

Woolpit Drama Club – Performance History

Woolpit Drama Club was formed in 1997 by David Cordon MBE and Sheila Serjeant from a nucleus of Woolpit Festival members to provide good quality theatre in the community. The founders wanted to provide a real social club as well as a dramatic one.

Even before Woolpit Drama Club was set up, there were lots of plays put on which have been almost forgotten.

One of the most memorable was a version of the Wakefield Mystery Plays, performed at the church in Woolpit in the mid 1980's. Cast included Eileen Jones, Ken Bromage, David Hughes (God), Joyce Coleman (Mary) Ros Melvin, John Levantis and the Vicar at that time, Alan Taylor. It was directed by David Cordon.

Sheila Serjeant did something based on *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* [?]

Woolpit Drama Club's founders aimed to provide fully equipped theatre facilities at Woolpit Village Hall. The formation of this group and the high standard of the productions they performed were instrumental in getting the Arts Council Lottery Fund to come on board and fund the project. The Village Hall now has fully functioning theatre facilities to professional standards.

Performing many different styles and types of theatre ranging from Pantomime through to serious drama, the club has since grown and goes from strength to strength with very ambitious productions being mounted.

Although at first members were only drawn from Woolpit, the catchment area has now spread through west Suffolk, with people from nearby villages and towns joining the group.

EARLY DAYS

Open Air Shakespeare – A Midsummer Night's Dream [1997?]

First ever WDC production, A Midsummer Night's Dream, in Simon Dean's garden. We have come a long way since those early days!

Music Hall Night 1998:

There was no proper stage and no backstage facilities in the theatre and, for this production, the company were onstage the whole time. We used to hire wooden boxes to form a stage at the end of the hall and we had hay bales to sit on between numbers. The Dressing Room was the balcony above the village hall entrance. We had to wait until the audience was in and the doors closed, then race down the stairs, along the alley at the back of the hall to the fire exit where someone would be waiting to let us in and close the door. Then you couldn't go back to the dressing room until the interval.

Two one-act plays: Fumed Oak by Noel Coward and Costa del Packet, May 15 1999:

An Evening with Noel Coward, November 1999: A selection of songs, sketches and scenes from plays alongside a short personal history of 'the Master' using his own words.

Oh! What A Lovely War, November 2000:

We put on this ambitious production with no proper staging and no facilities. When you look at the video, it is striking to see how calm the empty stage looks between scenes, while chaos was taking place behind the white canvas hangings (to represent the seaside pierrots' tent) as everyone struggled to find props and make costume changes!

Dick Whittington [2001? 2002?] This was our first shot at a pantomime – a short one, directed by Debbie Jones. Sheila Serjeant played Dick Whittington's cat.

Followed by: **Last Tango in Woolpit [year?]** - about a drama club trying to put on a panto!

Wakefield Mystery Plays [2002]: Performed at the churches in Woolpit and Rattlesden. This time it was directed by Gill Terrible. *This was not a WDC production but featured many of our actors, including John Levantis as Adam and Dave and Pat Ward. The Devil was played convincingly by Richard Stainer, with Rice Krispies stuck on his face to simulate scaly skin.*

Playhouse Creatures, 2002: This was one of our finest hours. A play about the first actresses on the English stage – including a young Nell Gwynn.

Talking Heads: Alan Bennett Monologues [year?] Rehearsed readings upstairs in the Woolpit Institute. Playing Sandwiches – (David Messer) about a paedophile who gets caught and imprisoned and Bed Among the Lentils (Joyce Coleman) about the unhappy, alcoholic wife of a vicar who finds consolation in the arms of a young Asian shopkeeper.

Double Bill – two comedies [2003]:

We didn't have a stage at all; a carpet was laid out on the floor, with furniture to suggest a room. I think the audience was seated at small tables rather than in rows.

