

Newsletter

September 2020



NORTHERN REGION

CENTRAL REGION

SOUTHERN REGION

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 The Little Theatre Guild represents
 114 member theatres that control
 and manage their amateur
 theatre companies with an annual
 audience of over 650,000 patrons,

and a turnover of approximately £4 million.

Visit us at www.littletheatreguild.org

Articles for the LTG Newsletters 2020 deadlines
 for copy: Nov 6th

Grey Paper Number 33

Working Safely during Coronavirus (COVID-19)

This Grey Paper is designed to help you to make your theatre premises Covid safe and thus be able to open to live performances in line with government regulations.

The detailed guidance for ENGLAND can be found on the UK Government website using the link here:
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/performing-arts>

The detail within the guidance may change and the LTG will endeavour to update members whenever it changes.

A recent email from DCMS states:

"As of 15 August we are now at Stage Four of the roadmap. This means that socially distanced indoor and outdoor performances can take place in line with this guidance, though we encourage organisations to continue to work outdoors wherever possible."

"Both professionals and non-professionals (meaning those participating in performing arts other than for work purposes), or groups which include non-professionals, should refer to this guidance for their activities."

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LTG National Conference

The Questors Theatre, Ealing, London
 17 – 19 April 2020. **CANCELLED**

Well of course bitter disappointment for all potential attendees, not to say frustration at all the work that had gone into the preparations for Questors members, for the loss of what would have been a stunning conference at the LTG's largest 'little' theatre, The Questors. They held the first ever National Conference there in May 1948 (according to some!).

The National Committee held a very successful AGM on September 5th and

Paul Tester received many plaudits for his considerable technical skills without which it wouldn't have gone so smoothly! We were able to formally say goodbye to the outgoing Chairman, Mike Smith and welcome our new Chairman Jo Matthews.

There are implications for the future here: for instance, LTG Reps who can't spare the time to attend conferences would be able to attend virtually if this took off!

It was agreed that a new Officer's post in Communications be created to ensure that The National Committee could have access to Paul's many talents.

And, it was so good to be able to see so many of our conference friends!

Regional conferences were cancelled but we anticipated next year's National Conference will be held at Southport Little Theatre April 14-16 and a meeting was already planned to discuss the Northern Conference in October 2021 at Carlisle Green Room.

Anyone interested in taking a play to the Monaco Festival next August should contact Anne Gilmour asap.



EVERY PRODUCTION SHOULD HAVE A COVID MONITOR - GUIDANCE SUGGESTS

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The contents of this newsletter are not necessarily the official views of the Little Theatre Guild.



Letter from the Chairman



Greetings, LTG theatre members, from your new Chairman. I am honoured to be taking on the role and will do my very best for this august organisation. Sorry to be controversial before I've even started, but I am very happy to be a chairman, and I do not have four wooden legs!

Mike has done excellent work for the LTG, and will carry on with his work.

The LTG tradition of working with the departing Chairman for a further year. This is a model which could be replicated in many other scenarios; when hard-working people leave their posts it is a shame they often quietly vanish. You, perhaps, have Trustees who do that when you might benefit from their experience and practical knowledge.

So here we all are, still perhaps reeling from the pandemic and the loss of our favourite occupation. To begin with we all needed to focus on our own families, work colleagues and friends. But our growing number of members with employees had to add to their private concerns and think quickly about the immediate future of those staff and the finances involved. No ticket sales (and many refunds), no hires, no bar sales quickly equals no finance for pay. Many of us employ cleaning staff, and increasingly theatre managers, front of house or technicians. Sadly many had to be asked to stand down, with no certainty as to their return. On refunds, after lengthy discussions many of you opted to offer the "leave your ticket credit with us until we resume productions" option as opposed to a straight refund. Where that's possible, it's a great boon to the theatre's bank account, but hard work for box office staff using ticketing systems. Psychologically too, a bond is created between theatre and audience member: we WILL be back, we have your money safely, sign up to our newsletter, stay connected!

Our members have proven themselves consummately resourceful, and the Job Retention Scheme, commonly referred to as furlough, was signed up to speedily where needed. Generally, keeping up to speed with government dictates, and the plethora of organisations interpreting it and giving their own advice, has been constant and exhaustive. Reading through the new, almost daily missives has been a herculean task undertaken by your National Committee. As Mike referred to in the last Newsletter, Eddie Redfern has been exemplary in following this continuing saga and we owe him huge thanks.

I've been hugely impressed with the variety of ingenious ways we have come up with and indeed invented in order to keep our theatre communities alive and connected. Many publish newsletters more often than usual, with so much news, info and gossip. A few of my favourite snippets:

We are all hopeful of getting to the theatre in the near future to resume our rehearsals and get our version of Dracula out in to the sunlight, where he belongs! Chesil Theatre, Winchester.

Let us take you back to the days when Corona was a bottle of fizzy pop and families gathered round the radio

for their evening's entertainment. Classic comedy is being re-tuned in this light-hearted revue show, a programme of sketches, snippets and daft poems performed in the style of a live broadcast BBC radio show. We can guarantee a complete lack of sophistication – but we can also guarantee a proper laugh along the way! Abbey Theatre, St Albans



At Blackfriars Theatre Academy our awesome staff have been working incredibly hard to create opportunities for our young members to get outside and be creative, engaging with their theatre friends in a fun and safe way. We've had zoom classes, acting workshops and are currently running Dance and Drama sessions outdoors in Fyde House Gardens.



We are particularly excited to be able to share the exciting news that our Blackfriars Theatre Academy and Senior Performers are putting on some socially distanced outdoor performances at Branston Hall Hotel, in the last week in August. Blackfriars Arts Centre.

However, we must not dwell on the now – it is what we do next that is of the most importance. I entitled this message as "we are the theatre" because its members are the life blood of Bolton Little Theatre, everything else is just bricks and cement piled on top of one another. Bolton Little Theatre

Apollo Theatre, Newport Isle of Wight recording a radio play by member Chris Hicks.



