

Issue No 10 – Spring 2001

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

At the beginning of another year, it is time to look forward to a New Season for the Suffolk Summer Theatres. Various events are being planned for the *Friends*.

We shall hope to see as many of you as possible on Thursday, April 26th in Walberswick Village Hall at 7.30 p.m. when Charles Collingwood, from the BBC programme *The Archers*, will join us to give us a talk about his experiences. So please put this date in your diary now.

The next date will be 1st July, when we hope all *Friends* will come along to *Westons*, through the kind invitation of Jill Freud, to join us for a buffet lunch. (There is a snag perhaps in as much as we do ask you to bring a plate as you have so kindly done for the previous evening events?) Do please plan on staying for the afternoon programme which is being planned. There is a brief note about this fete on page 5 but Jill will explain all when we meet at Walberswick on 26 April.

Friends in Aldeburgh are planning a coffee morning on 13th July and further details will be found elsewhere in this newsletter.

The Management Committee, chaired by Sir Nicholas Barrington KCMG CVO, recently set up a Fund Raising Sub-committee. The members, led by Terry Oakes, have already met and it is anticipated that events will be planned for this and future years. Please do look out for further announcements. Your help and support are vital.

Our Treasurer, John Veitch, tells me that the membership is 533 and that all our 2001 subscriptions will become due on 1st April. A subscription form is enclosed with this newsletter and John will be grateful if you will complete it and send to him with your donations and subscriptions.

We shall all look forward to July, August and September when the Theatre Company will provide us with their usual excellent and rewarding entertainments and theatre performances. You will find details of the programme in this mailing.

Rather belatedly, as winter is nearly over, all good wishes to our *Friends* and thank you again for your continued support.
Margaret Chadd.

JILL WRITES

Dear *Friends*,

It is eighteen years since our first season and already our seventh year in Aldeburgh is on its way, how time flies.

However, we are definitely not running out of steam; the first innovation for 2001 is that all early bookings for Southwold will be handled from our London office. The telephoning hours are restricted to afternoons so that Carol and I can get some work done as well Please note that if you call 'out of hours' and record your number on the answer phone, we will get back to you within 24 hours. Then in May, Merwyn Cunliffe will take on the Aldeburgh bookings using the same system.

I look forward to chatting with you all between 1st March and 28th May on our special booking number (020 7723 0303) and then seeing you in person at our get-together in Walberswick on 26th April. That evening sees the launch of the *Friends'* Theatre Vouchers Scheme (see page 6 for more information). We shall also be telling you about the Fete in Walberswick on Sunday 1st July which is preceded by lunch for (and by) members.

There is just time to recover from that before our very first Aldeburgh Coffee morning on Friday 13 July. This is at 'Aldehurst' by kind permission of *Friends*, Barbara and Terry Collins. More details in April (and elsewhere in this newsletter), until then,

Best wishes
Jill

A LITTLE BIRD HAS WHISPERED THAT . . .

In October Jill will be awarded with an Honorary Doctorate in Civil Law by the University of East Anglia in recognition of all that she has done for the Arts in the region.

It is certain that Jill and her family are all thrilled at this award. It is equally certain that all her friends – including readers of this newsletter - are delighted that her dedication to the theatre and sustained efforts over the years to satisfy our drama needs have been recognised in this way. Well done, Doctor Jill!

Tony Falkingham, Associate Director, writes about the coming season's plays.

OUR EIGHTEENTH SEASON

If this is February it must be time to tell you about our exciting new season, and what a cracking start with Arnold Ridley's perennial comedy thriller **The Ghost Train**. Filmed in 1927 and 1931 it was also the inspiration for Will Hay's *Oh Mr Porter*. Ridley, best known for his role as the bumbling Mr Godfrey from *Dad's Army*, was invalided out of the army in 1917. After working for a couple of years as a small part actor at the Birmingham Rep, he found himself in charge of his father's boot and shoe business in Bath. In his spare time he wrote plays, mostly rather highbrow. **The Ghost Train** was written in a fit of pique after one of these serious dramas had been turned down by a London management. Its try-out in Brighton was a fiasco and in Ridley's own words it "fluked" into the St Martin's Theatre where its reception was not overwhelming. It was then sold to the Manager of the Garrick Theatre, where it settled down to become one of the West End's biggest successes.

