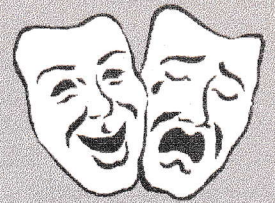




NEWSLETTER



AUGUST 1998



Officers and Committee 1998-1999

PRESIDENT
Joy Saunders

CHAIRMAN
Colin Mayes
(01935-812965)

HON. SECRETARY
Anthony Stephens
(01935-477567)

HON. TREASURER
Jessica Colson
(01747-838807)

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY
Mark Lambert
(01258-817270)

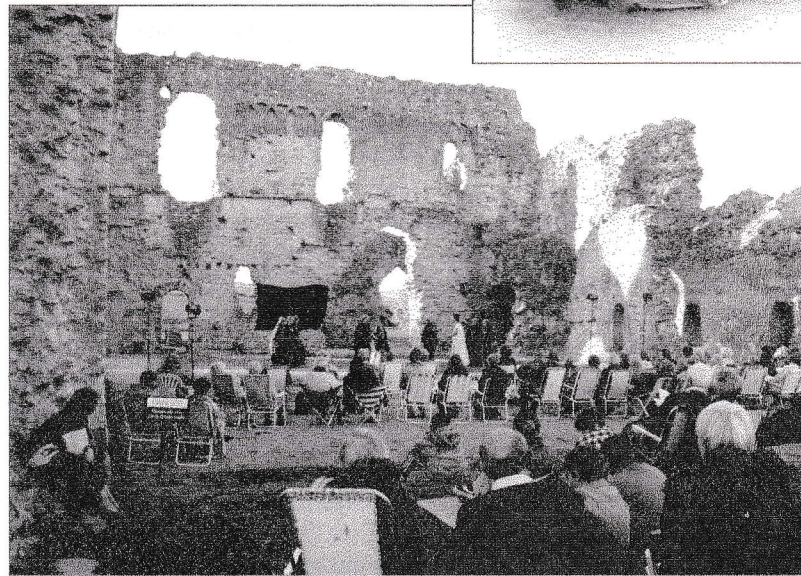
COMMITTEE
Michael Baatz, Sue Francis,
Chris Jessiman, Stuart McCreadie,
Kathy Messinger, Patricia Stewart,
Jennie Ward

In June Kieran Millar arranged a play reading of *Round and Round the Garden*, which gave us an amusing insight into what the characters of *Table Manners* were up to when they disappeared stage left.

Finally, at the AGM Jakki Gregory retired as Chairman and our thanks go to her for her tireless work over the past two years, particularly with regard to the wardrobe. This, thanks to the efforts of Jakki



Above: A dramatic moment from *Elektra* at Maumbury Rings.



Left: Sherborne Old Castle provided a superb setting for the second performance of *Elektra*.

One of the abiding memories of this summer, apart from the atrocious weather in June and July, will be that of the walls of the old Sherborne Castle reverberating to the sound of traditional Greek words and music. But more of that later. First our own news.

Last Season

Since I last wrote in April, the Players have enjoyed several evenings together. In April the first breath of spring was ushered in by a show that celebrated, in words and music, "love, romance, marriage, spring, happy ever after...and all that!". Led by Sue Francis, a cast of thousands—well, ten—entertained the audience with poetry, prose and songs from a variety of shows. A fortnight or so later Vivian Vale led a distinctly tongue-in-cheek tribute to the bard, in celebration of his 424th birthday. In May Kathy Messinger and friends gave us an interesting evening of poetry and prose by Dorset artists, all of whom knew and had been inspired by each other and their Dorset surroundings.

and her team, has been reduced, sorted and now resides in a new and spacious home at the Old Castle. Colin Mayes was elected as our new chairman, together with two new committee members, Michael Baatz and Chris Jessiman.

Forthcoming Events

The 1998/99 season will begin on Wednesday September 9th, when all are invited to foregather at the Crown. Our new chairman has arranged some entertainment and a fork supper will be provided, so please do come—and bring your cash/cheques with which to pay your subs (see note next page).

The Opening Night will be followed by "SRP—a tribute?", an entertainment presented by Chris Jessiman (if you want to find out what this is about, you will have to come); a rehearsed play reading arranged by Jessica Colson and an evening of autumnal poetry hosted by Tony and Margaret Field—see **Prompt Corner** for dates. Details of subsequent events will, as always, be published in your membership cards, so do make sure you get one.

Autumn Production

For our autumn production, as most of you already know, we hope that Jennie Ward will be directing *Salad Days*. Auditions have taken place and I had hoped to be able to publish a cast list in this newsletter. However, although Jennie now has enough people to make up most of the cast, she is still searching for a young man to take one of the lead parts. And until she finds him she cannot finalise the cast list, as this depends on getting the right balance of heights, ages, etc. The situation is getting fairly desperate, so if anyone knows of a suitable candidate please let us know immediately. If you have auditioned, you will be contacted as soon as possible. Production week begins on Saturday 28th November and performances will take place on 3rd-5th December.