Very very well done to everyone for keeping on going and staying positive.

A little bit about me. I'm a southerner, I hail from The Questors in Ealing, and the Apollo on Newport Isle of Wight. There I directed my first show, *Same Time Next Year*, followed by *Veronica's Room* and *One for the Road*. I have strong Mancunian connections where I studied at Manchester Polytechnic School of Theatre and where my sister lives. At The Questors I directed but also worked backstage and served on the Board as Chairman. I have been employed at Shakespeare's Globe on Bankside for 20 years, as Friends & Patrons Manager and Trusts & Foundations fundraiser, jobs I loved. I am currently furloughed and awaiting my fate, as my work is mainly seeking funding for young people to experience the Globe and learn to love Shakespeare, sadly not anyone's priority right now. Pre-C (my new phrase to go along with BC and AD) I saw about 80/90 shows a year, and very much hope to do so again soon. Theatre is my first love and I'm intending, circumstances permitting, to come and see as many of you as I can. Do please write to me; use jo.sth.matthews@gmail.com. And mention if you'd like your view or query to be published in our newsletter.

Jo Matthews

Michael Shipley reports: New Hare play takes on 'dishonest politics'

"David Hare's experience of coronavirus and his fury at the government's handling of the crisis is to be the subject of a new play starring Ralph Fiennes as the playwright. **The Bridge Theatre in London announced that it would reopen in September with physically distanced audiences**, assuming the government has given the wider go-ahead. It will begin with performances of a monologue written by Hare, *Beat the Devil*, which is a response to his experience of contracting coronavirus early in the pandemic. The theatre said Hare would recall 'the delirium of his illness, which mix with fear, dream, honest medicine and dishonest politics to create a monologue of furious urgency and power.' Hare, 73, contracted coronavirus

around the same time the UK government introduced lockdown measures. He described his experience of the virus, which evolved rapidly and unexpectedly. 'One day it would be a fever, next day it would be arctic cold, then it would be vomiting, then coughing, then conjunctivitis, then breathing problems' he said. 'Day 10 was five times worse than day five'.

Hare is one of Britain's most celebrated stage writers and has written plays that are witheringly critical of the performance of governments on subjects including rail privatisation and the Iraq War. He has been particularly damning of the coronavirus response, calling it worse than the handling of the Suez crisis or Iraq. **'To watch a weasel-worded parade**

of ministers shirking responsibility for their failures and confecting non-apologies to the dead and dying has seen British public life sink as low as I can remember in my entire lifetime', he said. 'In return for lockdown, isolation, commercial disaster and social distancing, the British public deserved honesty. They must own up to their mistake, stop dodging and waffling and start to trust us with the truth. Those of us who've had the virus know you don't under any circumstances ignore it. **What helped me to survive were pure luck and the assiduous expert care of my first-class GP'.**"

"The reason people blame things on the previous generation is that there's only one other choice". (Doug Larson)

Eddie Redfern, our National Liaison Officer has received 500 emails and generated 300 emails on our behalf, trying to keep us all well informed. In particular he has worked tirelessly to ensure that the amateur sector is treated in the same way as professional theatre in respect of guidance. The latest DCMS Guidance can be accessed on the LTG Website.

DCMS Guidance

*"As of 15 August we are now at Stage Four of the roadmap. This means that **socially distanced indoor and outdoor performances can take place in line with this guidance, though we encourage organisations to continue to work outdoors wherever possible.**"*

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We continue to reflect on whether further changes to the guidance are needed and will iterate as necessary.

Louise Smith
Deputy Director DCMS
29/08/2020

ILKLEY LIBRARY Ilkley have been opening their theatre on pre arranged dates to encourage members to call in to pick up books they have ordered online previously. The last notification gave members a list of 700 books to choose from.

Ilkley send a big thank you to all those who have supported the 'Lockdown Library' so far. "We have taken over £1400 from book & drink sales & from donations. With over 700 books we are running out of bookshelf space so if anyone has a bookcase they are willing to donate then please get in touch! Have a look through our latest list of books - e-mail your requests before lunchtime the day before our library opening and the books will be ready for collection from the bottom entrance of the Playhouse.

If you can't e-mail then just turn up on the appointed date with a list of the books you would like and we will get them for you; it might take a few minutes so please be patient and aware of social distancing whilst you wait. Paperbacks are just £1, hardbacks £1.50 and if you can bring in any 'old' books to donate to the library that would be great.

You have also helped considerably with reducing the bar stocks. As it is looking

unlikely that the bar will be opening before next year I have added all stock with a use by date up to the middle of 2021. Please have a look at the updated list and see what you can do to help me. Please feel free to let your family, friends & neighbours know too; the more books/drinks we can sell the better position the Playhouse will be in after Covid-19.

For those members who are housebound, I can deliver but would ask for an extra couple of pounds donation to the Playhouse for this service! E-mail or phone me and we will sort something out. If you've read this far you must have run out of good stuff to read so look at the list and order now!

Stay safe & keep smiling.

Jonty Hawkes
Bar Director (& Avid Reader)

Ilkley Playhouse has furloughed all paid staff but has been able to bring back two members of office staff for a short period to deal with updating membership and managing box office refunds. The artistic Director, Jay Cundell-Walker and her team have, like so many of us, been constantly adjusting, postponing, and sadly cancelling

the original choices for the programme of plays so painstakingly put together.

Repairs and improvements were put on hold as reserved funds were channelled into keeping the Playhouse alive throughout this period of no income generation.

Members and friends have responded generously to an appeal for donations.

One recent innovation was an 8x8x8 Playwriting Competition – eight new playwrights, eight new pieces of theatre lasting eight minutes. Submissions by 21 September will hopefully lead to a presentation in the studio, The Wildman Theatre, as and when the situation allows.

Their artistic director is anxious to expand the play reading committee and is seeking those who enjoy seeing amateur and professional theatre to get in touch – while some of us still have time on our hands!

