

NOISES OFF

90th Anniversary Edition



1934 - 2024

On November 19th 1934, when *Tons of Money* opened at the Carlton Theatre in Newland, it seems unlikely that the cast and crew were even contemplating the future of APS. But here we are, 90 years later, celebrating

this anniversary, and over 180 productions, with *The Importance of Being Earnest* (about which more later) and *Loads of Lolly*, Martin Williams' 'radio' adaptation of *Tons of Money*. I feel sure that if our founding members were still with us today, they would be highly delighted, and very proud of their legacy.

Above: Patrick Knox (Chesterman), Robert Brydges (George), Samantha Elgar (Jean), Richard Culham (Aubrey), Sally Matthews (Louise), Roger Chadbourne (Sprules), Bev Taylor-Wade (Simpson) and Adrian Harding (Henery) in *Loads of Lolly* 2024.

Below left: Queenie Southcombe (Jean), Fred Alcock (Aubrey) and Peggy Morris (Louise) in *Tons of Money* 1934

Below right: Christine Yardley (Jean), Andrew Cross (Aubrey) and Jane Pitts (Louise) in *Tons of Money* 2009.



CARLTON
SHERBORNE

Monday, Nov. 19th & during week
MON. TUES. WED.
AMATEUR PERFORMANCE
of the well-known Farce
TONS OF MONEY

Proceeds will be given to THE YEATMAN HOSPITAL

The Cast will include—
FRED. B. ALCOCK PEGGY MERRICK W. J. CORDY
R. G. NICHOLLS MURIEL DAVIS GWEN PETERS
GEO. ELLIOTT A. HUGH SAWTELL
ERNEST HULME QUEENIE SOUTHCOMBE
and the play will be produced by M. M. WELCHER

Incidental music played by the Sherborne & Thornford Orchestra

Evening Performances at 8, and a Matinee Wednesday at 2.30
PRICES OF ADMISSION (inc. tax) 2/- 2/6 3/6
and a few unreserved seats at 1/3

Tickets may be obtained and seats reserved, after Nov. 7th, at R. J. Shaw's, Cheap Street, Sherborne

Loads of Lolly featured eight of our talented actors having a wonderful time hamming it up for all they were worth with dummy microphones and false beards, accompanied by some memorable sound effects; how Aubrey survived the explosion, flying through the air and finally crashing through the roof is anyone's guess. And the 'kiss', well, what can I say -- Aubrey's talent in that department is clearly unparalleled!

Direction of *Loads of Lolly* in the end was largely by Adrian Harding and the rest of the cast, as sadly Martin was unable to continue

CARLTON THEATRE
SHERBORNE

TONS OF MONEY

For THE YEATMAN HOSPITAL

PRICE 6d.

due to illness. We wish him all the very best and look forward to seeing him back with us when he is sufficiently recovered.

So when did it all begin? Back in the summer of 1934, sitting outside the back door of the Digby Road Church Hall during a particularly unsuccessful production of *Rope*, with "a scratch cast in a scratch show working in wretched conditions to a



Above: Tons of Money 1934.

From left: Miss Benita Mullet (Gwen Peters), Louise Allington (Peggy Merrick), Aubrey Allington (Fred Alcock), George Maitland (Hugh Sawtell), Jean Everard (Queenie Southcombe), James Chesterman (R.J. Nicholls).

wretchedly small audience", Fred Alcock, our founder, was thinking "There must be a better way....I know what I want. I want to try, however ineffectively, to bring a professional approach to an amateur show".

Over the next few weeks Fred gathered together a Producer (the role we now refer to as the Director) in the form of Maurice Welcher, and a group of actors he had met though previous productions. Finance was organised by patronage and selling advertising space in the programme, and rehearsals started in October in a small room in Abbey Road. Fred and John Elliott, the Stage Manager, hired the cheapest set they could and made it look "as good as possible with lighting and striking furniture". The publicity "employed every device we could think of to build the show up to a social

9 Futures
"TONS OF MONEY"
by Will Evans and "Valentine"
(Performed by permission of Samuel French, Ltd.)

John Elliott
Characters in order of Appearance.

Sprules (a Butler)	W. J. Cordy.
Simpson (a Parlourmaid)	Muriel Davis.
Miss Benita Mullett	Gwen Peters.
Louise Allington	Peggy Merrick.
Aubrey Henry Maitland Allington	Fred B. Alcock.
Giles (a gardener)	George Elliott.
James Chesterman (a Solicitor)	R. G. Nicholls.
Jean Everard	Queenie Southcombe.
Henery	Ernest Hulme.
George Maitland	A. Hugh Sawtell.

