

# CROAK

Toads Theatre Newsletter December 2023

FROM OUR CHAIRMAN



Dear Members,  
This is beginning to become a bit of a habit!  
Who Killed Santa Claus was yet another stunning production with a very high level of ticket sales. Many congratulations to the Director Andrew Kenyon, his cast and crew. Cranford at Christmas is up next and I know we can expect the same success.

If you see Peter West, don't mention the heating! The poor man has recently spent almost every waking hour at the theatre trying to sort out the complicated and decrepit heating system. The auditorium and backstage areas were very cold in the week leading up to Who Killed Santa Claus. The cast and crew battled through the cold and we feared that the audiences would be suffering too.

As it turned out, due to Peter's unfailing determination to get it sorted, only Monday night was cold.

And then, hurrah! We all breathed a sigh of relief and put our blankets away...for now. Thank you, Peter.'

**Anna Reynolds**  
**Chairman**

## Who Killed Santa Claus



Did you guess 'who done it'?

## Thoughts of Pliny

Who Killed Santa Claus was the first of the seasonally themed plays and pantos around the Bay - and TOADS are to be commended for giving inveterate playgoers something a little different.

This play by Terrence Feely, known for his TV and Film writing both here and the USA, was ably directed by Andrew Kenyon - a stalwart of the local theatre scene.

The play is set on the night before Christmas in the home of Barbara Love, for the staff of her popular children's Television series.

Amid the champagne bubbles, tensions rise to the surface, culminating in an inevitable murder.

This production had been hampered by the cold conditions back stage whilst waiting for the work on the theatre's boilers to be completed, so an additional round of applause for keeping going under the circumstances.

Andrew Kenyon always gets the best from his actors and this play was no exception.

A caustically funny play with plot and pace.

Thanks (as always) to everyone who helped to make this an enjoyable evening's entertainment.

## From Front of House:

'Thoroughly enjoyed it'

'We thought it was the inspector!'

'Nice twist at the end!'

'Very good cast'

'I want those red trousers!!'

## UP NEXT!



Hello, Everyone!

I hope you enjoy reading this month's newsletter.

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

Mary Singleton (editor)

### GROAN TIME!!



**I saw a couple of actors having an argument about Shakespeare...**

One was yelling about Macbeth.  
The other was yelling about Hamlet.

I thought it was much ado about nothing.

## DEVON YOUNG PEOPLE'S THEATRE



TOADS young actors are excited to be in rehearsals for A Midsummer Night's Dream.

We are bringing you a night of magic and mischief!

Please join us Feb 8-9 on an exciting journey into the forest of Titania and Oberon and see what awaits!

**Heidi Pyburn**

# CineMundi

Cinemundi is the film club open to all TOADS members and the community held usually on

Mondays in The Little Theatre Cafe and because of its licence and that CROAK goes on the public website is not allowed to mention the titles or cast of screenings.

But .....we can hint .....see it as another cryptic quiz .....

**Monday 11th December 2023 at 10.00 for 10.30**

A comedy-drama chronicling the lives of those associated with a restaurant in Southern USA from 1920's to the 1980's, based on a best-selling novel and featuring their signature dish of immature red fruit/vegetables in a frying pan.

**Monday 18th December 2023**

**10.00 for 10.30 - Cinemundi's first anniversary**

A Christmas double-bill with seasonal picnic intermission.

**Monday 8th January 2024 10.00 for 10.30**

1987 epic Oscar-winning film based on Danish writer's 1910 novel of Swedish immigration to Denmark, for which the well-known Swedish lead was awarded the best actor Oscar (He's the guy under the lamp in the advert for the film featuring Tubular Bells - this gets complicated!!)

**Monday 15th January 2024 10.00 for 10.30**

A 1995 film tie-in to the TOADS production of Stella Gibbons' Cold Comfort Farm, which opens in the evening, with a host of British stars, bringing this rural idyll to life, but, beware...there is something very 'narsty' in the woodshed and it isn't the cake we will be serving!!

