

THE SECOND HUNDRED YEARS

'The Flowers That Bloomed in the Spring' was published early in the year 2000 and celebrated one hundred years of musical theatre in Haslemere.

However, in the days up to 1905, it was mainly individuals who put on the early entertainments and, although the pantomimes bore the name Haslemere Players, there was no formal structure to the group. The company was not properly constituted until 1907 but, since the first Gilbert and Sullivan production appeared in 1905, it is normally this latter date which is deemed to be the official beginning of the company.

But the story of the Haslemere Players is continuous and this latest issue covers the next fifteen years from the start of 2000 up to the end of 2014, which includes the company's official centenary.

THE YEAR 2000

Millennium year and the 21st century got off to a good start with a riproaring version of 'Anything Goes'. As the curtain went up on the deck of the cruise ship, *SS American*, Doreen Wylde's lively production swung into action, full of colour, life and sparkle. An excellent cast captured the spirit of Cole Porter's infectious melodies, with Racheal Rhodes outstanding in the lead role of Reno Sweeney. She had excellent backing from Phillip Elliott as Billy Crocker, his largest part to date, and Carolyn Beaumont, Teresa Marsh, Richard Tytler and the four attractive leggy 'Angels' all shone in their roles. Battling against awesome odds following serious illness, Barry Day mustered his considerable acting ability and technique to produce a creditable performance as Public Enemy No. 13, Moonface Martin. Thanks to new MD, Edward Roberts, the chorus were in splendid voice throughout, particularly so in the show-stopping 'Blow Gabriel Blow' number. Here Megan Farrington's imaginative choreography in the massed tap dancing ensemble was at its best and the combination of dazzling colour and exciting dance steps was the highlight of the evening. Jennie Budden's eye-catching costumes certainly added to the overall spectacle.

Earlier in the year there had been sadness over the death of Susanne Dew who finally lost her battle with cancer. A choir made up of members of the Players and Stagers sang at her funeral at St Luke's Church, Grayshott. One of Sue's legacies to the company was the transferral of her considerable wardrobe of stage costumes to the Players. Among the ladies' items were evening dresses, sets of dancers' outfits, 20s and 30s frocks and suits. The men did particularly well with blazers, period suits and uniforms, most of them in large sizes, plus some useful frock coats and character costumes which had been lacking in the past. The marvellous influx of costumes into an already bulging wardrobe, heralded a lot of activity in the Studio with the sifting, sorting and shedding of some of the old stock. It was good to know that the company will benefit from the love and effort that Sue put into building up her personal collection.

Another successful Players' Burns Night supper was held in February and the Catholic Church Hall was transformed with coloured helium balloons and giant Scottish flags. Traditional haggis, neeps and tatties were served and the dancing was led by caller John Martin, three of whose four children had appeared in past Players' productions.

Hamish Donaldson set up the Players website and promised that, from May onwards, news of all productions and events would be listed on www.HaslemerePlayers.com.

The Music Hall produced and compèred by Hamish was the culmination of a month-long programme of events to celebrate the Millennium, ending a run of concerts and shows from all the different groups in the town presented throughout May. The Players' show took the form of a musical celebration of the decades leading to the Millennium. Hamish directed his 34-strong cast in a sparkling cocktail of solo songs, sketches, chorus numbers and dance routines, cheered on by enthusiastic audiences. Among the acts were an amusing parody of Gilbert and Sullivan numbers, a hilarious sand dance from Teresa Marsh, Jonathan Foster and Phillip Elliott, and a comic take-off of the Luton Girls Choir. The penultimate theme was a nostalgic look at famous singers and performers of the century ranging from Marie Lloyd and George Formby through to Elvis Presley, Cliff Richard and the Beatles. Patriotism showed through at the ultimate finale with lots of flag waving and choruses of 'There'll always be an England' and other stirring songs.

Earlier in the month the Players entered a float in the Millennium carnival procession, the entire event being run by Hamish Donaldson and Don Stacey. Alan English built a set on a vehicle kindly lent by Rick Clement of Clembros, with Jennie Budden supplying the costumes. The chosen theme represented the diversity of shows presented by the company and, as well as members sitting and standing on the lorry, lots of colourful characters walked alongside. The prize for the best float was awarded unanimously to the Players, a decision which caused controversy as one of the three judges was the Mayor, Fay Foster, whom an anonymous writer to the Herald accused of bias. An unpleasant incident, but it all soon blew over. The procession made its way from High Lane to Lion Green where Hamish had arranged rustic sports and a wine and beer festival. The sun shone and thousands turned out and had a wonderful day.

At the AGM in June, Richard Tytler took over as chairman and the summer barbecue in August was once again held in the English's lovely garden.

'The Merry Widow', the show chosen for October, had more than its fair share of problems, causing headaches for the producer, Doreen Wylde. There were difficulties in casting the leading role but luckily Paul Weakley came over from Horsham to play Danilo. One last minute crisis related to the set which was unveiled to Doreen the evening before the dress rehearsal. She agreed that the Italian, blue marble staircase and the richly coloured backcloth were superb – but not together! Luckily Olwyn Gavin came to the rescue and within 24 hours, the staircase had been transformed to resemble mellow stone. Robert Cantan directed the orchestra, the company pulling out all the stops with their singing of the gorgeous Lehár melodies, and the four leading performers – Paul, together with Christine Gudger (the Widow), Jonathan Foster (Camille) and Claire Wright (Valencienne) - all on top form. Other supporting roles were well played by Richard Tytler, Don Stacey, Hamish Donaldson and newcomer Peter Gardner. As the Grisettes, six leggy lovelies delighted with their skilled version of the Can-can.

At the after-show party, Roy Brown, representative of NODA, presented long service awards to two members, Stan Hoskin for 25 years and Doreen Wylde for a splendid 50 years, thirty-three of them with the Players. Chairman Richard also mentioned that all proceeds from the raffle and a certain allocation of tickets on the Wednesday night were being given to the Marie Curie organisation.

News came of the death of Lady Rosamund Skelhorn, aged ninety, who had appeared on stage in the 1960s and been a generous patron since. She also left a bequest to the Haslemere Players, this fact being reported in the court page of the Daily Telegraph.

The Inter society quiz was hosted by Farnham OS at Farnham golf club. For probably the first time the company did not do itself justice but vowed to do better the following year.

Jennie Budden organised another trip to Paris in November and 25 members braved the channel (the Eurotunnel option having been withdrawn at the last minute) but thankfully the sea was fairly calm both ways. Although some exciting trips had been laid on there was disappointment that, during the visit to the gardens at Versailles, the weather was awful. However the short break was generally voted great fun.

The Haslemere Players' Millennium Cookbook, compiled by Linda Donaldson from recipes submitted by members, was launched in December. The £4 publication found its way into many Christmas stockings, the proceeds going towards company funds.

December also saw the first of the Christmas Cracker concerts which were to become part of the Haslemere scene. This was the brainchild of Don Stacey and Hamish Donaldson who sent out invitations to local churches and choirs to join members of the Players to sing traditional and unusual carols. The massed choir was conducted by Alan Drake to Tony McIntee's accompaniment, the resulting sound being most impressive. Particularly memorable was the singing of 'The Lord's Prayer' to the tune of 'Auld Lang Syne' (following Cliff Richard who had a number one hit with it). In this case there was accompaniment from a bagpiper who entered from the back of the auditorium. The programme of carols for audience and choir was interspersed with comic Christmas verse presented by Peter and Teresa Marsh, Fay Foster, Mike Clarke and Jane Hamlyn. Mulled wine and mince pies were served during the interval. The concert finished with a riotous performance of 'The Twelve Days of Christmas' with individual rows standing up and sitting down in turn. The Haslemere Hall was packed and everyone agreed it was a marvellous start to the Christmas festivities.

THE YEAR 2001

In March 2001 the company returned to 'My Fair Lady' and once again all performances were sold out and the show judged a smash hit. MD Edward Roberts made the most of Loewe's wonderful score and Teresa Marsh directed the show with great skill and imagination. The leading players were tremendous with strong performances from the delightful Racheal Roberts (née Rhodes, newly married to Edward whom she had met in the company) and from Tony Ostime, a superb Henry Higgins. Bob Fells was a lovable, earthy Alfred Dolittle, and Mike Clarke excelled as Colonel Pickering. The Herald also commented that Jane Hamlyn "exuded class as Mrs Higgins", while, as Freddy Eynsford-Hill, Jonathan Foster "made 'On the Street Where You Live' a real showstopper".

At the after-show party two new Players' awards were announced. These were a Golden Performances award for anyone who had appeared in 50 Players' shows, and a Five Years' Backstage Commendation Award for those unsung heroes who carry out duties so willingly in the wings. In recognition of his outstanding contribution to the society, the first recipient of the former was Barry Day, bravely attending the show following brain surgery. Alison Owen received the backstage award.

The May edition of Players' Patter, the company newsletter, was a full-colour gala edition to celebrate its 100th issue. Started in 1972 by Fay Foster and Eileen Christmas (who, tragically, was to die in a car crash on the A3 in 1974) the publication has continued to be produced quarterly. Over the years it has had just six editors: Judith Forde, Pamela Depledge, Howard Bicknell, Jonathan Foster, Fay Foster and, latterly, Linda Donaldson.

For the 2001 Music Hall director Hamish Donaldson chose a 'Devolution' theme, featuring a non-stop programme of singing, dancing, sketches and groan-inducing jokes which clearly appealed to the large audiences. The show was divided into four parts, with contributions from a barbers' shop quartet uniting the items from England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales. One of the high spots was a brilliant Irish Riverdance spoof where five leggy dancers were joined by three men whose cut-out "legs" were cleverly manipulated into interesting contortions from behind a screen! There was a stripper sketch brilliantly handled by Peter and Teresa Marsh and a hilarious duet from Kenneth McKellar and Moira Anderson, amusingly portrayed by the cross-dressing Vicki Gavin and Tony Creasey. And who will forget the sidesplitting octet of individual heroes of Britain including such unlikely characters as Alan Titchmarsh, Anne Robinson and Gladys Pugh from Hi-de-Hi? It was a wonderful evening, greatly enhanced by Jennie Budden's costumes.

The company learned a few months later that the Music Hall had been given a NODA award for best presentation in the Southern Area.

The company mourned Barry Day's untimely death in July. He had fought a malignant tumour with great courage and was an inspiration to everyone. Barry appeared in 54 shows for the Players, bowing out with a take-off of Frank Sinatra singing 'My Way' in the Millennium Music Hall. Members formed a large choir to sing at his funeral at the beautiful little church at Blackmoor on a brilliantly sunny day. His wife, Jane, had particularly asked that 'Younger than Springtime' be sung, recalling Barry's performance as Lt. Cable in 'South Pacific' in 1982. A collection afterwards raised a large sum for the Phyllis Tuckwell Hospice.

For the annual August barbecue, held at the Donaldson's home, the usual good weather deserted the company. For the first time the heavens opened and although guests nobly ate their chicken, lamb and salads under gazebos, eventually they sought sanctuary in the house and enjoyed the quiz which the new social secretaries, Sally Crossley and Laura Musco, had devised.

There were many who thought that the newly-released West End hit 'Mack and Mabel' would prove too difficult for the limitations of the Haslemere stage. However for many years director Doreen Wylde had longed for the chance to produce the show, and MD Robert Cantan was equally keen to oversee the music. Once it became available to amateurs and Haslemere Players were allowed to be the first in the southern area to première it, Doreen was determined to prove the critics wrong. But were there problems!

The show revolves around the story of Mack Sennett, the silent movie director (played by Tony Creasey), and his leading lady, Mabel Normand (Sally Rowlandson, making her debut). As well as featuring the antics of the renowned Keystone Kops, it also includes black and white clips from Mack's films. The Royal School offered its premises for some of the locations, their hall and elegant staircase being used for Mabel's arrest. Other scenes were shot at the Hollycombe Steam Fair site where, as the hapless heroine, Sally was tied to the railway line. The props list was quite mind-blowing with such items as a steam press, a horse, train carriage, etc, but luckily the Players found a society in Norfolk who offered them for sale. (They were later sold on to another company, thereby keeping down the cost.)

Although audiences did not support the show in the usual numbers, most agreed that it was superbly directed and cast. Sally and Tony were terrific and they had the backing of some superb characters: a stunning Carolyn Beaumont as Lottie; an unrecognisable Jonathan Foster as Fatty Arbuckle (so different from his normal roles); and Tony Krauze, Hamish Donaldson, Phillip Elliott, Richard Milla and Mike Clarke adding further depth. The crazy antics of the Keystone Kops were much enjoyed as was the slapstick 'Make 'em Laugh' scene with custard pies

The big dancing numbers produced some of the most spectacular effects. Megan Farrington had devised some exciting routines, particularly the bathing beauties number and the ensemble tap dancing sequence, and Jennie Budden's costumes, among them the stunning black and gold evening gowns and the twenties swimsuits, added much to the production.

'Mack and Mabel' was probably one of the most technically difficult shows ever. The enormous number of large props, the problems of synchronizing the film sequences, and the fourteen scene changes taxed the backstage teams to the full – but they rose to the occasion magnificently. The cast and musicians too had to be on the ball as never before, but it was generally agreed that the challenge had been met and the choice of show was well justified.

In November it was once again time for the inter-society quiz, the Thespians hosting the event in the Haslemere Hall annexe. There were also bangers and mash to fortify the team and their supporters during the hard-fought struggle in which the Players lost by 193 to 194 points to Farnham OS. This was all the more devastating after the spectacular success of the musical round where Players were fielding their joker. Peter Sillick proved a genius when it came to recognising TV theme tunes of yesteryear. On all but one question he identified the tune within one second – in the other he took just three seconds!

The second Christmas Cracker concert at the Haslemere Hall proved just as enjoyable as the first with twenty-seven Players providing the backbone to the massed choir. As before, the format included carols for audience and choir and comic verse, and again the audience enjoyed every minute.

THE YEAR 2002

In January Barbara Tytler, a former dancer for the company and wife of chairman, Richard, lost her battle with cancer. The company turned out in force and filled St Margaret's Church, Fernhurst, with music for her funeral. Particularly memorable was the contribution from Carolyn Beaumont and Vicki Gavin who sang the haunting duet from 'Lakmé'.