The Old Ladies by Rodney Ackland was adapted from a novel by Hugh Walpole and produced at the New Theatre in 1935 by Sir John Gielgud with Edith Evans, Jean Cadell and Mary Jerrold in the cast. Ackland, a popular playwright in the 30s and 40's, if ahead of his time, was rediscovered in the 80's and his work revived by Sam Walters at his Orange Tree Theatre in Richmond. Ackland's *Absolute Hell*, retitled from an earlier play was filmed for television starring Dame Judy Dench who recreated her role in a well-received new production at the National. It is the play I've chosen to direct this season and there could well be some surprises in the casting!

In August you will be able to witness, a rare event, the premiere of a sparkling new comedy, **Kissing Cousins** by Ian Masters. Jill and I read many new plays over the

year and it is unusual for us to find a play we know without doubt that you will enjoy. The author has long experience of working in comedy including playing the lead in *No Sex Please We're British* during its long run at the Strand. In the safe hands of Richard Frost, who has produced some of the funniest moments on our stages in the last five years, you're in for a mid-season treat.

The Winslow Boy was produced 1946 at the Lyric, ran for 476 performances, winning the Ellen Terry Award and the New York Critics Award. The key role of the barrister was played by Emlyn Williams. It was made into a film in 1948 and again in 1999 with Nigel Hawthorn & Jeremy Northam. It was based on the true story of an Osborne Naval Cadet accused of stealing. The boy's family, the Archer-Shees, sued the Admiralty aided by the renowned barrister Sir Edward Carson. With its lush Edwardian setting and costumes it will make a memorable night in the theatre.

Finally a spine-chilling mixture of suspense and shocks with just the right amount of comic relief, **I'll be Back be Before Midnight** by Peter Colley, blends Agatha Christie with Alfred Hitchcock. It has many of the surprises that made *Deathtrap* such a popular choice three years ago. It was described in its reviews as "a nightmare of frightening occurrences resulting in a heartstopping ending which left the audience gasping".

All five plays are playing in both Southwold and Aldeburgh so if you've not been to one of the theatres why not give it a try. I hope you will enjoy the season.

Anthony Falkingham

TACT

Every season *Jill Freud and Company* put on Sunday Gala performances in aid of TACT – **The Actors Charitable Trust** – and have raised about £15,000 so far. TACT has three main roles: assisting the children of theatre people during crises, helping to support the families of actors who are studying further education in the arts; and providing residential and nursing care for members of the theatrical profession at Denville Hall.

An appeal was launched last year to renovate and extend Denville Hall and £4.5M is needed. So the two Gala Evenings this year will benefit this TACT initiative. Additionally, if any reader would like to make a special donation to this good cause, Jill would be delighted to pass it on.

WALBERSWICK FETE

Instead of an evening meeting at Walberswick this coming summer, we will hold a special event at *Westons* on Sunday 1 July. *Friends* will meet to socialise and to enjoy lunch before the volunteer helpers welcome the general public to the fete.

There will be more information about this event at the April meeting but *Friends* (and we hope there will be lots of you) who would like to help might like to begin now to devise stalls and other fund-raising operations. Caro Prescott will be co-ordinating this event. So if you want to help – running a stall, selling teas or marshalling cars, etc – then please get in touch with her on 01394 384615.

We hope that decent weather on the day will ensure a happy day for all *Friends* and result in the raising of a considerable sum to support the Company. So make a note in your diary and put on your thinking caps!

The Editor

SOMETHING ABOUT THE FRIENDS

We *Friends* numbered 533 in February 2001 after we had excluded a small number of members who, after a careful reminder, had not paid their last year's subscription. Naturally most live within the catchment areas of the theatres at Southwold and Aldeburgh, but we have members in USA, Belgium and Ireland. We also have 26 with London addresses, 30 in Essex and 18 in Herts.

Our "local" *Friends* - based in Suffolk and Norfolk - number 393, about 75% of the total. Analysis by post code can be misleading, because some Suffolk residents have NR (Norwich) post codes and some Norfolk ones have IP (Ipswich) codes. However, the leading numbers are all associated with towns and surrounding areas, so we can see a general picture.

