



# Meopham Players Newsletter

[www.meophamplayers.co.uk](http://www.meophamplayers.co.uk)

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## ‘As You Like It’ Shakespeare’s Globe Visit

Players’ Theatre Critic, *Dame Kurtan Razor*, reviews an energetic production of a tricky comedy



‘As You Like It’ getting down and dirty

**A**t first glance a story about a shed-load of weddings, gender bending women, the force of nature, a fool and some violence thrown in may bring to mind an episode of EastEnders but scratch the surface and you are plunged deep into the underworld of the forest, which in Shakespeare’s time was associated as a lawless wild terrain where anything goes, passionate love affairs abound, gender flexibility subverts the norms of life and love between men appears commonplace, an ‘alluringly naughty playground’ as the programme notes succinctly puts it.



The Galleries alive to the sound of groundlings

The plot has Duke Senior usurped by his younger brother Duke Frederick and exiled to the Forest of Arden, their daughters Rosalind and Celia banished from court run amok in the glades, warring brothers Orlando and Oliver, a reflective

cave dweller Jaques, a shepherd who loves a goatherd, but she scorns him because she has fallen for a saucy boy called ‘Ganymede’ who is really Rosalind, but all to no avail as Rosalind loves Orlando and is busy encouraging him to tell her of his love and pay court to ‘Ganymede’ as though he was Rosalind and you have a potboiler with enough sexual ambiguity to make Larry Grayson spin in his grave.



Hymen, god of marriage ceremonies, makes a spectacular entrance on a handcart with a look to kill for: to make it all alright on the night

In essence the play is about how you wish to live your life and what you make of it is your prerogative. If you want a life of rustic simplicity, peace and contentment like the old shepherd Corin, don’t hold back.

On the other hand if your preference is hedonism, cross dressing and frolicking in woods like Rosalind, it is up to you.

If like the melancholy Jaques, the Bard’s alter-ego, your penchant is delivering the ‘all the world’s a stage’ speech, one of the most quoted passages in English literature, who are we to judge?

This crowd pleaser with its universal appeal could equally have been called ‘Make Of It What You Will’ as it can be whatever you want it to be. The Master Playwright poses questions with great prescience but doesn’t take sides.

The annual pilgrimage to the Globe organised by Brenda Ogden was a great success once again and started with a pleasant afternoon stroll along a bustling South Bank then an enjoyable meal in a restaurant overlooking the Thames before the show. Our visit coincided with the last day of the play which added extra excitement to the occasion. The replica theatre which is probably the best guess as to what the original was like, which Shakespeare had a quarter share in, was abuzz from the courtyard to the groundlings up to the galleries making it an experience to savour whilst pondering if the medium is the message. As always a wonderful night out and our thanks go to Brenda, who sadly missed the trip, for all her hard work in arranging it.



The intrepid band of Players and friends

### Comment is free

- ◆ Do you agree with *Dame Kurtan’s* review: or have a comment about any of the other articles? Let us know what you think.
- ◆ We welcome news, views and contributions for future editions.
- ◆ Know of someone that would like to receive a copy of the *Newsletter*?
- ◆ email: [meophamplayers@gmail.com](mailto:meophamplayers@gmail.com)

# Brush Up Your Shakespeare

**Terry Fairhead**, Players' Arts Correspondent asks if the Bard could have helped improve his wow factor with women

There is a Cole Porter song which starts: *Brush up your Shakespeare, Start quoting him now, brush up your Shakespeare and the women you will wow.*

I'm pretty sure you will all know it is from the musical, *Kiss Me Kate* which was loosely based on the Bard's *Taming of the Shrew*. The film, made in 1953, starred Kathryn Grayson and Howard Keel, but this particular song was sung (and danced to) by Keenan Wynn and James Whitmore.



Kathryn Grayson & Howard Keel having a ball

For me it was the highlight of the film not just because of the actor's performance, but even more for the brilliance of Porter's extremely suggestive lyrics. This was 1953 remember so the score had to run the gauntlet of the prudish and savage censors who were in office at the time. I can only assume they didn't get it. Should you wish to see it, a rather grainy version is still available on You Tube, but in my view, the best version – performed on Broadway and also available on You Tube – was that by Michael McCormick and Michael Mulheren.

