



Theatre Notes

New Trustee joins the Board of Trustees

Jeremy Thompson, one of our volunteers, has been co-opted to the Board until the AGM in November. Jeremy talks about his background and ambitions on page 9. The Board has ten Trustees.

Ticket sales are the highest ever

In the 2025/2026 end of year financial statement, Trustee and Hon. Treasurer, Jeremy Davies, reported that ticket sales reached £200,000 for the first time in the theatre's history - a result of excellent programming.

Our summer programme is published



The May – August 2026 printed programme is now available and is being distributed by our volunteers to local businesses and other outlets. A flip-book version of the programme, which looks like the printed booklet, can be found on the Fisher Theatre website (www.fishertheatre.org). All shows can be booked via the website, and tickets can be purchased by phone or in person at the box office.

Bungay Festivals 2026 at the Fisher Theatre

We will be hosting events for the hugely popular Black Shuck and Folk Festivals - See page 3.

Fundraising committee

Our income derives from a variety of sources with sales accounting for less than half our requirements. Grants are now much harder to get so we are putting extra energy into fundraising, led by Trustee, Frances Betts.

Reading marathon

During April, we staged our second reading marathon, this time featuring the seven books of *The Chronicles of Narnia* by CS Lewis. Twenty-three readers and a dozen stewards took part over eight days. The sponsorship income we receive is an added bonus.

FYTG Nestlings to perform Macbeth

Fisher Youth Theatre Group's youngest performance cohort will present a modern, highly entertaining take on Shakespeare's tragedy. There are two performances, at 2pm and 6pm on Saturday 16 May.



Naomi, from Inanna's Festival Book Shop, opens the reading marathon

Kinky Boots: The Musical is now in rehearsal

The lead production to celebrate our 20th anniversary is *Kinky Boots: The Musical*. This will be one of our most ambitious stagings and many thanks to everyone who has donated funds to make it possible. The show which features professional cast members, directed by Darren France and produced by Alex Butler, is already in rehearsal. The show runs for three performances from Thursday 24th – Saturday 26th September. It's sure to be a sell-out, so join us to celebrate by booking your tickets now!

Film shows for people living with dementia

Thanks to a generous £5000 grant from East Suffolk Council, we will be showing monthly films for people living with dementia and their carers. The film series starts in the autumn of 2026.

BATS Membership and event dates

Four new Members have recently been appointed by the Board bringing the total to 96. Any of our volunteers and supporters can apply to be a Member by emailing secretary@fishertheatre.org Members will be kept informed of our work, invited to a reception on 29th July and to the AGM on Sunday 15th November 2026.

One of the main themes in this issue is how we collaborate with other organisations to benefit the people of Bungay and beyond. Here Cathy Edwards-Gill writes about

Bidding together to be a Town of Culture

In the dark days of winter an email dropped into my inbox from the General Manager of Diss Corn Hall. Applications were open for the UK Town of Culture, and he had a proposal: why shouldn't the towns of the Waveney Valley come together to submit a joint application? This was intriguing, and so over the next weeks I and my counterparts at Diss, Beccles Public Hall, The Cut in Halesworth, and Wingfield Barns have had a series of meetings to begin to put this idea into operation.

As we talked through our ideas, it became clear that, whilst we are obviously separate towns, each with a distinct character, we are all connected by the Waveney Valley, and by a shared heritage, and history, and a shared landscape. We are all market towns with a cultural hub, and with multiple and varied creative providers in each town. We all live in an area that inspires creativity, and we share the same problems too – accessibility, transport, a need to involve the parts of our communities that may not have such easy access to the arts in the



Rehearsal photos

Photo montage: Alex Butler

area, notably children and families and the disabled, young adults and those of different ethnicities. While there is already a very strong cultural offering, there is much more that can be done, more people to include and attract, and many more cultural opportunities that could potentially be created.

The next step to take was to create and circulate the questionnaire that many of you filled in. In fact, Bungay came second in the number of responses submitted, which is fantastic – there are clearly many people who care enough to take the trouble and the results were fascinating, and interestingly very similar across the six towns.



