



The Woodford Gazette



The Woodford Players Quarterly Newsletter

Editorial board: Tom Dawson, Derek Snowdon and Wilson Young

(Almost out of) Lockdown Edition

July 2020

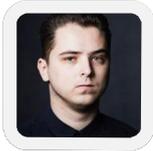
As the country as a whole emerges blinking into the light, we are still no nearer knowing when we can start operating again: a dilemma that all theatres, from great to small seem to be having.

So, until we do, this issue contains a miscellany of articles about the inner wheels that turn to get a production on stage.

Stop press

The Greater Manchester Drama Federation (GMDF) is recognised as one of the leading associations representing amateur theatre in the North West of England. The GMDF's affiliated network alone makes it one of the largest regional organisations of its type and it's Full Length Festival is probably the largest drama festival to be held in Europe. It also holds a long established, annual, week long, One Act Play Festival.

Woodford Players is a member of GMDF and we are very proud to announce nominations in the full length play festival for **Geoff Bird** as Best Actor in *It Runs in the Family* and **Josh Besso** as Best Supporting Actor again, in *It Runs in the Family*. These nominations are prestigious. The virtual GMDF Awards Night was held on Saturday 11th July and **Josh Besso** won the Best Supporting Actor Award. Quite an accolade and many congratulations to Josh.



Just to make you reflect on how we got "Lady In The Van" onstage, here is the conclusion of Derek's story.

In the last article I described how we managed to acquire the rear few inches of a Ford Transit van with the doors in situ, together with the rear step and a very large and heavy steel girder upon which the whole thing rested. The scrapyard had also thrown in two wheels with tyres and a length of exhaust pipe, what we were to do with this latter is still to this day a mystery.

The whole back of the van was very heavy, it took at least 4 strong men (not us!) to lift it on to the stage at the Centre and although it stood upright (just) it was very unstable. The first thing we had to construct was a wooden cradle to ensure that the structure remained upright, was stable and more to the point, safe.

The cradle was easy to make from some old roofing laths surplus to requirements and generously donated by Derek Manton following his acquisition of a new roof.

The next thing to decide was how moveable it would be and how it should be moved. One must not forget that a year previous to this we had constructed a full sized locomotive *The Titfield Thunderbolt*, so a little thing like a van that moved was child's play! After much thought and many discussions over innumerable cups of tea and endless biscuits, we decided to use one of the old wooden stage extension panels which we had used as a base for *The Thunderbolt*, so that bit of staging was no stranger to the world of transport!

The heavy duty castors we had used on *The Thunderbolt* were once more attached to the long suffering base and the "van" was carefully placed on top in its' cradle. The body of the van was constructed around a timber frame which was attached to the van back with very large screws after much drilling of the steel, I think Graham Scurfield ruined at least 3 drill bits during this procedure.

Once the frame was intact it could be screwed and bolted to the base and the whole structure was both safe and mobile and the cradle was dismantled and stored for future use.

The nice men at the scrapyard had very kindly donated a pair of wheels with tyres on and we decided that with a little ingenuity we could make these the rear wheels of the van. This entailed constructing an axle, fitting the wheels and keeping them in place with some hub caps made out of plastic plates by Jim Cawley. Although they did not take any weight, when the "van" moved on its' castors, the "road wheels" rotated in a realistic fashion and we were all mightily pleased with ourselves and had another cup of tea and more biscuits.

The next stage involve laying the floor which had to take the weight of a person and the sides which had to be slightly curved and a "roof" which had to let light through for one of the scenic effects. All of this was done by the team over the next few building sessions and finally a coat of sickly yellow paint was applied to the whole the overall effect I have to say was uncannily realistic.

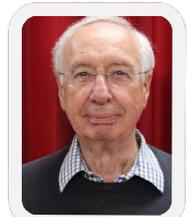
Some might say that we were pedantic but the van did not look quite right without working lights and Tom Dawson and Trevor McKelvey worked very hard at making the tail lights and direction indicators work, I cannot remember if the reversing light worked though.

The van was now almost complete and we could now hand it over to Pat Snowdon and Carolyn Manton to "decorate" the inside. They put up suitably grimy curtains, decorated the walls with pictures as demanded by the script and even erected a clothes line to which were attached several items of not so clean underclothing and piles of old newspapers and other paraphernalia demanded by the script !