A few weeks later there was a similarly large turnout for the funeral at All Saints, Headley, of Geraldine Evans (Rugman) who died in early March at the age of 88. Although her official role over fifty years in the Players had been as rehearsal accompanist, her influence was much greater as she helped and encouraged generations of aspiring singers. Along with Cledwyn, whom she had met in the company in 1949, she dedicated herself wholeheartedly to the Players and they both considered the members as their "family". At Cledwyn's request, the Players sang 'Brother Mine, Sister Mine', the difficult but beautiful number from 'Die Fledermaus', with Jonathan Foster singing the tenor solo.

After a five-year gap, it was back to Gilbert and Sullivan in the spring of 2002. Having herself appeared as Tessa when the Players had presented 'The Gondoliers' in 1984, Anne Manning was invited to produce the operetta, its eighth showing in the company's history.

However things were far from plain sailing as, for the first time ever the committee nearly had to cancel the spring show all together. It appeared that some members were not too keen to do Gilbert and Sullivan, and others had genuine reasons for being unable to take part. The chairman had the job of sending out a 'Gondoliers in Crisis' letter and, despite having selected a superb cast, it was touch and go as to whether there would be sufficient numbers for the chorus. In the end, director

Anne had just enough ladies, and the male chorus was happily augmented by two 'borrowed' men from Godalming who had recently performed the same show.

The production was unique in having two real-life couples as the leading gondoliers and their ladies, and Jonathan and Christine (Gudger) Foster, and Edward and Racheal Roberts looked delightful and sang and acted beautifully. The ducal party were well portrayed by Peter Gardner and Mary Coyte and, as their daughter Casilda, it was good to see Vicki Gavin in a role which did her magnificent voice justice. Opposite Vicki, in his first major part for the Players, Jamie Atkin acquitted himself very well. As usual, Hamish Donaldson made the most of his role as the sinister Grand Inquisitor.

In the event it was an excellent show, well up to the standard that audiences normally enjoy. Thanks to Doreen Wylde as chorus master, it was particularly strong vocally and Grant Hossack led the orchestra with distinction.

As in the recent past, raffle takings one evening were offered to charity with Canine Partners for Independence being the choice this time. In the foyer two lovely Labrador dogs encouraged people to buy tickets and over £500 was raised for their cause.

After the show NODA awards were made to Brian Upstell (25 years) and to Mary Coyte, who had just finished her week as the Duchess, for 35 years.

In the spring the hard-working social committee, headed by Laura Musco and Sally Crossley, organised a line dancing evening at Grayshott Village Hall. Traditional bangers and mash were served and denims and cowboy boots were much in evidence. There was a large turnout and everyone enjoyed learning the steps led by the callers, Derek and Sue Blackmoor. Later in the year Laura and Sally arranged a curry evening at the Prince of Wales, Hammer, another event that was much enjoyed. They also continued the practice of making party bookings to see shows at a number of venues, both professional and amateur.

For the Queen's Golden Jubilee in May the Players took a great part in the celebrations. On the first bank holiday weekend they ran a bottle stall at the Charter Fair, raising £180 during the afternoon. Just three weeks later came the Biggest Tea Party in the World, the brainchild of Don Stacey, with sterling help from Hamish Donaldson and others. Edwina Currie opened the event – this was just before the revelations of her affair with John Major were made public – and over 5,000 visitors flocked to the High Street. The Players manned one of six stations serving tea and sandwiches, dispensing over 600 cups in three hours.

In the midst of all the celebrations though, the company had a show to put on. It was inevitable that the annual Music Hall at the end of May should choose a Golden Jubilee theme and it took the form of a This is Your Life, Queen. The director, Teresa Marsh, together with Fay Foster, had spent many months researching details of the Queen's life and the show itself was divided into sections to commemorate some of these. In this way her subjects were introduced to her early days in the twenties and thirties, her connection with the Girl Guides, her War Service, and her wedding and coronation. In the second half further scenes introduced everyday life at the Palace and the Royal Variety performances, leading up to a triumphant finale with flags and patriotic songs.

Tony Creasey, who took on the role as narrator with the big red book, firstly welcomed Her Majesty to the Haslemere Hall. Positioned at the front of the balcony was a cut-out figure, suitably dressed, whose mechanical arm waved up and down greeting her guests! Tony continued as linkman covering the change of scenes with corny jokes and banter with the audience.

The advantage this year was that, rather than having to keep to Victorian/Edwardian material, modern ideas could be used. Some of the most popular acts came in this category: a quintet of young members did a superb pop sequence to a song made famous by the group, Steps, and a rhyming sketch featuring David and Victoria Beckham brought the house down. This was specially written by Margaret Stokes from Chiddingfold, and Jonathan Foster and Alisa Creaser were outstanding as Posh and Becks, sitting on their thrones in Beckingham Palace. This latter sketch followed an excellent song, written by Mike Clarke (who himself appeared as Prince Philip, with Jane Hamlyn as the Queen) reminiscing over the various prime ministers and other prominent people they had encountered during her reign.

Although serious items were kept to a minimum, the second half started movingly with the massed cast singing the beautiful four-part setting of 'Long Live Elizabeth', leading on to Vicki Gavin's solo, 'O Peaceful England', both from 'Merrie England'.

Another scena, which had the audience calling for more, featured the Old Contemptibles, a septet of men appearing as doddering Chelsea Pensioners with attractive nurses in attendance. They caused great fun recalling their prowess with the girls in their early years with saucy new words to such old songs as 'Daisy Bell', 'Mary from the Dairy' and 'Ivy on the old garden wall'.

In July Chairman, Richard Tytler, accompanied by Laura Musco, attended the NODA Southern Area annual awards ceremony, held at the Barrington Theatre, Ferndown, Dorset. Richard accepted the Accolade of Excellence for the 2001 Old Time Music Hall, produced by Hamish Donaldson. Roy Brown, who presented the award, called Hamish "a man of many ideas who had ensured that those ideas were received, understood and enjoyed by the audience".

Also in July six of the younger members, accompanied by William Godfree, provided a significant part of the entertainment as a fund-raising party in the grounds of Le Court Cheshire Home in Liss.

In October the choice was Gershwin's 'Crazy for You', another show newly-released for amateurs after a triumphant run in the West End. Hamish Donaldson was at the helm, with Edward Roberts as MD and, as usual, Hamish introduced many stunning and spectacular effects into the production. In view of the many dancing numbers choreographed by Megan Farrington, for the first time a dance captain, Laura Musco, was appointed to take teams through their paces while Megan was occupied elsewhere.

Although the story itself is fairly trite, the wonderful music more than compensated for that. The score is sensational and songs like 'I Got Rhythm', 'Someone to Watch Over Me', 'Embraceable You' and 'They Can't Take That Away From Me' follow one after the other.

For the lead role of Polly, the Players found a new star in Alisa Creaser, whose pairing with Tony Creasey as Bobby was ideal. Both can sing, dance and act and had plenty of opportunities to prove it. One of the highlights was a scene where Tony C joined Tony Krauze in a comic mirror double act – dressed identically they really did look like mirror images of each other and all their movements were superbly co-ordinated. Vicki Gavin's solo as she seductively wooed Mike Clarke was another high spot.

Major honours also went to the dancers, particularly the eight glamorous Follies girls whose skills reached new heights. The finale was especially stunning as Sally Barr came up from the trapdoor to join the others in a tableau where all wore pale blue and silver showgirl costumes with enormous butterfly wings. The effect was quite dazzling and great gasps were heard from the audience as they entered.

In the autumn the company celebrated two Golden Weddings of longstanding members. The first of these was for George and Dorothy Lockie, both of whom had contributed much in the past, George as Chairman for five years, and Dorothy with her 50-year record, either on stage or front-of-house. Later on Chris and Yvonne Forde celebrated their Diamond Wedding anniversary with a party in The Link. The Players were asked to help with the arrangements and a group set up the venue to cater for 150 guests. Hamish acted as MC for the evening and, while Chris's fellow choristers from St Bartholomew's Church sang amusing words to a psalm, the Players followed with a comic version of 'Nice Work If You Can Get It' written by Hamish. As well as appearing in the early Savoy operas, Chris was still producing backcloths for the company after fifty years.

Two Players who had at times in the past graced the stage died during the year. Jo Merrett's record on stage spanned nearly 35 years and she was also responsible for directing several spring shows and the critically acclaimed 'Half a Sixpence' in 1979. Several Players attended her funeral in Midhurst. Others were present at St Stephen's Church, Shottermill, for the funeral of Michael Harding who was just 68 when he died. Michael had been a mainstay of the company as a young man, when G & S was produced exclusively. He was also a longstanding patron and supporter of the Players.

The inter-show quiz, hosted by the Players, took place in Hindhead on a very wet evening in November. As the teams battled it out, supporters were kept busy baling out water which was cascading in through the ceiling due to faulty guttering! Haslemere was neck and neck with Grayshott for the last five rounds, with the Stagers just sneaking ahead at the last minute to win the trophy.

When the third Christmas Cracker hit the stage in December, several parts of the programme were becoming something of a tradition. The exciting version of 'We three Kings' composed by Brian Knowles, composer-in-residence at the Royal School, got its third airing and was just as popular with the audience. Comic verse this year included a mini pantomime from Roald Dahl, narrated by Fay Foster with Teresa Marsh and Mike Clarke playing all the parts, donning appropriate hats at the due time. Also included were poems by Nigel Forde (son of Chris) and Margaret Stokes whose contribution on David and Victoria Beckham had been such a hit at the Jubilee Music Hall. 'The Twelve Days of Christmas' with actions once more provided a riotous end to the sell-out concert.

THE YEAR 2003

In January the town enjoyed a traditional Burns Night dinner arranged by Players' patron and Councillor, James Mackie. He invited Carolyn Beaumont and Vicki Gavin to provide the entertainment and they sang a number of Scottish songs most delightfully, helping the evening to go with a swing.

'Kismet', first presented by the Players in 1985, had its second showing in March, with Doreen Wylde directing once again. Milva Sandison was the musical director, and choreography was by Laura Musco. With the Iraqi war threatening, thought was given as to whether it was a suitable show in the circumstances. However the decision was made to go ahead but all references to Baghdad in the show were changed to the fictional Akbar.

Sadly audiences were down but the Herald review was enthusiastic. The critic wrote: "For sheer visual ingenuity, 'Kismet' has to be in the top league. The Eastern scenery with its arches, minarets and columns was superb and was a perfect backdrop to the exotic costumes in jewel colours".

As the Poet who narrates the tale throughout, Tony Ostime was excellent, and his fine voice and acting ability could not be faulted. For the love interest, Christine Gudger, as the Poet's daughter Marsinah, was once again teamed with her favourite leading man, her husband Jonathan Foster, who played the Caliph. Both gave their usual polished performances. Hamish Donaldson reprised his earlier role as the wicked Wazir, the Herald critic commenting on his "wonderfully expressive eyebrows and body language" which enhanced his performance as the archetypal 'baddie'. Carolyn Beaumont made the most of her part as the seductive temptress, Lalume, and, in smaller roles, Richard Tytler, Tony Krauze, Thelma Robertson and Mike Clarke all gave strong backing. Mention must be made of the five princesses who coped brilliantly with the difficult drum rhythms which accompanied their sinuous dancing.

Sadly there was yet another funeral where a group of Players sang, this time for Stan Hoskin A great character, Stan had joined the company in 1957 and appeared in almost every show until his death.

In May the company put on a music hall with a European theme, which played to large and enthusiastic audiences. Joint directors were Hamish Donaldson and Don Stacey, and well-known local Councillor and businessman, Brian Howard, was welcomed as a warm and friendly Master of Ceremonies.

The show was split into four parts, with sections equally extolling and poking gentle fun at the French, British, Germans and Latins (Spanish and Italians). There was also a large cast with, what the chairman described as "a judicious blend of youth and experience".

Audiences had caught the spirit of the evening as they entered the flag-bedecked Haslemere Hall. The waitresses too sported aprons in the colours of European flags and the foyer was full of floral displays, kindly provided by the Flower Club. The ingenious set involved landmarks from each nation including the Brandenburg Gate, the Leaning Tower of Pisa (which mysteriously leant on command!) and Nelson's Column.

One of the high spots was the topical Eurovision Song Contest featuring such luminaries as Marlene Dietrich, Edith Piaf and Cliff Richard. To avoid the indignity of the British getting "nul points" (as had happened in reality a few weeks earlier) the result was a four-way tie for first place! Other popular sketches included a version of 'It's a Knockout' (complete with Eddie Waring), 'Have I Got News For You' and an 'Allo, 'Allo sketch.

In June came the death of Dorothy Lockie who had been with the Players since 1949, a recent recipient of the 50-year NODA medal. In view of the importance of the company in his wife's life, George asked the Players to sing numbers from some of her favourite musicals at her funeral in Fernhurst. A large group duly obliged with excerpts from 'Fiddler on the Roof', 'Merry Widow' and 'Show Boat'.

The annual NODA Southern Area Day was held in Petersfield in June. The company had the honour of being invited to produce an entertainment, which came at the end of the day's programme of workshops on dance, drama, lighting, sound and make-up. After the formal dinner, the Players produced twenty minutes from their recent Music Hall, which played to rapturous applause. Quite a feat when the audience is wholly composed of normally-critical fellow actors and singers!

Shortly afterwards came the exciting news that Doreen Wylde had been awarded the MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List. No one was more surprised than Doreen when she received notification that her services to operatics in Surrey had been recognised in this way. Her career had spanned fifty years in various parts of the country (thirty-five of them in our part of the world) as performer, director of over 100 shows, and musical director for many others. Farnham OS had actually instigated the award and, although she has been involved with many other companies in the south-east, the society were very proud that Doreen had chosen the Haslemere Players as her 'home' company and was still serving it loyally as committee member, secretary, chairman, wardrobe supremo and loyal member.

At the summer barbecue members gathered in great number to celebrate with Doreen, and performed a take-off of the 'HMS Pinafore' song with the words 'For she's director of the Haslemere Players – and a right good director too!' It was a great evening in the lovely setting of the Donaldson's garden, with perfect weather.

Long associated with the Players, current Mayor and Mayoress of Haslemere, Michael and Fay Foster arranged a gala concert to raise much-needed funds for updating and improvements at the Haslemere Hall. The Mayor had chosen the Hall as his special mayoral charity since he felt it plays such a vital part in the cultural life of the town. With only a minimal grant from Waverley Borough Council, it relies entirely on income received from lettings and consequently its financial position is always very finely balanced.