The Theatre Committee have agreed to aim for the programme to resume in January 1921. Fingers crossed! They have agreed to hold some small scale events before then, – perhaps a weekly café, an afternoon cinema club or a session of monologues - to test out their safety measures.

GOOD NEWS from STOKE ON TRENT

LTG Member, Stoke on Trent Repertory Theatre have already hosted a performance of Closure in their theatre from an outside company which ran 1 – 5 September. This was "A Social Distanced Drama and Audience of a new play written during 'Lockdown' by local authors Catherine O'Reilly and Tim Churchill.

THE STAGE discusses potential long term changes to Theatre

Can the past six months change the way we view theatre? Many of us are watching digital shows streamed in our living rooms due to COVID-19 closing theatres. Developments in digital arts were happening long before the pandemic but recent events have indicated that digital could become commercial theatre's biggest game changer.

In July the channel Disney Plus premiered its film version of the big hit Broadway musical, Hamilton. It was streamed to subscribers, replacing the previously planned cinema release.

Movie musicals have been around a long time but this development was different,

unlike other stage to screen adaptations shot in studios or on location often with Hollywood stars cast in their lead roles. Hamilton's release was of the Broadway production affording a level of production quality, which gave audiences the closest experience to watching it at the theatre.

Will Disney Plus subscribers want to see musicals streamed? Will they book to see Hamilton once theatres reopen, paying top dollar prices? Or will families stay at home and watch in HD on their TV for less than the cost of one ticket to see it live? A century ago, THE STAGE looked at whether films were muscling in on theatre's patch but found such concerns to be unfounded. If more performers who have used their celebrity platforms to warn of the industry crisis agreed to tour extensively outside London, would it invigorate regional thinking and attract audiences back (and we think of the work our past President has done).

A woman comes face to face with a handsome stranger at a family dinner party and becomes convinced he's responsible for ruining her life years before. What follows is a deadly race against time. Stay calmtrust no-onehow far would you go?"

They have a nice idea that with your ticket you can book a table for a post-show drink.

Of ICU that did seem to strangle her.
If all the days were lockdown,
To sunbathe would be as tedious as to work;
But when they seldom come,
they wished-for come,
And nothing pleaseth but rare accidents.
So, when this imprisoned
behaviour I throw off
And deliver the cure I, here,
hold in my hand,
By how much better than my word I am,
By so much shall I exceed men's hopes;
And like bright metal on a sullen ground,
My attainment, glitt'ring o'er my fault,
Shall show more goodly
and attract more eyes
Than that which hath no foil to set it off.
I, here, have the cure to protect us all
and NHS and delivered by NHS skill,
Redeeming health when
men think least it will.

Ed: Bravo

LTG Virtual AGM 5th September 2020 at 11am

Here is the Chairman's report below detailing the Guild's actions this year, to give you an idea of what they get up to on our behalf.....

Normally the Chairman's Report at the AGM is found in our Yearbook. This year is different in that our AGM has a virtual format and it is being held in September. That is of course the result of our National Conference and AGM scheduled for April having to be cancelled because of the Covid-19 lockdown. The Yearbook Report is still relevant but I felt a supplementary report would be appropriate concentrating on LTG's response to the pandemic.

It goes without saying that every single person in the country has been affected in some way by the Covid-19 pandemic. Whether it be social isolation or distancing, shielding, furloughing from work or fighting the virus. Tragically for far too many it has resulted in death with their lives cut tragically short. Our own theatres have not been spared with some reporting deaths of long-standing members who made such a valuable contribution. To those, and all who died we offer our sincere condolences. The contribution of the NHS staff has been immense and has rightly been recognised by the country.

When the lockdown was announced we believed it was important for LTG to provide proactive support to our theatres. Our support was four-fold:

- 1) We wrote and telephoned all our theatres with details of the Government's Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund. This provided a grant of £10,000 to theatres with a rateable value of up to and including £15,000 and £25,000 for a rateable value of over £15,000 and less than £51,000. A significant number of our theatres applied for these grants and received them.**
- 2) We undertook a survey of all our theatres to check on their financial resilience to a prolonged closure. In total 73 theatres responded and the results while re-assuring provided no grounds for complacency. Just under 95% confirmed they had financial reserves and only 18% responded they were very concerned about their financial situation.**
- 3) We have been engaging with the Department of Digital,**

Culture, Media and Sports through our National Liaison Officer Eddie Redfern to explain and help them understand the problems faced by our theatres.

4) Regular updates by e-mail and on our website detailing the latest position and our response. We know this work has been appreciated as many of you have been kind enough to write and thank us for the advice received and how much it was appreciated. I would like to place our record our thanks to Eddie who has done such a sterling job in leading our response so effectively. The current guidance, while I'm writing this in late July, is that professional theatres can reopen with effect from 1 August 2020 provided they comply with the guidance conditions but not nonprofessional theatres who are required to abide to a maximum of two households indoors and a maximum of six households outdoors. We regard this differentiation as wholly unfair to our theatres and lacking in logic. We have taken this up with the Department and asked them to share with us the science that justified such a distinction. We will update you on their response. It is fair to say that most of our theatres do not intend to open in the immediate future but do wish for a date for opening to be announced as soon as possible so that our planning and production schedules can be put in place.

Finally, I have been very fortunate in being supported by a dedicated and experienced national committee. Their great strength is that they all remain actively involved in their own theatres. This keeps us well grounded and very aware of what it is like at the "coal face". I would like to thank each and every one of them for the support they have given me and the work they have undertaken which has made being Chairman such an enjoyable and rewarding experience. I have been very fortunate to have as my Vice Chairman Jo Matthews from The Questors Theatre. Many of you will know her and be aware of her undoubted abilities and knowledge of the theatre. I could not have asked for a more supportive and dedicated Vice Chairman. I have absolute confidence she will make an excellent Chairman. I would like to conclude by wishing all our theatres every success in the future.

Michael Smith

All working papers have now been updated and are available on the LTG website

Shakespeare to the Rescue

ILKLEY PLAYHOUSE beat the lockdown with Bard in the Yard Monologues.



