



# Evocative Objects



Arts & Humanities  
Research Council

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**EXETER**



*Evocative Objects* was funded by the AHRC Connected Communities Festival and coordinated by the research team from Amateur Dramatics: *Crafting Communities in Time and Space*. We invited people who are dedicated and passionate participants in the world of amateur theatre to come along to a two workshop days and bring with them an object which captured memories and stories about their experience.

As a research team, we were overwhelmed by the richness of the objects that people brought – not particularly their monetary value – but a more social and personal richness of story, of dedication, of lifetimes of service to a sector which has received very little formal academic recognition. In many cases, these objects captured generational commitment, within families, and across cultures, cities, and age groupings.

We wanted to share some of these stories, voices and faces here.

They are only a snippet of a much larger picture, but they evoke much of the passion, hard work, and camaraderie of amateur theatre.



**Helen Nicholson, Professor, Royal Holloway, University of London**

We wanted to think through what that meant, to be part of community. What theatre contributes to community and to people's lives.

We think amateur theatre is about community and community life. We also think the amateur world creates its own community.

Why evocative objects? We're thinking through the work backstage as well as the work onstage. We're looking at what the process means for people. We're interested in memories. We're interested in stories. We're interested in people's perceptions... your perceptions, your memories... as well as the more formal histories which have been published.

We're interested in you. We're interested in what working in amateur theatre means to you – we're interested in the craft, the knowledge, the skills, the expertise, the brilliance you bring to your performance, the really fantastic creative experiences, for audience members and backstage crew. One of the things we really want to do with this research is to capture the spirit of amateur theatre as we know it – the warmth, the sociability, the stories, the creativity. That can be quite difficult to capture sometimes. That's where we appreciate the stories you have and the stories you've already told us. Thank you for coming.

## Sabine Hofmann

### Birmingham

I adored my stepfather Jack Myers. He was the baby of the family, and his parents said to their 4 boys: "Whatever else you do for your daily job, you're going to learn an instrument." So they did. Then they went off and played in the winter gardens at Scarborough and various other northern seaside resorts. My dad learnt the organ, clarinet and piano, and, like his brothers, went out playing in the evenings.

He met my mum in Berlin at the end of the war and told her he wanted to take her back to England. When he settled into his day job as a teacher, he became Musical Director at Bournville Light Opera, part of Bournville Musical Society at Cadbury's in Birmingham. In those days they had a Dramatic Society, Silver Band, Orchestra, Grand and Light Opera Sections, and a Male Voice Choir, which I think still survives. In the years when I was growing up, my dad did all the popular Gilbert and Sullivans like 'Iolanthe', 'Gondoliers', 'Mikado' and so on. We used to go to the dress rehearsals, and at home there was always a record on of whatever was current. I knew that one day I would join in – though Dad insisted on my getting properly qualified for my job first.

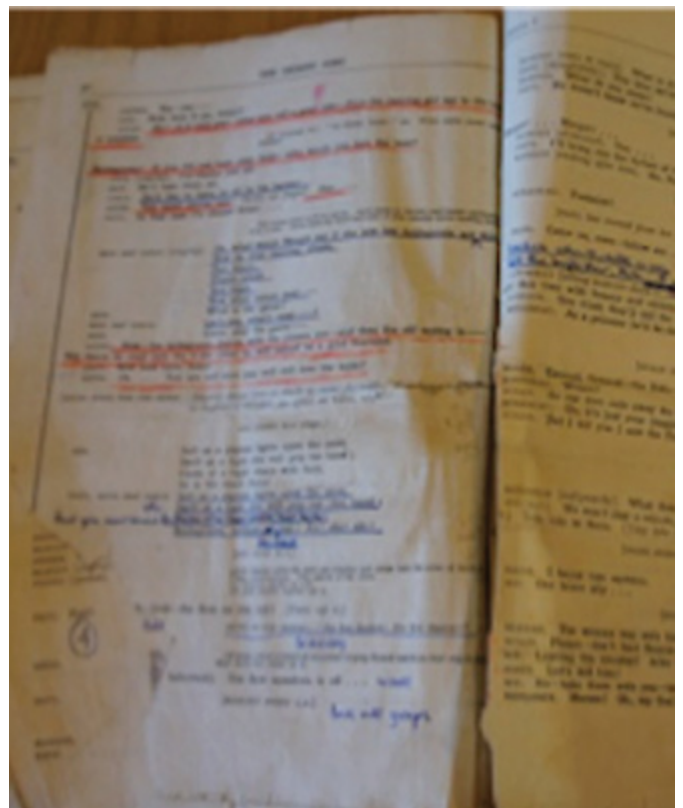
My parents were also in another company, the Kendall-Bond Operatic Society in Birmingham. They did shows like 'Wild Violets', 'The Belle of New York' and so on, which few people remember today.

I did my first show when I was 23, in my first year of teaching. I started with 'Trial by Jury' and 'H.M.S. Pinafore', a Novello show and 'Bless the Bride', which I really loved. I had a small part in that and could hardly believe it when I got flowers on the stage on the last night. Me - with flowers on the stage! Then we did 'White Horse Inn' and 'Carousel'.