All main users of the Hall were invited to produce up to half-an-hour of entertainment, with contributions from the Players, the Thespians, Grayshott Stagers, the Town Band, Haslemere Performing Arts and Wispers School. Local celebrity and TV journalist Michael Nicholson acted as compère, regaling the audience between the various acts with tales of his exploits as a foreign correspondent.

Teresa Marsh put together a sparkling programme and the Players did themselves proud. They performed a chorus from 'Sweet Charity', and Music Hall-type sketches, including a hilarious take-off in the traditional 'If I Were Not Upon the Stage' format. This featured several national politicians and their PA's, culminating in the appearance of Peter and Teresa Marsh in the guise of the Mayor and Mayoress themselves. This brought the house down and, for many, was the highlight of a brilliant evening, showcasing the talent in Haslemere. The whole event raised £3,500 for Hall funds.

In mid-October Rotary organised a Meet Haslemere morning at the Haslemere Hall. The Society took its place alongside other local organisations to display and demonstrate to visitors what each provides for the town. It was a useful exercise in PR with handbills handed out to all interested parties.

The end of October saw the company's production of 'Sweet Charity'. Peter Budd, who had produced 'The Wizard of Oz' some years earlier, was welcomed back as director, Edwards Roberts was musical director and Robyn Davies, a dancer in several shows, made her Players' debut as choreographer.

This American show stands or falls by its leading lady who is hardly ever off stage. Luckily the Players had Carolyn Beaumont as the hapless Charity, the incurable romantic who sees the best in everybody and everything, but is one of life's losers. Carolyn never put a foot wrong – she sang and danced well and injected humour and enthusiasm into the part throughout the show. Her sidekicks, played by Alisa Creaser and Sally Rowlandson, also gave sparkling performances, ably

assisted by the six Fandango hostesses. Their showstopping number 'Big Spender' was a particular triumph. While the ladies have the lion's share, there were one or two excellent performances from the men. The girls' minder Herman, played by Bob Fells, and Richard Milla as Charity's effusive and jittery boyfriend, Oscar, were both superb. The musical highlight was undoubtedly 'The Rhythm of Life' sung by a chorus of hippies complete with shades and flowing locks, led by the charismatic Daddy Brubeck (Nick Creaser). Costumes and inventive props added to the enjoyment of a very different sort of show.

In December a team from the Players redeemed themselves by winning back the Weald Cup for the inter-society quiz. Having lost by just one point on two recent occasions, their honour was regained.

Two weeks later it was time for another Christmas Cracker which this year featured the Town Band. This was a welcome addition, and enhanced the singing of the traditional carols. Once more comic poems and readings by Players' members made a welcome contrast between musical items.

THE YEAR 2004

Early in 2004 came two more deaths of long-established Players, and Players celebrated their lives by providing singers for the funeral services. Sylvia Easton, together with daughters Judith (Reading) and Carolyn joined the society in 1967 and she had appeared in most shows since. Her son-in-law, David Reading, composed some beautiful music for the occasion, the Players' choir accompanying a professional singer and instrumentalist during the service in Godalming. Cledwyn's death marked the end of a remarkable couple, who had devoted their lives to the Players for over fifty years. Since Geraldine's death two years earlier, Cledwyn had been in a nursing home, visited and cared for by several members. At the church at Headley a very large choir, consisting of Players, Farnham OS, St Bartholomew's Church Choir and Haslemere Musical Society gave him a wonderful send-off. The combined voices made a fantastic sound, particularly for 'Brother Mine' from 'Die Fledermaus' (solo by Edward Roberts) also sung at Geraldine's funeral. The rafters rang too during the powerful last hymn, 'Cwm Rhonnda', a tribute to a much-loved Welshman.

Among generous bequests to several local societies, the company learned later that Cledwyn had bequeathed £10,000 to the Players.

Burns night at Grayswood Village Hall in January, in aid of Haslemere Museum, again featured a cabaret by the Players. Vicki Gavin, Carolyn Beaumont and Edward Roberts provided a first-class entertainment and did the society proud.

The company was delighted to hear in February that Hamish Donaldson, the Players' president, had been made Deputy Lieutenant of Surrey.

In March the Mayor and Mayoress, Michael and Fay Foster, organised a fund-raising quiz in aid of the Haslemere Hall. The Players entered two teams, with their 'B' team finishing joint second to the winners, U3A. The whole evening raised £1,600 for the Hall which, at the time, was reeling with the news that the district council had cut their usual grant, while at the same time offering enormous sums to similar halls in Farnham, Godalming and Cranleigh.

In March came a reprise of a show that had been such a hit in 1986. 'Half a Sixpence' was just as popular second-time round, thanks to new-to-the-Players director Andy Boughton (more usually

seen on stage) and new choreographer, Mandy Sutcliffe. Robert Cantan was back with the baton, directing chorus and orchestra.

Jonathan Foster was a real tour-de-force in the Tommy Steele role of Kipps and, according to the review "carried it off with confidence and dexterity, both dramatically and musically". As his childhood sweetheart, Ann Pornick, the company welcomed talented newcomer Helen Hamilton, and Stephanie Goodfellow, playing Helen Walsingham, was back after a fifteen-year gap. With a dearth of young men to play the apprentices, it was decided to call them 'assistants' so that ages wouldn't matter. Thus Tony Krauze, appearing to shed at least fifteen years after liberally spraying his grey hair brown, was joined by Jamie Atkin and Paul Tapley as fellow assistants. It was also decided to cast Michael Clarke as Helen's Uncle, rather than her brother, when a younger man proved difficult to cast. Only purists of the original show would have noticed the difference. Angela Cantan and Mary Coyte both made the most of their cameo roles as Mrs Walsingham and Mrs Botting respectively.

The May Bank Holiday of the Charter Fair, where the Players were taking a stall, dawned grey and overcast. As a precaution, they had borrowed Hamish Donaldson's gazebo and fortunately had just erected it over their pitch when the heavens opened. Having decided on a tombola rather than a stall, they were disappointed to find there were several other similar sideshows on offer. Coupled with the dreadful weather, which kept the normal vast crowds away, profits were down on previous years. However the children's tombola did prove popular.

A big innovation this year was the launch of a Haslemere Festival, the brainchild of two leading members of the Players. Hamish Donaldson and Don Stacey undertook the entire organisation, with Mike Clarke doing publicity. The grand opening was attended by the Lord Lieutenant of Surrey, Sarah Goad, and local MP, Virginia Bottomley, both of whom praised Hamish and Don for their hard work and inspiration. The sixteen-day event had something for everyone, with talks, demonstrations and exhibitions during the day and performances in the evenings. Among the treats on offer were a sell-out inaugural concert given by Johnny Dankworth and Cleo Laine, and further concerts by the Temperance Seven, an Abba tribute band, Kenny Ball and his Jazzmen, a Flanders and Swann evening with Michael Mates and the Players' William Godfree, Surrey Opera's production of *The Magic Flute*, and an evening of French opera. Local groups played their part too with a classic comedy play 'The Constant Wife' from the Thespians, a Festival of Dance by Haslemere Performing Arts under the leadership of Angela Cantan, a Last Night at the Proms from the Musical Society and, bringing up the rear, the Players' old time Music Hall.

The Ports of Call theme for this year's Music Hall established a holiday atmosphere with individual songs, medleys, sketches and dance routines evoking memories of summer days in the sun. Starting from London, with an English flag, and a cut-out of St Paul's and Nelson's Column to set the scene, the backdrops changed as various Mediterranean ports were visited, each featuring their own flags and distinctive landmarks. Between the different sections an amusing running gag involved a sailor with a girl in every port, while his shipmate never struck it lucky.

As the master of ceremonies, Hamish Donaldson controlled the proceedings with traditional good humour. While the whole programme was most enjoyable, the comic highlights included a hilarious sand dance in the style of Wilson, Keppel and Betty; the very funny Peter Cook sketch entitled 'Casting Couch', an amusing melodrama 'The Lighthousekeeper's Daughter' and the now well-established Players' song, adapted for the occasion – 'If I were not upon this Ship, somewhere else I'd like to be.....'

As usual, the male barber's shop quartet was well received, but a welcome addition this year was a female close-harmony quintet whose two contributions were superbly sung. Tumultuous applause also greeted the appearance of the pop group S Club 7, an exciting and energetic routine from younger members of the Players.

All four performances of the show played to enthusiastic audiences, with many of the patrons wearing nautical attire. The programme was compiled and directed by Don Stacey, with choreography by Laura Musco and Teresa Marsh. The 'seven piece orchestra' (with six absentees!) was led by Tony McIntee at the piano, and Jennie Budden was responsible for the numerous colourful costumes which so enhanced the action.

Following closely on the heels of professionals who had wowed audiences during the first two weeks of the Festival, the Players proved that local amateurs have plenty to offer too.

At the AGM in June the society acknowledged the great service given by Jennie Budden. It was acknowledged that without Jennie's talent, imagination and willingness to provide costumes for shows, the cost to the Players would have been enormous. She had been in charge of the wardrobe for twenty-seven consecutive full-length productions, plus most of the music halls. She herself mentioned how, when she first started, there was no Studio and she recalled having "to scabble around in mouse-ridden suitcases" as she attempted to sort out costumes in the old wardrobe store in the Weaving House. She graciously accepted Life Membership of the company.

In preparation for 'Barnum', the choice for March 2005, Hamish Donaldson, the director, had acquired equipment to help develop circus skills and close-up magic training. This was on display at the barbecue at his home in August where participants were able to try trapeze, swings, rope ladder and a high walk. In addition those interested spent half-an-hour before each rehearsal from September onwards, honing their skills. The barbecue itself was extremely successful, particularly as it was held on a perfect summer evening, and the age range of those attending was wider than ever. This meant of course that the pool was in full use, and the many children present spent almost the entire evening in the water.

But, with the start of 'Barnum' still six months away, rehearsals began in June for the newly-released show, 'Meet Me in St Louis'. Many remembered the charming 1940's film starring Judy Garland and were looking forward to being part of the cast of a show which had never been done anywhere in the area. Heather Legat, a principal in several Haslemere productions, was invited to direct the company for the first time, with Frances Tull, normally seen in the orchestra pit, making her Players' debut as Musical Director. Laura Musco was in charge of choreographing the big chorus numbers, and Jennie Budden was again responsible for finding costumes appropriate to 1904, the period in which the play is set.

The Smith family of the play – parents, grandfather, four daughters and a son – required two young girls, supposedly aged eleven and six years. With strict rules over children appearing (subsequently changed just after the show was completed), it was decided to double cast the two youngest roles and four delightful youngsters were recruited. The youngest child, Tootie, was played on alternate nights by six-year-old Verity Foster and Alice Manville (10), while Lavinia Fitzpatrick and Rebecca Lelew took on the part of the next daughter, Agnes.

Both little girls playing Tootie had family connections with the Players. The appearance of Verity's father, Jonathan, in a cameo role in the opening scene, and grandmother Fay in the chorus, meant there were three generations of Fosters in the same cast. Christine, Verity's mother, was also

acting as dresser and helping backstage. Alice's mother Jenny and father Simon have both appeared in a couple of musicals in the past.

Impressed by all the youngsters in the show, the Herald critic commented: "Their contribution to its success cannot be overstated". He also singled out Will Keith, playing brother Lon, Laurence Fry as suitor to the eldest daughter, and Rebekah Lawes in a smaller role, mentioning their "freshness and raw enthusiasm which lifted the production".

The elder members of the family – Father (Tony Harris), Mother (Angela Cantan), Grandpa (Richard Tytler) and the Irish housemaid (Laura Musco) - all drew on their considerable experience and thespian skills to make real characters of their roles. Esther and Rose, the two eldest daughters, had most of the action, and were played superbly by Alexandra Legat and Helen Hamilton, and Paul Tapley as Esther's beau, John Truitt, added a touch of wit and provided quality singing.

Cast and audience clearly enjoyed the toe-tapping musical numbers particularly 'The Trolley Song' ('Clang, clang, clang went the trolley'), the square dance number 'Skip to my Lou', and a very moving performance of 'Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas' sung by Esther to her smallest sister, Tootie.

As an experiment, the after-show party took place, not on the last night, but on the penultimate. Normally cast and backstage staff are expected to come in on the Sunday and do all the clearing up but, since numbers of helpers have been dwindling, it was decided that everything should be done on the Saturday evening, straight after the last performance. With such a large posse of helpers, the job was done in record time as scenery was dismantled, costumes carried up to the Studio, dressing rooms swept, basins cleaned, corridors vacuumed and everything left spick and span. It was then up to the committee to assess whether the new procedure would be repeated for future shows.

The Inter-Society quiz was held in early December and, as holders of the cup, the Players' team were keen to defend their title. An element of chance was introduced this year with teams having to declare odds on the marks they would achieve for each round. With such ambiguous round names as 'Metamorphosis' and 'Quick on the Draw' this proved very difficult to assess beforehand and in the event Haslemere came a very close second to the Grayshott Stagers. However the evening, held at the British Legion Hall in Frensham, was great fun, thanks to the excellent organisation by Farnham OS.

The fifth annual Christmas Cracker concert was another sell-out with audiences as enthusiastic as ever. The singing standard of the massed choir was as high as always and soloists Vicki Gavin and Edward Roberts were on top form. Jane Clayton joined fellow Players Fay Foster and Mike Clarke to provide comic verse, with several of the local clergy adding humorous interludes.

THE YEAR 2005

In January the Hall was fitted out with new raised seating – a costly exercise, but one which proved very popular with audiences. The back rows downstairs had long been the last seats to sell and prices had to be kept relatively low. The new seats give an excellent view of the stage and there is far more space, both on the seat and in leg room. Since higher prices could be charged for the new seating, the Hall trustees were confident that the costs could be recovered within a fairly short time.

Early in the month came news that former chairman, George Lockie, had died, just eighteen months after the death of his wife, Dorothy. The pair had been connected with the Players since 1949 and once again a group sang at the funeral service. The family had requested 'The Flower of Scotland', apparently sung at all Scottish rugby games. Although none of the company knew the song, it was quickly learnt and was much appreciated by the family.

That same month three members of the Players again provided the entertainment at the town's Burns Night celebrations. Vicki Gavin, Carolyn Beaumont and Edward Roberts did the society proud with their melodic singing of a number of Scottish ballads, and, in delivering the Ode to the Haggis, Hamish Donaldson was in good form, especially when, in ceremonial fashion, he used a sword to slice off the hat of the chef who held the steaming haggis on a silver platter. It was an excellent evening and raised much-needed funds for the Haslemere Hall.

