

Tadley and District History Society projectnews

FREE

issue
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Hospital Sunday, May 1922 – outside *The Fox and Hounds* public house, Mulfords Hill, Tadley

Issue ten

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Comments and/or articles for possible inclusion in future issues of projectnews are welcome – please contact Carol Stevens; telephone: 0118 970 1578; email: DGWard@bigfoot.com.

Copy date for the next issue of projectnews is 20 September 2006.

About TADS

Tadley and District History Society (TADS) was founded in 1984 for people with an interest in local social history, and in the broader scope of history and natural history. Monthly evening talks are held on the third Wednesday of each month, except August, at 8.00pm in St Paul's Church Hall, Tadley. These meetings are open to visitors.

TADS is a member of Hampshire Archives Trust and The British Association for Local History.

TADS website (www.tadshistory.com)

Thanks to the hard work of 'project group' members, TADS website has had a major overhaul; fully functional, the new site will be updated on a regular basis.



TADS website's (www.tadshistory.com) – a source of information on Tadley's local history

It is now possible to access all copies (1-9) of projectnews, find out about the society's current projects, or view the year's programme which we hope will encourage new members and visitors.

If you have not yet visited the site, the homepage will give you clear choices, which will keep you in touch with the society's activities.

TADS are very grateful to Simon Kartar for providing technical expertise and Tadley Computers who are hosting the site.

Boundary Players – early memories

The Boundary Players was originally the Dramatics Section of the Ministry of Supply Recreational Association (Aldermaston). Its first performance, in a hall in Tadley in February 1952, was the play 'Jane Steps Out'. They were then given the use of a small wartime building (Building 203) adjacent to the Den, which had a seating capacity of 78. Fourteen productions were put on in this tiny theatre. In 1955 the Dramatics Section was renamed The Boundary Players under the leadership of Peter Todd. A year later the company moved to the clubhouse of the Recreational Society complex at AWRE. In 1965 the William Penney Theatre was formed within the club buildings. In 1995, electrical system and building construction problems were discovered and the theatre was closed for repairs, reopening in 1996. The Boundary Players continue to perform three productions every season and provide excellent entertainment.

We are grateful to Pam Terry for some of her thoughts and memories of the early years when she was a member of The Boundary Players.

Judith Orchard, one-time secretary to Colchester Repertory Company and her husband Leslie helped to form a drama section at AERE Harwell, before transferring to Aldermaston, where they originated the Dramatics Section with a production of 'Message for Margaret'. Leslie Orchard directed, with Judith in the role of Margaret. Then came Noël Coward's 'Blithe Spirit'. Photographic records begin with 'Dangerous Corner' by J B Priestley. The play, produced by Augustus Saunders in 1953, featured in the cast Peter Todd who had been a member of the Reading Repertory Company before taking employment at AWRE. The first newspaper report from the *Hants and Berks Gazette* reviewed 'Dangerous Corner', likewise coverage in *AWRE News*, the internal staff magazine.

The Dramatics Section was, at first, made up of AWRE employees only, and drew its support largely from the Ministry of Supply estates which housed most of the Establishment's staff. Director Sir William Penney and Lady Penney attended regularly.

At a reunion which took place to mark the end of Boundary Players' 50th season, representatives of every decade attended. Memorabilia relating to 180 productions assisted the writer in her quest to locate and contact many of her contemporaries.

Reflections

In the mid fifties the last of AWRE's scientific staff who had been ensconced in Grazeley Green Residential Club left for Boundary Hall, where they were re-united with those who had preceded them. Geographically, this meant exchanging a wooden hut for one of concrete, but closer to work. (The brick-built blocks, demolished 1995, were not yet in existence.) It was evident that a play was in rehearsal somewhere, and that aforementioned friends were a part of it. I was pressed to 'hear lines' and to go and see 'We Must Kill Toni', which I did. It was the last play to have been performed in the confines of a very small, yet tall, building only yards away. The interior was black, the space severely limited, but when the curtain went up, there was no mistaking it, this was theatre.

The casting readings for the first production of the following season signalled the move to a hall with a stage adjoining the Sports Pavilion. The 'new theatre' was more spacious. 'Playbill' consisted of the two plays by Terence Rattigan, 'The Browning Version' followed by 'Harlequinade', with an overall cast of 22. Alex Carpenter was to direct the former, Peter Todd the latter. Subsequently, it became apparent that Peter Todd had engaged in far greater involvement than anticipated, Alex Carpenter having been recalled to Orfordness at short notice. This was an occupational hazard of working on the weapons programme, indeed it was also a condition of employment that one would accept a posting to who knows where without demur. As for the need to step in, Peter gained his experience in Repertory Theatre so was accustomed to the demands of that line of work, also he was keen to encourage any newcomer who showed promise. Some changes were made and I made my

debut as a 22 year old playing the part of 90 year old Auntie Maud.