When I came back from 3 years in Germany, I did another 12 shows with my dad at Bournville before he finished there, sadly owing to deafness. We had got on very well with our common interest in amateur theatre, and I used to see all the shows he conducted at Sutton Coldfield and Lichfield too.

When he died in 2002 he left a whole lot of scores which I gave to various folk who would appreciate them. Some things, however, I could not bear to part with, notably the Desert Song libretto shown in the picture. Dad had been a British Army officer and at Tobruk, the reason why this was his favourite show – he did it several times. The libretto is very worn and full of sellotape. The red underlining is my mum's (she too did the show several times), and the blue is my own. So that libretto tells its own story – it's all about Our Dad.

In the old days the Musical Director used to come in with a spotlight on him and took a bow. Dad would always wear white tie and tails and in his lapel a white carnation, which we would fetch daily from the florist's. For that reason we had white carnations on his coffin. I wear with pride his NODA medal, which I am now entitled to in my own right.





## Frank Welbourne

### Swan Theatre, Worcester

This crown is from our children's theatre productions, which we've been doing for 70 years, from October to May. Of the many plays we have in our repertoire (we've been doing it for quite a long time) 7 of them have kings in them. And they get recycled, obviously.

I've made a paper-doll-king for each of the kings we have used since the beginning of the century. There are 16 of them, each represents the person who played the part. I've played it 5 times. I've got a house full of props and costumes, since 1992. But I've been doing it on and off since 1975.

I was working as a teacher. I came to the third year of what was the teacher training college in those days, in Worcester, and I came and saw a play. It was done beautifully. And so... I thought I've got to get involved.

I'd done drama at school. And had been quite successful at it. In fact, I got into teaching through drama.... But, I was so busy, I didn't have time. I worked into the evenings. There wasn't time for me. I got into it again when I retired.

## Sue Hawkins

### Swan Theatre Amateur Company, Worcester

This is my red dress. This splendid garment has since appeared in many productions, mostly children's theatre. As you can see, it's got an extension in the back. It's been taken up, let down, taken up. But originally, it was mine.

When I say children's theatre, I don't mean youth theatre. I don't mean training young people how to act. I mean adults doing plays for children. We're having a big celebration this year – it commemorates 50 years of the Swan Theatre. The children's theatre work goes back to 1975. What we do, for 7 months of the year, first Saturday of the month, is a short play for children. It's usually about 40-45 minutes.

We try to run them sequentially, so children can grow up and hopefully by the time they're grown up, they've never seen the same play twice. We have 4 weeks to rehearse it, basically, meeting twice a week. So our group has to be quite keen. They're pantomime style, they're relatively short. There are a lot of silly kings and evil queens. There are dragons and wizards and witches. But there are some scripts which are more contemporary – we have pirates, harassed mums with naughty children... there's quite a full range of interesting plays.

One thing that we've noticed is that plays which were written in the 1970s for junior school children, we're now performing these plays to primary aged children. Children's expectations these days are so much more sophisticated. They see the telly and video games, by the time they're 8 or 9. We're now getting very young audiences – preschool up to about 8.

Whole families come to see the shows. We know that grandparents bring their grandchildren, who once brought their children. And mums and dads who were once taken as children, now attend as adults with their own kids.

It's a bit of an institution, like the Saturday morning pictures used to be, but in the theatre. It's getting small children into a theatre setting so they learn basic concepts: Sit quietly in a seat, the lights go dark and action happens on a stage. It's not like a DVD, you can't stop it, start it again. No, you have to pay attention or else you won't know what's happening. It's got to be very visual, funny, with a clear idea of a plot. There are goodies and baddies in all our plays – from the start, they know who the villain is. There is usually quite a strong moral theme running.



## Jon Manley

### TOADS, Torbay

These are quite wonderful, these trousers, aren't they? The explanation is that this is my 7th summer season in Paignton, and 6 of those 7, including this one, has starred these trousers. And if I'm honest, I'm really secondary to this role. But if I could be candid, they are a little bit rubbish, aren't they?

The criteria for these trousers appearing in so many plays from the 1920s to the modern day is that I'm tall and so are they. The judicious use of belt is because braces looked ridiculous. The trousers did tend to move independently of my legs. It's much better, so I'm told to use the belt, as they're actually two sizes too big. These actually tend to end up with me at the end of the summer season, it's normally, 'you can take those home, Jon'.

I think burning is probably too good for them.

It is hilarious. We have a costume fitting every summer, prior to the show. I always get invited along to the costume fitting, and I just think 'Why don't they just give me the trousers?'

There's no sentimental value to them, they really should be burned. Last year, I was the hero, wearing them. This year, I'm the git, wearing them. Character development with costume is a bit of an issue at times. Right Jon, I want you to be really smarmy...which of course me is quite natural, then you have to be a hero, but wearing those trousers as well.

Why the trousers? Why not? They have become a standing joke in my mind, but not in a bad malicious way. I wryly consider them the epitome of am-dram. They illustrate all that we have to cobble together, whether it be props that are constructed from blue tac and string or ladies ankle boots made from socks with a cut-out heel. The trousers shout 'I have no money!' or certainly very little money – they perform a task, whether good or not is debatable, but they do.