As rehearsals carried on apace for 'Barnum' and the large cast of adults and children honed up on their circus tricks, new legislation added to the problems for the administrative team. The regulations now insisted that all children in the cast should be accompanied by 'matrons' who would look after them in the dressing rooms and lead them into the wings for their entrances. Recruiting adults for these duties was far more onerous than first appeared, since all such persons had to attend two lectures run by the County Council and have police checks on their suitability to undertake the roles. The fact that the matrons were mostly parents of the children concerned made no difference. In addition birth certificates had to be produced and four-page questionnaires completed for all children in the cast. Since there was every possibility that an inspector would visit the Hall and check that the law was fully complied with, the Players had no option but to conform.

In the event, the company was indebted to members of Farnham OS who, having been duly certified as 'matrons' for their earlier production, kindly undertook the task at Haslemere. It was just as well since there was a visit mid-week from council inspectors and, had the rules not been followed to the letter, they would have been empowered to close down the whole show.

Since further regulations relating to the appearance of children had also been altered, at least every child in 'Barnum' was able to play in all the performances. The new rules allowed that under-age youngsters could be on stage for six performances in two weeks, rather than three in one week.

As it was exactly one hundred years since the company had first presented a musical - in the six years from 1899 when the Haslemere Players name was first used there had been plays and pantomimes only - the committee decided to put on spectacular shows to mark the anniversary. 'Barnum' was certainly that and, after the initial scepticism over how it could possibly be staged, the doubters had to eat their words and admit that, under Hamish Donaldson's skilled direction, the show was a real triumph.

'Barnum' traces the real-life fortunes and misfortunes of Phineas T Barnum, a consummate showman and entrepreneur who eventually teamed up with James A Bailey to promote Barnum and Bailey's 'Greatest Show on Earth'. By its very nature, the show has few secondary parts but many minor, specialised cameos to illustrate Barnum's amazing collection of oddities and spectacles. Among these were attractions like Joyce Heth, 'The Oldest Woman Alive', played with relish by Victoria Gavin.

In the lead role of Barnum, David McClelland (who had appeared several times as a professional actor) was seldom off stage. Following the footsteps of Michael Crawford who undertook the part in the West End production, David faced a huge challenge, but he maintained outstanding energy

and dynamism throughout, even when executing a tightrope walk. As Charity, Barnum's wife, Stephanie Goodfellow provided an excellent foil to her exuberant husband, playing the part with sensitivity and charm.

Hamish added some novel touches such as the White-Faced Clown (Sally Barr) who shadowed Charity at times of crisis, and was particularly effective when Charity died in the second act. The linking of the many episodes was achieved by Len Pannett who, as the Ringmaster, deftly directed the soloists and the huge cast.

At times, there were no less than fifteen juvenile clowns, jugglers, diabolo artists, unicyclists, plate spinners, a tumbler and two very tall stilt-walkers to co-ordinate into the action. Some of the latter had been recruited from Bohunt School where circus tricks had been offered as an extra activity. All the youngsters rose to the occasion magnificently, were well-disciplined throughout and ably coped with the dance routines set by choreographer, Teresa Marsh. In the absence of a dwarf to play the 25-inch tall General Tom Thumb, Hamish decided to cast 10-year-old Eric Foster, who gave a memorable performance which included playing the trombone.

Playing Tom's father, Sherwood Stratton, was Eric's real-life father, Jonathan, and all five of the Foster family were in the show, his two siblings appearing as clowns. Mother Christine appeared as the "Swedish Nightingale", Jenny Lind, whom Barnum was able to promote as a high class European Star. Christine took Swedish lessons to perfect the role and her coloratura soprano voice was a real treat. There was also a delightful vignette from Carolyn Beaumont as a most accomplished blues singer.

Typical of the era, the score contained a lot of brass and oompah which musical director Grant Hossack and the small orchestra produced with consummate ease. Although the music is not all that well-known, audiences soon sat up when they recognised the familiar tune used by ice dancers Jane Torvill and Christopher Dean for their gold medal-winning Olympic performance.

'Barnum' was a massive undertaking but the general consensus was that it had been an outstanding success. This was further recognised when NODA awarded the Southern Area Accolade of Excellence to the production. There was the added pleasure of hearing that Eric Foster had been named as the Most Promising Male in Southern Youth Theatre for his role as Tom Thumb.

As mentioned earlier, following the death of Cledwyn Evans in 2004, the company learned that he had left a legacy of £10,000 to the company. Part of this went on a Yamaha keyboard, a portable instrument which would be invaluable when rehearsals cannot be held in the Haslemere Hall. It was also decided to use further sums to update the Studio and plans were made for new units and worktops in the kitchen. Before there had been just one sink both for preparing coffee and cleaning out paint tins, which was obviously unhygienic. With Laura Musco masterminding the project, Alan Clarke kindly installed the units. Future ideas include the external painting of the building and the purchase of a shed to provide extra capacity for props.

The second production in Centenary Year was the Music Hall in May, directed by Don Stacey, with choreography by Laura Musco and Angela Cantan. This was another humdinger of a show, with many of the most popular acts of the last fifteen years reprised for the audience's 'delectation and delight'. Phillip Jay was back as Chairman and at times he could scarcely make himself heard through the deafening boos, hisses and rousing cheers which greeted every act. With such favourites as the 'The Chastity Belt', 'The Pantomime Principal Boys', the Doctors' Barbershop and Barbara Thomas's rendition of 'Nobody Loves a Fairy When She's Forty' on offer again, the show just couldn't fail. There were also some singalong scenas including songs from the shows and a

Gilbert and Sullivan medley in which the audience joined in with gusto. They loved every minute and would quite happily have stayed on and on and on.... It was also good to report that, with audience numbers slipping slightly over the past few years, the trend was halted and over 600 attended the Music Hall.

June 25th was a night to remember as, on a balmy summer evening, Players of all ages gathered for a dazzling Centenary Ball at Cowdray Golf Club. It was a black tie affair, starting with a champagne reception, and followed by a dinner with tables decorated with individual themes of the many musicals produced by the company. A commemoration mug marked the place setting for each guest. The social committee, led by Laura Musco, had spent many months planning the event and the result was a glittering evening enjoyed by everyone. President Hamish Donaldson outlined the Players' history from its official incorporation in 1905 to the production of 'Barnum' three months earlier. The toast was then 'The Haslemere Players, the next hundred years'. During the evening members danced to a local band, Sharkfin Soup, (whose members included David Laver, a past member who had met his wife, Anne Matthiae, in the company in the sixties) in a ballroom decorated with blue and yellow balloons.

A month later the company were hosts for the annual NODA day, held at the Haslemere Hall. During the morning there were workshops on drama, stage fighting, costumes and sets, before the annual meeting in the annexe in the early afternoon. A buffet dinner was held at 6 pm, followed by the awards of the Accolades of Excellence. As stated earlier, the Players were proud to see Hamish Donaldson honoured with an award for 'Barnum' and the outstanding youth award go to Eric Foster for his role in the same show. The entertainment which followed started with demonstrations from those who had taken part in the workshops, with young Peter Foster showing off his new found stage fight skills and 'knocking out' an older assailant. The society featured strongly in the ensuing acts, with selected extracts from the latest music hall and from 'Barnum', including two scenes re-enacted with the characters Barnum, Charity and General Tom Thumb.

July saw a centenary barbecue held at the home of Hamish and Linda Donaldson. Although the evening was damp there was an enormous turnout, some former members travelling long distances to be present. Despite the rain, the pool was in constant use, especially by the many children present, and everyone enjoyed the magnificent hog roast and a mind-tickling quiz.

As the last musical offering for Centenary year, the Players presented the difficult musical, '42nd Street', another local première for Haslemere. When the mainly dancing show was chosen some two years earlier, the company was certain it could cast the dancers from among its own talented members. No-one could have guessed that, by the time the auditions came, no fewer than five of these would be pregnant! Without dancers the show would have had to be cancelled. Luckily word got around and, keen to be involved with such an ambitious show, people came from far and near. The influx included some very talented young dancers and two young male hoofers who had honed their skills in the States and South Africa. '42nd Street' was easily cast, and principals and chorus were set to work under the talented team of director Doreen Wylde, choreographer Megan Farrington, assistant choreographer Kevin Bourne, chorus mistress Angela Jones and musical director Graham Cross. In addition Alan English put his artistic talents to work designing the art deco set, and Jennie Budden pulled out all the stops to get some stunning showgirl costumes in glittering colours.

The stage musical, based on the 1933 film of the same name had featured Ginger Rogers and Dick Powell, with the legendary Busby Berkeley responsible for the choreography. The Players therefore had a lot to live up to. However, the audience reaction was incredible, with everyone

admitting that the dancing had never been bettered and well-known numbers such as 'We're in the Money', 'Shuffle off to Buffalo' and 'Lullaby of Broadway' were cheered long and heartily. The story revolves around a talented hopeful, Peggy Sawyer, who arrives at the 42nd Street Theatre in New York to audition for the chorus of a new show 'Pretty Lady'. In her first leading role for the Players (although her parents Andrew and Joanna have regularly graced the Haslemere stage) Alexandra Boughton made a charming debut opposite newcomer Ben George, outstanding as Billy Lawlor. Andy Boughton was cast as Bert Barry alongside Elizabeth Chester (as Maggie Jones), and together they made a great contribution to the strong cast. Two further stars were Paul Tapley and Susie Inskip playing the Broadway show director and his temperamental leading lady. Another real find was Twain Brighton whose skills as the Dance Director were much in evidence. There was great strength too in the smaller roles with Susie Dean, Peter Gardner, Jane Whalley, Sally Towle, Richard Tytler and Tony Creasey all adding their personal talents.

Sadly there was a considerable financial deficit on '42nd Street' but, having made a whacking surplus of £1,700 on the Music Hall five months earlier, the treasurer was not too worried. The shows for the Centenary year had all been artistic triumphs and had taken the company's reputation to an even higher plane.

The Haslemere Hall Trustees had laid a new floor on the stage just in time for the show. However there were a few problems as the stage extension was then half an inch lower than the new floor. Although the two components were clamped together, they were not all that secure and it was very difficult getting the pit back to its usual level after the show. Luckily former member, Rick Clement, (of Clement Window Group) came to the rescue and re-drilled the metal frame in time for the Stagers show in the Hall four weeks later.

November saw the Inter-Society quiz organised by the Thespians at the Marjorie Gray Hall, Haslemere. Competition was as fierce as ever and at the end Players and Stagers were exactly level on points, with Thespians and Farnham OS close behind. A tie break question broke the deadlock and the Players inched ahead by two points to win the Weald Cup.

Hamish Donaldson was again in charge of the Christmas cracker with tickets sold out well in advance of the concert. As usual local choirs joined the Haslemere Players to sing familiar and new carols with lots of audience participation. As well as comic verse, including the Roald Dahl version of 'Jack and the Beanstalk' from Teresa Marsh, Fay Foster, Jane Clayton and Mike Clarke, there were contributions from the local clergy with the new Methodist minister, Marie Attwood, amply displaying her comic talents.

THE YEAR 2006

By the new year 2006, Andrew Boughton was well into rehearsal with 'Oklahoma!', the third time that the Players have performed this gem from Rodgers and Hammerstein. Mandy Sutcliffe joined him as choreographer, and Alan Drake, in charge of music for every Christmas Cracker concert to date, was welcomed as musical director, with Angela Jones as chorus mistress.

It is difficult to fail with such a well-crafted popular show but the Players showed that their recent successes have inspired them to reach ever greater heights. It was a delight from start to finish with a first-rate cast and some excellent dancing, particularly in the long ballet sequence.

In his first lead in a musical, Alan Thornhill made an outstanding debut as the handsome hero who successfully wooed his Laurey. Alan's pairing with Racheal Roberts, a firm favourite with

Haslemere audiences, produced two notable performances, with their singing of 'People Will Say We're in Love', a highlight. As Curly's deadly rival, Jud Fry, Jonathan Crompton gave an intelligent interpretation of real menace, a good contrast to the general jollity of the story.

The secondary plot, involving Ado Annie (who 'Cain't Say No') and her two beaux, created the biggest laughs of the evening. Susie Dean was quite delightful as she flirted outrageously with both men, Will Parker (Twain Brighton) and peddler Ali Hakim (Jonathan Foster). Twain again demonstrated his considerable dancing skills and Jonathan, who also took the role in the 1990 Players' production, showed that his comic timing was as good as ever. As Gertie, the girl with a ghastly laugh, Rachel Perkins also produced a fine little cameo.

The linchpin role of Aunt Eller was superbly handled by Judy Fowler who fussed over the main characters and kept the warring factions apart. Among the protagonists, there were competent performances from Peter Gardner, Hamish Donaldson, Don Stacey, Tony Krauze and Richard Tytler.

The minimalist sets were designed by Hamish Donaldson, and Jennie Budden was yet again responsible for the colourful costumes.

Following the Haslemere Festival in 2004, Hamish and Don Stacey decided to build on the success and organise an even better festival for 2006. As before they booked several prestigious acts (notably Chris Barber and his band, The Kings' Singers and The Temperance Seven) to head the exciting programme and filled seventeen days with activities, talks, concerts and other events. The Festival was launched in March by Surrey's Lord Lieutenant, Sarah Goad, and South West Surrey's new MP, Jeremy Hunt. Both praised Hamish and Don for their vision and hard work and gave their best wishes for its success.

The four performances of the Music Hall brought the theatrical part of the Festival to a close and, despite his onerous commitments as co-organiser of all the events, Don Stacey had also found time to create and direct the Players' show. The production was lively and energetic, and the amusing programme of songs and sketches had the large audiences roaring with laughter and tittering at the many groan-inducing jokes. A newcomer, Horace Mitchell, chaired the proceedings with good-natured banter and coped well with the noisy hecklers.

Among the musical highlights were an excellent barber's shop quartet, and a group of younger ladies who sang in superb close harmony. Poems from Barbara Thomas raised some of the biggest laughs of the evening and, among the regulars, Tony Krauze and Bob Fells milked every scene to maximum comic effect. The Terrible Tale of Fanny Adams, a monologue directed by Teresa Marsh, was great fun, the audience joining in the hilarity when the heroine, Jane Clayton, kept asking them to decide whether she should submit to the amorous attentions of several unlikely suitors.

