

## **High Wych History - 19 - treading the boards**

One of the nicest things a community like ours can engage in is an evening of song and dance. It is great to discover what talents lurk behind the everyday façade we put on for one another. Since 1923 we have had our village hall, aka High Wych Memorial Hall to help us put on those shows.

The first example I found of such activity dates from January 1929 when the Women's Institute put on their annual tea and entertainment. To quote an article from the H&E Observer: the High Wych Band played and several people sang whilst Mrs W. Camp accompanied them on the piano. Two plays were performed: "the Little Scamp Next Door" and "Second Thoughts". The first of those starred four Camp daughters and their mother, the second featured Miss K Hart, Mr A.T. Hart and Miss Young. A rendition of Auld Lang Syne topped it all off.

The next examples I know of are the activities of the High Wych Youth Fellowship later also known as the High Wych Gang. These took place between 1959 and 1963. Participants were Trevor and Sandra Helmer, brothers Bob and John Springham, brother and sister Graham and Rosemary Springham (not all of them related !!) and many others. Mr E.S. Oakley produced, occasionally also helped by Trevor Helmer. There was a skiffle group, and performances of pantomimes such as Cinderella, Dick Whittington and Alladin.

A performance in October 1973 at the Hall of Stanley Houghton's "The Dear Departed" for an audience of our "Silver Lining Club" was the first of the High Wych Variety Group. For four years this group of dedicated young performers took to the stage not just in High Wych itself but also in many other places locally. They even made it onto local radio. Whilst Simon Hibbs and Mike Harding were the leading lights there were a number of others: Andrew and David Collins, Simon and Peter Hibbs, William Chapman, David Dixon, Philippa Stringer and Jane Wagland. Graham Beeby often produced these performances. A number of ambitious projects were undertaken: G.B. Shaw's "Passion Poison and Petrification", Taylor and Cussons's "Hiss the Villain" and "George" by Derek Hickman. Music Hall and short sketches completed the repertoire.

Some four years later, in 1981, the group reformed and got ready for two more successful "tours" Seven original members were joined by a number of newcomers. "Red Spy at Night" was the mainstay of the programme in 1982 whilst in 1983 it was "This Desirable Cottage" Roger Burrige produced and directed. It was that last show which I watched myself and noticed a particularly loud check high seventies jacket worn by a rather seedy member of the cast (to accentuate his seediness!). Only a few months previously we'd donated it to the church jumble sale! Toni Howarth too has good memories of that show: "Lynn Shearman forced me to sing a song which rather embarrassed me as I consider myself tone deaf. Lynn was a hard task master, but we're still friends"

Sadly, no productions of the calibre undertaken by the High Wych Variety Group have been seen since. There were however a number of musical evenings. I particularly remember John Andrreotti and his band performing in the nineties. There is of course no reason why musical times should not return to High Wych Memorial Hall. The facilities are excellent! It would be fun.

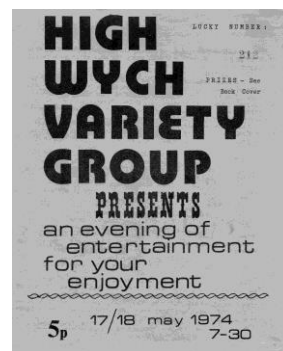
Thanks this time go to Michael Harding, Toni Howarth, Lynn Shearman, Bob Springham, the Herts and Essex Observer and the people at HALS, aka County Archives. Previous articles from this series (many in extended versions) can be downloaded from the Parish Council website at <http://www.highwychandallensgreen.co.uk/8.html> Meanwhile, the High Wych History Project still needs your contributions, your memories, stories and photographs. Get in touch!! Contact me at: [theo@vandebilt.co.uk](mailto:theo@vandebilt.co.uk) or phone me at 01279 725468



1956 hw skiffle group – note the conductor !!



1961 – The cast of Dick Whittington



Souvenir programmes from 1974 and 1983



1962 The cast of Alladin.



The High Wych Variety Group in 1983



1963 the "autumn collection" review