

History of the Wycombe Repertory Theatre

An abridged version of this article, entitled 'Wycombe Repertory Theatre – Its Rise and Fall' – appeared in the Winter 2007/2008 issue of the Newsletter of the [High Wycombe Society](#).

From its opening in December 1946 the Theatre was the venue for live performances by successive repertory companies. Despite attracting some of the best actors and actresses of the day, and a varied programme of plays, it was always struggling to attract sufficient audiences. The final death blow came in the late 1950s with the widespread availability of television. In this article Mike Dewey traces its history.

The idea for a repertory theatre in High Wycombe was conceived during World War II by four servicemen with a deep-rooted love of the dramatic arts, all of whom served in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (REME). They were led by Ian Dobbie, a theatrical producer before the war, who, being able to call upon not only men and women with acting experience, but also carpenters, electricians etc, organised a series of plays to help maintain the morale of the service personnel in the build-up to D-Day. Many evenings were spent in the NAAFI by Dobbie and his colleagues Jack Stone, a builder from Morden in Surrey, Nick Simms, an engineer from Slough, and Ted Shoesmith, a London clerk, discussing the idea, and choosing a suitable location.

Eventually they chose High Wycombe, and before demobilisation they travelled here when on leave to search for a suitable building. Of all the buildings they inspected the only possibility was the building at the northern end of Frogmoor, Figure 1, and in Ian Dobbie's own words, "It took courage to visualise the old swimming bath as a theatre!" During the war the building had been used as a furniture store, having been originally constructed, of course, for the Wycombe Technical and Arts Institute.

This was probably in the minds of members of the Borough Council when they granted planning permission for the change of use to a theatre. Ian Dobbie's practical stage experience was combined with Jack Stone's experience as a builder to draw-up plans for the conversion whilst the foursome were still in uniform.

When demobilisation started in 1945, however, they were spread around the world: Shoesmith and Stone had been sent to India, Dobbie to Germany, and Simms was in America! It was not until a year later, in July 1946, that the conversion work could begin. At that time regulations did not permit the employment of building labour on anything but 'essential work', and a theatre was way down the list of priorities! So all the work had to be done by the team themselves, working long days, 7 days a week. They tackled every job from labour-intensive tasks such as wood-sawing and cement-mixing, to the intricacies of electrical installation, ventilation, raked flooring, and staggered seating.



Fig. 1: The theatre building in the mid-1960s, disused and boarded up. It was refurbished in the mid-1970s for office use. The Bell public house is in the left foreground. Photo: HWS 02651 on the [SWOP website](#).

When finished the theatre had a stage area of just under 1,000 sq ft., the acting area being roughly square. The auditorium seated just under 300, the floor having a parabolic rake to give a perfect sight-line from every seat. The seating itself was designed by a well-known London firm of theatre furnishers, and tailor-made for the theatre. Stage lighting was of the latest design and had an entirely original switching system allowing great flexibility. There was provision for an orchestra

pit, and dressing-room accommodation. The theatre was complemented by a workshop for constructing the sets, a café-lounge (initially of limited facility), and a car park to the rear of what was then Frogmoor Garage.

The management team, led by the Director, Ian Dobbie, by now residing on Amersham Hill, comprised Nick Simms as Production Manager, Jack Stone as Stage Manager, and Edward Shoesmith as Catering Manager. The resident professional repertory company comprised Malcolm Graham, previously with Harrogate Repertory Theatre; Miss Lesley Lindsay, from the Oldham Theatre; Miss Katherine Page, from the Old Vic; Stuart Brown and Martyn Williams, from The Torch Theatre, London; Miss Zena Ralston, from the Alexandra Theatre; and Kenneth Osborne, from Guildford Theatre. All had served with the Forces during the second world war.