## Rachel Barnes

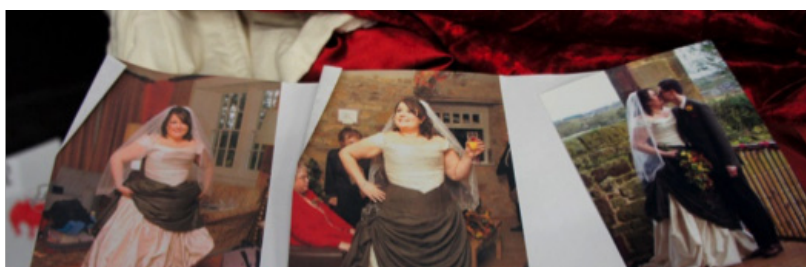
### Acting Out, Birmingham

Acting Out is Birmingham's only LGBT theatre group.

This chain of photos in the middle is the story of the corset. It starts as my fitting dress for my wedding dress. And then, because it was the fitting one it didn't matter if I 'altered it' – so then it gets transformed to be a good witch in *The Wizard of Oz*.

Then we see I for checking it for size so he could become Queen Elizabeth – which was a work in progress.

All the jewels were added on. Another of our number – she works for the police. They get a load of stuff which is about to go in the skip because it's stolen. So this is stolen property, which the police are going to throw away, so they go to her and say 'Ah, your acting group use stuff like that, don't they?' A load of bits and bobs – a bit of neckline here to make the ruff, and then fabric, a load of botching to make it... it was worn by I for and Matthew.



## Jenny Richardson

### The Questors Theatre, Ealing, London

I brought along a file. I've tracked my file over 40 odd years. I was a teacher. An 11-year old boy was leaving school to go to high school, and he said 'I won't need this miss, any longer, you can have it.' Then I joined Questors.

I started doing props, I made lists, I was so thrilled. The script and my lists went in the file. I carried it everywhere, I checked in my lunchhour, to see if the info was correct.

My first show was Pinter's *Betrayal*. I continued doing props, then I was SM with a friend. We did *Hamlet*. All the details went in the file – and script. I learned how to do 'The Book'. I'll always remember that show came down at 11.20 PM and we played for 2 weeks.

Another use for the file was *The Importance of Being Earnest*. It held all the details of the show. I remember having a crafty ciggie in back-walk round and hysterical ASM shouted 'I can't find THE HANDBAG!' It was found as the actor walked up centre VOM. To this day, I wonder what he would have done without it.

The file continued with me – script and set plans. My first show was *Educating Rita* – in the round, sightlines, set dressing, set designing, etc.

The file was with me when operating lights script and cues.

I remember watching from the lighting box as an actor dried and other actor rambled with mounting fear.

Then I learned to do box office, and then costume design – new purposes for the file: sheets of measurements, names, costumes.



## John Beglin

### Philippine Theatre UK

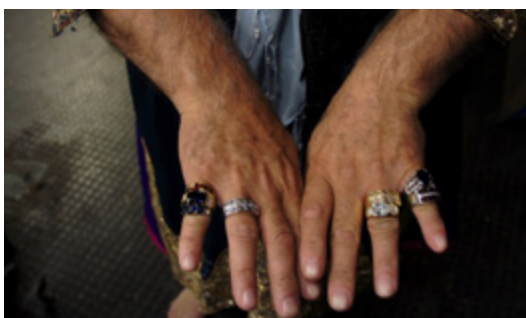
I first started sewing when I was at secondary school. I was the only boy in the class to do it. I got called a sissy and I didn't care. Because I learned something all the other boys didn't learn. I learned to do backstitch, I learned to do chain stitch, I learned to do draw stitch. I learned to knit. I learned an array of stitches – all of this stuff – and all these boys used to call me was a sissy. But guess what came out of it in the end? Me. Because no w, it helps me to all sorts of stuff.

It was something different, and it was something to do with who I am. But at that time, being who you were, I couldn't. I wanted to learn these things, so that in my long-term life, it would come in useful.

So I learnt to do blanket stitch, I learned to darn my socks. I bought a darning dolly and I fixed the holes in my socks.

This costume, two thirds of it I made myself. This costume is 100% me. I made 36 gowns for the previous show, for all the cast members and most of the costumes they wore, I either found from charity shops and altered to fit, or I made them from nothing.

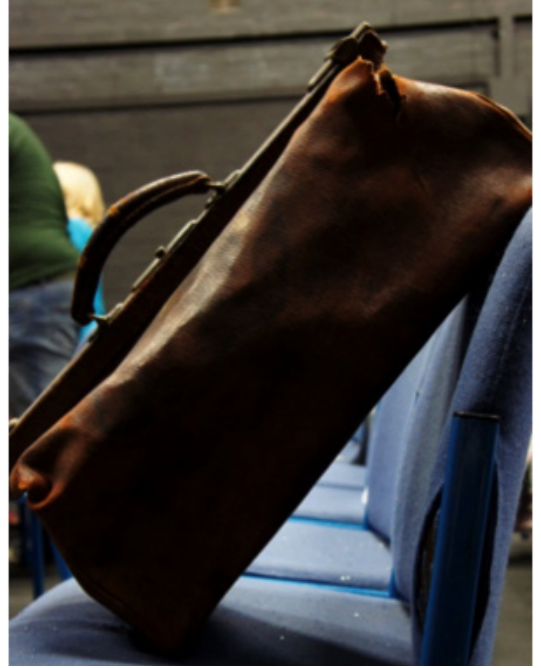
This theatre, it's given me a lease of life I didn't know I had inside me. I love it to bits. When Ramon asked me to do the costumes, I took it on with an open mind and an open heart. And I've now become the costumier of the company. And I won't do anything else – I act as well, of course. But behind the scenes, I do the costumes. So, for the last play, *Ibong Adarna*, *The Enchanted Bird*, I managed to acquire 12 or 14 gowns which either fitted or didn't fit. And if they fitted, fine. If they didn't fit, I would alter them to fit. It was a task, a serious task.



