

# CROAK

Toads Theatre Newsletter February 2024

## FROM OUR CHAIRMAN



Dear Members

Another month gone and Christmas seems like a long time ago.

And here we are in wet and mild January. Who would prefer it cold and dry? Me for one - having two dogs to walk in every weather.

Our 24/25 season has all been confirmed and I'm in the process of compiling the new brochure in partnership with Partington Print who always do a fantastic job.

The reason we're not advertising all our productions at the moment is that we're not allowed to until all Royalties have been paid. But almost there.

So here are the productions for which we have royalties so far:

July 8-13 Dial M for Murder (a second week)  
directed by Jon Manley  
Aug 5-17 Blackadder 11 directed by John Miles  
Sep 9-15 The Unexpected Guest directed by  
Jon Manley  
Nov 11-16 Sheila's Island directed by Julie  
Hancocks  
Dec 9-14 Wind in the Willows directed by Heidi  
Pyburn and Jill Pettigrew  
Apr 21-26 Butterflies are Free directed by  
Maggie Campbell

(cont.) Other directors include Mary Singleton, Sarah O'Connor, Andrew Kenyon and Anna Reynolds.

The same old Directors I hear some of you cry...if you'd like to direct for us, PLEASE come forward and you can assist a current director to see how a production is put together...and not only the direction of course.

Many of you will notice that from now on we will only be needing a ticket distributor and 3 stewards not 4. Don't worry if a steward doesn't turn up for whatever reason, we'll still be within the health and safety rules and regulations.

Trainee Managers still needed please. Without a Manager the performance will have to be cancelled!

Although we're doing really well in terms of audience numbers, we have some very large expenditures coming up. Fly Tower inspection and long-term safety of aforementioned, fire safety regulations to name but 3, and the elephant in the room is the car park.

We are currently going all out to raise money for the refurbishment (if that's the word) of the car park which has been a thorn in our side for many years. A quote has come in for £70,000. We're still recovering from the shock. Some interim measures are being discussed.

Those attending the Saturday performances of Cold Comfort Farm will have seen Paul Davenport and Andrew Kenyon selling raffle tickets for the prize of a super-duper hamper. All monies will go to our car park fund. This was a trial and we might be rolling this out for future productions. Many thanks to Paul for putting together the fabulous hamper. More ideas are coming in for fund raising and Chris Matanlé has started a Fund Me page on Facebook. Please let us know if you have any good ideas.

That's it...see you in the bar probably!

**Anna Reynolds**  
Chairman

## COLD COMFORT FARM



### The Thoughts of Pliny

This adaptation of Cold Comfort Farm by Stella Gibbons came to our stage via the West Huntspill Players.

If you know the book and the story of the author, you will pick up on many of the things that influenced her writing.

Her early years were spent in a deprived part of London where she describes her father, as Good Doctor but a Poor husband, who did his share of “Mollocking”... eventually dying and leaving Stella in the role of the main supporter of the family. She held various posts including that of a drama and literary critic.

Influences included the writer D.H. Lawrence and she parodies the regional and rural fiction of the Twentieth Century.

This first play of the New Year directed by John Miles did not get to the stage with ease. Panto/Christmas/New Year and illness all conspired to set things back.

But the “Play’s the thing “ and “All’s” was “Well” in the end.

A clever set included running water for ‘clettering’ the dishes, an old fashioned range, providing a wide assortment of meals from breakfast to supper’ and a boiler for washing the undies.

Laura Cameron-Long as Flora Poste pulls this dysfunctional extended family towards a surreal normality, which turns at the last moment with sound of Big Business chasing her off stage.

(cont.) Congratulations to all the cast and crew who made this work so well.

It should inspire us all to re-read the book and some of the literature that inspired Stella originally.

### Heard by Front of House

Fantastic set!

Very funny!

Lots of clever touches!

We loved the bull!

Do you know what the narsty thing was?

## UP NEXT!



## 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**



Paul  
Sylvester  
presents



The Songbook of  
**Lionel Richie**

17th February 2024

## *The Cemetery Club:*



My thanks to those of you who showed an interest in this production and came to the auditions.

Cast and crew, as follows:

Lucille: Nichola Aldridge.

Doris: Anna Reynolds.

Ida: Gill Poore.

Mildred: Jo Neagle.

Sam: Andy Killen.

Assistant Director/Prompt: Di Davies.

Stage Manager: Peter West.

We may need a couple of 'scene shifters' for the run but more of that later.

Thanks again.

Maggie Campbell.



