

50 YEARS OF THE PLAYHOUSE
AT THE QUESTORS THEATRE



SATURDAY 18 OCTOBER 2014

The Judi Dench Playhouse

A FOREWORD BY DAME JUDI DENCH, PRESIDENT OF THE QUESTORS THEATRE

I am delighted to be your President as The Questors Theatre marks the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Playhouse. Back in 1964 I was seven years into my professional career, performing in repertory with the Oxford Playhouse company and making my film debut in *The Third Secret*, playing the tiny role of an assistant in an art gallery.

Little did I know how my career would develop, but I knew I was on an exciting journey. And little did I know about The Questors Theatre in those days. It was Alan Drake who introduced me to The Questors, and much gratitude should be given to him for its success.

You at The Questors were also beginning an exciting journey with the opening of your splendid and innovative Playhouse, building on the success of over 30 years in the "Tin Hut".

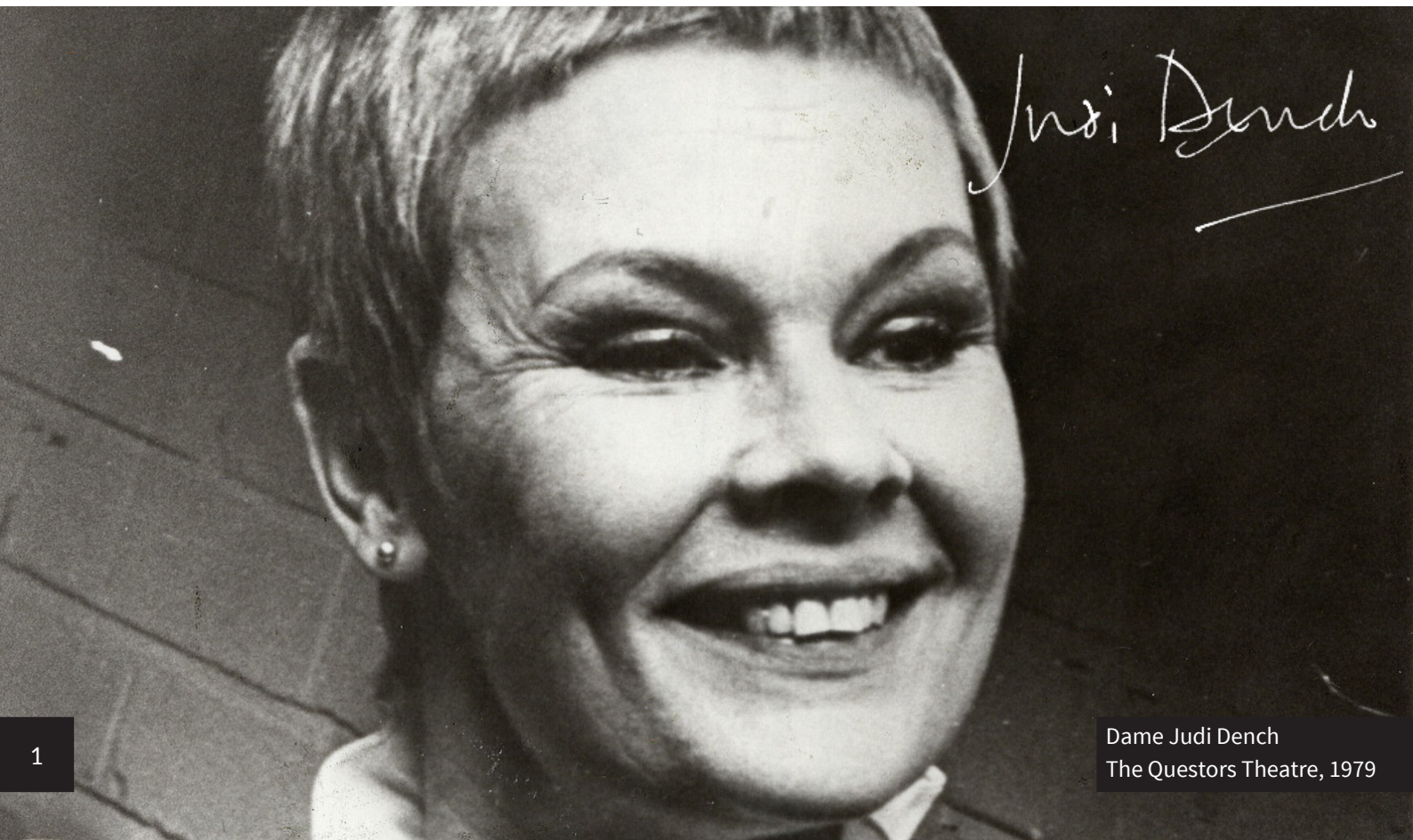
At the time no amateur theatre in the country had embarked on such an ambitious project and even today the Playhouse remains one of the best there is, with its highly flexible stage, state of the art lighting and sound, and superb backstage facilities. It certainly beats many modern-day professional venues!

But a building is only a building. It is the people and their passion for theatre which brings it alive. In those 50 years you have staged over 600 productions, performing in front of tens of thousands of appreciative audience members, keeping live theatre flourishing in Ealing and becoming Europe's largest community theatre company.

I had the pleasure of meeting one of your founders, Alfred Emmet, on a number of occasions. It was he who said in 1964 "it is The Questors' way to look ahead rather than backward".

In looking ahead you have decided to re-name the Playhouse in my honour. I am thrilled and very flattered and thank you all.

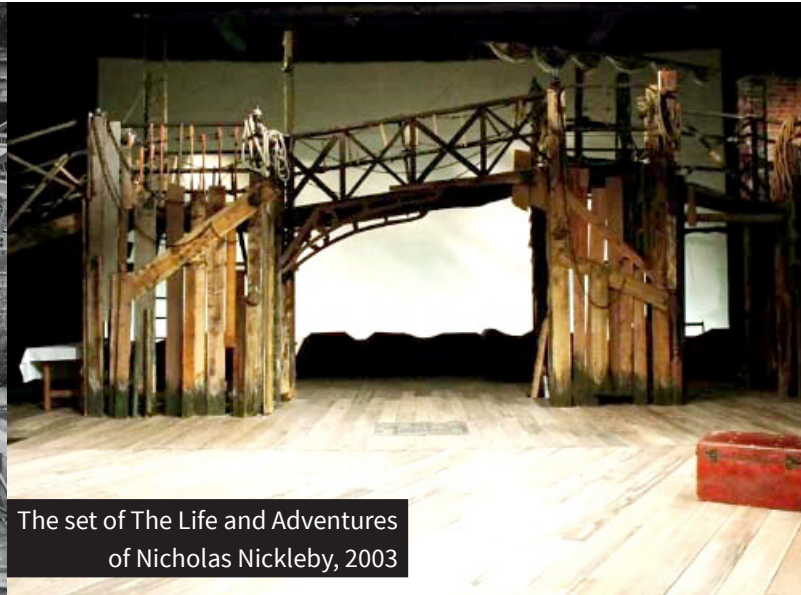
I sincerely hope that the second 50 years of the Judi Dench Playhouse at the Questors Theatre will be even more successful than the first 50 years and that your remarkable theatre company continues to flourish through to your centenary in 2029 and beyond.



Dame Judi Dench
The Questors Theatre, 1979



The Playhouse during construction, 1963



The set of The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby, 2003

Introduction

Tonight is a celebration - of 50 years of artistic endeavour in our wonderful Playhouse.

Back in 1964 the Chairman George Benn wrote “We now have the shop window which we have hitherto lacked – let us use it to its maximum capacity”.

We think and hope that we have done George proud, as well as those who over five decades ago took forward the plans which culminated in Her Majesty the Queen Mother opening the Playhouse on 22 April 1964.

