



Director's Pack

2026-27

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I. INTRODUCTION

So you've joined the company, maybe taken a few roles in plays – or maybe you want to get stuck straight into the director's chair! How do you go about it?

Even if you have directed a play with another company before, we do things differently at HTC, so we always ask that you assist a seasoned member in co-directing a play before taking control of a production yourself. Alternatively, you could ask someone who has directed before to co-direct with you – so that you have creative control, but have someone to hand who knows how things work here. If you approach the committee to express your interest, they will help to set this up for you.

2. YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES

As director, you don't just have creative control of the production. You will also be ultimately responsible for the health and safety and conduct of everyone who attends rehearsals. You have a duty of care to understand and abide by all of Horncastle Theatre Company's policies, including:

- Health and Safety Policy
- Code of Conduct
- Safeguarding Policy
- GDPR Policy
- Equality and Diversity Policy
- Audition Policy

Unless you appoint a producer, **you** as director are also ultimately responsible for ensuring that your play has a set, costume, lights, and publicity. Although we have committee officers in charge of all these items, they often will not know your creative vision or the play well enough to act without your input, and their job is not to do everything for you.

3. PICKING A PLAY

Before a play can be staged by the company, our rules say that it has to have been read by at least four members together at a play reading, and comments written in the playreading book (aka, 'The Book'). This is to make sure it suits our tastes, it's a quality show, and it can realistically be staged in our theatre.

If you just want to direct, and don't have a specific play in mind, you can browse The Book (kept behind the ticket desk) to see what has been read already, or you can approach the committee and ask to be matched with a play. If you want to see a specific play put on but don't want to direct, you can propose it and ask to be paired with a director.

The Committee meets once a year, usually late November or early December, for a special 'selection meeting' to consider proposals for plays people would like us to put on. Once they have agreed a balanced programme of comedy, drama, musicals, etc., this draft programme is ratified by a vote of the membership at the December business meeting. It's helpful if you can provide a written proposal describing the play and how you'd like to stage it, and/or attend in person to answer any questions members have.

We have four slots a year for plays (in addition to the pantomime, and two youth productions). These are usually Spring (late March), Summer (early July), Autumn (early September) and Winter (late October). The exact dates are set in advance by the committee but can be negotiated within reason. NB: the 2025 programme departs from the usual pattern.

Before a play is selected, you and the Committee must check to ensure that the performing rights are available for amateur companies in the UK.

4. TIMELINE OF A PRODUCTION

Previous year – You'll need to get your play read by at least four people together and comments written in the 'book'. The committee should also take the opportunity to read your script.

Check that performing rights are available for your play and make a formal written proposal to the committee.

December – The committee creates a programme at the annual Play Selection Meeting, which is presented to the whole company for approval or amendment.

January – You should think about publicity for your play immediately. Graphics will be needed for the annual Forthcomings leaflet and the website. They don't have to be the final thing! As director you have the final creative say on all publicity.

You should also think about ordering scripts now, and assembling your production team if you haven't already. Write out a draft rehearsal schedule.

You should reach out to the Production Coordinator to discuss the design and construction of your set and any major props, lighting, and costume. It is possible to hire outside spaces to begin rehearsals before you get access to the stage if you feel it's necessary.

Auditions – You can hold auditions as early as you like; they are usually done one or two months before the start of rehearsals. As soon as you have cast the play, you should organise cast photos, costume measurements, etc.

Previous production – You should have a final poster design ready for printing at least one week before the previous show goes on, so it can be advertised in the theatre.

The morning after the last night of the previous production will be 'set break' – you should attend if possible as the set for your play will now begin construction (unless there is a theatre hiring).

Week after previous production – You can begin rehearsals on the stage. You usually have six to eight weeks for these. It's not compulsory to begin rehearsals immediately!

Two weeks before opening night – This is the hard deadline to approve the final design for your programme. You will need to have all content submitted in advance of this, including your cast and crew list and anything else you would like included.

Paid online advertising begins on Facebook and runs for two weeks.

Sunday before opening night – Tech rehearsal, usually during the afternoon

Monday before opening night – dress rehearsal. A second dress can be scheduled for Tuesday if absolutely necessary.

Opening night – your work here is done; the Stage Manager takes over responsibility for the show.