Courting Disaster by Margaret Wood Directed by Pat & Dave Ward. Val Mayhew and John Levantis, David Messer, Christine Ashdown and Debbie Jones. *Christine remembers wearing jodhpurs and having to whip John Levantis with a riding crop!*

Give the Clown his Supper (Colin Mason/Gayle Wade, Director David Cordon) *This was a comedy about a man and his wife who had been on a TV game show and not won anything. The man blamed his wife who had not been able to get a ball into the clown's mouth and was trying to re-enact the game at home with tennis balls and a colander strapped to his head.*

Shakespeare Revue [summer of year?] *The review was due to be performed in The Swan garden but adverse weather intervened and we ended up squashed into the Institute within touching distance of the audience.*

Scrooge, 2003: *Upstairs in the Woolpit Institute. Food was provided for the audience, I seem to remember. Maybe glass of wine and a mince pie?*

Cinderella or The Ball at the Hall, March 2004: The first production in the newly refurbished village hall. *The refurbishment introduced a proper raised stage, a lighting box upstairs with a control desk and, very importantly, a room which we could use as a dressing room backstage.*

Separate Tables, November 2004:

Brief Encounter, November 2005: *"The hall itself was decorated as part of the station, with railway staff (members of the cast) to take tickets and sell programmes and sound effects of a railway terminus [which] all added to the evocative nature of the play."*

Mixed Doubles May 2005: A selection of short plays and comic scenes based around couples and odd characters.

Aladdin, February 2005: Family pantomime

Woolpit Whiffs, March 2006: Billed as 'An Intimate Revue' – an evening of pure entertainment with music, songs, dance and sketches.

How The Other Half Loves, November 2006:

The Green Babes in Woolpit Wood February 2007: A family pantomime in the best traditional style, loosely based on the pantomime Babes in the Wood and the famous 12th century legend of The Green Children of Woolpit.

Outside Edge, November 2007: With undercurrents of lust, adultery and sexual deception, Richard Harris's cricketing comedy Outside Edge gives a new meaning to the phrase 'leg over wicket'.

Murder on the Nile by Agatha Christie, March 2008: Agatha Christie's stage version of her novel Death on the Nile.

A Man For All Seasons, November 2008: A truly great play about a man who stood up for the truth at the cost of his own life. If you have ever felt something was wrong, but you were afraid to say so, this play will inspire you."

Cinderella, February 2009: A revival of the pantomime written by Stanley Bates.

A Midsummer Night's Dream, November 2009: A modernised version with punk fairies in kilts.

The Killing of Sister George, March 2010:

Woolpit Drama Club on Tour, September 2010: A double bill of Two plays by Richard James, "White Lies" and "I Am Hamlet" performed at three different venues on a mini tour of Suffolk villages. Woolpit village hall, Stanton Church Rooms and Drinkstone church (following a fire in the village hall).

A Christmas Carol, December 2010: A new version of the popular tale, written and directed by Lesley Pearson.

It Runs in the Family, November 2011: A farce, requiring precise timing of entrances, exits and line delivery. One scene revolved around people precariously perched outside on a window ledge: a workable window and impressively realistic backdrop were created.

Rebecca, April 2011: A gripping evening's entertainment, with impressive characterisation, high drama and suspense.

Salad Days, May 2012: Some members of the audience had seen the original London performances and enjoyed ours!

Leaving Tommy, September 2012: WDC on tour again – this one-act play was followed by a 2-course supper in Woolpit village hall, then at St Botolph's bowls club, Rickinghall and Church Rooms, Stanton.

The Diary of Anne Frank, November 2012: A moving real-life story.

Calendar Girls, May 2013: "[I was] truly lost in a story of love, sorrow and sadness along with great happiness, shared by friends that were so well portrayed that it allowed me for a short time to become part of the Calendar Girls lives ... "

Double Bill, October 2013: A Double Bill of tragedy and comedy matched two plays as different as chalk and cheese: The Browning Version by Terence Rattigan and Red Peppers by Noel Coward.

When We Are Married by J B Priestley – 20, 21, and 22 February 2014: From the calm of the opening scene to the final camera flash of the happy photographic ending, this is a fast and furious farce of a comedy.

Alice's Adventures, July 2014: Outdoor performances in a selection of lovely garden venues: Woolpit 12 July, Walsham Le Willows 19 July and Thurston 20 July. Lewis Carroll's characters brought to life in an adaptation by Stanley Bates.

Oh! What A Lovely War, November 2014: This production marked the 100th anniversary of the start of World War I. £1 from every ticket sold was donated to the Royal British Legion Poppy Appeal. A cheque for £462 was presented to Woolpit's Poppy Appeal Organiser in May 2015.

Black Comedy, May 2015: A hilarious one-act farce which saw the cast stumbling around in a black-out. The stage lights are on, but for the characters in this ingenious play, a power cut has turned out the lights in their flat. It is a very clever concept, and a challenge for any actor.

Aladdin, December 2015: A family pantomime written and directed by Lesley Pearson. We gained ten new members and welcomed back two child actors who were involved with our production of A Christmas Carol. Good news for the club and, hopefully, for all the people concerned.
"Aladdin was great and we really enjoyed it; a first class performance from very professional amateurs. Woolpit Drama Club - a big thank you for the brilliant entertainment."

The Shakespeare Revue, April 2016: A sparkling cabaret of songs and sketches Inspired by The Bard, with material from many contributors, including Victoria Wood, Stephen Fry, Cole Porter, Alan Bennett, Stephen Sondheim.
"What a sensational evening! Thank you. The work that must have gone into it, but when you have a happy team it pays off - and it did last night - brilliantly!"

Alice's Adventures, August 2016: A charming tale, combining vignettes and characters from two Lewis Carroll books. A reprise of the open air, promenade performance of 2014, in different venues, where spectators could bring a picnic.

See How They Run, November 2016: A hugely funny period farce is set during World War II. A succession of misunderstandings, mistaken identity and mishaps beset a well-meaning vicar and his glamorous wife, a former actress. Two vicars, a Bishop, a British soldier and an escaped German prisoner, a cheeky maid and a resentful lady churchwarden swerve through the plot at breakneck speed, heading for a catastrophic climactic collision!

Staying the Course, March 2017: A new play by local playwright and actor Richard Stainer, charting the hilarious mishaps and misunderstandings unleashed among four married couples who embark on an amateur marriage guidance course.

Agnes of God, November 2017: This powerful and electrifying drama tells the story of a novice nun, Sister Agnes, who gives birth but insists that the child was the result of a virgin conception. A court-appointed psychiatrist and the Mother Superior of the convent clash during the resulting investigation.

Comedy Tonight, April 2018: A musical revue, offering an evening of frivolous entertainment! Songs from the shows were interspersed with comic sketches, drawing on classic favourites from Joyce Grenfell, Ronnie Barker and Victoria Wood, among others, mixed with more topical, satirical skits by Stanley Bates.

The 'Allo 'Allo inspired café/dining experience, July 2019

Held at The Bull Woolpit. Diners were treated to sketches, songs and a quiz inspired by the classic TV series.

Fright and Frivolity, November 2019

Two spooky nights of jumps and frights, with thrills and laughter at comedy bites.

COVID pandemic

The Wind in the Willows, July 2022

An outdoor promenade performance for all the family. Spectators were invited to bring a picnic.

Duets, by Peter Quilter, November 2022

Four one-act plays about couples, in different relationships, showing just why the grass is never greener on the other side of the love nest.

Ladies Day by Amanda Whittington, March 30, 31 and April 1 2023

A funny and touching tale about four Hull lasses who take a day off from work at the fish packing factory to go to Royal Ascot in the year the meeting was held at York racecourse.

Entertaining Angels, by Richard Everett, November 2023

A bitter-sweet comedy set in a quintessentially English vicarage. Clergy wife Grace has spent a lifetime conforming to the role. Now the ghost of her late husband Bardolph roams the vicarage garden.

Night at the Musicals, April 2024

A cabaret style musical journey, exploring love, friendship and laughter. Spectators enjoyed a supper at their tables, with drinks available from the bar, followed by a programme of songs from the musicals of all eras.

A Bunch of Amateurs, November 2024

Sparks fly when Hollywood action hero Jefferson Steel turns up to join an amateur group in the sleepy village of Stratford St John, thinking he has been booked to play King Lear at Stratford Upon Avon. The play is described by the authors, Ian Hislop and Nick Newman, as “a love letter to amateur dramatics”.