

# Artists return for final Pump Room show

Steve Caddy looks at the past and future prospects for the 'temporary' annual show that has become an integral part of the town's tourism scene.



When a group of Buxton artists was invited to stage a public exhibition in the Pump Room in 1997, its members didn't expect to stay for long.

High Peak Borough Council offered the group a one-year contract on the understanding that its exhibition would have to make way for the much-desired redevelopment of the Crescent. A series of proposals came and went and each year the steadily growing group set up shop in the full knowledge that the season could be their last.

In 1999 the group became the High Peak Artists' and Craft Workers' Association and continued to prosper from their high-profile venue. In 2001, when it seemed that the exhibition really was in its final year, the council offered a room within the tourist information centre, donating £500 to create the Spa Gallery. However, the Pump Room remained in business.

It seemed the end was in sight in 2003, when the borough and county councils appointed the Trevor

Osborne Property Group Limited and CP Holdings Ltd to transform the Crescent into a hotel and spa. And when funding for the Buxton Crescent and Thermal Spa Project was confirmed last year, the exhibitors made the most of a final season in their distinctive venue.

But continuing preparations for the £32.4million scheme mean that, against all expectations, the association is back in the Pump Room again - albeit for a shorter season. Once again the exhibition is running at full capacity, accommodating 36 amateur and professional artists and crafts people from across the High Peak. Members believe that venue has been crucial to their success.

"Because we man the exhibition ourselves and we haven't got huge overheads we can keep our costs down. People can buy a piece of calligraphy for £1 or a painting for £500," says silk painter and association secretary Pauline Townsend.

Unusually for an arts organisation, the association is financially self-sufficient, with turnover increasing every

year. For many fledgling artistic businesses, the Pump Room has provided high exposure at low cost. New artists have also benefited from the experience and expertise of their more established neighbours.

While the annual exposure has been hugely beneficial for the association, the exhibition is also a considerable asset to the town. It directly supports local businesses such as framers, art shops and printers and by attracting visitors it indirectly supports other traders.

So when the doors do finally close on the Pump Room exhibition at the end of August, it is to be hoped that a permanent home can be found. The Spa Gallery will be lost too, as the tourist information centre is also part of the Crescent development. Only the museum's art gallery will remain as exhibition space in the town.

High Peak Borough Council says it values its partnership with the association and has looked at alternative central locations.



Free art and craft demonstrations, including children's workshops, are staged in the Pump Room as part of the Buxton Festival Fringe and in 2005 the association won the Best Exhibition in the Fringe award.

As visitors arrive in Buxton in ever-increasing numbers, many of them make a bee-line for the Pump Room. Says Pauline: "We have visitors from all over the world and some people come back year after year."

Several years ago, when the redevelopment of the Crescent first looked likely to become a reality, the artists launched a petition to see if there was public support for the continuation of their exhibition. To date, 10,000 visitors have added their names.

"Clearly, the cultural industries are becoming an important local employer and what people need is a local outlet," says chief executive Peter Sloman. "The gallery and shop in the Pump Room is valued by visitors and it is a regular stop for lots of people, whether they are day trippers or they are staying longer. They often leave with a memory of the Peak District from a talented local artist."

He adds: "We want to make sure that when the Crescent development takes place, the future of the association as a significant player in the region is assured" ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROBERT MORRIS AND  
HIGH PEAK ARTISTS' & CRAFT WORKERS' ASSOCIATION

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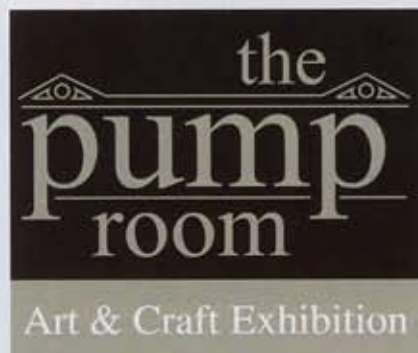
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**High Peak Artists' & Craft Workers' Association**

**The Pump Room, The Crescent, Buxton.**

**Tel: 07849 673058 (during opening hours)**

**Open every day from 10.30am - 4.30pm. Admission free.**



High Peak Artists' & Craft Workers' Association

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