John H. Elliott
The Play produced by M. M. Welcher.

John H. Elliott



*Above: Tons of Money 1934.
From left: Miss Benita Mullet (Gwen Peters), Louise Allington (Peggy Merrick), Aubrey Allington (Fred Alcock), Jean Everard (Queenie Southcombe).*

occasion". Fred remarks in his book *As It Was*, "I may not have been proud of all of our devious methods of persuading people to come to the theatre, but I was certainly relieved when I could see that the idea was catching on".

Starring Fred himself as Aubrey, the 1934 production opened on Monday 19th November and played for three nights, with a matinée on the Wednesday (early closing day in those days). It was attended by capacity audiences and raised the huge sum of £101 (nearly £5,500 in today's money) for the Yeatman Hospital.

That might have been the end of it, but it wasn't. One year later Fred and his team found themselves preparing another show. They turned back to the *Tons of Money* programme to see how they had described the company. And there it was: "presented by Amateur Players of Sherborne". It was not at that time meant to be a title, just a modest description of 'some amateur players'. But it stuck and the name came to mean a great deal to Fred, as it has to all of us.

You may wonder why Fred styled himself as Fred B. Alcock. In a programme for a D'Oyly Carte

production of *The Mikado* he found the name of his hero, the actor Henry Lytton, as 'Henry A. Lytton' and Fred became Fred B. Alcock thereafter. I never met him, but there is no doubt in my mind that he was a forceful personality -- and, I suspect, something of an autocrat. For a while it was more or less he and he alone who ran APS, delegating tasks to others chosen by him. And I think it was with some reluctance that he consented to the formation of an electable APS committee in 1947. Among the first Committee Members were Maurice Welcher, W.J. Cordy, Meg Hulme and Jack Dodge. Meg and Jack were still members when I joined in 1992, as was Fred's daughter, Joy Saunders, who was always passionate about her father's legacy. For some time she was one of the driving forces behind APS and you can read more about her in the August 2004 Newsletter.

Fred left Sherborne in 1947, by which time APS had presented several more productions. Since Fred's departure, APS has had several homes and has seen many members come and go. But the continuity provided by an electable Committee has been an

*Below: Tons of Money 2009.
From back row left: George Pearson (Giles, a gardener), Zac Graham (Henery), Colin Hart (George Maitland), Adrian Thorpe (Sprules), Gilly Savage (Simpson), Derek Williams (James Chesterman), Christine Yardley (Jean Everard), Andrew Cross (Aubrey Maitland), Jane Pitts (Louise Maitland), Jennie Ward (Miss Benita Mullet).*



important factor in ensuring the survival of the society. You can find a summary of the ensuing years on the 'About Us' page of our website and a full list of productions on the 'Past Productions' page. In most years two productions a year were performed over three nights, and from 1972 all APS productions were staged in the Digby Hall.

November 2009 saw our 75th Anniversary and to celebrate that we presented a revival of *Tons of Money*. Most of the 2009 cast are still with us: Jane Pitts (Louise Allington), Gilly Savage (Simpson) and Adrian Thorpe (Sprules), remain as APS members; Andrew Cross (Aubrey Allington) and



An embarrassing moment for Aubrey Allington (Andrew Cross) on returning home to Louise (Jane Pitts) without his clothes after a swim in the river.

Tons of Money 2009.

A shocking encounter for Henery (Zac Graham) and George Maitland (Colin Hart).



Colin Hart (George Maitland), still live locally too. The production was accompanied by an exhibition in the Digby Hall bar of photos, cast lists and reviews of APS shows to that date, and two of the exhibition boards were displayed in the Sherborne Studio Theatre at our 90th Anniversary celebration on November 29th this year.

The production didn't win any awards, but we all had a great deal of fun, and there were even some carry-overs to 2024; the door bell and explosion used in *Loads of Lolly* were the exactly same sound effects created for *Tons of Money* 15 years ago.

Since then APS has continued to progress. We went through a couple of sticky patches in 2012 and 2014, when we were, unfortunately, only able to present one production in the year instead of the usual two. But we recovered quickly and by then, thanks to Malcolm Cockburn, we had the 'Tin Tabernacle' as our base. Since 2018, when the building became the Sherborne Studio Theatre, we have gone from strength to strength. Membership of The Players is at an all-time high, four high quality productions a year is now the norm and, thanks to Malcolm's extreme generosity, the theatre now belongs to APS. We continue to maintain Fred's original ethos of presenting plays in as professional a way as possible, and I hope he would be proud of us. All in all, the future looks bright.