**AUDITIONS FOR**

**'DIAL M FOR MURDER'**

**SEE Page 9**

## **Blackadder II**

**Directed by Amy Burton-Smith and John Miles.**

**From the 1986 second series of the hit television show.**

**Set during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, Lord Edmund Blackadder, his servant Baldrick and his companion Lord Percy come up against some ridiculous problems with hilarious consequences.**

**Potato: With Sir Walter Raleigh returning to London, Blackadder decides to plan a sea-faring adventure to win the hand of the Queen.**

**Beer: The wager is laid! Blackadder has challenged Lord Melchett to a drinking competition but has unfortunately double booked himself. Warning: this episode contains an amusingly shaped vegetable!**

**Bells:**

**Blackadder has found true love... or has he? Could there be wedding bells? If so, who could he find to be the best man?**

**Auditions,  
Sunday 25th Feb at 6.00pm.  
Sunday 3rd March at 2.30pm  
The parts of 'Edmund',  
'Queenie' and 'Baldrick' have  
been cast.**

### **Character audition details for Blackadder**

The best way to prepare for these auditions is to watch the episodes because, whilst we are not doing a show of impressions, the audience will have expectations of every character. There's scope for some doubling up across the episodes, but the principal roles of Blackadder, Queenie and Baldrick have been cast. Audition pieces will be available at the audition.

Lord Percy: (30-40) A dithering berk with not much intelligence. Edmund Blackadder's companion and a principal part appearing in all three episodes.

Lord Melchett: (30 -40) Always at the Queen's right hand and not afraid to win her favour, normally by grovelling. Always trying to one-up Edmund Blackadder. Appearing in all three episodes.

Nursie: (40+) The Queen's nursemaid described as a 'mad old woman'. Treats the Queen as if she is a little baby still. Appearing in all three episodes.

**Potato:**

Sir Walter Raleigh: (30-40) Dashing and confident explorer. A big personality that commands a room until the Queen threatens to have his head cut off.

Redbeard Rum: (40+) a mad old seadog with no legs. A booming voice!

**Beer:**

Lady Whiteadder: (40+) Stern, religious woman who slaps anyone who sins. A booming character that can say lots with a single glare.

Lord Whiteadder: (40+) Still and silent. Only one spoken line as he has taken a vow of silence. A sombre looking man.

Simon Partridge: (20+) Loud, boozy, dirty-minded drunk who likes the word "bum"

Geoffery Piddle: (20+) Loud, boozy oik!

Freddie Frobisher: (20+) Loud, boozy, flatulent monk. Repulsive.

**Bells:**

Kate/Bob: (female, 30s) Edmund Blackadder's love interest. Played as if she is a pantomime principal boy.

Kate's father: (50+) Dirty old peasant man.

Doctor Leech: (40+) Outspoken and frank doctor who is just plain rude.

Young crone: (20-40) Eccentric mad woman who can drop the act quickly to become "normal"

Wise woman: (50+) Old and warty, grotesque old hag who is completely mad.

Lord Flashheart: (30-50) Dashing and strong; makes the ladies weak at the knees – and possibly the men too!

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 or in the main body of an email, please – so over to you!

Mary Singleton (editor)

### How's your General Knowledge??

1. Who wrote the book Chitty-Chitty-Bang-Bang: The Magical Car?
2. In which part of your body would you find the cruciate ligament?
3. What is the name of the main antagonist in the Shakespeare play Othello?
4. When was the movie the Titanic released?
5. What element is denoted by the chemical symbol Sn in the periodic table?
6. How many of Henry VIII's wives were called Catherine?
7. What was the most popular girls name in the UK in 2021?
8. What is the name of the 1976 film about the Watergate scandal, starring Robert Redford and Dustin Hoffman?

Answers on p.7

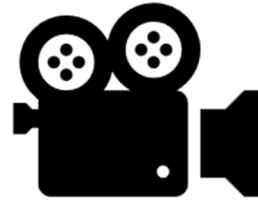
### What's on in February.

8-9<sup>th</sup> February, 2024. 7.30pm.

**'A Midsummer Night's Dream'** by William Shakespeare, directed by Heidi Pyburn. Devon Youth Theatre Company, DYPT in association with Toads Theatre Company. 01803 299330. [toadslittletheatre.co.uk](http://toadslittletheatre.co.uk)

13-16<sup>th</sup> February. 7.30pm.

**'Laying the Ghost'**, by Simon Williams, directed by James Mackenzie-Thorpe. 'Bijou' at The Palace Theatre, Paignton. 01803 665800.



## CineMundi

We have started the New Year with two relatively unknown films proving so popular we nearly ran out of cake! - nearly!

