



Meopham Players Newsletter

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PAUL DOUST talks about Meopham Players May offering:

Rehearsals for our production of Terence Rattigan's wonderful play *Flare Path* are going extremely well. The cast are superb, and we're all very excited to be working on such a mesmerising script. The depth of Rattigan's writing and his understanding of the human heart only really become apparent when you start to actually stage his plays - and *Flare Path* is one of his very best (and perhaps the most nuanced and subtle). Certainly I, as director, am discovering things about the characters that I hadn't even considered in the past. All this is lending a particularly human dimension to what we're doing - and we can't wait to share it with you in performance. In case you don't know, we're bringing much of the action down from the stage and

closer to the audience than is usually the case. This is already lending the rehearsals a very intimate and emotional feel - which we know will translate to the production. The play, after all, is all about the men and women who did so much for us in WWII. It's their story that the play tells, with all the drama, comedy and heartbreak that they experience. This means that this is what we are concentrating on in rehearsal. This is what interested Rattigan - the people in the play. So it's the people in the play that our production focuses on.



Lancasters follow the pathfinder flares to the target (Painting by Michael Turner)

Rattigan was, himself, a rear gunner with the RAF during the war. This, too, gives a remarkably truthful quality to *Flare Path*. All of this then - our staging, the quality of the script, and the excellence and commitment of our cast -

really will guarantee you a spellbinding night of theatre. If you've never seen this play before be sure to book your ticket - you're in for a treat. And if you know the play already get ready to admire the wonderful job our actors are doing with it.

Editor's Note

Flare Path the play spawned the 1945 film: *The Way to the Stars*. But although the screenplay was co-written by Rattigan, it was not the same story and it contained a couple of poignant poems by John Pudney that were not in the play. One of these - *For Johnny* - was read in the film by Flight-Lieutenant David Archdale played by Michael Redgrave.

Do not despair
For Johnny-head-in-air;
He sleeps as sound
As Johnny underground.

Fetch out no shroud
For Johnny-in-the-cloud;
And keep your tears
For him in after years

Better by far
For Johnny-the-bright-star
To keep your head,
And see his children fed.

CASUALTY CORNER



This picture of our President, Henry Roberts has been cropped from a publicity photograph taken for Players 1949 production of *Quiet Weekend* by Esther McCracken. It required a cast of 14 in those early days of amateur dramatics in Meopham - something that is beyond us in the current climate. Henry would have been about 28 when this was taken. He is a little older now and not quite as agile as he once was. But at least he is back home from hospital where he was recently treated for a broken hip. This return might not have been possible had Joy not had a

Chairlift fitted in their house. This has proved to be boon for both Henry and Joy. Indeed, you could say it has become a bit of a Joy Ride. Being the resilient sort of chap he is Henry is bearing up to his misfortune with customary fortitude, despite having to resort to the use of a Zimmer frame to get about the house. Hopefully Doctor Glen Fiddich can help ease the pain.



Our other member amongst the Players walking wounded is Eileen Bush for she damaged her back a few weeks ago and has been in such pain she was unable to join us at the March Monthly Meeting. Fortunately

In the last couple of days there has been a significant easing of her discomfort and she is confident she will be back amongst us at the April meeting. Now, in case you are wondering about the picture, it is there because in fairness if we are going to have one of Henry at a young age in Casualty Corner we should offer the same courtesy to Eileen. And I would have done this had I access to a suitable genuine picture. This one on the left is genuine enough, it's just... unidentified.



Anyway, I'm sure I can speak for the whole membership in wishing both Eileen and Henry a more comfortable time ahead together with the hope we'll be seeing them again soon.

Act One
Presents
Spring Fever
Friday 20th April 2018
An entertaining evening of songs, stories and poems to make you think, laugh and rejoice in the coming of spring.
Doors Open 7.30pm - 8pm start
New Ash Green Village Hall
Tickets £7 each
from www.actonedrama.info
or call 07795 363 807

APRIL in New Ash Green

As many of you will know already, some of our recent productions have been joint ventures with our friends at the New Ash Green drama group **Act One**.

Our Spring productions though will be independently performed. This is Act One's offering and we would like to wish them every success.



Players' brand goes viral, says Sir Doug.

Meopham Players' newsletter is of course a 'must read', with delightful and informative pieces from our regular contributors and resident cartoonist. On opening the monthly edition, the masthead featuring a view of the village green is instantly recognisable as is the use of colours in our branding (for techies, #ee521a and #f88c34).

