



Annual Report Summary 2023-24

Horton Chapel Arts & Heritage Society

Registered Charity 1167510

The Horton is a vibrant independent venue for arts, heritage and events in Epsom, Surrey.

The formerly semi-derelict Horton Asylum Chapel was saved by registered charity Horton Chapel Arts & Heritage Society (HCAHS), a Trust set up specifically to undertake the renovation project and run The Horton as a not-for-profit cultural venue, providing amenities, education and enterprise opportunities for local people.

Objectives and Activities

The Charitable Aims of The Horton (HCAHS)

- To preserve Horton Chapel in Epsom, a Grade II listed building, for the benefit of the public and the heritage of the local area, by establishing a not-for-profit arts centre within the building and its associated grounds; and
- To promote education in and appreciation of the arts, local history and creative activities that promote well-being, for the public benefit of all ages of people living, working and studying in the borough of Epsom and Ewell and its surrounding areas.

About The Horton

The Horton, also known as The Horton Arts Centre, is a site of national historical importance. Built in 1901, it has a pioneering history of mental health care and was Europe's first music therapy centre from the 1950s.

Following a six-year project to raise funds and renovate the building, The Horton officially opened to the public on 28th April 2022.

The venue hosts creative arts workshops, performances, exhibitions, community events, and a free-to-access permanent exhibition about the history of Epsom's psychiatric hospital cluster and the people who lived and worked there.

The heritage of the site is embedded into the culture of our public programme and retained in the architectural and decorative detail of the building.

The Horton's Café provides a community hub where local people can meet, eat and drink together.



Our Mission

The Horton draws upon its rich history and seeks to celebrate creativity and inclusivity, aiming:

- for visitors to learn about local heritage, and enjoy an exciting cultural programme of events, courses, and activities.
- to be an accessible community asset that local people feel proud of, and emotionally invested in.
- to explore historic and contemporary issues around mental health and its treatment. Seeking to change attitudes towards mental health, and to be a place where people with mental health considerations are actively involved and feel safe and welcome.
- to be a place where creativity is celebrated, and skills development within the creative sector is fostered.
- for artistic programming to be innovative and high-quality, offering something that is not otherwise available in the locality.

Activities Summary

During this period the Horton extended its opening hours from four to five days a week – Tuesday to Saturday plus evenings for performances and events.

Renovation Project

The period saw completion of outstanding elements of the restoration and renovation works including stonework repairs and damp-proofing parts of the building. Internal signage and on-site outdoor signage was installed.

Creative Programme

During this reporting period, The Horton hosted live music, dance and theatre performances, exhibitions, films, visual arts courses and workshops, comedy, wellbeing activities, experiential and heritage events, as well as a first poetry performance event.

As a member of the house theatre network, The Horton was able to programme some selected subsidised performances that would not otherwise be affordable.

At the beginning of the year, the charity invested in the purchase of professional exhibition display boards. There was a subsequent huge demand from visual arts groups in the region to book exhibition space.



Going forwards there will need to be a balance in programming to ensure that the Atrium space can also be used for other activities.

Programming highlights included:

Experiential:



Collapse was an immersive, live audio-visual performance from Void_null – a collaboration between visual artist James Ward and musician Ian Oakley. Featuring electronic music and multi-screen projection, the performance was a creative response to one of the dark mystery of the

Black Hole.

The event used The Horton's space and high ceilings in new ways and demonstrated its experiential potential. This was supported by a donation from MGSO4 Arts.

Dance:

The Rest of Our Lives by Jo Fong and George Orange, was a joyful dose of dance, theatre, circus and games exploring ageing and optimism, with British Sign Language Interpretation.



We also held two sold-out Ceilidh dances with live folk band attended by a very wide age range from the local area and another season of Spanish music and dance.

Live music:

Ranging from gypsy jazz, blues, rap-poetry and funk to classical and folk.

The Horton welcomed for the first time - Samantics, Jez Hellard & the Djukella Orchestra, Moscow Drug Club, Mario Bakuna and many artists performing at acoustic Singer-Songwriter Nights hosted by Dragonfly Sky. Others returned by popular demand.

Theatre:

As a non-traditional theatre space, without a fully-equipped rig, The Horton has to be selective over what can be adapted and programmed.



This reporting period, performances included *Sold: The True Story Of Mary Prince* By Kuumba Nia Arts - a historical play, retelling the powerful yet seldom talked about story of freedom fighter, Mary Prince. Prince played a vital role in Britain's abolitionist movement as the first Black woman whose narrative of her enslavement was recorded.