Last night – usually the time for an after show party.

Sunday after the last night – set break usually starts at 10.30. Your cast and crew are expected to come back and clean up after the play in the dressing room and back stage areas, returning them to their original state, ready to hand over to the next cast. This includes helping pack props and costumes away.

5. ASSEMBLING A TEAM

So you've successfully got yourself a slot – what next?

You need to assemble a team who will help you stage it. You might even like to do this before you submit your proposal to the committee – and certainly before rehearsals begin. The sooner the better!

There are a wide range of roles in a production team, not all of which are necessary depending on the scale of your production and how much you are comfortable taking on yourself.

The Company do our best to organise training and shadowing opportunities for anyone who wants to take on any of the more in-depth roles!

The Director

This is you.

By default, you will have full creative control of the production: everything that happens on the stage, and final say on anything to do with the production.

If you don't appoint a producer, you'll take on all of the admin too. That might mean anything from scheduling rehearsals to buying timber, to organising set painting and the after show party. But basically you are there to make the play look and feel how you want, and direct rehearsals.

The Producer

Except for very large productions, it's rare for a director to appoint a producer these days, but it still happens. The Producer is responsible for assisting with all the admin a production involves (in no particular order):

- Scheduling rehearsals and putting them in the Theatre Diary
- Liaising with the production coordinator to get the set built to the director's specifications
- Liaising with the Wardrobe Manager to organise costume
- Liaising with the Publicity Officer to get the poster and programme designed and printed, and any other publicity, well ahead of production week
- Compiling information for the programme
- Ensuring the production sticks to its budget
- Ordering and distributing scripts to the cast, stage manager, lighting and sound team, prompt, etc.
- Making sure all cast and crew are fully paid up members (and therefore, fully insured)
- Organising certified chaperones if there are children and young people in the cast
- Making sure we sell as many tickets as possible
- Holding contact details and communicate with cast and crew about rehearsals
- Organising socials and trips for cast and crew if desired (e.g., The Gaul team had a research trip to the Arctic Corsair in Hull)
- 101 other little jobs, and being a general 'go-fer'

Assistant Director

The assistant director (if there is one) can direct rehearsals in the director's absence, or block/re-run scenes in another area while the main action is rehearsed on stage. A good starting point for anyone wanting to observe how the director's role is done.

Stage Manager

The Stage Manager has control of everything that goes on behind the scenes. It's essential they attend all rehearsals and make note of scene changes, curtains, and prop movements. After the dress rehearsal, the stage manager takes over command of the ship: you'll relinquish complete control over the show to them.

The Stage Manager is in charge of producing risk assessments for the play, especially if there are any practical effects or sword fights involved. They are generally expected to recruit their own crew of stage hands as they require – when you're running a show behind the scenes, it's essential that everyone can be relied on to work smoothly as a team.

The Stage Manager is not expected to pay for their script.

The Prompter (or 'Prompt')

The prompt must attend every rehearsal, noting any pauses or changes in their script, so that once the actors are 'book down' they can feed lines smoothly as required. In the prompt's absence, the producer or another member of the cast might handle this temporarily – but the director's attention has to be on the action, not the book.

Lighting Team

The Lighting Manager needs to be someone trained up to use the theatre's lighting system (and potentially the sound board too), and be confident climbing ladders to move and set lights (or directing others to do so). This is a specialist role. Operating the lights from the board now often involves only pressing a 'next' button, so the lighting operator could be anyone with a rudimentary knowledge of how to turn everything on – and what to do if something goes wrong during a performance.

Costume

If you're appointing a costume person, you will need to liaise with the Wardrobe Manager – the committee officer ultimately in charge of our costume stocks, and with details of the various costume hire services we use. It's ultimately up to you as the director whether you want to hire costume in, use stock, or have items made specially – but it will be up to you to find volunteers able to do this.

Set building and design

If you are unsure where to start with getting your set designed and built, the best thing is to speak to our Production Coordinator (appointed by the committee). They can advise you on what flats and doors we have in stock, what is possible on our stage, and how to adapt your grand designs to something we can build and operate. They can also, if required, organise the set building teams and work parties to get your set erected.

If you're interested in joining work parties and set building teams, you can speak to the Production Coordinator who will make sure you're included in invitations – or come along to a set break and make yourself useful! Having your own drill is useful but not mandatory.

