

From Colin Winslow, Freelance theatre designer from Alberta, Canada

I have had a long association with theatre in Farnham, first designing several shows in the old Castle Theatre in the early 1960s, under the direction of the remarkable Joan Knight; often having to sleep on the floor of her flat above the stage when I missed the last train back to London. Then years later, I became Head of Design at the Redgrave during most of Graham Watkins' regime as Artistic Director.

I was particularly interested to read Rula Lenska's message in a recent Newsletter, as I was the designer of 'the lovely, moody set' for *The Cherry Orchard* she referred to. Plus, I remember Rula Lenska's wonderful performance with great affection.

I can't believe that the people of Farnham will allow this beautiful theatre to disappear. I now live permanently in Canada (teaching Design in the Drama Department of the University of Alberta.)

I wish there was something practical I could do to help. Much strength to your campaign. It would be a tragedy and a disgrace if Farnham's long and rich theatrical tradition is curtailed. You have my total support.

Good wishes

Colin (<http://www.winslow.uk.com>)

All budding Stage Designers should look up Colin's work on his website - there's fascinating material too about CAD design and the 'printing' of 3D models.

Farnham educated Jeremy Hardy is to perform his one-man show at Farnham Maltings on 5th April. This is what he has said in conversation with our own Abigail McKern.



Jeremy Hardy

"I went to Farnham College, starting when it was still the boys' grammar. I also went to a theatre-in-education workshop called Saturday Mornings at the Redgrave Theatre (SMART), run by the actor and writer Peter Corey. We did two live shows. So my first appearances in a theatre were at the Redgrave. I also did shows there professionally in the 80s. It's a great space.

This year I had a book out in which I wrote about the theatre in a chapter on Farnham. I was a keen teenage theatre goer and went to see everything the theatre produced for a number of years. It's ludicrous that a wealthy town like Farnham can't sustain a medium sized theatre, especially with the potential to forge links with the 6th form college and the art school (*Now the UCA*)

Best

Jeremy

Membership charge

It was agreed at the previous AGM that we should introduce a membership charge to help defray costs and running expenses. All new members will be asked to pay a small charge whereas we shall give existing members an introductory period of 6 months grace before this becomes due.

- Membership charges are:
- Single person £10**
- Family £20**
- Group £20**
- Corporate by negotiation.**

Follow us on Twitter and Facebook

FTA now is on Twitter and Facebook so why not join us there to see the latest news and find out who else supports our campaign.

We welcome your comments and support! See us on:

Twitter: @farnhamtheatre

Facebook: Farnham Theatre Association

Can you help?

Is there a budding Treasurer out there able to help FTA? For personal reasons our current Treasurer has to move on so we are looking for someone with a financial background able to work with us who also supports our aims.

This individual doesn't need to be qualified as a Company Secretary.

If you would like to help us then initially please contact Anne Cooper on 01252 716394.



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Support grows for a Community Theatre

We would like to see a theatre in the town with a lively programme of mixed entertainment: seasons of professional plays interspersed with community productions of drama, music and dance with educational projects, business and social events in the mix – something for the whole town.



Kika Mirylees calls into the FTA shop in the Lion and Lamb Yard and pictured here with Janet and Jack

Many organisations in the area are now voicing their support for a Community Theatre here in Farnham - recent joiners lending their weight to the campaign include The Waverley Singers, Stagecoach, Farnham Shakespeare Company, The Hart Male Voice Choir, Rushmoor Male Voice Choir and Alder Valley Brass.

Provided a building offers the right characteristics, it proves that a significant need exists.

We asked: Would a new venue in Farnham be of interest to your organisation? If it had excellent acoustics and sightlines would it be the type of venue that your group seeks? FTA invited these groups to give their views about what a Community Theatre building in the town would mean for them.

Once we have gathered sufficient support from like-minded individuals and organisations across the district, what is FTA's aim? It is to ask the Council to either return the Redgrave Theatre to the people of this area or see that it is replaced elsewhere in the town.

The business case for a Farnham theatre is modelled on other successful venues of this kind, but is custom-built to suit our local circumstances

Mike Morgan, Chairman of Hart Male Voice Choir whose President is Bryn Terfel, endorses our campaign, saying they "give their full support. The existing theatres are very dated and offer very poor facilities for both artistes and theatre goers. The future provision of a modern, user friendly theatre, equipped with up to date equipment and facilities would greatly enhance the ability of organisations such as ourselves, and local charities, to stage prestigious concerts and raise large amounts of charitable aid. We fully support your initiative and are happy to throw our full weight behind the project."



By the FTA display. Kika is currently starring in Martina Cole's *The Graft* at Theatre Royal, Stratford East. Amongst many film and TV roles, Kika is perhaps most well-known for her work in *Bad Girls* and *EastEnders*.