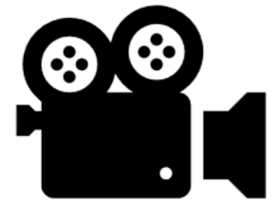
For **Monday February 12th 10.00** for 10.30 the 1967 version of the story of tragic runaways circus performer Hedvig Jensen and noble soldier Sparre to the tune of Mozart's Piano Concerto no.21.

For **Monday March 11th 10.00** for 10.30 to complement the opening of TOADS production of the criminal farce, *Cash on Delivery*, a 1955 film with 'The Cat' and a soon to be real life Princess on the (French) Riviera.

The TOADS Film club, Cinemundi, is open to all, members, guests and public, so if you have nothing better to do on a Monday morning, come and join us, for coffee, cake and interesting company.

Alistair & Nicola

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)



## The Wednesday Club, December 2023.

We started on 10<sup>th</sup> January 2024 with a review of 'Cranford at Christmas', with several cast members in attendance. A well-received production with a large cast and the bonus of carol singers.... and a fitting end to the year.

Our pop-up bookshop proprietor, Leslie Leggett, next gave us a talk entitled 'From The Big Apple to the English Riviera'. Leslie told us why she and her husband had decided to settle in Britain after a long trip around Europe, searching for somewhere which felt like home... New York having lost its charm, at least for a while.

With new premises opening in Ashburton for 'First Draft Books', Leslie is a very busy person!

This week we are to review 'Cold Comfort Farm'... I wonder what the verdict will be?

Then next week we will all be given the opportunity to say what we would do 'If I Ruled the World'. What changes would you make, what would you encourage; what would you prohibit? Please keep off political subjects, they only cause disagreements!

Then, to start February, we have 'The Quintessential Quiz' compiled by that all-round entertainer, Steve Gill.

For Valentine's Day, we will confess what 'Our Song' might be, with a CD player for illustration. I can't decide if I can get away with "Fight the Good Fight" for my offering.....and I wonder what Jim will choose?

Austin Hawkins will next present Ken Russell's "Elgar", the famous documentary of the great composer, which will be followed by Gary Fremantle's reading of his novel, "Ogrefish". Suzy and I have read it... it's good.

So, a packed month of variety and.... oh, OK, just come along and see for yourself...

John Miles



### GROAN TIME!!

A sound technician, a lighting designer and a stage manager find an old lamp, backstage at the theatre. One of them gives it a rub, and out comes a genie! "Since you all found me," he says, "You each get one wish!"

The sound technician steps up and says, "I wish to be sitting poolside in my own multi-million-pound mansion!" And POOF, he is gone.

The lighting designer takes his turn and says, "Well, I wish to be sitting on the beach on my own multi-billion-pound private island!" And POOF, he is gone.

Then the stage manager turns to the genie and says, "I wish to have them both back in 10 minutes."



## Unsung Heroes

### Our set building team

A 'set' is the artificial environment in which a performance takes place, and is usually created from scratch - and so, Toads' directors work closely with the **VOLUNTEER** set construction team who then make their ideas a reality (or get as near to them as possible!)

The director's design can range from a complicated box set with stairs and levels (Cold Comfort Farm), to a minimal set with little - but effective - scenery (Ladies Day).

Whatever the play demands, the final result is always a creative collaboration between director and our talented set building team!

They can build the perfect room or garden, make flat surfaces look like solid walls, paint the stage floor to look like tiles, floorboards, cobbles or paving stones. They can hang doors and windows that open and close smoothly (vitally important - as any actor will tell you!), build extra bits on trucks to be pushed on for special effects (the memorable train in 'Dad's Army').

They can extend the set beyond the stage area with glimpses of a garden, another room, a beautiful blue sky – because it's not just what's on the stage that matters. The list goes on!

### What are our set team's strengths?

Technical knowledge and inventiveness; a mixture of conventional DIY skills such as carpentry, decorating and problem-solving; having an eye for structure, texture, colour, light and shade; an ability to deal with impossible requests and keep smiling; an ability to deal with exhausted, tearful directors; an ability to drink endless mugs of tea and scoff whole packets of biscuits...