Post code	Major Town	Friends
IP1-10	Ipswich	22
IP11	Felixstowe	9
IP12/13	Woodbridge	43
IP14	Stowmarket	6
IP15	Aldeburgh	33
IP16	Leiston	7
IP17	Saxmundham	23
IP18	Southwold	99
IP19	Halesworth	12
IP20	Harleston	5
IP21/22	Diss	5
IP23	Eye	2
	Other IP	2
Total IP		268
NR1 -10	Norwich	27
NR29-31	Gt. Yarmouth	7
NR32/33	Lowestoft	39
NR34	Beccles	39
NR35	Bungay	12
	Other NR	1
Total NR		125

Does the table surprise you? I didn't expect the Woodbridge figures to be so high, but the postal area also includes Framlingham and Wickham Market. Leiston membership is lower than I would have guessed. Clearly there is plenty of scope for a recruiting campaign in the IP16 area!

Jack Clayton

*When (cheekily) I invited **Paul Heiney** to pen a few words about the Suffolk Summer Theatres for our newsletter, I had no idea that he would share with us this captivating personal view. I am delighted to introduce him – in Paul's own words - as ' writer and broadcaster who lives in Suffolk and for whom the theatre season is the height of his summer '. The Editor.*

FINGERS CROSSED

I wonder where your gaze is fixed when the curtain goes up and the show begins? On the actors, probably. You're waiting for that finely-judged pause to end; the one which lasts only a beat but ensures the actor has the audience's total attention. But my eyes are elsewhere, which is no reflection on the charisma of the actors or their ability to engage my attention by their mere presence on stage. It is simply that old habits die hard.

You see I am always waiting for something to go wrong. It seems a long time ago now, but I was once a stage technician in the professional theatre, and I remember the knots in my stomach every time the curtain went up; knots as tight as a sailor could tie. I would stand in the darkened wings and watch the scenery slowly be illuminated as the curtain went up. This was the most frightening moment.

The dread was not that the scenery would fall down, which was unlikely, but that more subtle disasters might strike. Like doorknobs, which you were supposed to have fixed, come away in the actor's hand, doors swing open of their own accord, chairs collapse, taps run dry, bells don't ring.

The worst of these accidents to which I was party involved a well-respected actress who was required to cook bacon and eggs, live, on a Baby Belling as part of the show. For several nights the cooker had performed flawlessly, but on this occasion someone had kicked the plug as they rushed on stage. The only person who knew the cooker was stone cold was the poor actress who nevertheless had to perform the cooking of the eggs. Even worse, she had to eat them. That night, both eggs and bacon went down raw. She became, in my eyes, an even more respected actress after that.

She was not the only poor thespian whose career I almost brought to a premature end. One Christmas, at the old Birmingham Rep (where the names *Olivier* and *Richardson* could be found scrawled amongst the graffiti in the fly tower) the show required a set of stairs to be built so that a fairy princess (Anna Calder Marshall, actually) could emerge from beneath the stage to gasps of astonishment from the audience.

Given that I'd only been in the workshop a couple of weeks and my knowledge of carpentry was at the nailing-things-together level, I was proud to be given the task of building these treads. To be honest, the stage manager had little choice, for the chief carpenter was an old Irishman who needed to be surgically removed from his pint of Guinness before he'd lift so much as a chisel. So I built the steps and on the first night watched the leading lady safely climb them.

So far, so good. The problem arose when she had to turn and go down them. As anyone who has climbed a ladder will know, going up is easier than coming down, and in rehearsal the poor girl didn't have a crinoline dress to contend with. I fear she made a far speedier descent than she intended and may have uttered unprincess-like words on the way down. She was saved only by the open arms of an actor below, a young Mike Gambon, I think.

These disasters happen all the time in the theatre, so why do I never see them on the Southwold stage? Especially when, season after season, set designers and builders perform such acts of theatrical heroism, like staging *Noises Off*. I remember watching that play and marvelling not only at the performances but at how so much had been created on so little a stage, and how the illusion was flawless. It was a mountainous theatrical achievement built on a molehill of a stage and ran like clockwork.

What I learnt in my brief theatrical days and what we should perhaps remember in the coming season, is that creating the illusion is not only a job for the actors. Scenery and setting are as vital as words on the page, and any flaw in them destroys the experience just as much as an actor forgetting their words. The scope for disaster is huge, yet year after year we witness that little hall transformed totally into whatever place the play requires it to be. No one falls down a hole in the stage; no one is reduced to eating a raw breakfast.