On behalf of FTA, we thank you, Mike Morgan for your most valued support.



Neil Dudgeon, the new star of *Midsomer Murders* who recently worked with Abigail McKern on that show, has generously signed a copy of his photo wishing us well with the campaign. Now you can see this in the shop.

We are in the Surrey and Hants office (next to Laura Ashley) in the Lion and Lamb Yard, Farnham every Friday between 10.00am and 3.00pm until Easter and we welcome you or your group's representatives to call in and discuss a community theatre with us.

Jerry Hyman: is he Farnham's knight in shining armour?



Remember the planning application? A31 ACCESS TO THE EAST STREET DEVELOPMENT SITE FOR CREST NICHOLSON CONSTRUCTION TRAFFIC: WA/2010/1650. Remember that deadline of December 16? This meeting had to be postponed by

Waverley Council because of Jerry Hyman's insistence that further information about the potential impact on air quality in the town centre and the bypass was needed and had to be presented before such a decision could be considered. We congratulate Jerry for his incredible tenacity and determination to keep the Council and the developers to the letter of the law.

Since then Crest Nicholson have responded saying they will not work at peak hours and so there will be no impact. This is a blatant admission that frustrated drivers will inevitably avoid delays from the single lane proposed for the access junction by cutting through the town. As we all know, peak hour conditions are frequently reached on the A31 at all times of the day. Crest Nicholson must be very worried that with the loss of the tree screen on the bypass and the congestion in the town that their plans will cause, they may find their retail and residential units difficult to sell.

Lest we forget, the Crest Nicholson development requires the demolition of the Redgrave.

A Tale of Two Cities Revisited. More similarities and yet more sharp differences

Best Regional Theatre

In 2009, The Theatre won the title of Best Regional Theatre. Judges were impressed by the theatre's ability to increase its income, despite losing its entire £40,000 grant from Arts Council England in 2008. The venue earns approximately 75% of its income and sells about 50,000 tickets a year.

In the last issue we featured Aylesbury's £42m Waterside theatre which serves a population of 69,000 contrasting that with Farnham with its



The Theatre

many smaller towns are better served than we are. Look at the tiny town of Chipping Norton in Oxfordshire. The town itself has under 6 000 inhabitants. Does it have better facilities? Yes, indeed!

Open throughout the year, The Theatre promotes a wide variety of performances – theatre, classical concerts, jazz, folk/rock, children's events, workshops and lectures – and has firmly established itself in the lives of the people who live in Oxfordshire and surrounding counties.

This Theatre survives on a mixture of box office income, grant aid and fund-raising. It is fortunate in having a dedicated organisation of Friends who regularly arrange fund-raising events.



How did it begin?

The building that now houses The Theatre started its life as a Salvation Army Citadel in 1888. After they left, the building was used as a furniture store. In 1968, John and Tamara Malcolm, two RSC actors, moved to Chipping Norton, later discovering the now deserted Citadel which they purchased in 1973.

With the help of grants from many trusts, and the hard work and support of scores of Chipping Norton volunteers, they converted and equipped the building. On 29 August 1975 the dream became a reality and The Theatre opened its doors for the first time.

An exciting new phase in The Theatre's history began in 1991 with the launch of an Appeal to purchase and convert a building adjoining The Theatre. The new annexe opened on 2nd April 1993. In 1996 The Theatre was one of the first theatres to receive money from the National Lottery and in October that year re-opened after 6 months extensive refurbishment.

A celebrated event in The Theatre's calendar is the annual pantomime which draws over 17,000 people to the intimacy of the 217-seat auditorium. The Theatre forms its own company of professional actors for this production. There is always fierce competition amongst the local children to become junior members of the company – traditionally known as the "pippins".



Stage at The Theatre

The Theatre has also recently hosted evenings with Alan Price, Jacqui Dankworth, Fairport Convention and Daby Toure, as well as performances by The Academy of St Martin-in-the-Fields, the Brodsky String Quartet and Ballet Central.

The Theatre is home to a flourishing Youth Theatre.

The Gallery features exhibitions by local, national and international artists. Recent exhibitions have featured original work by David Hockney and Pablo Picasso.

The Theatre is also the town cinema, providing a programme of current popular film releases, foreign language films and special children's programmes during school holidays.



The auditorium

To revisit the conclusion once again... This development shows great vision and enterprise - one has to regret the poverty of ambition regarding our theatre here in Waverley!

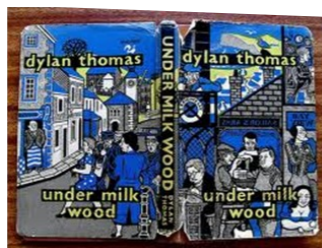
We will be highlighting other towns with theatres old or new, in the months to come to show how successful they can be and how they are supported

Coming up this July from Farnham Rep is the wonderful and uniquely descriptive *Under Milk Wood* by Dylan Thomas.



