

# CROAK

Toads Theatre Newsletter October 2023

## FROM OUR CHAIRMAN



On Saturday 23rd September we celebrated the 40th year that Toads had been in The Little Theatre. And what a night it was.

Jeannie Roberts, who was Secretary at the time that Toads bought the empty Church in St Marks Road, joined us and talked about those early days, (see p.5) along with Alec Stokes who was the architect. Many anecdotes were exchanged which were fascinating for those of us who hadn't heard these stories.

John Miles brought along a stack of old programmes - and there were photos and plans of the old church tracking the transformation into our theatre.

There was lots and lots of food and Paul Davenport made a stunning cake. No one wanted to spoil it by cutting it so we decided to auction it. Richard Bearne bid £30 and won. Looking forward to the 50th Anniversary!

Well, if the rest of the season is as successful as the first two productions, then we're in for a very good year. 'Spider's Web' brought in large audiences every night. Agatha is much loved in Torbay, so we can't really go wrong.

Well done to Jon Manley and his cast and crew.

We're already planning next year's production. Speaking of which...please submit any plays you think should be considered for the 24/25 season. And, if you fancy being a new director, we can team you up with an experienced director on a production as an assistant with a view to you having your own production thereafter. Baskerville is well under way with a talented director and cast so it looks as if we'll be in for another winner!

Anna Reynolds  
Chairman



## DID YOU MISS THIS THEATRICAL TREAT?

### *The Thoughts of Pliny*

"Oh what a tangled web we weave when first we practice to deceive."

Spiders Web first premiered in 1954, subsequently being made into a film in 1960.

It remains popular today with Christie fans.

Agatha was well read and it is likely that the title and plot come in some measure from Sir Walter Scot's epic poem 'Marmion'. A tale from Floden Field, published in 1808. Not everyone's bedtime reading.

Sarah Mallet, starring as Clarissa, created the good meaning chaos that takes us on a fast-paced romp through the play carrying the audience with her.

Jon Manley (not on stage this occasion!!) ably directed this jolly murder mystery.

Thank you to all who were involved in this excellent evening's entertainment including the youngest policeman ever... or perhaps it's just me getting older!

### *From Front of House:*

***'Absolutely brilliant!'***

***'Better than professionals!'***

***'Loved the set!'***

***'Super costumes, especially that gorgeous dress!'***

***'Great production! Thoroughly enjoyed it!'***

***'The characters were totally believable!'***

***'Have you got a spare poster I can have?' (The lady wanted to frame it!)***

***Job VERY well done, Mr Manley!***

## AUDITIONS COMING UP!



A reminder that auditions for **Cash on Delivery** are to be held on Sunday 8th and Sunday 15th October at 2.30pm in the large rehearsal room. Scripts and audition pieces are in box office. For any further information please contact Anna Reynolds: [annareynolds1403@gmail.com](mailto:annareynolds1403@gmail.com)



Sat 4<sup>th</sup> Nov 2pm /Sun 5<sup>th</sup> Nov 10.30am

Alan Ayckbourn's *Confusions* is series of five interlinked one-act plays: *Mother Figure*, *Drinking Companion*, *Between Mouthfuls*, *Gosforth's Fete*, and *A Talk in the Park*. Each play is entirely different - typifying Ayckbourn's particular brand of comedy and his ability to dissect human behaviour. Each, however, deals with the common themes of loneliness and relationships. The characters and their conflicts are immediately recognisable and are still relevant today.

This is a challenging project and I have decided not to cast each play separately, but to follow Ayckbourn's original plan (well, almost!).

He chose to use only five actors – 2 female and 3 male – each taking multiple roles.

My ideal cast will be 3 females and 3 males playing ages between 30 and 60.

It won't be possible to indicate definite roles until the auditions are over, as the matching of ages is important! So auditionees must be prepared to play any part.

Because this production will be quite complex, rehearsals need to begin in mid-February (Mondays/Tuesdays and Thursdays with extra rehearsals for tech and dress)

Performances will be April 8<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> – with a matinee on 13<sup>th</sup>.

Scripts will be available from the box office from 10th Oct. As there are only 6 scripts, PLEASE return asap!

Mary Singleton

## MEMBERSHIP CORNER

At a recent Wednesday Club meeting, it was heartwarming to hear a relatively new member of Toads talk about how friendly they find the company. This person has been involved with theatre companies for many years in various locations but finds Toads to be the most welcoming of them all.