It can't be good luck, because in the theatre, as I soon learnt, it quickly runs out. In Southwold, I can only assume it is because genius is at work.

Paul Heiney

What happens to members of the company after the season finishes? Carol Carey, the Production Co-ordinator, presents this vivid picture of an overseas trip.

INDIA 2000

"We're being posted to Mumbai" a good friend announced.
"Where?" I asked, showing my ignorance.
"India! BOMBAY."
"Ah-h!"

For a girl with absolutely no qualms about inviting herself to stay with friends, this was music to my ears. So eighteen months later, clutching a visa stamped passport (and that's a story in itself), a healthy supply of Imodium and half the contents of Sainsbury's, bubble wrapped to within an inch of its shelf-life, I found myself bound for the sub-continent on a cold, dull November morning.

To say "I've been to India" is not strictly true. I stayed in Mumbai for three weeks and briefly visited Mahrbaleshwar, a small hill station 6 hours south of the city, in the stunning Western Ghats. I actually saw very little of India; a bit like saying, "I've been to America" when all one has done is to visit New York, but what I did see left a lasting impression. India certainly does not let you down and India makes you feel very small.

Before going, I wondered what my first impressions would be. I spoke to people who had been, heard their stories, got lots of advice but nothing can truly prepare you. From the moment you step off the plane at 2 am and plunge into the chaos that is Mumbai airport, you hit the Indian floor running. That is, of course, after you've queued for over an hour at immigration, fought for your luggage with three plane loads of people around the single, faltering carousel and remembered - too late - the advice about spraying on insect repellent before getting off the plane. My initial impression? Overwhelmed!

For me, the word "India" conjured up certain images - curry . . . dodgy tummies . . . ancient buildings . . . faded Colonialism . . . amazing bazaars bathed in marigold sunsets . . . old photographs of Grandparents on horseback . . . children playing by sun drenched verandas. Many film and TV classics of a long lost era also contributed to my romantic if slightly sentimental, Indian picture.

I was in a country where I was a minority. I had never experienced that before. I had never seen mediaeval villages except in museums and I had hardly experienced the kind of "Upstairs, Downstairs" culture that still exists over there. From the cushioned comfort of an air-conditioned Range-Rover, I would look out daily at monsoon ravaged buildings that seemed to merge into desperate, rat-infested slums, dust and pollution blending everything into the same greyish-khaki. How would any of it survive next year's torrential downpours?

Amongst overcrowded streets (17 million people in Mumbai alone, not to mention cattle), I saw a solitary baby crying at the side of the road, children playing by stagnant water, beggars risking their lives amongst the traffic madness and exhausted families living under the motorways that they were building by hand.

I wondered at the unexpected beauty - children emerging out of the squalor in clean, pressed school uniforms, the people, the saris, bright, colourful washing hanging everywhere, the flowers, the sunshine, the trees, peeling Victorian houses with splendid balconies and fabulous stained glass windows, the amazing markets and the beautiful temples.

I experienced the frustrations of living day to day in a third world country: the noise, the smell, the heat, the damp, the ignorance and an Aids epidemic about to explode, the postal service and the drainage system (or lack of).

Cashing travellers cheques - taking on average 20 minutes - and of trying to buy anything (you see, you barter, you buy, you wait . . . as six people write, stamp, work out change, give change to third person who hands goods to second . . . you get the picture); the service industry is alive and well and living in India.

When I got back, friends asked me if I'd felt guilty at what I'd seen and how I'd lived out there. Guilt was one emotion I didn't feel. It doesn't help anyone and you do feel you have to do something, however small. Mumbai alone has huge problems and I met some extraordinary people working hard to try and overcome some of them.

I had an amazing time and I am very grateful at having had the opportunity to go - and thanks to a very careful diet consisting mainly of chippatis, paneer and bottled water, I hardly needed the Imodium.

Carol Carey

THE SOUTHWOLD AND ALDEBURGH 2001 SEASON

The Plays:

The Ghost Train by Arnold Ridley is a classic mixture of laughs and thrills. 10 passengers, marooned in a station waiting room are caught up in darkly mysterious and frightening happenings - good entertainment for the audience if not for the bemused travellers.