But there is a certain irony at work here because while I find great pleasure in Porter's lyrics, I have much difficulty in valuing Shakespeare's. Now, while it is true I didn't have a classical education, I did go to a grammar school where the Bard's works were certainly not neglected. Indeed, in 1944 we were taken to the cinema to see the newly released film *Henry V* starring Laurence Olivier.



Once more to the breach, dear Olivier, once more?

All I can remember of it now is that apart from the amazing Agincourt battle scene, it was incredibly boring – a feeling shared by a goodly number of my schoolmates.

So, what's wrong with me? Am I not English; is this not a part of my heritage embedded deep in my soul?

Apparently not and what's more, I don't really believe my lack of a wow factor with women when I was young would have been improved by my quoting "*is this a dagger I see before me?*" at an appropriate moment.

I don't know why I mentioned it really.

## The Twitterati guide to ... Shakespeare

by **Lunchtime O'Trill**, Fleet Street's golden warbler tweets it as it is

Qu: Who is this Bard bloke?

Ans: William Shakespeare was an English poet, playwright, and actor, widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and the world's pre-eminent dramatist.

Qu: Yes, but could he tweet in 140 characters or less?

Ans: Try these for size:

#: To be, or not to be: that is the question.

#: What's in a name? A rose by any name would smell as sweet.

#: Now is the winter of our discontent.

#: Is this a dagger which I see before me, The handle toward my hand?

#: Be not afraid of greatness. Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon 'em.

#: We are such stuff as dreams are made on, and our little life rounded with a sleep.

#: If you prick us, do we not bleed? if you tickle us, do we not laugh? if you poison us, do we not die? and if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?

#: I am one that loved not wisely but too well.

Qu: all right, all right, I've got it; but who would have heard of him if hadn't been for the star of Sherlock playing Hamlet?

Ans: Benedict Cumberbatch? You're pulling my leg now.

Qu: Surely the Twelfth Time Lord will make Shakespeare a household name?

Ans: You've got that the wrong way round pal, the master of the iambic Pentameter is the superstar not the imitator of Alan Turing.

Qu: What's the difference?

Ans: one's a transient here today, gone tomorrow. The other is here to stay

Qu: Fine, is it the star, or is the play the thing?

Ans: All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players. They have their exits and their entrances; And one man in his time plays many parts.

Qu: Wot?

Ans: #theBard@Avon: OMG! Methinks Titanic II with BC should make mineself loads of lolly, quick fetch me mine quill you embossed carbuncle in my corrupted blood.



Sylvie Stickings, Anne Horrocks & Terri Horton

## A Word from Sylvia

It was so nice to welcome some new members to our cheese and wine evening to start off our new season, **writes Sylvia Stickings**, the Players' new Chairman.

We performed a one act play called 'Between The Soup And The Savoury' in full costume that we had intended to enter in the one act festival at the Medway little theatre. Many thanks to the cast for all the hard work!

In order to complete next years programme, we need directors for the May and October productions. We don't want to have to cancel a production, but unless we have someone to offer to direct, we will have to just that. Come on Players, support your society!

Let us go forward with enthusiasm for our society and make next year a really fun packed year!



# Mysecretlife

Brenda Ogden, describes how an early trip to the theatre has sparked a life long interest in drama and acting

Come to think of it, the love of drama - I don't mean "being dramatic" or "actressy" - has been a thread running throughout my life. Even my games with friends at primary school, growing up in North Staffordshire, were about telling stories, acting them out, having imaginary adventures, being somebody else.

My first memory of going to a theatre was when I must have been about 7, when we went to see a production of "An Inspector Calls", shortly after it was first written. It was nothing like the all-singing all-dancing West End production which has now become so famous, rightly winning awards for its very clever set design, but completely missing the claustrophobic tension of the original, which is set in one room in real time. It completely blew me away. I knew that I had seen something special - and I also knew that that was where I wanted to be, on a stage, taking part in something as powerful and important as that.



The Ogdens at home

Life of course took me in different directions, but in many ways teaching, particularly in English, is the closest thing to being on stage that you can get, except that you are using your own words and trying to communicate real information rather than a script. I used drama a lot in my teaching. I never took a drama class or produced a play, but used drama to explore the themes of what we were reading at the time.

