

Issue No 11 – Autumn 2001

JILL WRITES

Dear Friends,

Our splendid company for the 2001 season was in for a few surprises: full houses for *The Old Ladies* were unexpected and the runaway success of the brand new play *Kissing Cousins* was astonishing. Less happily though, bookings for *The Winslow Boy* were low - a pity as it was an excellent production. **Michael Imison**, who was Rattigan's agent and has seen the play many times, wrote: "I can honestly say I don't think I have seen a better all-round account of the play. You are to be congratulated". Great praise coming from him. The last week of the season, inevitably, was overshadowed by world events.

We are all delighted that **Terry and Bobbie Collins** will host another coffee morning in their delightful garden next summer. As your Chairman has explained in her report, Terry will also spearhead a campaign to raise funds and recruit more *Friends* in Aldeburgh and district.

The theatre fete in Walberswick last July proved to be a fun day out where *Friends* could flogather (belated thanks to 'Dinah' who spent hours serving teas and received no note of thanks as we couldn't identify her). My family is happy to provide the venue again and I am hopeful that many of you will rise to the occasion and organise a similar function in 2002. *Jill Freud and Company* will of course provide all possible support.

As the item on page 5 shows, there are changes on the Management Committee: the chairman **Sir Nicholas Barrington** is retiring and **Dudley Clarke**, who lives in Southwold, will succeed him in January. **Maggie Steen** from Aldeburgh will be proposed as Vice-Chairman at the next meeting. Nicholas first supported our work when he was British Ambassador in Pakistan and has led the committee since the first meeting in 1995. We are grateful to him for staying with us. Good Luck to Dudley for the next seven years

Peter Roberts, the *Friends'* Publicity Officer, did sterling work to improve the *Friends'* distribution of programme cards and posters in 2001, and has plans for it to be even more efficient next year. This is a vital exercise over a far-flung area that no one but the *Friends* could carry out for us - we have come to rely gratefully on you all.

Last season there were some teething problems to be overcome with the Southwold Box Office. You can't replace **Peggy Hurren!** As always, it was difficult for theatregoers to get through during the day. (A good time to 'phone is on the St. Edmund's theatre number between 5 pm and 7 pm.)

On the last night on stage we were happy to present Peggy with an inscribed bowl. But how can you properly thank someone for eighteen years of loyalty?

We all hope you enjoyed the season as much as we did.

JILL

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Another memorable season of the Summer Theatre has come and gone. So many *Friends* and visitors to Suffolk will have enjoyed the variety of plays which were presented, and all of us are grateful to Jill and her company for giving us this entertainment and pleasure.

Since the last newsletter, the *Friends* met in Walberswick Village Hall in April when, as well as hearing from Jill and Tony about the forthcoming season, we also enjoyed a talk by **Charles Collingwood** (Brian in *The Archers*).

On Sunday 1st July a *Friends'* lunch was held at *Westons* by kind invitation of the Freud family. This was well attended and *Friends*, as usual, generously provided plates of food for the occasion, although some comments were made as to "Where was the sweet course?" The wonderful weather ensured that the fete, which followed, organised by Jill, proved to be a great success. There were pony rides, a coconut shy, various stalls, refreshments and games and clown entertainment for the children.

Later that month a coffee morning was held in Aldeburgh at the home of **Bobbie and Terry Collins**. Again this was a warm sunny day and it proved to be a great success: it was well attended by the people of Aldeburgh as well as members of the company and a contingent from Southwold and, though not intended primarily as a fund-raising event, made a handsome profit.

This event helped to boost the number of *Friends* in the Aldeburgh area and gave us ambitions to increase our numbers further. I am delighted to report that **Terry Collins** has agreed to mastermind this project and to co-ordinate a recruiting and fund-raising programme.

John Veitch, our Treasurer, tells me that our recruiting leaflets and advertisements in the theatre programmes have resulted in new members coming forward. Our membership continues to grow (see the box on page 6 for details). Thank you all for your continued support and financial assistance which enabled us in 2001 to provide funding for the Children's shows in Aldeburgh and Southwold (£2000) and to contribute towards the cost of the Company's invaluable students (£1000).