There is a charge for the Coffee, the Cake and the Company. All proceeds go to TOADS Theatre Company.

If you would like full details of what is on and when, then get on the list by

emailing [tlccinemundi@gmail.com](mailto:tlccinemundi@gmail.com)

Alistair and Nicola

## Can you score 10/10?

1. Which street in New York is synonymous with the musical theatre scene?
2. Sophocles, Aeschylus and Euripides were all playwrights from which ancient civilisation?
3. 'Wicked' is a retelling of which classic children's story?
4. 'Two households, both alike in dignity' is the first line of which play?
5. Which iconic West End play is the longest running theatre production of all time?
6. 'Mama Mia' is based on the music of which band?
7. What is the name of the inspector in 'An Inspector Calls'?
8. 'Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead' is a spin-off of which Shakespeare play?
9. Though he's called Earnest in London, what name does the main character of 'The Importance of Being Earnest' go by at his country home?
10. Vladimir and Estragon spend an entire play waiting for whom?

Answers on page 9

# Literary Treats!!



Stephanie Austin will be coming to

## Wednesday Club

on 6th December

to talk about her latest book, the

7th in her Juno Browne series

'A Devon Midwinter Murder'



## FIRST DRAFT BOOKS & CRANFORD AT CHRISTMAS

Get ready for a full literary experience at the Little Theatre this December!

During the production of *Cranford at Christmas*, First Draft Books' pop-up bookshop will be waiting for you in the lobby.

This new independent bookstore in South Devon will have books for all readers, including Elizabeth Gaskell's delightful original *Cranford*, to purchase on the night and enjoy long after the show.

Come say hello & have a browse.

[firstdraftbooks.co.uk](http://firstdraftbooks.co.uk)

**Leslie Leggett**

Owner, First Draft Books



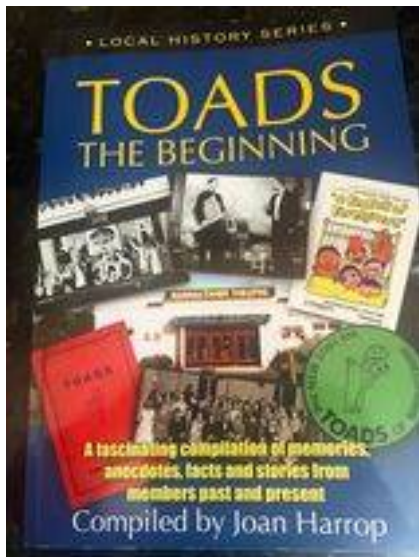
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m: 07930801061

Buy A Book, Support Our Shop

## BOOK REVIEW



During the recent run of Baskerville a friend bought me a copy of 'Toads: The Beginning' - a history of our society compiled by Joan Harrop. This book has been available to buy

from our Box Office for some time, but now I wish I had got a copy sooner.

Packed with stories from past members, Joan has put together a really fascinating picture of how Toads began, and the 'glory years' of putting on 8 shows between October and May at the Babbacombe Theatre - often playing to 600 people a night!

It's also pretty inspiring to read the way that funds were raised to purchase the Little Theatre and it made me feel proud to be carrying on the tradition of the many enthusiastic and obviously talented past-Toads.

Above all though, the best parts of the book are the interviews and recollections of the members (some of whom are still members). The joy in producing good shows and the hilarious consequences of when things go wrong will be very familiar to 21st century readers, and almost every page contains a mishap or memory that made me laugh out loud.

It's also clear that the social life of the society used to be pretty riotous. On the last night of every show the all the members (including those not involved in the show), were invited to a party on the stage. There are all sorts of veiled hints about the bad behaviour that used to take place at the theatre afterwards.

I particularly liked the story of the Toads who, at an 'after-show party', moved the bed and entire furniture from one member's house onto their lawn, without them realising.