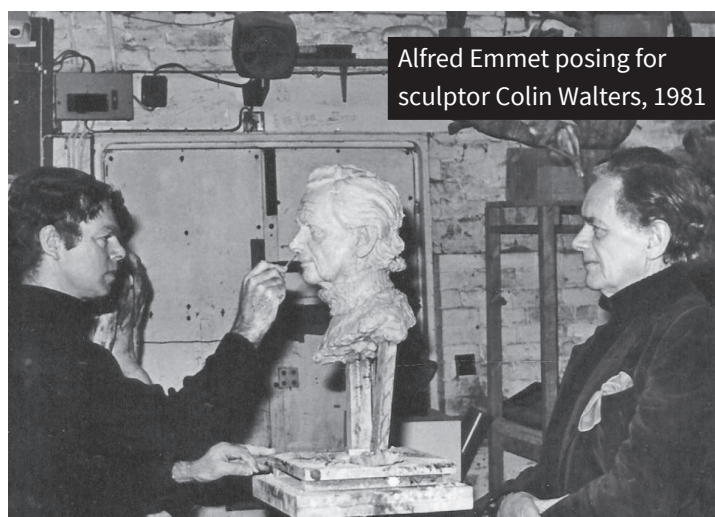
So we honour those who led this great endeavour back in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The committee of management from the year 1964 are listed below:

George Benn - Chairman, David Eldridge - Vice Chairman, Alfred Emmet - Hon. Director, Graham Heywood - Dep. Director, Laurence Nixon - Hon. Treasurer, Martin Bowley - Hon. Secretary, Ken Conington, Clifford Hampton, Betty Ogden, Joan Pyle, Tony Shipley and Clifford Webb.

We have taken our inspiration for this evening from the 50th anniversary celebrations of the founding of the National Theatre. Tonight you will see a series of short extracts from a cross-section of Questors productions which we think capture the spirit and vision of our theatre since 1964.

As the National found out, the selection was not easy and every possible permutation meant much had to be left out.

We believe that the plays and playwrights chosen for our celebration will provide you all with a rich feast, some good memories and a few laughs too and reinforce the seven core values of The Questors Theatre as enshrined in our constitution, namely to serve the art of the theatre, to achieve the highest possible artistic standards, to be a theatre of learning and education, to be an outward-looking theatre, to be an open and inclusive theatre, to be a theatre of adventure, and to remain an independent theatre.



Alfred Emmet posing for sculptor Colin Walters, 1981

RM

Richard Mead

Chairman of The Questors Theatre

Mike Langridge

Mike Langridge

Director of 50 Years of the Playhouse

THE QUESTORS THEATRE: 1929 TO 2014

5 SEPTEMBER 1929

The Questors Theatre is founded – our first production is *The Best People* at the Park Theatre, Hanwell. 17 members and bank balance of 7s 11 1/2d.

1936

First experimental production in the round, sowing the seeds for the Playhouse.

1945

A Doll's House is the first conventionally realistic play for which the forestage is used and starts the chain in staging experimentation which culminates in the designs for a new Playhouse.

1930

1933

First production at Mattock Lane in the Tin Hut is *Dragon's Teeth*, a new expressionist play featuring 70 parts. On opening night, nine parts fall vacant! £75 is spent equipping the stage.

1934

First Shakespeare production: *The Taming of the Shrew*.

1938

The Boy Scouts, who share the Tin Hut, vacate and take their chairs with them. The Questors launch "Cough up or stand up" to raise the money for a set of old cinema seats.

1940

1940

A Blitz bomb comes within 3ft of hitting the Tin Hut; performances are taken to ARP depots, factories, hospitals and community halls. This continues through the war years with average production costs of £7.

1958

Our President, Sir Michael Redgrave, opens the Shaw Room. The foundation stone for the Stanislavsky Room is laid by members of the Moscow Art Theatre company.

1964

HM Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother opens the Playhouse and attends a performance of Ibsen's *Brand*.

1974

The Stanislavsky Room now formally becomes our Studio Theatre.

1960

1960

Dame Edith Evans opens the Stanislavsky Room, now more commonly known as the Studio (also built by members).

1963

The old Tin Hut is demolished and on 8 November the Grapevine committee decides the time has come to open every night and Sunday lunchtime. A pint that day costs 1s 6d or 7.5p.

1970

1968

Michael Redgrave rehearsal room opens above the Grapevine.

1972

The upper foyer and the link between Shaw and Stanislavsky rooms and workshop are completed. The same year a major LTG conference is held under the title of "The Open Stage".

1989

Our Diamond Jubilee is celebrated with the publication of *A Few Drops of Water*, a history of The Questors Theatre, and a rehearsed reading of *The Best People*.

1998

The Alfred Emmet Room opens. This is part of the Renaissance Project which is achieved with a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund and includes a covered lower foyer, lift and new box office. It is celebrated with a ceremonial re-opening with Vice-President Oliver Ford Davies.

1990

2000

1992

Acting for All starts.

1993

Dannie Abse, whose early plays we championed, celebrates his 70th birthday in Mattock Lane.

1996

Cumulative donations from the Grapevine pass the £500,000 mark.

1997

Godspell is the first Questors Youth Theatre show to be staged in the Playhouse. Members of the 50th Student Group graduate.

1998

The first Questors website is launched.

The opening of the Playhouse was labelled “After The Beginning” by Alfred Emmet in his notes in the 1964 programme. Here is “The Reduced Questors Theatre History - Abridged” for us all.

1946

First student group, made up of 10 women, is formed.

1952

We play an active part in the formation of the International Amateur Theatre Association now known as IATA or AITA.

1952-54

Design of the new Playhouse. It takes five designs to get it right; the work is led by architect and member Norman Branson.

1954

The Young Questors (now the Questors Youth Theatre) is formed.

1950

1946

Formation of the Little Theatre Guild (LTG) - we are one of the nine founder members and Alfred Emmet is its first secretary.

1952

Mattock Lane premises are purchased for £8,500 even though we only have £2,500 in our building fund. The “Save our Stage” appeal has weeks to raise the balance. The deal is sealed when Arthur Guinness Son and Co. Ltd offer the theatre a 20 year loan of £4,000 at only 2%, on condition its dramatic society can use the theatre three weeks a year.

1955

The plans are published and the new theatre fund is launched to raise £50,000 in two years, equivalent to £1.2m in today's terms. Meanwhile work starts on the Bernard Shaw Room, almost entirely built by members.

1979

The Golden Jubilee includes a visit from Sir Michael Redgrave and Twenty Four Characters in Search of an Author, starring Judi Dench, Michael Williams and Roger Rees.

1985

The death of Sir Michael Redgrave, President since 1958. Judi Dench OBE, a Vice-President since 1981, becomes President.

1987

Rebuilding and expansion of the workshop and provision of more backstage area and a dressing room for the Studio.

1988

We run an Edinburgh Fringe venue – Old St Paul's Church Hall, repeated in 1990 and 1992.

1980

1983

Alfred Emmet retires as Director of Studies and passes the mantle to his son, David.

1983/84

New heating and computerised lighting is installed in the Playhouse and HRH The Prince of Wales pays an unofficial visit to a Coarse Acting Show (1984).

1987

The Questors Choir performs for the first time in the Playhouse.

1989

PlayBack, The Questors' reminiscence theatre group, is set up. From Cradle to Grave is staged in the Playhouse in 1997.

2004

The first Executive Director is appointed, the Questors Youth Theatre celebrates 50 years and the Arts Council come to launch their brochure “Commissioning new work; a good practice guide for amateur theatre companies and playwrights”.

2011

First phase of a collaboration with the Royal Shakespeare Company as one of the chosen regional venues for their Open Stages project.

2012

The Grapevine is voted CAMRA National Club of the Year and its donations to the theatre reach £1.25 million. We present our Big Shakespeare Season with the RSC.

2003

Online booking is launched.

2005

The Questors Theatre becomes a public venue.

2008

We host the LTG Annual National Conference and welcome Oliver Ford Davies, Sir Ian McKellen and Amanda Redman.

2014

Launch of new website, renewal of computerised box office and major restructuring of all office systems to create an efficient and integrated IT platform.