We now look forward to the next season in 2002 and to seeing you again at the various events for *Friends*.

MARGARET CHADD

AN ACTION CALL TO FRIENDS

Enclosed with this newsletter is an invitation to all *Friends* to declare themselves "ready, willing and able" to give practical support to **Jill Freud and Company** in the years ahead. Please study it and, if you think you will be able to help in some way, complete the form and put it in the post. We are only trying to identify future *Active Friends* at this stage so, rest assured, there is no commitment involved.

We currently have nearly 600 paid up members - many being families of two or more *Friends* - and our records show that more than 135 of this number have given active

help of some kind in the recent past. However our information is sketchy and not up to date. So if you helped in any way during the last year or two, please don't assume we know all about you. You are especially important to us, so do complete this form and make sure your talents, expertise and diligence are not overlooked. Thank you all in advance.

THE EDITOR

A GREEN ROOM COFFEE MORNING

Friday 13th July turned out to be a lucky day. It was the date of the first *Friends'* event in Aldeburgh: a coffee morning at the delightful home of **Bobbie and Terry Collins**. Despite the date the event was a very successful one! It was warm and the threatened rain showers did not arrive until half an hour after the end.

Jill Freud welcomed local *Friends* and visitors, saying that she hoped and anticipated that this would become an annual feature. It provides a second chance (the party at *Westons* in Walberswick being the other) for the Company, *Friends* and potential *Friends* to meet and socialise together. Everyone enjoyed that, and there was no lack of chatter over coffee. In particular it was good to meet the director and cast of *The Ghost Train* which had opened to a great reception in Southwold the previous night.

Although this was intended primarily as a social event, it has resulted in an influx of new *Friends* and actually made a profit. Well done and a big thank you to the organisers.

THE EDITOR

PS: We are all delighted to learn that there will be a repeat performance next year!

THE COMPANY LEAVES HOME

The only work required of us during our annual post-season collapse in Portugal is to pen a few words for the *Friends'* Autumn Newsletter. From the chilly shores of Suffolk, this seems perfectly feasible. However, once horizontal and semi-comatose under the Algarve sun, literary ambitions disappear, along with the clouds; the only activity taking place is the demanding and arduous chore of doing absolutely nothing. I am, therefore, writing this from my desk in London, albeit on a sunny October morning, and not from poolside 'ao lado da Casa". (The latter may sound more glamorous but this way I get the use of 'spell check'!)

To a large extent this season saw the jigsaw, that Jill began to assemble mentally over six years ago, completed: to facilitate the seamless move of the Company away from *Westons* and to make it independent of her if and when she decided to retire. We are 18 and it is about time we left home!

From the start, *Westons* was the heart and bones of the company and that unique atmosphere and infrastructure was going to take time to recreate and rebuild elsewhere. The various pieces of puzzle that needed to be fitted together included:

- ❖ storage for the auditorium, publicity and photo boards, props, sets, Front of House equipment, various fridges, eighteen bikes, five vehicles, two washing machines and a dryer (Brampton);
- ❖ the Wardrobe and costume storage (Brampton);
- ❖ Maurice's design studio and our Production Manager's office (Paintshop, Southwold);

- ❖ accommodation for all the company (St Felix);
- ❖ Jill's office (Walberswick);
- ❖ Tony's office (St Felix);
- ❖ my office (St. Edmund's Hall).

Then finally this year, when rehearsals of our opening play ended (up until now in the barn at Westons) and the paraphernalia was cleared to the theatre, the move - the 'jigsaw' - was complete.

The most noticeable change for all of us in the company (apart from the obvious logistical ones) was that we hardly saw Jill. She was busy rehearsing, directing *The Twelve Pound Look*, manning the early evening box-office and wading through her own office admin. But she was based at *Westons* while we were all in Southwold. The students missed her, the actors missed her, the production team missed her - the only one who appeared not to was Molly, the infamous *Westons* cat, who got Jill, and most of her bed, to herself. Happily, the barn and smokehouse at Brampton are well established, the Paintshop is a success, the accommodation at St Felix works superbly and having an office at St Edmund's proved an extremely useful move.