There followed other parts. I was shown the Drama Section of Berkshire County Library, then situated close to Battle Hospital, Reading. I was urged to read and see plays. It was the beginning of a long association with the work of leading playwrights and of the colourful characters created by them. Plays in those early days tended to be a full 3-acts long, with several scenes per act, and involved a lot of scenery painting. Frequently, there were complicated set changes to be mastered. Considerable attention was paid to set-dressing, and the assembling of props was no mean task. Bare boards needed a large carpet on occasions and Victorian furniture, which was very heavy to move, (These latter items called for storage space, but they earned their keep and were much admired.) The majority of playscripts were French's Acting Editions, packed with dialogue and stage directions; crisp verbal exchanges governed the pace and breaks between scenes were kept to a bare minimum. Woe betide anyone claiming to have insufficient time for a costume change – or claiming to be a non-smoker. Ash-trays abounded. They were there to be used.

The four plays per season were well-received. There was a good spread of drama, mystery, the new, the old (period costumes from Beatrice Saxon-Snell), and comedy or farce. Season tickets cost 10/- and a cup of tea was 2d. Programmes had gone up from 3d to 4d; they contained interesting snippets of information and advertisements for local businesses: Kents Luxury Coaches (Phone Heath End 224), I C Jewell, Newsagent and Simon's, High-class Grocers, Noted for Bacon. Only Queens College Arms and Falcon Garage remain.

One programme read; 'Are you interested in statistics? Nearly 500 of you saw our first production of this season. This was most satisfying and pleasing to the 27 acting members and technical staff who spent 55 hours at rehearsals.'

On the back of this same programme: "We sincerely hope the petrol situation will not deter you from supporting us again. We shall, of course, as in the past, provide transport at still only 1/6 per person (return)". This referred to coaches hired to convey supporters from outlying areas. Friday night was Newbury night, noted for the exuberance of the audience, probably offering encouragement to friends on stage.

Still in 1957, a newspaper recorded the following: "Two B47 bombers from the USAF base at Greenham Common paid an indirect tribute to the Boundary Players on Wednesday evening. Their obliterating roar completely disrupted... yet within seconds, residents were swept back into the atmosphere of the piece," and on the following programme: "You will be pleased to learn that we now have over 100 season ticket holders. A row of seats has been made available to old age pensioners at a reduced rate on Wednesday nights" (not on account of the B47s, I hope).

The same programme carried a tribute to Maurice Pound who would be leaving to work elsewhere. I felt a pang of conscience. He was the energetic friend who had provided the impetus, who had engendered my joining, and in this my first attempt at directing a play I had cast him as Briggs, a policeman, little more than a walk-on part. I had cast a new man in the pivotal role.

Fresh recruits replaced those who had to leave, and a succession of VIPs from Aldermaston forbore to take on the role of President. One such worthy was



« *The River Line* (1956), left to right: Geoffrey Lovegrove, Clifford Mason, Roy Johnson and Alex Green, with Pamela Terry standing in the background.

» Beryl Mullender (née Hiscock) in *White Sheep of the Family* (1955).



Admiral Brooking CB, DSO, who was Assistant Deputy Director from 1954-61. An impressive figure, he presided over our committee meetings with a mischievous glint in his eye. When it came to play selection his preference was for 'Dry Rot' (Whitehall farce). We chose 'The River Line' (a play of greater intellectual depth). The Admiral sat with arms folded, wearing a hangdog expression.

Of the philosophising in a Gloucestershire garden I have little recollection. For me, the highlight of 'The River Line' was a flashback to wartime France. The eerie sound of Bartok's Concerto for Orchestra, just a few bars from the opening section, introduced Act II. The scene had shifted to a dimly-lit granary loft. Allan Wilding was responsible for lighting and sound. He worked unobtrusively, selecting mood music, juggling with gramophone records and round-pin plugs, creating lighting effects from relatively unsophisticated equipment and sound effects from unlikely sources. He was Peter Todd's right hand man.