There are many plays and films which have had a real influence on me for many different reasons - Danny Kaye in "The Court Jester" for its sheer visual wit, "Gosford Park" written by Julian Fellowes before he side-stepped in "Soapism" with "Downton Abbey" - sorry, dreadful snobbery there, I admit. The cast of that film reads like a Who's Who of British drama - Maggie Smith, Helen Mirren, Michael Gambon, Eileen Atkins, Derek Jacobi, Richard E Grant, Alan Bates, each playing beautifully observed characters to perfection. More than that, the film exposes the exploitation of many female factory



I love, I love, I love my Calendar girls

workers in the twenties and thirties and is a spoof whodunnit at the same time - no mean achievement. "Brassed Off" is another important film to me, not just for the superb performances but for the political points it is making.

But really, it is when you see some actor revealing something entirely new in a character which stops you in your tracks. One such is John McEnery playing Mercutio in Zeffirelli's film of "Rome and Juliet". Usually, Mercutio is played as a brilliant wit with a stunning imagination - which of course he is, but in McEnery's version in the Queen Mab speech, his imagination controls him, he just can't stop it, he just gets wilder and wilder until Romeo has to pull him back to reality, an Elizabethan manic-depressive. More recently, we went to Stratford to see "Much Ado about Nothing" which was set just after the first world war. I think it has to be said that some of Shakespeare's comic characters are not really very funny, but the actor playing Dogberry did a masterful job. His BODY was funny, his walk was hysterical and yet at one point you realise that he knows that he is a figure of fun, that people constantly mock him, but he is shell-shocked and cannot help himself and



Peggy for You?

suddenly your heart goes out to him.

Once I retired, the thread became much stronger, I literally retired one day, auditioned for a part in "Autumn Manoeuvres" directed by Edna Bell the next and then never stopped being involved in productions in some way since then. There have been many highlights, amongst them taking part in "Twelfth Night", "The Dresser", "Calendar Girls", "Peggy for You" and now "Snake in the Grass". Above all Players has forged so many friendships, brought so many warm and memorable moments and formed the basis to my entire retirement - a rare gift.

Come to think of it, having drama in your life can be no bad thing.

## Meopham Players

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# Bijou Tales of Theatre Folk

'ICE' by *Les Peters: who* recounts another story from his years in the professional theatre



This is a tale of people who always think they can do your job better than you!

The year if memory serves is 1977 and I am working at the Victoria Palace in London. It is the festive season and we have an ice spectacular playing. The staging of this kind of show basically involves covering the stage with a very large but very shallow pool with freezing elements in the bottom and filling it with water.

As soon as we started rehearsing we were getting constant complaints from the skaters about the ice being too soft or too hard. This got to such a level that

temperatures on both sides were starting to fray.

At this point my mate Bobby had a brilliant idea.

He came in very early the next morning and found an old electrical cabinet. He then ripped the knob of an old rheostat and glued it to the front. Then he affixed it to the back wall of the stage and put a sign on it that said "Ice Temperature Control". It was actually an empty box, connected to nothing.



Nothing was ever said, BUT IF LOOKS COULD KILL!!!!

## What to see, what to do and how to help

compiled by our Showbiz Correspondent, *Ima Starstruck*, who has her ear glued to the stars

### Snake In The Grass?

Rehearsals are well underway for the next production scheduled for 22, 23 & 24 October.

**PROPS** - Eileen is still looking for someone to take on this key post. *Contact Eileen*

**FOH** - a volunteer is needed to help on the bar for each of three nights by Bill; Lesley needs help with refreshments/programmes on Thursday & Friday. *Contact Bill/Lesley*

**BOX OFFICE** - is open, see contacts Page 3

### Les Peters

We are very sorry that Les, who has been our lighting Guru for the last few years, has reluctantly had to retire from that position through ill-health.

We are pleased that he will still be making contributions to the **Newsletter** which have been very illuminating insights into his astonishing range of contacts and experiences in a long and successful career in the professional theatre from which Les retired just a few years ago as

Stage Manager at The Theatre Royal Drury Lane. We know he will keep in touch and hope to see him at some of our productions.

*If you are able to help with lighting, please email: [meophamplayers@gmail.com](mailto:meophamplayers@gmail.com)*

### 70th Anniversary Dinner

**Bartellas Restaurant, December 2nd**

You will recall that we had to cancel our plans for this celebration in June. Arrangements have now been made to hold a less costly dinner at Bartellas restaurant on Wednesday, December 2<sup>nd</sup> when we will take over the Orangery.

More details will be announced in the near future, but PLEASE put it into your diary and **let John Ogden know preferably by email** that you would be interested in attending, subject of course to the price being acceptable and final confirmation when the details are confirmed.