Participants at the meeting with Adrian Ramsay MP

On March 31st, using the data that we gleaned from the questionnaire, we submitted our Expression of Interest, or EOI, and gave ourselves a name – “Six

Towns – One Heart”. (The six towns in question being Bungay, Beccles, Diss, Halesworth, Harleston and Eye). We are delighted to have the support of Adrian Ramsay MP, and of East Suffolk Council, as

well as the councils of the various towns. Of course, this is a hugely ambitious project, and we are one of a dozen applications from East Anglia alone. The chances of success are, let's face it, vanishingly small! But it has to be worth a shot; our EOI is strong, and let's keep our fingers collectively crossed that we can take it further. If our EOI is successful we'd be awarded £60,000 to take it through to the next stage.

The ultimate prize for the winning town (or towns) will be an award of 3.5 million, to be spent on cultural provision throughout 2028. And if we are not successful..? The future collaboration between the Waveney Valley towns is a reward in itself, and something we are all keen to take further, so watch this space.

*Cathy Edwards-Gill, General Manager
Programme and Events*

Bungay Festivals at the Fisher

Continuing the theme of collaboration, for some years the Fisher has hosted events at both Bungay's major music festivals, the Black Shuck and Folk Festival. Didy Ward gives the background to this year's Black Shuck, which runs from 31st July to 2nd August and Pete Sewell outlines this year's Folk Festival from 3rd to 6th September.

In April 2022 the Fisher Theatre hosted an event led by acclaimed portrait artist Stuart Pearson-Wright in which he posited a new public arts project for Bungay. He emphasised the importance of the Black Dog of Bungay story to our town and stated, to a very enthusiastic audience, that this should be celebrated through an annual festival – and to claim Bungay as the natural home of the wider Black Shuck legend.

Many in the audience agreed and a group of like-minded Bungay people met to scope out how such a festival might, with very little money, be held. The result was the one-day festival held as near as possible to the anniversary of the Black Dog's visit to St. Mary's Church on August 4th 1577 with an eclectic mix of performances on the Castle Bailey and a dramatic retelling of the story in St. Mary's church in the



Black Shuck painting from a children's exhibition

Photo James Mayhew

evening. Such was the success of this event that the group of people running it consolidated into the 1577 Committee and started planning for a larger festival in 2023, aided by a grant from East Suffolk Council. The festival has been able to attract Arts Council funding and has grown and grown ever since. In 2025 The Fisher was almost overwhelmed with the number of events taking place here and a very full programme of events at the Fisher is planned for 2026, introducing the theatre to even more new visitors. But with additional funding from the Sizewell C Tourism Fund, the team will be able to manage new visitors to the town much better.

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Rust and Stardust's Black Shuck puppet show

Photo: Alex Ward

The Fisher will again be at the centre of the 2026 Festival with events for audiences of all ages in all of the amazing Fisher Theatre spaces. As the Festival has grown, so has its outreach

programming and this year the Gallery will see an exhibition of creative work from the children who have attended workshops through their schools – all with a folklore theme. There is currently a folklore revival happening in the UK – and the Black Shuck Festival and the Fisher Theatre are at the heart of it.

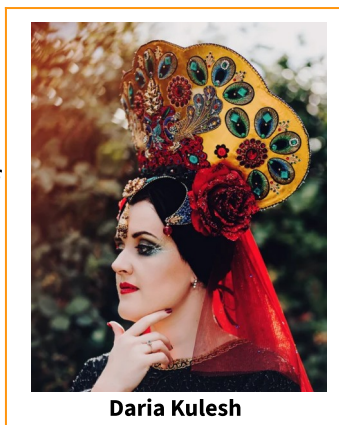
Didy Ward

Bungay Folk Festival 2026

Bungay Folk Festival this year starts on Thursday 3rd September and goes through until Sunday 6th September. The Fisher Theatre is the main hub for the festival and is the place to go for information, programmes and that early morning coffee! The festival was conceived by Vicky Lambert and Pete Sewell early in May 2023 and finally came to fruition in September 2024 through the efforts of a dedicated committee. We built the first festival around performances by Solana and Sam Kelly at the Fisher Theatre and relied heavily on a huge team of willing volunteers.