**Thank goodness we have them!**

*Answers: Ian Fleming Knee Iago Tin 1997 3 Olivia All the President's Men*

*Editor's note:*

*This glowing report has nothing to do with the fact that my plan for the set for 'Confusions' is on the horizon...!*



### The Toads' Set Building Team



**Lead by Paul Lewis:  
Thea & Jim Redman, Eddy Wright,  
Phil Dunster, John Miles,  
Michael Audet, John Franklin,  
Bob Page, Steve Gill**



**FOR YOUR INFORMATION**  
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***if you'd like to help behind the bar:***

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***Technical Team:*** David Warren & Olie Taylor  
[technical@toadstheatre.co.uk](mailto:technical@toadstheatre.co.uk)



# **Audition Notice**

## ***Dial M For Murder* by Frederick Knott**

Performance dates: 10th to 15th June 2024

8th to 13th July 2024

Director: Jon Manley

## ***Auditions: Sunday 18th February 2023 @ 2pm***

(Scripts now available from box office – please read & return as quickly as possible)

### **Role ..... Description**

Sheila Wendice..... Tony's wife but in love with Max. Ideal playing age = 30 to 45.

Max Halliday ..... TV writer, "starving artist". Loves Sheila but resigned to her staying with Tony. Ideal playing age = 35 to 50.

Tony Wendice ..... Recently retired tennis player. Intelligent schemer who wants to kill his wife for her money. Tony is the lead role. Ideal playing age = 35 to 45. Captain

Lesgate ..... Crook, always "on the make". Nowadays would be guilty of romance fraud. Hired by Tony as a potential assassin. Only has one scene but it's a crucial one! Ideal playing age = 40 to 50 (needs to be a few years older than Tony).

Inspector Hubbard The copper! Intelligent, laid back, but nothing gets past him. On from after the interval. Ideal playing age = over 40.

Set in the early 1950s with a middle-class set of characters. As such, good diction (RP) is necessary. Gentlemen will need to be clean shaven and of smart appearance (no pony tails etc) although "Clark Gable moustaches" are acceptable. Don't get too hung up on the age requirements – these are the ideal but age boundaries can be pushed quite far (Ray Milland was 47 when he played Tony in the film).

I encourage and welcome first-time auditionees – NO ROLES HAVE BEEN PRE-CAST!!

Volunteers for **prompt, wardrobe, stage manager** also required – please help if you can.

### ***Important:***

***Please note that this production will be run twice (see dates above).  
Therefore, a larger commitment is required from all involved personnel.***

Any queries or if you require further information, please contact the director Jon Manley on 07815 323982

## Membership Matters

Dear Members.

I can't believe it is February already!

As you know, I only joined the committee a couple of months ago as membership secretary. I did of course take over from the lovely Sherry Dudley. I would like to take this opportunity to say a big thank you to Sherry from all of us. She has of course done a fabulous job.

I was asked to set up a Go Fund me page to help to raise funds for the car park. Please go to the link below and if you can, donate. As most of you are aware, the car park desperately needs tarmacking and linings done in order to make things literally, go a little smoother!

We have many problems in relation to the car parking, which continually means that the Front of House Manager is taken away from the necessary duties inside the Theatre. I am delighted to have been asked for some ideas in respect of fundraising for this mammoth task. One of the first has been the organisation of a raffle which took place on the last day of Cold Comfort Farm.

We had two lovely champagne hampers containing lots of goodies. We also had second and third prizes. The first lots of prizes were raffled off on the Saturday matinee and the second, on the last evening of the show. Most of the items in the hampers were donated which helps us in keeping the costs down. This was a trial and a very successful one at that raising a whopping £190.00

Now I feel is the perfect time to ask all of you, to donate any of those unwanted Christmas gifts, birthday gifts, Easter gifts or indeed, anything else! We will be holding various fundraising events this year and all of course going towards helping us raise and reach, our £70,000 target! All of course in aid of the car park upgrade. We know we can do it!

Paul Davenport

Go Fund Me link:

<https://gofund.me/4c6c7f45>

## SARAH DAVIES

We were shocked and saddened to learn of the untimely death of Sarah Davies in Torbay Hospital on December 21st. A talented singer, dancer and actress, as a teenager in the 80s, Sarah took the role of Gigi at the Princess Theatre for Toads SMC in the musical of the same name, before leaving the bay to study at the Webber - Douglas Academy and pursue a theatrical career. On her return, in recent times, she appeared in The Producers and White Christmas for TOPS. Her roles for Toads were also numerous and varied. She appeared in Stepping Out, Under Milkwood, some Shakespeare plays, Flat Spin, was Gwendoline in The Importance of being Earnest, and gave a memorable performance horsing around as Alfred in the Wind in the Willows. Sarah's talent and personality will be greatly missed, but no more so than by her daughter Imogen, from whom she was inseparable, and who is in our thoughts and to whom we send condolences.

## LATE NEWS

We heard that Joan Harrop died a few days ago. She was a prolific actress in Torbay and regular Wednesday Club member. She also wrote the History of the Little Theatre  
A full obituary will be included in next month's Croak.