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Meopham Players Newsletter

February 2016/ issue 18

Going Green set to smash attendance records



The cast take a break from rehearsals: front row (l to r) Gill Skinner [Christine]; Terri Horton [Madeline Gascoigne]; back row (l to r) John Winson [Brian]; Rodney Buckland [Sir Clive]; S Sangha [John Brown]

Pre-bookings for Going Green are set to break all records as ticket sales go through the roof

The next Players' production is a side splitting comedy by David Tristram, the highly acclaimed writer, recently judged to be the UK's most popular and performed playwright.

The tale revolves around John Brown, a high flyer with the Green Party tipped for the very top, who comes to prominence just as public sensibilities were starting to shift and people were losing faith in the political establishment. The whole country was crying out for a fresh start. It just needed the right platform and someone with a bit of charisma to articulate the message – John Brown was that man.

Throw into the mix a host of equally

colourful and idiosyncratic characters – Madeline Gascoigne an intelligent, articulate medical professional; Brian an old-school political bruiser with questionable views performing a double act with his much put upon wife Christine; Laura a child of the selfie generation and John's girlfriend; and Sir Clive provides gravitas with his commanding presence.

This meticulously crafted tragi-comedy starts with John Brown delivering a stark message to the waiting world - 'Go Green, or die', profound words that start a roller-coaster of a ride. The hottest ticket in town will have you rolling in the aisles so do not miss this show!



Theatre Dining Experience

Make your visit to 'Going Green' a night to remember by trying the Players' Theatre Dining Experience and enjoy a two course meal before seeing the show.

There is now a choice of three venues in Meopham to choose from all offering fantastic food in smart surroundings.

We have partnered with Bartellas, The Cricketers and The George to offer you a range of dining experiences at a bargain price of £18 per head for a two course meal - including show admission.

Going Green
Meopham Village Hall
25, 26 & 27 February
Box Office

tel: 0844 288 9708

email: meophamplayers@aol.com

Plus

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The Robin

Full breasted he
That swoops and alights nimbly
On the broad handle
And surveys my work in a garden
Now betraying autumn's first bite

I, breathing hard from heaving clods of earth
Run through with root and dead twigs like broken spears
Stand and admire the red breasted scrutineer who watches my labour
And think him quite arrogant in choosing my shovel as his observation point

The robin inclines his head, puffs a chest that already looks full to burst
And casts a bead like eye to the ground
In search of writhing spoil
But in vain

I wipe a sweated hand across my brow
And match his gaze along broken ground
Which matted and cloying in answer to the waning year
Betrays no other sign of life in its various eruptions

Just then I see at the corner of my eye
A grain of soil tumble down a small mound of earth
And a wriggling blind head emerge from the earth
At this the robin leaps from his smooth perch
And seeks his prey

Too late! Too late!
The worm snuggles back into the hole
And the robin hops and pecks in futile stamping upon the earth
While I laugh at my scrutineer's failure
And taking up my burden once more
Prepare the garden for winter

David Alexander
Players' Poet Laureate

What to see, what to do...

Our Showbiz Reporter
with her ear glued to the
keyhole



Ima Starstruck

February



Going Green, the next Players' production on 25, 26 & 27 February. Box Office open, book early to avoid disappointment

March

Auditions for Nurstead Court play *tbc*

April

Luke Taylor, stage director at Medway Little Theatre will be giving a talk on "The Perils of Stage Managing" on 6 April. Given Luke's personality this will be very amusing as well as teaching us a few trade secrets. It will appeal to actors and stage crew alike, so make sure you don't miss it!

June

Nurstead Court outdoor production on 20, 21 & 22

September 2016

Annual General Meeting on the 7th.

Meopham Players

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Can you help please?

Two small, low height coffee tables are required as props for the set of *Going Green*. They do not have to be a matching pair and it is the size that matters not the shape so they can be square, round etc. Collection and return can be arranged if required. If you are able help, even, if you only have one, please email John Winson at: jwinson1955@hotmail.co.uk.