The Old Ladies by Rodney Ackland is a suspense drama. In a seemingly friendly old house, Mary, Lucy and Agatha each rent a room. But there are undercurrents between the three which may - or may not - be resolved. Doreen Mantle (*Mrs Warboys* in 'One Foot In The Grave') who played so brilliantly in *A Passionate Woman* heads the cast. They will keep you guessing to the very end.

Kissing Cousins is a brand new comedy by Ian Masters. Alan and Margaret Bestle really must sell their delightful country cottage - and soon. But all does not go according to plan when buyers and relatives coincide. As the play progresses from one hilarious misunderstanding to the next, Alan finally loses the plot. Don't miss. We are delighted to be presenting the premiere of this very funny play.

The Winslow Boy has its origins in one of the most famous lawsuits of the 20th century. From this beginning Terence Rattigan brilliantly creates the impact on Arthur Winslow's family and friends as he valiantly struggles to clear his son's name.

I'll be Back Before Midnight by Peter Colley is a very exciting thriller with an eerily sinister plot and some wonderful theatrical effects. You may think you have seen a frightened wife at the mercy of inexplicable happenings before - but not like this. Who is the stalker, who the victim? Greg, Jan, George and Laura reveal all - eventually. We guarantee to keep you glued to your seat

The Sunday Evenings

Old friends "**Hiss and Boo**" **Music Hall** will appear at Southwold on Sunday 29 July. Our Gala Night in Southwold is on Sunday 26th August when we will be entertained by two leading "Archers" stars - 'Brian' and 'Shula', also known as **Charles Collingwood** and **Judy Bennett**. These two accomplished raconteurs provide a delightfully entertaining evening based on their lives together - on stage and off. With a Champagne Raffle and autographs, the evening is in aid of T.A.C.T and the Children's Society.

For our Gala Evening in Aldeburgh, on Sunday 19th August, we are proud to host **John Mortimer and Friends**. One of our most famous writers (remember 'Rumpole' and 'Voyage Round My Father'?) brings well known theatrical friends to entertain you with literary gems - comic or serious - woven together with music. The evening is in aid of T.A.C.T and is sponsored by Thompson's Gallery of Aldeburgh. Champagne Raffle.

FRIENDS' FEEDBACK – PART TWO

Shortage of space in last November's Newsletter meant that I was unable to report comprehensively on the information, comments and ideas received from the sample of *Friends* who completed and returned a questionnaire sent to them last September.

As an experiment, I had written to 25 *Friends* at random from our 500+ membership inviting their views and comments. The results were very satisfactory. 14 replied and provided many useful comments and suggestions. These were passed to Jill who read them carefully and enthusiastically. She particularly welcomed ideas for plays as she and her associates were about to begin devising the 2001 programme.

Many of the respondents had put a lot of time and effort into their answers, and one suggested her labour had merited a free ice cream next season! Others requested more events for *Friends* – especially at Aldeburgh – and readers of this newsletter will note that this plea has been taken to heart.

Now for a few items of interest from the answers.

Four *Friends* attended both theatres. All made the journey from Aldeburgh to see *Mr Cinders*.

Eight reported that they most liked *Jane Eyre* of the plays they saw. Another liked it least.

None of the 14 made any adverse remarks about the choice of play, the productions or performances. One complained of the hardness of the seats at Southwold, another wanted a longer season (don't we all?), and another suggested earlier starts to the evening performances. Universally their remarks were appreciative and indicated that the Company understands its customers thoroughly and routinely gives them complete satisfaction.

Comments about the *Friends* organisation were generally favourable. Apart from the wish for more social events, three respondents requested more involvement in fund-raising and publicity. There will be plenty of opportunities to help in 2001 and in future years!

If any reader has ideas or comments to make about our organisation or the Newsletter (favourable or otherwise) – not necessarily for publication – please send them to me. My address and telephone number are:

Jack Clayton, 5 Old Brewery Yard, Market Place, Halesworth IP19 8AW.

Telephone: 01986 872425 E-mail: jclayton@freebie.net

The Editor

TACT

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An appeal for £5M was launched last year to renovate and extend Denville Hall and the two Gala Evenings this year will benefit this TACT initiative.