The Early Years

The theatre was named 'The High Wycombe Repertory Theatre', and it was with an enormous and justifiable sense of pride that the theatre opened on Monday December 16,

1946, an event which was attended by Hugh Williams, star of stage and screen. The opening took place despite the fact that Wycombe Town Council's watch committee was not entirely satisfied that the theatre complied with all the then current safety precautions. Specifically a safety curtain was not in place, but at the council meeting Councillor Brocklehurst argued that it might be fairer if they did not "stick to the strict letter of the law"! A temporary licence was granted until December 31, and then extended until March 31, 1947.

The first play was Gerald Savoy's *George and Margaret*, which ran for 8 days until December 24th. The company then worked over Christmas to re-open the theatre on December 26th with a Christmas comedy by N. C. Hunter, *A Party for Christmas*. The play was supported by businesses: for example the local shop Gardners' supplied furnishings, and the telephone was supplied by courtesy of the GPO. The performances were daily at 7.30pm, with matinees 2.30pm on Wednesday and Saturday, and admission prices were 10s.6d for a box (seating 2), stalls at 4s.6d., and the pit at 3s.6d. and 2s.

Over the next weeks the theatre presented weekly productions, which included such well known plays as *The Sacred Flame* by W. Somerset Maugham and *Blithe Spirit* by Noel Coward. After 20 weeks of continuous playing the company took one week's rest at the beginning of May 1947. This allowed a local amateur dramatic society, The Masque Players, to present *Time and The Conways*. Ian Dobbie had previously announced that it was the policy of the Repertory Company not to monopolise the theatre but to encourage its use by local organisations. Also in May, a Repertory Ball was held, which became an annual event for the next 12 years.

During the initial 20-week period, attendances had been such that the company usually played to capacity in the later days of a week, but there had been some downturn in February due to the 'bitter weather'. The company continued weekly productions from May 12th under the direction of Ian Dobbie, but with the appearance of a new actor Antony Stuart. Their first Shakespeare production, *Twelfth Night*, took place at the end of June, with the programme notes subsequently stating, 'The response was better than expected, but not as good as it should have been, but attendance at matinees by schoolchildren was good!' This is the first indication of what became a recurring theme in

the programme notes, that attendances needed to improve. These notes were written by Ian Dobbie until the production which began on August 25 1947, *Fools Rush In*, which was directed by Antony Stuart, and he also wrote the programme notes in which he stated, 'Mr Dobbie will be back to write the next letter.' He did indeed return for the next production, but only until the end of November. The programme notes for the production starting on December 1st 1947 were again written by Antony Stuart, who also directed the play *I Have Been Here Before*. In the notes, Mr Stuart wrote that 'Mr Dobbie is on holiday', but he was never again to feature in the fortunes of the company. So ended the tenure of the man who had driven through the idea for a Repertory company from conception to reality. We do not know the precise reasons why he severed all connections with the company, but it is easy to imagine the profound disappointment he must have felt.

Antony Stuart seems to have introduced two innovations to the theatre. In August 1947, weekly productions changed to fortnightly, so allowing more time for the next production to be organised and rehearsed, and the theatre company was re-formed as the High Wycombe Repertory Players Ltd. In December, in a further sign of commercial pressures, the first pantomime was held. *Cinderella* ran from December 26th to January 17th 1948, and was adjudged in the subsequent programme notes to have been 'a great success'. Antony Stuart

remained as Director of the company until March 1949, and after that for nearly 3 years there was no one regular Director. In March 1949, the company would have received with mixed views the news that the Repertory Theatre at Amersham was closing down. But shortly after, it reverted to weekly productions, the first being *The Linden Tree* running from April 18th to 23rd 1949, with a new policy of 'a more varied range of plays'. The programme notes stated, 'We hope the weekly rep habit will grow!'