The plan was to present three half hour versions of Shakespeare's most famous plays in the Manor House Yard on the bank holiday weekend. COVID-19 put paid to that idea. Due to government restrictions rehearsing the combined cast of 20+ players would have been prohibited. Not to be discouraged, it was decided to present favourite Shakespearian monologues instead. These could be rehearsed privately and presented with full social distancing.

So we are hoping for fair weather for the Bank Holiday weekend. Two separate programs of monologues will be presented on the Sunday and the Monday at 2.00pm in the Manor House Yard. Audience seating will be appropriately distanced in the safe open air environment although the audience may wear masks if they wish.

No pre-booking is necessary. The bucket collection will be split between the Manor House and the Playhouse both of which have been suffering from lack of income during the crisis. Early arrival is recommended as restriction on numbers may have to be imposed.

A dozen of your favourite monologues – comic, tragic and historical will be presented in each one hour performance. The Macbeths will be rubbing shoulders with Malvolio, Helena with Hotspur, Bassanio with Benedick and many more. Come to both performances, A rare opportunity to witness live Shakespeare in the open air on two sunny afternoons in Ilkley!

Bard in the Yard at The Questors

It was with much delight, and a little bit of trepidation, that The Questors opened its doors (sort of) and welcomed Members to real live outdoor performances in the Courtyard. Three performances of Bard in the Yard over the Bank Holiday weekend for 30 Members each.

Shakespeare's life was shaped by viruses and during the height of the plague he wrote some of his greatest works, so he was the playwright to inspire us. Seven actors and a puppeteer performed 7-minute quick-fire snippets of his best-known plays with hardly any props (apart from a giraffe, rabbit, elephant and of course a bear). One man in his time wears many masks as did the audience who got into the mood with beer, wine and snacks served from the outside Grapevine Bar.

Rupa Huq MP was passing and wished us well and, judging by the comments on Facebook, the event was hugely enjoyed. "It was a

WONDERFUL show! Loved it! So lovely to be back at Questors."

"A great evening with lots of laughs."

"Congratulations to everyone involved in staging and organising this first event of the new world of Questors."

"Brilliant show! Great energy, imagination, and no little skill. We laughed and laughed."

Two Queens Awards for Voluntary Service!



Progress Theatre, Reading

The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service aims to recognise outstanding work by volunteer groups to benefit their local communities. It was created in 2002 to celebrate the Queen's Golden Jubilee. Recipients are announced each year on 2 June, the anniversary of the Queen's Coronation. Award winners this year are wonderfully diverse. They include volunteer groups from across the UK, including a community shop in Cornwall, an environmental group in Swansea, a group working with refugees and vulnerable people in Stirling and a thriving community arts centre in County Down. The MBE for volunteer groups, this is the HIGHEST AWARD given to volunteer groups across the UK to recognise outstanding work done in their own communities.

Progress Theatre is one of 230 charities, social enterprises and voluntary groups to receive the prestigious award this year. The number of nominations remains high year on year, showing that the voluntary sector is thriving and full of innovative ideas to make life better for those around them.

Representatives of Progress Theatre will receive the award from Mr James Puxley, Lord Lieutenant of Berkshire later this year. Furthermore, two volunteers from Progress will attend a garden party at Buckingham Palace in May 2021, along with other recipients of this year's Award.

Steph Dewar, Chair of Progress Theatre, says, "THANK YOU to all of you who have given so much of your skills, passion and time! It is because of you we are able to have a hugely positive impact on our community, here in Reading."

Sinodun Players, Wallingford

"Congratulations! All the work of our wonderful members and volunteers has been officially recognised. On 2 June 2020, the Sinodun Players and Corn Exchange Wallingford have been given the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service. This is the highest award a voluntary group can receive in the UK and equivalent to an MBE. We will receive a signed certificate from Her Majesty the Queen, presented locally by the Lord Lieutenant of Oxfordshire; a crystal award with the QVAS insignia; permission to use the official QVAS logo".

Huge congratulations to Progress and Sinodun Players! More details in the Year Book.

Priory say Goodbye to President

Keith Morris 1933 - 2020

Keith had been a member since the disastrous fire of 1976 when the theatre was lost for over two years. He took an active part in the the rebuilt as the cinefilm made at that time testifies. Keith took part in forty productions since then. As well as treading the boards he served on the General Committee in just about every capacity through to Chairman and latterly President from 2014.

He always had a story for every occasion and his long years working in the Haematology Dept. where he rose to Chief Technologist were the source of many an

amusing anecdote. From '43 to '48 he attended King Henry V111 school where he would jest that he knew Henry well.

He placed great emphasis on the younger elements of the theatre, encouraging them all to strive for greater success. K fully understood the importance of diversity within the membership and championed the intergration of the younger elements with the older onto the main stage.

He was a great versatile performer in plays and musicals but excelled in Panto with a great sense of fun and quick repartee. He as a full member of the magic circle and with Joyce as his assistant would perform his wonderful act with the air of amazement that his trick actually worked! Performing with him was an enjoyable experience, sometimes with no relevance to the script.

Keith was the (LTG) Rep for many years and was well known and liked all over the country. He was at the National Conference last year with Suzi Walker and was soon involved with the many friends he and Joyce had met over the years.

Latterly he was an active (well nearly!!) member of Dads Army, that band of ageing and resting actors that help to set build and innovate backstage when the theatre is open. Keith was a handy carpenter and would make genuine antiques out of orange boxes! He turned his hand to many things – gardener, coach driver, chorister, bird watcher, and of course a dedicated family man leaving a son and daughter, grandchildren and a great grandchild.

Priory People will miss you Keith but we guess you are still keeping busy on your next stage and making people smile.

Mitchell's Wings

The story of the Machine that inspired a Nation

If there could ever be something called a labour of love, then this project has been it! Having lived in Southampton all my life, I have always been proud of the Spitfire heritage connected to the city. This amazing plane first flew from the city's airport (Eastleigh) on March 5th 1936.