At the annual general meeting in June, Andy Boughton took over the chair from Richard Tytler, the latter, together with Teresa Marsh and Pamela Depledge, being honoured with life membership for outstanding service to the society. It was also learnt that South West Surrey's new Member of Parliament, Jeremy Hunt, had agreed to be an honorary Patron of the Players.

After weeks of sunshine the July day of the annual barbecue dawned cloudy and drizzly. But undaunted, the event went ahead in the Alan and Jennie English's garden as arranged. As usual the food was excellent, as was the quiz organised by Elizabeth Chester with a limerick competition as

a finale. The best of these arrived the next morning (the overnight thinking time reflected in the quality) went as follows:

There once was a Haslemere Player
Whose stagefright was apt to betray her.
There was no need to panic
Her part in 'Titanic'
Made her green hue seem mere *mal de mer*

Under Teresa Marsh's skilful direction, 'The King and I' in October was a delightful show from start to finish. An army of children had auditioned for the chance to be one of the twenty-four Siamese princes and princesses (a separate twelve playing on alternate nights) and they did everyone proud. Both Teresa and Angela Cantan (who choreographed the superb children's ballet) kept firm control over their youthful exuberance and the matrons who looked after them in the dressing rooms did a brilliant job. As musical director, Angela Jones also did wonders with the children and the singing from the whole cast was of a very high standard.

In fact the cast proved one of the best ever seen on the stage with not a weak link among them. In the leading role, Paul Tapley, with his manly physique and shaven head, was every inch a King and gave an outstanding performance. The most repeated audience comment heard during the week, that he was easily as good as Yul Brynner, was praise richly merited. Playing opposite him was his fiancée, Suzie Inskip, quite delightful as Anna, the English governess. The secondary characters, the doomed lovers, Lun Tha and Tuptim, played by Jonathan Foster and newcomer, Vikki Thornhill, had the best duets to sing and performed them quite beautifully. Jonathan's real-life wife, Christine Gudger, took on the role of Lady Thiang, the head wife, and her poignant rendition of 'Something Wonderful' was a particular treat.

The Foster family were well represented among the younger members of the cast with twelve-year-old Peter playing Prince Chululongkorn, the heir apparent, with confidence, and his younger brother Eric, 10, sharing the role of Louis, Anna's son, with Michael Turner. Eric was delighted to be playing the part that his father had himself played in the Players' 1976 version of the show.

Making it a first, with seven members of one family in a show, sister Verity, eight, was one of the tiniest princesses and grandparents Fay and Michael Foster appeared in the roles of Amazon guard and Buddhist priest respectively.

Smaller named roles went to Richard Tytler (the Kralahome), Bob Fells (Sir Edward), Peter Gardner (The Interpreter) and Graeme Somerville (Captain Orton).

It was the company's turn to host the inter-society theatrical quiz which Don Stacey organised in the Hall Annexe in November. Led by captain Edward Roberts, the Players' team romped home to victory, beating the Grayshott Stagers by a tiny margin for the second year running. The Haslemere Thespians and Farnham AOS were a little further behind. The refreshments provided by Vicki Gavin and Rachel Perkins were much enjoyed, and the Hall staff kindly kept the bar open all evening, greatly assisting the little grey cells of all the participants.

Two days after the triumph of 'The King and I' and brimful of ideas and enthusiasm, Hamish Donaldson outlined his ideas for 'Titanic, the Musical', one of the most exciting and difficult shows ever embarked upon by the company.

Completely different from the film, the show was first performed on Broadway in 1997, winning five Tony awards. More operatic than the usual Players' production, it requires an enormous and exceptional cast, with a vast number of men who can sing. Although sceptics felt Hamish would never find the right people, he performed the impossible and, within a month, had a superb cast, several of the principals returning to the company after a long break.

Christmas duly intervened and the traditional sell-out Christmas Cracker concert was again presented, with united choirs from local churches and music societies singing some beautiful carols in four-part harmony. Once more Edward Roberts and Vicki Gavin were soloists and the quartet of Players – Teresa and Peter Marsh, Fay Foster and Mike Clarke - provided the usual comic verse and potted pantomime.

THE YEAR 2007

In the new year, 2007, rehearsals for 'Titanic' gathered pace with enthusiasm running high and rumours began spreading that the forthcoming production was going to be something special. And special it was. The depth of talent amassed on stage was phenomenal with no fewer than seventeen male and twelve female soloists. In all fifty-four men, women and children were assembled and yet, thanks to the clever staging and use of different heights to depict separate parts of the ship, the stage never appeared too crowded.

During the pre-publicity for the show, local memories of the *Titanic* surfaced. A link was discovered through the Jack Phillips pub in Godalming High Street and the nearby memorial garden, both dedicated to the 25-year-old telegraphist on board the fated ship. His efforts to contact other ships in the area led to about one-third of the passengers and crew being saved by the *SS Carpathia* several hours after the sinking. Sadly Jack Phillips was not among those rescued.

A local man also came forward whose life was touched by the tragedy. Sidney Daniels from Chiddingfold, was the son of a steward aboard the *Titanic* who survived the disaster. Sidney and his wife Betty met the cast and told them some of the harrowing details which his own father had related to him. The couple were honoured guests at one of the performances.

Just before the show, the company learned of the death of Grant Hossack, a recent rehearsal pianist who had also composed and played for many West End musicals. As a child, growing up in Haslemere, he had taken part in many musical events at the Haslemere Hall and left the Players £1,000 to go towards the costs of the orchestra of 'Titanic', one of his favourite shows.

For the six performances three well-experienced actors and singers undertook the lion's share of the story. Welcomed back after a long break, Peter Barber and his glorious voice opened the show, when he appeared as Thomas Andrews, the ship's designer, accompanying archive film illustrating the construction of the *Titanic*. Richard Tytler was ideally cast as the Captain, E J Smith, who, weary over rapidly-changing technology and the demands of the owner, J Bruce Ismay, to go faster, was ultimately forced to accept responsibility for the disaster which ensued. More used to being seen in comedy roles, Tony Creasey was forceful and haughty as Ismay. The interplay between the three very different characters was excellent.

All the other people on stage were the ship's crew or passengers, the latter ranging from millionaires in First Class to the Irish immigrants in Third Class. This made for a fascinating commentary on the three social classes and allowed for many cameo roles reflecting how different life was in the various echelons of society in 1912. Among the best were Bob Fells and Anne

Manning as a wealthy elderly couple who accept their ultimate fate with dignity, Vicki Gavin as the bossy, socially-aspiring wife who dominated her husband Peter Gardner, Mike Clarke as a pompous Major boring everyone at the Captain's table, and the three Irish girls, Suzie Inskip, Rachel Perkins and Louisa Feldon, all looking forward to a better life in America.

Within the crew there were sterling performances from Andrew Boughton as the chief steward Etches, Paul Tapley as the stoker Barrett, young Charlie O'Riordan as the radio operator, Alan Thornhill as the bandleader who played on, and Jonathan Foster as Fleet, the Lookout, perched in the crow's nest high above the auditorium.

The splendid cast, whose ensemble singing was probably the best ever heard on the Haslemere stage, had been taught the difficult music by chorus mistress Doreen Wylde, who then handed over the reins to Robert Douglas who conducted the superb orchestra. Robert had been the conductor for the Portsmouth Players' production of 'Titanic' and his experience and expertise were of great benefit to the Players. Mandy Sutcliffe was responsible for the imaginative choreography in some of the large chorus numbers.

Jenny Budden had again wrought her magic in the wardrobe department. She managed to costume the large cast in authentic-looking period clothes gathered from the Players' studio, and, by hiring a minimum of costumes, mainly the crew's uniforms, managed to keep costs down.

But the highest honours were reserved for Hamish Donaldson, the man who masterminded the entire show and whose vision and enthusiasm saw it through to the triumphant finish. Together with the talented scenic designer, Alan English, he created the ship on stage and, as the terrible events unfolded, the deck was seen sloping at a dangerous angle until the final scene where it split in half and sank slowly to the floor of the stage. The drama of the moment could be gauged from the audible gasp from the audience who, moments earlier, had witnessed the frantic struggle of the passengers to reach one of the inadequate supply of lifeboats and search desperately for their loved ones. It was a unique theatrical experience which cast and audience will remember for a very long time.

To no-one's surprise, two months later came the announcement that the annual NODA Award for Excellence had been awarded to the Players for 'Titanic, the Musical'. Hamish and Linda duly travelled to Tonbridge where the presentation was made among members of operatic companies from all over the South of England.

But there was no chance of resting on their laurels and the society was back into rehearsal the next week for the annual Music Hall. Once again Teresa Marsh was at the helm with Angela Cantan responsible for choreography. Chairman Andy Boughton took on the role of MC and the whole production went along at a cracking pace.

Interspersed with singalong medleys for the audience were some very amusing sketches. Among the best of these was a hilarious Pam Ayres' sketch in which a deadpan Richard Tytler, a job centre official, was seen interviewing Jane Hamlyn, an elderly would-be pole dancer with a broad Brummie accent. Jane and Bob Fells also kept up a running joke as a grumpy old couple, unhappy with the Haslemere Hall arrangements for the evening. As audiences split their sides over their antics it was sad to realise that, after fifty years with the Haslemere Players, this was Jane's swansong as she would shortly be moving to Devon. Other enjoyable moments included an excellent female ensemble of Buxom Barmaids, a comic 'Tiptoe through the Tulips', the regular barbers' shop quartet performing Beatles' numbers, and a song and tap dance from the new musical 'Wicked' by Katie-Jane Beaven.

At the annual general meeting in June, Jane's long connection with the company was recognised when she was offered life membership of the Haslemere Players.

In the summer the new Haslemere Hall management, Richard Oldham, manager, and Graham Perrett, caretaker, decided to replace all the equipment used to raise and lower the backcloths on the stage. Most of the ropes and pulleys had been put up in the twenties by local blacksmiths and carpenters, with some of the antique wooden cleats being works of art in themselves. With the present emphasis on health and safety, and to make the lowering and raising of cloths less heavy, all the mechanisms were renewed. This was an enormous task and Richard and Graham, plus Paul Bonner our sound engineer, spent all the August bank holiday weekend completing the task. Since several of the ropes were found to be almost worn through and liable to break at any moment, the refurbishment was very timely and is much appreciated by the backstage staff for all productions at the Hall.

In September a new properties store was installed on a grassy area at the back of the Studio. A small but enthusiastic 'gang' prepared a concrete base using two tonnes of aggregate which they managed to complete in one day. The store relieved the pressure from the wardrobe by releasing valuable shelf space for boxes of costumes.

Sadly the choice of show for the autumn proved most difficult to market and audiences were at an all-time low, with just 850 people attending, as opposed to the usual 1,500. This led to an unprecedented loss of over £5,000. Despite this 'My One and Only', with Gershwin's delightful music, was thoroughly enjoyed by those who did see it. Heather Legat directed the show with her usual enthusiasm and verve, and Megan Farrington's choreography was as stunning as ever. Edward Roberts and his orchestra contributed hugely to the success and handled the complex rhythms admirably.

Originally written by George and Ira Gershwin for Fred and Adele Astaire as 'Funny Face' in 1927, the show was revamped several times before it re-emerged as 'My One and Only'. With Tommy Tune in the lead it had a pre-run as Chichester Festival Theatre before its runaway success in the West End in the late 1980s.

The Players' strong cast more than made up for what was a rather vapid and lightweight plot. Peter Coxon as Captain Billy Buck, an aviator determined to be first to fly a plane non-stop from New York to Paris, and Carolyn Beaumont as Edythe Herbert, a channel swimmer-turned-showgirl, were outstanding in their roles. Other highlights were the courtship of Mickey (Vicki Gavin) and Prince Nikki (Tony Krauze), and Tony Creasey as Mr Magix, who endeavoured to give Billy a crash course in sophistication. Peter Gardner, Elizabeth Chester and Val Bishop all impressed in smaller parts. Particularly talented too were the seven 'Fish' dancers, and the Ritz male quartet.

The scenic designers, Alan English and Hamish Donaldson, had their work cut out to produce some stunning effects including a specially-built, car and even a swimming pool. And Jennie Budden, again in charge of costumes, produced some stunning creations befitting the glamorous era of the twenties.

As usual Players took major roles in the Christmas Cracker production on the Saturday before Christmas, providing four voices to perform the traditional psalm outlining events in Haslemere during the year. They also supplied soloists for some of the carols, and the five regulars – Peter and Teresa Marsh, Fay Foster, Jane Clayton and Mike Clarke had the audience in stitches with

their Christmas poems and readings. Most popular was the sight of Peter, as a snowman, dressed in a fluffy white babygro!

THE YEAR 2008

Rehearsals started immediately afterwards for the spring 2008 production of 'Summer Holiday' and, in view of the poor ticket sales, a special committee was formed to try to turn around the society's fortunes. Three members, all with experience in marketing, were recruited, and it was decided to try to get sponsorship from local companies and to enlist the help of individual members as Territory Managers, each charged with ensuring that posters and leaflets would reach towns and villages within a radius of about ten miles.

The marketing committee liaised with Treloar's College in Alton offering the Trust 50p per ticket sold in recognition of the publicity which should be gained from supporting such a high profile charity. Haslemere Travel generously provided sponsorship of £500 and the two leads, Racheal Roberts and Kevin Bourne were interviewed on local radio. The committee also tracked down the red double-decker bus which, following in the wake of Cliff Richards and his friends in the film version of 'Summer Holiday' had toured the world in 1969. The bus and its passengers, including Players' member, Richard Hayes, has been stored in Liphook ever since, and still makes trips around Europe. Although too young to be on the original tour, nowadays Simon Coyte, husband of Mary, is involved and very generously gave up his time to take the bus to Tesco car parks in Bordon and Haslemere to promote the show.

The hard work paid off and the show enjoyed total audiences of 1,596 over the six performances. With current costs of mounting any production constantly rising, sadly even these numbers were insufficient to recoup the loss on the last show, but the treasurer was able to announce a tiny profit of £5.60.

