



The Marlow Players

President and Chairman's address for
The Marlow Players Annual General Meeting 2020 23rd June 2020 8pm

The Meeting was held via Videoconference .

Welcome to this Annual General meeting of The Marlow Players: the 82nd, I believe, and unlike any other in my experience. The players have survived a World War, the collapse of finances in 2008, and we expect to survive Brexit and the Coronavirus lockdown.

It is this last which has so drastically altered our schedule since the last AGM.

On 5th July 2019, we presented our Murder Mystery to a capacity audience at Liston Hall: the new play, *Shooting Shambles at Shropton Manor* was received most enthusiastically: the arrangement of bring your own food and drink worked well, and the interval was not the only opportunity for refreshment! The format of the radio play with live sound effects the microphone and the turning of pages, together with the elegant 1950s evening dress and a very reliable cast – a team in fact- made for a terrific evening. There were a range of new characters, well delineated, and, speaking personally, as the butler in both productions, it was a fun challenge to play a Jeeves type servant, rather than the creaking old retainer- and to be the guilty party. I note that the play will allow us to vary the villain top keep up the Mystery. This was a huge financial success, as we gained virtually as much profit from this one evening with relatively little rehearsal, set and costumes, as we do for our full-length plays. But the aims of our Society have never been to make a profit (other than to keep us running) but to further the cause of the Arts and performing plays and of course to have a social society in which deep friendships- even romantic ones- are sustained.

During the Summer, we had a delightful canoe trip from Henley to Marlow for which Brian and his son Matthew are to be thanked- not forgetting the careful safety lessons from Toby who was on duty that day.

There was also a theatre trip to Hall Barn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and a Pimms and strawberry tea at Di Hudson's before we broke for the rest of August, before returning for the first rehearsals of our November production, JB Priestley's *Mystery at Greenfingers* directed by Gloria.

I say "directed", and also adapted by Gloria, who issued her own edition to which everyone agreed.....eventually. The reliable team of Caroline, Alison and Raymond provided Stage Management , Sound and Lights, and it was very

evident that Alison as the winner of the Anderson Award 2019 was determined to show she knew her stuff. Brian has provided such a support with our technology, and as a director I know that his knowhow and Alison's attendance at rehearsals means that we really know that all cues will be there, however demanding the script. Gone are the days of waiting for the sound (more of this later!)

In the cast it was great to see our Players ,both old sweats and the newer members working together so well: Brian, Andy, Hilary, Laura, Wendy, Di, Jossy, Karen, Sharon – and a certain temperamental chef- working as a team to present a very successful and well-attended play. Audiences were warm, responsive (most of the time) and appreciative- and numerous. We again made an excellent profit. And we made £300 for Cancer UK; this brings our total to over £1,000 in donations since we began after the loss of Tony Bew.

At this time, we also learnt that the Marlow Entertainers, run by Ray and Jen Weeks had decided to discontinue. Jen had been a wonderful actress for us as well as the Entertainers, and we had crossed over on many occasions (Bobby Ashton, Annie Spracklen, Tony K and several others from times past had played for both groups. They very kindly donated their funds to us and to the Marlow Operatic group, which is thriving as a reformed and new directional group of young musical performers. We now also have access to their store in the cellars below Court Garden, where we intend to store much of the largest pieces of scenery and platforms.

There was the usual Carol singing on the Causeway followed by refreshment at The Two Brewers.

Immediately after the New Year, we held our party in the Garden Room, with very good food, organised by Hilary, and brought in by Players, drink which we provided ourselves, music provided by Jossy, Max and Andy, and a Quiz provided by Andrew in which the chief source of diversion was the backchat and querulousness of the contestants. The Quizmaster was challenged throughout and in dire need of refreshment at the end of it. My thanks to all who organised and helped, whether preparing the room, providing food or entertainment, or (and most importantly) clearing up afterwards. I have been doing this for some 30 years and I still cannot work out where the tables go!

After this, we began rehearsals for *Rookery Nook*, which we had chosen over *Crown Matrimonial* and *Blithe Spirit* as a very funny play indeed, full of banging doors and semi clothed ladies. We were very pleased to welcome Michelle Hartfield and Jack Orr into the group. I had seen Jack at the Masque Players and knew he would be perfect in the part of Clive. I was also sure that Laura would play opposite him and Andy very effectively, and Jossy was a most convincing housekeeper (Mrs Leverett), with Karen as the bossy mother in law, David Choules as a hilarious Admiral Juddy, Michelle as the scantily clad Poppy and the screamingly dunny Steve Powell as Putz. Alison provided cat, dog, crash and other sound effects, while Olwen , another great new arrival, was Stage manager and fished out all sorts of props from trunks to tea cups a loofah and flags for the lifeboat . Speaking of newcomers, we had Charlotte ,

again Andy's wife in fiction expecting in fact. We had a really great cast, and the greatest moment of all came when Wendy told us "I feel sick". She had her line learnt from the first rehearsal. In fact rehearsals went so well that three weeks before the show we had the lines and actions virtually there. David and I went to do a publicity interview for Marlow FM and people who heard this felt it went well.

Max and his mates had made superb platforms and stairs and the sound, costumes and props were ready. My thanks to all our backstagers and actors.

It was a week later that the Committee made the decision that we should have to postpone the performances, due to the danger threatened by the infection- we had sold hardly any tickets- and in fact three days later it was announced that no performances could take place as Court Garden and eventually the country went into lockdown.

I am grateful that nearly all the cast offered their support for performances in November 2020: some understandably had other commitments, and we now do not know what will happen: but to date we have had no indication of whether public performances will be physically possible.

What could we do?

Well, after the initial shock we have held meetings twice a week: we rehearsed Rookery Nook, we read new plays, we have recorded and broadcast *Tobermory* an adaptation by Andrew of the short story by Saki; and we have broadcast and recorded "*Bottom's Dream*" adapted from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. We have held quizzes, a musical evening, three "Bring and share" evenings, which provided some really moving moments, and we are now preparing another Murder Mystery *Lucifer struck at Blazes* devised and directed by Gloria, to be broadcast live next Friday.

Brian has hosted these Zoom meetings, and I for one, have had a real course in IT and videoconferencing, which has proved very useful in my Tribunals work and connections to my other interests. The only organisation I have yet to Zoom with is Windsor Castle: odd, that...I am told I am missed....

Our friends in Marly-le Roi have of course been equally stricken, but I have had some regular emails from Laurent and so far they are all unscathed health-wise.

As President I thank our Committee very gratefully for the hard work that has made so much of the time in 2019 and 2020 enjoyable and be assured we will get together properly once we are allowed to associate and meet in a back garden- and later in the Studio and on the Stage! We can plan in hope, and possibly it will be a Murder Mystery that has us in front of an audience again, before we consider our 2021 agenda.

June 2020