Clearly the theatre was still having difficulty with attendances because in early May 1949 there was an appeal for help with publicity 'as we are endeavouring to secure an increased attendance in the early part of the week.' During early 1950 the plays were directed by Michael Acton-Bond, and on April 3rd Richard West was introduced as the producer of a series of plays. He was followed by Brian Oulton, who became Director of Productions in October 1950, with John H Stone as General

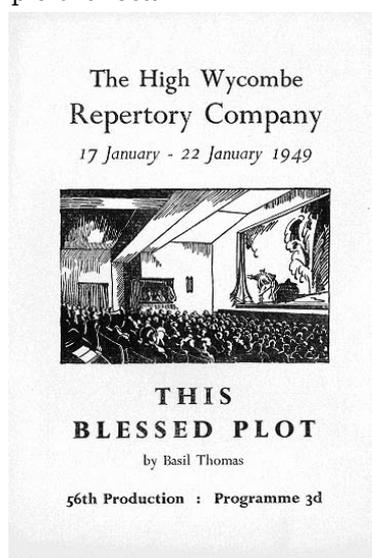


Fig. 2. A programme from 1949.

Manager and Edward R. Shoemith as Secretary (these being the only remaining founder members of the theatre). This team operated until August 1951 when Oulton left, and there followed a very difficult few months for the theatre. In the programme notes early in December of 1950 it was announced that, 'This year the pre-Christmas slump has started earlier than ever, and your theatre has been severely hit by it.' There was no pantomime, but a play *Ambrose Applejohn's Adventure*, the programme notes for which included a request for patrons to include in their New Year's resolutions: 'To come to the theatre without fail in 1951, and to encourage my friends to come too!'

On January 15th 1951, the theatre staged *Here We Come Gathering*, directed by Peggy Thorpe-Bates, which was the first performance of that play on any stage, and it was reported, 'That this is a great honour for the town goes without saying.' Later that year a proposal to form a Playgoers' Club was discussed and adopted at a meeting on July 26, with Mr D. W. L. Fellows as Chairman and a subscription of 5s. per annum. The first club evening was held on October 28 and a regular magazine *The Compere* published, Figure 3. On Brian Oulton's resignation in August 1951, Alfred Bradley, an old boy of the Royal Grammar School, High Wycombe, became the Director. Virtually his first announcement was that the play then being performed, *Charley's Aunt*, would be retained for a further week 'by public demand'. The theatre company had a week off from November 26th to December 1st when the High Wycombe Operatic and Dramatic Society (HWODS) presented *The Mocking Bird*. This was followed by the revival of the pantomime season, with *Beauty and the Beast* from December 20th to January 5th 1952.

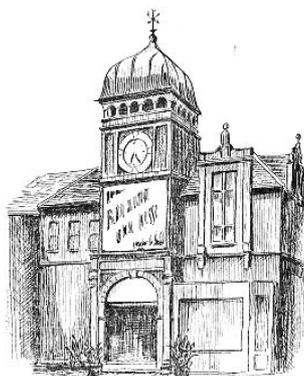
The Tower Theatre

On March 3 1952 Alfred Bradley announced in his programme notes the 200th production by the theatre, which was *Who Goes There*. Shortly afterwards the theatre was renamed the **Tower Theatre**, and the company the High Wycombe Repertory Company. On May 2nd of that year the Annual Repertory Ball was held at the Town Hall, with dancing to Ken Madelin & His Orchestra, and his trio performed at the Playgoers' Club party held in the Oak Room on May 29th. On June 23rd the theatre appealed for a workshop to prepare and store scenery, as they had had to vacate their previous premises. Weekly productions continued through 1952 and 1953, except for the

pantomime, *Little Miss Muffet*, held over the Christmas/New Year period.

But early in June 1953 there was a dramatic announcement in Alfred Bradley's programme notes under the heading 'Urgently Required': '2,000 people required weekly to keep the live theatre open in High Wycombe. Without your support we cannot continue. Please tell your friends that we close on Saturday June 13th if help is not forthcoming.' The appeal seems to have been successful as the theatre remained open, but in August 1953 it was taken over by Quality Plays Bedford Manager, George Radford. Their first production was the play *The Gioconda Smile*, directed by Hubert Wood. The pantomime *Puss In Red Riding Boots* featured in the Christmas season for that year. But the Bucks Free Press was reporting in January 1954 that the theatre would close on January 9th, at the end of the three weeks run of the pantomime. In the January 8th edition under the heading 'Tower Theatre Temporary Reprieve' the paper reported that the theatre was continuing 'for the time being'.