From his corner perch above the stage, Allan looked down on the four characters whose immediate fate would be decided by the French Resistance. To pass the time, they played cards. Attention to detail decrees that a card game must first be learned, if unfamiliar. The next lesson is to pay attention to the plot, rather than the cards which can be very distracting! When the time came to move on, the four were ordered to "Synchronise watches". With heads bowed they gazed intently at an ill-assorted collection of malfunctioning timepieces, one without a glass, one with only one hand and one with no hands at all. No matter. It gave the impression of a tense situation.

Another tense situation was taking place in the dressing room. Acts I and

III featured ladies, one of whom had complained of feeling unwell for two or three days. On the last night, her low-backed evening dress revealed a spectacular rash. She had German measles.

The previous play, 'Dial M for Murder', had only one female role; this went to *Miss Atom**, somewhat to the indignation of the regulars. The delightful Carole gave an excellent portrayal of the hapless wife. During one performance she excused herself politely, leaving the stage and her fellow actor in order to collect a missing coat. The set-building hadn't allowed for this. Squeezing through the narrow space between the back-cloth and the rear-wall in her stiff petticoats, she made her way from stage left to right and back again, creating quite a disturbance. Her opposite number stood, literally speechless, for what must have felt like a very long time.

Years later, during 'Relatively Speaking', I left the patio where my stage husband and I had been breakfasting, and disappeared into the house on the line "I'll go and get dressed". He departed stage left to wander down the garden. A young man entered through the garden gate, at which point I should have reappeared, still in my dressing gown and engaged in dialogue with him. Unfortunately I failed to return! In a state of undress, I glanced at the one or two others sitting quietly in the dressing room. Even the Tannoy was silent. "What's happened?" The casual reply came from someone holding a script. "You're supposed to be on". Cursing, I crashed into reverse gear and re-appeared just as the perplexed actor was about to leave the empty stage. He came down from the Midlands for the 50th re-union. The incident is etched on his memory.

The Players continued to perform

four plays each season, with many a full house, and approaching 300 season ticket holders. There was a brief interlude, then in 1965 the William Penney Lecture Theatre opened its doors. It had swallowed up the hall in which we had cavorted through 35 productions, and was cavernous. How should we be heard? There was a 25 foot stage area to be filled and a vast, luxurious raked auditorium. The event was celebrated with a production of 'The Taming of the Shrew', a first and only venture into Shakespearean territory to date.

The seventies introduced audiences to the work of Alan Ayckbourn, so prolific among playwrights. It was with one of his plays 'Joking Apart' that Peter Todd ended his domination of 'Am Dram' at Aldermaston. After thirty years of continuous involvement he had earned a rest. In the absence of a stampede of volunteers to succeed him, I carried on where he left off.

It was 1982, the stock of players had dwindled. It had to be built up again. Seeking to perpetuate the ambitious programme to which we had grown accustomed, and having the support of some talented and hard-working people, I was pleased to continue for another thirteen years, only returning once after that, to direct 'Look no Hans' in the year 2000.

* AWRE Recreational Society activities included the Annual Gala Day, which in August 1958 was attended by 3,000 people, and was opened by *Miss Atom* (Carole Booth, née Rolfe). Carole's stay at AWRE was brief; she progressed to Anglia Television.

References etc

AWRE News, April 1971.

Star newspaper, 9 December 1954

For further information, see also

Around Tadley – fact and fable (p 20) and
Around Tadley – people and places (p 134-5).



« *The River Line* (1956), left to right: Clifford Mason, Pamela Terry and Geoffrey Lovegrove.

» Peter Todd in *I Have Been There Before* (1955).