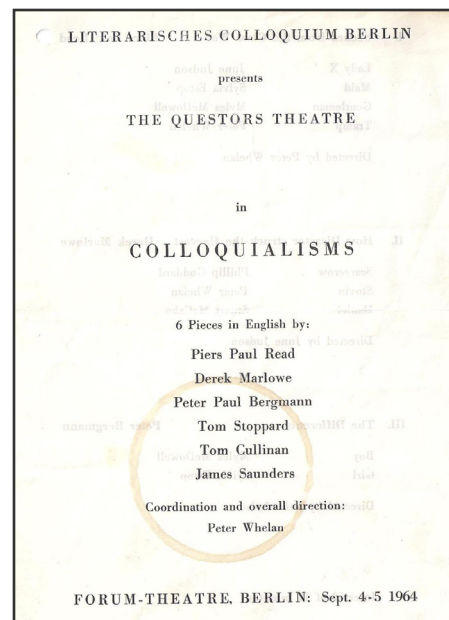
1964-73 “MAKING WAVES”

In 1967 The Questors had its first trip to the Minack Theatre in Cornwall



The opening of the Playhouse was called “The Beginning” but it was only as a result of 35 years of history and commitment to theatre that this ambitious project could have happened. The confidence the new theatre instilled in the members meant that they were ready to “make waves” at a time when society was seeing radical social change.

The annual New Plays Festival at The Questors had started in 1960 and continued for 18 years through this decade and beyond. A number of the plays were especially commissioned by us and many now established playwrights cut their literary teeth in Mattock Lane. In the theatre’s 40th anniversary year, we hosted the first of six international amateur theatre weeks. These continued until 1982 with Alfred Emmet and later Tony Rushforth at the helm. In 1964 we had our first foreign tour to West Berlin, and in 1969 and 1971 we welcomed two companies each from France and Italy and one from Czechoslovakia.



Other productions worth noting from this decade

A Collier’s Friday Night – this rarely performed DH Lawrence play was staged in the round in the bleak midwinter of 1971/72 during the infamous 3-day week power shortages. The stage was lit with hurricane lamps and candles, the audience kept their winter coats on and the atmosphere was magical.

The Dogs of Pavlov – Dannie Abse sadly died in September 2014, but he remains a well-known modern playwright with a strong affinity to The Questors. This play was commissioned for the 10th New Plays Festival in 1969. It featured as one of Alfred Emmet’s “Founder’s Dozen”, his choice of significant productions between 1964-89.

Edward II – this Christopher Marlowe play was a brave choice in 1968, dealing as it does with the king’s homosexuality. The following year, the play had its first professional revival for 300 years starring Ian McKellen and Timothy West.

The Homecoming – Pinter’s work has been performed at The Questors no fewer than 33 times and this play in the Playhouse in 1968, 1995 and 2010.

Macbeth – the title role in this 1966 production was played by Peter Healy who remarkably went on to play the role again in 1980. It was directed in 1966 by Alan Clarke, a film and television director renowned for the gritty social realism of his work through the 1970s and 80s.

A Scent of Flowers – written by James Saunders it was staged in 1966, fresh from a successful West End run. James had a long and fruitful association with The Questors and his works have been performed on our stages on 30 occasions.

Sweeney Todd – this 1964 production was by George Dibdin Pitt rather than Stephen Sondheim, who did not write his version until 1979. It is one of a number of melodramas which were a Questors Christmas tradition.

The World Coarse Acting Championship – held in 1972, this featured Tony Pedley and Roger Rees of the RSC in a wonderful Julius Caesar which had Caesar crazily pursuing Brutus around the auditorium with daggers.

Tonight, The Questors presents...

BRAND - the first production in the new Playhouse, this Ibsen classic performed in front of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother with a 30-strong cast was the premiere of a new translation by James Forsyth. Directed by Alfred Emmet, according to one critic it “perfectly demonstrates [The Questors’] dramatic courage.”

Director 1964 - Alfred Emmet

Director tonight - Mike Langridge

Ffrangcon Whelan, who played Agnes in the original 1964 production, will be reprising her role tonight.



THE SCHOOL FOR SCANDAL - Richard Brinsley Sheridan’s classic 1780s romp is a firm favourite. It has been staged twice in the Playhouse, first in 1970 and then in 1996. The 1996 production was invited to perform in the Georgian Theatre in Richmond, Yorkshire on the occasion of the opening of their theatre museum. Don Kincaid wrote the music for this production and has composed and performed many original pieces for The Questors, including a number of collaborations with Peter Whelan.

Director 1996 and tonight - Tony Rushforth

Cast 1996 - Tony Barber, Sarah Galton

Cast tonight - Tony Barber, Caroline Bleakley

COARSE ACTING - for over 50 years playwright and author Michael Green has been one of our actors and directors. His book “The Art of Coarse Acting”, which spawned the Coarse Plays, also celebrates its Golden Jubilee in 2014. The Questors has staged numerous Coarse Acting shows over the years, most recently as part of the Big Shakespeare Season in 2012.

Tonight - Michael Green



1974-83 “THE FRINGE YEARS”

The second decade of the Playhouse we have labelled the “Fringe” years for the reason that The Questors had a big break when it toured unofficially to Edinburgh in 1977, and then went back again officially in 1979 and 1980.

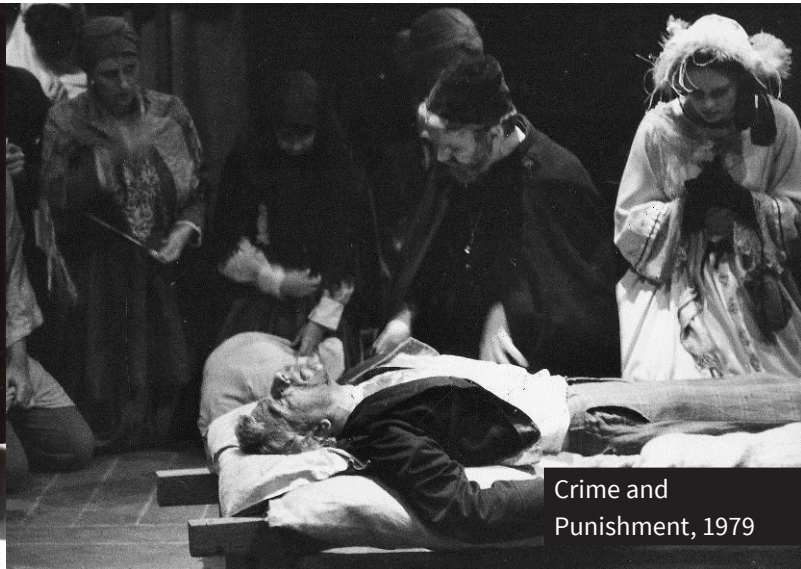
The production of Coarse Acting in 1979 led to a transfer to the West End and a run at the Shaftesbury Theatre.

But that was not all, The Questors also toured to Austria in 1976, to the USA in 1977 and Sweden in 1983.

Sisters,
1982



Crime and
Punishment, 1979



Other productions worth noting from this decade

The Beggar’s Opera – the 50th anniversary production of John Gay’s production in 1979 was attended by Sir Michael Redgrave despite illness.

Cabaret – proved a rare musical success for us in 1983 and was The Questors’ contribution to the English Amateur Theatre week held in Mattock Lane.

Crime and Punishment – this 1979 production of Rodney Ackland’s stage adaptation of Dostoevsky’s novel featured 23 students from former years brought in to support the main cast of 12 students graduating that year.

Gashiram Kotwal – in 1980 the Theatre Academy from Poona brought what is believed to be the first production to this country by an Indian theatre (as opposed to dance) company.

The Lark – the Christopher Fry translation of Jean Anouilh’s play about Joan of Arc was a great success at The Minack Theatre, Cornwall, and is the only Questors production to go there which has not been seen in the Playhouse (just some dress runs in the car park!).

The Merchant of Venice – this 1977 production was staged through the energy crisis and three performances were delivered using the headlights of cars to light the stage.

Sisters – 1982 saw the British premiere of this Canadian play by Michel Tremblay with 15 roles for women and none for men.

Staircase – Alfred Emmet wrote of this 1975 production of Charles Dyer’s play: “the director and designer ... found a way of successfully unifying the temporary and permanent seating. This showed the way and led to further in-the-round productions”.

What the Butler Saw – in 1977 a very successful production of this Joe Orton classic embarked on a three-week, six-venue, 1,000 mile tour of the USA, playing to 90% capacity despite the gynaecological sensitivities of some American matrons in the audience.

Tonight, The Questors presents...

ROSENCRANTZ & GUILDENSTERN ARE DEAD - in 1964 we performed a series of one-off performances of emerging works under the title "Five plays from Berlin". One of these was Guildenstern and Rosencrantz by a young playwright called Tom Stoppard who directed the first version. Peter Whelan directed a further iteration but the play then went on to be retitled and reworked. The play we know today was first staged at the Edinburgh Fringe in 1966 and, a year later, at the National Theatre. Our 1974 production celebrated the 10th anniversary of the opening of the Playhouse.

Director 1974 - Bill McLaughlin

Director tonight - Dominique Gerrard

Cast 1974 - Neville Cruttenden,
Richard Gaunt, Duncan Livingstone

Cast tonight - Alex Cummings, Anil
Goutam, Simon Roberts



OH WHAT A LOVELY WAR - the epic Joan Littlewood/Theatre Workshop musical has been staged twice at The Questors - in 1978 and 2005. It is included in part to mark the centenary of the start of the First World War. It also provides us with a moving musical interlude. Geoff Webb directed this in 1978, and tonight's production reprises the 2005 show.

Director 2005 - Nick Murza

Director tonight - Dominique Gerrard

Soloist 2005 and tonight - Jananne
Rahman

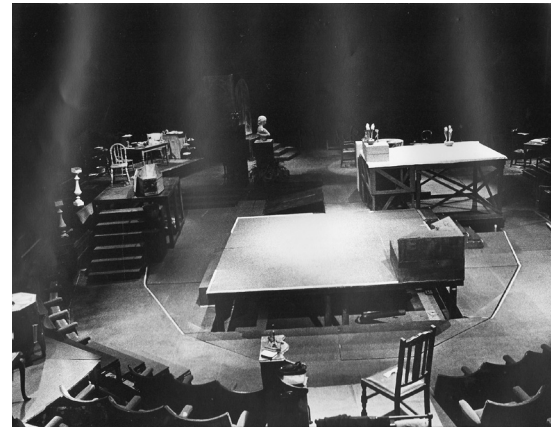
Ensemble tonight - Lucy Aley-Parker,
Lauren McGee

THE GHOST SONATA - this Strindberg play was one of Alfred Emmet's "Founder's Dozen". He selected it partly because of Tony Rushforth's decision to make it a promenade production, which set a new landmark for The Questors' use of the Playhouse, but also for the critical acclaim it received at the Edinburgh Fringe in 1980.

Director 1979 and tonight - Tony Rushforth

Cast 1979 - Neville Cruttenden, Mary
Davies, Mary Hodlin, Barbara Hutchins,
Alfred Emmet, David Emmet, Robin
Ingram, Michael Mountain, Ken
Ratcliffe, Dorothy Boyd Taylor

Cast tonight - Paul Collins, Alex
Cummings, Nina Flitman, Robin
Ingram, Alex McDevitt, Iain Reid,
Dorothy Boyd Taylor, Ffrangcon
Whelan



THE ACCRINGTON PALS - another tribute to the centenary of the First World War, but also an important one for a famous member, the playwright Peter Whelan, who sadly died earlier this year. It has been performed three times on our stages, in 1983 directed by David Fletcher, 2004 (as a radio play in the Studio directed by Steve Fitzpatrick) and 2010 (Studio).

Director 2010 and tonight - Mark Fitzgerald

Cast 2010 - Katy Bond, Jed O'Hagan
Chambers, Sherralyn Croft, Ellie
Jeffreys, Clara Latham, Tom Lincoln,
Ellis McNorthey-Gibbs

Cast tonight - Julian Casey, Jed
O'Hagan Chambers, Claire Durrant,
Jasmin Hinds, Clara Latham, Ellis
McNorthey-Gibbs, Hannah Whiteoak

1984-93 “THE OUTWARD-LOOKING YEARS”

The period 1984 to 1993 was seen by many as a time to review The Questors’ role in society as an outward-looking theatre. We launched PlayBack – reminiscence theatre aimed at engaging local people and recording their recollections on a chosen theme. These memories are then woven into plays or presented in a verbatim script-in-hand style. The first full production, Soapsud Island, was a great success in the Studio and a further seven full-length plays have been developed since then.

A first national student playwriting competition was launched in 1986/87, sponsored by Gestetner. The winning play, John Fay’s The Death of Joe Hill, almost made it into our selection tonight, and we performed the runner-up, The Brick, by Nigel Swain, at the Edinburgh Fringe in 1988, attracting critical acclaim from The Guardian and The Independent. 1992 saw us mount a season of 12 plays from 12 different European countries. Guardian theatre critic and famous theatre historian Michael Billington said that “only The Questors Theatre would be brave enough to celebrate ... in such a way”.

Meanwhile The Questors also went to Japan in 1985 – the furthest the company has travelled overseas - where we performed in a 1,000 seat auditorium as part of an international festival. In 1988 we then took over venue 45, Old St Paul’s Church Hall, at the Edinburgh Fringe and ran the venue successfully that year and in 1990 and 1992.

Other productions worth noting from this decade

All My Sons – not an easy decision, but the extracts tonight do not include any by American playwrights. We staged this play by the great Arthur Miller in 1993, directed by Peter Field. It will be seen again on the Playhouse stage in 2015.

The Aspern Papers - Sir Michael Redgrave’s stage adaptation of this Henry James novel was performed in 1990 in his memory with his widow, Rachel Kempson, playing the role of Miss Bordereau. Corin and Vanessa Redgrave came to see this production, directed by Jimmie Chinn.

Bartholomew Fair – set in 1614 and written by Ben Jonson, this is (so far!) the largest production ever in the Playhouse, with 76 people appearing every night – 50 of whom had never set foot on the stage before.

Bedroom Farce – this Alan Ayckbourn play has appeared twice in our Playhouse repertoire, in 1985 and 2008.

Daisy Pulls It Off - written by Denise Deegan, this 1993 Christmas show went on to be a phenomenal success at The Minack Theatre in 1995.



Don Juan or the Love of Geometry – this play by Max Frisch was part of the 1992 European season and a great example of us fulfilling our aim of staging rarely performed plays.

Fen – by one of the UK’s greatest living women playwrights, Caryl Churchill, and directed in 1993 by Alan Chambers, this story of Fenland folk involved a few tonnes of mud being transported into the Playhouse to make a potato field.

Happy Families – this was another first, a play commissioned from John Godber by British Telecom for the Little Theatre Guild, staged in 1991 by 49 companies more or less simultaneously.

Hello Paris – this also toured to Edinburgh in 1992. The writer Sebastian Baczkiewicz is a former Questors student, actor and director. He is now one of Radio 4’s most prolific dramatists.

Measure for Measure – set in the 1930s, this Shakespeare production was directed in 1989 by Carol Metcalfe who went on to found the Bridewell Theatre.

Tonight, The Questors presents...

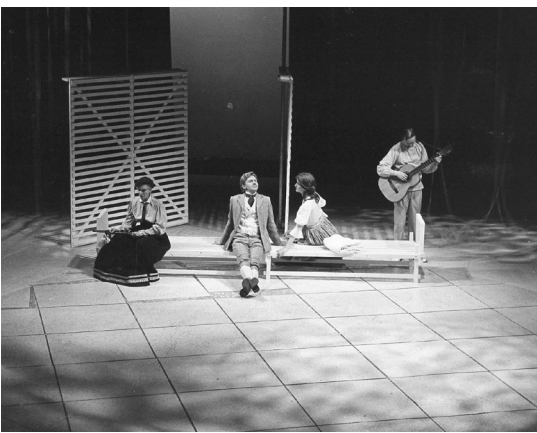
LARK RISE - this adaptation for the stage of Flora Thompson's trilogy broke new ground for The Questors, being described as our "first community play". This promenade production was a major tour de force in which a cast of 33 was supplemented by a live folk band and a 47-strong crew.