Compere
The Magazine of the HIGH WYCOMBE REPERTORY THEATRE CLUB
 No. 2 New Series June, 1952



PRICE 6d.

Fig.3: *Compere* was the magazine of the High Wycombe Repertory Theatre Club, formed to encourage the support of local people.

The next milestone in the history of the theatre was announced in the Bucks Free Press edition of January 22 1954:

'The Repertory Theatre is to be reopened on Monday February 8 under the management of Mr Neil Gibson. Mr Gibson, known locally as Tom Gibson, was born in High Wycombe, and is the youngest son of Mr C. A. Gibson, who was a well known builder and contractor, and for a short time was in practice in the town as a chartered accountant. It was through the Little Theatre Club of High Wycombe that Neil took up the stage as a career, being seen by Bruce Belfrage, at that time on the staff of the BBC who sent him to Miss Eileen Thorndike, by whom he was trained at the Embassy Theatre in London. During the Second World War Mr Gibson served for four years with the RAF, and for two years afterwards taught drama for the University of the West Indies in Jamaica. He has had all-round theatrical experience as an actor and producer, and has worked for the BBC, both on sound radio and television.

'His most recent West End experience was in *Hanging Judge* which starred the late Sir Godfrey Tearle at the New Theatre, London. His business manager will be Mr Clifford Elson of Amersham.'

The first production by the new company was *Night Must Fall* by Emlyn Williams, produced by Neil Gibson, in association with the High Wycombe Repertory Players Ltd. The BFP reported that the Mayor and Mayoress of High Wycombe, Alderman and Mrs R. P. Clarke,

with members and officials of the Town Council had accepted invitations to the opening night. An innovation would be a Thursday matinee, to which old age pensioners would be admitted at a reduced rate. A review of this production in the newspaper stated:

'Early judgement of the new company at High Wycombe Repertory Theatre, that they deserve success in their efforts to set the live theatre in the town back on the road to bigger and better audiences, is confirmed this week.'

The review by Bridget Boland of the production of *The Return*, starting on March 19th, spoke of 'subtle characterisation, some poignant passages, genuine feeling, and flashes of humour.'

However it went on to remark:

'That did not stop two ladies behind me talking of operations and sewing parties for some time after the curtain rose on each scene!'

Good reviews continued to be published in the BFP, and in May 1954, the popular stage, screen and radio personalities Claude Hulbert and his wife Enid Trevor even appeared in a production of *Nothing But The Truth*, Figure 4. In his curtain speech Mr Hulbert expressed himself delighted to be playing once again 'with my old friend Neil Gibson'. But the initial euphoria engendered by the new company was soon dispelled by an announcement by Mr L. C. Smith, Chairman of the Theatre Club:

'Urgent, are you a founder member of the Supporters' Club yet? Please forward your £1 subscription to Neil Gibson before Thursday July 15th. This is essential if the Theatre is to re-open on July 29th.'

The appeal must have been successful as a new season of plays commenced at the end of July, and the play, *A Christmas Carol*, was the Christmas/New Year production.

The Intimate Theatre

Early in 1955 a decision was taken to rename the theatre once again, as the **Intimate Theatre**. The announcement was made to the audience on Monday February 28th by Neil Gibson, who explained that the change was to avoid confusion as to the professional status of the company: it was felt that the name 'Repertory Theatre' implied an amateur status. On July 5th a Theatre Night and Supper Programme was organised by the Supporters' Club, and an appeal was made for funds to install a new heating system. It was also announced that 'Our biggest money-raising event, and an event of some local importance, will be a Theatrical Garden Party to be held in the grounds of Castle Hill, Priory Avenue, on Sat 27th August, by kind permission of Mr and

Mrs R. P. Clarke.' The event was a great success, and installation of the heating system began in November just in time to combat the winter cold.