I remember visiting the Science museum as a youngster and being completely awestruck by this iconic machine hanging from the ceiling. As a drama teacher and playwright, I decided that I wanted to tell the story of the Spitfire not only to adults, but to a generation

of children, some of whom had no idea about the city's connection with this iconic machine. Being a private pilot, ex-member of the RAF Reserves and general all-round aviation geek, it has even been suggested that I was 'born to write it'. Much to my family's amusement, if ever the sound of an aeroplane is heard overhead, I instantly start scanning the sky. But I also can't help but feel a huge sense of responsibility and privilege in telling this man's incredible story; I hope I've done him justice.

I consulted with Mark Wheeler, director of Oasis Youth Theatre and a colleague at Oasis Academy Lords Hill, along with Paul Ibbott, Head of Music, about my idea. I subsequently put a proposal forward to Maskers Theatre Company, of which I am a member, to commission Mark, Paul and myself to write and direct a musical that would tell this story (Mark with the lyrics and Paul the music). They agreed that this could be an exciting opportunity to celebrate our local history whilst joining two respected theatre groups together - Oasis Youth Theatre and Maskers Theatre Company. One would provide the younger cast members and the other ... the not so young!



This really was a collaboration of talents and experience, and a massive thank you must go to the Maskers for funding the

original project. I felt that for the published version, in order to reach as wide an audience as possible, I had to adapt the play and make it a straight drama rather than musical. However, I did leave one song in and a link for the recording of this, along with the music can be found in the text. This can be used in any way people see fit.

Writing this play has been a real privilege. I have been humbled listening to the stories that have been contributed and they all helped shape the piece, although regrettably there just wasn't the capacity to include them all. Stories of bravery, humility and modesty; from Peter Ayerst's 'amusing' recollection of being chased by twenty five Messerschmitts which he had accidentally joined in formation over Germany, to Johnny Freeborn's riveting account of shooting down a Heinkel over London, to Bob Doe's moving testimony of how

he couldn't bring himself to shoot down the helpless German fighter he had chased over the English Channel.

I had read biographies of and interviews with WW2 pilots, but talking to these gentlemen, first hand, knowing that they were barely twenty years of age during The Battle of Britain, has left me with nothing but admiration for them.

This project is not, however, just about pilots, or indeed R.J. Mitchell. It is about how the Spitfire itself has touched so many people and left such a lasting impression. Pat Viney and Joan Rolfe both recollect eloquently their experiences of the Spitfire; they talk with a sense of pride and fondness that is, I suspect, mirrored by many thousands of others... all of whom could tell their own story.

When this play was first performed, it travelled to three venues: my school (Oasis Academy Lordshill), The Museum of Army Flying at Middle Wallop and the Solent Sky Museum in Southampton. Each venue had its own advantages and challenges, but each worked tremendously well using the 'promenade' style of performance. We felt that in order to perform at the latter two venues, with aeroplanes as a natural backdrop becoming part of a natural set, 'promenade' was necessary. The audience would be discreetly ushered around the different scenes by the cast and they became intimately involved in the story telling of the play.



Although to begin with I was slightly nervous of this style of presentation, without fail in each performance, at each venue, the audience twigged within the first five minutes how to 'behave' and it worked superbly. But this doesn't mean it can't be performed in a more traditional 'end on' setting.

As for the multi-media mentioned in the script, this can be adapted or even foregone completely. It could be that images/films/soundscapes are used just some of the time. Alternatively, it could be a very interactive performance with film/ images projected around the theatre (or on a suitably placed screen) in a way that submerses the audience in the 'Spitfire experience'. Could physical theatre be used to represent some of the images and 'moments' instead? A Crowd could easily be incorporated at different times to help portray particular scenes; this play really does afford the imagination of the director (and their technical crew) almost endless opportunities if they so wish.



I hope that this play gives some insight into the extraordinary appeal of the Spitfire and how in the dark days of WWII, it was able to help inspire nation - A legacy that lives on today.

Johnny Carrington – Author / Director

For more information: Contact Adam Taussik
maskers-ltg@hotmail.co.uk

"This is a great ensemble piece and would suit an outdoor performance with a spitfire centrepiece!"

LTG New Members

LTG is delighted, especially at this difficult time to offer a warm welcome two new Members. The *Davenham Players* are based on the outskirts of Northwich, a leafy Market Town in the heart of Cheshire. They stage at least three drama productions a year as well as hosting regular Jazz evenings, visiting drama productions from both professional and amateur groups and art events. Their website is www.devenhamplayers.co.uk. By way of a contrast, the *Elite Cinema & Theatre* in Ashbourne, Derbyshire is not yet open, has no members nor even a website. But its owner, Mick Gallimore has great ambition that this former cinema will become a cultural hub for the town.

DAVENHAM PLAYERS

The history of the Davenham players (The Players) is most interestingly told by their current Chairman Bob Almquist and the full story can be found on the LTG Website as well as the theatre's website. In brief, the company began during WW II but hardworking and farsighted predecessors pushed through the purchase of the current building about 50 years ago.



Bob says he cannot imagine how today they could raise the money to pay for their current home which was purchased through hard work and determined fund-raising in 1969. Once purchased a building and refitting programme took over five years to complete (and, some say, continues today!). From the road, the building looks like a gardenless detached cottage but behind the scenes.....

The first production in the new theatre was Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood* in 1972. Cast members who needed to make an entrance at the back of the auditorium did so via a stepladder up to a window opening in the back of the building! The formal opening of the theatre, however, was carried out by David Edwards, General Manager of the Chester Gateway Theatre.

On the back wall of the theatre is a community Mosaic, created by their artistic neighbor with the help of the local villagers and an Arts Council grant of almost £10,000, which was unveiled at a grand opening. This is definitely worth an article all of its own.

A decision to further improve the building revealed that no current Deed of Trust existed – the building was not officially owned by anyone! But the problem was eventually solved and building work on Phase I is almost finished. Next post-COVID step is Phase II improvements. We wish them every success.