The festival grew and by 2025 we had over 50 bands performing across the weekend in multiple venues.

Local poet Luke Wright and his friend Eliza Carthy were the talk of the festival. The ranks of volunteers swelled to 50 and Bungay town certainly felt the joy of being the centre of so much folk music.



Daria Kulesh

Planning for the festival begins in November and the whole programme is pretty much in place by March. This year we have a great team working on many different aspects from fundraising and programming to operations and education.

What makes BFF so different from most other festivals is that we have tried to keep much of it free. In this age of austerity and hardship knowing that you can rock up in Bungay with the family and enjoy a whole day of free quality music is unusual. Local musicians feature heavily at BFF2026 with many local groups getting the opportunity to play to a new audience.



Oleg and Simone

The main acts this year are Chris Wood, Sam Kelly, Will Pound and Jenn Butterworth and Oleg and Simone. Reg Meuross, The John Ward Trio, The

Shackleton Trio and Helian are well known in folk circles and bring folk glitter to the proceedings. Local artist James Mayhew and his friend Daria Kulesh are a very special addition this year. The East Suffolk Community Folk Orchestra will be performing a newly commissioned piece with Cohen Braithwaite-Kilcoyne.



Bungay Voices will perform at the Folk Festival

The folk picnic is taking place at Bungay Castle again on Sunday afternoon with a procession by Scottish pipers. Morris dancers, belly dancers, bell ringers and the Bungay Voices choir all lend a hand to make this a weekend to remember. There is so much going on. Check it out at www.bungayfolkfestival.co.uk

If you would like to volunteer this year, it's not too late to drop us an email and join the team: operations@bungayfolkfestival.co.uk

Pete Sewell

Focus on the Fisher Gallery

The Fisher Gallery is our space for painters and creators, reading marathons, writing and painting workshops and just the occasional party. Here we reflect on recent events, starting with Jacqui Holmes explaining the intricacies of mounting a show.

Textile Tales

Let's have an exhibition! An exciting idea, much enthusiasm and the starting point of an emotional roller coaster ride. Supporters of the Mary Walker Foundation had been, and still are, working on a textile hanging for the community centre. An exhibition would be an opportunity to showcase our individual tastes and styles.

Where? When? Practicalities had to be faced. The where was agreed - the Fisher Theatre Gallery - discussion with manager Cathy and the date fixed. Cathy was brilliant suggesting dates and explaining terms and conditions. I left the office clutching a booking form.

Only one problem - we need a title and soon to ensure inclusion in the programme. What should we call it? We had no theme. *Textile Tales* was settled on.

Now for words and an image for the programme and publicity, in fact more than one for the large AO poster. The image for the programme was a collage and words written. Tick.

Thoughts turned to the poster. A different matter, bold colours to stand out, different styles to show the diversity and shapes for interest. Three images were chosen.

Fortunately, nowadays most mobiles take hi-res images suitable for print. This all handed to the Fisher to work their magic.

Time to get flyers printed and distributed. A bundle of 200 seemed to go nowhere.

Back in committee, a submission form was created, so we had an idea for how much work to expect, and the work had to be labelled, some for sale, some not. From this information a list was created for use at the Fisher Theatre.

Time for a quick breather, before collection day arrived. We set up in the gallery to receive the work, checking we had the correct information. No one changed their mind about what to submit. Phew.

Next day the hanging team of four gathered. Pictures were placed round the gallery floor and ramp, moved - numerous times - to

achieve a satisfactory flow and display the work at its best.

Help now required, more hanging wires, ladders, lights. Alex and Molly came to our rescue. The sticky labels we

prepared were handed to Alex, who stuck them on to board and cut them to size.

