

**ROCKET LAUNCH BLAENAVON**  
**AUGUST – SEPTEMBER 2021**

# TIN SHED THEATRE COMPANY

A theatrical company of freelance artists, makers and creative innovators specialising in arts activity and creative outreach provision in Wales. The company seeks to connect communities through creative activation in outdoor locations, publicly populated space, heritage sites and structures.

The company has over 10 years of experience creating large scale, site-responsive theatrical works and extensive track record for developing multiple outreach provisions, connecting disparate communities to form lasting intergenerational and cultural relationships.

Partnerships and support organisations include Arts Council Wales, CADW, Living Levels Project, RSPB, Newport City Council, Heritage Lottery Fund, Community Lottery Fund, Newport City Homes, Arts Agenda, Friars Walk, Articulture Wales, The Riverfront, Blaenavon Town Council, Newport Live, 101 Creation Space, Outdoor Arts UK and Welsh Government Major Events.

## ROCKET LAUNCH BLAENAVON (AUG-SEPT 2021)

A multi-platform blended theatrical experience of digital, site specific, documentary/mockumentary film and immersive storytelling.

The production was hosted at Blaenavon Ironworks with satellite activity taking place in the town centre in the lead up to the event.

Telling the story of a young girl from Blaenavon who left planet earth on a 1 way ticket to space, the trip into the future integrated a mixture of live, digitally enhanced and durational content that is broadcast across multiple platforms.

Audience interaction was through a series of digital and in real life actions. Ticketed places were available to attend the production on site, and a live stream provided for those at home or at host venues.

The project followed a successful Research & Development phase in October 2019, and was postponed during 2020 as a result of the pandemic and restrictions in place. Initial funding for the 2020 project came in at £124,000. This was made up of support from Arts Council Wales, CADW and Heritage Lottery Fund. Due to funding restructure within Heritage Lottery Fund in early 2021, we were tasked with finding additional funding and were able to secure this from Welsh Government Major Events and CADW and, during the course of the project, an additional amount from Blaenavon Town Council. Total project budget totalled £135,525.



# KEY OUTCOMES

Rocket Launch Blaenavon was an event to champion major events at historic heritage sites, whilst being the vehicle of discussion for how we repurpose these sites for modern day use. Tin Shed's intention was to reimagine a historical space and respectfully introduce it to the 21st century.

It was a project to champion monetary and physical accessibility. It created a great buzz around Blaenavon and surrounding South Wales valleys and cities, gathering much interest and significant media attention.

Rocket Launch Blaenavon took place at an extraordinary time. A time in which the arts had faced severe difficulty in the wake of the covid pandemic, the effects of which were still very much present as people emerged from a lengthy winter lockdown and a significant hiatus in community and performance events of any size. We built meaningful community engagement alongside creation of a performance piece.

Co-creation of a large scale, site specific production with an audience made up of 449 tickets sold via CADW, 282 Community tickets issued including 132 community procession participants. Totalling 731.

A 24 strong core team of theatrical and outdoor arts professionals from Wales with 50 paid freelancer positions during the course of the project. All paid above industry standard minimum.

An inclusion of digital outreach using film to extend audience access via 3 satellite venues and an at home viewing experience. An additional 150 viewings were streamed at home.

Connected with 112 community participants, 2 paid Skill Share positions, 8 community cast members. Culminating in 22 workshop sessions.

The creation of 'The Space' - A community hub in the heart of the high street in Blaenavon with a total of 260+ visits.

A Skill Share Scheme that gave paid positions to local people aged 18 and over.

The creation of the facebook page 3rd Rock Blaenavon which was set up by a Skill Share Participant. The group now has 185 members and continues the legacy of Rocket Launch Blaenavon.



The project developed and strengthened relationships with key partners including Cadw, Blaenavon Town Council and Welsh Government Major Events.

A pro-active provision to support the well-being needs of the team.

A continued approach of sustainability, using local businesses to support local traders and boost Blaenavon economy. During this project we committed to supporting local suppliers where possible. Total amount spent in Wales by Tin Shed Theatre Co. was £129,977.45 with extra personal spends being made by the professional team staying and working in Blaenavon.

A fully integrated audio description and British Sign Language embedded into performance.

A commitment to documenting evaluation and supporting legacy through continued community links.

# AUDIENCE

Paying audience members- 449 administered by and income generated for CADW. Tin Shed Theatre Co. distributed 282 Community tickets totalling 731 live audience members at the Blaenavon Ironworks.

A breakdown of 674 (91%) visitors from Wales and 57 (9%) from England.

We reached just over 73% of our in person target audience number.