If you are a member of Toads, I think this book will inspire you, and make you realise we are carrying on a fine tradition.

We have been at the Little Theatre now for 40 years, and perhaps a second volume entitled '...what happened next' will be written one day?

In the meantime, I urge you get a copy – the proceeds go back to the society and this book really is much, much better than I was expecting.

Ben Tisdall

## CAST ANNOUNCED!



The ensemble players for 'Confusions' are:

Sarah Mallett

Karen Allen

Andrew Malcolm

Chris Mitchell

Steve Aldridge

Elaine Harvey

## AUDITIONS

The lovely Mr. Manley and I have decided that, with so much happening at the moment with productions and Christmas, we are going to hold our auditions in the New Year.

### **The Cemetery Club:**

Auditions will be held on Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> January at 2-30, at the theatre, in whatever space is available!!

This is a true ensemble piece, following the lives of three Jewish widows, old friends, who meet once a month for tea and then visit their husband's graves.

### **Maggie Campbell**

#### Cast

Ida:

Sweet, happy and in no hurry to 'move on'.

Lucille:

A party girl, getting payback against her unfaithful husband.

Doris:

Devoted to her late husband, rather 'droll', with many funny asides.

Sam:

A warm, shy butcher, whose late wife is buried in the same cemetery.

Mildred:

Cameo role, 'a minx'.

Playing ages: 50 plus. Set in 1980's.

Accents: New York Jewish.

Audition pieces and scripts will be available from box office 1<sup>st</sup>. December.

## From Secretary Julie Hancocks

### **Prop Plea**

If you need to replace your washing machine between now and the middle of February, please can you let us know, as we need one for our March production *Cash on Delivery*. We will collect it from you and dispose of it after the show.

Please contact the Stage Manager, Julie Hancocks on 07901 119576.

### **AGM Update**

The AGM took place on Monday 30<sup>th</sup> October and was attended by 46 members. Anna started proceedings with her Chairmans Report by updating us on the progress of our current season, which commenced in July. All the shows to date have been well attended, and it would seem that audiences are starting to feel more confident in coming to the theatre post COVID. Our professional one-nighters have also brought new patrons to our door, many of whom had no idea that we existed!

Membership is slightly up, which is a good thing, as we need the goodwill of our members to provide Front of House (Coffee Shop, Bar, Box Office and FoH Stewards and Managers), and Stage Side support (Set Building, Director, Stage Manager, Stage Crew, Lighting, Sound, Props and Wardrobe).

Anna thanked all the 'hidden' members who work so hard for no applause, as without their contribution the theatre could not run. Aware that there have been lots of mixed messages about FoH this season, Anna is planning a Sunday afternoon meeting for Managers and Stewards to iron things out.

Anna also gave a grateful shout out to the Maintenance Team for their unstinting and often frustrating attempts to keep the fabric of our lovely old building up to scratch, and safe for us and our customers.

(cont.)

Nicola Margetts (Treasurer) reported that after two years of reporting losses, the 2022/23 season had returned a small profit of £13,000, which is encouraging and audiences for the 2023/24 season looks likely to continue the trend. Despite the enormous expense of maintaining the fabric of the building, there are no plans to increase our ticket costs.

We are also seeing greater revenue from Bar and Coffee Shop spend. Plans are in place to review the hire fees for wardrobe and props as they have been unchanged for several years. Nicola has worked very hard this year moving all our accounting from manual systems to an integrated computerised system. This means that going forward we will be able to make accurate comparisons year on year. Peplows have been helpful in supporting Nicola in this transition and will remain as our Independent Examiner.

Work has been undertaken to develop a Financial Policy, which is now a requirement for the Charity Commission. Alistair Conquer has undertaken this to ensure that we are compliant and that risks are managed. This document was not circulated to members prior to the AGM. Therefore, there will be an EGM, or another method deployed to obtain ratification from members.

The Constitution has been revised and approved by the attending membership.

The Committee has changed this year. Sherry Dudley has retired as Membership Secretary, and Jill Pettigrew has stepped down as Secretary after ten years in the post. She has been nominated and approved to become our newest Life Member.

The Committee now consists of: Anna Reynolds (Chair); Nicola Margetts (Treasurer) and Julie Hancocks (Secretary), plus elected and co-opted members: Alistair Conquer, Andrew Kenyon, John Miles, Paul Davenport (new Membership Secretary), Nichola Aldridge and Margaret Kirk.

### *The Wednesday Club, December 2023.*

A splendid month for the Wedders Crowd!

The 'Favourite Poetry' session went down well, possibly because Suzy and I were on holiday. Thanks to Sherry for organising the session.

Steve Gill next entertained us with 'Customs of the Calendar Year', illustrated by some tunes and songs. Once again, Steve produced a well-researched talk for us... I think we'll ask him back.....

Then we had 'Desert Island Disc', where we all (most) brought along a track from a CD to play to the group and explain why it had some meaning. Well, we had a varied selection of tracks, played on a vast array of techno-equipment.... Jean Tolchard brought along her 'pink thing'; Alistair had a mobile 'phone and a strange cylindrical apparatus; Alan had a black doughnut which, when placed on the floor, made a noise, but mainly it was Jim with his famed ghetto blaster. We may put together some rational technical plan for future events..... 'Spotty Fi' was mentioned.....but I don't think I know her.

By way of light relief, we next had a 'Show and Tell' meeting when members brought along an archive object which had some history for them.... Suzy brought me.

The following week we reviewed 'Who Killed Santa Claus?' with the cast, followed by Austin Hawkins with 'Moving Aside', one of his 'talking heads' videos... Austin always provides an interesting afternoon.

Our multi-talented ex-Chairman, Stephanie Austin, has written another in her series of 'cosy crime' novels! She will be reading extracts from this just-released next edition, entitled "A Devon Midwinter Murder"(see page 4).

There will be an opportunity to ask questions and to purchase copies, for cash.

(cont.)

Then, on 13<sup>th</sup> December we have an end-of-term Christmas Party when members bring along something to share and a jolly time is had by all.

The year's sessions end on the 15<sup>th</sup> with 'Season of Lights', our latest POETS Friday meeting, which starts at 2.00pm. Poems of your own or by others, cake, coffee and conviviality. Your host is Deborah Treliving.

Our next season starts on 10<sup>th</sup> January 2024 with a review of 'Cranford at Christmas'.

What, another year of 'Wednesday Club'?!

"I think it might be Santa Time already, Suzy. We've certainly had enough rein-dear."

**John Miles.**

*Here's a poem from Nigel, written for the 'Favourite Poetry' meeting*

In the heart of Toads Theatre, every Wednesday afternoon,

Where laughter echoes and spirits take flight.  
A gathering of souls, a harmonious blend,  
Where joyful moments never seem to end.

The room comes alive with stories untold,  
Drama and comedy, a treasure to behold.  
From tragic heroes to whimsical fools,  
Each performance a masterpiece that rules.

The audience, captivated by the magic in the air,  
Embracing emotions without a single care.  
Laughter erupts like a symphony of delight,  
As John transport us to worlds so bright.

Wednesday afternoon at Toads, a sanctuary of glee,

Where troubles fade and hearts dance so free.  
Friends gather 'round, old and new,  
Creating memories that forever imbue.

So let us raise a glass and toast the joy we find,  
In happy Wednesdays at Toads, Wedders kind.  
For in this haven, true happiness prevails,  
A celebration of life's most vibrant tales.

**Nigel Colledge**

WHAT'S ON IN DECEMBER

TOADS' CHRISTMAS PRODUCTION

11-16<sup>th</sup> December. 7.30pm Sat mat  
2.30pm.

**'Cranford at Christmas'** by Laura Turner

directed by Jill Pettigrew.

Toads Theatre Company. 01803  
299330. [toadslittletheatre.co.uk](http://toadslittletheatre.co.uk)

**And for other companies...**

It's PANTO TIME!!

6-10<sup>th</sup> December. 7.30pm.

Plus matinees Sat and Sun at 2.30pm.

**'Dick Whittington'** by Alan Frayn

directed by Chris Mitchell.

KATS at Kingskerswell Village Hall

[Kingskerwellats@gmail.com](mailto:Kingskerwellats@gmail.com).

16<sup>th</sup> Dec- 1<sup>st</sup> Jan. Various times, evening and matinee.

**'Aladdin'**, by Alan Frayn

directed by Iain Douglas

choreography by Elaine Johnson

MD Allan Fouracre.

Paignton Pantomime Productions.

The Palace Theatre, Paignton. 01803 665800.



23-30<sup>th</sup> December. Various times including matinee.

**'Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs'**, by  
Limelight Scripts.

Directed by Despina Carr,

Choreographer: Carmen Louise.

TP at Pavilions, Teignmouth.

01626 249049

[boxoffice@pavilionsteignmouth.org.uk](mailto:boxoffice@pavilionsteignmouth.org.uk)



Once upon a time...

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**Answers:**

1. **Broadway**
2. **Ancient Greece**
3. **The Wizard of Oz**
4. **Romeo and Juliet**
5. **The Mousetrap**
6. **ABBA**
7. **Inspector Goole**
8. **Hamlet**
9. **Jack**
10. **Godot**

**Sad News...**

**Dave Fagan**

We all knew he was unwell, but it was sad to hear the news this week that he'd died.

Dave did a lot of work backstage - and occasionally on stage - with Toads and SADS, last appearing with us as the foyer accordionist in our 'Allo, Allo' production.

In 1953, when we were boys, Dave and I were on the same P and O liner, 'SS Canton', sailing for the Far East. I have a photo of us both, in shorts on the deck... but neither of us remembers the other. He was bound for Singapore; me for Hong Kong.

A man of strong opinions, and never afraid to voice them, Dave and I clashed many times, particularly on Brexit, but we still maintained our friendship throughout.

More recently Dave and Shirl founded 'Spam Fritter Skiffle Group', playing for free to care homes and occasionally on Toads' stage when we held parties.

He as great man with uncompromising views and a 'ton of bricks' attitude to getting things done!

I shall, as will many others, miss his flamboyant emails and his genuine caring friendship.

**John Miles**



Welcoming 2024!

Wash away those Christmas blues and welcome in the New Year by attending our  
**12th Night party at The Little Theatre on Saturday 6th January at 7.30pm.**

There will be mulled wine and mince pies for your delectation and the lovely Steve Gill and Chris Robson will be entertaining you. Come on, you know you want to!

After the success of Andrew Kenyon's last Quiz, we've persuaded him to put together another one on Friday 26th January, 7.30pm in the bar. Teams of 4, £2 per head. So... start polishing your little grey cells, get a team together and come along!

**Calling All Theatre Club Members!**

***Get yer thinkin' caps on***

***Because it's .....***

**? QUIZ NITE ?**

**Friday 26<sup>th</sup> January**

**In the Theatre Bar**

***(where else would it be?!)***

**7:30 pm**

**Your Genial Host: Mr. Andrew Kenyon**

**Come One! Come All!**

**Old ones, New ones, Loved Ones, Neglected Ones!**

## FOR YOUR INFORMATION

### CONTACT DETAILS

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### **COMMITTEE MEMBERS:**

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**Croak Newsletter:** Mary Singleton

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**set building/painting, etc:**

Paul Lewis 07555 396654

[paul1970lewis@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:paul1970lewis@yahoo.co.uk)

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