All of this work was performed by the members of The Woodford Players OFC and thanks to the generosity of the Woodford War Memorial Centre management committee we were able to use the Centre to work on the van when it was otherwise not in use.

I should like to thank my esteemed colleagues and friends of the OFC, Tom Dawson, Derek Manton, Wilson Young, Graham Scurfield, Trevor McKelvey, Jim Cawley and Graham Ackers for all their hard work, ideas support, tea and biscuits during what I think we all agreed was a fantastic build.

Now I expect you would like to know how we built a locomotive? Watch this space



Thanks to Derek S

**Most productions rely heavily on costume to give characters credibility.
Here our Wardrobe Mistress, Jude, tells us what it involves.**

Putting a Costume Plot Together



Rule number one – every costume plot is different, but they all start at the same place and that is, I sit down with a cup of tea and read the script!

The above done, I then repeat the process.

For me it's always two reads of the script to get the feel of the play as in is it a fast-paced comedy, a period piece, a cast of thousands, a two-hander with no costume changes, a farce, a play that spans many years etc. All these things and many more greatly affect the next stage of creating the costume plot.

I usually then leave the script for a few days whilst I let it simmer in my potted brain.

The next step is more tea, phone on silent, notebook, script and pen in hand and Delilah (my cat) and I head for the settee (it has to be said that we are particularly good at this). Once comfortably installed I read the script again but this time taking notes about all sorts of things, the first one generally being whether the opening scene is in say a WWII bunker, a teenager's bedroom, a park and the time of day and time of year. For example, if the script tells me that the play opens on a cold January day late in the afternoon then the cast are not going to be dressed in lovely linen suits and tea dresses.

Quite often the script will say something like "Jill enters wearing a green coat and wellington boots" at that point my alert flag waves because the green coat and the wellington boots may be referred to later on in the play. A certain character may be described as "vibrant, creative and fun" – that tells me that a washed out beige, conventional suit is not the order of the day, male or female. You begin to get the idea. I continue through the script in this vein making lots of notes with the aid of a few more cups of tea. The other important thing I am looking for at this stage is the infamous "Quick Change". This is where an actor comes off stage in one costume and reappears within a very short space of time in a completely different outfit – more on this in another article.

When Delilah and I feel that we have sprawled for long enough on the settee with sufficient cups of tea and cat treats the next move is a chat with the Director. Directors are like costume plots in that they are all different. Some have very set ideas about how certain characters look and some are much less involved in the costumes until further on in the process.

If what we end up with is a "messy" costume plot (one way or another, most are) the next thing to be drawn up is the famous excel spreadsheet – I love a spreadsheet. This is great for concentrating the mind about how it is all going to work and fit together. Once this is drawn up I can clearly see the extent of what is going to be required (always useful).

What we need is not just dictated by the script or any flights of fancy taken by the Director or yours truly but by the size and shape of the cast members. To say that this can be a variable feast is somewhat of an understatement. The other fairly common problem is that the initial cast is rarely the final cast which in itself creates problems particularly if the changes occur well into the rehearsal process.

Suddenly the leading lady's costume for a 5ft 3 ins frame, with the best will in the world will not fit a 5ft 9ins frame and it is only three weeks to curtain up. Gin, I am never doing this again, expletives, huffing and puffing, more gin are all things that spring to mind at this point - such are the joys of doing wardrobe for a play!.....more next time.



Costume goes from one extreme to another!!!

Sound Effects

Before a production by the Players is performed, the director will discuss with our Sound Engineer, Graham Scurfield, what sort of sounds and noises he will want that are relevant to the performance (music, cars, rain etc.) and Graham will collate them to play at the appropriate time during the action.

But . . . what about the other extraneous noises that are required? Back-stage members are often asked to perform these tasks. I, myself, have on occasions been asked to participate in sounding dinner gongs, ring door bells, rat-a-tat on door knockers and (once) to kneel down on the floor and hammer on a piece of wood (don't ask). During our production of "Outside Edge" four of us sat in the curtained-off bar area and, at intervals, were required to applaud, shout "good shot," "well played" or groan, etc., as part of the imaginary crowd at the game. All these actions to intertwine with what is happening on the stage. This next segment doesn't contain sound effects but is just to explain some of the other duties, as stage crew, you could be asked to do.