Next year, Jill's family has kindly said that we will be able to rehearse our opening play in the stables at *Westons* and hold our *Friends'* fete there too. I know leaving home takes getting used to and this way we can come back to visit - we just won't be encouraged to bring our washing.

CAROL CAREY

MESSAGE FROM DUDLEY CLARKE

It is with much pleasure and indeed honour, that I have been offered and accepted the post of Chairman of Suffolk Summer Theatres Management Committee, and I take this opportunity of thanking the present members of the committee for their support in agreeing to me taking over the role.

My association with Jill and the Summer Theatre goes back to April 1988, when as the new manager of *The Crown* I met Jill and some of her colleagues to discuss lunchtime theatre arrangements. Since that meeting I have maintained a close relationship with the Company, for many years hosting with Jill, a fancy dress party at *The Swan* for the cast and back stage teams.

Having departed from Adnams in the autumn of last year, I have maintained a high profile in the community, working on PR projects such as the opening of the new Southwold Pier, The Annual National Amber Hunt, helping Lyn Knights of Denny of Southwold raise £5,000 for Breakthrough Breast Cancer Appeal and promotional work for Stephenson's of Aldeburgh, plus much more.

I live in Wenhaston with my wife Marion, who was Chief Executive of the *Theatregoers Club of Great Britain*, ardent supporters of Summer Theatres.

On leaving London in 1990 Marion was appointed Appeal Director at the Theatre Royal in Norwich, helping to raise over £3.5 million, a stiff target during the last recession. My claim to treading the boards goes back to the late fifties when I belonged to the Fortnum and Mason Amateur Dramatic Society (FADS) and appeared on stage at The Rudolph

Steiner Theatre. I also managed to appear in a few plays whilst serving in the Royal Air Force.

I look forward to working with the Management Committee, many of whom I have known for some years. There is no doubt that a lot of hard work lies ahead. I firmly believe that the *Friends* and the Management Committee will need to liaise on some projects to ensure a sound financial future for Suffolk Summer Theatres. We live in a world of rapid change and increasing legislation, this in no way should divert us away from the task of ensuring a long term and financially viable theatre in our community for years to come.

I wish my predecessor, Sir Nicholas Barrington, every success for the future and thank him for his commitment during these past few years.

Hopefully I will have the pleasure of meeting you all during my first few months in the role, commencing in January 2002, and assure you of my wholehearted support for Suffolk Summer Theatres.

DUDLEY CLARKE

LETTERS TO AND FROM THE EDITOR

*In early September came a letter from a Friend, **Jill Franklin**, writing on behalf of her family.*

Dear Editor,

Would you please pass on congratulations from us to **Jill Freud and Company** for this year's production of *The Winslow Boy*? We (aged from 14 years to mid-50s) thought it one of the most successful we've seen at the Southwold theatre (our 8th annual visit).

Would you mind also passing on a small moan? For the first time we managed a fortnight in Southwold, rather than just the usual week. One of the perks, we'd hoped, would be to fit in more theatre trips! But no; *The Winslow Boy* was on for the entire period of our stay! Imagine our dismay! Is this a trend?

So I replied to get permission to print this correspondence and to make a couple of points.

Dear Ms Franklin,

Thank you for your letter of 10 September, I've passed on the content to Jill Freud and she thanks you for your kind remarks about *The Winslow Boy*.

On the subject of your disappointment at the programme whilst you were in Southwold:

- The March 2001 newsletter included the programmes at Aldeburgh and Southwold, so you were forewarned!
- Aldeburgh is not too far away so you could have seen one, perhaps two, of the other plays there. There were additionally at Southwold two lunchtime events and several children's shows.

In the next edition of the newsletter you will find the subject of the programmes - choice of plays, length of runs, etc. - treated at some length. It is a very complicated business to organise efficiently and Jill was forced to abandon the original concept (all plays running for one week from Thursday to Wednesday) in the interests of improving standards and holding down prices. You will appreciate that, with ticket prices being very constrained, running small theatres and achieving constant high standards necessarily means tight budgets.

Next year we hope you can manage to choose two weeks in Southwold that allow you more theatre visits. Watch out for the March 2002 newsletter!

