

# BARBY PLAYERS

## 1947-2005

**BARBY LOCAL HISTORY GROUP**

**2024**



**The early history of this amateur dramatic group, compiled by Jan Fraser of 4 Castle Mound, Barby, in 1975 for their 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, is taken mainly from the first (1947-1971) of five albums recording the doings of the Players over more than half a century, at present in the custody of Barby Local History Group.**

**The five albums contain programmes, posters, photographs, press cuttings and other ephemera collected over the life of the Players until they sadly had to disband in 2005.**

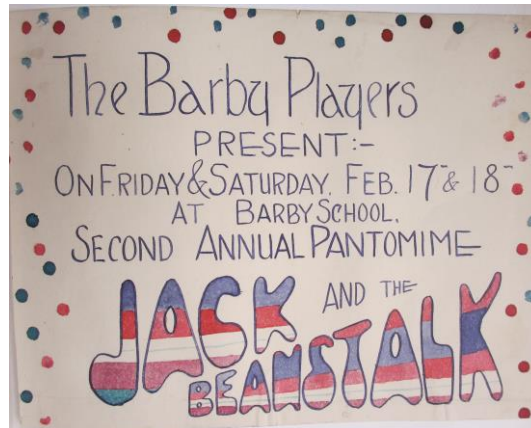
## **A Brief History**

There had been a village tradition regarding amateur dramatics for many years. It centred on Mrs Eva Mitchison, wife of the Rev Richard Stovin Mitchison, Rector of Barby 1926-1947. She was keen on producing one-act plays in the school, using the talent of the schoolchildren. She was an enthusiastic producer and an amazing seamstress, making the costumes required herself. It was her enthusiasm and the combined interest of the Weston family that gave rise to the founding of the group in 1946. Eva's death in February 1947 was a tragic loss to the village, and in memory of her interest and activity in amateur dramatics, a small company of players continued to meet and read and produce plays.

This small band of half a dozen had no recognized name. They did not wish to be known as The Barby Amateur Dramatic Society as they would soon be dubbed the BADS! Therefore the name "The Barby Players" became adopted in March 1948, with John Weston as their first Chairman. At this time three one-act plays were performed but were not their first productions.

Their first effort was on 29 November 1947 when a one-act play, *The Late Miss Cordell*, was produced in the Old School, followed by songs and sketches. The Founder Members according to this production were Florence Byerley, Margaret Weston (later Livesey), Joyce Herbert (later Owen), Jean Tompkins (later Underwood), Lucy Weston and John Weston. Later in March 1948 numbers were fortified by Margaret Wagstaff, Joyce Wagstaff, Brenda Henson (later Stanley), Mrs Byerley and Mrs Weston (John and Margaret's mother), and in November by others including Joyce Belcher (Turnbull). Harry Livesey (Pop) who died in 1975 was another early member and talented artist who designed many of the early posters.

Interest then spread to pantomime, and the Players produced their first, *Cinderella*, in Feb 1949. Others were produced, although not annually, up to 1959 when it was replaced by a revue. Parties from many neighbouring villages came to see these productions according to *Rugby Advertiser* reports. Generally there were three productions a year, usually in February, May and October. The first productions were staged in the village school, moving to the newly acquired Village Hall in Ware Road in 1952. The last performance in this building was in March 1972. The 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Party was held in the new Village Hall the following November, the first performance there being a revue.



*A poster designed by Harry Livesey for the 1950 Pantomime*

One of the greatest milestones in the history of the Barby Players was the opening of the new Village Hall in October 1972 with its spacious stage. Conditions in the old hall on Ware Road, the former prisoner of war camp, were laughable – “entrance left” was literally a window! “Backstage” was mere cubic inches with room to squeeze but not to sneeze! Dressing rooms were boxes without doors; no-one forgot their underwear. The old hall had been purchased by the villagers in 1951/52 and was used by all village groups. The land was sold to developers which helped fund the purchase of the old school in the centre of the village for a new hall.

