

Annual reports

Chairman's report

I am pleased to present my report to members on the Society's activities since the last AGM.

16 films were shown between September 2025 and April 2026, an increase on 2024/25. Combined with our summer season at the Terry O'Toole theatre, we now show 20 films in the course of the year. While this isn't quite up to the number that we programmed pre Covid (when 26 films were shown), it's reasonable to claim that our film seasons offer plenty of opportunities to present world cinema at its most diverse.

The increase in last season's membership subscription did not seem to deter people from joining. Membership numbers again exceeded 300 for the second season in a row and audiences have been substantial, with the majority of films attracting between 160 and 170 people and one - The President's Cake - enticing 202 members through the doors.

However, uncertain times lie ahead. Any volunteer-run group needs the support not just of those who take part in the activities that are organised but also of those willing to help with organisation and management. The departure last year of Tony Butcher and Sue Firth as joint secretaries might have caused us difficulties which could have been compounded when Ben Reynolds left Lincoln for pastures new. However we were joined by a new committee member Pavlos Zafeiris, making eight members of the committee, who have worked very much as a team this year to put the programme together, organise film evenings, keep track of memberships and communicate with those who join. As always, I am grateful to them.

Unfortunately, we lose one of the team at the end of the season. Helen Hancocks is stepping down to concentrate on her career as an illustrator, writer of children's books and her new venture at Lark Books. Helen has been a committee member for many years and the Society is fortunate that she has put her film knowledge and artistic skills to good use on our behalf to design our programmes. While she has offered to continue to do this for us, she will no longer be part of the committee, leaving us with just seven members.

We'd also prefer to find another person as secretary. This year, David Brook has ably filled the role but he has a major film project to concentrate on next year. While he is happy to remain on the committee, he hopes that someone else will be able to take on the secretary's role. We would therefore welcome anyone who would like to volunteer to join us to take on that role.

As a charity, we are supported by a small group of trustees who monitor how we discharge our responsibilities. Over the past year that group of 3 has overseen our activities but they will be down to 2 as Ray Longmore is stepping down. We are grateful to Ray for the support he has provided but we really would like to recruit another member to replace him. We hope that the membership is appreciative enough of the society to want to contribute to its future.

A more significant challenge may await us besides that of refreshing the committee and the trustees. Members will be well aware of the technical problems that disrupted a couple of films recently. What they may not be aware of is that our hosts at Lincoln Bishop University are going through an extremely turbulent period. This has affected the way The Venue is being run.

At the start of the season in September it was part of the Conferencing and Events portfolio, with a staff of 3 who managed it and who took it in turns to support us on film nights. We have since learned that Conferencing and Events is being wound up as a standalone unit at the University and all 3 members of that team have left.

At a recent meeting with Rachel Crane, whose main role is head of campus operations, we also learned that the University is in serious financial difficulties, as a result of government policies affecting higher education and overseas students. This has required significant restructuring. A new vice chancellor has been appointed and a new business plan created, intended to focus the university's attention on its core purpose as it prepares for the 2026/27 academic year.

This core purpose includes a community focus with The Venue continuing to serve as a cinema. Film Society will still have a significant presence there. Responsibility for running the building would be devolved to Kieran Wiseman, commercial manager for the student union. Omnex would continue to service and maintain the projector and some improvements to the bar are being considered. Ms Crane said there was now more optimism about the future.

There are some significant challenges ahead though. The equipment is aging and sourcing spare parts will be a growing problem in the short to medium term. Costings have been obtained for replacements but the 6 figure sum that was quoted means there is no immediate prospect of new investment for the new projector and sound system which would be needed.

Since there is no other location in the city that offers the amenities available here at a price that allows us to provide such good value for money, the Society will therefore have to address this problem. I'm certain that the membership would like us to make every effort to remain here, not least because next season marks the 40th anniversary of our arrival at the theatre. We have mentioned this to the University and pitched the idea of some sort of celebratory event to mark the occasion, subject to the usual caveats about detail.

This seems to me to offer us a focal point for the next 18 to 24 months and it would be hugely encouraging to the committee to think that members would support us in responding to these challenges. In the short term though we are planning to begin next season in September, have selected a programme to take us up to Christmas and membership details will be announced in time for the list to open at the end of the summer season.

It remains for me to thank the committee, the trustees, the team at The Venue and you, the members, for ensuring that the Society has completed this season so successfully. I look forward to sharing the new season with you all.