Properties Master

Depending on the complexity of your show, you or the producer might take on this role as well, but it's useful to have someone on board to handle this. The props master:

- Sources or fabricates props as required
- Makes sure props (or 'gash' or stand-in – props) are available and set for rehearsals, or issued to the cast
- Makes sure all props are returned to their correct places after use and at the end of each rehearsal or performance
- Sets and moves props between scenes
- Is in charge of the 'props shelf' near the stage door, where props are organised

The Company have a wide selection of generic props available in the barn.

Front of House

Front of house will be organised by the Front of House Manager, but you should speak to them if you have any special requirements, such as volunteers being costumed or a front of house 'theme'.

Publicity Designer

The practical aspects of Publicity are mostly handled by the committee Publicity Officer and their team, but you have creative control over your poster, programme, online ads, etc., and you will need to either design the artwork yourself or ask someone to do it.

The programme may be as simple as a list of cast, crew, and thanks, or may include cast bios, children's activity pages, information about the author, 'making of' shots, or anything else (within reason). The audience love something to read!

Musical Director

If your show contains a lot of music and/or singing, you'll need to find a musical director to organise musicians, singing and music rehearsals, etc. Historically the company has sometimes partnered with local bands and choirs like Banovallum Brass where they can be accommodated on stage.

Choreographer

If your show contains dancing or sword fighting, you'll need a choreographer to organise auditions for dancers, and organise dance rehearsals. This need not be a member – there are several local dance teachers who have joined as members or associate members to help bring shows to life.

6. BUDGET & EXPENSES CLAIMS

There is no set budget for productions at Horncastle Theatre Company, but if you wish to spend a significant amount of money on a particular item, such as a large amount of period costume, it is good practice to run this by the Committee. Common sense can usually be used here.

To claim back money you have spent on your show, you will need to provide an invoice or receipt to the company treasurer as soon as possible. You can also have invoices sent directly to the treasurer to be paid, or ask for an advance of money to pay for particular items. You will need to keep and produce receipts for these too.

7. SCRIPTS

The company will buy scripts for your production. Cast and crew are permitted to keep their scripts after the production if they have marked them, and may wish to make a contribution towards the cost to the Company. Conventionally back stage crew and the production team do not usually pay for their scripts under any circumstances. For musicals it is often necessary to hire the libretto and music; this should be numbered, a record kept of who has been issued which script, and all books returned unmarked on the last night of the performance.

8. ACCESS TO THE THEATRE

There are a number of access points to the Lion Theatre:

The main gate: the entry code for the main gate padlock will be shared with you when your play is selected for the next year. While the pub is unoccupied, the gate should be opened on arriving at the theatre and fastened back, and closed and locked when the last person leaves.

The theatre main entrance: the key code for the main entrance door is changed after each production and will be made available to you at the point of changeover with the previous production. The committee also have access to the code and will provide a code holder for any access prior to the start of your rehearsal period.

The barn: access to the barn is restricted, and the code for accessing the key safe (located in the Green Room) and for the hatchway padlock is changed annually at the AGM. It is provided on a need to know basis.

9. AUDITIONS

Auditions are usually held one to two months before you expect to begin rehearsing. Before inviting anyone to try out, you should have at least a draft rehearsal schedule, performance dates, and any other special requirements available to potential cast members. It can be very awkward to discover after the show is cast that your leading lady is unavailable for half the rehearsals, or worse, a performance night. Have all the information available up front. Auditions can be held in an outside space or in the theatre.

HTC auditions are open to all comers, whether paid up members or strangers off the street, in order to encourage the widest possible pool of actors. We have no requirement for previous experience of acting – indeed many of our best actors had not set foot on stage for decades before wandering into the Lion Theatre.

Your auditions should be advertised as early and as widely as possible. This might include local newspapers or social media groups, but **MUST** include the members' mailing list, Facebook group and WhatsApp group chat. It is your responsibility as director to do this in order to avoid any appearance of pre-casting or unfair practice, and to ensure everyone has equal opportunity.

Open auditions are usually held twice, one on a weekday evening and one in the afternoon at a weekend, but it is up to you how many you hold, and you are allowed to hold private auditions for anyone who is unable to make the open sessions.

