

President and Chairman's address

The Marlow Players Annual General Meeting 5th July 2022 8:15 pm
in The Studio

Welcome to everyone here, and especially to new members.

It is so good to be able to meet in person, after two years of AGMs held using videoconferencing. The year of activities was limited until November, by regulations which did not make it easy, but we have had a successful, creative and enjoyable year.

I should like to thank the Committee, who have met regularly to plan activities, and have set an Agenda and continued with their most valuable work: Brian continues as Treasurer, and updates us all with the Newsletters on the website, which he manages most expertly; Hilary as membership Secretary, Gloria, Alison and Andy as committee members, and to date I've continued as Chairman and Secretary, assisted by Hilary and Gloria in recording meetings if unable to be there myself. The recording of meetings will still fall into those hands, but Jennifer Major has kindly offered to provide a more user-friendly digest of committee discussions which can be viewed by all members.

Since the last report, we have met on Tuesdays to produce performances of our Radio play versions of Murder Mysteries, directed by Gloria and Andrew,

We began on July 2nd with an early afternoon performance of *Murder in an Ice Cold Manor* on the stage in Higginson Park. The audience of about 30 were in deckchairs, and we were really miked up as well as pretending to be. We raised over £140 for Cancer charities.

With a relaxation in Covid regulations, we then began preparing our next "Murder Mystery" which was presented at Liston Hall on October 23rd: "Shooting Shambles at Shrapnel Castle" an event which was followed by a certain amount of refreshment as it was also my birthday.

The performance was a great success. We had, I think, 38 people in the audience, which was about the maximum to meet social distancing advice and this meant that all tables were well separated and the requirements of Liston Hall could be met.

We then moved towards a production in March, by which time regulations had eased off completely, but we were by no means confident that it would be possible to mount a fully acted play, in view of the fact that an actor might be forced to withdraw if they caught Covid. We decided to present a play written for the Marlow Players by your president: "Calamity in the Cloisters" and to have two performances on the same day: a matinee and an evening show. We were able to have almost a double cast, which was really good: but, as director, I would say that it was quite a logistics problem. Nevertheless, it meant that Brian, Andy, and Gloria were acting in both performances and Alison was good enough to be both Narrator and Sound Effects for both. We

experimented with an adaptation of the usual rostrum, which seemed to work, and croquet was played in the Hall while the audience arrived. The audiences were very satisfactory: 43 for the matinee and over 60 for the evening performance. Many thanks to Gloria and John for the setting up, decoration of tables, and the provision for the quiz element- and prizes. The evening performance was much enlivened by the presence of a considerable party from St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, who got all the jokes and chortled throughout. They reported the play to the Dean of Windsor, with a warning to be careful what happened to the Choir!

The following day, Gloria and I attended a Civic service of dedication and reception for representatives of all the many organisations which go to make the Marlow community.

Four weeks later, we presented "Calamity in the Cloisters" again, as a Charity performance at All Saints Church in Maidenhead. This was a lovely venue, as we were able to play croquet on the lawn of the quadrangle as in a real cathedral setting, and with some excellent screens from the church create a very satisfactory set which combined the Studio and ecclesiastical setting. A large audience meant that after all expenses, we raised some £480 towards the Disaster and Emergency Relief work in Ukraine. The audience were very appreciative and feedback afterwards was very positive. Yet again, "When are you going to do another one?" was the F A Q.

We are now ready to perform a play in the old manner: and we have chosen "A Bunch of Amateurs" written by Ian Hislop. This will be performed twice on the same Saturday in November at Liston Hall, using a set of rostra put up in the morning, and using the Studio as off-stage as well as Green Room. It will be interesting and possibly a little fraught to get everything in and out during one day, but there is also a possibility of performing at Henley if all goes well. We are very pleased that Jennifer Major is going to direct: I know that her approach will be illuminating and creative, with rather more use of "the method" and exploring actors own creativity than the schoolmasterly regime which has been used (in which the term "lines" has acquired more resonance than usual!)

We have been able to bring back some social activities as well. Most recently, Jennifer hosted a lovely picnic at Wittington House, the home Viscount Derwent and now HQ of SAS. Wonderful gardens to stroll through, a historic house to admire, and a walk down to the riverbank.

On Midsummer's Eve, we brought secateurs and saws to clear up the overhanging vegetation and weeds around the Studio. Andrew disposed of large amounts of the cuttings and loppings and the rest remains to be removed. A great team of helpers made it work very well.

Similarly, a team have been working on removing and disposing of the flats and redundant set pieces which have occupied a lot of space in the studio. Brian and Andy led a team of us to haul the pieces outside and break them up,

and Brian has been disposing of these gradually. We have been able to store more efficiently the set of steps, blocks and rostra which were built largely to stage "Rookery Nook" sadly cancelled by Covid, and , because of the close physical contact required, unlikely to be considered safe to play. Another team has been reorganising the props and costumes boxes. We have acquired some costumes from the late Betty Durrant, and Gloria has sorted these, but now we must accept we are stuffed full!

We continue to support Players in other groups, notably the Valley Players' performances of versions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Pride and Prejudice* in the Naphill orchard and their pantomime, and also the Masque players *Rumpelstiltskin* at West Wycombe, directed by Alison Rogers- our "Matron".

During a visit with the Town Twinnings to Marly in May, I was able to spend an evening with Les Baladins. It was good to catch up with them. They had just presented " *La Nonna*" a very funny play with the stalwart Sylvie in the lead role and would have liked to bring it over here in the Autumn, but this is not possible. We still hope to be able to resume our exchanges by playing in Marly next Spring.

Finally I would like to welcome a new member- Ajeet, who has been very helpful in the Studio tidying sessions and who is taking on a part in the play for November . Again,thank you to the Committee who have been very loyal and supportive to the Players through a very difficult two years.

Andrew Stafford , President.