From all other angles 'Summer Holiday' was a spectacular and artistic success. Directing his first show for the Players, Tony Creasey injected enormous energy and inventiveness into the production. He had gathered round him the excellent team of Alan Young, whose six-piece band provided great backing to the talented cast, Angela Cantan, who staged the show imaginatively, his wife Lynn whose costumes captured well the spirit of the fifties, and Alan English who created a life-size London bus, accurate in every detail, which formed the backcloth to the stage. The cast were able to climb on to and use the top deck, and particularly clever was the winding staircase at the back of the bus, each step edged with a metal strip. Another clever touch was the tiny replica red bus which was trailed across in front of the blacks to mark the passage of the bus and the miles travelled. Audiences were amused when this little bus appeared on a boat (representing its journey over the channel) and labouring up a slope to denote its passing through mountainous Switzerland.

It had been known that 'Summer Holiday' would require a minimum of four pairs of young men and women and sceptics had said these could never be found. Luckily they were proved wrong and each one of the eight showed that they could sing, dance and act. At one stage, for the unaccompanied number 'Living Doll', they each sang a different line. The result was an amazingly harmonious sound with not a duff note throughout. Surely very few companies could have made that boast.

Kevin Bourne led the intrepid group of boy mechanics and fitters off on their holiday, with Will Keith, Will Forde and Charlie O'Reardon giving excellent support. Three of the girls, Abigail Rhodes, Emily Swatton and Emma Lumb were members of a slick girl band, joined later by the runaway Racheal Roberts, whose performance was a sheer delight. Her character, Barbara, was

trying to escape from her overbearing, wealthy mother, played with glorious over-the-top vulgarity by Heather Legat. Her role contrasted nicely with her camp sidekick, Robin North, making a very promising debut. There were other valuable cameos from Tony Krauze as a French onion seller and upper class twit from the Embassy, Tommy Trussler as a jogger, and Graeme Somerville as a Greek border guard.

Teresa Marsh was back again to direct the 2008 Music Hall with Angela Cantan staging the various medleys of songs. Real-life chairman of the Players, Andy Boughton, took over the role of Chairman of the Music Hall with the usual groan-inducing introductions to the various acts. Among an excellent programme, were an amusing sketch from Angela and Jane Clayton as two naïve married ladies commenting on their husband's prowess, and a hilarious mini panto of the story of Dick Whittington which climaxed with a Boris Johnson lookalike in a mussed-up blonde wig cycling on to the stage as the current Lord Mayor of London. The singing was of a particularly high standard with the barbers' shop quartet probably the best ever. The ladies had a couple of riotous numbers with a group of elderly crones listing their 'Favourite Things' – zimmer frames, false teeth, bunions, and the like – and several sturdy members of the VAD with some fearsome-looking equipment ready to be used on unsuspecting soldiers. Ensemble numbers included both a World War I and World War II scena, while in contrast Act II opened with a selection of songs of the '50s and '60s recalling the days of hot pants and flower power.

Despite the excellence of the show, ticket sales were down and it only just broke even. This was a blow as, traditionally, the Music Hall is relied upon to subsidise the other productions. The committee decided to undertake a complete review of the format.

At the AGM life membership was offered to Don Stacey and Peter Sillick, both long-serving members. Don joined the Players in 1949, at which time Peter's father, Ken, was responsible for resurrecting the company after its temporary closure during the war years.

It was back to G & S for October, with the committee electing to perform the Broadway version which includes one or two songs from other of the Savoy operas, modern dancing, and a brighter orchestral scoring. Hamish Donaldson was director, with Angela Jones as musical director, Doreen Wylde as chorus mistress, Megan Farrington as choreographer and Mandy Sutcliffe as dance captain. Jennie Budden was taking her regular place as wardrobe mistress.

It was a sparkling production with Hamish going for his usual spectacular effects and added touches which might have upset pre-1970 Gilbert and Sullivan fans, but wowed the current audiences. The music and dancing too were of a very high standard and the chorus, having been reintroduced to the difficulties of having to sing complicated harmonies in 'Titanic', used their new skills to fine effect in 'Pirates'.

The leads were splendid and the part of Mabel, one of the most taxing of all the G & S roles, was admirably filled by newcomer Rebecca Lucas. It was remembered that back in 1911, when the Players were unable to find a singer who could do the part justice, the company contacted Rupert D'Oyly Carte at the Savoy Theatre who sent one of his professional principals, Janet Oram, to join Haslemere's amateurs. Opposite Rebecca, as Frederic, Alan Thornhill added another strong and compelling performance to his previous roles with the Players. Although appearing for the third time as Major-General Stanley, Andrew Boughton proved yet again what a superb 'patter man' he is, and Tony Krauze's Police Sergeant was another pleasure. Chris Bridge returned to the company to play an imposing Pirate King, Elizabeth Chester acted and sang with great gusto as Ruth, and Vikki Thornhill, Leanne Holmes and Clemency Bray were delightful in their smaller roles as the Major-General's daughters.

It was gratifying to find out that 'Pirates' made a healthy profit and made significant inroads into clawing back some of the financial losses of earlier shows.

Christmas saw the usual Christmas Cracker concert at the Haslemere Hall and a get-together in the Haslemere Hall for carol singing, mulled wine and mince pies during the last rehearsal before Christmas.

THE YEAR 2009

In January members enjoyed a karaoke evening with supper at Grayshott Village Hall. The equipment was lent and organised by Jamie Atkin, who has appeared in several Players' shows.

By the start of the year, rehearsals were well under way for 'Sweeney Todd', a tremendous undertaking with its difficult staging and incredibly difficult harmonies written by the composer, Stephen Sondheim. Despite its gruesome theme, much of the show is funny and a snapshot on the coarseness and unfairness of 18th century London.

Stephanie Goodfellow, last seen as Charity Barnum in 2005, and with experience of directing for other companies, was invited to be in the hot seat, with Robert Douglas back as musical director. Hamish Donaldson designed the set, and Mandy Sutcliffe was choreographer.

Although very difficult to stage and consequently not performed very often, 'Sweeney Todd' remains a prestigious show. The number and quality of actors lining up to be part of the cast, meant that the standard of auditions was truly phenomenal. With a number of polished performances for the Players, Peter Barber was back as a powerful Sweeney whose presence dominated the stage. Kate Chesworth as Mrs Lovett was a terrific find, a local actress with some professional experience, who played the role to perfection. Among others making their debut were youngsters Matt Schouten as Tobias Ragg and Robyn Lisa Donnelly as Johanna. Both still at school, they showed tremendous potential and will surely be destined to go far in the world of musical theatre. Alan Thornhill as Anthony and his wife, Vikki (unrecognisable in voice and costume as a beggar woman) were both in top form, and Edward Roberts (Judge Turpin) and Robin North (Beadle Bamford) gave competent support. It was hard to identify Jonathan Foster as he bounced on to the stage trilling an Italian aria as a rival barber, Adolfo Pirello. It was a shame that his polished performance was cut short as he became one of the first victims destined to be pie filling!

Most productions of 'Sweeney Todd' use a trick barber's chair which dispatches the unfortunates to the cellar below. The clever use of lighting and blank masks for the chorus obviated the need for this, and audiences were in no doubt of the victims' fate. There were a lot of ingenious touches and these greatly enhanced the action.

During rehearsals chorus members grumbled that they had never had more difficult music to learn. But they persevered, and the complicated, sometimes discordant, harmonies were mastered and the result was a joy to listen to.

The only sadness was that many of the regular audiences stayed away in their droves. Many felt they could not stomach the grisly theme and despite being told that their perceptions were not really correct, many would not be moved. This was in spite of great efforts by the marketing team, led by Peter Marsh, who managed to get lots of articles into the newspapers and local radio. There

was also an enjoyable lunch at the Lythe Hill Hotel in the company of the Mayor of Waverley attended by fifty members. On the menu was blood red soup, delicious meat pies (the filling tasted like beef but.... who knows?), with 'Death by Chocolate' for dessert.

For the Music Hall in June it was back to a more traditional Edwardian theme which was appreciated by the audiences. While fewer people came than in the vintage years of the 1990s, there were still a goodly number who heckled and booed with enthusiasm. Don Stacey was the director with a new MD in Clive Osgood, and Angela Cantan as choreographer. Andy Boughton took on the role of Chairman once more.

Among the cast it was good to welcome back after illness Barbara Thomas, who once again delighted with 'Nobody Loves a Fairy When She's Forty'. Other individual contributions which the audience relished came from Robin North in 'Nobody Noticed Me' and from Hamish Donaldson with some comic business delivered in an amusing laid-back manner. The ensemble numbers 'Heaven will protect an honest girl' and the 'Blushing Bridesmaids' attracted much applause, and the imaginative 'Clock of Old Hafflemere', where, in the continental style, a group of clockwork figures performed set actions each hour – before everything went disastrously wrong – was a triumph. As usual Jennie Budden's colourful costumes enhanced many a scene, especially those used in the seaside and Cockney medleys.

In the Queen's Birthday Honours in June came news that two long-time members of the Players had been honoured, the only two recipients in Waverley borough. Don Stacey and Fay Foster both received their awards for Services to the Community in Haslemere and, five months later, went with their families to be presented with their medals by the Queen,

In July came the unveiling of a plaque to Cledwyn and Geraldine Evans whose generous bequest to the Society had paid for the new props store behind the wardrobe at the Players' Studio. This essential new building meant that, once the hundreds of props had been removed from the main Studio, much more space was freed up for the wardrobe. With the team led by Doreen Wylde and Teresa Marsh still doing sterling work in managing the costumes, they were delighted when, having hired a large number to Mill Hill School for 'The Boy Friend', they were given a £600 donation in recognition of the choice of costumes and the length of time they were allowed to keep them.

The annual barbecue was held at lunchtime on August Bank Holiday at the home of chairman Andy and his partner Mandy. Several members brought their young children and the event was particularly well attended by some of the "oldies". As usual the food was delicious, the regular quiz was thought-provoking and a great time was had by all.

Having held auditions for the October production of 'Scrooge', rehearsals began in earnest in June. The show is an adaptation of Charles Dickens' 'A Christmas Carol' with music by Leslie Bricusse, famed for his many TV themes and the scores for such musicals as 'Stop the World, I Want to Get Off', 'The Roar of the Greasepaint, Smell of the Crowd' and 'Dr Dolittle'. After a break, Doreen Wylde was back as director, with Robert Gillman as MD, and Mandy Sutcliffe as choreographer.

Two weeks before the show, several members of the cast previewed some of the music at a concert arranged by the Foster family as part of a fund-raising concert for a Scout Project in Zambia which Eric would be undertaking in summer 2010.

'Scrooge' was a superb show and there were excellent audiences for all six performances. Although everyone knew that a Dickens' story, along with Bricusse's stirring music and lyrics

would be a sure-fire recipe for success, the company had also gathered an outstanding cast who did full justice to the libretto and created an exciting musical experience.

Under Doreen's experienced direction, the production captured the spirit of Victorian London, while Robert's skilful control of both orchestra and singers added much to the enjoyment of the evening. The chorus had rarely been better, with excellent singing and lively dancing to Mandy Sutcliffe's innovative choreography. There were also charming contributions from a group of children.

Barely off stage throughout the show, newcomer Ben Lawson was a compelling Scrooge, masking his tender years, and completely believable as the crabby old miser whose life changed so dramatically after his spectral encounters. His handling of these scenes was superbly done with Chris Bridge, Carolyn Beaumont, Andrew Boughton and James Thonger giving excellent support as the ghosts of his partner, Jacob Marley, and of Christmasses Past, Present and Yet To Come.

As Scrooge's nephew Harry and wife Isabel, Kevin Sampson and Rebecca Lucas were in fine voice and acted well, particularly in the scene where they became the alter egos of a young Scrooge and his first sweetheart.

While scenes with the Fezziwig family, led by Mary Coyte and Peter Gardner, showed the jollity and good living of wealthy citizens, the Cratchit family clearly demonstrated how the other half lived. Jonathan Foster and Teresa Marsh and their delightful family (including the appealing Tiny Tim of Harry Simmonds) provided the real pathos of the evening and there wasn't a dry eye in the house as Jonathan wept over the grave of his dead son during the vision of Christmas Yet To Come.

The sets devised and constructed by Hamish Donaldson and his team were imaginative and effective, while Jennie Budden's costumes were colourful and true to period. These were shown to perfection in the final scene when 'snow' fell and created a typical Christmas card scene from Victorian days.

The triumph of 'Scrooge' was a fitting end to the decade, although the company was once more on the Haslemere Hall stage for the tenth annual Christmas Cracker on 19th December. The audience cheered and clapped as the massed choir (including many members of the Players) and the five-strong team providing comic verse and readings (all Haslemere Players) presented a festive programme which, as the departing patrons always say, is the "perfect start to the Christmas season". It is indeed a real community event with lots of audience participation and thanks to the vision of Hamish Donaldson and Don Stacey ten years ago, continues to entertain audiences annually.

THE YEAR 2010

At the start of the second decade of the twentieth century the delightful musical 'Annie' was in rehearsal. Mary Coyte had been appointed as director but half way through she had to withdraw through ill-health. Angela and Robert Cantan nobly stepped into the breach maintaining the continuity of preparations and building on the sound base already laid by Mary. Angela Jones was musical director.

Back in October 2009, sixty-seven girls had auditioned for the starring roles in *Annie*, a record number for any parts in the history of the society. In a change to tradition a workshop was held when all the children who wished to be involved were put through various moves and actions and

observed by a panel. After two hours the children who would be invited to attend the actual auditions were selected. In the end, two 14-year-olds, Hannah Lucas and Julia Peters were given the roles of Annie, with two sets of eight girls – who played alternate nights - chosen as the orphans.

Nearly stealing the show was the endearing brown-and-white bearded collie playing the role of Sandy (with a reserve dog standing by just in case). Colin Skeaping, who trains dogs for television, provided the pair and his enthusiasm and great support throughout the show was much appreciated.

The adult characters were particularly strong and this strength and the directors' talent ensured that 'Annie' was a first-rate success. Suzie Inskip played the evil Miss Hannigan, owner of the orphanage with obvious relish, ably supported by her shady brother Rooster (Jonathan Foster) and his ditzy girlfriend Lily (Clemency Bray). A lot of the comedy fell to the last two and, together with Miss Hannigan, their lively rendition of 'Easy Street', was one of the best songs in the show. Tony Creasey was ideally cast as Oliver Warbucks, the philanthropist who invites an orphan to stay for Christmas, assuming it will be a boy. Horrified at first but persuaded by his sympathetic assistant Grace Farrell (an excellent debut by Lisa Bailey), he is gradually won over by the winsome Annie and the happy ending is assured.