A mixture of event hesitancy and location, are undoubtedly contributory factors in not reaching the anticipated in-person attendance, but by factoring in satellite venue and at home streaming additional audience members were reached as follows:

*CultVR, Cardiff - 28 Audience members*

*Riverfront, Newport - 20 Audience members*

*Cellb, Blaenau Ffestiniog - 50 Audience members*

*At Home - 634 households connecting to the live stream (2,536 individual views if in households of 4)*

*These figures show that we exceeded our audience target, reaching over 147% if we include digital viewings. Potentially reaching households of 4 which would take that to over 337%.*

Important to note that given the extreme circumstances of the 2 years prior resulted in audiences who are much more engaged online, able to enjoy entertainment from the comforts and safety of their own homes. We took this opportunity to ensure that this production was equally successful, accessible and enjoyable in person and at home, working with award winning, immersive multimedia production company 4Pi - <https://www.4piproductions.com/about-us/>

Social Media was an integral part of the marketing and publicity for Rocket Launch Blaenavon. We worked with Equinox PR and Marketing to ensure consistent and fruitful connections via the website, outreach and social media.

Through the month of August Tin Shed Theatre received 61 unique visitors to the website - <http://tinshedtheatrecompany.com>



The impact created by the project saw our unique visitors jump to 2,810 (26 returning and 2,764 new). On event day we saw over 1,000 clicks to our website.

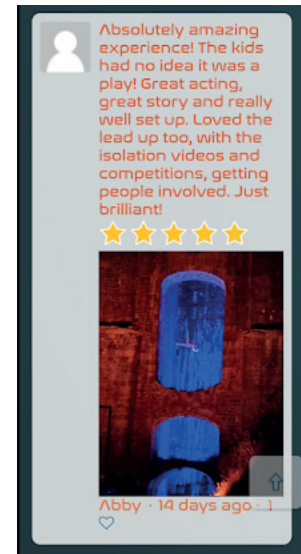
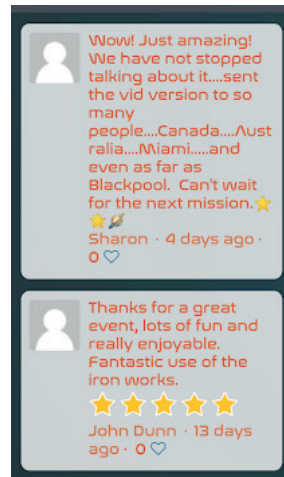
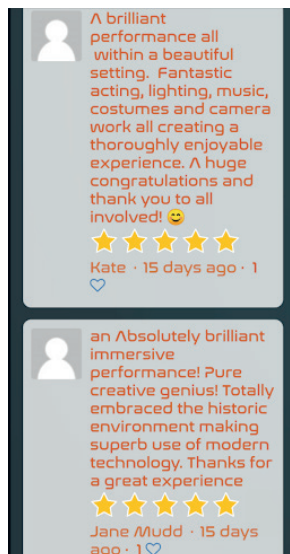
A similar picture can be presented on our Facebook and Instagram accounts. August saw us reach over 11,000 on Facebook and over 1,000 on Instagram and in September we saw an increase to over 44,000 on Facebook and over 4,000 on Instagram.

In September our highest reaching post was our release video called 'IS Wales...' with 28.3k people engaging with the content. The top 6 viewed content videos engaged with approximately 304,800 people.

Engagement reached men and women of all ages but mainly aged 25-44. On event day 761 devices interacted with our website with 643 tuning it at the show time.

# AUDIENCE RESPONSE

We received an impressive amount of positive feedback from Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, emails and the website.



# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

As always, the most exciting collaboration to come out of this project were our developing relationships with local people and community groups. Everyone was eager to get creative as we exited lockdowns, engagement levels were high, the community as a whole recognising the potential benefits of the experience to the area and that it made our job very enjoyable.

The ambition was to build on the community experiences from the Man Engine project in 2018, successful in involving over 300 members of the community in performances, 67% of attendees making their first visit to the Ironworks with the Blaenavon event achieving highest ticket sales from outside Wales.

We were able to work with established groups that were identified from our Research and Development phase and our Producer of Participation brought an added depth of understanding and experience of working within the community.

There has been a 40% increase in poverty in the area over the past year, and the council were keen for us to find further opportunities for young people in particular to engage.

The community engagement work allowed us to really embed ourselves into the town and its community, and over the course of the 4 weeks there was a wider reach and connection with the local people and volunteers as Infinity Space Wales landed in the centre of town, taking over a shop space.



## The Space

'The Space' shop was a crucial part of the engagement process, making us visible within the community. The interactions which happened here demonstrated our post lockdown commitment to the event being for the local community.