As with all Farnham Rep productions the difference is created by a strong professional core of actors, Director and technical team.

But those of you who know this powerful, moving, funny and sensitively written play will appreciate that with a cast list of around 50 there's doubling for the professional actors and indeed there are great opportunities for volunteer actors too with further doubling



Actors please!

So all you Volunteer actors interested in auditioning, please initially contact the coordinator, Toby Valley by email on: tobyvalley@mac.com

Auditions for Volunteers are on March 17 at the United Reformed Church, probably at 8pm, but please register with Toby in advance, and brush up your South Wales accent!

Look out for more details of this production in the next newsletter.

"LIFE WITHOUT CULTURE IS INCONCEIVABLE" says Alison McGovern

This new MP who is working with Equity put forward the case for the arts in the heart of government.

She accepts Equity's argument that there is a strong case for supporting culture (such as that for every £1 the Arts Council receives, £2 is generated) but believes there is a stronger defence.

Alison McGovern

"Of course we can make the economic argument, and that's typically what industries do when they're looking for government support. However, if you're a government administrator, it can be difficult to connect how subsidising theatre can help you have better national health or less unemployment," she explains.

"I think the stronger argument is about deciding on what kind of country we want to live in. I grew up in Merseyside in the 80s and 90s. It was a fantastic city, but there was a lot of stress because of unemployment.

The one thing we did have was The Everyman Theatre and the Philharmonic Orchestra. People at the time argued they were a waste of public money, and the Philharmonic did close for a while. I disagreed. My view is that humanity without art and culture is like humanity without language: it's just inconceivable."

Reproduced from a fuller article in the Equity Review 2010 and with their kind permission.

A tour of the house - the Royal Opera House!

Last year one of the auctioned prizes at the FTA's Midsummer Feast of Entertainment, that Abigail McKern generated through her contacts, was for a tour around the Royal Opera House. Abigail writes:

I met Colin Newman - the prizewinner - and his party at the Royal Opera Houses' Stage Door and we were soon joined by Hywel David, the Internal Communications Manager who was our tour guide for the morning. I first met Hywel in 1974 at the Swan Theatre, Worcester and we have remained friends ever since! Hywel has such a passion, interest and knowledge about the building, the music and its history; he was the perfect person to instil excitement and interest as we entered into the honeycomb of backstage life.

Hywel had been very careful to pick a good day when there was plenty going on in the building and we were entranced gazing through the plate glass into the rehearsal room to watch the morning ballet class. We were lucky to watch Marianela Nunez, Tamara Rojo and Sergei Polunin among others, I could barely tear myself away - it was like watching a room full of alien beings leaping through the air and fascinating to practically bump into dancers round every corner who use the corridor space to stretch and warm up.

Wandering through the VAST scenic workshops looking at all the extraordinary sets for *Otello*, *Sylvia* and *Tannhauser* was an

other high point and the view overlooking Covent Garden Piazza and the London skyline was a real treat.

Next back in the main auditorium to watch a technical rehearsal for Gounod's *Romeo Et Juliette*.

Even though I have been involved with countless technicals over the years it is always exciting watching someone else's. There was the full orchestra present in the pit and the stalls below us were full of stage management, sound and LX staff, the choreographer and of course the director giving instructions into a microphone. I felt very privileged sitting quietly in the dark with our little party.

We wound up in the backstage canteen amongst all the singers dancers and crew enjoying a jolly inexpensive subsidized slap up lunch! I would highly recommend a backstage tour at the ROH to anyone who has an interest in the Arts and I'd like to thank my dear friend Hywel for giving us such a wonderful time.

Thanks to you, Abigail for sourcing this as just one of the great auction prizes and for your description of the tour.



The Royal Opera House

News of Farnham's Community Play



Stephanie Dale

Playwright, author and lecturer, Stephanie Dale has been approved by the steering committee as the writer for the Farnham Play and once funding is received, she will be officially appointed.

With her previous experience in writing community plays, Farnham will be assured of a stimulating and fascinating

piece of drama created from the life and times of our town.

Stephanie visited Farnham recently and was shown around the town by members of the committee who were impressed by her enthusiasm and interest in everything she saw.

Currently, Stephanie is a tutor on the MPhil in Playwriting studies at Birmingham University and for the past five years she has taught Applied Drama at Loughborough University.

She is also a visiting lecturer at BSA, City

University, where she teaches Writing and Devising.

Current work includes writing for Birmingham Rep and Midland Actors Theatre. She has also written extensively for BBC Radio 4.

Stephanie Dale has an MA in Playwriting (1997) and BA (Hons) Theatre and Media Drama. (1993-1996). She is a full member of the Writers' Guild of Great Britain.

