



# The Prompter



*Workington Playgoers' newsletter – April 2015.*

Welcome to The Prompter. We look forward to seeing you in the theatre in the near future.



## 'Tommy's Story'

**A Heritage Funded WW1 Commemoration Drama set in West Cumbria**

April 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> – Dean School  
April 21<sup>st</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> – Theatre Royal

Written and Directed by Beryl Ballance  
Produced by Workington Playgoers

Tickets for both venues are free.



Written and directed by Beryl Ballance and performed by Playgoers, CADS and other local actors, this moving play uses fictional characters but real life events to depict life both at home and in the trenches.

Beryl Ballance writes, "‘Tommy's Story' doesn't just portray the agony of the lads at the front, it gives testimony to the power of community spirit - communities that could easily have been torn apart by the ravages of WW1 but were conquered by friendship, loyalty and love, communities that overcome the most horrific times imaginable.

Mothers of five British soldiers await their sons' fate; sons who have been dazzled by the whole concept of going off to war, fighting for their country and coming back heroes. The soldiers go, thinking it is all a massive game..."

## Brief words from the Chairman

Now that we “have gone public” and the planning work has started in earnest, I promise that I will not use the words “lottery” or “funding” again in this brief communication. You are all probably heartily fed up with the subject and my frequent emails, but I must congratulate all the members of Playgoers’ Council and James Watson our mentor and advisor who have worked so hard over the last two years to get us to this point. Countless hours of work have gone into the application process and in arguing our case when our bid was rejected at each stage.

We are most fortunate to have the use of the old Moorclose Sixth Form centre from June to December and I am heartened by the number of productions and events that are already being planned whilst the Theatre is closed. The determination of many members that “the show must go on” is very encouraging.

On the social front I would like to thank Jenni Rushton who organised a very successful Members’ evening in a Cockermonth restaurant in early March. 25 Members enjoyed a buffet supper and read extracts from *Up Pompeii*, 1984 and *Cleo*, *Camping* etc by Terry Johnson. We hope to organise another Members’ evening shortly to discuss plans for the year and any other burning issues. Ron Dickens may be moving house, so we will possibly have to find an alternative venue for the Summer barbecue.

The development of a youth theatre group (Second Stars) in the Theatre Royal organised and run by Millie Hardie Sims and her mother Maria is very exciting and hopefully should introduce Playgoer members of the future to the Theatre. All of the youngsters taking part are joining Playgoers as Junior



Members and we have enlisted James Watson’s help once again to source some grant funding to support the junior productions. They too will decamp to Moorclose while the building work is carried out.

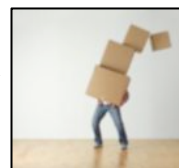
And finally, I must thank Gwyneth and Nicola most sincerely once again on behalf of all our Members for the magnificent sum of £662-60 raised for the Theatre Royal from their 309 mile walk from Chepstow to Land's End last year. They raised a similar amount for the Henderson Suite at Whitehaven hospital and will be off again this year from Carlisle to Grangemouth. Please support them!  
Peter Inglis

## Props

Where do we start? From the top and work down? The big clear out is starting to take shape. But before we start packing up there are some items that people have brought in for recent (last few years!) productions and we wonder if anyone would like to reclaim their treasures. There are a lot of old vinyl L.P.s, telephones, typewriters, light fittings and lamp shades which we will probably send to auction or charity shops. As you all know I’m a bit of a hoarder and time after time we throw something out and two productions later we need it. But I will be ruthless (a little bit) and have already spotted two items for the tip.



Storage will be in the Moorclose Community Centre (old 6<sup>th</sup> Form Centre). We are building up a collection of boxes for the job and the first session for volunteer packers will be on Monday April 13<sup>th</sup> 10a.m. There will be a list of dates and times on the notice board in the foyer for members to add their names if willing to help. It’s a



huge task but many hands make light work so hopefully we'll have lots of helpers.

Meanwhile we are organising props. for "Tommy's Story" in Dean School for two nights and five performances in the theatre, "Bouncers" and "Twelfth Night" which we hope will take place at



Moorclose. So we will be busy on all fronts and any new members who want to get involved do please contact me. We have fun, honestly!

Anne Chambers

## Director of 'Tommy's Story' Beryl Ballance

Since joining CADS in 1986, I have played numerous parts, from Alice in 'Hobson's Choice' to the title role in 'Educating Rita' and Sarah in 'Accrington Pals' to name but a few.

I always had a yearning to direct, but never had the confidence. In 2009 I eventually plucked up the courage and directed John Godber's 'April in Paris'; a play that we were awarded Runner up for in the NODA Drama Festival.

About eighteen months ago I decided I wanted to direct something about WW1. I spoke to the Chair of Playgoers who, along with me, thought it would be a good idea for both of our societies to join forces for this special commemoration production.