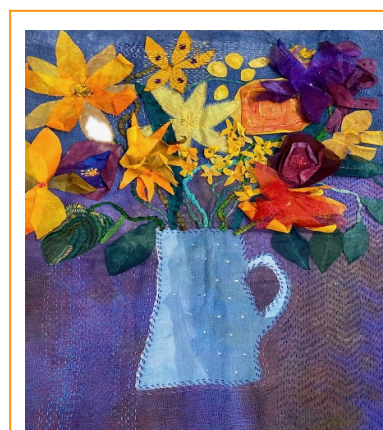
Buoyed by euphoria we hung the pictures. Big mistake, straightening pictures before labelling. You guessed it; the titles, description, artists' names and sale price were on the back of the pictures. At least we had resolved the positioning. So marrying labels to work took a little longer and we had to straighten the pictures again. We used the Fisher's spirit level for the task.

It all looked good and ready for the preview. We bought drinks via the Fisher, so much easier than negotiating sale or return plus glass hire, we provided nibbles.

As guests arrived - all seemed happy and complimentary - a moment for relief. It was all plain sailing from then until the last day. Staff deal with sales and pay artists at the end. We had to do no stewarding.

It was sad when the exhibition came down, work collected and the gallery empty.

Thanks go to the staff, who are there to help and guide you through the process, to ensure it is a success.



Jo Howell *Spring Flowers* *

Hand stitched in Kantha stitch with appliqué.

Design inspired by a painting by Ann Gram.

Jacqueline Holmes

(*The image shows one of many varied pieces in the show.)

Mindfulness through oil painting

Jo Shepherd, one of three artists exhibiting at the Fisher Gallery until 25 April, also runs oil painting workshops there. She writes about her background and joy of sharing skills with others.

Born and raised in Wanstead and now living in Norfolk, I was inspired and guided to a career as an artist by my grandfather, a self-taught painter. I studied at St Martin's School of Art and later studied makeup artistry at the London College of Fashion which was a big influence on my experimental colour work. Using oils and a palette knife, I am inspired by the vast Norfolk skies and ever changing coastline throughout the seasons. They are a mindful practice that is very healing and restorative.

Fisher workshops

One of the most beautiful and satisfying parts of my life as an artist is sharing my knowledge and inspiring others, helping them find their love of painting and creativity to escape to, observing the world in colour and form.



Participants at Jo's workshop

So many have said they now see skies in a way they hadn't before, looking for all those subtle changes in colour. They look up now rather than down. Painting and observing, really noticing

not just looking, is a mindful practice that everyone can benefit from. Teaching children to do this changes the way they connect with themselves and our environment. It's awe inspiring to see nature as the greatest artist and to try and capture that.

I encourage everyone to paint as loosely as they can, leaving only the essential information there. We paint quickly and freely often to music, using palette knives and silicon brushes to avoid getting in too much detail.



Jo works with oils and a palette knife

Oils offer a richness and softness in tone that I prefer to acrylics and we learn to desaturate colours using harmonious

colours often found in nature. We look at colours within colours and explore how to capture the light.

Anyone can attend my workshops and many that have never painted before have created pieces that they are immensely proud of. Everyone leaving feels better than when they arrived.

Jo Shepherd

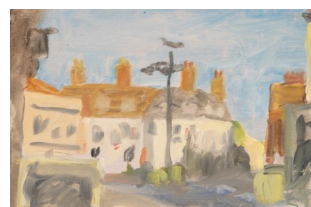
www.joshepherd.co.uk

Exhibiting together – an update

Last November, four of us – Sarah Cannell, Louise Dougherty, Caroline Mackintosh and myself – exhibited our art inspired by walking in Norfolk and Suffolk in *Rooted in the Landscape* at the Fisher Theatre Gallery. As I noted in the last edition of *Fisher Spotlight*, this was the first time we had exhibited together. We were delighted with how our different styles but common subject matter complemented each other, as well as with how positively our exhibition was received. We vowed to look for more opportunities to work together.

This update is to let you know we have been successful in this. In June, we will again exhibit together in the prestigious Mandell's Gallery on Elm Hill in Norwich. The exhibition marks the culmination of Sarah's ambitious 1000 vessel project, her extended exploration of creative process, media and form. Our landscape pieces will complement and contextualise Sarah's ceramics, with all our work showcasing our interpretations of the ancient, enduring and inspirational landscapes of Suffolk and Norfolk.