ELITE CINEMA AND THEATRE

This is an exciting new project, which I am sure LTG Members will follow with interest. Mick Gallimore, owner of the former 1930's Elite Cinema has grand plans to transform the building into a theatre and cinema. Situated on the High Street in Ashbourne, Derbyshire, the Derby Telegraph noted "The glory days of town centre movie screenings could be rekindled next year, as a long-running project to restore the Elite Cinema finally looks set to reach the final act."



Since its days as a night-club ended, there have been several attempts to breathe life back into the building – including a high-quality dining facility – but Mick hopes that a European grant will signal a change of fortune.

Mick wants to return the building to its original use as a cinema, theatre and performance space. The interior still has many of its tiers, which will allow up to 144 seats to be installed. The stage will be equipped with a roll-down cinema screen, making the building dual purpose. The designs are being finalised in preparation for the grant application, which will aim to ensure the building will cater for as many uses as possible.

The plans is for a flexible space with theatre lighting and extending each of the existing tiers to accommodate larger, more luxurious seats. Disabled access from Market Place to the rear of the building is included in the plans while the box office will be accessed from the main double door at the front of the historic building.

I am sure that LTG Members wish Mick and the theatre company he creates all the best for this challenging new project.

Chesil reports on progress of the TakeTenplay-writingcompetition



• Our TakeTen play-writing competition is progressing, with large numbers of plays being submitted, and we hope that the winning ten plays can be performed in February 2021.

• Over 400 plays have been submitted for the TakeTen competition. Each one will be read by at least two Chesil members, and the process will commence in whittling the 400+ down to just 10. A mammoth task – many thanks for the TakeTen co-ordinating group for managing this task, and to all the readers. Keep going guys!

Meanwhile the technical sub-group is looking at ways of videoing a performance, perhaps with a small live audience plus an on-line audience, and a cast from a single household! Let us Know!

TOWER THEATRE

Virtual Tower

"What revels are in hand? Is there no play to ease the anguish of a torturing hour?" Theseus - Midsummer Night's Dream

It was a ruff night but fortunately not a rough night on Tuesday as the VT slot brought Shakespeare to our screens in a celebration called **A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S STREAM**.

The first half featured some well-known and not so well known speeches from the Bard's plays as Tower members tackled soliloquies which are ideally suited to the Zoom format. Mixed in among appearances by Prospero, Portia and Polonius et al were some lovely of songs from Twelfth Night, Hamlet and As You Like it. The second half started with a visit to a nearby fairy bower and then, exactly five years after it was officially announced, the Tower Team which worked well with the RSC during the Play For

The Kevin Spence Column THEATRE IN CRISIS? WE'VE BEEN HERE BEFORE!



In 1605, Robert Catesby's band of conspirators nearly destroyed what could be termed as the entire 'Jacobean establishment' with the help of large amounts of gunpowder – an event so pivotal in our history, that it makes Brexit look like a bit of a footnote in the grand scale of things. Although Catholics at the time would have lamented perhaps the failure of the Gunpowder Plot, others would have breathed a sigh of relief that an act of appalling death and destruction had been thwarted.

Just like us, Shakespeare's contemporaries had a major political event to deal with – only to be followed closely by an outbreak of plague in the summer of 1606.

We know that despite these twin catastrophes, Shakespeare was somehow contriving to have one of his most productive bursts of genius.

It is quite clear that 'Macbeth' is permeated with references to the Gunpowder Plot, just as 'King Lear' refers to Goneril very unkindly in one of his numerous rants as a 'plague sore'. He even describes the plague uncannily as hanging 'in this pendulous air' – a clear reference to the idea that Shakespeare believed it was passed on, like COVID, through airborne transmission.

There is no doubt that both these great plays emerged at a time of great upheaval in England. We also know that Lear was acted before King James 1 on Boxing Day 1606, so the chances of Shakespeare writing it in the previous summer – when the plague was at its most rampant – are pretty high.

LIVING WITH THE BUBONIC PLAGUE

We can also reasonably speculate that bubonic plague – a frequent unwelcome visitor to England throughout Shakespeare's life – would have been assimilated into the lived experience of Elizabethans as a deadly companion with which they had to cope – their version of what we have come to know as 'the new normal'.

Indeed, we also know that the plague could have easily carried off Shakespeare on several occasions when he was younger.

As we in the Little Theatre Guild lament the current situation for our theatres, our members and our audiences, it is also worth remembering that from 1603 to 1613, the Globe and other London playhouses were shut for an astonishing total of 78 months – more than 60% of that time. Actors were forced into other work and, of course, many died. The major difference between the Elizabethan epidemic and the coronavirus is that it tragically favoured the young more than the old.

However, as in 2020, the plague of the early 1600s was a great disruptor of the normal calendar of events – even King James 1's Coronation in 1603 had to be postponed.

All of this underlines one important point. It is quite clear that Shakespeare and his contemporaries responded with great resilience to being repeatedly hit by disaster. Not only is it apparent from our knowledge of that time, that people became even more creative during the equivalent of their 'lockdown' but also in the case of Shakespeare and other writers of the period produced some of their greatest work – and all this without the support of a brilliant NHS or any awareness of what we all now know as 'mental health'.

SHAKESPEARE IN QUARANTINE

Just as in many LTG theatres in the current crisis, people turned their creative talents in slightly different directions. Shakespeare

the Nation project were able to reimagine and recreate Act 5 of A Midsummer Night's Dream. This ended with a surprise appearance by Lucy Ellinson who had played Puck in the production. She fittingly brought the evening to a close with her rendition of The Dream epilogue. Meanwhile many of the audience joined in the fun by donning an Elizabethan ruff specially made for the occasion. Thanks to all who participated on screen and off.