Fund-raising continued with a Fancy Dress Ball at the Red Lion Hotel, and a cabaret by members of the theatre company, on December 9th 1955. Despite these efforts it was thought necessary to raise seat prices, from January 15th 1956, by 6d. for all seats. But the financial tight-rope continued. Neil Gibson used his programme notes for the February 13th production, which marked the second



Fig.4: Actor Claude Hulbert, left, rehearsing for a production at the theatre of *'Nothing But The Truth'* in May 1954. Photo: Bucks Free Press BFP 03413 on the [SWOP website](#).

anniversary of his company in High Wycombe, to appeal for more people to patronise the theatre: 'The next two months will be critical as far as my company is concerned.' The theatre restaurant was opened for lunches from March 12th, and an intense programme of money-raising activities got under way. In April a raffle raised about £120 and a Jumble Sale £19 'which amounts will be applied to reduce the loss incurred during the last year.' On July 14th, a Theatrical Garden

Party was held at Castle Hill House, the home of Alderman and Mrs R. P. Clarke, and was attended by Mr. Claude Hulbert and Miss Enid Trevor. This made a profit of £100.

However, the financial concerns undoubtedly placed great strain on Neil Gibson, and in August he was taken ill and admitted to Wycombe Hospital. He was away in total for four weeks, returning for the September 17th production of *Murder at the Vicarage*, and announcing in the programme notes a new scheme for regular block bookings. Under the Seat Endowment Scheme, bookings could be made of seats every week for six months or a year. Amongst those taking up this scheme were Murrays, Lintafoam and the Arts Association. On November 12th the intention of creating a new amenity for the town was announced: a licensed bar in the Theatre Clubroom, for which membership would be required. This was not opened until Friday February 8th 1957, but it was an immediate success, the membership being 'well on the way' to 300 in the first month. A Supporters' Club dance in the Oak Room to the Ken Madelin Band on March 21st cost 3s.6d. including refreshments, and was adjudged a great success.

But the success of these activities seems not to have significantly improved the financial position, and on April 29th Neil Gibson announced that he had decided to close the theatre for the summer months but hoped to re-open in August:

The step has been forced upon me by the drop in attendances since petrol rationing commenced. I am afraid that it is not economic to keep open during the summer. The Restaurant and Club Bar will remain open, and the Garden Party will take place as planned on July 13th.'

He enlarged on his plans in an announcement on May 6th:

'[I am making] every attempt to let the theatre to a visiting company. My present plans envisage re-opening the theatre around the end of July or beginning of August for a three-months season with a pantomime at Christmas.'

The theatre duly re-opened on July 29th with a production of *Goodbye Christine*: this was directed not by Neil Gibson but by Steven Scott. On August 19th 1957, Neil Gibson announced:

'For personal reasons, I am obliged to take a less active part and have arranged to let the theatre to another management – the theatre café and club bar will, however, remain under my direct control. My company will close on Sept 21st and the new company will open on the 23rd Sept.'

He would also continue to operate the Intimate Theatre Drama School which had opened on January 22 1957.

The new company was the West End Repertory Theatre Company, under John Chitty, who announced in the programme notes for their first production (of *The Devil Was Sick*): 'At a time when many theatres are closing down a completely new company has been formed.' But the reality of the situation soon became apparent with an announcement in the next programme,

'For some weeks prior to our opening this theatre was filled on an average to only 50% capacity attendance must increase to at least 75%.'

As had happened before when such appeals were made, audiences soon increased and on October 21st Chitty could say, 'Last week our audiences increased by nearly 50% over the average of the previous three weeks.' The play that week was *The Threatening Storm* by Basil Ashmore, starring Jean Kent, and it was having its English-speaking premiere. It received wide acknowledgement by the press, being mentioned in, amongst many others, The Times, The Daily Telegraph and The Observer. Attendances at the pantomime that year, *Babes in the Wood*, were said to be 'excellent', and the management appealed for those who came to patronise the theatre during the year.