Helen Derbyshire, artist and Fisher volunteer



Susannah May

'Ring of it'

11 May – 13 June

The Fisher Gallery

Paths to the Fisher stage

When you come to an event at the Fisher, have you thought how many years of study, hard work and creativity go into a performance or a lecture? Here are two accounts from regular contributors to our artistic programme.

An unspoken dedication



Live with Pure Floyd

For the past 15 years, my musical journey has been closely intertwined with the charming and majestic Fisher Theatre. In my formative years, I would frequently sit in the

gorgeous balconies, wide-eyed and dreaming about performing on your beloved stage (as I sat and studied my parents play in their Pink Floyd tribute act 'Pure Floyd').

Starting out as a drummer

When I was 17, I performed the first professional show of my drumming career, picking up the sticks for my parents one night at Newmarket Memorial Hall (a special fundraiser event for Cambridge Rock Festival). I remember tentatively peeking through the curtain and being hit with a cascading wave of emotions (excitement, nervousness, curiosity and glee) as I realised how many people were stood waiting to watch us perform at any moment. Seconds into the opening track, all of the terror washed away, leaving me with absolute clarity about how passionate I felt about performing, confirming in that special moment, the unwavering belief that this is how I needed to spend the rest of my life.

Almost ten years on and I have been fortunate enough to make a steady career as a session drummer, recording engineer and music teacher. I feel honoured to have performed at the Fisher Theatre many times since then with my various bands and I'm lucky enough to be back again this year with Pure Floyd, The British Rock Experience and Behind Who Eyes. The very fabric of the building seems to resonate with the rich and

beautiful art that has been staged here, making it an absolute haven for someone like me!

With all of the various acts I tour with, we all have an unspoken dedication to stage the most immersive, impactful and emotive performances we can muster and so we often bring 10x the amount of instruments, lighting, video screens, costumes etc., than many other touring bands at our level, as we want to make every show so special.

A huge team effort

An average Pure Floyd performance at Bungay Fisher, starts at 7am in the morning (with us loading a removal lorry, bursting at the seams with equipment). We then tend to grab a spot of lunch

(honestly, despite our healthy aspirations, this tends to be something dangerously deep fat fried). Then comes the huge team effort as we spend 7 hours erecting the sound, lighting and instruments, helped by the amazing Fisher tech team. Then comes the best bit; a beautiful performance in front of some of our favourite patrons and followers. Many cups of tea later, we have the stage deconstructed and then play what we call 'Flightcase Tetris' (trying to squeeze two lorries worth of gear into one, ha ha!). Depending on the speed of this all, we tend to then get home around 3am (having completed a 21 hour shift). It definitely isn't for the faint hearted but we like to see it as fairly rock and roll and the deserved price to pay for the fantastic experience of performing to Bungay and its amazing army of live music devotees! Long live the Fisher!



The British Rock Experience



Please follow my drumming and day to day escapades on my social media, where you can also check out the details for my debut solo album.

[facebook.com/OfficialReubes](https://www.facebook.com/OfficialReubes)

Reubes Cocksedge

BATS Member creates a drama of her own



Hilary Mason

A new play, written by one of our very own BATS Members and a long standing Fisher Theatre supporter, goes on tour across Suffolk and Norfolk in June this year.

The play, *never-2-late.com*, written by Hilary Mason, tells the story of Ruby, an 80-year-old woman who announces to her children that she is about to marry a much younger man whom she met on an internet dating site for senior singles. But Ruby's revelation does not go well.

A roller-coaster of a play

Hilary's lips are sealed about the rest of the plot, except to say that *never-2-late.com* is a roller-coaster of a play that she hopes will challenge an audience's attitudes to love in later life.

The play is directed by BATS Trustee, Paul Baker, and Ruby's daughter is played by none other than our General Manager, Cathy Edwards-Gill.