Along the way we meet real-life characters such as Chris Bridge as F D Roosevelt and there is an excellent close-harmony trio (Sue Stuart Smith, Carolyn Beaumont and Chloe Johnson) who perform in a radio studio. Peter Lucas and Andrew Boughton were in other small roles.

Earlier in the year the company heard that the programme devised by Edward Roberts and Elizabeth Chester for 'Sweeney Todd' had been awarded the prize for best programme in the NODA Southern Area deluxe section.

In charge of the Music Hall this year, Wayne and Kay Richardson devised a slightly different programme. The songs and skits ranged in time from over about fifty years, including swing, Latin American, rock 'n roll, shows and World War Two. As usual the barbershop was in good voice, as were the 'Andrews Sisters' and Hamish Donaldson performed yet more magic tricks. It was very reassuring too that the show made a small surplus as opposed to a loss on last year's.

At the AGM in June, Andy Boughton stood down as chairman after four years, his place being taken by Vicki Gavin. In typical business-like fashion, Vicki set out to reorganise the committee so that each member had a definite job, hence the company had someone in charge of Marketing and Publicity, Social Activities, Child Protection and Front of House.

Rehearsals for the October presentation, 'The Music Man', started in June with Hamish Donaldson at the helm, assisted by MD Clive Osgood and choreographer, Mandy Sutcliffe. This was the second time the company had performed the show (Hamish having himself appeared in the previous production). It was also a tribute to past wardrobe mistress, the late Pam Sobey, that the costumes she made for the child bandsmen were used again and looked just as fresh as in 1980.

As is becoming a tradition, several social events took on the show's theme with the summer barbecue (held at the director's home) featuring, in true Iowa fashion, an 'Ice Cream Sociable' with many interesting flavours on offer. Later on cast and friends met at the Georgian House Hotel for a special Daddy Warbucks' lunch. At the event the River City Mayor Shinn (Don Stacey) met up the real-life Mayor of Haslemere, Melanie Odell, who was an invited guest. In company with Chamberlain Music, the Georgian House Hotel were also sponsoring the show.

The show was as good as ever with an excellent cast who handled the often quickfire songs and libretto with ease. In the leading role of 'Professor' Harold Hill, Peter Coxon was a likeable rogue whose charms managed to win over the cityfolk, with the exception (at first) of the town's librarian Marian Paroo (Rebecca Lucas). These two had some of the best songs with Peter leading the chorus in great voice for the well-known 'Seventy Six Trombones' and joining Rebecca in the charmingly gentle 'Till There was You'. As Harold Hill's friend, Marcellus, Jonathan Foster produced a lovely little cameo role. Vicki Gavin excelled as Mrs Paroo, whose younger children, Amaryllis and Winthrop) were appealingly played by Verity Foster and Harry Simmonds. Other youngsters who impressed were the Mayor's children played by Alice Simmonds and Meredith Leston, and the latter's boyfriend, Joe Mills. Other vocal highlights were 'Pick a Little, Talk a little', sung by a quartet of gossipy village ladies, and the very professional-sounding barbers' shop quartet 'Lida Rose'.

Despite the work done by the publicity committee and the show being so enjoyable, sadly for some reason it didn't attract the regular large audiences with the result that a substantial loss was made. Had it not been for Jennie Budden's usual miracle in producing most of the outfits from the company's own wardrobe, the loss might have been very much higher.

In addition to the three productions during the year, there had been a skittles evening and a large group had attended a performance of '42nd Street' at Chichester.

THE YEAR 2011

With an extremely snowy start to the year, the production team for the March production, 'Guys and Dolls', must have been desperately worried after rehearsals had to be cancelled as many roads were almost impassable for days on end.

They needn't have worried because 'Guys and Dolls' became one of the most enjoyable shows put on for many a year. Based on the stories of downtown New York by Damon Runyon, it must be one of the best musicals ever written with a wonderful libretto and a score full of sparkling songs. And the inspired direction of Stephanie Goodfellow, the competence of William Godfree as MD and sheer brilliance of Laura Musco's choreography ensured that the Players' performance was outstanding.

The whole action zipped along at a cracking pace, the talented principals showing the way to an exceptionally good chorus. From the opening number, led by a trio of 'Guys', backed by the slinky razzamatazz of the Hot Box Girls to the whole cast belting out 'Sit Down You're Rockin' the Boat', the evening was a feast of music, dance and fun.

In a show so full of stars, it is difficult to pick out individuals, but Carolyn Beaumont as Miss Adelaide certainly captured her audience with every entrance she made. Her lament, as she struggled with her psychosomatic cold, justly earned rapturous applause. As Sky Masterson, Edward Roberts' wonderful voice was heard at its best and the tender scenes when he eventually won over his Salvation Army lass, Sarah Brown (Lisa Bailey) were wonderfully done. Tony Creasey produced his usual exuberant performance as Nathan Detroit, with strong support from other "Guys" including Phil Elliott, Chris Bridge, Mike Byrne and Peter Lucas. Alan Thornhill was in better voice than ever as Nicely Nicely Johnson.

On this occasion word had got around and audiences were back in their droves. New treasurer, Sally Barr, was therefore delighted that the loss on the last show had turned into a reasonable profit.

The company was delighted to hear afterwards that 'Guys and Dolls' had been awarded an Accolade of Excellence by NODA. Producer Stephanie, together with secretary Pam and leading man Edward, went to the Mandalay Hotel in Guildford to receive a large silver cup and certificate on behalf of the Players. There was also a bonus – the programme for 'The Music Man', devised by Carolyn Beaumont - was also adjudged the best in the deluxe section of the programme competition. The presentations came at the end of a day run by the Southern Area of NODA which included the annual meeting where the opportunity was given for questions and answers on the worries and problems of putting on shows in the current financial climate. At the end Epsom Light Opera Company presented a shortened version of the operetta (performed twice in the past by Haslemere), 'Orpheus in the Underworld'.

In the spring, secretary Pam had had a phone call from some people in Devon who had finally got her number from the Tourist Office in Guildford! It appears that one Margaret Henderson who had been wardrobe mistress to the Players in the 1970s had died and, before putting her possessions into a tip, the house clearers wondered whether the company would like some things that had connections with the Players. Among these were some designs and paintings that Margaret had produced from the shows and Pam gladly accepted them for the society's archives.

In place of the Music Hall the committee voted to do something completely different. Since the date coincided with the biannual Haslemere Festival, it was decided to present a non-stop medley of music, with particular emphasis on songs from shows that, for one reason or another, could never be attempted by the Players. Thus 'Showstoppers', devised by Vicki Gavin emerged. Tony Creasey took on the role of MC to introduce the separate numbers and teas or light suppers were served at the interval. The show proved an amazing success with both matinee and evening performances sold out. Most important of all, because the event was advertised widely in the Festival programme, many among the audience had never even been inside the Haslemere Hall, let alone seen a Players' show. Having received such plaudits over the standard achieved, it is hoped that this augurs well for future productions.

Just before 'Showstoppers' was presented came the much-longed-for day when local people were allowed to walk through the Hindhead Tunnel, just prior to its official opening for traffic. As part of the proceedings walkers were entertained to music as they reached daylight at the end of the 1¼ mile tunnel. Among the groups invited were the Players who performed some of their programme for 'Showstoppers', and the Haslemere Town Band. Among members of the latter were Peter (17) and Eric Foster (16), both of whom have appeared in several Players' shows. Eric was particularly honoured that 'The Punchbowl March', written and orchestrated by him especially for the occasion, was played by the band and featured in the coverage of the event by BBC South Television.

The Players had yet further publicity for their show when they were invited to provide 45 minutes of entertainment on the main stage at Lion Green during the Fringe Festival.

At the AGM June came the announcement of the retirement of Jennie Budden who had been responsible for the wardrobe for nineteen years and had costumed nearly 60 shows. She offered to carry on in an advisory capacity and with her great expertise on costumes of all periods, and her encyclopaedic knowledge of where things are in the Players' studio, this will be eagerly taken up. Another invaluable asset is that she knows which society has certain costumes in their wardrobes

and is aware of where the most reasonable prices are. The money Jennie has saved the company during her years in charge must have amounted to many thousands of pounds.

The choice of show for autumn 2011 surprised many as it is so different from anything done before. 'Beauty and the Beast' based on Disney's magical story had enjoyed a run in the West End and all agreed would be very challenging. Invited to direct the show, Kenn Macdonald had worked on the original London production as part of the stage management team and it was thought his intimate knowledge of the show would be a great advantage. Joining the production team were Clive Osgood as MD and Megan Farrington as choreographer.

Social events during the year included the annual quiz at Grayshott Village Hall where the Stagers finally emerged the winners. The summer barbecue was held at the home of President Hamish and his wife Linda. There were also several trips to theatre shows including productions of *Chess* at Woking and 'Singin' in the Rain' at Chichester. There were also lunches at various hostelrys with appropriately themed menus to fit the setting of the production in rehearsal.

The marketing team for 'Beauty and the Beast' did a magnificent job and managed to secure sponsorship of more than £1,000 from local businesses. They also involved local schools in a colouring competition, the winner getting to meet the cast and have a backstage tour.

The show itself was a triumph which, because of its appeal to children, drew very large audiences. In fact an extra matinee was added on the Friday, a first-time with the Players.

In the leading role of Belle, it was good to welcome back Alex Yates, who as Alex Legat had taken many leads for both the Players and Grayshott Stagers. She was ably supported by Hamish Donaldson as her father, and by Alan Thornhill who took the part of the Beast. He had some of the best songs which he delivered with his usual fine voice. Outstanding among the 'humans' was young Sam Barrett as Gaston, an insufferable suitor for Belle's hand. Still at school, Sam obviously has a glittering future ahead. His sidekick, Le Fou, was wittily played by Mike Byrne.

The actors and actresses playing the enchanted household objects gave very different interpretations to the inanimate items they were portraying. Each appearance of the candlestick (Howard Bicknell), clock (Tony Creasey), teapot (Chloe Johnson-Jones), and wardrobe (Vicki Gavin) were all much enjoyed. There was an amusing cameo too from Carolyn Beaumont as Babette.

While not appearing as often as in other shows, the chorus were in particularly good form and they were animated and in good voice throughout.

Despite the large audiences, the show made a loss of £3,500 although this had been anticipated. Since many of the costumes and effects had had to be hired from specified companies this had hiked up the costs and there were also the high royalties payable to Disney who demanded 15 per cent plus VAT on all sales. In addition, the number of children in the audience at reduced rates, and the fact that they do not buy programmes or raffle tickets, also made an impact on the finances.

However the good sense of presenting a child-friendly show during the half-term holiday was recognised and the Players were confident that they had played to vast new audiences which boded well for future productions.

November saw auditions and early rehearsals for the March show, 'Oliver', with the husband-and-wife team of Robert and Angela Cantan in charge of direction and staging, and Angela Jones as musical director. Then on 17th December came the twelfth Christmas Cracker, arranged by Don Stacey and Hamish Donaldson featuring many of the Players in the massed choir and featuring five further members in the interludes of comedy verse.

THE YEAR 2012

Prior to the production of 'Oliver' in March, the Georgian House Hotel was the venue for a specially themed lunch with profits going to the cost of the show. There were the usual amusingly-named items of the menu with the turkey main course listed as Mr Bumble's Beadle Bird, and the veggie alternative of Crisp Filo parcel named the Artful Dodger's Pickpocketed Parcel.

The show itself delighted everyone, the Treasurer especially, in attracting the largest audiences for some time so that there was a very pleasing surplus after the expenses were paid. The production by the Cantans was particularly geared towards the very many children who joined in the fun in true pantomime tradition, even down to the water-throwing in the Undertakers' house, similar to the kitchen scene in the best Christmas tale.

Kate Chesworth proved an outstanding Nancy whose talent at both singing and acting provided the necessary pathos amidst the jollity of most of the other scenes. Howard Bicknell, a regular in Haslemere pantomime, brought the same thespian qualities to his competent performance as Fagin, while Graeme Somerville, in his largest role to date, impressed as Mr Bumble, ably assisted by Mary Coyte as Widow Corney. The double-cast Oliver and Artful Dodger (Alfie Richards/Monty Vann, and Andrew Chalmers/Sam Crosby) had won their roles from very stiff competition and they did not disappoint. Fagin's gang of urchins were also in strong voice and well drilled. Samantha Ryan, Chris Ackroyd-Parr, Lucy Moore and Chris Bridge added good support. As the Haslemere Herald reported: "This was fun on a grand scale and another extra-special serving from the Players".

A new idea for fund-raising, an Auction of Promises at Grayswood Village Hall in April, proved a tremendous success and the money came rolling in! Members had dug deep to find interesting things to offer with lots ranging from computer tuition, piano lessons, meals at local hostleries, a celebration cake, pole dancing lessons, baby sitting, dog walking, gardening, etc, etc. which Tony Creasey sold with his usual charm and quick wit. All present enjoyed a fish and chip supper with the odd glass to loosen their tongues and their purse-strings. It was a great fun evening with plenty of support from everyone.

With Haslemere's Fringe Festival coinciding this year with the Queen's Silver Jubilee, the Players decided to repeat last year's successful programme of Showstoppers, presenting songs from each decade of Her Majesty's reign. As well as three sell-out performances in the Haslemere Hall with supper or tea included, the company repeated excerpts on a temporary stage on Lion Green in the midst of enormous crowds (reckoned to be over 4,000). While cream teas were being enjoyed, the Players had a wonderful captive audience who seemed delighted with all they were seeing and hearing. Vicki Gavin had put together a sparkling show which appealed to all age groups. As well as 'oldies' from Rodgers and Hammerstein, Ivor Novello or Bernstein, there were popular items from more modern musicals, 'Les Miserables', 'Grease', and 'Chicago' among them, while the big full chorus numbers from the Beatles, Abba and Queen went down a bomb.

Rehearsals started immediately afterwards for 'The Sound of Music' which, due to the large loss on *Beauty and the Beast* had been substituted for a show that could have had less audience appeal.

Hamish Donaldson was back as Diector on the third occasion in the company's history that the show had been performed. Robert Cantan was MD with Lisa Bailey as choreographer. Two sets of delightful children were selected, appearing in three performances each.