We do not anticipate that the cost will exceed about £25 to £30 a head including a service charge, as **we will not be including the cost of any drinks in the price**, to

allow people to make their own choices and pay for them individually. We may hold a raffle for an appropriate memento of the occasion.

### Monthly meetings

**OCTOBER 7** - play reading by Joy and Henry Roberts

**NOVEMBER 4** - auditions for February production

**DECEMBER 2** - social dinner and anniversary celebration at Bartellas (above)

**IDEAS PLEASE** - Please let us know of any suggestions of plays you would like to see, or be involved in, as "rehearsed" play readings at monthly meetings

### STOP PRESS

We are pleased to announce that 'The Cricketers Inn' on Meopham Green, has decided to join our Theatre Experience programme with effect from our current production.

Tickets for all three venues are available directly from the Box Office Manager, Terry Fairhead at the usual price of £18 per head for a two course meal.



# The Audience Make it

Terri Horton, the Newsletter's Roving Reporter reveals the fun she had with her torch selling Lyons Maid ices

As anyone who has been involved with a production knows, the audience and their reactions are very varied from performance to performance and this was first brought home to me when I had a short-term summer job as a cinema usherette when I was a student (back when dinosaurs walked the earth!).



Our local cinema had been changed from a traditional cinema with one big screen with circle and stalls seating to 3 screens; 2 from the former stalls area, and the bigger screen from the former circle, seating a larger audience.

In those days it was customary for an usherette to be in the screen throughout the show, more of which later. Usherettes were also required to show people to their seats when they arrived after the lights went down – resulting in much stage



whispering and sshh-ing when the person did not want to sit in the seat you showed them to, and for the usherette to stand like a lemon (or in my case a de-mented plum owing to the very tasteful purple striped nylon overall I had to wear – agh!) in the screen at the interval with the ice cream tray, fondly known as “doing the ice-cream break”.

That summer the two big films were Steven Spielberg's Close Encounters of the Third Kind and The Revenge of The Pink Panther with Peter Sellers. Now I didn't really have much of an appetite for Close Encounters – not my genre really – but I had to sit in the screen 13 times, however owing to the need to do “ice cream breaks” in other screens I never actually saw the film completely from start to finish.

Anyway, back to the audience – as mentioned above the usherette sat in the screen with the audience and it became very clear to me that at different screenings of the same film what an audience liked/disliked/laughed at varied enormously. What one audience laughed at another didn't, some audiences picked

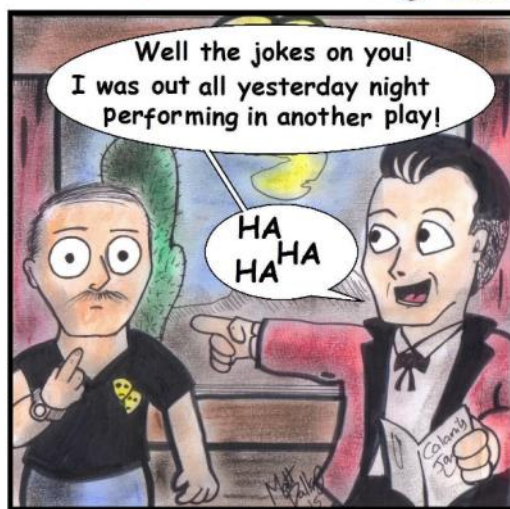
up on jokes and others didn't etc. Of course film makers and indeed any script writer makes use of this especially where the audience crosses age ranges as the different verbal and visual “gags” are picked up by the different aged audiences.

The Pink Panther film really brought out the variety of responses in the audience and influenced my enjoyment of the film too, I enjoyed the film best on a Saturday night when the audience was adult as they really got the jokes and even though I had seen the film before (23 times for this one!) it still made me laugh. However, one Saturday night was memorable for another incident, I was sitting on my little fold down seat in the former circle, at the top of the short flight of stairs and enjoying the film enormously as the audience were particularly lively.



At one point I was laughing so hard that I leaned back completely forgetting that I was sitting sideways on the seat with no back and therefore crashed off the seat, down eight steps to land in an ungainly heap at the bottom. Luckily the continued audience laughter at the film covered my noisy fall and shrieks of pain as I bounced down the stairs! I can truly say that the film brought tears to my eyes – and the bruises matched my overall.

## Pottham Regional Amateur Theatre Society By Matt Dallas



Matt Dallas 2015