

Players Dramatic Society – A Brief History

Did you know that for Players, the year 2005 marked the anniversaries of three significant events in the society's history and development

Founded in 1923 the Players spent many years performing their productions and holding social events in the Parish Hall and sometimes in member's homes. This pattern carried on until after WWII but members always yearned for a home of their own.

In 1947 they purchased a redundant army hut which had been in use during the war as an ambulance depot in Sharston. This was dismantled and stored until such time as a site could be found for its re-erection. Over the following years several sites were considered and for various reasons, rejected until finally the present site was purchased and in 1950 the hut was erected and optimistically named 'The Playhouse'.

This wooden structure was used for meetings and socials but plays were still presented in the Parish Hall, until, as usually happens at Players, a bunch of enthusiastic members rolled up their sleeves and set to work on the construction of a stage and fairly primitive dressing room facilities. This included the use of a caravan parked behind the theatre and accessed through an open window on the back wall. Not exactly the height of luxury but at last, Players had a theatre they could call their own.

Which brings us to our first of our Players anniversaries, for it was in 1955, fifty years ago this year, that "Count Your Blessings" became the first three-act play to be presented at the Playhouse.

This was a great step forward but not without its problems. The building was only recognised by the Council as a temporary construction, with the constant threat of demolition hanging over it. The only answer was to make it a permanent building by putting a brick shell around the wooden structure. Thus began another building project to do just this, and, at the same time, to create the lighting and sound 'perch', make the Green Room a permanent fixture and carry out other improvements to the foyer, kitchen and toilets. (Goodbye Elsans - Hello flushing loos!)

And so to the second Player's anniversary, for the new theatre, externally much like it is today, opened for business in 1965, forty years ago this year.

Over the succeeding years the society went from strength to strength both onstage and in the facilities provided for our patrons and performers. One project saw further improvement of the foyer, kitchen and toilets and the construction of the lounge and bar at the front of the theatre. Then came the building of what was known as 'The Tower' at the rear of the theatre, to provide storage for scenery, props etc. Another part of this project was the provision of new toilets and a washroom for the actors. At around the same time the car park was surfaced and at last we were able to drive in without putting our car's suspension at serious risk.

Seating in the theatre still took the form of stacking chairs which, before each production, had to be clipped together, numbered and laid out on the 'stillages'. These were a set of boxes which created different seating levels, and which after each play had to be removed and stacked under a tarpaulin in the corner of the car park.

Then, in the early 1980's, suggestions were made in committee that we should consider improving the auditorium, with a proper stepped floor and real tip-up theatre seating along with central heating, carpets and other creature comforts. The idea took hold, particularly among those of us sick of the sight of stillages and stacking seats. Plans were drawn up and a budget prepared, and at the end of the 1984-85 season work commenced and carried on at a frantic pace throughout the summer.

Which brings us to the last of our three anniversaries for in 1985, twenty years ago this year, we had the official opening of the theatre, more or less as we know it today.

Much has been achieved over the years and much remains to be done. Let's hope that in the future, members will be able to look back on similar achievements with the same sense of satisfaction and pride as we do.

Alan Simpson
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