Yours sincerely,

The Editor

Ms Franklin replied giving the requested consent and stressing that "we are only grumbling because we couldn't get enough Summer Theatre!!" She went on: "Your point about Aldeburgh is entirely just; it's simply that one of the delights, for us, of staying in Southwold is the opportunity of driving there, parking the car and, not getting into it again before it's time to return to London. Having everything - including the theatre - within walking distance is such a treat."

SAY 'FREUD' TO A FRIEND . . .

Say 'Freud' to a *Friend* . . . and the answer will be Jill. But Freud is Jill's married name and her husband of 51 years is Sir Clement. As well as being the most dedicated supporter of *Jill Freud and Company*, he is a man of so many talents that any brief summary is bound to be inaccurate.

Sir Clement has recently published his autobiography and some extracts, published in *The Sunday Times*, so amused me that I immediately decided what some of our relatives will receive for Christmas!

One description of Sir Clement reads: "Cook, politician, wit, bon vivant . . . and the man who made a dog food famous." Remember 'Henry' the lugubrious dog that also appeared in the ads? Henry became such an embarrassment that Sir Clement grew a beard and retreated to Australia.

The summary on the book's dust jacket is more balanced. It begins:

Clement Freud is in danger of becoming a legend in his own lifetime. Television and radio personality, author, journalist chef, Liberal MP, grandson of Sigmund Freud, he is, in his spare time, patriarch of the talented Freud family.

By the time this newsletter reaches its readers, I expect Sir Clement's book will have been well and truly publicised. But, just in case you missed it, it is called **Freud Ego** and it is published by BBC Worldwide at £16.99.

The Editor

Doreen Mantle - *'Mrs Warboys'* in the very successful BBC series *One Foot in the Grave* - has, very helpfully, made an informative and interesting contribution to this coverage of *The Old Ladies*.

LUCY AMOREST IS HOPE!

"Yes! Yes!" I almost shouted when Jill invited me to do *The Old Ladies*. My enthusiasm was because I was being given the chance of coming to Southwold, acting for the first time with Jill, and, not least, the rare chance of playing a part for the second time. I have repeated theatre rôles on TV and radio, but they are different media and don't count in the same way.

I chose Lucy Amorest again as I thought I'd remember the lines. Wrong! I couldn't remember a single word after 9 years. But I did remember very clearly all those 'props': Lucy always busy serving tea and cakes; Lucy always busy putting on (or taking off) coat, hat, gloves or spectacles - busy, busy, busy Lucy.

The previous production had not been an altogether happy experience - an 'abstract' set with a long flight of stairs: result two very unhappy elderly actresses who had the first floor rooms, and a disappearing director.

This time could not have been more different - Maurice, senior designer, gave us a splendid set; Tony directed with care and sensitivity; and three very happy ladies worked with him, and with each other with ease and enjoyment. And over and above that I had the chance to try to get the part right.

Lucy Amorest is a 'good' woman - the challenge was not to allow her to be prim and stuffy. She is an optimist, believes the best in others, and sheds light and warmth in a poor, dark environment. She is Hope.

What a challenge! Thank you Jill and the Suffolk Summer Theatres.

DOREEN MANTLE

*I was delighted when **Maurice Rubens** agreed to contribute to this collection of articles on the realisation of the 2001 season's production of *The Three Ladies*. Maurice has designed all Southwold productions since 1991 and is well known to Friends - although he is a very busy person, he always shows up at our events and cheerfully demonstrates his sets and models. Readers may remember a special insert in the autumn 1999 newsletter in which Maurice described "What I did in the Holidays". This concerned his part in the staging of a rock musical *Subtopia* in one of HM's prisons.*
The Editor

LOVELY DARLING BUT

I must be galling for distinguished actors to be congratulated after a magnificent performance with 'You were lovely Darling but . . . the set!'

I would like to put on record that the design concept for "The Old Ladies" was not primarily to upstage the actors.