The Space was made fully accessible and included a range of activities and means of engagement to appeal to all ages. The interactive games appealed to younger visitors while the space artefacts and information became great conversation starters. The touch tour of the ironworks provided a unique insight and experience of the site and there were fun and surprising elements around each corner. Talks and workshops provided a focal point of engagement and people knew that The Space was the place to go for information about Rocket Launch Blaenavon.



We recorded over 260 individual visits to The Space and 22 workshop sessions, all within the space of 4 weeks of The Space being open. Young people who wouldn't normally engage were popping in to help feed the plants and support the marketing, inviting people in, talking about the project and encouraging people to give feedback via the QR Codes.

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

## Community groups

**Heritage Youth Ambassadors (HYA):** 11 - 15 young people between the ages of 8-24 worked with us for a month in the role of Space Ambassadors. They were involved in developing ideas for the narrative and story of the space cadet, as well as taking a lead role in the design of the shop. While also sharing their skills on the heritage of the town.

**AdHoc:** 15, Youth Theatre participants between the ages of 8 - 16, worked with us on the procession and on telling the story pre-show to the audience. The older participants of AdHoc were involved in creating vox-pops that became part of the footage of short films on social media prior to the event. 6 AdHoc members worked with us as the press and were invited to come on site to work with the creative director on the day of the event and were a part of the 3rd Rock Blaenavon press, who interviewed Ralphy at the Space opening and the live event.

**Shining Stars singers:** 43 in total between the ages of 5 - 18 yrs olds, singing / recording a music video of David Bowie 'life on mars'. They took part in 2 sessions with a musician - Helen who was fantastic with the groups.

**Shining Stars youth Theatre:** 11 - 15 worked with us to explore the role of the cadet in the narrative of the piece as well as creating video footage for the recruitment of the cadets, and attending the Space on the Saturday mornings to create the Rocket Mobile packs to decorate the window.

**Rec Rock:** 11- 8 - 16 year old musicians created a bespoke song about space, belonging, and coming out of lockdown. The group came to the Ironworks and were given an opportunity to be recorded by CultVR for their music video.



Rec Rock Filming their music video in the Ironworks

## Community Cast Volunteers

We engaged with **8 community cast members** who were all involved in the filmic element of RLB. They became part of the creation of short videos created at CULTVR Lab (4PI Media's base) in Cardiff which appeared as 'Transmissions' during the marketing campaign, on social media, and Infinity Space Wales website in the lead up to the event.

## Key Community Partners

**Emma** - Local business owner (Hairdresser) and Town Council member volunteered her time to coordinate a window display creation project throughout the town centre in Blaenavon.

**Dan** (Rec Rock) – song creation and recording

**Rebecca** (Healthy Blaenavon)

**Ashley** (Heritage YA Co-ordinator) **Seren** (Apprentice HWB)

**Hannah** (Hwb Co-ordinator)

**Cwmni Gwerin Blaenavon**

**Blaenavon Town Council** - Supporting the road closure and event.

**Artie Craftie** - making 80 craft packs to be handed out to local young people. At home they will be able to make Rocket Launch Blaenavon themed arts and crafts or pass them onto the shop spaces in town.

**Munchies LTD** - Empty Shop Space.

**Blaenavon Cheddar Co.** created Space Cheese for the event.



The procession to the Ironworks on event night!  
Excitement for the event builds as cast members are joined by 132 community participants

# THE LYNETTE WEBBE SKILL SHARE SCHEME

**LYNETTE WEBBE SKILL SHARE**  
**tin-shed-theatre-co**  
**(tinshedtheatrecompany.com)**

The Lynette Webbe skill share scheme is a buddy programme offering individuals a chance to be part of a professional creative team. We began to recruit individuals to work with us on Rocket Launch Blaenavon from 23rd of August - 26th of September advertising the scheme on social media accounts, TSTC website and through local channels. Participants were required to be 18+ years, to have an interest in working creatively and live no more than 20 miles outside of Blaenavon for this project.

Skill share participants were offered the chance to be part of the creative main frame of the production, working alongside our professional team and allocating roles in response to an individual's interests, passions and skill set.

Example roles:

**Design** (Prop making, set / costume design)  
**Production** (building, making, measuring, stewarding)  
**Performance/Storytelling** (Does what it says!)  
**Technical** (Lighting, sound, all things electric)  
**Digital Media** (Film, social media, marketing)

Skill Share participants specifically worked with us to engage the community with the opportunities to get involved in the project, creating posters, marketing, social media databases, letters, emails, and connecting to local community groups.