Theatre of Préveza

It has to be said that when the visit of the Theatre of Préveza was first broached to the committee, it was not without some misgivings that we agreed to go ahead with the plan. In the event, however, our fears were

proved to have been groundless and the whole thing can truthfully be said to have been a resounding success. I should apologise here for not having mentioned it in the last Newsletter. My only excuse is that at the time the event seemed somewhat distant and it thus slipped my mind.

As the time drew nearer the potential problems seemed to increase rather than decrease; distance and language problems made it hard to communicate effectively. However, by the time our visitors arrived venues, accommodation and a programme of entertainment had all been arranged most successfully by Tony Stephens (henceforth to be known as 'Mr Tony'), Kathy Messinger and Jakki Gregory and the success of the visit was in no small part due to these three. My own contribution was as 'technical backup', which in the event meant supplying a tent, and some basic sound and lighting equipment.

One of our initial misgivings concerned the fact that they were to perform *Elektra* entirely in Greek. Would audiences come to such a production, and if they did, would they have any idea of what was going on? Again, we need not have worried. The group provided an excellent translation that members of the audience could follow if they wished and even without this the sheer power of the performances was enough to keep everyone glued to the action. Most notable was the performance of 19-year old Dora (Theadora) Beka as Elektra. Mally and I got to know Dora very well, as we had the privilege of being her hosts, and we discovered that not only is she a very talented actress but also possesses great personal

MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS

The membership fee remains at £8.00 (£1.00 students). As usual, subs are due **on or before the Opening Night**. Please would all those wishing to maintain their membership pay up promptly. Late payment does make keeping track of members more difficult. Unfortunately we are not clairvoyant and have to assume that if you do not pay your sub you do not wish to retain your membership. **If we do not receive a your membership fee you will cease to get Newsletters after October.** Last year there were members who only remembered to pay in January! If you cannot attend the Opening Night, I will be glad to receive your contribution by post (Ridge Farm, King's Stag, Sturminster Newton, Dorset DT10 2AU)

Reminder: Membership of APS is mandatory for all casts and backstage teams of our productions, for insurance purposes and in order to be fair to existing APS members.



Above: The town hall and waterfront, Préveza.

Right: The theatre at Nikopolis.



charm. I was truly amazed that such a delightful girl could maintain such a stream of venomous invective for so long.

Dora was ably backed by the rest of the 20-strong troupe. Many people have commented on the audibility of every member of the cast and the combination of powerful acting, music and singing made the whole performance highly atmospheric. The audiences at both venues appeared to have enjoyed themselves very much, judging by the comments I overheard afterwards. About 30 people attended the show at Maumbury Rings in Dorchester, but over 90 were present at Sherborne Castle the following night; not the numbers that the Theatre of Préveza is used to as you will learn, but given the circumstances in Dorset, they were as good as we could expect, if not better.

The weather, too was, in the main, quite kind to us. Both nights were cold, but at least the rain held off. Tuesday night in Dorchester was dull and grey, and due to a late start a rapid erection of lights during the last two acts was called for. On the Wednesday night at Sherborne Castle the sun even shone, and the lights, rigged in advance this time, became superfluous.

Socially, the occasion was also a great success. Speaking personally, I found our Greek visitors delightful to have around and I'm sure that most if not all of the hosts felt the same way. Many thanks, incidentally, to all those who acted as hosts and took the time and trouble to get their visitors to the various meeting points at the appointed times. During their brief stay our visitors were taken to Weymouth and Longleat, which they appeared to have enjoyed very much. Gerald Pitman's tour of Sherborne was also a great success. Not least of the social side of things were the sessions in the Crown, which got quite lively at times. And the party on the last night went with a tre-

mendous swing. Many thanks to Tim Messinger for the disco and to all those who provided food and helped, particularly Ann Russell, Elsie Lombard and Eve Snell for their sterling work in the kitchen..

Prompt Corner

At the Crown Inn, 7.30 p.m.

Wednesday 9th September

Opening Night

Fork supper

The Chairman entertains

The Crown Inn, 7.30 p.m.

Friday 25th September

SRP – a tribute?

presented by Chris Jessiman

The Crown Inn, 7.30 p.m.

Thursday 22nd October

A rehearsed play reading

Arranged by Jessica Colson

Thursday 5th November

Autumn Poetry

Hosted by Tony and Margaret Field

Bring your favourite seasonal poetry to read.

The overall success of the visit was clearly demonstrated by the many fond farewells that took place as the group left on the Friday morning. We were sad to see them go and they were obviously sorry to be leaving. Every one of them insisted that we should make our way out to Prèveza next year.

Prèveza 1999

So that is the challenge. I have to say that from the postcards I have seen Prèveza looks very tempting. It lies right on the tip of a peninsular about 2 hours drive south of Corfu. The town itself is a typical Greek fishing port/market town with a thriving tourist industry. The houses come right down to the waterfront and 'idyllic' seems to be a good description. The theatre is a wonderful, ancient amphitheatre about ¼ mile outside the town. The Theatre of Prèveza normally expect audiences of up to 600, and an audience of 200 is regarded as small!

I have heard comments to the effect that, 'We have so many problems casting plays to perform in Sherborne, how on earth can we hope to put together a production to take to Greece? But if we start organising things early enough it may, perhaps, be possible, particularly if we were to perform the same play as our spring or autumn production.'

Obviously, the first thing to do is to choose a play. Clearly it has to be one that has a reasonably large cast and it must also contain a high element of drama; a play that, like *Elektra*, has characters and visual impact that transcend any language barriers. Possibilities that I have heard suggested so far include *The Tempest*, *Twelve Night*, *Salad Days* and *The Crucible*. Our Greek friends have suggested an English comedy, but not Shakespeare. However, most English come-

The sad news at the start of this season is that Queenie Coles (née Southcombe) one of our oldest life members, died earlier this year. In fact, Queenie was one of our founder members—she appeared as Jean Everard in *Tons of Money*, the play that launched the Players in 1934. Fifty years later in 1984 she took a small part in Gerald Pitman's production of *Quality Street*. Unfortunately, I have not been able to discover which productions she took part in between these dates, but I am sure that she must have played a number of roles and I do know that she took a keen interest in the players throughout her life.



Queenie Southcombe and Fred B. Alcock in *Tons of Money*.

M.L.

dies that have a high visual element are farces and it occurs to me that a Greek amphitheatre might not be the ideal setting for a British farce. Alternatively, how about a Comedia dell'arte play, such as Carlo Goldoni's *A Servant of two Masters*? Do you have any ideas? If so the Committee will be delighted to hear about them. If we do manage to arrange something we can be sure of a warm welcome and an excellent time in Greece.

As a footnote to all this, you will have realised that a venture of this sort was not without cost. The Greeks paid their own fares to get here, but thereafter everything was funded from our end. The total bill came to £1121; thanks, incidentally, to all those who provided food, hospitality and services for free, without which the bill

would have been considerably higher. The costs have to some extent been offset by funds received; cash collected at the performances and party (voluntary contributions, sale of programmes and raffle) amounted to £211 and the Douzelage organisation is contributing another £200. There may be a little more to come, as our Secretary is still approaching other local organisations cap in hand, but it looks as though the net cost to us will be about £600-£710. And worth every penny I say, as it not only gave us a lot of fun but has also done a lot for our standing in the local community.

If anyone has any further comments to make about any of this, do let me know and I will be happy to pass them on.

The Boy With A Cart

Another of this summer's achievements, of course, was Margaret Field's production of *The Boy with a Cart*. This was not strictly an APS production and indeed it was independently organised and financed. However, in the event not many people from the Churches came forward and Margaret's cast consisted mostly of members of The Players. Margaret had some difficulty in finding young men (where have I heard that story before?!) and having cast Colin Hart in the title role she had to alter some of the other parts so that they could be played by more mature gentlemen. From what I can gather the whole thing was a bit touch and go at one point and so it must have been all the more gratifying when it turned out to be great success. I was not able to see it myself, but I understand that the production turned out very well and that they played to almost full houses on all four nights. Report has it that audiences enjoyed the play immensely, so congratulations to all concerned.

See you all, I hope, on September 9th.

Mark Lambert

Editor's note

Observant readers will have noticed that the banner and layout of the Newsletter have undergone minor changes. No reason really, except that I got bored with the old layout after three years, added to which I have a new desktop publishing programme, which meant starting from scratch anyway. Accolades are welcome, but complaints should be sent to Peter Mandelson, c/o The Millennium Dome, Near(ish) the Meridian, Greenwich. I'm sure he will be interested to hear from you.

Your contributions welcome

When I first took over the production of the APS Newsletter three years ago, I suggested that members might like to submit contributions. The appeal fell on stony ground and so for the last two years I have bullied few people into writing pieces about directing and acting, which I believe have helped to make this a more interesting publication. So far this year I have not approached anyone in particular. Instead I would like once again to ask you for voluntary contributions. Perhaps you have ideas for future productions or events or ideas about how to promote The Players and achieve larger audiences. You may feel you have ideas on acting, directing, backstage or production that could be useful to others. Maybe you have seen a play that you would like to review or you may have an interesting anecdote to tell—something you came across on holiday, perhaps. Or a photograph. Or you may simply want to get a particular gripe off your chest. Anything, in fact, that you think might possibly be of interest to other members.

Being a little cynical by nature, I suspect that this appeal will, as before, elicit no response. There's a challenge now, so why not surprise me and rise to it!

ML