Director 1984 - Ed Pitt

Cast 1984 - Glynn Backshall, Roger Bootle, Richard Brown, Julian Critcher, Michael Howard, John Kearns, Vincent McQueen, Wilfred Sharp, Ffrangcon Whelan

Director tonight - John Davey

Cast tonight - Howard Benbrook, Alex Cummings, John Dobson, Anil Goutam, Anthony Green, Alison Griffin, Declan McAndrew, Jon Rose, Phillip Sheahan



THE CHERRY ORCHARD - The Questors has staged Chekhov at least 35 times and his long association with Stanislavsky means that Chekhov's works are a part of the core syllabus for the Student Group. The Cherry Orchard has been performed four times, most recently in 1985, directed by Tony Rushforth, and then in 2004.

Director 2004 and tonight - Peter Field

Cast 2004 - Anne Neville, Simon Roberts, Izabella Urbanowicz, Norman Wilkinson

Cast tonight - Helen Parkinson, Jananne Rahman, Simon Roberts, Norman Wilkinson

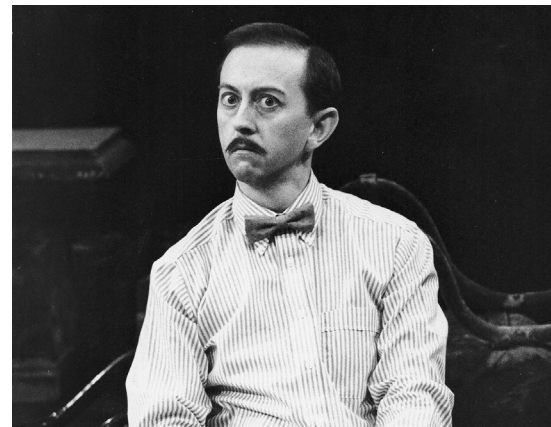
LIVING TOGETHER from THE NORMAN CONQUESTS - this production bears witness to the massive contribution made by Ayckbourn to British playwrighting in the 20th and 21st centuries. One of the major proponents of theatre in the round, he describes our Playhouse as "a theatre after my own heart". The Norman Conquests presents a considerable challenge with all six characters appearing in a trilogy of full-length plays, designed to be performed in rep.

Director 1986 - Barbara Hutchins

Cast 1986 - Phillip Clayton-Gore, Mary Davies, Simon De Deney, Paul Southgate, Elizabeth Timms

Director tonight - David Emmet

Cast tonight - Alex Cummings, Anthony Green, Rachel Griffiths, Declan McAndrew, Alex McDevitt



MOTHER COURAGE AND HER CHILDREN - staged in 1967, directed by David Gower and repeated here in 1989, Brecht's classic is a truly great play, a timeless story about the self-perpetuating nature of war and the effect it has on the common (wo)man. 1989 was the Diamond Jubilee of The Questors and this was the production chosen to celebrate it.

Director 1989 and tonight - David Emmet

Cast 1989 - Howard Benbrook, Gwenan Evans, Sarah Girkin, James Goodden, Anne Neville

Cast tonight - Anil Goutam, Jasmin Hinds, Helena Lewis, Madeleine Maxwell-Libby, Declan McAndrew

1994-2003 “THE RENAISSANCE YEARS”

We call this decade the renaissance years partly because it witnessed the conception of the most significant change to the way The Questors Theatre has been run since it was founded as a membership club theatre in 1929.

From a high point in the 1970s of over 4,000, the membership had dropped below 1,500 by the end of the 1990s. The concept of a membership theatre, where only members could buy tickets, had become old-fashioned and did not attract younger people with quite different lifestyles from those of their parents' generation.

The turn of the millennium presented the theatre's Committee of Management with a significant challenge as it became clear that radical change was needed if The Questors was to continue to fulfil its Quest and to remain independent. An in-depth membership consultation resulted in a decision that The Questors become a public theatre. This was finally achieved in 2005.

The 1990s also gave birth to the Renaissance project, which saw The Questors become one of the first arts organisations to apply successfully for Heritage Lottery Funding. This award, together with a very generous bequest from a member, enabled us to upgrade the lower foyer and box office, install the lift and make other improvements to our facilities in order to enhance the experience of people with disabilities.



The Wind in the
Willows, 2000



The Questors Youth Theatre in
Arabian Nights, 2008

Other productions worth noting from this decade

Dancing at Lughnasa – The Questors Theatre has had a strong affinity with Irish playwrights over many years and Brian Friel's wonderful memory play set in 1936, directed by Paddy O'Connor in 1995, was a critical success.

The Glass Menagerie – this Tennessee Williams play has had two outings in our Playhouse, once in 1986 and once in 1999. This evening's time constraints simply did not allow for any of this great playwright's work to be included.

Godspell – in 1997 this was the first Questors Youth Theatre show to be staged in the Playhouse for a full week's run.

Heartbreak House – if we have done a disservice by not including an American playwright, then at least we have evened this out by not including Shaw! Produced in the first decade in the Playhouse and then again in its fourth, this Shaw classic is one of 40 productions of his works staged since 1929.

Uncle Vanya – this 1994 production of Chekhov's classic was directed by a visiting director from Moscow and performed in Ealing and then in Moscow as part of the annual Chekhov Festival. Getting a “stage pistol” through customs and into Russia was interesting.

The Wind in the Willows – it was recognised that there was a demand for something to appeal to children and their parents in west London at Christmas-time. A new tradition of great family Christmas shows was really set in 2000 with this superb adaptation of Kenneth Grahame's novel by Alan Bennett, directed by John Horwood.

Tonight, The Questors presents...

NEXT TIME I'LL SING TO YOU - James Saunders is another playwright who has had a very close connection to The Questors Theatre. Commissioned by us, it was first performed in the Studio as part of the third New Plays Festival in 1961/62, it transferred to the West End and went on to win the Evening Standard Award for Most Promising Playwright. The 1995 production was to honour Jimmy's 70th birthday. Two of tonight's actors were in the original cast!

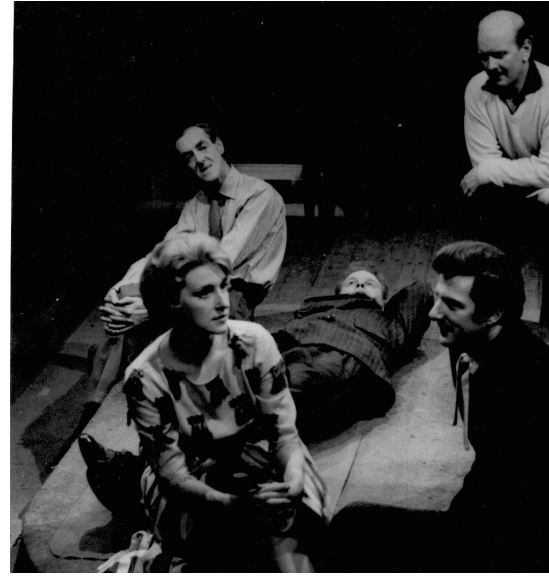
Other James Saunders plays that premiered at The Questors were: Who Was Hilary Machonochie?, The Pedagogue, Neighbours, The Borage Pigeon Affair, Hans Kohlhaas, The Island, and The Girl in Melanie Klein.

Director 1962 - Shirley Butler

Director 1995 and tonight - Larry Irvin

Cast 1962 - Jo Irvin, Larry Irvin, Laurence Nixon, Peter Whelan

Cast tonight - Tony Barber, Paul Collins, Jo Irvin, Larry Irvin



KING LEAR – there were so many productions by Shakespeare that we could have selected, but this production stood out as an excellent and comparatively recent example of The Questors and Shakespeare at their joint best. The set design of both productions in 1975 and 2000 was stark and allowed the Playhouse to be itself.

Director 2000 and tonight - Peter Field

Cast 2000 - Steve Fitzpatrick, Charmian Norman-Taylor, Keith Parry, Alison Pollard, Cameron Smillie

Cast tonight - Lisa Day, Helen Parkinson, Keith Parry, Simon Roberts, Phillip Sheahan

THE LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF NICHOLAS NICKLEBY – one of the most ambitious productions ever staged, the two plays were performed in repertory featuring 35 actors in 90 scenes which required 18 weeks of rehearsals. Over 250 costumes were made too.

Director 2003 and tonight - Mike Langridge

Cast 2003 - Caroline Bleakley, David Hovatter, Jananne Rahman, Simon Roberts

Cast tonight - Caroline Bleakley, Jananne Rahman, Simon Roberts, Iain Stirling



2004-2014 “THE OPEN THEATRE YEARS”

So the most recent decade which has seen us obtaining a public licence in 2005 and completing the move from club theatre to public space, has brought a change of emphasis in its wake but, significantly, the size of our membership has not suffered and we are back at around 1,400 members.

With a growing emphasis on young people, our educational offerings are now grouped together under the Questors Academy. Every week over 500 young people attend Questors Youth Theatre classes. The Questors Student Group, which started in 1946, has continued without interruption for nearly 70 years and provides a 2-year part-time training in voice, movement and acting. This course has a fine reputation and students are entitled to student Equity membership. Most graduates become members of The Questors’ acting company and many go on to full-time drama school training.

The Questors has forged new connections in the world of academia and is partnered with the University of West London to provide a BA (Hons) in Theatre Production (Design and Management). With Kingston College, students on the BTEC Level 3 Extended Diploma in Production Arts come to Mattock Lane to apply their skills in a real working theatre environment.

We are a member of the Society of Independent Theatres, which represents the larger fringe theatres in London, and continue to be active in the Little Theatre Guild and IATA.

Touring continues and occasionally Questors members find themselves travelling “on company business”, most recently to Slovenia in September 2014; our next trip to the Minack Theatre is in the summer of 2015.

In 2012 The Observer magazine described us as “the acme of amateur theatre”.



Other productions worth noting from this decade

After the Dance – by reviving this long-neglected Terence Rattigan play in 2006, The Questors stole a march on the National Theatre who didn’t give it an airing until 2010.

Cogner au Plafond – this original piece, written in French and English, by Questors Youth Theatre tutor, Wanda Duszynska, was performed in the Playhouse in 2007, won a European languages award and was selected to go to Vienna two years later to represent the UK at the first World Festival of Youth Theatre.

Enron – Lucy Prebble’s play was one of the unlikely UK smash hits of 2009 and then it went on to stagger Broadway. 2013 was when The Questors unexpectedly got the performing rights and it turned out to be one of the major hits of our season, directed by Anne Neville, with the Playhouse auditorium sold out on many evenings.

The Lady in the Van – 2007 was when Sarah Galton and Jo Matthews, who directed this piece, were looking for not just one but two actors to play Alan Bennett himself. Having overcome that challenge, the next was to work with the designer and technical team to get a moving vehicle onto our stage and for Miss Shepherd to exit it without being seen by the audience.

Peter Pan – was the 2006 Christmas family show classic complete with pirate ship, mermaids, three flying children, Peter Pan, Tinkerbell, Captain Hook, Lost Boys and some very silly pirates.

The Tempest – another Questors Youth Theatre success was the physical theatre version of Shakespeare’s play presented in 2012 as part of our Big Shakespeare Open Stages season.

Waiting for Godot – we could not ignore this Beckett classic especially as this one has appeared four times on our stages - twice in the Playhouse and twice in the Studio.

Tonight, The Questors presents...

FESTEN – a challenging piece about how a family is destroyed by secrets and guilt, this drama was presented in 2008 and featured when the Little Theatre Guild visited us for their conference.

Director 2008 and tonight - Roger Beaumont

Cast 2008 and tonight - Mike Langridge, Simon Roberts



BLUE STOCKINGS – Our look back would not be complete without a scene from the Student Group's production earlier this year of this play about the emancipation and enfranchisement of women undergraduates at Cambridge University in the first 20 years of the 20th century.

Director Summer 2014 and tonight - Richard Gallagher

Cast Summer 2014 - Aram Armaghanian, Catherine McCarthy, Melissa Reddin

Cast tonight - Alex Cummings, Catherine McCarthy, Melissa Reddin

THE RISE AND FALL OF LITTLE VOICE – although clearly every piece of casting is critical in its own way, the biggest challenge for the director of this ambitious project in 2014 was to find the right LV. One of our newest acting members arrived with not only the right voice, but experience in the role.

Director Spring 2014 and tonight - Dominique Gerrard

Cast Spring 2014 and tonight - Lauren McGee



BEHIND THE SCENES

Sound

Alan N Smith

Sound in a Questors production 50 years ago sounded very much like sound does today but perhaps with a touch of disc or tape hiss, if you listened closely. Putting that sound track together would have meant much more work for the Sound Designer preparing the reel-to-reel show tape(s), and required the Sound Operator(s) to have a considerable level of dexterity to operate, on cue, all the faders and machine controls. There would have been fewer loudspeakers; sound effects would have come from 45rpm or LP discs; special recordings were possible, but needed quite a lot of kit. On some productions several Sound Operators may have been needed to control all the replay equipment to produce the 'right' sound in support of the production adding to the magic of theatre.

We have migrated through cassette, DAT and mini-disc and now have a lot more loudspeakers to use; we download our sound effects from CD or the internet and use computers to replay the tracks, but we still rely on the skills of the Sound Designer in selecting and putting together the 'right' sounds and the Operator in pressing the Go button on cue. Computer systems allow a multi-output, wide-ranging soundscape with many cues to be composed, giving the Sound Designer an opportunity to be very creative; but, at the end of it all, the sound still has to be 'right' on the night.

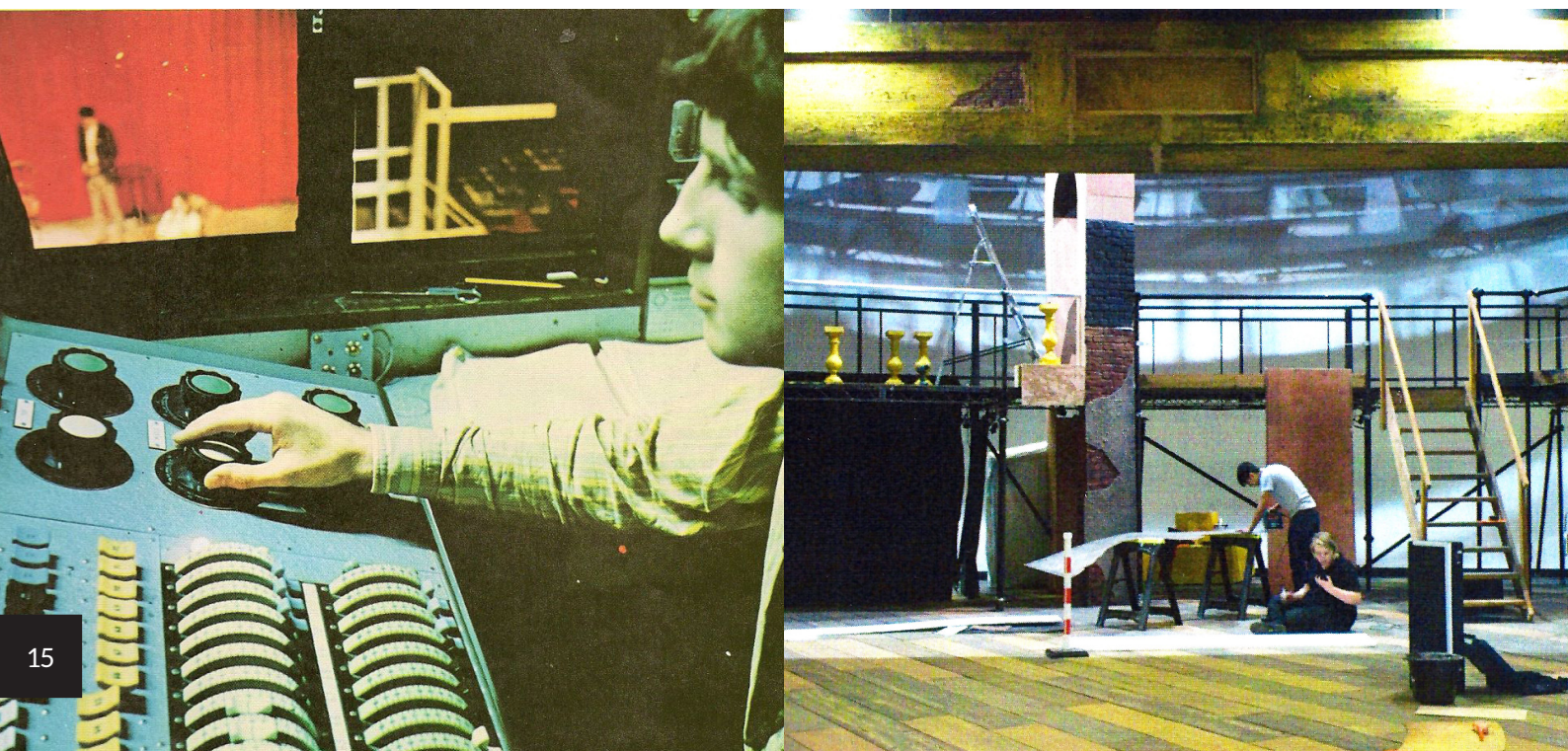
Design

Alex Marker

When I started at Wimbledon School of Art my tutors were keen to point out that theatre is not just about plush red seats and proscenium arches and that they would challenge our preconceptions of how theatre could be staged. Having already designed for our Playhouse I found this a bit obvious and even now I still find designing for proscenium arch spaces harder than for thrust or in-the-round spaces.

Although designing for the Playhouse can be challenging, as the last 50 years have shown, we can produce bold, creative, striking designs that would be unthinkable in a more traditional setting.

Thrust and adaptable stage auditoria have at times been dismissed as an evolutionary cul-de-sac in mid 20th century theatre design. But it's intriguing to note that, after exhaustive experiments to find the most dynamic playing space for their new theatre, the RSC chose a thrust stage proving, perhaps, that the form is here to stay.



OF THE PLAYHOUSE

Lighting

Alan N Smith

Amazingly we have a few lanterns that were used 50 years ago still in service. Lantern design moves comparatively slowly as new types of light sources come onto the market. The old large glass envelopes housing the filaments have shrunk, allowing a more compact and brighter light source and a smaller luminaire to be built. Now the migration is to LED sources offering greater flexibility and colour manipulation. The Lighting Designer still paints with light to create the moods needed in each production but the Lighting Operator is no longer faced with rows of faders that have to be reset cue by cue during the performance. The 84 channel, three pre-set lighting desk was in use for many years until a computer-based desk was installed when the lottery funded refurbishment took place. Now 144 channels give a Lighting Designer a bigger palette to paint with and a large stock of modern luminaires provides brighter sources. The Lighting Operator can now control a complex cross-fade with many channels by moving one fader or pressing one Go button on cue.

The challenge of creating magic is still the same – just the right amount of light in the right place at the right time – but the question is always, will the actors hit that spot? Whilst musicals and some productions may need the importation of moving lights, most of our productions will still be lit in a very similar way to those of 50 years ago, albeit with many more lanterns and many more cues to add to the subtlety of the magic of live theatre.

Costume

Sarah Andrews

The last 50 years have seen profound changes in the costume department. Fabric costs have risen way ahead of the cost of living. Sewing is no longer on the education syllabus. Much of what we do is very labour-intensive and members do not have the same free time as in 1964. In spite of this our aims remain the same – to engage collaboratively with directors, designers and actors and to design, make and maintain costumes to the highest standards possible.

Having appropriated the old “Green Room”, we have three well-equipped workrooms, our laundry facilities have been hugely updated and our storage space is good for a theatre of our size. This all means we can work on a number of shows at a time and also hire costumes to other companies, both amateur and professional.

The department is a relaxed, creative place - if a bit bizarre at times - where a sense of humour is required. Most importantly, we strive to help our actors breathe life into a character, not merely put on some clothes for a play.



BEHIND THE SCENES

Stage Management

Sylvia Wall

The stage manager of my first Questors show in 1966 asked me to mend the holes in the stage curtains. I went into the wardrobe department and asked for a needle and thread. The lady in charge said no and explained that stage management had their own budget to buy tools. So, I brought in my own sewing kit and mended the curtains – a valuable lesson learned by a green ASM. Fortunately times have changed and co-operation between departments is much stronger.

During my on-show training I was taught to construct canvas flats from scratch, introduced to set painting and learned about paper stripping. We had little or no scaffold; most sets were propped up with braces and stage weights, and cleated. ASMs were encouraged to work in other departments, hanging lights, helping in wardrobe and buttering baps for Sunday.

One of the major changes is in communications. We did not have computers, emails, texting or photocopying to communicate with cast and crew. We might get access to a typewriter and carbon paper, or it was handwritten notes to everyone. The Questors landline was in a locked office and only opened in extreme emergencies.

These are some of my memories from 1966 to today on how life has changed for stage management.

Props

Harriet Parsonage

Many will remember with fondness Iris Phelps who ran the Props department up until the mid-1980s. Were she still with us, she would certainly recognise items of furniture and props seen on our stages today! In 1998, the National Lottery award gave us a second furniture store, but our props are still kept in the “Den”, that veritable Aladdin’s cave in the cellar of the Lodge.

Naturally, designs of furniture, household items and particularly typewriters and telephones have changed since 1964, and we now have to cover an additional half century. However, modern technology has also benefited the department: we now have eBay to assist with acquiring elusive items and the internet to help with historical research and with the promotion of our props hire service for ... cradles, ladles, ice skates, fire grates, broad swords, bread boards, lampshades, garden spades, tiger heads, bedsteads ... and so much more.



OF THE PLAYHOUSE

Front of House

Anne Furneaux

The FOH Department now consists of volunteer FOH Organisers, Duty Managers, Stewards and Programme Sellers: answerable to the Executive Director. We are as businesslike as a professional theatre - dare we say better than some?

Our responsibilities range from pre-show site safety checks to working co-operatively with our Office Staff, other relevant Departments (in particular co-ordinating with Stage Managers and DSMs in the Playhouse and Studio) and with the many organisations who hire the Playhouse.

Apart from this serious stuff, our job is to make our audiences feel welcomed, and to remember that they and everyone else come to The Questors to enjoy themselves - and that includes us!

Box Office

Tina Harris

Over the years the Box Office has moved possibly more than any other Questors department, both in our location and in our ways of working. In 1964 we sold pre-printed paper tickets to members only from a Portakabin.

Since then we've adapted to some physical moves, the introduction of online booking and the step change to a public theatre in 2005. When we first offered 24/7 ticket sales through the web in 2003, we were ahead of many West End venues but technology (and our audiences) have become much more sophisticated so we have recently migrated to a ticketing system with wider capabilities which is better integrated with other Questors IT functions.

What hasn't changed is our commitment to providing friendly personal customer service to everyone – members of The Questors and the public alike.



LETTERS OF CONGRATULATIONS

Sir Ian McKellen

Patron of the Little Theatre Guild

I'm sorry not to be at The Questors this evening. Nor was I at the opening fifty years ago. I must have been too busy preparing for my West End debut in *A Scent of Flowers* by Questors' playwright, James Saunders.

What an amazing series of treats you have given to local theatregoers and what a unique resource for Ealing's theatre enthusiasts!

As the current Patron of the Little Theatre Guild, I send sincere congratulations on behalf of all the other Guild members who envy your jewel of a theatre and admire the work you have produced there.

With love,



Ian McKellen

Roger Rees

Vice-President of The Questors Theatre

Congratulations on allowing Dame Judi to permit you to rename the Questors Playhouse the "Judi Dench Playhouse". Though, regrettably, I cannot be there myself I trust and know it will be a joyous occasion and perhaps everyone who performs there after the 18th October will inherit Dame Judi's love of language and skill in the craft of acting. That would be nice.

Maybe from that day forward every Questors actor will be known by a naughty twinkle in the eye, a delicious catch in the voice and an unflagging passion for live theatre - just like our great Dame, your President, Judi. I hope so. You've made a great decision.

Ever yours,



Roger Rees

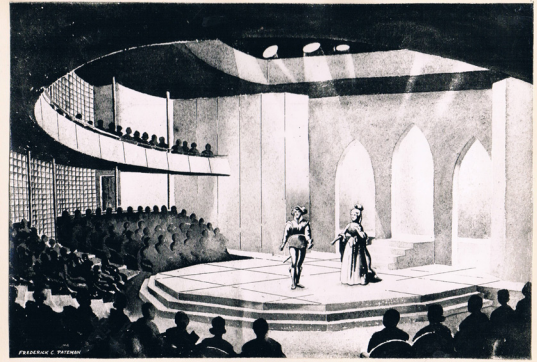
Oliver Ford Davies

Vice-President of The Questors Theatre, currently on tour with the RSC

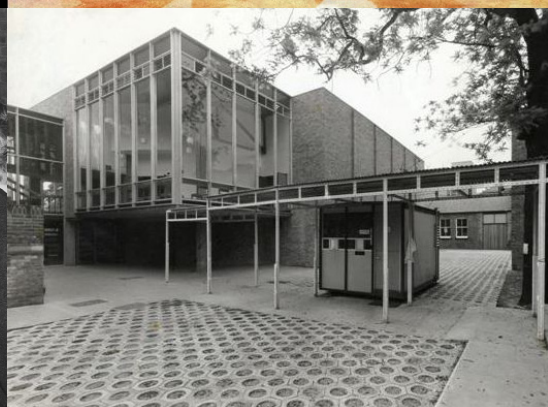
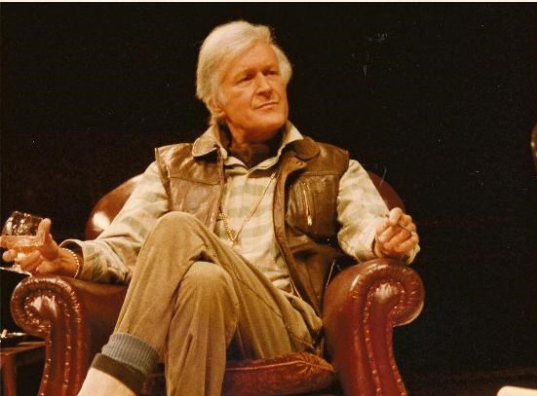
As someone who grew up in Ealing and for whom The Questors was a theatrical lifeline in the 40s and 50s, I feel proud and passionate about its continuing success. I had my first acting outings in the old Tin Hut, and later graduated to bricklaying alongside Alfred on the Stan Room. At its best, as in the recent 'Festen', The Questors can rival any professional company. I am proud to be a vice-president, alongside the consummate Amanda Redman and that Master of Coarse Acting Roger Rees, and feel certain the Judi Dench Playhouse will have another fifty years of success. Congratulations!

Warmest,

Oliver Ford Davies



Artist's impression of the interior of the new theatre



FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Questors is an exciting venue to perform in – and our Playhouse is a thrilling stage to perform on. This experience is one which we have shared with countless visiting companies over the last five decades, who have brought us professional as well as local, national and international amateur productions to enjoy.

As a public venue we now sell over 25,000 tickets every year. About two thirds of these are bought by the general public, and about one third are purchased by our membership.

Our season is enhanced by our range of visitors. This autumn alone we welcome a popular light opera company, a vibrant professional dance company, one of our regular visiting companies performing Shakespeare, and the first of our RSC Open Stages revues featuring top amateur companies from across the south east. They are all delighted to enjoy our friendship. Abbots Langley Players comment: “We are so thankful for all you do for us on each of our visits to The Questors. The generosity of your volunteers who greet us and provide us with refreshments has been so welcoming and their hospitality has been very reassuring and professional.”

We are also a thriving home to energetic young performers bringing jazz dance, tap, ballet, gym, singing, acting and enormous enthusiasm to our stage. To these groups – Dance Gallery, Ealing Street Dance, Chiswick Theatre Arts, Theatre Studio West, Christ St Saviours, Avenue House, St Augustine's Priory, Twisters and Artists' Theatre School – thank you for giving us the chance to share our resources with these amazingly creative and talented young people.

Many of our visiting companies return year after year, enthralled not only by our superb facilities but also by the warmth and friendliness of our welcome:

“Congratulations to The Questors for 50 great years of theatre from Gloc Musical Theatre. We've enjoyed using The Questors for the past 25+ years and hope to perform there for many more to come.” Karen Steel, Chairman Gloc Musical Theatre

“50 wonderful years! Congratulations to The Questors – where, since 2002, the Julian Light Operatic Society has been privileged and grateful to present innovative productions of Gilbert & Sullivan operas.” Edwin Owen, Chairman Julian Light Operatic Society

“We wish the Questors Playhouse a fantastic 50th Birthday and are confident that they will provide the community with superb theatrical entertainment for many more years to come.” Freddie Mauwer, Director Theatre West Four

“I would like to offer my heartfelt congratulations to The Questors Theatre on their 50th Anniversary and your 85th year of being a club.” Pamela Armstrong, HEOS Vice-President and Questors member



Andrea Bath
Executive Director

AND FINALLY, A BIG THANK YOU

Putting on an event like this takes a lot of effort from a lot of people. They are listed below. We thank:

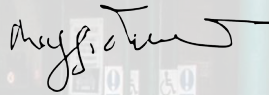
- Dame Judi Dench, for her long Presidency of The Questors and for lending her name to the Judi Dench Playhouse, and her team of Sue Jennings and Julian Belfrage Associates
- Our Vice-Presidents Oliver Ford Davies, Amanda Redman and Roger Rees for their ongoing support
- The Box Office team, led by Tina Harris
- The Front of House team, led by Robert Eagle, Anne Furneaux and Eileen Ritchie
- The Grapevine Bar team, led by Jon Webster and Nigel Bamford
- The team in The Questors office, led by Andrea Bath: Ian Briggs, Mike Hagan, Jane Mason, John MacCarrick, Caroline Mackenzie, Jennifer Matthew, Tiffany Sanders and Joe Smith
- The Questors Archivist, John Dobson and the photographers whose work appears in this publication
- Gwenan Evans and all the contributors to A Few Drops of Water, The Story of The Questors Theatre 1929-1989, which provided so much of the background
- Claire Durrant, for designing this souvenir brochure, and all those who contributed to its content
- The directors who have staged the pieces, the actors who have performed in them and Artistic Director, Gary Reid
- Stage Manager - Alec Atchison; DSM - Sue Collins, Frances Sherwin; Production Co-ordinator - Clare Watson; Lighting Designer - Andrew Dixon; Sound Designer - Colin Horne; Props - Harriet Parsonage; Wardrobe - Anne Gilmour; Event Photographers - Peter Collins, Robert Vass; Musical Arranger for the Little Voice Medley and Keep the Home Fires Burning - Jane Marlow; and for additional help - Ian Black, Jenny Richardson, Rita Walters

Finally, we are grateful to you, our audience tonight and to all loyal members of The Questors Theatre since 1929, without whom we should have had nothing to celebrate.



Mike Langridge

The P50 Organising Team



Maggie Turner



Robert Gordon Clark

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Vice-Presidents: Oliver Ford Davies, Amanda Redman, Roger Rees
Chairman: Richard Mead
Executive Director: Andrea Bath
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Registered in England and Wales no 469253.
Registered charity no 207516.
Registered office: 12 Mattock Lane, London W5 5BQ.