100 years ago – Hants and Berks Gazette, Jan – Jun 1906

Date	Page	Village	Topic
06.01.1906	2	Bramley	Roman road Silchester to Winchester – discoveries.
06.01.1906	5	Little London	Slate Club payout £39.7s.6d gross, £30. 7s 6d nett.
13.01.1906	6	Charter Alley	Primitive Methodist Chapel Public tea in Chapel building.
13.01.1906	6	Silchester	Wedding of Miss Emily Lavinia Stevens of Silchester to Henry Hall of Reading.
13.01.1906	8	Baughurst	Sunday School and Mothers Union Tea Book prizes awarded [scholars named].
20.01.1906	5	Basingstoke	North Hampshire General Election result Jeffreys (Con) 4825, Verney (Lab) 4705.
03.02.1906	6	Aldermaston	Chain Ringing In honour of wedding of Mr A T Wood and Miss D M Keyser.
24.02.1906	5	Aldermaston	Man drowned in canal Inquest (with jury at Frond Farm) on Mr J C Pinniger.
24.02.1906	8	Basingstoke	North Hants by-election Due to sudden death of Hon A F Jeffreys.
03.03.1906	5	Pamber	Marriage of Miss Gertie Blewden and Mr Herbert Barter (list of presents and givers). [C]
10.3.1906	6	Silchester	A fox's last visit to the poultry run Vine Hunt (which met at the Pine Apple, Brimpton) ran a fox into a paddock of poultry pens at 'Trevids', Silchester (owned by Mr Herbert) where it was killed! [C]
10.3.1906	6	Silchester	Entertainment (in Schoolroom) of 'Mirth and Harmony' attended by over 100 villagers. [C]
24.3.1906	8	Aldermaston	Chain ringers 8 men of Oxford Diocese rang 5184 changes in 2 hours 56 minutes.
24.3.1906	8	Pamber	Death of Mr Leonard Beer, youngest son of landlady of 'The Pelican'. [C]
24.3.1906	8	Baughurst	Inquest at 'The New Inn' on William Roy Cripps (aged 4 months), Dr Langley attended. [C]
31.3.1906	6	Baughurst	Meeting to consider arrangements for Annual Hospital Parade on 13 May. [C]
07.04.1906	6	Aldermaston	Treat for the choir A day in London through the kindness of the Squire, Mr C E Keyser. [C]
07.04.1906	6	Tadley	Mr Sidney Jewry brought action against Mr Walter West in respect of 13 days carpentry. [C]
07.04.1906	6	Little London	Sparrow Club Annual supper at 'The Plough Inn'. 2,054 sparrows were destroyed last year. [C]
07.04.1906	8	Pamber	Service in Pamber Heath Mission Room in memory of the late Mr Leonard Beer. [C]
21.04.1906	8	Silchester	Lecture by Lieut Col Lynden Bell 'Invasion risks – our food supply'. [C]
21.04.1906	8	Silchester	Funeral of Commander H G W Thorgold RN, (list of names of those attending).
28.04.1906	6	Baughurst	Lecture on Boer War Illustrated by lantern slides given by Col Enthoven – poorly attended. [C]
28.04.1906	6	Tadley	Quoits match against Monk Sherborne at 'The Fighting Cocks' (names in teams given). [C]
05.05.1906	8	Aldermaston	The late Mr Higford Burr, former owner of Aldermaston Estate, died last Saturday. [C]
05.05.1906	8	Tadley	61 children living in Heath End invited to entertainment at Heath End House by Mrs McConnel. [C]
05.05.1906	8	Baughurst	Concert in aid of parochial funds given by Mrs Lyell of Newbies – including a dialogue by Mrs Roller.
19.05.1906	6	Baughurst	Annual Hospital Sunday parade £27 4s 2d collected, including church collections.
19.05.1906	8	Silchester	Roman remains being resurrected under Mr Mills Stephenson's (FSA) supervision.
16.6.1906	8	Silchester	Primitive Methodist Chapel Flower Service Mr J F Cooper presided over the large congregation.
23.6.1906	3	Silchester	Silchester excavations exhibition of antiquities in Burlington House (Society of Antiquarians).

100 years ago – national and international, Jan – Jun 1906

Date	Topic
29.1.1906	Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters Christabel and Sylvia campaign for women's suffrage.
10.2.1906	The British Battleship 'Dreadnought' launched by King Edward VII in Portsmouth.
13.2.1906	In the General Election the Liberal Party was returned to power with a majority of 104 over all other parties combined.
10.3.1906	In London the new 'tube' railway from Baker Street to Waterloo Station opened to the public.
13.3.1906	In Basingstoke very disorderly scenes occurred at the declaration of the result of the by-election.
18.4.1906	In San Francisco a series of earthquake shocks destroyed two thirds of the city. 2500 people believed killed.
26.5.1906	In London the new Vauxhall Bridge is opened for traffic.
6.6.1906	In Scotland at Clydebank the Cunard liner 'Lusitania', the largest passenger liner in the world, was launched.
30.6.1906	In Canada the 40th anniversary of the proclamation of the Dominion was celebrated.
Among those who died at this time were: Professor Curie, joint discoverer of Radium (19 April) and Henrik Ibsen, author (23 May)	
In sport, Cambridge won the University Boat Race (7 April) and Major Loader's 'Spearmint' won the Derby in the record time of 2mins 37secs (30 May)	

Articles marked [C] have been copied and archived by TADS for reference.