Bijou Tales of Theatre

Les Peters



The latest story from a long & successful career in the professional theatre is 'Just a tic, Your Majesty'

In this age of large mechanical sets driven by hydraulics and complicated electronics unfortunately there are occasions when a show has to stop due to a breakdown, embarrassing for the crew and disappointing for the audience, but it does happen.

This tale is of an occasion when this should have happened but just could not be allowed to. During the preview period before the opening of Starlight Express in 1984 there were two special performances, a charity evening attended by Prince Charles and Diana and the second one of the very rare times that Her Majesty the Queen attended the theatre in an official capacity other than the Royal variety performance, and you don't stop when she is watching!

If you have seen the show you will know that the main element of the set was a six ton hydraulically driven bridge that travelled up and down stage, revolved, tilted,



Starlight Express -Whoo-whooh, whooh-whooh - everybody's waiting for their dream train

and moved up and down to connect different parts of the racetracks. I was the first operator for all the automated parts of the set. Today I would be called the automation operator an occupation common today but did not exist then.

I had four digital readouts to show the position and angles the bridge was in placed over four joysticks for driving the beast. Twenty minutes into the show the readout for the angle of tilt stopped working making it impossible to operate the thing.

The normal thing to do would be to stop the show and fix the problem, but not tonight. So dressed in a dark boiler suit miraculously supplied in minutes by the wardrobe department, a black knitted hat borrowed from a crew member and a deft re-plotting by the lighting operator to keep the light concentrated on the centre

downstage area, I sneaked on to the set and then on the bridge on my stomach to reach the tilt sensor in the middle. I managed to re-attach a loose wire to the sensor by touch alone and crawl away. Only when I got back did I realise I was shaking and drenched with sweat.

I am writing this after last night watching a programme on BBC4 "The story of musicals" and saw a clip of the Queen meeting the lined up cast that evening. Little did she know there was one other person on stage that night she did not meet?

Princess Diana arrives for the performance



Witch Theatre?

Eileen Bush



A consumer guide to the weird world of stage facts & supersti-

Bouquets

It is good luck to give bouquets on the last night. Traditionally these should be stolen from a graveyard to symbolise the death of the show.

It is bad luck to give bouquets before the performance because they have yet to be earned



Ghostly Light

There should always be a light burning on stage in an empty theatre to ward off ghosts. This also has practical value though. Stages are cluttered, dangerous places, and leaving a light burning ensures that the first person in can see their way. This is also sometimes known as the Equity Light or Lamp



Three Candles

It is bad luck to have three lit candles on stage. The actor closest to the shortest candle will be the first to marry - or die.



MEOPHAM PLAYERS

By Arrangement with Samuel French Ltd.

presents



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Naughty but was this quite nice?

Terry Fairhead
Arts Correspondent



The Meopham Players History Project kicks off with a look back at 1980 when *Habeas Corpus* was first performed and sensibilities were very different to what they are today

With *Habeas Corpus* selected for our summer production this year it might be worthwhile looking back to October 1980 when it was last performed by Meopham Players. Of course, this time auditions will be open to members of other local amdram societies as well as our own and a look at the old programme will tell you why – there were eleven in the cast.

Bearing in mind this was thirty-six years ago it is not a little surprising that a number of those involved then are still taking an active part in Players now. Our current Honorary President Henry Roberts, for example, played the leading role of Arthur Wicksteed, while our current chairman, Sylvia Stickings played the part of Mrs Swabb. Indeed, Elsie Cook, who wrote the reviews for *The Reporter* in those days, praised Sylvia in the following extract from her piece:



● A scene from the Meopham Players' production of "Habeas Corpus."

"But it was Sylvia Stickings, playing Mrs Swabb, the cleaning lady, who would be my choice for star of the production. She kept the whole thing going and she knew her lines, which is more than could be said for some on the first night when I attended."