I made up the story and characters then wrote the script for 'Tommy's Story,' which was something I thoroughly enjoyed, nearly as much as I have enjoyed directing the play. The characters are fictitious; although I have used Cumbrian names, they have no

bearing on anyone living or dead. Some incidents really did happen and ... they are included due to the help I received from my Stage Manager Jackie Burd. Jackie did most of the research for the play. I have tried as much as possible for the drama to be authentic however, please allow me some artistic licence, as I am not an historian

Jackie also put in a successful bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund. We were very lucky; we were given nearly £10,000 for the project. I would like to take this occasion to thank her for her hard work in that department.



Beryl Ballance with tommies Shaun Palmer, Mark Stillwell, Jonathan Mc Dowell, Marc Goodwin and Jack Sewell.

## Living with 'Tommy'.

The idea for this joint Playgoers/CADS



production was first mooted in 2013. The idea had been sparked by a Playgoers Council meeting where we

wondered how to commemorate WW1. The notion of a revue was raised and this, coupled with an earlier idea of a joint production with CADS, resulted in an initial foray one cold winter's night to Cockermouth Conservative Club where several Playgoers and CADS members discussed the project with enthusiasm. That was the start of a roller coaster experience and ... I was there!

The revue then began to evolve. In order to incorporate the myriad of material that we wanted to include, the 'thing' needed a structure. A mere revue seemed far too jolly for the events we wished to commemorate and so ... Beryl started writing!

It was wonderful watching the script take shape. At times it almost seemed to have a life of its own. A joint planning group met regularly throughout 2014. The consistency of the group was somewhat fluid at times but a faithful group of stalwarts remained true to the cause. Beryl kept us up to date with her writing and slowly a very moving and engaging story began to emerge. Scene read-throughs were emotional events as Beryl transformed thoughts and ideas into realistic dialogue. Together we researched appropriate poetry and Jackie Burd, Stage Manager for the production, researched many local and national events which were incorporated into the script.

At an early stage Beryl brought Mike Ames, a renowned local musician and musical director, on board as our Musical Director and his enthusiasm and expertise were – and are – inspirational. He is a perfectionist with an eye for detail and an insight into what will captivate an audience. He enlisted the skills of a number of brass musicians and also the help of dance teacher Gill Greenhalgh, (Strictly Kirkgate) to help choreograph the Music Hall section and together they make a formidable team.

As the script and cast numbers grew, so did the costs, particularly for costumes and musicians, and it was soon realised that this was going to be an expensive production. Financial help was needed. Jackie, Beryl and Peter applied for Lottery



funding and after many tense weeks and some negotiations, we were successful ... with the added bonus of extra funding so that we need not charge for tickets. One of the conditions for the money was that we did some outreach work, hence the performances at Dean School. This all means extra work for the production team but hopefully it also means we will reach a wider audience – even if Dean is only a few miles away!

Acquiring actors for the various parts was a nightmare at times. Some recognised the calibre of the script from an early stage but finding our young soldiers was a headache. However a combination of the power of the press and word of mouth has resulted in the discovery of some very promising talent. (Let's hope they will volunteer for other productions now they have the bug!)

Now we are almost there. The Playgoers production team have created some wonderful costumes, some excellent props and an imaginative set. Beryl Ballance's script is funny, sad and dramatic. The cast has actors both familiar to you and new. The music will 'blow you away'. Catch this Playgoers/

CADS production from April 21<sup>st</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup>.  
Your last chance to see The Playgoers in action in The Theatre Royal this year!

Watch out for news of our productions at Moorclose later in the year.

Gillian Scholey

## Subs!

A gentle reminder! Subs are due on June 1<sup>st</sup>. Full members £20. Associate and Junior Members £10.

Gilda Wells

## Youth Theatre

"Second Star Youth Theatre" takes place weekly on Saturday mornings, 10.30—12.30 at Workington's Theatre Royal. This is run by Millie Hardie Sims who says:

'Based at Workington Theatre Royal, the successful drama group provides actors aged 10 and up with the means to perform on a real life stage in a beautiful traditional theatre, learn skills suited to theatrical arts and be part of a production to be proud of.'

See below for their next production which we hope members will support.



Your last chance to see a production in the 'old' theatre. Will YOU be able to say you saw the last production in the old theatre and the first production in the new theatre?)

## Play Production

From a play point of view this season has been full of false starts and missed deadlines as it has taken so long in getting confirmation of what was happening with the lottery funding and when work would start or not if we failed to get the funding. This has affected what plays could be chosen, when they would/could go on as before anything starts on the refurbishment, the theatre



needs to be cleared of props, costumes, play scripts, stage gear etc. and this is going to take a fair amount of time to do. This impacts on the plays as we can't be building sets when at the same time we are trying to clear the theatre.