Fatherhood - a one-man show exploring fatherhood across different generations and continents; *The Silent Treatment* - a professional singer who loses her voice exploring her past and identity; *I'm Glad I Asked* - a tender, heartfelt, one-woman (and a puppet) theatre show, drawn from workshops with women of all ages and Michele O'Brien's own lived experiences with her 91-year-old Mother, Gena.

Matt McGuinness and the MLC put on a special performance of the show - *We Are What We Overcome* – for World Mental Health Day, weaving tales of how he got to and came back from the brink of suicide with comedy, catchy songs and eclectic stories. This was supported by a donation from MGSO4 Arts.

Visual Arts:

New workshops included: cyanotype printing, print-making techniques, dressmaking, Chinese brush painting, sketchbook club and bookbinding.

Others, such as life drawing, nagomi pastel art, macramé, mosaic and ikebana have continued to be popular.

Epsom-based artist Adele Annett became our first Artist in Residence during August, with her photography project, *Fragments* and offered collage workshops to children and families on the theme of identities.



Children & Family:



Theatre included *Journey to the Stars* by Squashbox, and Short Stories Tall Tales - a first-theatre interactive experience for under 5s, that became more regular, with a different show each month.

Snowplay by Lyngo Theatre had a run of ten shows over five days and offered an interactive, festive alternative to pantomime.



New workshops were tested including: a holiday drama course, aerial circus, street and commercial dance, collage, baking, clay dragons, a puppetry masterclass and pastels. Relaxed family film screenings were reported to be particularly appreciated by parents and carers who did not think their children would sit through a film in a traditional seated cinema.

The summer family disco was one of our most popular events for this audience group and brought lots of new people into the venue.

Heritage:

Expert talks on various themes relating to local and regional history were very well attended, with a repeat of the *History of Mental Hospitals in Surrey* being fully booked for a second time. Other talks included: *Horton's Architectural Heritage*, *Horton Voices* and *Epsom & Ewell Through Time*.

The Horton was invited to participate in Mayor Rob Geleit's Civic Celebration event in September, and an audio installation called The Horton Listening Room was set up in Bourne Hall for guests to access the recorded stories of the people who lived and worked in Epsom's Hospital Cluster during the twentieth century.

Community

Key events that brought the community together at the Horton during this period included:

The Coronation of Charles III – Live Screening.

Diverse groups including many families with younger children shared this historic moment in a friendly, communal atmosphere.

Jigsaw Week

A free week-long drop-in and jigsaw swap was a great success. It attracted lots of new people who spent many hours completing puzzles and created companionship for those attending on their own.



Exhibitions from local groups included: *Connections* – a celebration of artwork created by children, young people and staff from the NHS Surrey & Borders Partnership Children and Young People Specialist Services, STARS and New Leaf. The exhibition was the first of its kind featuring a range of artwork linked to the topic of ‘Connection’ and ‘What Matters to Me;’ Epsom & Ewell Camera Club and Epsom & Ewell Art Group.

A monthly Book Club, launched and run by a volunteer, meets a social need and regularly attracts good attendance.

Various groups have set up drop-in stands in the Atrium, including

- Surrey Foster Carers
- Police - PCSOs Meet The Beat
- End Stigma Surrey – Time To Talk Day
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Out Of Sight Out of Mind Project

It was one of the highlights of our year at The Horton to host the *Out Of Sight Out of Mind Project*, exploring the cross-section between local history and the politics of mental health, working with Dr Alana Harris of King’s College London, Friends of Horton Cemetery and Freewheelers Theatre & Media Company.

The project including the *Forget-Me-Not* Ceramic Flower Installation, *Us & Them* photographic exhibition and Eric Fong’s *Cyanotype Apparitions* artwork. Public flower-painting workshops through-out Epsom & Ewell, supported by Friends of Horton Cemetery and Historic England, resulted in a floral collection of more than 1000 pieces, to remember the stories of those buried in Horton Cemetery.

The flowers were planted in the grounds of The Horton, with the installation as a memorial garden. The striking installation not only attracted visitors from the wider region but it also had a profound effect on many local people who remembered the mental hospitals.



The launch day itself on World Mental Health Day was a celebration of community brought together through this heritage project. More than 300 people attended the unveiling of the installation at The Horton and listened to speeches and experienced creative responses to the subject. The Horton Cemetery itself is not publicly accessible.