But sharing our brand is our website - www.meophamplayers.co.uk, which has been undergoing major development over the last few months. In addition to the usual news about productions and other Players' activities, our website has: an on-line seat and *Theatre Experience* booking service; an archive of posters and programmes from past productions going back to the early 50s; an archive of our newsletters, a virtual lost-property office, and a round-up of other amdram productions in our area. You can also contact the Committee via an on-line form in the *Contacts* page.

And we mustn't forget that Matt's cartoons are now syndicated via the website to a global audience. We're watching out for the first 'hit' from Ulan Bator.

(In case, like me, you were wondering who or what *Ulan Bator* is or was, it is the capital and largest city in Mongolia, Ed.)

Poppy Cock's

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Hello Darlings,

Where do I start? We've lots of things coming up, of course, but perhaps it might be best to deal with the case of the missing script first. It seems that our Vice-Chairman Sylvie, is missing a copy of *An Inspector Calls* and would like it returned. Could you give her a call please if you have it, on **01474 812598**.

Now the next Monthly Meeting is on **Wednesday 4th April** - can you believe that?

It seems only a week ago I was trying to find time to get my hair done for Christmas. But there it is; we are where we are as my dad annoyingly says all the time. Anyway, we will again be attempting to agree on what play we will be producing for October and will be reading some possibilities,

as we did last time. And we'll also have another mini-quiz which went down quite well at the March meeting.

Saturday 12th May Lesley is in the process of organising another **Treasure Hunt** in the area around Victoria Station. Currently she is checking on prices for a 16-seater coach, so if you think you might like to go, give her a ring on

07931236058. These things are great fun and are really worth taking part in, but as will be evident from the size of the bus, numbers are limited to 16. So if you really want to go, book early.

Brenda is in the process of organising another trip to *The Globe Theatre* but at the moment there is no date for it. We will let you know as soon as we know.

18th to 20th May - Set building for *Flare Path*. We are going to need as much help as we can find for this, so please can you keep these dates free.

Sunday 27th May - Set breaking. Again, please help if you can.

Saturday 2nd June - Please try to keep this clear as we need lots of volunteers for a clear-out of **Henry's Hut**. It shouldn't take too long, but we do need a bit of muscle - who doesn't? - To help with the dumping. Maybe we could organise a barbeque to attract more helpers - I'll have a word with the committee.

And finally, I have a message from Graeme, our equipment Manager. He is looking for an old, portable CD player to be used as a prop, so it doesn't have to be in working condition. Should you have such a device you don't need, please contact him at:

Gthemanh@hotmail.com

The Birthday Party review:

At the Harold Pinter Theatre until 14 April

Pinter considered Petey's final exclamation '*Stan, don't let them tell you what to do!*' - the best line he ever wrote; it could be argued it summed up all he ever did, writes **S Sangha**, our man about town.

Harold Pinter's first full length play *The Birthday Party* received its London premiere in 1958. At the start of that decade, touring Ireland as a young actor in rep, Pinter had discovered Samuel Beckett, a moment that is said to have made his hair stand on end. The influence of Beckett is never far from his work and later when the two became friends, he was known to send his scripts to 'Sam' for comment.

Reviews can provide rare insights but on this occasion a cursory scan reveal chants of a similar mantra - the first performance at the Hammersmith Lyric received such a savage mauling, they intone, that it was forced to close within a week. The current revival marking the 60th anniversary of this ill fated beginning, continue the incantations, is a chance to see if the play so misunderstood at the time has stood the test of time.

The setting is a seedy seaside



Unholy Trinity: L to R Stephen Mangan, Tom Vaughan-Taylor & Toby Jones

boarding house of a type that would have been familiar to post-war actors touring the provinces. The sole lodger Stanley (Toby Jones) is treated like a son they never had by Meg (Zoe Wanamaker) and Petey (Peter Wight) who run the place. Their repetitive, prattling existence is shattered by the arrival of two sinister besuited strangers Goldberg (Stephen Mangan) and McCann (Tom Vaughan-Taylor) who insinuate themselves into the household.

The menacing duo who claim to have a past with Stanley subject him to the third degree before throwing a seemingly innocent birthday party which sucks in Meg's friend Lulu, played by Pearl Mackie shedding her Doctor Who persona for that of a blowsy neighbour. Soon everyone

is engulfed in an intimidating mire of cryptic dialogue, disputed memories and pregnant pauses, the classic Pinter signature dish.

