

JANUARY 2021

Latest News

The committee wishes you a happy and more importantly a safe New Year. With the elevation of Herefordshire into tier 3 it is even more important that we do not lower our guard against the virus. The good news, of course, is that the two vaccines are being rolled out in the coming months with a possibility of seeing a return to some sort of normality by the Spring and the re-opening of the theatre. With this in mind, the cast of The Ladykillers have been canvassed and are keen to restart rehearsals with a view to reopening the production in May. The set is still on stage.

I hope you have been able to listen to the audio recordings of Panther Town and Lady Windermere's Fan which were sent out in November and December. If not, here is the link to David Pollard's podcast:

www.podomatic.com/podcasts/handtomouth



The Zoom Phoenix Xmas party on Friday 18th December was well supported. Congratulations to Claire and Neil Price with a winning score of 38 out of 54 points in the quiz.

The Singers performed a carol concert outside the theatre the following day.

Thanks must go to Alan Smith, our building manager, for keeping an eye on the theatre whilst it is closed. His diligence is much appreciated by the committee.

There are still a few members who have not renewed their subscriptions. Please contact Catriona (Catrionapearson@aol.com) our membership secretary, if you wish to continue being a member.

Sadly I have to report the passing of Jan Sheldon just before Xmas. She was a lovely lady and an incredibly gifted painter and our sets have had the benefit of her artistry over many years. I still marvel how with a few brush strokes she could create a back scene in minutes. We will miss her. There are two articles in the Newsletter below.

Graham Russell (Newsletter Editor)

Production Co-ordinator's Column

[‘The Ladykillers’](#)

Our next production, when the theatre reopens, will be ‘The Ladykillers’ by Graham Linehan, directed by Tom Lee-Hynes. The set remains in place and the cast and crew are keen to get back to perform to our audiences. We are hoping to put it on at the end of May 2021. Renee Field has kindly agreed to move ‘The Weekend’ to a later date.

[Phoenix Theatre Singers](#)

A group of the Singers came together on the Saturday before Christmas to sing Christmas songs and carols in front of the theatre. Mary Brigg played the keyboard and we sang. We were socially distanced and very much enjoyed seeing each other after so long. Father Christmas and two elves joined us.

[‘Oranges and Ink’ by Claire Louise Amias](#)

David Pollard was to have directed this play as a Phoenix Theatre production at the theatre in July 2021. Sadly, David and Alex are moving to Suffolk in the New Year, so this production has been cancelled.

[‘School for Scandal’ by Sheridan](#)

David Pollard is directing ‘School for Scandal’ by Sheridan as an audio production which will be sent out to members via his Hand to Mouth Sound Theatre on the podmatic website. Rehearsals have been temporarily halted as Gloucestershire has moved into tier 4. The cast include Suzanne Hill, Rosie Walker, Jacky Bedford, Charlotte Bull, Steve Banner, Alan Chacon, Nathan Cole, Graham Bull, Les Davis, Tom Lee-Hynes, Brian Jackson and David Pollard. Michelle Cooper will take over as director should David move house before the recording has been completed.

[Phoenix Youth Theatre](#)

It is hoped that the Youth Group will restart after Easter 2021 with a new facilitator from the Courtyard Theatre in Hereford, as Ellen Dorsett is leaving as she is expecting a baby. We wish her well.

[Herefordshire County Drama Festival 2021](#)

The Phoenix Theatre will not be entering the HCDF in 2021. The festival will take place at the Market Theatre, Ledbury from 27, 28, 29 May 2021. Note change of dates.

[‘The Weekend’ by Michael Palin](#)

This comedy was to be our May production in 2020. Directed by Renee Field. It will now take place either in September 2021 or May 2022.

[Our Star Theatre Company’s production of ‘Death at Sea’](#)

This production will now take place on 7 and 8 May 2021.

[Our Star Theatre Company’s production of ‘The Great Gatsby’ by F. Scott Fitzgerald](#)

This production will take place from 16 to 18 September 2021.

[Venice Revisited](#)

This musical will now take place in March 2022. More information when available.