## Harriet Parsonage

### The Questors Theatre, Ealing, London

This bag was inherited from my father who died in 2002. He came from a long line of medical men, although not a doctor himself. I cannot say with confidence how many generations it goes back, but certainly it belonged to my paternal grandfather. It has travelled widely, including the Far East and Africa. I have always been aware of its existence but it was only when it passed to me 14 years ago, by which time I was an established member of Questors. Then its theatrical potential became apparent. It has graced Questors stages in both playing spaces many times, including *Hedda Gabler*, *Tis Pity She's a Whore*, *Great Expectations*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *Charley's Aunt*, *Travesties*, *Bloody Poetry* (by Howard Brenton). It has been in numerous plays varying from 1600-early 1900s, although it probably actually dates from the last part of the 19th century. I am delighted it has come into its own after decades of disuse. It would originally have been used as a doctors' bag – at least that is what I have always been given to understand. It is probably the only tangible reminder left of my paternal family's distinguished medical pedigree. One of my 19th century forebears has a ward named after him in a major London teaching hospital. It has of course seen better days as a cursory inspection will reveal. I suspect it will expire in the service of Questors. It is a question of whether it or I go first.



## Anne Gilmour

I'm a real newbie, I only joined in 1983.

I started in wardrobe, and although I've done quite a lot since, I still sort of fall back in wardrobe.

My object is a dress, which was made for a production of the Rivals, which we took down to the Minack Theatre in Cornwall. The book below is a pattern book, which is costumes of the period, from which you can actually make original dresses. And that is one, from page 60, I think it is.

I wanted to create the journey of this dress. This was the journey:

- Buying the fabric in Oxford Street, buying the pattern book from Foyles.
- Going to McCullough and Wallace, buying bits of beading and the decoration that goes on it.
- Bringing it all together in the Questors Wardrobe.
- Then being performed on the Questors stage – we have a thrust stage here, the Minack Theatre stage is made up of 6-sided stone, so we created that here at Questors.
- Taking it down the Minack, where there's a bit of sea and air at the back.
- Then it comes back into the Questors wardrobe, and then gets let out to other groups, carrying the story on.

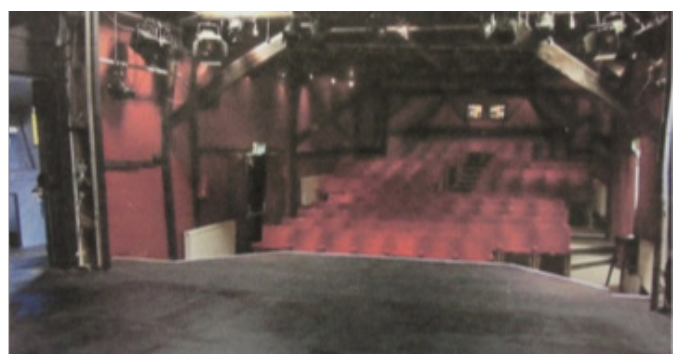
## Robert Gill Barn Theatre

It's a nail. And it's from the theatre. It was in the roof of the theatre when we had to modify the theatre fairly recently. The theatre we have is a barn. It was built as a barn, it was on a farm. In an area which eventually has become Welwyn Garden City.

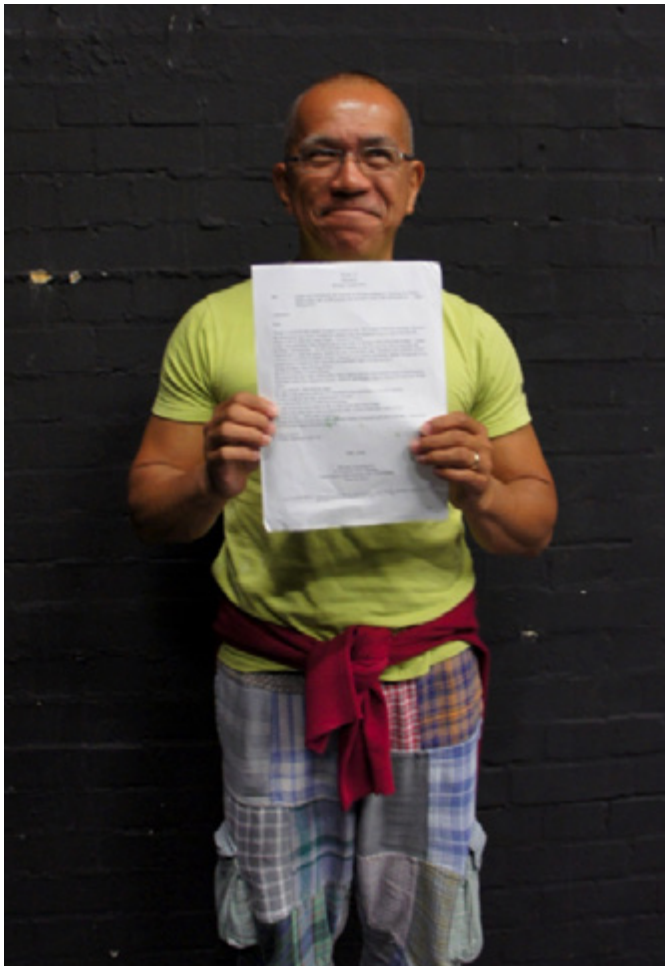
The history of the Barn Theatre is really all about the history of the Garden City. The garden city was created in the first place, in 1920. The barn had been there, since... well, the age of the wood is dated at 1598. So there's been something in that area, in that space since that time. But in 1920 the whole area was bought by a guy called Ebenezer Howard, who then started to build a New Town – a garden city. A second garden city, as opposed to Letchworth, which was the first. When the garden city was being built, the whole barn was converted into a dairy, so it housed cows and it housed milk processing facilities. But in 1932, the local people – by then, the population had then grown, to such an extent that they wanted something to do. They wanted to expand and grow their interests. There was a lot of interest in amateur dramatics. May have been a thing of the 20s? That's what people did? There is no television as such, or radio as such. Entertainment was very much home-produced. Amateur dramatics, I assume, became a very dominant expression or outlet for people to get involved in. So in 1932, it opened as a theatre, as least half the building did. They started to put shows on – 3 or 4 a year. It was like that until the war. In the war, it was taken over by the army. So the inside was gutted – the stage was removed completely. In 1946, it reopened. People had reworked the theatre back into a theatre again. Since then, it's grown. The theatre now occupies the whole of the building, all signs of the dairy have gone – they all went just before the war. Instead of being in the middle of a field, which it was, it's now in the middle of a housing estate.

We do 10 shows a year. It's now a theatre which has 600 members, we do 10 shows a year. It has all the facilities you'd expect in a theatre, admittedly in a quirky-looking barn. It's neat and compact in many ways, it doesn't have facilities you would expect to see in a modern theatre. But it's a thriving theatre and the public come to see all the shows that we put on. So it's done pretty well.

The one thing that has changed, though, is that we suffer a lot from finding people to do things. It's all voluntary, there's no paid staff in the building, except for the bar – we have to pay bar staff. But everything else is voluntary. So fixing the roof in of an old barn, that can be a challenge. Where we are today, is that most of the people who do the work, look after the place, are retired. It's like they retire and think 'oh, what am I going to do?' Go and work at the Barn. Actors come and go, but we have a hard core of largely retired people who keep the place going, physically look over the maintenance of the place. They manage the wardrobe, we have a very extensive wardrobe, things like that. Even the props people are older people. The younger people, by and large, all they ever do is come and act. People worry about the future. I'm optimistic that as we old folk get older, as people get older, they'll eventually reach their retirement point. They'll think 'oh, I know, I'll go and do something at the Barn.' If not, the Barn will eventually come to an end, but I don't think that will happen.







## Ramon Castellanes Teñoso

### Philippine Theatre UK

I brought a torn page from the play I've written, called Migrants. This is actually the last page, the finale.

It brings me lots of memories because Migrants is to be restaged this year in November and this copy has been revised and edited several times... or shall we say updated?

So the play is now on its 7th Edition. I thought a torn page of it would be right. I am the founder of PTUK. We started on September 8th of 2002. We've done 16 original plays – I've written 16 plays now – and all of them have been produced by PTUK.

The theatre itself was conceived with a few friends, a long time ago. Our mission and vision is to create a platform for people who have never done theatre, especially people who just have fun and want to experience the magic of theatre.

We have dropped the word 'amateur'. Because we always raise the standards of our productions. Also, PTUK is the only Philippine theatre group in all of Europe, and we're really happy and proud of that achievement.

We are very informal at PTUK. We don't have hang-ups. We're not so concerned about titles. One of the advantages of our community theatre is we always have fun. We always try to respect each other's opinion and cultivate creativity in everything we do.

## Maggie Turner

### The Questors Theatre, Ealing, London

I am a member of the Questors Theatre and have been so since 1964.

I am going to tell a story of comedy.

What unites comedy and tragedy of course, is passion.

What unites all of us here today is passion.

This is what I have made from my object. My object is a little flower.

My object and I were first connected in 1972 when we (because we were raising money to build the foyer) decided we were going to use the connections we had with an author called Michael Greene. He wrote a book called *The Art of Coarse Acting*. A number of plays came out of that – *The Play that Goes Wrong* which is on in the West End at the moment had its roots here, in that one of the writers of that play was in our youth theatre and learned all he knew about coarse acting from Michael Greene's book.

We wrote other coarse plays – including one called *The Cherry Sisters* which is a pastiche of things going wrong in Chekhov. This is one of my props for that. This also represents the queues round the block we had when we took it to Edinburgh Festival. That production actually transferred to the West End, it went to the Shaftesbury Theatre.

And of course, here is the Questors logo, because without the passion, the string that holds these together, 51 years later, I probably still wouldn't be here a couple of times a week.





## Lisa Fletcher

### TOADS, Torbay

I brought massive bloomers today.

I was in *Wind in the Willows* as the barge lady and every night would hand my 'smalls' (which were small!) to Toady. Every night, on I went to sing my solo, Toady and the Horse would ping the smalls at each other, which sometimes put me off. To get my own back, I decided to fill my bag of smalls with a pair of bigs!

The bloomers came out, Toady gave me a look (he was back to audience) of 'What the \*&!\*%?' so instead of putting him off, I was the one who corpsed!

This has taught me never to play tricks on anyone during a performance again, because it can backfire.

The whole production was something I was very proud of, so it's a special memory of a special time.

## Chris Sydenham

### The Questors Theatre, Ealing, London

I have been here from the late 1970s, almost all backstage. This object is an integral part of work backstage. For anyone who is familiar working with sets that are made up of flats... this cleat, the #6 Cleat, is crucial. Old fashioned flats used to be held together with cords up the back – lacing them together. The key thing about that was that you could also unlace them very quickly and do relatively quick scene changes.

This one has a sticky-out-bit at the back, so you had to flick the cord over the top. It was an art form. Those of us standing behind the flats for a quick scene change could easily undo it, but then putting the bloody thing back together was another thing.

A skill, which I have to say, is unrecognized.



## Bryony Wilman

### St Michaels Players, Chiswick

I'm Bryony from St Michaels Players in Chiswick, which celebrating its 65th anniversary this year.

My object is the wig I bought for my first major part I had, which I got because the person who was meant to be doing it was going to be away too much, and I was reading in for them, and the director said, 'I'm not having it, will you do it?'

Yes.

So I thought, I need something a little bit more glamorous.

So I bought the wig.

It was on the strength of that play, I got a bigger part with Theatre West Fore. And I was away.

So this wig has been worn a number of times by me... it has influenced my own hair colour over the years.

It was actually worn by a man in Harlequinade. And a lot of laughs it got him, didn't it?



## Victoria Gigante

PTUK

What I brought here is these sketches: Maurice knows all about these. He sketched these and turned them over to me.

Actually, first, I just wanted to dance - as a choreographer. But later they were looking for a backstage manager, so they offered me this job. I don't want the big responsibilities, so I was really scared at first. But they really pushed me, said 'you can do this' so I accepted.

This is the sketch of my first theatre show I did - *From Heaven with Love*, which we did at Chelsea Theatre. It's from scene 1 to scene 14. So... I was, you know, really in this backstage thing.

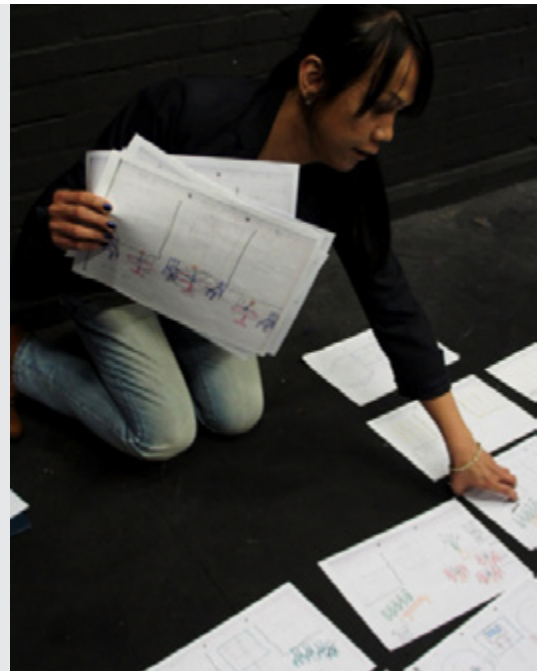
Organise things.

Sometimes he scolds me.

Do this, do this, just to be organised.

Luckily, I managed it and made it. And now, since 2013, I was still the backstage manager and for this next show, I will do a bit of backstage manager again - I'm really happy to do it.

I found myself a job.



## Maurice Newbery

PTUK

My name's Maurice. I have the very grand title of Managing Director of Philippine Theatre UK, which as anyone who is in management knows, means I'm the gopher. I'm everybody's dogsbody. It really started back in 2002, with myself and Ramon. Ramon is our in-house playwright, and we only do his plays.

As Philippine Theatre, we started with his 3rd or 4th play he'd written - a play called *Chained*.

For which, this is my object.

It reminds me of how we started.

In as much as we had absolutely no idea what to do about the theatre.

We had a group of people who'd gotten together. Ramon was the only one who knew anything about theatre whatsoever. The rest of us were just happy bystanders. We had about 20 people turn up to the first meeting, which was about 15 more than we were expecting.

This gentleman here became our mascot - our motif - for that particular play *Chained*.

It became 'who can do lighting' 'who can do props'. I went and physically bought curtains and we put them into a church hall, made it into a theatre with all the seating.

That's how we started back in 2002, with a lot of enthusiasm, very little talent... and we've come to where we are today, now 15 plays in. It reminds me of the beginnings.

## Dotti Lawson

### The Questors Theatre, Ealing, London

I'm currently sorting out my garage and finding all sorts of exciting things that I'd forgotten about. I honestly don't know how old this is. I wrote a truncated version of *The Wizard of Oz* when I was teaching, for 6 and 7 year olds. My wicked witch was not as tall as this broom.

I've been in Verdi's *Macbeth* in which there are a group of witches, and I was in a rather interesting production where we had some traditional witches and some wacky.

I was a traditional witch.

And I also had it in a panto when I was a witch. I don't think it's that old, it's not come from my childhood or anything. It might have just appeared, I might have borrowed it, got it given, the first time I remember it was these children doing *Wizard of Oz*.



## Alvi Camanzo

### PTUK

The object I have with me is a pin.

It commemorates the victims of the Typhoon Haiyan which struck the Philippines in 2013.

The colour represents the flag of the Philippines, the blue, red, and yellow, and the candle represents hope.

This pin was designed by the PTUK.

From that time on, I was part of the group.

It touches me – a friend of mine was a victim of Typhoon Haiyan.

When you are involved in this work, you don't only get to do the things that you like, but you hope.

And you make people happy.

## Tina Harris

### The Questors Theatre, Ealing, London

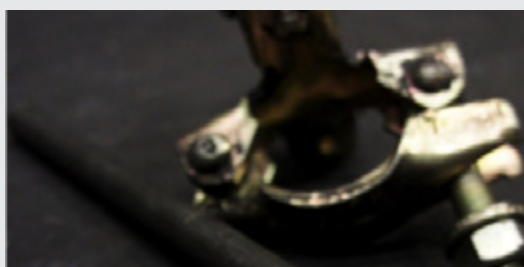
I'm part of the Questors Theatre and have been so for an embarrassing number of years. I brought this to show that whilst there are those of us which are completely non-artistic and creative, we do support in every sense.

One of the other things this illustrates quite well is that we are the chief scaffolders, for any set in this theatre.

The interesting thing is the inclusiveness.

It's interesting that youngsters who come to help seem to be completely comfortable taking direction on scaffolding things from 60+ women, which is an age, rather than a number.

And we continue to do these things – which is a context which I don't think would happen anywhere else.



## Tony Gibbs

### Chief Executive of NODA (National Operatic and Dramatic Association)

This is a programme. It's a programme for a production of Cinderella. You have to bear in mind, printed on paper – a bit like a magazine. But in this case, the programme is actually the box itself. It's a replica of a shoebox. Inside, it's full of Cinderella-themed paraphernalia. It meant that the programme did a number of things. It helped create opportunities for local businesses. It meant the audience were completely surprised when they asked for a programme. There are some white chocolate mice in there and all the rest of it. I'm thinking about memories. A memory of something can also be innovative. It's not just about looking back, it's about looking forward.



## Sabine Hofmann

### Worcester area

This is a pair of socks, with holes in the heels. The holes are in the heels because if you put them on over a pair of court shoes, they look like little ankle boots.

If you can imagine that the foot goes through the hole, they really do look genuine. I wore them in *Bittersweet* and I wore them in *Hello Dolly*, and they're there, in case I ever need them again. I had to put some buttons on them, so I safety-pinned them, so they're easily removed in case I ever need them again.

You have to come up with inventive solutions, because you can't afford it otherwise – you tell me a company that isn't struggling for resources.

## John Davey

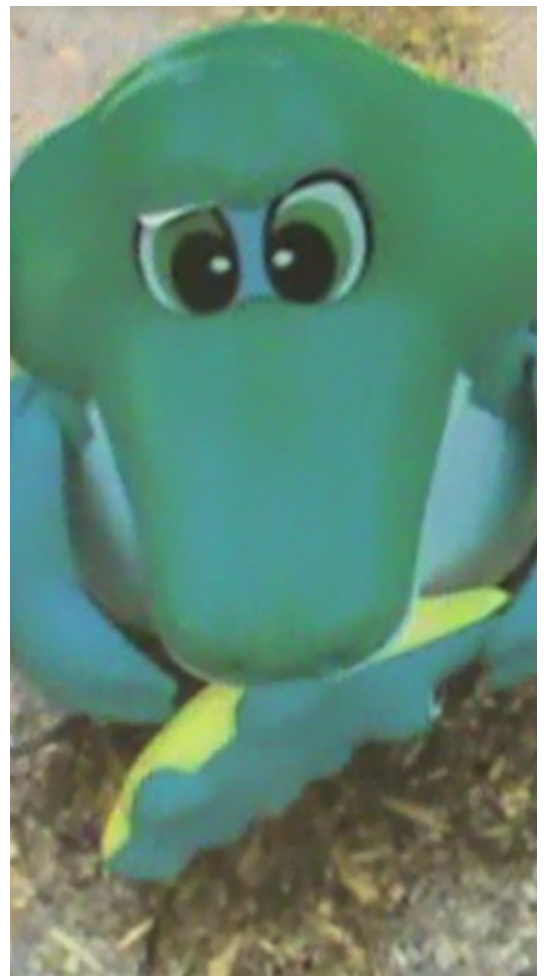
### The Questors Theatre, Ealing, London