The Year Book 2019 - 2020

Up and Down the Land members will be writing reports of our last season and looking ahead with our plans for the season that follows on. Well, no doubt most of us will be still be hedging our bets about which plays and when. Will we find a place for the plays that never made it through lockdown? The way things fell out many theatres got in an opening night before the lights were switched out. September 19th is the deadline. Some of us might be burning the midnight oil! List the cancelled productions in your reports.

could not produce his plays for large, tightly-packed audiences at the Globe, so he put pen to paper in anticipation of the return of live theatre – just like many of you!

He could not use Zoom or social media, or stream solo performances online from his bedroom, but he too worked on solo, more intimate writing – in his case no doubt also to sustain his income by selling this work. We can be certain, for example, that during a terrible outbreak in 1592 which closed theatres for sixth months, he produced his long narrative poems 'Venus and Adonis' and 'The Rape of Lucrece'.



As I have learned from LTG newsletters and websites over the past few months, our wonderful theatre - makers have followed in Shakespeare's creative footsteps. Not only do many of you seem to be sustaining some sort of active theatre life for your members, and, in some cases, online audiences – but you have managed to maintain your buildings – and who knows? – perhaps you have replicated what many of us have done at home – and finally got around to all those 'tidying up' and 'chucking out' tasks which, under normal circumstances, would have been endlessly postponed.

All sorts of questions spring to mind regarding what LTG theatres might have been up to during our enforced closure. Perhaps the time for a major retrospective survey will come when we all finally get back to our normal routine.

For example: how many auditoria and dressing-rooms have been renovated and tidied? How many cupboards, filing- cabinets, workshops, scenery bays and lighting boxes have been cleaned? All with appropriate social distancing and the other important mitigating factors, of course!

And perhaps, more amusingly, how many of you have heard a colleague say:

'I thought we'd thrown that out years ago' or 'I wondered where that had got to'

My current favourite of these spring-cleaning one-liners is: 'What on earth did we ever use that for?'

At home, I found a rather nicely framed version of Edvard Munch's 'The Scream' – and I cannot remember for the life of me how I came to own it – though having found it, I could not help thinking it was a wonderful representation of how I was feeling at the time!

RESPONSE OF LTG THEATRES TO COVID 19

The last few months have certainly been a busy time for the LTG National Committee – your response to our efforts to support you as best we can, has often been encouraging and heart-warming. YOUR response to COVID as LTG theatres has been amazing – but why would I be surprised? In all the years I have been associated with all our fine theatres, I have never known any of them to be anything but resourceful, resilient – and, in every way, remarkable! We know that after 1606 Shakespeare managed to respond to the plague with Anthony and Cleopatra, Pericles, Coriolanus, The Winter's Tale, Cymbeline and The Tempest. I suspect most LTG Theatres would be proud to have a creative burst like that post-COVID!

And what of the future of all our theatres in the remainder of 2020 and beyond? It's hard to guess how things will work out at the moment, but of one thing I am certain, that whenever that time comes for us to get together as a group of theatres it's going to be quite a party!

KEVIN SPENCE



Richmond SS are keeping their membership interested and engaged with an invitation to their latest zoom meeting

Five Asides by Ben Francis

Five very different characters take us into their confidence and tell five very different stories.

Cornet Solo

Ianto is a gloomy ice-cream man whose life is turned upside-down by a request from a very unusual customer. He may re-evaluate his view of the human race - that is, if he survives...

The Knock-Around

You know that old friend who's become an embarrassment, but who you can't bring yourself to leave? Calvin's that kind of friend, but when he joins the same golf club as upwardly-mobile kitchen-fitter Jake neither of them can guess what it will lead to.

West Ken Stomp

Trapped at home all day Gilda is being driven mad by building noise. But she never sees the neighbours, and soon she starts to wonder if a terrible crime has been committed...

The Revenge of Spotty Herbert

Clem Attershaw drew for every kid's comic your dad ever swapped in the playground. But what will he do when he is offered a chance to take revenge on the man who stole his greatest creation - 'Spotty Herbert, The Kid With Magic Pimples'?

Flowering Cactus

Deborah is excited, she's a pharmaceutical executive who's been given an important international assignment which might make her career. But why are they sending her with Stuart Cole, the office

drunk? And can she manage a twelve-hour flight without a fag?

Finding out the answers is easy - just click to register and you will be sent a unique link to join us for the event itself

ps: I may be wrong, but something tells me Deborah is going to have trouble...

Making Theatre in the Dark

One of the ways RSS have been keeping their members engaged is by organising three zoom evenings entitled 'Sunshine and Rain'. Here is their programme for their final evening - a mixture of well known and original contributions.

And an interval of ten minutes - time to put the kettle on or refill the drinks!

In Union We Stand written by Katie Abbott performed by Lily Tomlinson
Can They Tell? Written by Mia Skytte performed by Clare Farrow
Sonnet XV11 written by W. Shakespeare performed by Lisette Barlow
Sun and Reigns written by John Roth performed by Simon Bartlett
The Ruined Maid written by Thomas Hardy performed by Debbie Campbell

Salter's Hill written by Lyn Randell performed by Hannah Ehrlich
10 min interval

An Extract from East Coker written by TS Eliot performed by Francesca Ellis

After Pinter written by Lyn Randell performed by John Gilbert

Mexican Wave written and performed by Steve Laffey

Same Time Tomorrow? written by Harry Medawar performed by Luciano Dodero

Sun After the Rain written by Andy Moseley and performed by Denise Tomlinson

'Hope' is the Thing with Feathers written by Emily Dickinson performed by John Buckingham

Press Release

Monday 20th July 2020

Now, That's What You Call Entertainment!

Thame Players Theatre Company have been performing in the market town of Thame, Oxfordshire, for over 75 years. This week, a new book about the history of Thame Players, **That's Entertainment**, is being released.

The book, written by Tony Long, an active member of Thame Players for nearly 40 years, covers the development of the group from its earliest beginnings to the present, over 75 years later. The first performance staged by the group under the name of Thame Players was in 1944. Throughout their history, Thame Players have become ever more active and ambitious, progressing from just one or two productions a year to five of their own productions a year today - more than 30 live performances. The theatre, in Nelson Street, is a former church hall, owned by Thame Players for over 40 years, and also the venue for some 30 visiting shows each year, including musical acts, comedy and drama. It also houses Thame's only public cinema, run by Thame Cinema For All.