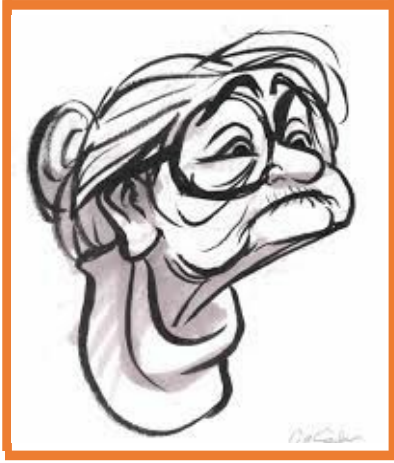
To the casual observer the play appears a patchwork of 20th Century anxieties - a dash of Oedipal Freud, a sprinkling of Proustian remembrances past drowned in a primordial Kafkaesque soup with the ghostly hand of Beckett everywhere, albeit drained of its poetic lyricism and allusive philosophic intent.

Ian Rickson's revival features an outstanding cast in a production that has a delightful old school feel about it, perhaps in homage to the original staging. Well worth a visit to see six British actors in their prime pondering Pinter's pauses.



L to R: Zoe Wanamaker & Toby Jones; Peter Wight; Pearl Mackie.
all photo credits: Johan Persson

This review first appeared in the Malling U3A Newsletter



New Contributor, Penny Pinching asks if conflict is ever a good thing in fiction or in life.

What would we do without conflict? Can you imagine a novel for example, which started off in complete harmony; developed without rancour of any sort and then finished with everyone living happily ever after? Apart from it being utterly boring you would have to conclude it had no relation to real life.

This is not to say conflict is a good thing but it is sometimes inevitable as a last resort. The trouble is some people; some societies invite it as a first resort. A glance in the wrong direction at the wrong time can provoke unjustified aggression as in: "Are you looking at me?"

I suspect most of us would turn away from this challenge before hastily moving on although it might depend on what the aggressor was actually doing at the time. Of course if one felt compelled to intervene then conflict would inevitably follow with no certainty of a satisfactory outcome.

This is the sort of dilemma faced by societies from the beginning of Homo sapiens' tenure of earth. History, as we all know is written by the victors and in the battles for land and power there is little doubt that the nice guys didn't always end

up as winners. Nor, after the establishment had finished with them, did they even hang on to their niceness.

So, conflict is a bad thing then?

Well, in isolation the answer would have to be yes, but as with everything there are certain caveats. In 1938 for example the Chamberlain government sought a dishonourable accommodation over Czechoslovakia with the German Chancellor, Adolph Hitler. The process was known as *appeasement*; post war historians though, with the benefit of hindsight, have called it betrayal. However, whatever description you prefer, there is no doubt Chamberlain at the time was desperate to avoid conflict because of the parlous state of the British armed forces. But conflict was inevitable and it is most likely Chamberlain knew this despite the *Peace in our Time* speech he gave on his return from Munich. Less than twelve months later – and marginally better prepared than we might otherwise have been – we were at war with Germany.

So, conflict can be a good thing then?

Actually, no. As previously said, it can be unavoidable and it can be justifiable, but it can never be entirely good because even at the very mildest level someone is going to end up in some sort of pain either physical or mental. And you can't say whoever is on the receiving end probably deserved it, for those with the best arguments are not always physically equipped to triumph. At the other extreme the consequences of conflict are utterly appalling. Millions upon millions can die merely for being in the wrong place at the wrong time and they don't have to be combatants to be slaughtered.

Victory will always go to the strongest, but even if the eventual victors fought for a noble cause, the warriors themselves will find that their sense of values has been degraded by the conflict; they will have become brutalized.

But what about conflict on the playing field? We love to watch people competing against each other whether it is in teams or individually; we always choose our champions and we want them to win because in one way or another they are representing us.

So winning is incredibly important; nowhere more so than in the sports pages of the popular press in which opponents are not just defeated, they are utterly destroyed or humiliated or both. Not for journalists does the old adage about the importance of taking part hold sway; you are either a winner or a loser. And if you are the latter, well shame on you; you've let us down. We hear a lot about *British Values* these days although it is not always easy to agree what they are.

However, you may be sure that nostalgia is very high on the list, which is why we don't always seem able to move on from the days when Britain *Stood Alone, Kept Calm and Carried On*. If ever a conflict could be described as inevitable and just, World War II was it. We were though ill equipped to fight it and there is little doubt that had Hitler not made the colossal blunder of invading Russia before defeating Britain the outcome would have been very different for neither of our two main allies would have entered the war if they themselves had not been attacked. So we wallow in the myth that we won the war, when what really happened was we ended up on the winning side; something we have done throughout our long history. That is not to say we aren't good at conflict, but perhaps we invest it with too much of a sense of glory.