A Charmed Life production

never-2-late.com is produced by Hilary and Diana Cook, both founder members of Bungay-based theatre production company Charmed Life. Charmed Life is the company that brought three other sell-out shows to the Fisher: *Behind the Big Blue Doors* written to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the re-birth of the Fisher,

Hey Jig-a-Jig, the story of Shakespeare's Fool Will Kemp and his nine-day dance from London to Norwich, and *Slyghtly Historical*, a hilarious take on Bungay's more colourful characters. Hilary has been a passionate supporter of the Fisher since she first moved to Bungay 21 years ago. She has been a volunteer, the vice-chair of the Board of Trustees and a long-term Member.

Preparations are well underway

Hilary says: "I finished the script for *never-2-late.com* over a year ago. I was thrilled and humbled when both Paul and Cathy agreed to help me and Diana to bring it to fruition.

The rehearsals are going very well so far. I've got a great cast and crew, including a saxophone player who is composing bespoke music. We've just delivered our posters and flyers to the seven tour venues, and all the theatre managers were hugely complimentary about the design and artwork. Many thanks to Alex for this."

Touring schedule

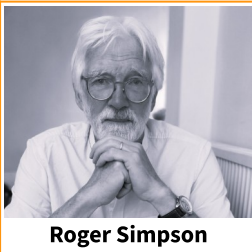
never-2-late.com opens at the Maddermarket Theatre on June 11th and, of course, the closing performance will be at the Fisher Theatre on 27th June.

For all our other tour dates and venues, rehearsal photos and much more, please visit the never-2-late.com website.

Characters from the play (top to bottom): Ruby, James, Rachel, Becca, Charles and Frank



Art as social history



Roger Simpson

Roger Simpson writes:
I have a doctoral degree in Art History, and published my dissertation on the Victorian political

cartoonist and children's illustrator, Sir John Tenniel (1820-1914).

I firmly believe that art is a fundamental cultural expression and is therefore comprehensible to everyone, without the need for specialist jargon. So I work at my own level and don't talk down my audience. I also stress history over aesthetics, as art production takes us deep into the social structures of the cultures that produce it.

About Art in America

This series of talks runs at 10.30 a.m. on Fridays between May 8th to June 12th 2026 at the Fisher Theatre.

Some see America as a rogue state, a view held by Noam Chomsky, Gore Vidal and Harold Pinter among many others. That's debatable, but what is surely true is that the America of 20th and 21st centuries is an utter betrayal of all its founding principles: a tolerant, fair agrarian Arcadia.

That's the theme that will provide the backdrop to my series of six talks. A major body of artworks from Thomas Eakins to Andrew Wyeth to Edward Gorey suggest that American Freedom isn't necessarily all



Thomas Eakins *John Biglin in a Single Scull*

© 1932.263 Yale University Art Gallery

it's cracked up to be. And this pristine New World would rapidly become as corrupt as the old one, as Robber Barons like Andrew Carnegie chased sainthood in atonement for their sins.

There would be great expressions of optimism too, images of joyful hope in the future rather than of dull corporate power: the Art Deco architecture of the Chrysler Building among many others.

And a vast number of images of community typified by Norman Rockwell: images so pervasive and powerful that we have to wonder if they are compensating for a perception that the old Arcadian idyll of Small Town America has been shattered and fragmented and lost forever in a sea of small-minded spite, mistrust and numbing consumerism. ■

Acknowledgements: Sincere thanks to all the contributors, to Alex Butler for the new masthead design and Margaret Rose-Langran for proofreading. The copy deadline for FS7 is 29th August 2026. Please email suggestions for future articles to secretary@fishertheatre.org © Bungay Arts and Theatre Society 2026.

Prompt Corner – news about the way we run the Fisher Theatre

Jeremy Thompson co-opted to the BATS Board of Trustees

With a degree in English and Drama, and as the Founder of Troubadour Publishing, Jeremy was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts in 2022. Always active in theatre, he was a volunteer lighting designer at The Little Theatre in Leicester for 25 years as well as an occasional actor and director. He was a Trustee for five years with responsibility for facilities and marketing. Jeremy writes: *I would like to bring both my business and theatre experience to The Fisher, which as a relatively young venue, has a lot of potential.*



Jeremy Thompson at a lighting desk