We are now at the stage where "Tommy's Story" will be on in April but after that no plays will be performed in the theatre until the building work has been completed which is likely to be early next year. This has not stopped us though in trying to continue the work of the club.

We are going to be putting on "Bouncers" in July, "Twelfth Night" in October and "Dad's Army" in December. They will be going on in the Moorclose Sixth Form building. We will need your support for these performances and to spread the word that we are not closed for business.

Next year should be an exciting time as we want to start with a bang and we have been successful in getting one of the first

amateur opportunities to perform a "murder" play. This play has had a successful run in London and has been on tour throughout the UK. Thanks to Jenni Rushton for getting us this opportunity. Don't want to jeopardise our opportunity until things are finalised so won't mention the play's title. This will be followed by ?????.

We have ideas and plays in mind but they need to be confirmed by Council before we can let you know what they will be. Suffice to say that we are thrilled by some of the suggestions made. But now we would like to give you an opportunity to influence the choice so please let me know of any ideas that you may have.

Exciting times are ahead so let's make the most of the new vibrant theatre with plays that you want to see.

Brian Young.



## Tommy's Story

A Wardrobe Department perspective

The Wardrobe department again rose to the challenge of sorting out costumes for our large production. I am delighted to say we managed to furnish all the costumes (apart from uniform hire) from our fantastic and varied wardrobe. Jenni

surpassed herself with the hats as usual for the Music Hall scene.

Thanks to our new wardrobe member Mary for supporting us with the making of the gentlemen's, accessories and Gilda who will be in charge of wardrobe at Dean.

It has been a pleasure and privilege to work in partnership with CADS and the cast, and especially the younger lads who have risen to the occasion supported by the more 'mature' cast.

We hope you will be able to come to the production, all seats are free. Bring your hankies for the 'challenging scenes' that we associate with the Great War and in contrast enjoy the superb music production in the Music Hall. See you there.

Helen Earl – Wardrobe



## Is it Yours ?

Have you got any personal possessions in the theatre?

Can you please check and remove them as soon as practically possible as we have to empty the theatre in early June.

Members will NOT be able to access the theatre after that time due to building/health and safety regulations.

Saturday Morning Coffee will also stop after June 6<sup>th</sup>. Council will let you know when we are reopening.

**Soundwave** will be joining us in our newly revamped theatre next year. Much of their work will be in the newly renovated Wilson Street part of the venue. Here Peter Cooke, Marketing Officer for Soundwave, tells us about the company.



Soundwave is funded by the National Foundation for Youth Music and receives project and strategic funding from the Arts Council of England, as well as various trusts and foundations. We earn income by charging for workshops, some projects and events.

**We are leading a music education revolution!** Our goal is to create fresh and exciting opportunities for people (young people especially) to use music and singing to connect with and inspire each other.



## ABOUT SOUNDWAVE

**Soundwave is one of the leading music participatory companies in the North of England.**

Established since 2007, Soundwave is a company limited by guarantee, and since March 2014 a registered charity.

**We're on a mission to track down** every rural location, free-thinking school, digital platform, community venue, bedroom studio and open air square footage to use music and singing to improve people's playing, singing voice, health, relationships, work opportunities, lifestyle choices and the quality and range of fun activities they can undertake in their spare time.

Every year Soundwave engages with more than 3000 people, mainly young people who are in challenging circumstances. Our work focusses on:

- **13-19 year-olds who are not attending regular education, training or employment.**
- **Learning disabled young people from 14**
- **Young people who are rurally isolated.**
- **Vulnerable Adults.**
- **Schools.**
- **Dementia/Alzheimer's sufferers (and their carers).**

We're also leading the way with professional development for musicians, music leaders, teachers, freelancers and youth workers in Cumbria - helping them to ensure their practice is the best it can be, with regular training seminars and events led by internationally-renowned musicians and practitioners!

### **And how do we do all this?**

Soundwave deliver high-quality participatory music programmes throughout Cumbria. Annually we hold over 200 events, including weekly sessions across the county, often working in partnership with other youth organisations.

Our flagship project **MusicZone**, has been running since the very beginning of Soundwave, and offers young musicians expert help from one of our professional musicians, a space to rehearse and a place to jam with their friends. Other weekly sessions include **Beat It Up!** - A carnival-styled drumming group who take to stages across Cumbria to impress crowds with their rhythmical madness.

We also engage international guest artists to work with and inspire

Cumbria's young musicians. Our **DO IT YOURSELF! Music Festival** is a 12 week-long programme of musical masterclasses, seminars, residentials, gigs and workshops, all designed to help 13-19 year-old musicians improve their skills and abilities, and at the same time developing their own musical style and voice!

Peter Cooke.  
Soundwave Market Officer