Suzanne Hill

Jan Sheldon

I first met Jan in the late 1970s when we were both members of The Goodrich Arts Society, an amateur drama group based in Goodrich. Jan was the set designer and set painter. She was incredibly skilled and could transform a set.

Jan was married to Alan, who was headmaster of Goodrich Primary School. In 1980, Jan, Alan, their daughter, Pip, and twin sons, Robert and Duncan, took part in Dicken's 'Xmas Carol' at Goodrich. In 1983, daughter Pip, played Sharon, in 'Outside Edge'.



It was in 1993 when Jan was persuaded to tread the boards, when we put on 'Thriller of the Year' by Glyn Jones. Jan played the secretary to an author. Jan took part in 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland' in 1994, when she also designed and painted the set and sewed costumes. I was the caterpillar and Jan made me an amazing costume out of a sleeping bag, most inventive! Jan played a suffragette in 'The Militants' in 1995 and Agatha, the housekeeper, in 'Tomb with a View' in the same year. In 1997 Jan was excellent as an amateur sleuth in 'Murder Deferred' by Stuart Ready. In 2000 she appeared in 'Dead Guilty' by Richard Harris and 'House on the Cliff' in 2002 (above right). Note the wood panelling. All Jan's work!

Jan was involved with many productions at Goodrich, mostly backstage as SM or costume or, in the most part, set design and painting. I remember how impressed I was on entering the hall after Jan had transformed a set from bare flats into a three dimensional library containing wooden shelving and books, just with the swish of her very talented brush.

Jan came to help us at the Phoenix Theatre when we needed a talented set painter to paint garden scenes outside french windows on our sets. On looking in my scrapbooks, I find that the first time Jan was mentioned as set painter was for 'She Stoops to Conquer' in 2012. She was in the credits as scenic artist for 'Canterbury Tales' in 2014, 'Anastasia' in 2016, 'All Things Considered' in 2017, 'And Then There Were None' in 2019 and finally, for 'The Ladykillers' in 2020.

A lovely lady. She will be missed.

Suzanne Hill

Jan Sheldon

It was sometime in the mid-nineties when I first met Jan at Goodrich Arts Society (GAS) and discovered what a talented scenic artist Jan was. She painted many scenes and scenic effects for me over the years.

But it was the GAS 'Alice in Wonderland' when I discovered her mischievous side. The production was set in Victorian picture-book costume and the set called for a number of scene changes achieved by changing the (lightweight) flats, rather like turning the pages of a picture book. So arriving to see how Jan was progressing I peered at a flat she was painting and asked, 'What is that?' There were two discreet male figures painted on. Jan replied in all seriousness, 'Its my two boys.' I looked at her. 'But they're on surfboards!' Jan nodded. 'It's their favourite sport.' My protest was futile, in fact it was half-hearted. Jan appeared quite serious (but I could see the twinkle). 'OK,' I said and so 'Alice in Wonderland' set in Victorian England went ahead with two surfboarders. I don't think the cast noticed, or if they did, they didn't seem to mind.

The high point of my association with Jan came a few years later. Jan had a lovely speaking voice (I can hear her now as I write) and in 1998 I was preparing a production of 'A Man for All Seasons' in St Mary's church in Ross. I was going to play Sir Thomas More and, in the film Sir Thomas's wife had been played by the wonderful Wendy Hiller. And so I asked Jan to take on the role. She was lovely to work opposite and a few weeks later, when BBC's 'Songs of Praise' were planning to broadcast a programme from the town the researchers were told of our recent production in the church. The upshot was Jan and I donned our costumes and were filmed in St Mary's performing a short scene together from the play. It was broadcast some months later, and is a memory I treasure. Jan Sheldon was a lovely talented lady, someone you could call upon in need and who responded to my varied theatrical requests always with willingness and good humour. I was privileged to call her "my friend".

Brian Jackson



Jan also painted the wood panelling for the set of "Theft" in 2008, a joint GAS and Phoenix Theatre production. She created the panelling by drawing chalk and charcoal lines to create the highlights and shadows.

Graham Russell