In addition to *Loads of Lolly*, of course, we celebrated our 90th year with our production of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, directed by John Crabtree. I'm not exactly sure how fast hot cakes sell, but ticket sales for this production were at least on a par with that, and we were completely sold out by the end of the first week. I ascribe this to a) the choice of a very popular play, b) John's richly-deserved reputation as a director, c) the reputation of APS in general for excellence, and d) the phenomenal publicity afforded

by the leading article in the November edition of The Sherborne Times -- if you haven't yet read that, there are copies available in the Sherborne Studio Theatre.

You can read Robert Brydges' review of *The Importance of Being Earnest* on the next page. Meanwhile, I wish you all a very Happy Christmas, and confidently look forward to a prosperous New Year for APS.

Mark Lambert (President)

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST



There were panicked emails going out within 36 hours of tickets for Earnest going on sale – BUY NOW OR YOU’LL MISS IT! Many of APS’s regular patrons had to settle for a place on the waiting list for returns. There was wailing and gnashing of teeth as adjudicators for Rose Bowl and NODA - and even members of the APS Production Committee who had chosen the play - failed to book tickets in time. Some very welcome advance publicity in the Sherborne Times triggered the stampede, but a John Crabtree production of the UK’s most popular comedy was always going to be a sell-out.

And what a treat it was for those fortunate enough to get tickets! The Director had wisely chosen to preserve the period setting of the original, and let Jack, Algy and the others pronounce, pose, and preen themselves every bit

as absurdly as the text demands; but always maintaining discipline and staying in character, never teetering into self-indulgent panto mode.

We start in Algernon’s flat, with Lane the butler, played in appropriately deadpan fashion by Mike Stanley who delivered

every self-effacing line heavy with implied judgement on his drone-like master:

‘ALGERNON: Good heavens! Lane! Why are there no cucumber sandwiches? I ordered them specially.

LANE: There were no cucumbers in the market this morning, sir... not even for ready money.’

Richard Jones’ Jack/Ernest begins as a model of self-restraint, buttoned-up in morning coat and spats, but he quickly gets rattled as Algy prises open his double life with a cigarette case. Here — and again in Act 2 when he appears at his country house in deep mourning for an entirely fictitious brother — Richard expertly conveyed Jack’s transition from pomposity to panic to huge comic effect.





In both cases, Algernon is only too delighted to puncture Jack's façade and bring him down to earth. Chris Williamson was having the time of his life as Algy — fizzing with energy, naughtiness and joie de vivre in a blazer vibrant enough to induce migraine.

Enter Tanya Ogden as Lady Bracknell — she gave us a commanding performance, all the funnier for playing it straight — too many actors go way over the top in trying to out-do Edith Evans' Lady B — not Tanya. She dominated the stage without striving to do so, entitlement evident in every finely-judged movement, facial expression and vocal inflection.

Samantha Elgar's Gwendolyn showed every sign of becoming a second Lady Bracknell once she had Jack where she wanted him — safely married and under her thumb. Her scenes with Hazel Perrett as Cecily were a delicious tennis match of feminine point-scoring, umpired by Trevor Walton as Merriman, who showed undisguised pleasure whenever Cecily delivered a winner.

Last, but far from least, we meet Cecily's very prim governess, Miss Prism (Sally Matthews, who has played different varieties of self-deceiving women in every APS show this year). Miss Prism is besotted with Patrick Knox's equally lovestruck Canon Chasuble. Wilde loved these dotty characters; Sally and Patrick loved playing them, and their infectious joy left dopey grins on many in the audience.

Earnest is a jewel of a play, every line familiar and unimprovable. It has become part of our psyche, our national DNA — a comic, class-fixated England of cucumber sandwiches and sunny afternoons which perhaps never existed, but to which we remain deeply attached. APS will continue to challenge us in future with Brecht, Miller and Beckett, but good theatre can take many forms. For a couple of hours on a Saturday afternoon in December, as Storm Darragh raged outside, the Sherborne Studio Theatre audience were transported to a simpler, happier world, under an English heaven.

Robert Brydges



DIARY DATES SHERBORNE STUDIO THEATRE

Welcome or Welcome Not

Fri 13th December, 7.30 pm

Auditions — The 39 Steps

Wed 28th January, 7.30 pm

Sun 2nd February, 2.00 pm

Hedda Gabler

Mon 24th - Sat 29th March, 7.30 pm

Dead on Cue

Fri 11th April, 7.30

Sat 12th April 2.30 pm and 7.30 pm