The whole critique though pretty favourable, expressed shock at certain parts in the play which is why the headline suggested some reservation on the part of the reviewer: **NAUGHTY BUT WAS THIS QUITE NICE..?** was spelt out in more detail by Elsie in a letter she subsequently sent to the producer, Dickie Kagan in which she quoted the final part of her review that *The Reporter* had cut:

"The play was produced by Richard (Dr) Kagan and presumably was his choice. Well

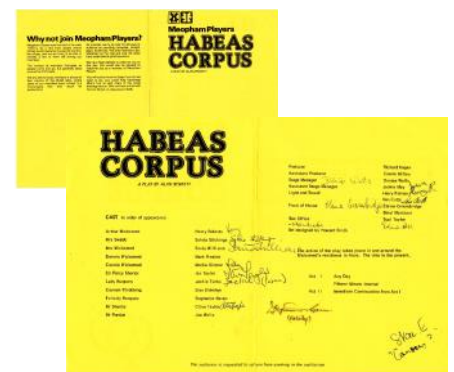
sir, some of your patients will have found this hard to take. I wonder what made you prescribe it for us."

Dickie wrote a robust reply to this which is too long to include here, but if you want to know what all the fuss was about, you can find it in the earlier part of Elsie's review:

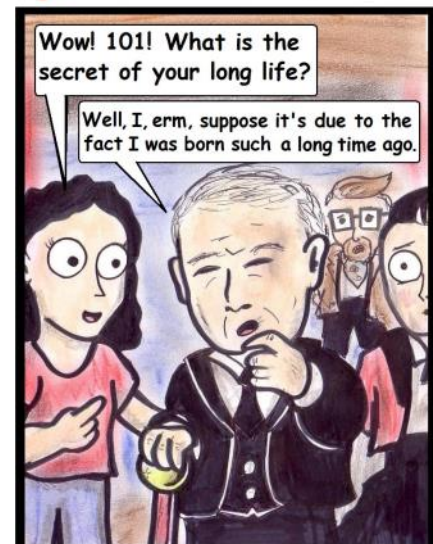
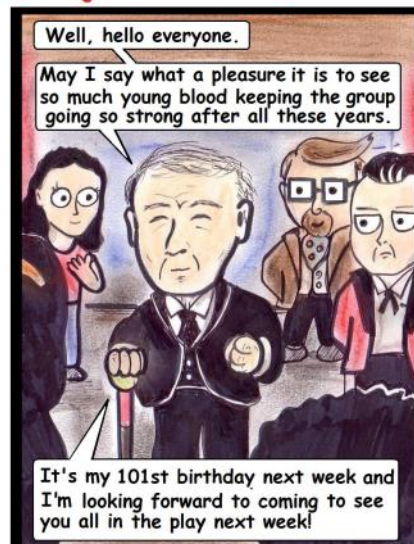
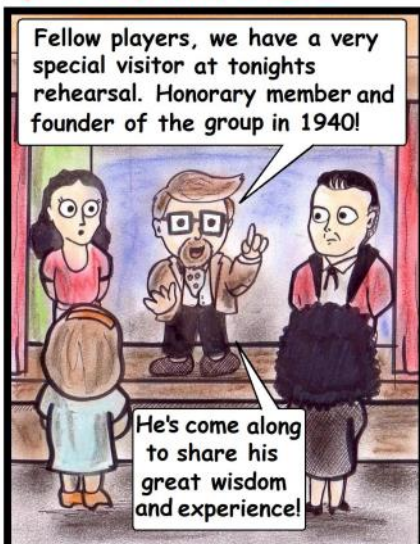
"The shock moment for me came with the arrival of the pair of inflatable tits (and that's not a word I can bring myself to say in real life – it was not in the vocabulary of my generation."

In her letter to Dickie it seemed Elsie was concerned for "some members of the *Over Sixties* who are invited to such shows, and old faithfuls like Bobby Murring."

Sadly neither Elsie nor Dickie are with us any longer; nor are a number of the cast and crew, but then, neither are the standards that allowed audiences to be so shocked over so little.



Pottham Regional Amateur Theatre Society By Matt Dallas



Matt Dallas 2016