

Ten years of Highclere Film Club

The first I heard of the plan to form a film group in the village was a flyer inviting me to a meeting at the Village Hall on 11 May 2006, organised by Kevin Pearson. Some 50 people attended that meeting and there was plenty of interest and agreement to proceed. At a foundation meeting in June a committee was formed with Kevin as Chairman, Mark Tiley as Treasurer, me as Secretary, Mat Scalpello on the technical side and Tim Jarvis on film sourcing and PR. The Club became a member of the British Federation of Film Societies (BFFS), which had a scheme whereby new groups could borrow the necessary equipment to get started.

The equipment finally arrived for the Club to start film shows on 16 October with “Mrs Henderson Presents”. The loan of equipment was only temporary but with grants from Basingstoke & Deane and Highclere Society and funding from our Chairman Kevin, the Club was able to purchase its own screen, projector and sound equipment.

In its first year, the Club showed films once a month. For the second year we decided to expand the programme to have mainstream films on a Thursday evening and foreign-language and independent films on a Sunday. The number of films per season peaked in 08/09 with 23 films. The Sunday film attendance was never that high and, with an average cost of £100 to license the films, the plan to schedule films for that day was eventually dropped. We did try a “pot-luck” series of Sundays where members brought along DVDs and we would pick one. These we could show under the terms of our umbrella licence, where no film is advertised beforehand. The lure of Sunday evening television, however, proved to be too great so this idea was also dropped for the 2013/14 season.

As mentioned, the Club has benefitted from grants over the years, with one from Greenham Common Trust for a new projector and Hampshire CC for a portable screen. The latter item proved to be a useful addition for the Club’s “Outreach” programme, where we would show films in other locations. The programme started with schools (Woolton Hill, St Martins East End, Thorngrove and Burghclere) and has been expanded to include churches (Highclere and Hannington), another village hall (Ashmansworth) and the Stockcross Arts Festival.

One successful initiative was that of food-themed evenings, where we served meals or snacks to match the film being shown (huge thanks to all the chefs). One of these (“Love’s Kitchen”) was further enhanced with the presence of the director, producer and a cameraman. These events culminated in the showing of “Casablanca”, where Kevin had the hall comprehensively decorated and kitted out as Rick’s Cafe Americaine. After eight year’s sterling service, Kevin stepped down as Chairman and I took over.

Over the years, the Club seemed to have problems retaining female committee members (were we too ‘blokey’?) but the current committee has been enhanced with the addition of Angela Tiley and Barbara Martin with support from Justine Grace. Of the original committee, four are still active in the running of the Club (Mark, Mat, Tim and Chris).

In the past ten years, the Club has shown 165 scheduled films and, although the audience size used to be quite variable, we seem to have settled down to around 25 on a regular basis. As we need 20 or so in order to cover the cost of the public performance licence, this has been a great help in ensuring that the Club has the funds to continue to keep up with improvements in sound and vision technology. Hopefully we are doing something right.

Chris Martin