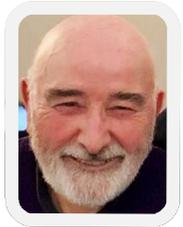
When we did "Seasons Greetings" I stood on a ladder behind the flat that had a front door in it. While balancing at the top of the ladder I had a tea tray in one hand which had a heap of torn up tissues on it that I had done at home. With four performances I had used quite a few boxes. OK – this was the snow. In my other hand I held a home-made fan (cut out of an empty Kellogg's cornflakes box – waste not want not).

Did I mention that whilst standing on the top of the ladder that my head was about two inches from one of the back stage lamps? They can get really hot, believe me! Anyway, now sweating from the heat, back to the action. When one of the characters opened the door I had to waft the "snow" like mad without falling off the ladder. The first two performances went well. I was told that my "snow" looked impressive.

On the third night, when the character (who happened to be Tom Dawson) opened the door I began wafting like mad again, but for some reason the snow wouldn't become a blizzard.

Tom could see things were not going according to plan. He, forever the consummate actor, reached up and grabbed a handful of the snow off the tray and threw it into the air above his head, then calmly turned and delivered his line about how heavy the snow was falling, thus saving my embarrassment.

All these sort of incidents are just little cogs that go round and around to help make the whole for our excellent productions. Long may the back-stage crew keep sounding off.....



Thanks to Derek M

.....and in a similar vein:

What goes on up in the balcony.

If you have looked towards the back of the auditorium, you might have seen two or three heads peeking over the balcony: Trevor, Graham and Wilson.

It's from here that these three intrepid technicians run the show, operating the lighting and sound.

Their job starts, like all other aspects of a production, months before the opening night at a production meeting, where the director outlines his/her ideas to all the production team.

Very occasionally this may be met with "sorry, that can't be done" but on the whole we are a 'can-do' bunch. The technicalities of lighting a production run from one extreme to another.

"See and be seen' means we simply put up the lights as the curtain opens and then retire to the pub until the interval. Just kidding, you never know what's going to happen and you always have to be alert, like the time when we had to close the curtains half way through when one of the cast managed to knock herself out during a farce.

On the other hand, some plays have a multitude of light and sound cues, meaning we have to keep our eyes glued to the script.

Sometimes sound cues are best done live. One recent play involved somebody (off stage) falling down some stairs. We discovered the best result came from throwing a chair down the stairs leading from the dressing room to the stage.



Thanks to Wilson

One of our traditions at Woodford is that we have an after show supper.

It's actually on the Friday night rather than the conventional last night, as after the performance on Saturday we have to return the hall to its Community Centre function. The set has to be taken down, similarly all the front of house lighting and last but by no means least, the raked seating dismantled (another aspect of a production you may not have realised)

It's a tradition that Tom writes a poem about the production, with which he regales us with during supper.

Here is the one he wrote for **'A Bunch of Amateurs'**

In England the Stratford players are down in the dumps,
it's 50 grand they need
to save their theatre that's gone to seed
they've lost their grant they need a miracle
a star who's career is at it's pinnacle
In the US of A their prayer is heard
by a falling star who's agent sends word
Jefferson Steel's your man he can play your Lear
But the Stratford he expects is not I fear
upon Avon but upon Mersey this is no premier
With Judy and Kenneth, Helen or Patrick
It's not the R.S.C. or even the "Old Vic"
He tries to back out but the papers have the story
About the American Hero wrapped in "Old Glory"
In the Community Hall not a theatre vast
Now things get bad he meets all the cast
Nigel he's Kent a real lovie number one on the roster
Dennis set builder plays Edgar and Gloucester
Mary, she's Goneril and Regan to boot
Dorothy is the director who dons the Fool's suit
Now things get worse no 5 star hotel to lay his head
Just Mary's comfy home with Breakfast and Bed.
At first rehearsal Jefferson' delivery is dire
Have you even read the play Dorothy doth enquire
As Lauren enters ex physio and wife of the backer
Between you and me she's a bit of a cracker.
Jefferson's had enough and goes out for a cigar
but on return it has not improved his repertoire
Won't drink the sponsors beer the Nutty Badger tastes foul
After tasting the King Lear beer he throws in the towel
Nigel spits out his dummy and wants to resign
Want's to play Lear but Dorothy gets him to toe the line
reminds him of his previous glory as Malviolo in Twelfth Night
In the East Anglia Drama Festival best ever seen a real highlight
David now appears as Cornwall via the miracle of FaceTime
Childcare issues mean he's at home reading a nursery rhyme
Another shock for Jefferson in the form of his daughter
Should have been at the Airport to meet her come hell or high water
Together at the B&B their relationship is tested Jessica wants to act
She agrees to prompt so they make a pact
Until Jefferson cheats with cue cards and earpiece radio
When discovered **act 1 ends** with Jefferson giving the play the elbow

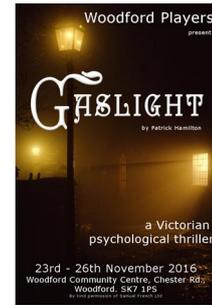
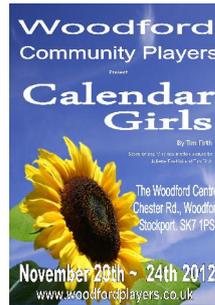
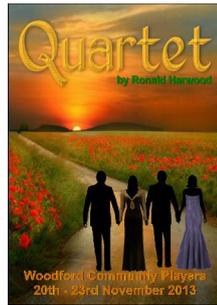
Act 2 opens by massaging of Jeffersons ego and a muttered apology
rehearsals begin with the death of Cordelia and by use of psychology
involving Jessica's presence an emotional speech by Lear is achieved
As he lifts his dead daughter however he strains his back
Enter Lauren as Physio to put him back on track
The massage is observed by Mary who in a moment of jealous rage
Tell's Nigel who rings the Sun and says "Hold The Front Page"
The headlines are printed with front page pomp
Hollywood has-been and brewers wife in saucy Sussex sex romp

The reporters descend and hassle Jefferson night and day
Jessica leaves for the airport after a row calls her dad a cliché
Dennis resigns his position as official entourage and takes back J's
wheels
Jefferson is now at his lowest ebb and as Jack Finality shows a clean
pair of heels
Meanwhile Lauren explains to Dorothy that nothing occurred
That what Mary said she saw was plainly quite absurd
They trace the quote from the Players to Nigel the cowardly cur
Jefferson kneels a broken man humbled by an untrue slur
As Lear proclaims "I am a man more sinned against than sinning"
Under a blanket he crawls as Dorothy the Fools song beginning
He that has and a tiny little wit /with heigh ho the wind and rain
He then falls asleep in the midst of his pain.
The morning dawns fair and with warming mug of tea
A Cast meeting is called by Dorothy's decree
To clear the air Mary's first to bend the knee
Then Nigel arrives thinking Jeffersons gone and he's back as Lear
Until Jefferson from under the blanket doth appear
Nigel reaches for the prop box and a sword he wields
Jefferson grabs a furred umbrella and they fight until Nigel yields
Then in a merry mood Jefferson offers Nigel the part of Lear
I'll play Kent what the hell it's only a play no need to shed a tear
The players are reunited and to close the scene Jessica returns to say
Cordelia's line "O my dear father" Jefferson responds as well he may
Lear's line "Pray do not mock me : I am a very foolish fond old man".
The merry band now reunited realise they still have no backer
So they formulate a plan and it's a real cracker
They will sue the newspapers for printing falsehoods and lies
The theatre's full thanks to Nigel's insistence the papers advertise
Lear hands out chocolates as thanks to the crew and cast
The play progresses to its final scene Lear in tears holding Cordelia fast
as she goes limp in his arms he realises she's fallen into a coma
Jefferson remembers as a doctor on the television he performed a
trachoma
As he mentally prepared his incision he remembered the epi -pen
gets it out of her bag sticks it in her thigh and counts to ten
The play is abandoned and audience refunded their cost
next morning they believe that all has been lost
Jefferson is offered a new tele show as a maverick medic a bit like Die
Hard
until Dorothy arrives with an offer from the home of
the bard
Which to choose well it doesn't take long
Its off to Stratford this time (upon avon) its where they
all belong.
we are bunch of amateurs so why do we do it the
answers quite simple
it gets us out of the house and if were lucky in to a
wimple!



Thanks to Tom

We may not be able to put on new productions just yet, so in the meantime we thought you might like to browse through some old programmes. If you click onto the cover pages below, you will be able to refresh your memory of ones you enjoyed (or perhaps wish you had seen some that you missed)



More next time

Talking of previous productions, here are the answers to the picture quiz:



Articles for publication

We'd love to hear from some of our readers (that means you).
Comments, articles old production photos particularly welcome
If you have a contribution, please email your copy to
wilson01538@gmail.com

(Any views expressed are not necessarily those of the Woodford Players Executive Committee)