I was particularly excited when *The Old Ladies* was proposed. I had seen, as a teenager, the first revival with two of the original cast; and had a vivid memory of the play's atmosphere. The original design in Sir John Gielgud's 1935 production was by Motley (a trio of designers: Margaret and Sophie Harris and Elizabeth Montgomery). Even then it had caused a sensation, depicting a complete house on a West-End stage usually inhabited by a drawing room with french windows leading to a painted garden.

To meet the requirements of the play - three bed-sitting rooms, a hall and staircase - on the mini-stage of St. Edmund's was indeed a challenge.

A careful reading of the text and detailed notes of who was in each area at each and every point in the play led to an allocation of space that would allow each character to have the maximum ration of scarce space. The menacing gypsy-like Agatha seemed to take all her rest in her rocking chair, so only two beds would be called for. Gradually a first-stage, white card model, made in our usual 1:24 scale, was presented to the director and, from the ensuing discussion, a more detailed and painted model was produced and rather apprehensively shown to Mark Sterling our unflappable production manager. He was able to convert the cardboard and Evo-stick dream into a safe and transportable set of scaffolding frames with a cladding of plywood flats.

All this would be required to be set up and dismantled (for transfer to Aldeburgh) in a reasonable time and be steady and safe enough to reassure the actors who had been rehearsing for three weeks on the more-or-less stable floor of the Stella Peskett Memorial Hall.

With an exceptional student assistant, I was able to paint the set in time to erect it at Walberswick Stables and allow the cast two days to negotiate the, at first sight, vertiginous structure.

I particularly relished painting, furnishing and dressing *The Old Ladies*. Each character's area would reflect their individuality. Agatha, with a rich and mysterious past, was given a scaled-down Chinese lacquer cabinet, bursting like a deranged cornucopia with silk, sequins and feathers, with a few theatrical postcards and a religious statue for good

measure. The insecure and newly arrived timid spinster, May, was given a cool lavender-water, Spartan room, a tiny fireplace and some pious framed tracts. Downstairs, the widow Amorest seems to have created a warm, cosy compact domestic ambience, with a few "good pieces" and mementoes salvaged from her previous life with her "cloaked man of letters" husband.

The common ground of the hall and passageways of the rooming house, arid and anonymous, fitfully lit by coloured windows draped with dusty lace were equally important to create the microcosm inherent in Rodney Ackland's chamber-music-like writing.

All this considered and detailed planning was memorably unified by Richard Handscombe's brilliant costumes and sensitive and meticulous lighting schemes devised by Ben Payne after careful study of the painted set.

The house is the fifth character in the play (after young son Brand), and all of us are extremely proud of the result of a fine team enterprise that, once again, gave us all an opportunity to extend the boundaries of our unique theatre.

Don't miss next year's thrilling instalment - whatever that may be . . .

MAURICE RUBENS

THE OLD LADIES

As the name of a book or play, the title doesn't exactly grab you by the throat, does it? It neither explains the plot nor provokes interest in its content. Hugh Walpole (better known to me as the author of the *Rogue Herries* saga) was at the height of his fame when he published the novel *The Three Ladies* in 1924. So perhaps he didn't think it necessary to dream up a more intriguing title.

When Rodney Ackland adapted the story for the stage in 1935, the production was directed by John Geilgud and the cast comprised Edith Evans, Mary Jerrold and Jean Cadell. It was a great success and the play has been revived many times since.

The play was set in 1911 and the entire action takes place in an old house in Winchester. There is a cast of three and they are visible on the stage the entire time.

So, how did this play get selected for the 2001 programme of the Suffolk Summer Theatres? It is difficult to stage, makes enormous demands on the cast and there is not a lot of action. Someone said about the play: "It takes a long time to get nowhere." But he or she, I believe, missed the point. *The Three Ladies* is strong on atmosphere, character and, on a miniature scale, it examines expertly the motives and machinations of human beings.

It is a play that **Jill Freud** and **Tony Falkingham** had wanted to stage for a long time and, perhaps, one deciding factor for its selection in 2001 was that **Doreen Mantle**, returning as a member of the Company, had already appeared in the play in 1997.