*The three Liveseys L-R:*

*Joyce, Don and Jan in the 1970 Revue*



As can be seen from *Rugby Advertiser* reports, the Players also held fund-raising events such as whist drives and dances to help towards the costs of their productions. The production of *Blithe Spirit* in February 1960, “the most ambitious project the Players had attempted since they started thirteen years ago” was unfortunately very expensive as performing rights, costumes, hire of hall, scenery etc came to much more than the incoming money. A loss of over £20 was made, but there was enough money in the Players’ funds to cover this. John Weston’s report was covered in the *Rugby Advertiser* on 19 February: he said:

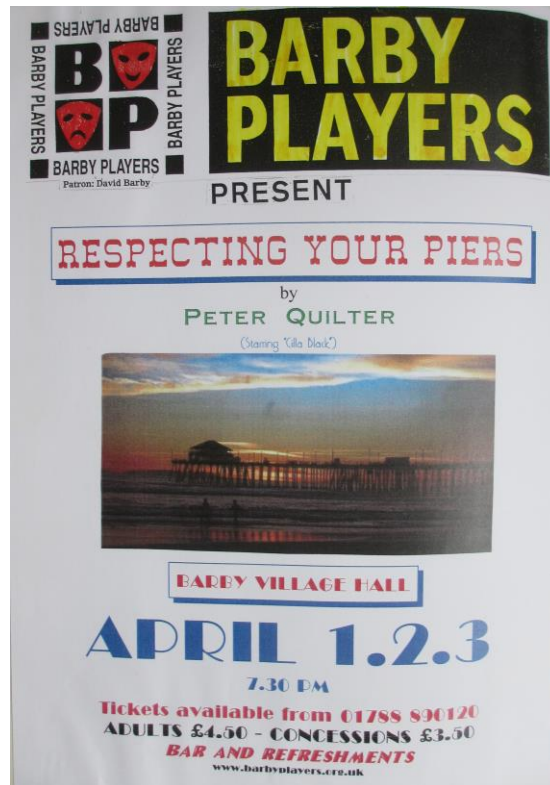
*“In the thirteen years the Players had progressed from a platform in the school to a permanent stage with new surrounds and curtains, new switchboard and stage lighting, all paid for by pantomimes and plays and the hard work of the Players.... A most important point they had built up an audience who came regularly to every production from Rugby and the surrounding villages and other dramatic groups.”*

The Players also occasionally went to local old people’s homes to provide entertainment, and appeared with other groups in revues at Rugby Theatre.

In 1985 they performed their 100<sup>th</sup> production, *Post Horn Gallop* by Derek Benfield. In 1997 they celebrated their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a lunch party at the Village Hall when past and present members were reunited to commemorate a great landmark. Over 50 people attended.

In 1999 the Players were chosen from societies across Britain for a Sky TV documentary *Guiding Stars* which matched professional actors with amateurs in a variety of fields to pass on their expertise. They had been followed by a camera crew from casting sessions to final performance.

In later years the first performance of one show a year was held as a charity gala to raise funds for different causes. By the 1990s only 10% of the members were Barby people, the rest came from Rugby and the surrounding neighbourhood. The group continued to entertain us with their productions until the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but sadly were disbanded in 2005, mainly through lack of male actor volunteers.



*Poster for the last performance in 2004*

### **Some early reports from the *Rugby Advertiser***

5 Deember 1947

A concert was held in the Schools on Saturday consisting of short sketches, songs, monologues and a one act play "The Late Miss Cordell" by Philip Johnson. Those taking part were Miss F Byerley, Miss Jean Tompkins, Miss Joyce Herbert, Mrs Weston, Miss M Weston and Mr J Weston. The concert was produced and directed by Mr John Weston and proceeds of £9.10s were for Earl Haig's Poppy Day Fund.

5 April 1948

One of the finest concerts ever seen in Barby was presented by Mr John Weston and his concert party on Saturday in aid of the new Village Hall funds .... A profit of £10 was made.

12 November 1948

Barby actors took part in the WI play festival at Northampton on Wednesday. The play was "The Ride Through Coventry" by Olive Popplewell. Those taking part were Joyce Herbert, Kate Byerley, Joyce Belcher, Joyce Wagstaff, Margaret Wagstaff, Margaret Weston and John Weston who produced the play. Prompter Mrs Boughey, Make-up Mrs Wiggins.