All of us can take pride in the reputation our society has for the standard of performances. But equally important is how people perceive the atmosphere. Thank you to everyone who helps to make newcomers feel at home.

Earlier this week I enjoyed the privilege of showing round a life member of Toads who was involved from the very beginning. Having attended the 40th Anniversary celebration, she was curious to see how backstage looks since she last acted here 20 years ago. We exchanged tales of our experiences with Toads and it was one of the most rewarding tours I have done.

Next backstage tour: Tuesday, 31st October, at 10.30 a.m.

*Sherry Dudley*

## UP NEXT!



Hello, Everyone!

This is my first attempt at producing the Croak. Following Nigel, Bea and John will not be easy!

Apologies if this issue is a little late! I didn't return from holiday until 30<sup>th</sup> Sept.

Any contributions need to be with me by 25<sup>th</sup> of the preceding month and in WORD format, please – so over to you!

Mary Singleton (editor)

**GROAN TIME!!**



I have a pencil that used to be owned by William Shakespeare, but he chewed the end...

Now I can't tell if it's

2B or not 2B



**Can you do better???** Send yours  
**in!!!**

**Vowels needed to name these  
films...**

**LSMSRBLS, LDSNLVNDR, THGRTSCP,  
WSTSDSTRY, TTNC**

**Answers on last page**



## THE WEDNESDAY CLUB,

OCTOBER, 2023

The new season of meetings took off with our POETS Friday meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> September. The main club meetings started again on 20<sup>th</sup> September, with a review of 'Dad's Army' and a catch-up of 'What we did in the Holidays'..... Following the next week with a review of 'Spider's Web', that's two great shows in quick succession!

The Torbay Street Pastors do an important job in the centre of town, so we have invited two pastors to tell us about the worthwhile work they do to protect our more vulnerable community.

On 11<sup>th</sup> October we have a video by Peter Whittle of Arne House Productions' cabaret, 'Off the Cuff'. Peter always gives us an entertaining afternoon.

Then we will review 'Baskerville' with the cast... I'm looking forward to seeing the play; what a cast!

On 1<sup>st</sup> November Steve Gill will be giving us "Customs of the Calendar Year", a well-illustrated talk on traditional folklore.

So Wedders is back with a bang, with a well-researched presentation from Austin Hawkins next month to look forward to. See you there!

John Miles

### Norman Hutchinson.

Norman was a Toads member for several years, playing smaller parts in our productions. For many years he and his wife, Nena, ran The Ashurst Hotel in St Elvide's Road. We haven't seen him at The Little Theatre for several years, but Margaret Fforbes-Hamilton, who told me of his death, reminded me of his dry Northern sense of humour. Many of our members will have fond memories of his time with us.

## WHAT'S ON IN OCTOBER

6-7<sup>th</sup> October. 7.00pm for 7.30pm.  
**'Two's Company'** by Ipplepen Dramatic Soc. Two one-act plays, 'Sinful Intent' by David Wells and 'Napoleon's Shoe' by Ben Henderson. Both directed by David Wells. Unsuitable for under18s. Ipplepen Village Hall.  
<https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/whats-on?q=Ipplepen> or 07912 742235.

9-14<sup>th</sup> October. 7.30pm Sat mat 2.30pm.  
**'Baskerville: A Sherlock Holmes Mystery'** by Ken Ludwig, directed by Sarah O'Connor. Toads Theatre Company. 01803 299330.  
[toadslittletheatre.co.uk](http://toadslittletheatre.co.uk)

19-21<sup>st</sup> October. 7.30pm.  
**'Never Mind The Butler'** by Lou Treleaven, directed by Simon Mathews. Bovey Tracey Players at The Function Room, Dolphin Hotel, Bovey Tracey.  
Contact [boveytraceyplayers.org](http://boveytraceyplayers.org) or 'Bovey Larder' in town.

25-28<sup>th</sup> October. 7.30pm Sat mat. 2.30pm  
**'Oliver!'** by Lionel Bart, directed by Elaine Kingston. MD Robert Young, Choreographer Tracey Loveridge. TOPS at The Princess Theatre, Torquay.

25-28<sup>th</sup> October, and 2-4<sup>th</sup> November. 7.30pm.  
**'Wyrd Sisters'** by Terry Pratchett, directed by Nicole Davall. Teignmouth Players at the Ice Factory.