The audience was one of the most diverse that we have experienced. The popularity of the installation led to the initial 6 weeks being extended twice.

Operations

With increased awareness of The Horton as a venue, several brown directional signs were installed by Surrey County Council on the highway, which should improve the visitor experience for people travelling by car for the first time.

The lack of signage from restricted bus lane is still an ongoing issue for all residents, as well as The Horton.

Consent was given by Epsom & Ewell's Tree Officer to fell one diseased tree and pollard another in the car park, due to safety.

The Horton has developed a small retail offer based on heritage books and small branded gift items to raise further funds. This is an area for potential expansion of earned income.

The Horton continued to build relationships with local stakeholders, offering opportunities for skills training, including work placements for Professional Cookery

students from NESCOL College and paid internships in marketing and design for graduates of Surrey universities

Achievements and performance

The Horton has consolidated its reputation for quality, innovation and above all, a warm welcome to all, with an inclusive approach.

In this financial year March 2023-February 2024, visitor numbers increased. There were:

- **30,000+ visits to The Horton**
(This number excludes those attending private events through venue hire.)
- **6,500+ people attending a performance, course or workshop**

The permanent heritage exhibition continues to attract visitors in its own right, as well as providing historic context to the building for those who are attending our programme of cultural events and workshops. The exhibition, which is free to access for all visitors, includes artefacts, images, audio recordings and digital resources including testimonies of staff and patients of the Epsom Hospital Cluster from throughout the 20th century. This important aspect of the project brings to life the heritage of the site and the hospital cluster for visitors who are unaware of its fascinating history.

The charity and its achievements have been recognised at county level, with The Horton being described as a cultural asset to Surrey, as well as the borough of Epsom & Ewell.

Surrey Cultural Partnership

In January 2024, The Horton was very proud to be chosen to host the launch of a new initiative for delivering the county's new Cultural Strategy.

More than 130 people attended, representing arts and heritage organisations from throughout Surrey, as well as funding bodies. The Horton was cited as a great example of what could be achieved.

"It was so good to hold the launch in a place which displays absolutely the spirit the strategy is written in and see what grant money can do when in good hands."

Evaluation

The National Heritage Lottery Funded capital project was concluded with the production of an independent final evaluation report by Anna Cullum Associates, which was very positive about the achievements of the charity and the impact that opening The Horton had on local people.

Stability

Following post-Covid changes in patterns of behaviour of audiences attending cultural

events, and weathering the challenges of the cost of living crisis, The Horton has achieved a sustainable position during this reporting period, securing the stated target reserves required to mitigate against the impact of a future event.

The charity has become a member of the Association of Cultural Enterprises giving us access to new training opportunities and peer to peer learning on increasing earned income to boost funds that can be dedicated to our charitable purposes.

Partnerships The team at The Horton continued networking and partnership building with other local charities and community groups. A strand of The Horton's artistic programming focused on performances, talks and activities that would seek to enhance greater understanding of mental health and inclusion.



Our staff and volunteers have established a much-valued relationship with Horton Rehabilitation Centre and its service users. One mental health professional interviewed for our independent evaluation cited this as 'transformational' in the lives of people who regularly visit The Horton.

An event reaching out to Creative Arts Leads at primary schools in Epsom & Ewell was held in October. Staff attended from seven local schools and were able to discuss barriers for participation and where they thought schools could work together with The Horton in providing opportunities for children.

Skills development

The Horton has provided graduate internships; professional work-based placements for local professional catering students; work experience placements for young people at local schools; approximately 50 volunteering opportunities and 5 Duke of Edinburgh placements.

Young Film Programmers Project

The Horton recruited locally for young people aged 16-20 with an existing interest in film to join a Young Film Programmers group.

A diverse group of six young people met on a weekly basis from November 2023 to March 2024 and collaborated with expert guests to understand programming, marketing, branding and screening operations. They named the group Fourth Wall Film.



Our main beneficiaries were the young people who attended the programming group. Their knowledge and skills increased enormously as we were able to host more regular meetings than

initially projected due to their enthusiasm and also the commitment of local school Glyn and NESCOL College who facilitated them in attending weekly sessions at the venue during the school/college day.

The group programmed and ran four film screenings at The Horton, and attended a BFI film festival in London. The Horton will need to secure further funding to continue this project.

Plans for future periods

The charity continues to develop and test new activities and income, and review The Horton's strategy based on operational learnings, visitor feedback and our charitable objectives.

An important focus will be on strengthening the new sense of community that has been created around the opening of The Horton to ensure we are reaching underserved and under-represented groups in our programming and events. We will cultivate partnerships with other organisations and fundraise to help to deliver more affordable creative activities.

The Horton is committed to gathering more stories about the heritage of the site, giving everyone a voice, and engaging more with people who have lived experience of poor mental health.

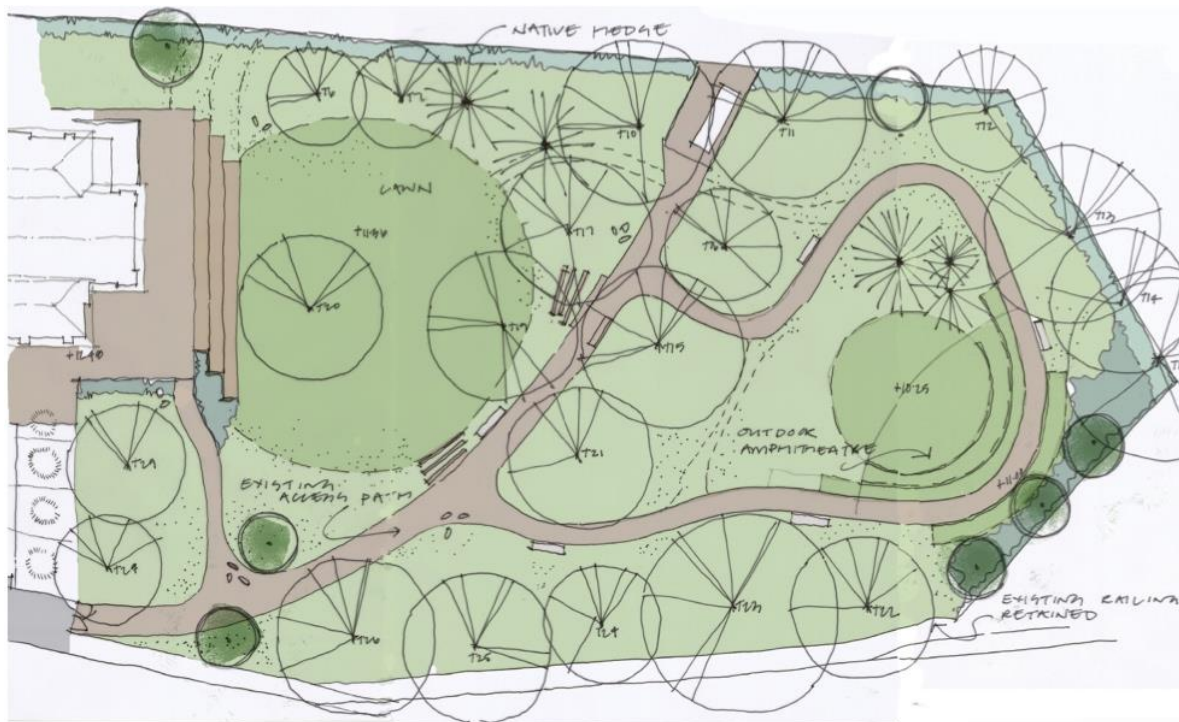
We intend to carry out deeper qualitative evaluation using the Most Significant Change methodology to understand our influence and where we can be more impactful in achieving our charitable aims.

The Horton Gardens

Work is due to begin in summer 2024 on phase one of the transformation of the grounds.

In developing The Horton as a creative place for the community, our vision is not just for the building itself – it extends to the whole site. We want The Horton Gardens to be a safe place to enjoy views of the heritage setting and interact with nature. Drawing on its history as a place of refuge for those experiencing mental stress or illness, the new landscape works will enable visitors of all ages to feel inspired and rejuvenated through outdoor creative and wellbeing activities too.

Securing funding from Your Fund Surrey has enabled phase one plans for transforming the neglected grounds to go ahead along with match-funding from EEBC CIL.



The Horton Gardens project will transform the 11,000m square area surrounding the building, into a natural landscaped green space for everyone to enjoy.

As well as making the grounds safe, the plan for development includes new trees, planting, seating and the creation of paths, so that The Horton's grounds can be accessed by all.

Preparatory project management work and consultation was carried out in this period and work is due to start on-site by the main contractor in summer 2024.