Towards the end of the project each Skill Share participant had a 1:1 chat with either the producer of participation or project evaluator to reflect on their experiences.

1:1 conversations at the end of the project ensured time to reflect on their experiences focus on what wanted to do next with the experience they had gained during the project and to ensure that there was appropriate support and guidance in place to help them take next steps.

## LEGACY

Our commitment to embedding community development into our large scale productions is an integral part of the legacy we leave. Our intention is to always leave individuals and groups with the skills to continue the work long after we have left. While our work in Newport allows us to stay engaged with people from the area, Rocket Launch in Blaenavon differs as a result of no continuation of funds to support ongoing development of the work. Instead we committed to facilitate local conversations and sign post individuals to the places where they can create their own connections.

"The experience has definitely inspired them and raised aspirations for their future programming beyond RLB. It has inspired and given the group confidence to themselves lead on larger projects and events. They are keen to work on a Unesco Youth Summit which last happened in Blaenavon in 2015. They have ideas for a Heritage Parade and have started to believe that they themselves can have an impact in their community!" Hwb Group leader in conversation with Project evaluator

Tin Shed have continued to engage and evaluate with the community in Blaenavon, who have shared their thoughts on what they would like to see happen in their town and the possibility of a Rocket Launch Blaenavon Part Two. These conversations have demonstrated the effectiveness of working in collaboration with a community and their willingness to take ownership as a result.

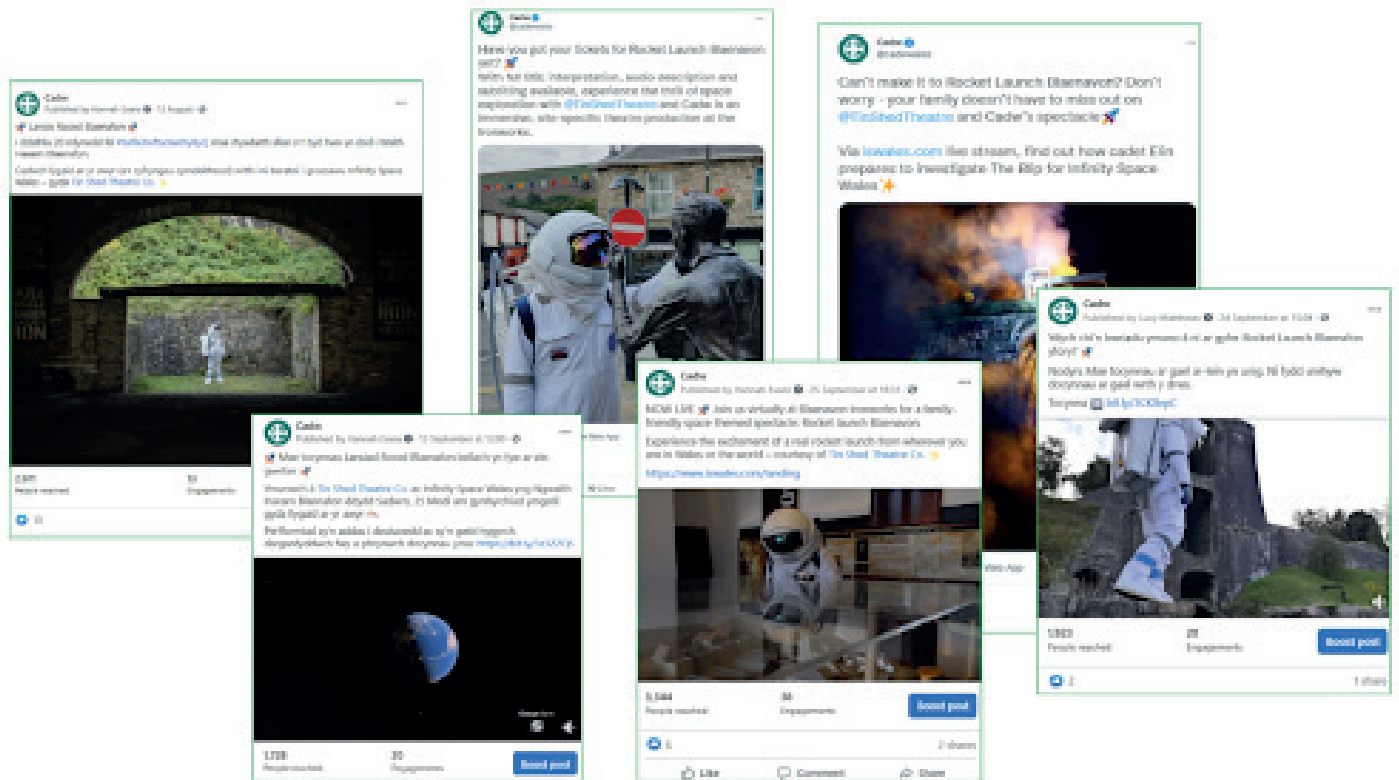
A Cadw custodian expressed that Rocket Launch had 'healed the town' and that as a result of the event she believed a positive bond between the site and the local community can once again be formed. Cadw Custodian in conversation with Tin Shed Director.