The production gained a Second Class Certificate.

## Appendix: List of Productions

- 29 Nov 1947 *The Late Miss Cordell*, followed by songs and sketches
- March 1948 Three One-Act Plays: *Sentimental Ladies*, *John's Mother* and *The Old Fool*
- Nov 1948 *The Ride Through Coventry*
- 1949 First Pantomime: *Cinderella*
- 1950 Pantomime: *Jack and the Beanstalk*
- Feb 1951 Pantomime: *Mother Goose*
- 1951 *Mr Tremlow is not Himself; Master Dudley*
- Tableau for the Festival of Britain: *Red Queen, White Queen*, entered in Northampton Festival
- 1952 Pantomime: *Sleeping Beauty*
- Watford Play Festival: *Her and Her George* and *The Final Rehearsal*
- 1953 Pantomime: *Queen of Hearts*
- Rugby Theatre Festival: *The Master Key*
- First Revue: "Bits and Pieces No 1"
- 1954 Rugby Theatre Festival: *Women Within Walls*
- 1955 Revue: "Bits and Pieces No 2"
- 1956 Pantomime: *Cinderella*; One-Act Play: *They Fly by Twilight*
- 1957 Pantomime: *Jack and the Beanstalk; Crystal Clear*
- Nov 1-2 An Autumn Concert including 2 One Act Plays: *One Such a Night* (Nora Kelly), and *The Witching Hour* (Philip Johnson) plus songs and humorous items
- 1958 Pantomime: *Aladdin; Gathering Storm; The Camel's Back* (Arnold Helsby)
- 1959 Pantomime: *Babes in the Wood*
- Love in a Mist* (Kenneth Horne); *Kind Cousin*
- 1960 *Blithe Spirit* (Noel Coward); *A Husband for Nora; The Secret Tent*
- 1961 *Love's a Luxury; As Long as They are Happy; The Shadow Between*

- 1962            *Revue: Laugh it Off; The Crooked Road*
- 1963            *Cat Among the Pigeons*
- 1964            *One of Those Days; A Murder has been Arranged; Such Things Happen*
- 1965            *Time to Speak* (Sylvia Rayman); *Too Soon for Daisies* (William Dinner & William Monum)
- 1966            *Madness in May* (Sam Bate); *Murder out of Tune; Hay Fever* (Noel Coward)
- 1967            *Revue: Pantomonium; Wishing Well* (E Eynon Evans); *Intent to Murder* (Leslie Sands)
- 1968            *Revue: Happy Landings; Goodnight Mrs Puffin* (Arthur Lovegrove)
- Nov 1968       *21<sup>st</sup> Anniversary Production: One Happy Marriage* (John Clements)
- 1969            *Revue: The Hollow; Do-Do in Love* (Harold Brooke & Kay Bannerman)
- 1970            *Revue: Spring Cabbage; Tell Tale Murder* (Philip Weathers)
- 1971            *And This was Odd* (Kenneth Horne); *I'll Get my Man* (Philip King)
- March 1972    *Pools Paradise* (Philip King), last production in the old Village Hall
- Oct 1972       "An Opening Revue" in the new Village Hall when the stage was used for the first time
- 1973            *Wishing Well* (E Eynon Evans), the first play in the new hall; *The Curious Savage* (John Patrick)
- 1974            *Shock Tactics* (John Dole); *Semi-Detached* (David Turner)
- 1975            *The Deep Blue Sea* (Terence Rattigan); *Wanted One Body* (Raymond Dyer); *Present Laughter* (Noel Coward)
- 1976            *Macbeth Did It* (John Patrick); *No Escape* (Rhys Davies); *Love in a Mist* (Kenneth Horne)
- 1977            *Panto-Revue: The Queen and the Rebels* (at St Edith's Church, Monks Kirby); *See How They Run*
- 1978            *Something to Hide; Hippo Dancing; The Touch of Fear*
- 1979            *Boeing Boeing; Children's Day; Doctor in Love*
- 1980            *Suddenly at Home; How the Other Half Loves; The Hollow* (Agatha Christie)