The book is illustrated with dozens of photographs from the earliest post-war performances through to *Dick Whittington*, the most recent pantomime, performed in December 2019. Incorporating a 1984 account of the first 40 years written by Bob Norman, **That's Entertainment** tells the story of Thame Players from the post-war years, through the period when productions were staged in venues such as the Town Hall and the Wenman School (now Lord Williams's), to the times when Thame Players first leased the Players Theatre in 1977 and subsequently acquired the freehold in 1997. The book also recounts the substantial development work since undertaken, including the installation of raked seating, a bar, a foyer, enlargement of the stage, improvement of lighting and technical facilities, and much else besides.

Tony Long said, 'We are justly proud of our history and our theatre, which has developed into the modern, well-appointed venue we have today. The Players Theatre entertains over 10,000 people a year from the local area and farther afield and is also used by community groups. None of the achievements would have been



possible without the generous support of our town and district councils, local businesses, grant bodies, members and friends of Thame Players, and the many volunteers who keep the theatre running. Having achieved this much in the first 75 years, we look forward to the continuing success of the group in future years'.

Cllr Ann Midwinter, Mayor of Thame, said, 'Thame Players and the Players Theatre are together one of the jewels in our crown. They have occupied this position for over seventy years through their members' dedication and hard work. Embracing the challenges of modern technology along the way, they continue to provide live entertainment in a well-equipped theatre that benefits the people of Thame and surrounding area. I am sure the live performing arts will prosper in our town for years to come, building on the foundations laid by Thame Players'.

Light It in Red

The 'Light it in Red' campaign saw venues across the country, including LTG Member theatres of all shapes and sizes, illuminated in red to draw attention to the devastating impact COVID-19 is having on the arts industry. On the back page of this Newsletter you can see some of the LTG members who took part.

Inspired by Germany's #NightOfLight2020, the campaign, co-curated by Clearsound Productions and Backstage Theatre Jobs, asked participating theatres to light up in red on 6 July and again in August.

Breaking News from the AGM Criterion hope to be opening with live theatre on September 29th!



Explaining why they had joined in the campaign, artistic director of **Teddington Theatre Club** Lottie Walker said: "We plan one to two years ahead for our community theatre club, but we had to pull the plug on everything. The last production we did ended mid-March a week before lockdown and we don't know when we can next raise the curtain. The government's five-point plan is pointless for us because, until we know we can open a show, we have nothing to rehearse. We need to know the implications of when we open and if we have to social distance, because this will affect how many cast and backstage crew we can have. Until things are made clear for us, we can't plan anything. It's not just about one company, it's everyone else in the chain – how long can people afford to go on? We're an amateur theatre company, so don't pay our actors, but the building still needs to be paid for and we can't live forever without generating income. We've got no bar income or ticket sales income."

Ladies in Lockdown

Exposed! Secret Tea Party in Theatre Garden Car Park.

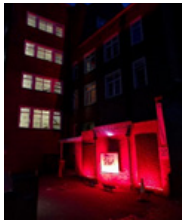
Priory Member Marlene Cox, has spent years looking after the small garden and winning awards from Kenilworth in Bloom. She was joined by other members to enjoy a cuppa!



Norbury Theatre

Definitely No Longer Tiptoeing through the Puddles

We're excited to announce that work will finally begin on restoring the foyer to its former glory after suffering water damage last year. It's been a long road with insurers etc, but the work should be completed and the foyer looking new in around 4 weeks.



A further #LightItInRed event took place (August 11th) nationally representing the events industry and its importance to the economy. The Norbury won't be taking part this time due to work taking place on the foyer, but here's some photos of last month's campaign for you to share.

The Questors

Making the Most of Lockdown

Large scale refurbishments projects have been put on hold at The Questors temporarily which has presented members with a once-only opportunity (we hope) to roll up their sleeves and tackle those jobs that are neglected when the season is underway. Many other theatres have been similarly occupied.

A message from Alex Marker, the Artistic Director at The Questors.

During lockdown our membership has adapted to create, run and participate in a whole manner of Questors activities that would have seemed distinctly alien to us a few brief months ago. We need to keep the best of the things we have learnt from this, while we start planning for the future.

Recently small groups of Questors members have been returning to the site on set days of the week to engage in a wide variety of cleaning, refurbishment and tidying tasks. We are very grateful to

them. During a regular year we are often so busy rushing to mount the next run of plays that many essential, and let's face it, not quite so glamorous tasks don't always happen. This hiatus has presented us with a one-off opportunity to reset our venue back to 'factory settings'.

Here are some of the things that have been achieved:

- The whole of our extensive wardrobe stock has been brought down in batches onto the playhouse stage where it has been sorted, assessed and rehoused. Most of the box storage in the ladies' and men's stock rooms has gone and has been replaced with new costume rails and labelling.
- The workshop has received its deepest clean and tidy for 15 years. New tool boards have been created, the workbenches resurfaced and all tools have been tested, serviced or discarded if beyond their useful lifespan.
- The cosmetic elements of the Studio Theatre refurbishment, started last summer, have been completed. The studio is now one shade of black... all over!
- Various other parts of the site have been tidied, with items rehoused or thrown away.

But there is still further to go and there are various other things on the list such as:

- Repainting and cleaning the dressing rooms
- Tidying the vom walk-round in the Playhouse
- A complete audit of our stock of black drapes and curtains

Anything that we can do ourselves will cost the theatre less money. So if you have any skills that might be applicable to the above tasks (and others) and some spare hours, I would like to hear from you. Obviously, we have to limit the total numbers present on site at any one time, but all offers are gratefully received.

One production that did go ahead



People - Nailsea Little Theatre, Bristol

Lit Up in Red

Chorley, Blackfriars, Priory, Oast, Apollo, Teddington,
The Crescent, Norbury - and a theatre built in 1881