As a company we pride ourselves on working with people new or transferring into the industry. Many of our team have worked with us for a number of years or knew us from Youth Theatre/School productions and we are always keen to nurture those relationships. The Skill Share Scheme is a shining example of getting those who may not be interested in a typical way into the career, to learn hands-on experience with the professional team, a number of whom reflected that Rocket Launch Blaenavon had allowed them to continue to expand and develop their skills and connections within the industry.

# KEY PARTNERSHIPS

This project was built on collaborations and partnerships and at TSTC we are proud of continuing to work in such a way. Blaenavon Town Council were a very welcomed supporter of the project, although we had individual conversations with them during the R&D, this time around we were invited to town council meetings which very much helped spread the word of the project.

CADW were identified as a key partner organisation as a result of creating a positive connection in the legacy phases of Moby Dick on the Transporter Bridge. This support continued throughout RLB from R&D to final performance, Tin Shed ambitions aligning perfectly with the Cadw vision within Heritage and Arts Framework. We want the arts to offer different experiences that will open up other questions, understandings and responses to enhance the interpretation of our monuments. We continue to aspire to engage in a new dialogue, within Cadw and with our visitors, one that can be provocative, enjoyable and enriching. Cadw Heritage and Arts Framework.



It is important to identify the partnership relationship that has developed between the organisations as a good practice example of cross sector working. Whilst this can provide elements of bureaucratic delay due to protocol, this was dealt with by both TSTC and CADW, often with a flexible and adaptable approach to problem solving. It must be noted that in order for CADW to continue working with mid to large scale creative engagement and arts projects, structures must be put in place to raise the £5k cap on procurement.

The CADW partnership was a hugely successful example of good practice, cross-sector working, resulting in further partnering on TSTC's ACW Connect and Flourish bid. The project seeks to strengthen partner relations and build longer term development projects with stakeholders and the 2 organisations are now working on a 3 year strategic plan that will draw together Arts and Heritage across multiple sites in Wales.



# SUMMARY

Rocket Launch Blaenavon surpassed our expectations in terms of outreach and delivery. The production took on a whole new meaning post Covid-19 Lockdowns and presented its own challenges in terms of the effects felt after the uncertainty of the last 18 months. What was really felt amongst local people, participants and professionals was that this would be one of the biggest productions to happen in South Wales in 2021 and with that came a tremendous amount of support which ensured we met the purposes of the funding.

We set out to create a highly inclusive, large-scale, outdoor performance at the Blaenavon Ironworks. We committed to working with locals and outdoor arts professionals to ensure the execution of this project. In total we were able to employ 50 professionals and engage with 112 community participants.

We set out to examine and interrogate the relationship between one of Wales' most iconic Heritage sites and the idea of futurism and reinvention. We were able to be a part of great conversations with The Hwb and their Heritage Youth Ambassadors in how, as young people, they continue to respect and acknowledge their town's history but also look at what the future holds for sites like The Ironworks. We are confident that we created a space for these young people to continue with their learning but to also see what these sites could be and that it is possible to reinvent historical sites without losing the context in which they sit.

The production was set out to be all live and in person but due to the pandemic, we adapted and took the decision to broaden the access by streaming it online as well as sharing it live with a predominantly local audience. This allowed us to reach more homes, putting Blaenavon and the Ironworks at the forefront of the production. This also gave us the opportunity to expand our knowledge and working practices with regards to access provisions. Rocket Launch Blaenavon was a fully integrated performance for those online or on site.

We wanted to show an unwavering commitment to making the piece truly accessible for audiences and this was rewarded with high praise from Arts Disability Wales among others.

"I was so impressed that Tin Shed put so much emphasis on good accessibility and the fact that they employed a team to work on it was a real joy to see. Congratulations to all of you." Sara Beer, Senior Arts Officer, Disability Arts Cymru

We were able to create a cohesive environment for professionals and community members to develop together. We set out to explore multidiscipline artforms and achieved that by working with access consultants, circus and aerial professionals and outdoor arts practitioners.

We are confident that we were able to meet the purposes of funding by creating a safe, large scale outdoor production that connected with audiences on live and digital platforms on one of the iconic sites in Wales.