Auditionees are not usually asked to prepare an audition piece, except where trying for a singing role in a musical or pantomime, when they might be asked to prepare a song to sing. Singing rehearsals usually take place one-to-one, while acting auditions take place on stage in the auditorium, in front of everyone.

Everyone auditioning should be asked to write down their name, contact details, and the part/s they are interested in trying for. You are allowed to invite people to audition for specific parts if needed, even if they have not expressed an interest first.

EXAMPLE AUDITION SHEET

NAME	CONTACT DETAILS	PREFERRED PART
Jo Bloggs	00000 000 000 joe@bloggs.com	Widow Twankey

Once you have seen everyone who wishes to audition, you can go away and put together your cast list. This can often be a bit of a juggling act! You should speak to each individual separately to ensure they are happy to take the part you are offering them. Once you have a final cast list, you must also contact everyone who was not successful in getting a part, to thank them for auditioning and break the bad news gently. Only then can you announce your cast list to the Company. Like the first audition notice, this should go out by email, and in the Facebook and WhatsApp groups. Historically the cast list was also pinned to the green room door!

10. YOUR SET AND LIGHTS

As soon as your play has been selected for the next year, you should speak to the Production Coordinator about your requirements for the set, lighting, and any special effects. It is their job to coordinate with your production team, set builders, and light and sound technicians to make sure we can do what you want – as well as ensure you have realistic expectations! The Production Coordinator provides a point of continuity to ensure the changeover from one show to the next is as efficient as possible.

11. COSTUME

Although there is a Wardrobe Officer on the committee who will be able to advise you, you will need to ask someone to do costume for your production. Costume purchases should be run past the wardrobe officer first and a record kept of costs for their records. We have many items of costume in stock already or may be able to borrow from members and supporters.

12. MUSIC & SOUND EFFECTS

The Committee appoints a Musical Director for the Company who is able to advise you on matters to do with live music such as singing or performance. The Production Coordinator can put you in touch with the technical team to discuss playing recorded music and sound effects. In addition to music used as part of the play, it is usual to play front of house music in the auditorium before curtain up and during the interval. If you wish to choose this yourself, you will need to find approximately 35 minutes of music.

13. PROPS

The Production Coordinator can put you in touch with members of the company who enjoy helping with props. We have a large stock of props, particularly period items, in the barn and theatre lofts, so it is wise to check whether the item you need is in stock before buying or hiring anything particularly expensive. The Treasurer should be approached about items which cost a large amount of money, and they will decide whether it should be run by the committee first. Appeals can be put out to members and supporters via social media and email for items we do not hold, before purchasing them.

14. REHEARSALS

Although it's (strictly speaking) up to the director to schedule rehearsals, the convention is that they will be held every Tuesday and Thursday in the six to eight weeks between the previous production and your performance week. Occasionally, you may need to put in additional rehearsals on Wednesday nights, or even Friday, or Saturday afternoon in dire situations.

This is considered a short and intense period of rehearsal by the standards of some companies who prefer to rehearse for as long as six months, and if you're staging a musical, there is a much longer rehearsal period available before the July slot (by design). The pantomime usually rehearses from November to late January, with the expectation that attendance may be poor during the festive period. For straightforward shows, however, we recommend resisting the desire to rehearse for too long as you risk cast fatigue and may peak too soon!

The cast are expected to be 'book down' – have their lines learned – by a couple of weeks before the performances.

Rehearsals should start promptly at 7.30 unless otherwise agreed. This means everyone should have arrived and be ready to begin by then. The cast will expect to be in the pub by 9.30 or 10 PM at the very latest!

During rehearsals you are the person in charge. You are responsible for the health and wellbeing of your cast and crew, and the safety and security of the Theatre building. It is very important you are familiar with the Health and Safety policy for this reason.

If cast members do not have a lot of time off stage to use the loo or get a drink, you can call a short break during the rehearsal. About five minutes is usual – set a limit so people don't drift away and you can re-start promptly.

You should issue your cast with a paper rehearsal schedule and stick to it as far as possible. Your rehearsal schedule **must** include the theatre clean-up and set break after your final performance.