- 1981 *Here We Come Gathering* (Philip King & Anthony Armstrong); *Top Gear* (John Dole); *Portrait of Murder* (Robert Bloomfield) – the 90<sup>th</sup> production
- 1982 *When We Are Married* (J B Priestley); Gala Evening at Rugby Chamber of Commerce; *Round and Round the Garden* (Alan Ayckbourn); *The Anniversary* (Bill Macllwraith)
- 1983 *You Too Can Have a Body* (Fred Robinson); *Hay Fever* (Noel Coward); *Spring and Port Wine* (Bill Naughton)
- 1984 *Busybody* (Jack Popplewell); *Oh What a Lovely War* (Joan Littlewood); *Dead on Nine* (Jack Popplewell)
- 1985 *Post Horn Gallop* (Derek Benfield) – the 100<sup>th</sup> production; *Table Manners* (Alan Ayckbourn); *Murder in Company* (Philip King & John Boland)
- 1986 *East Lynne* (based on a novel by Mrs Henry Wood); *Joseph Andrews* (Henry Fielding); *The Restless Evil* (Charlotte Hastings)
- 1987 The production of *Cat in the Bag* (Joyce Rayburn) had to be cancelled due to illness of three out of five members of the cast. *Happy as a Sandbag* (Ken Lee); *The Farndale Avenue Housing Estate Townswomens Guild Dramatic Society's Production of "Macbeth"* (David McGillivray & Walter Zerlin)
- 1988 *Party to Murder* (Oliver Chase & Stewart Burke); *An Inspector Calls* (J B Priestley); *Look Who's Talking* (Derek Benfield)
- 1989 *Brush with a Body* (Maurice McLoughlin); *Hindle Wakes* (Stanley Houghton); *Blithe Spirit* (Noel Coward)
- 1990 *Daisy Pulls it Off* (Denise Deegan); *The Heiress* (Ruth & Augustus Goetz) – marred on the Gala Night by a power failure; *The Haunted Through Lounge & Recessed Dining Nook at Ferndale Castle* (David McGillivray & Walter Zerlin)
- 1991 *Dial M for Murder* (Frederick Knott); *There Goes the Bride* (Ray Cooney & John Chapman); *Play it Again Sam* (Woody Allen)
- 1992 *Gaslight* (Patrick Hamilton); *Find the Lady* (Michael Pertwee)
- 1993 *Saturday, Sunday, Monday* (Eduardo de Filippo); *I Have Been Here Before* (J B Priestley); An Evening with Bob Bradbrook and Friends – a musical entertainment; *Why Me?* (Stanley Price)
- 1994 *The Winslow Boy* (Terence Rattigan); *Kidnapped at Christmas* (Willis Hall)

- 1995      *On the Bright Side* – a Benefit Evening for long time Players member Ian Rowley; 3 One-Act Plays by Noel Coward, *Astonished Heart*, *Fumed Oak and Still Life*; *Din Dins* ((Derek Hodinott)
- 1996      *House Guest* (Francis Durbridge); *The Importance of Being Earnest* (Oscar Wilde)
- 1997      *The Anniversary* (Bill McIlwraith), the Players 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary production; *Arsenic and Old Lace*
- 1998      *A Twist in the Tale*, three one-act plays; *Wyrd Sisters* (Stephen Briggs)
- 1999      *Fish Out of Water*, *The Kidnap Game*; *Cat in the Bag*
- 2000      *Bazaar & Rummage* (Sue Townsend); *The Kidnap Game* (Tudor Gates); *The Farndale Avenue Housing Estate Townswomen’s Guild Dramatic Society’s “Murder Mystery”*
- 2001      *Do Not Disturb* (Michael Pertwee); “Summer Nights” variety show; *The Farndale Avenue Housing Estate Townswomen’s Guild Dramatic Society’s Production of “A Christmas Carol”*; A Christmas Assortment, seasonal entertainment with St Mary’s Choir
- 2002      *An Inspector Calls* (J B Priestley); *Laying the Ghost* (Simon Williams)
- 2003      *Proscenophobia* (Bettine Manktelow); *The House on the Cliff* (George Batson)
- 2004      *Respecting Your Piers* (Peter Quilter)