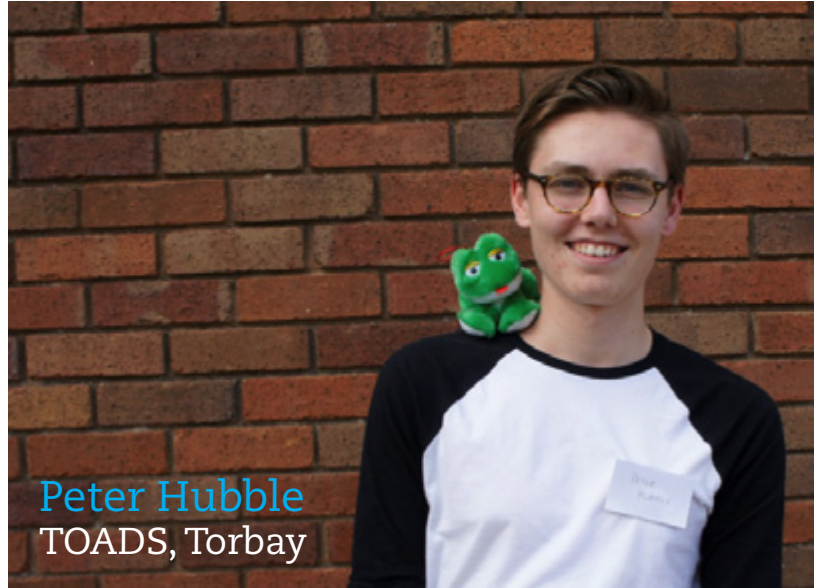
I wrote a Coarse Acting play which was called *The Glass Ménage A Trois*, which was reasonably closely based on the *Glass Menagerie*, rather than generic as they often are. Now coarse acting pieces need to have a core running joke, like the stuck door, or the legs coming off the table. The central running joke from this is that there is the props girl from hell who is brought in at the last minute, and everything she touches is completely wrong.

When the girl takes the cloth off the *Glass Menagerie*, it's full of animals like this. So when you picked them up, they squeaked. Or made other sounds. But this one is responsible for the biggest laugh I've ever had in anything I've ever done. As the two of them were in this very sentimental scene, picking up these terrible things. There wasn't a single glass item in the glass menagerie. So one of them got the body and one got the pull-out string. So between the two of them, they managed to energize his little engine. So when you put him down on the floor, he'd run around.

But he did a classic on one occasion, which was to run right around and then, as he ran out of energy, he poised on the edge of the stage and just tipped off. And particularly nice for me was that my daughter, at the time was 7, and she provided all the animals for it. Including a *My Little Pony* with a horn for the unicorn. She's got a programme credit.

But also, the coarse acting thing I find very interesting because there's the tension between doing things really well, very precise, very sincere... but doing something which is recognized as being 'ranked bad'. Which is kind of the tightrope that amateur theatre has had to walk for quite a long time. People who really believe in the fact that they can be – and are – very very good, fighting against the background of people who just think, 'well, it's just am-dram'.





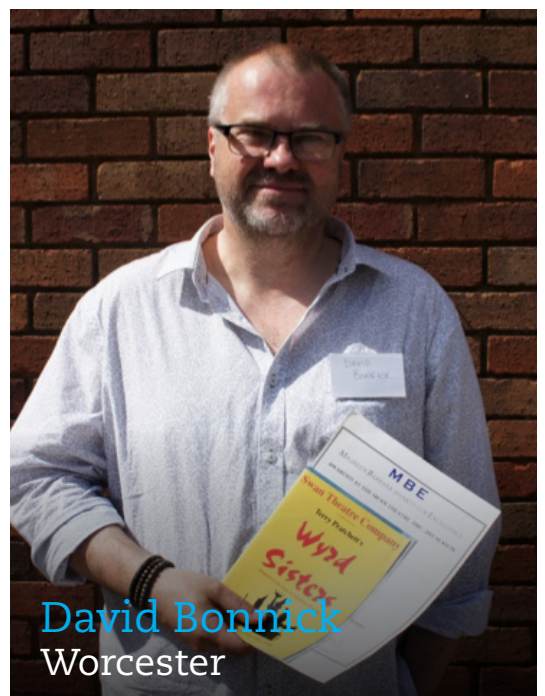
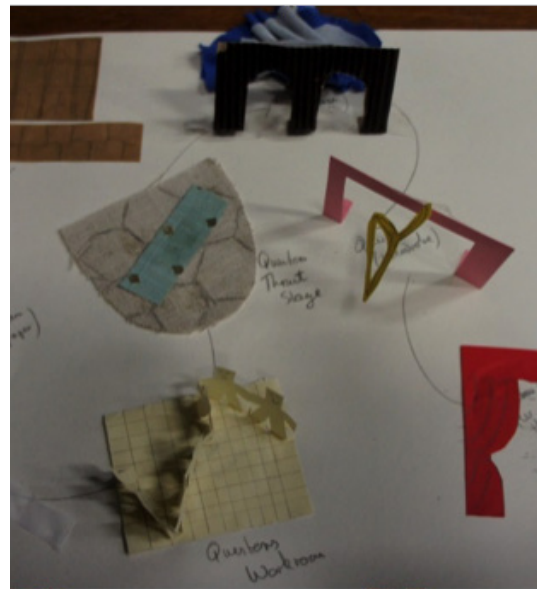
Peter Hubble  
TOADS, Torbay



Alex Wrightson  
Acting Out, Birmingham



Sally Metcalf  
Swan Theatre Amateur  
Company, Worcester



David Bonnick  
Worcester

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