The Beginning of The End

Early in 1958, Shakespeare's *As You Like It* was presented, and there was a message from Sir Laurence Olivier in the programme notes:

I should like to send my very best wishes and congratulations to the Intimate Theatre, which is, I think, the only live theatre in Bucks, the county in which I have the great pleasure to have my home. It is sad to think that there should be only one theatre left, and I hope that the folk of High Wycombe will appreciate what I trust they will consider to be their very good fortune, and that they will show their appreciation by giving the Intimate Theatre the patronage which it deserves. If it is forced to close, then a county of nearly half a million people will be left without a single theatre, and that would be a sorry plight.'

Unfortunately the play was well attended by schoolchildren, but not by adults!

In an attempt to attract a new audience, 'Housewives' Matinees' were introduced on Wednesdays at 2.00pm, but this was short-lived. Apologies were offered in the March 3rd programme notes 'to those who had to be turned away when the Tuesday evening and Wednesday afternoon performances had to be cancelled through lack of support'. In the same programme a new approach was announced:

'We feel that this theatre will be better established if it operates under the patronage of a body of well-known Bucks residents. As you will see from this programme, we already have five patrons – Earl and Countess Attlee, Lady Penelope Clementi and Mr and Mrs John Hall – and we hope that very soon we will have some more.'

Two weeks later, two more patrons were announced, Miss Celia Johnson and Miss Gogie Withers, and a week later Sir Laurence Olivier joined.

But the inexorable audience decline continued. The programme notes on April 7th included:

'Audiences, particularly during mid-week, have been very thin for the last two or three months, and unless attendances show a considerable improvement in the very near future, the theatre will be forced to close down. The company has suffered heavy financial losses.'

But the attempts by the company to reverse the trend continued and two weeks later another new scheme was announced:

'Those of you who heard my curtain speech last week will be well aware of the sad financial state of the company, so to help raise funds to cover urgent commitments I am offering a special Spring reduction in the price of season tickets. Our target is to sell 100 season tickets in the next fortnight.'

This was somewhat belatedly successful, 106 tickets being sold by May 12, no doubt due to a certain amount of arm-twisting!

However the financial situation was now affecting the standard of the productions, and the Bucks Free Press theatre critic was becoming increasingly critical. In the May 2nd

issue he complained of the finish of the sets, and in the issue on the 9th wrote:

'I have rarely seen High Wycombe Intimate Theatre company so raggedly directed as in *Towards Zero* by Agatha Christie, this week.'

Also:

'Last week I complained about the finish on the sets. Teddie Batley, the scenic artist, has twice appeared as an acting member. He does this well, too, but can anyone do both efficiently?'

Still the theatre struggled on, the production on June 7th being a Revue, *Let's be Intimate*, written by John Chitty himself together with Jill Hyem. This was followed by a 'Gala World Premiere' on Monday June 23rd of the winning play in a National Playwriting Competition, *Their Own Hands*, by Anthony Booth (described as 'an ex-actor now farming in Jersey, a family man with two children').

The end of regular productions at the theatre was now near, and the final chapter was heralded by the BFP reporting:

'A new company, to be known as High Wycombe Repertory Theatre Players, under the direction of E. Steven Scott, is to take over HW Intimate Theatre from Mr John Chitty and will re-open on Saturday, July 26, with *Sailor Beware* which will also be presented the following week.'