15. TECH AND DRESS

Although elements of lights, sound and costume may be introduced in the last couple of weeks before the show is staged, we have a single dedicated 'tech', most usually on the Sunday afternoon before opening night. Curtain up should be around 13.00 or 14.00, so there's time to iron out practical problems, without forcing anyone to stay late into the night.

The dress rehearsal almost always takes place on the Monday evening before opening night, and is run as though it were an actual performance as far as possible – with no stopping. This is also your final opportunity to thank your cast and give any last-minute notes on the performance.

16. PERFORMANCE WEEK

At the end of your dress rehearsal, the Director should relinquish control of the production officially to the Stage Manager. The time to give notes or make tweaks is over, and it is considered very bad form for you to step back stage unless to give a quick 'break a leg!' and wish the cast well. Any more than this may cause cast confusion or anxiety! You are more than welcome to watch the show from the back of the auditorium.

Performances at the Lion Theatre run from Wednesday to Saturday, usually for one week – but sometimes (in the case of a musical or the annual pantomime) for two. Saturday matinees are usually only run for the pantomime. If you want to run a matinee for any other production you should highlight this up front when proposing it to the committee and make it clear in your audition notices.

Curtain up is at 7.30 PM (3PM for matinees) and you should be out of the theatre by 10 PM (a legal requirement if there are children in the cast). Cast and crew are usually asked to arrive at the theatre by 6.30 if possible.

17. AFTER SHOW PARTY

The after-show party usually takes place immediately after the last performance ends. It could be as simple as drinks at the Director's house, pizza on the stage, drinks and karaoke at a local pub, or a buffet and bar at the Community Centre. It all depends on the size of your cast and what you'd like to do.

The Social Secretary will be able to advise and help you organise the after show party. In order to include everyone and bring the Company together, the details should be widely publicised, and the party is open to everyone – including all members, and any friends or family who might have come to support you on the last night. All are welcome.

Before the party, directors often like to go to the dressing room to thank their cast and crew for their hard work on the production and congratulate a job well done. This can be done at the party itself. Traditionally the cast will club together for a souvenir and card for the director, and the director might wish to thank their team in a similar way. More details can be found in our Refreshment and Hospitality Policy.

Occasionally the after show party might take place on a different day once the play is over, especially if there are children in the cast.

18. SET BREAK

Set break usually takes place the Sunday morning immediately after the last night, and anyone who has participated in the show is asked to be there to help with dismantling the set, packing away props and clothes, giving the back stage areas a thorough clean, drink lots of coffee and tea, and helping to eat whatever is left over from the after show party the night before (or in some cases, from the play itself!)

This is considered just as much part of the show as the rehearsals in theatre etiquette, as it means that you can hand over the theatre to the next director in the condition you found it.

We find that many hands make light work, and this is usually a very social occasion – running from 10 AM to 2 PM at the latest, members of the company who haven't been involved in the show are invited to come and lend a hand.

In exceptional circumstances set break may be held on another day, by special arrangement – although sets always need to come down as soon as possible so the next production can begin rehearsing the next week.

19. PUBLICITY AND PROGRAMMES

You'll need to get your publicity organised as soon as you can after the membership approve your play for production, and make sure there is at least a 'gash' or temporary poster ready for immediate display on the website and social media, and in forthcoming leaflets.

You can speak to the Publicity Officer about organising photo shoots or finding a designer for your poster – or you can take on the whole job yourself. You'll also need to provide a very short 'blurb' of the play to get people interested.

Horncastle Theatre Company does not allow the use of generative AI for the creation of posters or promotional materials.

The Publicity team's role is to order and distribute posters and other material, and provide advice and contacts – not to come up with the marketing campaign for you. Most plays have posters and a

banner, and two weeks of paid Facebook adverts, as standard. Anything else **must be specially arranged by the director** for circulation by the publicity and social media team.

You should take as many photos as you can during rehearsals (or allocate someone to do this). **You should give your cast or crew the opportunity to opt out of being in publicity material at the start of rehearsals.**

The deadline for printing the programme is usually at least a week before the opening night. You will need to send the Publicity team a full list of cast, crew, and acknowledgements, along with a list of scenes and any other information you would like to include, well before this date. Many directors choose to include cast biographies and headshots, puzzles, or articles about the playwright, for example. It is entirely up to you.

Please remember to save copies of all publicity produced for your play to hand to the Archivist for their records.

