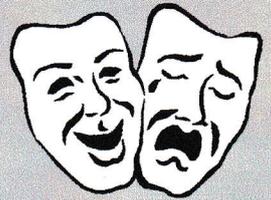




NEWSLETTER



APRIL 2002

I always have to think hard to come up with a suitably topical or apposite first paragraph. This time, as you can see, I have failed miserably. So I will just get on with the rest of the Newsletter.



Hotel Paradiso

This was not an easy play to put on. A large cast, combined with a complicated, movable set and an enormous amount of fast-moving stage business, made it a daunting prospect for the Director, cast and crew. Indeed, things were a bit 'touch-and-go' as production week began, but due to the dedication and hard work of everyone involved, it all worked very well in the performances, which were much enjoyed, particularly on the Friday night.

When so many people have put in so much hard work, it is, I know, a little invidi-

ous to single out only one or two—and I have made mistakes in the past (see below). But nothing daunted I do feel that two people deserve special mention. First, it should be said that it was not Tony Birks-Hay's original intention to take on a major part, but when David R. Smith had to drop out, he volunteered to take the lead role and I know that many will agree with me that he created a truly wonderful Benoit Pinglet. In this he was ably supported by a universally strong cast.

Backstage, the pivot of the entire production, and without whom there would have been no play at all, was, of course, Tony Manns, who took on the job of Production Manager, only to find that he also had to take on the roles of Set Builder and Stage Manager. There were times when, I believe, exhaustion nearly took its toll, but by the end of the week, when he had managed to

Gerald H.D. Pitman, MBE, FRSA

Gerald Pitman lived, with the exception of his National Service years, in Sherborne and for Sherborne, his only regret being that he wasn't born here, his family being in south London when he arrived. But he made up for that unfortunate lapse by being baptised in the Abbey, which he served loyally in one way or another for the rest of his life.

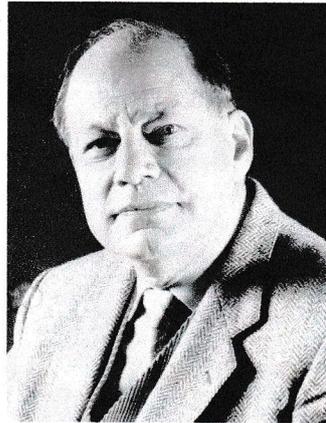
'Mr Sherborne', as he came to be known as a result of his extensive local knowledge, which he shared through his books, articles, videos and lectures, had extensive links with many organisations in the town, the Museum, the Historical Society, Gryphon School, Sherborne House and of course his long association with APS, which he first joined in the late 1950s.

For almost 40 years Gerald acted in, compèred or directed countless productions. In 1966, having appeared in the spring production, *In Good King Charles's Golden Days*, he went on to direct the autumn production of *Love's a Luxury*. Other plays that came under his talented direction were *Berkeley Square* (1969), *An Ideal Husband* (1972), *Rookery Nook* (1977), our Golden Jubilee production of *Quality Street* (1984) and *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1991). His final appearance on stage was in 1995, with a typically scene-stealing cameo performance as Sir Charles Marlow in *She Stoops to Conquer*.

Always an active member, Gerald served as Chairman of APS from 1972 to 1974 and as a Committee Member from 1977 to 1980. In 1988, on the death of Fred Alcock, he was elected our President, handing over to Joy Saunders in 1993 when his other commitments became too heavy.

Such was Gerald's commitment to the community that the Town Council granted him a Civic Honour, the first awarded to an individual citizen, in 1998 and the following year he was awarded the MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours, also for services to the community.

A great loss to the town and The Players, Gerald Pitman died on February 11th aged 71 years.



Tony Field and Mark Lambert

Prompt Corner

All events at 7.30 pm in the Clubroom

Thursday 11th April

Director's Meeting

Directors present to the Committee their ideas for for 2003 productions.

Wednesday & Thursday 17th & 18th April

A Rehearsed Play Reading

Presented by Margaret Dixon

Friday 10th May

Nightingales Sing

Another evening of music with your resident folk group

Wednesday 22nd May

Fish and Chip Quiz Evening

Arranged by David and Jenny Peet

Tuesday 4th June

1940s Musical evening

Arranged by Sue Francis and Angela Lindley, assisted by Elsie Lombard

Thursday 20th June

An unrehearsed play reading

Arranged by Tony and Margaret Field

get things running smoothly backstage he was seen to smile and crack a joke or two. I know that he does not want to repeat the experience, but we hope that after a well-earned rest he won't hold the unfortunate circumstance of his triple role against us. I know that I speak for everyone when I say that Tony's marathon effort was much admired and appreciated, as was all the extremely hard work put in by everyone backstage.

The final figures are not yet in, but a large total audience (over 400) and a production team that kept expenses down to a very moderate level has meant that we have probably made a profit of around £800 on this production, which is a figure we haven't come close to achieving for an indoor production since autumn 1997. John Sutherland-Smith likened producing *Hotel Paradiso* to climbing a mountain. But he and his cast and team made it to the top and as he said "the view was good". Congratulations John on a daunting task well-executed.

Recognition issues

It has recently become apparant that some people feel that they do not get sufficient recognition for the work they do during a production, either in the programme or a subse-

quent Newsletter. This is particularly true of those who assist with set building.

Taking the Newsletter aspect of this first, it is rarely feasible to acknowledge everyone's contribution. And, given that we don't (I hope) do what we do just for the recognition, I doubt if many of you would want me attempt to do so. I try to see fair play but I do also make mistakes (memory problems!), for which I apologise. And, I'm afraid that as the editor/writer I do reserve the right to make editorial decisions on my own. I have in the past been taken to task for some decisions or omissions, but I have to say that, while I accept other people's viewpoint, I tend to resist attempts to influence what I write and generally stand by my decisions.

Regarding the programme, there was a policy decision made some years ago that only the main set designer/builder would be listed under the heading 'Production Team'. The reason for this was that on every occasion there are a number of people who help with constructing the set, particularly during the first weekend of production week, and a full list of helpers can get ridiculously long if it includes everyone who lifts a flat or bangs a nail in. And if we are going to include only some people, where do we draw the line? Unless we include everyone, it is quite possible that someone will feel unappreciated. What do you think? Some feedback on this subject might be useful.

Recent events

Since the last Newsletter John Sutherland-Smith completed his series of improvisation workshops, which those of us who attended found very stimulating and enjoyable. Acting is sometimes about being prepared to make a complete prat of oneself and John's workshops gave us all plenty of opportunity to do just that. In the process, however, we learned much about the relationships that can exist between characters on stage.

The annual dinner in February at The Sherborne Hotel was a very pleasant occasion, well organised for the second year running by Tony Birks-Hay. The guest speaker was David Brierley from the RSC, who gave us an interesting, if a little long-winded, account of the activities of the company at Stratford and elsewhere. At the next committee meeting Tony apologised for the fact that the speaker was not as amusing as he had hoped and told us that he hoped to do better for us next year, perhaps at a venue with more atmosphere and a more interesting menu.

As you know the folk evening had to be postponed, but Jill Hudson saved the day by bringing forward her planned unrehearsed play reading. Some 18 members enjoyed reading J.B. Priestley's *Dangerous Corner*, a psychological thriller with some (perhaps unintentionally) hilarious twists and turns of plot in the final act.

Plays

Absurd Person Singular (Ayckbourn)
The Admirable Crichton (Barrie)
Albert Make us Laugh (Chinn)
Alice in Wonderland
Amadeus
Anastasia (Maurette)
Aristocrats (Friel)
The Aspern Papers (James)
Barefoot In The Park (Simon)
Break A Leg (Hepple)
Candida (Shaw)
The Chalk Garden (Bagnold)
The Cherry Orchard (Chekhov)
Chorus of Disapproval (Ayckbourn)
Colomb (Anouilh)
The Corn is Green (Williams)
The Country Wife (Wycherly)
The Crucible (Miller)
Dangerous Corner (Priestley)
Deep Blue Sea (Rattigan)
Dial M for Murder (Knott)
The Dolls' House (Ibsen)
Donkey's Years (Frayn)
The Dresser (Harwood)
The Duenna (Sheridan)
Fallen Angels (Coward)
Hay Fever (Coward)
Hedda Gabler (Ibsen)
The Importance of Being Ernest (Wilde)
The Lady's Not For Burning (Anouilh)
Lady Windermere's Fan (Wilde)
The Linden Tree (Priestley)
Lloyd George Knew my Father
London Assurance (Boucicault)
Love in A Mist (Parker)
Loyalties (Galsworthy)
A Man For All Seasons (Bolt)
The Magistrate (Pinero)
Major Barbara (Shaw)
The Man With a Load of Mischief (Dukes)
The Merchant of Venice (Shakespeare)
Mother Courage (Brecht)
Noises Off (Frayn)
The Old Bachelor (Congreve)
On Golden Pond
Outward Bound (Vane)
Plaza Suite (Simon)
Present Laughter (Coward)
Pygmalion (Shaw)
Relatively Speaking (Ayckbourn)
The Rivals (Sheridan)
Romanoff and Juliet (Ustinov)
St Stephen's Green (Philips)
School for Scandal (Sheridan)
The Seagull (Chekhov)
The Second Mrs Tanqueray (Pinero)
Separate Tables (Rattigan)
Sergeant Musgrove's Dance (Arden)
The Servant of Two Masters (Goldoni)

Directors Meeting

On Thursday April 11th there will be the annual directors' meeting to which the committee invite all directors and potential directors to present their suggestions for plays for the year 2003. If you have any inclination to direct a play, please come to this meet-

She Would If She Could (Etherege)
The Signalman's Apprentice (Phelan)
The Snow Queen
Take Away The Lady (Chinn)
They Came to A City (Priestley)
Time and The Conways (Priestley)
Vivat! Vivat Regina (Bolt)
A Voyage Round My Father (Mortimer)
Whose Life is it Anyway
The Wild Duck (Ibsen)
Wild Oats (O'Keefe)
The Winslow Boy (Rattigan)
The Woman in Black (Hill/Mallatratt)
84 Charing Cross Road (Hanff)

There is also, of course the possibility of repeating a play we have done before (see the list on the clubroom noticeboard).

Experienced Directors

Margaret Dixon (01963 210353)
Tony Field (01945 815427)
Margaret Field (01945 815427)
Jakki Gregory (01935 850708)
Patricia Harris (01963 210462)
Jason Hepple (01935 817956)
Geoff Lewis (01300 345521)
Fizz Lewis (01300 345521)
Gill Manns (01935 474206)
Stuart McCreadie (01963 210548)
Eve Snell (01935 812933)
John Sutherland-Smith (01935 815135)
Jennie Ward (01935 817567)

Some of the above may be interested in helping a less experienced person. Note that some people you might have expected to see on this list have indicated that they have retired from any form of directing or have moved away.

Less experienced/ potential directors

Claire Axelson (01945 83330)
Tony Birks-Hay (01935 850511)
Colin Hart (01935 872471)
Patrick Knox (01935 891267)
Tamsin Lambert (01258 817270)
Katie Mottram (01935 812003)
Jenny Peet (01963 220333)
Jonathan Stark (01935 824844)
Michael Welland (01935 814661)

The above are members who have indicated an interest in directing, but have not yet directed an APS production. Some of them may be interested in having experienced help or in assisting a more experienced director. This is not necessarily a definitive list. There may others who can be persuaded to try some directing.

ing and let us know of your ideas. And even if you do not yourself wish to direct, but know of a play that you would like to see APS produce, why not suggest the idea to some of our directors.

If anyone is looking for an idea for a play, there is a list of plays above that have been

Skilled and unskilled help needed

Please read this section right through to the end and think seriously if you or anyone you know can help.

The Players are currently short of people with certain skills. First and foremost we need new **Set Builders**. This is, it has to be said, a major task and of the four members who have built recent sets, three are over 65 and have indicated that they don't feel able to do it very often in the future and the fourth, although slightly younger, is usually heavily involved in other aspects of the production.

Basic DIY skills are all that are needed in the first instance. The processes of planning and constructing a set are quite easy to learn and the best way to discover how our system works is to begin by helping someone else build a set, being there on occasions during the initial preparation stages in the Castle room and continuing to assist throughout the set building process in the Digby Hall.

Without set-builders we are going to find it very difficult to stage productions in the future, so if you are willing to help bail us out of this predicament, or can think of someone who might like to join us in order to build sets, please let us know.

Similarly, we currently only have one lighting designer and one sound engineer and the committee rightly feels that we would be better off with more. The **lighting designer** needs to be someone who can not only design a lighting plan for a play, but also has the skill and knowledge to be able to assemble the lighting system, program a lighting desk and mark up a lighting script. If necessary, the lighting can then be controlled by a technician who runs the lighting cues according to the script.

The **sound engineer** usually has to obtain, record and modify sound effects, install required sound system and plan how the sound controls must be used in order to produce the effects on cue. Minidisc and computer technology are currently the best means of producing sound effects, but cassette tapes and CDs might still be suitable on some occasions. Again the sound desk can be run by a separate technician if necessary.

Lighting and sound skills can be learned by anyone with sufficient interest and basic technical ability. Again, please let us know if you have any inclination to learn such skills or can think of anyone else who would.

Unskilled help is also required. When we move into the Digby Hall (or any other venue) the more people who turn up to help the better. Initially, the work consists of helping to move the necessary equipment (lights, sound equipment, flats and sundry set-building items) into the Digby Hall. This is followed by assembling the flats into a rough set and roping them together. Slightly more skilled work is then involved as the set must then be firmed up (using braces and battens), while doors are fixed and adjusted. The set may then have to be wallpapered, or least have wallpaper strips placed over the abutting edges of the flats. Next, some painting is usually necessary (strips, skirting board, doors, scenic backgrounds etc) some of which can benefit from the work of the more artistic among us. Finally, we usually fix black curtain round the top. All this takes time and the set is rarely finished before the Sunday evening—often the work continues for several days. The more people who can help, the quicker the work goes and the more the Set Builder enjoys life! Please note that being a member of the cast does not mean that you are not required during the set-building stage; on the contrary it is much appreciated if members of the cast help with moving in, set construction and getting out after the show.

Finally, of course, there is front-of-house. Again, it is not always easy to find people to take on the job of **Front of House Manager**, but it is an important job and requires only basic organisational skills. FOH Managers do not normally have too much difficulty in finding people to **usher** and/or **sell programmes**, but there does seem to be a greater reluctance to help out with **coffees**. OK, we know that this is not a glamorous job, but someone has to do it and if you have enjoyed being a member of a cast or production team for one production are not involved in the current one, it would be much appreciated if you could take a turn at helping to do coffees on at least one night. It really isn't much to ask; just remember that others did it for you. ML

suggested by various people as potential productions for APS to stage. This is not in any way a definitive list, nor does it represent the ideas of the current or any earlier committee.

Some of our more experienced directors have let it be known that they would be willing to use the services of an assistant director. There are also those who have little or no experience but who have ex-

pressed an interest in directing with the help of a more experienced director.

It might therefore be a good plan if such people were to get in touch with one another, and to assist with this I have included lists of experienced directors and less experienced/potential directors. Please excuse me if I have placed your name under the wrong heading; just explain to anyone who calls you that the Newsletter editor has got it wrong yet again!

Wanted: Spare buttons

Pauline Tillett, our invaluable new costume supremo, is on the hunt for such things as buttons and trimmings. So if you have anything of this sort going spare, please do let her know. Call her on 01935 381618 or e-mail pauline.tillett@southsomerset.gov.uk

Other forthcoming events

Due to illness, Margaret Dixon is, sadly, unable to arrange the planned rehearsed play readings on 17th and 18th April, which are therefore **cancelled** and at this short notice it has not been possible to replace these evenings with anything else.

Nightingales Sing will now take place on Friday May 10th. This evening of folk music will this year take place in the clubroom, which is easier in some respects than The Crown. But those of you who feel that folk music requires the consumption of alcoholic beverages need not fear; wine and beer will be provided at a reasonable cost.

A few people have mentioned that they would like to be involved in some way with the folk evening. However, we do have to keep the folk group relatively small in order to make proper rehearsal possible. This year, however, there will be an opportunity during the evening for 'floor' singers to perform one or two songs if they wish. There is no need to give any notice of your intention to perform until the evening itself—unless you require accompaniment, in which case please let us know what folk song you wish to sing.

The **Fish and Chip Quiz Night** is this year to be hosted on Wednesday 22nd May by David and Jenny Peet. We look forward to trying to answer their no doubt fiendish questions.

The **1940s evening**, postponed from February, will now take place on Tuesday 4th June. At present we do not know of any serious clash with Jubilee week events. Sue Francis, Angela Lindley and Elsie Lombard look forward to seeing you there.

As a final note, it has not escaped the Committee's notice that things were a bit fraught backstage at times during the latter stages of the last production. The Committee have taken notice of the problems that occurred and we will do our best to ensure that they do not occur again.

Both acting and backstage work are inevitably stressful on some occasions and everyone reacts differently to stress and criticism; misunderstandings are not uncommon. It is, however, worth remembering that we do what we do for fun, with the aim of staging the best drama we can. As long as all concerned retain a sense of proportion and a sense of humour, even in the face what appears at the time to be adversity, then harmony and creativity should prevail. ML