The play was presented by Neil Gibson, and directed by Steven Scott. The review in the BFP was very favourable: 'The packed house rocked to a hilarious production.' But only two or three more plays were presented, and there were no further advertisements for productions by the new company in the BFP from October to December 19th 1958. From December 11th to 13th the High Wycombe Operatic and Dramatic Society presented *The Whole Truth*, and from December 26th to January 10th the Steven Scott/Neil Gibson company ran a Christmas attraction *The Puppet Prince*. But Neil Gibson announced on December 26th,

'The future of this theatre is, at the moment, very indefinite, but I am hoping to be able to keep it open for the general benefit of the town and present two or three seasons of professional repertory during the year, the theatre at other times to be available to visiting companies, the amateur societies, for concerts, meetings, etc. Please watch the BFP for theatre news, and we hope to back with you again ere long.'

At its AGM on December 19th, the HW Repertory Theatre Supporters' Club...

'decided to become dormant until the theatre opened again. If the theatre did not open within the next year, members agreed to call a general meeting in November 1959.

'The present officers will remain in office and will call last year's committee should the theatre re-open.

'Mr Paul Slater (Treasurer) reported a balance at September 30 of £84.9s.8d. It was agreed that £70 should be placed on deposit account at the bank and £4 invested in Premium Bonds.'

Thereafter the theatre was only occasionally used for productions by local organisations until it closed completely. For example The Fourways Drama Group presented 'Wycombe's Own Music and Laughter Panto, *Cinderella*' on January 22, 23, & 24th 1959, and *Bonaventure* on May 28, 29, & 30th of that year. And the play *The Bridesmaids* was directed by Basil Ashmore from March 9th to 14th 1959, with Roy Adams as Manager and Licensee of the theatre. But by November 1959 the High Wycombe Operatic and Drama Society had moved its productions to Mill End School.

So ended over 12 years of repertory theatre, during which over 400 plays and pantomimes had been presented by a succession of companies. The name had been changed twice, and many well-known actors and actresses had trodden its boards. But despite the best efforts of the many people associated with the theatre, it had never managed to attract consistently the level of audiences necessary to make it financially sustainable. Live theatre was not to return to High Wycombe on a regular basis for over 30 years, until the opening of the Swan Theatre in 1992.

Personal Reminiscences

Two members of the Society have provided their personal reminiscences of the theatre. Nina Battleday's will be included when they have been finalised for the publication of the High Wycombe Society's Spring 2008 Newsletter. Ronald Swain's reminiscences follow here...

Ronald Swains

I first became aware of the Wycombe Rep. when I went to the schools dentist in the Christmas holiday of 1948. The tooth man had premises in a run-down terrace at the end of Frogmoor, almost next to what I saw was now a theatre. I did not attend until *Hamlet* had its Wycombe premiere. Esme Percy of West End status was a guest as Claudius and Antony Stuart was the Prince. He was one of the early Directors when the Rep. was still fortnightly – it later had to go weekly and, inevitably, down-market.

I was much involved with local drama and later became a student of the Wylie School which Margaret Wylie ran at Oxcroft, 57 London Rd. Mrs M Lancaster-Wylie (affectionately known as Ma) was a focus in speech and drama. She had many students of all ages and, usefully, a hoard of costumes and props. The Rep. could thus borrow from her – both the props and the students, if the show was a big one and needed extras. Thus I was seconded as 'a manservant'

for the *School for Scandal* and 'another gentleman' in the same production, this being in the tavern where we sang 'Fill every glass for wine inspires us". Later, too, I was 'another man' in *Desire Under the Elms*. We were, of course, unpaid, and I imagine Union rules were bent to allow us to appear at all! My dear friend Kenneth Matthews also appeared, very briefly indeed, in the first scene of *Murder at the Vicarage* where he stood by the body of Colonel Protheroe and had a line, pronouncing "Dead, I'm afraid; shot through the heart!"

These were some highlights but, during the time I assiduously attended, one might suggest that *Murder at the Vicarage* set the tone as being, roughly, what Wycombe wanted.

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Information for Mike Dewey's article was obtained from: copies of the theatre programmes, held at the Library, and in possession of the author; copies of the theatre magazine 'The Compere' in possession of the author; and the Bucks Free Press.