of this year have to include The Nutcracker, which brought local creatives, professional actors and musicians together for an extremely short rehearsal period and creates the most wonderful piece of entertainment for our community.

Similarly, NT Connections involves our young people in a professional performance space with a brand-new piece of work entitled "No Regrets". Their performances were astounding

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What are we working towards in 2026?

- **Launching our new five-year strategy**
- **Working in close partnership with Taunton Town Council**
- **Taking responsibility for the maintenance and improvements to our building and facilities**
- **Working with TYCA and Go Create on a three-year contract to deliver Taunton Together Festival**
- **Seeking funding to make our LEARN programme affordable to all**
- **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 2025 – "The Treasure Island" – a Taunton Brewhouse production**