25-29<sup>th</sup> October. 7.30pm. Sat mat 2.30pm.  
**'Spamalot'**, Monty Python. Directed by Jamie Brown.  
BOADS at Brixham Theatre,

28<sup>th</sup> October, St John's Bridgetown, Totnes. 7.30pm. and  
29<sup>th</sup> October. Chudleigh Parish Church. 7.30pm  
**'The Montagues and the Capulets'** by Bellini. Red Earth Opera.

# ***WE ARE 40!***

**40 YEARS  
CELEBRATIONARY EVENING 23<sup>RD</sup>  
SEPTEMBER 2023  
OF  
TOADS THEATRE COMPANY at THE LITTLE  
THEATRE**

*Included with kind permission from  
Jeannie Roberts*

## ***Hello, I'm Jeannie Roberts!***

### Act 1

I have been a Toads member since 1964

### Act 2

In 1974 I joined the Toads Committee as secretary and 23 years later, I was still there (don't think anyone wanted the job!)

Our venue was the council owned concert hall Babbacombe theatre where we played a 32 week winter season of 10 plays from September to may so there were always 3 plays in various stages of production, performing to a theatre club of approx., 2,000 plus the general public.

After the initial 'get-in,' each play required the transportation of 'the set' furniture, props and costumes, with the whole exercise performed in reverse 10 times a season.

The 'tools of our trade' were scattered over 3 properties, Toad Hall and Toad Manor (just off the St.Marychurch precinct) which we owned, and rented storage space in St. Annes road near the theatre. On those Sunday mornings we only needed Hercules the cart horse and could have done a Steptoe and Son street performance. We looked a motley crew.

We dreamed of a headquarters encompassing rehearsal rooms, wardrobe, props, lighting, scenery and social space. A car park would be nice and the icing on the cake - a stage and auditorium.

We felt the 'writing was on the wall' as the council had intimated that their ideal tenant at Babbacombe would take the theatre all year round on a fully repairing lease. Ouch! Our hard-earned pennies being spent on someone else's leaky premises? We thought not! So, armed with the appropriate 'go ahead' from the Toads members, the search was on for a place to call home

### Act 3

The redundant church of St Marks, not the first door we had opened in our quest, but could it be the last?

As the heavy arched wooden doors creaked open the present tenants swooped down, their wings disturbing the dust laden air made visible by the shafts of sunlight forcing their way through a long-neglected roof. Surely a setting for 'Murder in the Cathedral'.

The gloom revealed the still visible imprint of knees on hassocks, now reduced to provide bedding for the rodent squatters! Ghostly pews, chewing gum in the choir stalls hurriedly disposed of before the final hymn rang out, hymn books still laying open. We wouldn't have been at all surprised to see 'Pyewacket the cat' - from John van Druten's 'Bell Book and Candle' - stroll by.

Ticking a lot of 'our boxes' we had the purchase price £25,000 but would the redundant church commissioners accept the Toads as fitting owners and if so, could we raise the funds to artistically convert this grand but lonely building?

### Act 4

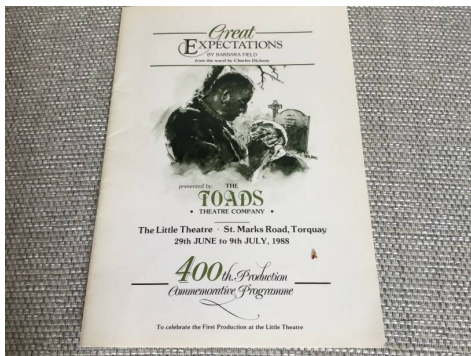
Once again Toads members gave us the mandate to pursue the dream and we embarked on our 'long day's journey into night' to make it into reality.

### Act 5 and final act

The toads wheeled me out for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary and I'm back for a repeat performance for the 40<sup>th</sup>. The Lord knows what they are going to do for the 50<sup>th</sup> as I shall probably be in that great auditorium in the sky, with my incredible husband Lionel and all those talented Toads actors who so generously shared their theatrical knowledge with an eager 24 year old tadpole.



# CELEBRATION TIME !!



*Our first production*



*Photographs by Brian Tilley*

## CONTACT DETAILS



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### LATE SUBMISSION FROM BEN TOWILL

Black Riders Session Players are extremely grateful to everyone who came to see our first show at The Little Theatre. We had a lot of fun and you were a great audience! Please write to [blackriderssessionplayers@gmail.com](mailto:blackriderssessionplayers@gmail.com) to join our mailing list. Black Riders Session Players do not have a website or Facebook page, so this is the best way to stay informed about future shows and get in touch with the band.

Answers: Les Miserables, Ladies in Lavender, The Great Escape, Titanic