20. THINGS TO REMEMBER

As Director, you will be in a responsible position and will need to be familiar with our [Code of Conduct](#), [Health and Safety Policy](#), and our [other theatre rules](#).

If you're in doubt, ask – there are many seasoned members who have decades of experience putting on shows at the theatre who will be happy to advise you on how things are done.

There are no hard and fast rules – just because this is 'the way we've always done it', doesn't mean you can't innovate or introduce best practice you've learned elsewhere. You're the director!

Remember that at the end of the day, this is a hobby! Your cast, and even your crew, are there at worst to do you a favour, but mostly (we hope) to have a good time, socialise, and express themselves. They all have lives outside the theatre – including day jobs, other volunteering responsibilities, and families.

Your duty as a director is not only to put on the best show possible for our audiences. You need to balance this by making sure that everyone involved has lots of fun and wants to come back in the future.

And last but not least, don't whistle in the theatre. Oh, and break a leg!

21. ALTERNATIVE REHEARSAL SPACES

Alternative spaces in Horncastle where rehearsals and auditions can be held include:

The Community Centre - <https://www.horncastlecommunitycentre.org.uk/rooms-and-hire/>

The Stanhope Hall - <https://stanhopehall.co.uk/venue-hire/>

Thimbleby Village Hall - booking secretary - thimblebyvhbookibgs@gmail.com

22. USEFUL CONTACTS

The Committee – committee@horncastletheatre.com

Chairman – David Allerton – Chairman@horncastletheatre.com

Production Coordinator – Russell Alder – productions@horncastletheatre.com

Theatre Custodian – Doug Sheppard – theatre-custodian@horncastletheatre.com

Musical Director – Chris Hinkins – Chris@Hinkins.net

Wardrobe – Priscilla Burbidge - wardrobe@horncastletheatre.com

Ticket sales – Dominic Hinkins – secretary@horncastletheatre.com

Banner, poster, programmes, Social media, Facebook, Instagram, radio, miscellaneous publicity –
Natasha Lowes publicity@horncastletheatre.com

Social Secretary – Nancy Shackleton – social@horncastletheatre.com

Radio publicity - radio.lincolnshire@bbc.co.uk

Communicating with members:

Secretary – Dominic Hinkins – secretary@horncastletheatre.com

23. FAQ

Q:

A:

GLOSSARY

Archivist – committee member responsible for maintaining theatre records

Auditorium – The main part of the theatre where the audience sit

Banner – The long thin poster usually hung across the archway at the bottom of the Theatre yard

The Bar – may be used by older members to refer to the Foyer, where coffee and alcohol used to be served in the old days.

The Barn – The separate building across the yard where costumes, flats, and props are stored.

Box set – a traditional set, usually a trapezoid shape, with the widest point nearest the audience, representing a room in a house.

Break a leg – It is traditionally bad luck to wish you cast ‘good luck’!

Foyer – The old coffee bar, where the audience now come in and collect tickets.

Gantry – the elevated platform running round three sides of the stage

Gash – adjective – makeshift, temporary, stand-in: ‘This prop is only gash.’

Green Room – The room where cast wait their cue to go on stage, immediately inside the stage door. Traditionally painted green, considered a calming colour.

Lighting box – the small, high room at the back of the auditorium

Programme – Printed booklet

Prompt – n. – 1. A line shouted from the wings to help an actor struggle with the script; 2. The individual responsible for shouting.

Proscenium – the archway separating the stage from the auditorium.

Old lighting box – The elevated platform to the left of the lighting box. Originally lighting operators lay on their stomachs here to operate the stage lights.

Scenery Dock – the large attic space above the foyer and auditorium where large pieces of scenery and pigeons are stored. Restricted area.

Stage Door – the door leading to the Green Room and Dressing Room

Stage Left – the side of the stage on an actor's left as they face the audience; the audience's right.

Stage Right – the side of the stage on an actor's right as they face the audience; the audience's left.

Main tabs – the main curtains spanning the proscenium arch which open and close to mark the beginning and end of a show.

Flats – lightweight, portable walls made of hardboard or canvas on thin frames.

Cyc – pronounced 'sike' – the cyclorama. A tightly stretched canvas used for projections and lighting effects. It is very special and expensive and must never be spoiled with paint.

POLICIES: