



Scene

March 2021

It's (Almost) Opening Night.

Actors, this is your three-month call ...

With Boris Johnson's latest "roadmap" (I can't wait until a time when never hearing that word again) laid out on Monday 22 February, we're well on the way to getting back to normal.

We've had no end of theatre-based shows and productions delivered to us over the last year via our TV's and computers – David Tennant and Michael Sheen have been hamming it up in 'Staged', streaming services like Disney+ have brought West End shows like 'Hamilton' to our living room, and the National Theatre seem to be putting every single one of their productions online.



BUT WHAT ABOUT AM-DRAM?!

We don't audition and rehearse for the money; for most of the Little's members, theatre is a hobby. And we can watch 'Hamilton' as many times as we like, it doesn't compare to the feeling we get when we get into a rehearsal room, or in the sound booth, or backstage on opening night.

I asked a few friends for what they're missed about theatre, (I had so many responses that I've had to shorten the selected ones a little!):

"Everyone collaborating and being valued."

"The glow of applause – they don't do that at work!"

"Literally everything. The creativity, the camaraderie, the use of my brain, my body and my voice, the thrill of it ... the whole lot."

"I miss seeing my friends and having a laugh at rehearsals."

"Escaping from family, work, responsibility, stress and being a version of me no one else usually sees (or expects!). And the buzz – I will take any tiny job just to be a part of 'show week'!"

I'll leave you with this actual poem, written by one of our members, Jordan Handford. • EB

I miss everything about it, stood in the wing,
Learning my lines, hearing people sing.
I miss the challenge, remembering the page,
The lights in my eyes as I step on the stage.
The family feel when sat in the bar,
The dressing rooms, the banter, putting change in the
donation jar.
Doing those shows when the audience want more,
Arriving or leaving with Fred at the door.
The costumes, the fashion, the joy of people's passion.
The audience, the cheers, the anxiety fears.
The socialising, the test, but doing the things we love
best.



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Editorial

So, we now have a road map to get us all "unlocked".

And I've always loved a mixed metaphor. As the actress said to the hare.

However, much of it seems to be written in pencil and has more caveats than Ian Carmichael appearing as *Lord Peter Wimsey*. Or is that cravats?

After so many weeks of lockdown I get confused.

Trustees at their regular meeting at the end of February spent a good deal of time discussing potential opening dates, the order of shows and rehearsal time and spaces. It certainly led to some head scratching. We hope that in the very near future white smoke will appear and we can announce our opening set of shows and performance dates.

Gosh, it will be good to be back.

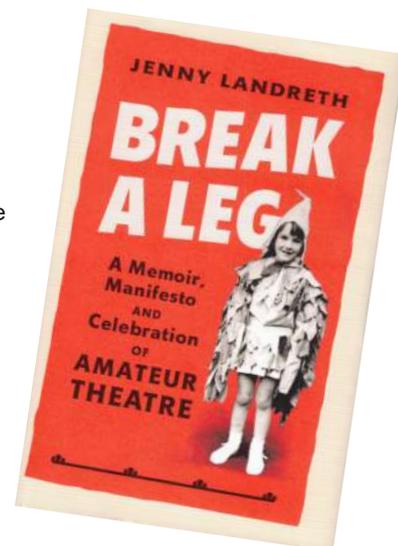
Over Christmas I finished reading Jenny Landreth's book "Break a Leg". A revelation within it, at least to me, was the popularity of English speaking Am-Dram in mainland Europe.

As the UK formally exited the EU at the start of the year, but we remain of course, geographically within Europe, I thought that we should reach out and find out more about Am-Dram in Europe.

Thus we print two fabulous articles from companies in Europe with hopefully a couple more coming for next month.

Enjoy this issue.

Colin & Emma



Contributions to Scene are invited. Articles, images & ideas for stories are most welcome and if you are a nervous writer Editors Emma (EB) & Colin (CH) can write for you. Our deadline is a week before the end of each month - but if you have a story let us know before then to guarantee that we reserve space for you!

Contact us via email at scene@thelittletheatre.co.uk

All photos in each edition of Scene are by the fabulous Sally Evans, unless otherwise stated.

If members use any images of Little Theatre productions in any social media post please give a photo credit to the person who took the photo. In most cases, for production photos, this will be Sally Evans.

The Bonn Players

Whilst reading Jenny Landreth's book "Break a Leg" just before Christmas I discovered that Amateur Dramatics is hugely popular throughout Europe, and, indeed, there is a Festival of European Anglophone Theatrical Societies (FEATS) each year where companies throughout Europe come together to perform in friendly competition. As the UK exits the EU, but remains firmly within Europe, Scene embarked on a mission to find out more about Am Dram in Europe. Christopher Nott-Held introduces the Bonn Players.

The Bonn Players e.V. is a Bonn-based, English-language community theatre company in Bonn, Germany. We are firmly embedded in the Bonn cultural scene and perform for local and international audiences. Part of our Fan Base comes from English-speaking employees of the UN, Deutsche Welle, DHL, Deutsche Telekom, Ford...etc.

We were founded in 1981 as the British Embassy Players, and, following their move to Berlin in 1999, we lost our key sponsor and were rebranded as The Bonn Players. In August of this year, we will celebrate our 40th anniversary.

We are a volunteer-driven, non-profit organisation with a diverse group of members from across the globe. We currently have 106 members and are growing. We are self-financed from membership fees and ticket sales, and the occasional private donation, and don't receive any state aid. The unique thing about the Bonn Players is that you can walk in from the street, audition, and go on stage, with auditions being 100% fair and devoid of internal politics. Our productions are performed in the Bonn culture centre, the Brotfabrik (185 seats), where we have an excellent relationship with the management. Our basic annual schedule is a spring and an autumn production, for five nights respectively. We also regularly compete and have won prizes at the Festival of European Anglophone Theatrical Societies (FEATS), hosted every year in a different European city. This year is no exception and we hope to be performing at the



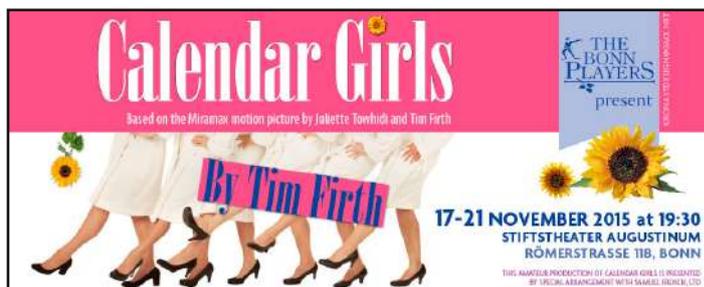
Festival in Brussels, Belgium – Covid-19 permitting.

Running an English-speaking theatre company in another country is not

without its challenges. First, it is important that we have a good command of the local language, German. As we are not performing in the local language, we need to speak with greater clarity and at a slightly slower speed. We also understand that our audiences don't always have the same sense of humour or cultural references that we do.

We also experience the typical challenges of finding and financing rehearsal space, storage, set building space and theatres. Luckily, we have free rehearsal space in the Independent Bonn International School (IBIS), an English-speaking primary school.

The Covid19 lockdowns have resulted in all of our 2020 productions being



postponed. To mitigate our revenue loss, we're experimenting with the Brotfabrik with live or recorded streaming of productions on a pay-per-view basis. Therefore, we're also holding online workshops to improve our actors' film acting skills.

Please visit our website or our Facebook pages for more information and let us know if you will be in the Bonn area post Covid – we are always up for a glass of wine and a chat about all things theatre!

Let's see what 2021 has in store for us! • CN-H

The "Diplomaten Toneelspelers" of The Hague

From Bonn in the heart of Germany we travel to somewhere much nearer to home - The Hague in Holland. Here we find the AATG who started life as the fabulously named "Diplomaten Toneelspelers".

The AATG is an English-language amateur theatre group based in The Hague. Membership is open to all nationalities, adults and children alike, with or without theatre skills or experience - as long as you share our enthusiasm for anything theatre! Whether you're excited for acting, singing, dancing, choreography, set design, painting, backstage crew, lights, sound, costume, make-up - there is always a spot for you within the AATG.

It all began in November 1951 with a production of *French Without Tears* by Terence Rattigan. The proceeds were donated to the building fund of the Anglican and American Episcopal Church in The Hague, which had been destroyed by the bombings of 1945. The group's original name was 'Diplomaten Toneelspelers' (Translation from the Dutch: Diplomatic Actors). In March 1964 Queen Juliana of the Netherlands gave her Royal Assent and the group was registered at the Chamber of Commerce as the Anglo-American Theatre Group of The Hague, hence AATG.

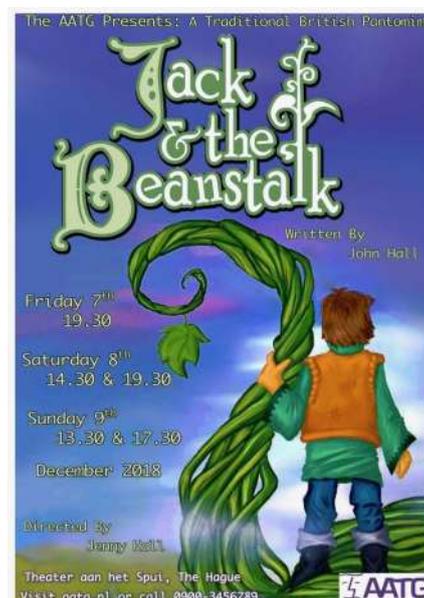
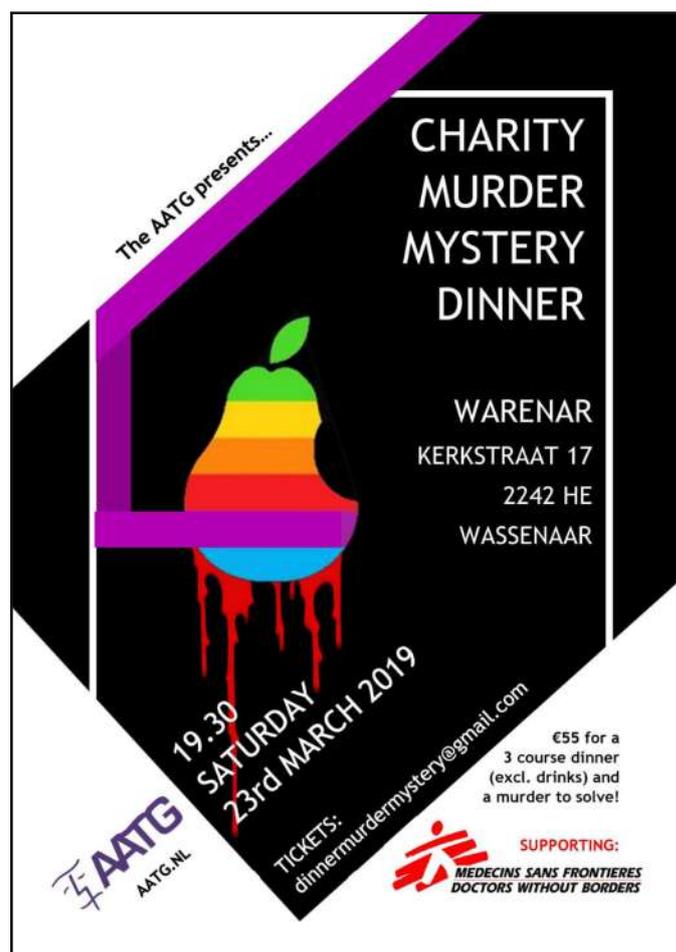
Our biggest yearly project is our hugely popular British Pantomime, generally involving about 100 people on stage or backstage in one way or another. This fun show for all the family, usually based loosely on a traditional fairy tale, is seen by nearly 2,000 people each year at four or five performances in a major The Hague theatre. The principal actors are selected by audition at the start of the summer, while the adults and children who sign up for the singing and dancing chorus have their first rehearsal straight after the summer holidays. Principals and chorus then attend

scheduled rehearsals leading up to the live performances in December. And, of course, a whole army of backstage helpers has to be recruited as well!

From New Year to the summer, our efforts are mainly focused on our Spring Production, which may be a full-length play or a number of one-act plays or musical sketches. Here too, the cast is selected by audition, but the backstage volunteers are equally indispensable! Our Spring Productions are staged in smaller theatres such as the Warenar theatre in Wassenaar.

Throughout the year we also hold several play readings (about one a month) and other learning and social events, in which anyone can take part. And in recent years we have organised a very successful Murder Mystery Dinner in March, which gives AATG members a great opportunity to dress up and improvise the scripted characters – murderer, victim(s) or innocent bystanders – so that the diners can try to pinpoint the guilty party! The net proceeds are donated to a nominated charity.

The AATG is governed by an annually elected Committee which takes care of day-to-day business, manages the finances in accordance with Dutch law and selects proposed plays. • AATG



Our Archivists Write... about Panto'

Scene's Editor at Large, Emma Bamford, wrote recently about the LDS Pantomime's that have become one of the many highlights of the LDS regular season. However, the the panto' itself would seem to be only half the story of Yuletide merriment for those involved. Mavis Roper, John Brooks, Jim O'Donoghue and Alan Freckingham take up the story.

One fact that was not mentioned in the January issue of Scene regarding the history of pantomimes at the Theatre, was the then traditional cabaret performed by the backstage crew in the bar following the strike after the final performance of the run.

When the panto cast first appeared on stage for rehearsals, the backstage company would notice certain incidents that would be remembered later; as the dress rehearsals continued and the run started, they recorded various mannerisms of the characters and any faux pas and errors that they could incorporate into the cabaret later.

Around ten days before the last night, the writing of the revue would begin with much input from the musical director, with rehearsals commencing on the Monday evening of the final week of the show after each performance. The cast was chosen from all the backstage departments and with the assistance of the wardrobe crew, costumes were selected for each person which was usually achieved by the individual standing beside the principal who had been wearing it in the show, making sure it would fit, whilst at the same time being able to observe them closely for any particular characteristics in their performance. The final rehearsal would take place between the matinee and evening of the last Saturday (there were no Sunday performances in those days.)

The script was a parody of the show, never sarcastic with the words of the songs changed and the traditional song sheet introduced towards the end with the Director and all the other key members of the production team invited to join in and nearly all the musical directors were the accompanists for the show.

The reviews first started during the Alan Gayton era, with material from Neil Bevan and in the 70's and 80's it was Charles Orr, John Moore and Andy Crooks who were the ideas men!

After one year's review the Director of the show that year volunteered for backstage for the following year's production, just so he could perform in the cabaret due to its popularity. • MR, JB, JO'D & AF



Two cast stills from the 1968 LDS production of Cinderella directed by Alan Gayton.

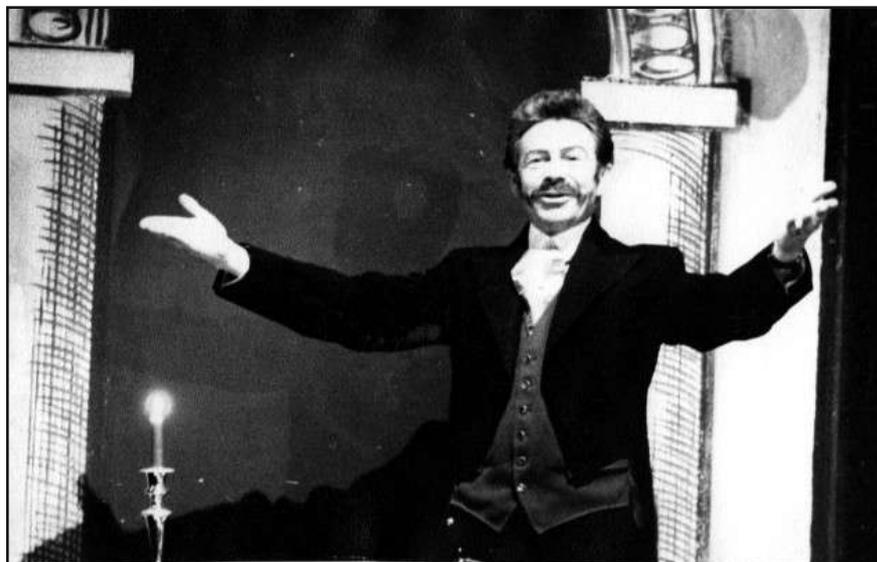
Our Archivists Write... about Music Hall

A fabulous thing about having senior members of the Theatre as our archivists is that they can remember so much about the Theatre from first hand experience. Following memories jolted by Jenny Harding's piece in the December Scene about Music Halls, Mavis Roper, John Brooks, Jim O'Donoghue & Alan Freckingham share their memories.

Following on from the article in the January edition of Scene although Geoff Sharp introduced the concept of Old Time Music Hall to the Little, Ken Armitage, the musical director, must also take much of the credit for making the first production a huge success.

Mr John Graham as *Your Chairman* from the *Old Time Music Hall* show in 1968

The Society has been fortunate over the years in having the services of excellent musical directors for all the shows, and, sadly, they are never given sufficient credit for their contribution. Geoff was an actor, director and a lighting wizard who had a wealth of theatrical experience and was also a member of the renowned Questors Theatre in Ealing, London. During the early 60s he obtained a senior management position with Rank Taylor and Hobson, in Leicester, thus joining the LDS on arrival in the city, and the first part he played within the Society was Falstaff.



Our version of the Old Time Music Hall was based on the BBC's 'Good Old Days' television programme broadcast from Leeds City Variety Theatre, but the difference was that we had waiters serving drinks throughout the show. This was achieved by a makeshift bar being built in the upper foyer and manned by Fred, our first professional bar manager assisted by volunteers, in addition to the lower floor bar that was open throughout the evening. Accommodating drinks in the auditorium was resolved by only selling four centre seats on A row, selling all the seats on B row and this was repeated up to K row; the whole of the L row was sold and the pattern again was repeated up to R row. This arrangement allowed the waiters to move freely between the rows. Trays were built supported by brackets over the backs of unsold seats for the placing of glasses. One consequence of not selling all the seats meant that the capacity was reduced by one third. The original seating plan is safely locked away in the archives.

During the first few years the waiters were all gentlemen and during the evening would go up on stage to sing two numbers in each act before returning to drinks duty. However, this only lasted a few years and as the popularity of the music hall grew with longer runs, so did the introduction of waitresses.

The Cockles and Mussels stall was initially run by Reg and Kay Kenny who later became Geoff's in-laws. The first run was for only one week, but such was the demand for tickets and with the full backing of all involved in the production it was reprised seven days later.

The introduction of Gala evenings started in the early days and were held in what is now the studio and clubroom with the catering provided by the Theatre members. Towards the end of his life, Geoff was confined to a wheelchair and lived with his wife Barbara in Wigston Fields. Sadly all his theatre memorabilia were destroyed, a great loss to the theatre world. • MR, JB, JO'D & AF



In the 1970s the Society would often take a show to the world famous Minack Theatre, Porthcurno, during the summer months. Lisa Thirlby has dug out this fabulous photo of David Harris singing 'I Live in Trafalgar Square' with Geoff Sharp as Chairman at the table. Photo credit: Alison Houstoun.

The Rusty Nail

It's always a joy talking to Frances Harris as you inevitably end up roaring with laughter, whilst sometimes wondering what exactly you are both laughing about or if it is quite appropriate that you should be laughing at all. Nevertheless it's always a complete joy. Continuing our Music Hall theme she shares her memories as a Music Hall "turn".

There's a certain thrill when you are on stage waiting for the curtain to go up.

Everyone in all departments is waiting for the 'Go'. The show you have been rehearsing for weeks or months will now run for about seven performances.

But those who performed regularly in variety groups didn't enjoy such luxury. The shows consisted of musical routines, sketches and every member had their own act, so at the normal weekly rehearsal you would be given the programme for, say, the coming Saturday.

You may ask why it wasn't a standard one. Several reasons. You may have visited the venue before and been asked to return, so you had to check previous lists to make sure you were not repeating anything. Also you had to bear in mind the kind of audience as some sketches may not have been suitable for all tastes or groups.

It could be a problem if you were in more than one society. On one occasion I had three shows in one day, so the car was packed with all the outfits, plus lighting, oh yes, my friend made his own portable set but he didn't drive!

Some places weren't very modern when it came to the amount of electric plugs, at one we were told we would have to run the extension through to the kitchen. Well, with footlights, spot lights and a control box gobbling up the juice it resulted that right in the middle of Cockney Capers everything fused and we were in darkness, but the pianist kept playing and I was in the middle of 'My Old Man' so I kept going. Never has "I can't find my way home" been so effective!

Obviously with all the changes we had, the first question was always 'where is the dressing room?'

At one venue we were told there wasn't anywhere we could use. The stage had wooden screens either side, no curtains etc. I spent the time I wasn't on, standing in my suitcase, behind a screen changing and not making a sound.

The Rusty Nail ?

Well, almost.

Again, when we asked for a dressing room we were shown the corridor! One of the items was the soprano singing The Bells Of Saint Mary's and in the middle one of the lads having done a quick change into his Quasimodo outfit, had to run on and carry her off. What anyone must have thought if they had been going along the corridor was anyone's guess.

Theatre is absolute luxury and everyone who makes it possible is a star. • FH



Notes from the office

Work in the office has continued throughout February. During this time we had a succession of trades people working in the Theatre, but the absolute star, month in, month out has been our very own, Rob Mullins.

▶ Trustees have taken the opportunity during the closure period to fit an automated shutter to the Theatre's Stage Door Entry. The shutter is now raised and lowered via a key activated electric motor. Unfortunately, the key is not the same as the old one. Therefore, if you were in possession of an old shutter key please pop into the office sometime and swap it for a new one.

▶ An alternative method of accessing the Theatre has had to be established given that the electric shutter on the Stage Door may, very occasionally, fail. If this unlikely event does happen, entry will be made via the fire doors nearest to the studio. Full details will be given on a needs-to-know basis to those who hold entry keys.

▶ During lockdown the dressing rooms have been cleaned and repainted. The toilets have been refurbished too and the ventilation and broken windows replaced. Door ironmongery has been stripped back & buffed. Pics here!

▶ Office staff have been working on an "Office Manual" over the last few weeks. This manual will provide brief details of most office functions and the basic operation of the Theatre, which could provide a first resource for those members coming to assist in the office.

▶ Following the upgrading of the wi-fi throughout the Theatre, members of the cast and crew now have their own dedicated wi-fi for use backstage. The wi-fi network name is: LittleTheatre-CastCrew & the password: Performance2021! (The exclamation mark is part of the password!)

▶ Huge thanks to those members that declared an interest in helping out in the Theatre Office following our appeal in last month's Scene. Many thanks too to those that offered professional advice in several areas. We now understand the options we have with our Lantern - it's now just the small matter of securing the £20,000 to fund the fix.



▶ With the exciting news that we will be performing "Chariots of Fire" this summer, the painting of the pantomime cloths could not take place in its regular summer slot as the stage would be full of the play set. Trustees have therefore opted to have the cloths painted by local specialist Theatrical Scenery painters, Visualscene Ltd. Once they have been delivered to the Theatre they will be flown from the fly rail.

▶ Our Cyclorama has been replastered and is drying out. For those, like myself, who had no idea what a cyclorama is, it's the big curvy thing at the back of the stage. And it's the naughty step for the person who suggested the big curvy thing at the back of the stage was Dame Milly Muffin.

▶ The paintshop sink behind the stage is being replaced. A kitchen grade stainless steel deep double sink and drainer unit has been purchased along with a paint sediment trap. Once installed the surround area will be configured for best use. • CH

Feb 2021 Winners

**LDS
200
CLUB**

1st prize - £250
Share Number - 012

2nd prize - £100
Share Number - 134

3rd prize - £50
Share Number - 057

LDS Noticeboard - March

Chrystal Derbyshire

We recently learnt, via Fran Harris, the sad news of the passing of Chrystal Derbyshire. Our thoughts and condolences are naturally with all that knew her at this difficult time. Fran collected these tributes to Chrystal from the many people who knew & worked with her.

Chrys was a wonderful volunteer. She worked on stage as well as box office.

Jackie Caunt

A lovely lady. I met her through drama and we played scrabble on line.

Hilary Saunders

Chrys and Brian were really nice people and Chrys had a rare strong sense of humour, as well as not suffering fools gladly.

John Ghent

Another loyal worker lost.

Mary Jones

Sad news. They both did such a lot of work for us over the years.

Andy Crooks

A lovely couple. I worked with Brian FOH many years ago and Chrys always had time for a chat. Will miss them both very much.

Fran Harris

Very sorry to hear about Chrys. As well as FOH she fulfilled many other roles in the Theatre. She will be sadly missed by all those she helped at the Theatre over the years. Although she had Parkinsons and other health problems, she showed great courage coping with them.

Teresa Heaps

A real trouper whose dry wit prompted an explosive chuckle which increased ten-fold as one's appreciation of her comment dawned. A very clever lady; her warm and compassionate nature was endless for others in spite of her own long and trying illness.

Margaret Damant

Bryan Porteous

I was sad to learn Bryan Porteous had passed away during January, deepest sympathy to Pat and the family. • Alan Freckingham

Archive News

The Archive Team have negotiated with the family of a deceased member whose memorabilia was destined for America, but thanks to Jim all the documents will be donated to the Little.

We have received donations during the lockdowns but unfortunately have not been able to access Dover Street to file etc.

• The Archive Team



HAVE YOU MISSED PERFORMING?

Then it's time for us all to get back to it ~ together. The Olympics begin on July 23rd 2021, so we plan to stage

Chariots of Fire

the week before. There will be 40 + roles available, opportunities for all.

Rehearsals will take account of whatever restrictions are in place.

Get in touch NOW to express interest or to ask for more information, so that we are ready to go, as soon as the starting pistol is fired!

Contact Mary Jones - e:adamary86@hotmail.com or m: 07814510059