Rebecca Lucas was a charming Maria who handled her charges in a gentle, appealing manner, and won the affection of the dashing Captain von Trapp (Edward Roberts). In the smaller roles Carolyn Beaumont was charming as the Captain's fiancée, Elsa, Mark Waters was a roguish Uncle Max and Angela Cantan was ideal as Frau Schmidt, the housekeeper. Benjamin Johnston produced another sterling performance as young Rolf. The magical 'Climb Every Mountain', superbly sung by the Abbess, Vicki Gavin, brought the house down for every performance, and the three named nuns gave her excellent support. Then of course there were the children who, as well as singing and doing their drill perfectly, were quite enchanting.

It was the first show for many years that there was a sellout for four of the six performances and so the Players' coffers were enriched with a healthy surplus.

Over the year teams were very busy in the studio. New shelves were erected in the end room to hold all the libretti and scores and crates were acquired for extra storage. A washing machine and tumble dryer were also added in the main in the kitchen area. Further jobs included painting the window frames and replacing the rotten timber. Most Saturday mornings the building was a hive of industry as the wardrobe team sorted out costumes for shows for other societies or fancy dress for individual hirers, as well as for the Players' shows.

Hamish and Linda Donaldson opened their garden once again for the summer barbecue which also featured the making of paper aeroplanes and a yodelling competition.

THE YEAR 2013

Everyone was delighted to learn that president Hamish Donaldson had been awarded an MBE for his services to the community the New Year's Honours list. The company can now boast of four MBEs among its fifteen long-serving members who were offered Life Membership for their contributions to the Haslemere Players.

Another repeat show, 'Calamity Jane', was chosen for the spring with rehearsals having begun, as usual, the previous November. Following an article in the Herald, several new members (including men!) joined the company and the resulting cast was excellent.

Mary Coyte was back as Director, with Angela Jones as Musical Director and Debra Allen undertaking choreography for the Players for the first time.

For the usual walkabout in the High Street appeals had been made for a horse to accompany the cast for their pre-publicity. Luckily Lisa Hamilton, whose son, Frederick, had appeared in 'The Sound of Music', answered the call and provided two family-friendly animals who caused much interest for shoppers who were also serenaded with impromptu bursts of choruses from the show.

Despite the distinguished cast and the best efforts of the publicity team, ticket sales did not come up to expectation. This was especially sad as the show is a great audience pleaser, with its well-known choruses and solo numbers and the amusing script.

In the leading role, Kate Chesworth, was her usual energetic, larger-than-life character who had the audience laughing and crying with her at different times. Hers was indeed a real tour-de-force

performance. Chris Bridge was a likeable Bill Hickock who proved to be Jane's perfect match. Kevin Sampson and Jessi McCluskey were excellent as the second leads, Danny Gilmartin and Katie Brown, Rebecca Lucas was a suitably disdainful diva, Adelaide Adams and Alan Thornhill was amusing as the crossdressing Francis/Frances Fryer.

Other small roles were well-filled and the chorus were exceptionally good, never better than in the beautifully harmonized 'Black Hills of Dakota' number.

Shortly afterward the social committee, led by Mike Byrne organised a Race Night which proved most enjoyable and profitable.

To tie in with the Haslemere Hall's Centenary, the company presented Showstoppers, a Century of Song, at the end of May. This was another joyous pot-pourri which amply demonstrated the wide talents of the current Haslemere Players and ran for three performances. The directors, Vicki Gavin, Mary-Lou Knox and Adrian Stent, undertook different sections, with Carolyn Beaumont acting as MD and Debra Allen and Jessica-Alice McCluskey sharing the choreography between them. Although items from the first 50 years of the century were thin on the ground, there were a great number from the past twenty years including one which was not due to be premièred until later in 2013!

Again, although some well-known shows were included, often more obscure numbers were chosen, ignoring those which might have had more popular appeal. However the audiences were most enthusiastic, and visually and musically the evening was a triumph.

Among the most successful items were a medley of 40s wartime songs with an authentic array of costumes of the period, and Jonathan Foster's tribute to the ladies of the silent screen, singing beautifully as pictures of film beauties flicked by on a giant screen. 'Tradition' from 'Fiddler on the Roof' was a most enjoyable start to Act II, with Bob Fells splendid in the role of Tevye, the milkman, and Carolyn Beaumont adding to the atmosphere with her impressive solo on the violin. The Barbers' Shop dressed as The Beatles wowed the crowd, and ensemble numbers from 'West Side Story', 'Les Miserables' and 'Sister Act' were particularly popular. Highlights among the solo items came with Vicki Gavin's version of 'You'll Never Walk Alone' which was spellbinding and Racheal Roberts' 'This Time' from 'Cabaret' was an especially accomplished performance.

The annual barbecue in August was again held in the Donaldsons' garden and, to keep to the nautical scene of HMS Pinafore, among the party games there was a paper boat-making competition. In September the Inter-Society quiz resulted in the trophy again being won by the Players.

It was back to Gilbert and Sullivan in October with 'H.M.S. Pinafore'. Stephanie Goodfellow was at the helm once again, aided by Jocelyn Brown, with William Godfree as musical director ably assisted by Angela Jones. Choreography was in the capable hands of Jessica-Alice McCluskey. All involved agreed that the script, actually written in 1878, is amazingly appropriate over one hundred years later and director Stephanie made sure that traditionalists and newcomers alike thoroughly enjoyed her production with a few modern touches. The orchestra was brilliantly managed, sets were magnificent and there was excellent singing and movement on stage.

Among the principals there were particularly good performances from the ladies: Vicki Gavin as Little Buttercup, Rebecca Lucas (Josephine) and sparkling Carolyn Beaumont (Cousin Hebe). Newcomer Richard Arthur excelled as Dick Deadeye and, in his largest role to date, Adrian Stent made a very respectable debut as Sir Joseph Porter. Good support came from Chris Bridge, Alan

Thornhill and Edward Tobin in other roles. Having been unable to cast Ralph Rackstraw the company had to import Nathaniel Hook from London who, it was noted, produced some rather odd paraphrases of Gilbert's much-loved words.

The treasurer was delighted to report a healthy surplus of £1,800 on the show. Although ticket sales were disappointing, since G & Shows are out of copyright so the usual large sum on royalties was not payable. Special thanks were due to the wardrobe department who managed to costume and set the show for less than £1,200.

It was pointed out later that the costs of staging increase year on year. In addition major expenses were incurred in the studio where the windows needing painting and repair. The Studio team were very busy culling, cleaning and generally organising the ladies' section so that clothes are accessible either to use in Players' shows or to hire to the general public. When the Phoenix Players in Bordon closed down, the chance came to acquire many of their costumes and these were gratefully accepted as they were of high quality. The Players' cast-offs were dealt with under a new 'Phil the Bag' scheme. Run by Haslemere Care Charity, this accepts clothes and shoes and the Players then get a proportion of the money made by selling them.

Christmas 2013 saw another Christmas Cracker a few days before the festive season with many members again taking part in the massed choir or providing comedy verse.

Following the collapse of the ceiling in a London theatre, the Haslemere Hall had a look at its safety procedures. Front-of-house teams responsible during Players' shows then had to attend training sessions so that they were fully versed in how to clear the Hall in emergencies and cope with other problems.

In March 'South Pacific' was the choice, the third time the show has been produced at Haslemere. Robert Cantan was director, while his wife, Angela, joined him in the musical staging. Angela Jones was the musical director.

It proved to be a bright and sunny production with some excellent chorus singing and a particularly good orchestra. As portrayed by Jessica-Alice McCluskey, Nellie Forbush had a formidable presence with some superb singing and acting. The Emil de Becque of Mark Waters was a gentler performance but his rapport with his two young children was especially touching. In her first major role for the Players, Jan Treacher-Evans' Bloody Mary was a rather more understated character than usual, but newcomer Christopher Sadler made up for her with a larger-than-life performance as Luther Billis. The secondary love interest between Lt Cable (Tim Spindler) and Liat (Genevieve Labuschagne) was charmingly portrayed, with Tim's singing one of the treats of the evening. Alan Thornhill and Christopher Cain were both competent in their roles as American Navy officers, while Bill Hudson, another newcomer, excelled in two tiny cameo roles.

Rehearsals started immediately afterwards for the summer production, another Show Stoppers extravaganza – and what a show it turned out to be! As a life-long film buff, Jonathan Foster offered to put together a programme featuring music from the movies and happily for him, everyone wanted to be in it. Having been determined to have 50 people on stage (so that all the ladies would have a man to dance with) he attained his numbers and, more importantly, managed to keep their interest, with everyone involved and enthusiastic. He was also lucky enough to have Stephanie Goodfellow as compère, the first female ever to undertake the role. And what a great success she turned out to be – her anecdotes and pithy asides between the items were delivered with brilliant timing and helped the action go with a swing.

Jonathan had chosen popular numbers from films from the silents to the present day. He himself introduced the show with 'Movies were Movies from Mack and Mabel' (1912) as stills of the stars of the day, including the Keystone Kops, were projected onto a screen at the back of the stage. The projected images were repeated throughout the show creating instant backcloths. What a difference from the days when a scenic artist was employed to paint two or three cloths to dress a whole musical!

The animated chorus and superb set of nine dancers had some lovely ensemble scenes, particularly the 1st World War scena (the centenary of the start of the War was currently being celebrated), the rumbustious Cockney and Pearly Kings number 'Get Me to the Church on Time' (an excellent performance from Andrew Boughton as the drunken Dolittle), and the melodic 'Thank You for the Music' which had all the audience swaying. But definitely the best one was The 'King's Song' from 'Joseph and his Dreamcoat' led by Alan Thornhill as an Elvis lookalike, with the chorus in glimmering gold costumes swaying and swooning. This was a real magical moment. As for the solo performers, since most of the Players' stars from the past ten or so years were performing, the standard was incredibly high. To have the vocal and acting talents of Vicki Gavin, Carolyn Beaumont, Jessie McCluskey, Alexandra Boughton, Rebecca Lucas, Racheal Rhodes, Rachel Perkins and Christine Gudger on one stage was a real treat. And at least another five or so excelled in smaller numbers. Young Verity Foster, playing a teenager declaring her love for Clark Gable was charming and there special cheers for Pamela Depledge who, having celebrated her 'special' birthday earlier in the week, gave a lovely rendition of the 1943 'You'll Never Know'. The men were less well represented but newcomer, Bill Hudson, was a smash hit with his 'Ol' Man River' accompanied by a quartet of men singing in close harmony. There was also sterling support in other numbers from Richard Tytler, Adrian Stent, Peter Lucas and many others.

On a night devoted to the movies, Jonathan couldn't resist a nostalgic lookback to the cinemas which Haslemere once boasted. Pictures of the Rex, the last of them which disappeared in 1986, were flashed up on the screen and, as a tribute to those days, there was a charming lament, 'The Usherette's Blues' from Mary Lou Knox who bemoaned the fact that, although she was present for every film, she never got to see the ending.

While a couple of famous Disney songs were sung, stills from the dozens of his films flitted over the screen showing many well-beloved cartoon characters. Another highlight was 'Bright Eyes', from 'Watership Down'. While a quartet sang the song in four parts, the Ryan sisters, Samantha and Rebecca, performed a delightful ballet, and there were many damp eyes as, inevitably, one of the rabbits died at the end.

The show was a tribute to many others who contributed to its success: to the musical director, Justin Luke and his two outstanding musicians, to the wardrobe mistresses, props and stage staff and many others who worked backstage. It really was a magical, unique evening.

In August the Players were invited to provide entertainment at the Midhurst pre-Festival dinner and had great fun reprising many items from Showstoppers, linked as before by Stephanie. The audience were most impressed and the Players received a handsome cheque for the company.

There was a new venue for the summer barbecue when Jane McMichael kindly lent her lovely garden for the occasion and the weather was glorious. As usual the many old and new Players enjoyed swimming, quizzing, chatting and eating. They also made and flew paper aeroplanes and composed limericks relating to the forthcoming production of 'The Producers'.

Rehearsals for this latest show had started in mid-June although Hamish had been making his plans for months beforehand. The show, with music and lyrics by the talented American, Mel Brooks, had won every kind of award – Oscar, Emmy, Tony and Grammy in the States and an Olivier award in Britain. Because of its ‘adult’ content and decidedly non-PC jokes and actions, some people were unsure of how Haslemere audiences would react. They needn’t have worried as in the event it went down a bomb. Everyone agreed too that all members of the cast could not have fitted their parts better – surely the dream of every director and so Hamish Donaldson was well pleased. He was joined by Robert and Angela Cantan as Musical Director and Choreographer respectively and the excellent chorus singing and movement added to the excellence of the production.

For once a reporter from the Herald actually wrote a glowing critique the week of the show saying: “It is a risqué show and not everyone will want to see simulated sex scenes (yes, in Haslemere!) but Haslemere Players did a wonderful job.... We all loved it!”

She also wrote that the company could “give professionals a run for their money”. How right she was about the performances of all the major principals. Tony Creasey, as Max Bialystock, a failing Hollywood producer, was a tour-de-force, barely off the stage, ably partnered by Tim Spindler as Leo Bloom, a timid accountant who got dragged into Max’s evil plans. These aimed at getting lots of money from Max’s many “angels” (all little old ladies), then finding the worst show ever written with the worst director and cast - which would surely be a massive flop. After this the two could abscond with all the money to Rio. Needless to say, the show was a great hit with amusing repercussions for all.

The crazy playwright, Franz Leibkind, played with manic brilliance by Chris Sadler, came up with “Springtime for Hitler”. Engaged as director, was the camp Roger Debris - a hysterically funny performance by Jonathan Foster, with the equally funny Bill Hudson as his sidekick, Carmen Ghia. For glamour there was the sexy Swede, Ulla, who certainly hadn’t won the part for her acting abilities. Carolyn Beaumont was superb in this role. It was great too that so many of the smaller roles were taken by those who usually played leads including Adrian Stent, Peter Lucas, Mike Byrne, Robin North, Debbie Bowyer and others.

The dancers were exceptionally good and the sequence where the ‘little old ladies’ did a choreographed number complete with walking frames was uproarious. There were some Hamish speciality touches, notably a loft of nodding pigeons, and the scenery team had gone to town with some spectacular sets. Jenny Budden too is to be congratulated on the magnificent costumes.

As an audience member remarked in an email afterwards: “I couldn’t believe that a local am-dram could possibly have achieved that standard. Next stop – the West End?”

A very satisfactory way to end the account of the first fifteen years in the second century in the life of the Haslemere Players.