Jill and Tony have, over the years, revealed something of the complexities of choosing a programme of plays for Aldeburgh and Southwold. Elsewhere (page 3) Tony discusses

how the Company has carefully worked over the years to attain higher standards in every aspect of its productions. But there are many other matters the producers have to consider carefully before they can settle on a programme of five plays and the sequence of production.

Firstly they must offer the theatregoers of Aldeburgh and Southwold variety - plays of many moods and styles yet of general appeal. But because of other aspects the initial shortlist of plays must include two of each category (thrillers, comedy, farce, etc.) and the final choice will depend on how well the plays fit into the overall plan. So the producers preferences have to be modified by factors such as:

There is a direct relationship between production expenditure and the size and stature of the company, so the potential box-office revenue is a constraint.

One expensive production (perhaps in terms of the size of the cast, the scenic and/or costume considerations, etc) must be balanced by another which makes fewer financial and resource demands;

Once the size of the group of actors has been identified, it is important to ensure that each individual can be selected for a series of parts which are both demanding and appropriate to their sex, experience, age and physical appearance, and which keep them busy and satisfied but not overtaxed.

So *The Old Ladies* won through this elaborate process last season. It seemed to me, someone who sat enthralled through the production, that it would be a very suitable play with which illustrate the challenges faced by various members of the company. As usual, all I had to do was to make a suggestion and articles came in. Many thanks to **Jill, Tony, Maurice Rubens, Carol Carey and Doreen Mantle** for providing a number of building blocks which together illustrate the complexities of mounting a quality production.

JACK CLAYTON

Jill Freud, who played May Berringer in the play, writes:

Being one of *The Old Ladies* was a joyful and scary experience. Rehearsing with Doreen and Moyna under Tony Falkingham's gentle guidance gave us great confidence until we moved onto the set and nearly lost it all. Playing scenes in a small space above an open drop of twelve feet (which felt more like fifty) took some getting used to - I wish I could have seen the effect from the front but as we never left the stage that was impossible.

THE CHANGING SEASONS

Back in the good old days of weekly rep, a new play would open on a Monday night and on Tuesday morning the actors would block the 1st act moves of the following week's play. The afternoon would be free - but only for learning lines - then back to the theatre for the evening performance. Acts 2 & 3 were blocked on Wednesday and Thursday, followed by a stumble through the whole play on Friday. On Saturday, a run-through

before the matinee and on the following Monday, after a hurried and often chaotic dress rehearsal, the new play would triumphantly open. It could, of course, be anything from *Wuthering Heights* to *Plaintiff In A Pretty Hat*.

In seaside towns most of the audience only had one week's holiday and so it was the custom to change the play mid-week to allow for two visits and thereby increase the box office take.

By having a double company and two plays in rehearsal at the same time, the Southwold Summer Theatre left 'weekly rep.' behind in 1985. Even so, because productions mostly ran only for one week, it was 1993 before we were able to present a season where every play had had a minimum of two weeks' rehearsal.

In our early seasons all the plays closed on Wednesday and the first night of the next play was on Thursday. This allowed 21 hours for the old set to be dismantled and the new one put in, the lights to be re-hung and the technical rehearsal called for actors to work through with set, lights, effects, props and costumes for the first time. Finally, at any time up to 5 pm, there would be a dress rehearsal staffed by stage managers who hadn't yet gone to bed from the previous night.

Well, times have changed, standards have risen, both in the quality of the acting and the ingenuity and craftsmanship of the settings. Last season most of the plays were rehearsed for three weeks. We presented shows with the technical excellence of *The Ghost Train* and *I'll be Back Before Midnight* and with the complexity of *The Old Ladies*. We had the space to rehearse a new comedy *Kissing Cousins* and there was the all-round excellence of *The Winslow Boy*. We presented all five plays in both Southwold & Aldeburgh and sets were dismantled and moved overnight to be ready to open the next evening. Some productions had to open after the weekend to allow the technical team to work all day on Sunday; otherwise, sets and lighting could not be ready in time.

The play season is always complemented by seven lunchtime shows, six children's shows, Sunday charity galas and weekly lunchtime jazz. We do try for as many midweek openings as possible but the one weekly, sometimes twice nightly, good old days of seaside rep. are gone for ever.

ANTHONY FALKINGHAM
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR