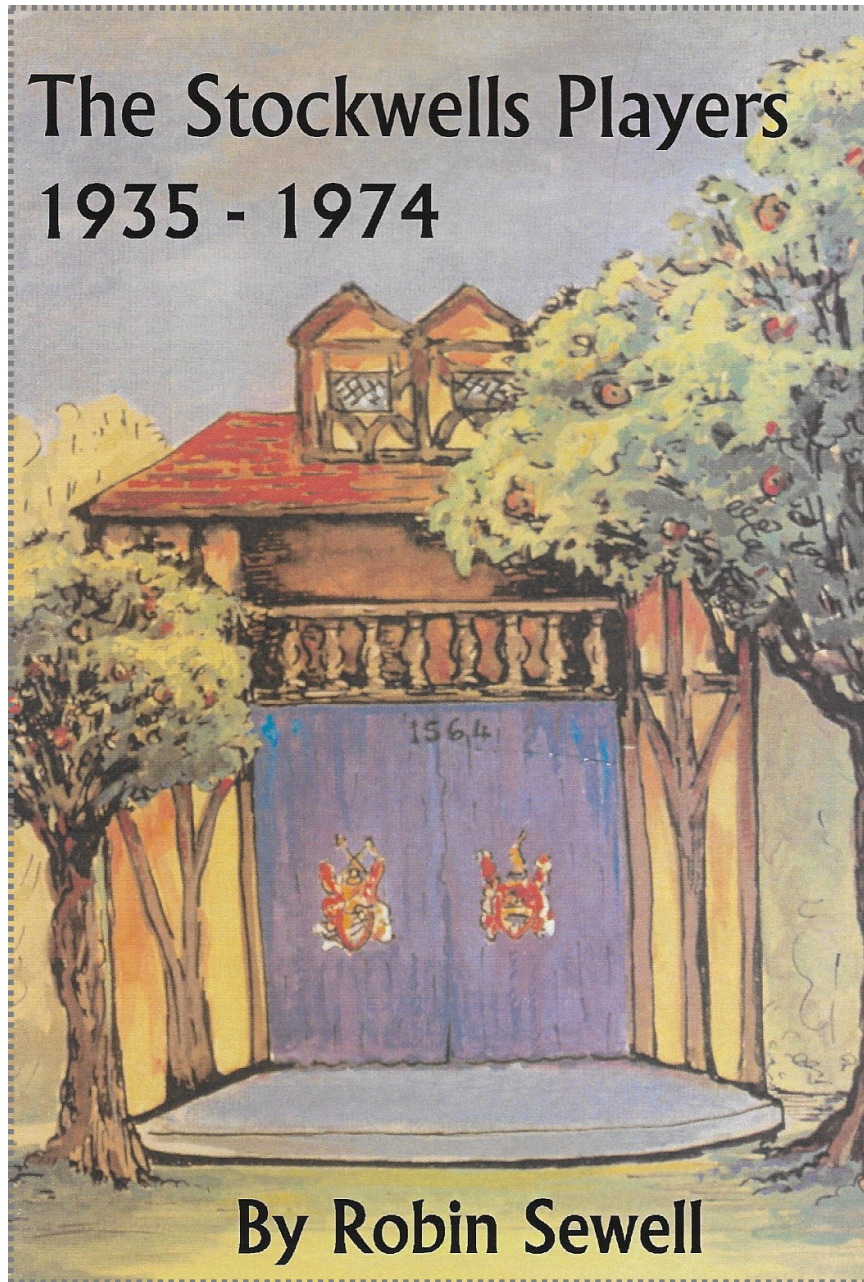


The Stockwells Players 1935 - 1974



By Robin Sewell

First published 2000, re-printed with additions 2026.

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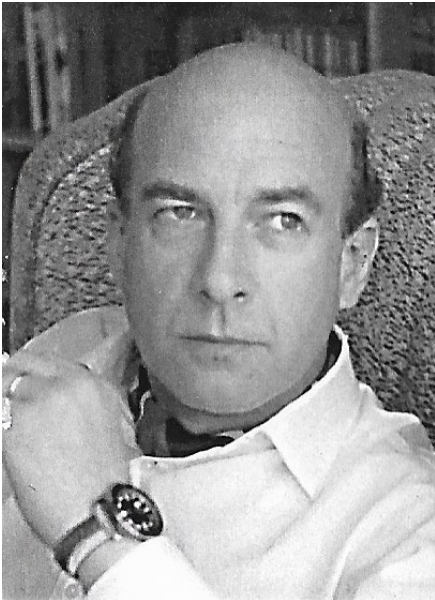
2000. Reprinted with additions 2026.



Above: Paulise in her early 20s, as Juliet
in an Oxford University Dramatic Society production.

Below: as Nurse in Romeo and Juliet in 1967, with Margaret Gouriet as Juliet.





Introduction:

This re-print of Robin's 2000 history of the Stockwells Players was published in 2026, with additional photos taken by Robin during his time with the Stockwells Players. Robin's evocative history was the first publication of the Astons History Group, of which he was a founder member.

Robin was an actor in, and director of, several of Paulise's later productions, and was a longtime friend of Paulise. Without Robin's enduring dedication to all things Stockwells so many memories and memorabilia might have been lost.

The re-print includes forewords by Sonia York-Pryce (known to all as Muffin), Paulise's granddaughter, and by Robin's children Philip and Christine. All three appeared as child actors in Stockwells productions.

Among her many talents, Paulise was a talented artist - the front cover illustration chosen by Robin was typical of the many she created for her annual production albums, which included programmes, photos and reviews. She also created the distinctive drama masks of tragedy and comedy for the Players' 'logo' - seen as a footer on her 1965 'Reflections on a July Night' (*see below*).

When the Stockwells Players disbanded Robin played a major part in establishing the Blewbury Players in our neighbouring village. It is particularly fitting that the year of this re-print is also the year that they have celebrated their 50th anniversary, and that their celebratory exhibition included many items from our Stockwells Players Archive. I think both Paulise and Robin would have been very pleased.

It has been a joy to be able to add so many of Robin's photos to this re-issue - they bring to life the camaraderie and the fun that was so much a part of Paulise's endeavours.

I have included, as appendices, some of the items that Robin had kept in his Stockwells Players archive (which was so kindly given to us by Robin's children after Lalie's death in 2021), the Blewbury Players' tribute to Robin on his death in 2012, and finally, Paulise's other hobby - the Edlins Costume Museum of historic costumes. Jancis Smith. 2026.

Appendices

- * Page 24. 'Reflections on a July Night' - written by Paulise in 1956 to mark the Stockwells Players' 20th anniversary.
- * Page 30. A tribute to Paulise by her friend Stephen Whitwell, on the occasion of a Thanksgiving Service at All Saints' Church - the church she raised so many funds for over the years.
- * Page 32. A tribute to Robin by the Blewbury Players in 2012, showing just how much he had continued to contribute to the 'dramatic' legacy of Paulise and her husband Herbie.
- * Page 33. Postscript: Edlins Costume Museum.
- * Page 34. Astons History Group Publications.

Foreword: by Sonia York-Pryce (Muffin)
Paulise and Herbert Lugg's grand-daughter.

I think my memories of the Stockwells Players began with Shakespeare's *Henry V* (1964). I recall we were staying at Stockwells Cottage, then the home of dear Molly Hone. As we were very young, we did not attend the performance, but I recollect standing in the dark beside the open bedroom window (which looked out onto the garden and lawns of Stockwells), and hearing what were to become the distinct voices of Michael Godley and Robin Sewell, two gentlemen synonymous with the productions. It was an incredible and magical moment as I listened, and it was the beginning of my love for Shakespeare and the spoken word.

As children my brother Sean and I were dispatched every school summer holiday to Stockwells for the plays. The highlight was either watching or being part of the performance such as it was. We often sat on the raised auditorium watching rehearsals, or witnessing scenery being constructed, observing music and stage management, all part and parcel of a truly enlightening time in our young lives. No matter which play was in production, by the end of the holiday we knew the dialogue off by heart. It really was the most wonderful introduction to the language of Shakespearean England, and a brilliant means into a child's imagination. In *The Tempest* (1968) I played an attendant to the goddess Ceres, played by my grandmother Paulise, an honour I took most seriously. At the time I had just begun my tuition at Elmhurst Ballet School, so Paulise was very eager for me to appear in the plays just as her daughter, my mother Mary Elizabeth Lugg, had back in the 1950s. Later,



in 1970, I had my special moment in Leslie French's beautiful production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as the fairy 'Peaseblossom'. I was so fortunate to perform a beautiful solo, entering via the woods to dance alone on the dewy grass accompanied by Felix Mendelsohn's atmospheric score. It was a magical experience. Even now decades later when I hear this music, I am transported back to being thirteen years of age, dancing at Stockwells.

The weather was sometimes a worry during productions with unwelcome rain and thunderstorms. On a few occasions I remember the cast and set had to move to the confines of the Aston Upthorpe Village Hall. I have vivid memories of Paulise's grand piano being loaded onto a trailer pulled by a tractor headed for the hall. It was a most incongruous vision, but Paulise insisted the show must go on at all costs! Audiences were faithful and came from far and wide, local, London and further afield, always with the promise of a packed house. In fact, when Paulise travelled the globe, she often crossed paths with people who had attended a Stockwells Players performance. It always brought her such joy. Along with the productions we enjoyed fabulous *en plein air* lunches in the garden at Edlins, or boat trips on the Thames from Wallingford to lunch at the Nautical Wheel at Streatley, or the Beetle and Wedge at Moulsoford. At that time the summers seemed so glorious and never-ending. It really felt to me that I was part of a big happy family.

In the summer of 1974, due to Paulise's failing health there was to be no Shakespeare production. Robin Sewell decided to bring various people together for a special summer production for Paulise, which was more special than I could have ever realised at the time. I gathered my fellow Elmhurst dancers, and we performed in the garden a piece I choreographed to Handel's *Water Music*. Paulise was delighted. It was performed with a heavy heart knowing that there would be no further Stockwells Players productions, that a wonderful, productive and historic period of time was gone forever.

Despite this the memories are still so vivid, the voices so clear, Michael Godley, Robin Sewell, Geoffrey Carr, Stanley Jacob-Hood, Glenys Arthur, Robin Baillie and dear Paulise. Yet it feels like only yesterday we were all assembling for the first performance, full of anticipation, hope, excitement and joy.

Foreword: by Christine and Philip Sewell

Looking back now after all these years, Stockwells was a truly magical place.

Every year from May to August a mixed group of ex-professionals, gifted amateurs, young drama students and various families' offspring would spend weekends rehearsing at Stockwells, culminating in the famous garden performances. This wonderful open air experience (weather permitting..) was enjoyed by many, thanks to the wonderful generosity and hospitality of Paulise and Herbie Lugg.

As children we took all this for granted - summer weekends spent admiring the varied talents rehearsing, making costumes, creating special effects, and building stages and spectator stands with lighting and audio. Scrumptious afternoon teas with sandwiches & cakes galore are fondly remembered too - and of course, the steady immersion and increasing familiarity with some of the Bard's finest works!

For our father, a professional actor in his younger days, Stockwells was truly his 'happy place' and an opportunity to renew his deep love for the theatre.

With only a few left to remember these years, it does feel like 'The Dream' - but what memories!



Christine, Muffin and Philip in our archive room, surrounded by Robin's Stockwells Players exhibition boards. 2023.

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Particulars for the Stockwells estate sale 1929

“In the late spring of 1929, two people leant over a gate looking down an overgrown drive towards a charming little old house, standing by itself in the midst of an apple-orchard.” These two people, who were they? and what was the house they looked at? They were Herbie Lugg and his wife Paulise de Bush, and the house was Stockwells, Thorpe Street, in Aston Upthorpe, which remained their home for the rest of their lives.

Herbert Lugg (1884-1961) came from a well-known acting family from Cornwall; he had a brother, Alfred, also in the theatre, who diversified by leaving the theatre to work for Equity, the Actors’ Union. Another brother, Eric, became a well-known actor, often heard on the radio in the 1930s and ‘40s. Herbert - or ‘Herbie’ – was a stage director and producer, having done every job in the professional theatre in his early years.

Paulise de Bush (1900-1975) was the only daughter of William Ernest Bush (1860-1903) and his wife Pauline, née Joran, who was an American opera singer. William Ernest Bush was the eldest son of William John Bush who founded the family firm of W.J. Bush & Sons, manufacturing chemists, in 1851. W.E. Bush, Paulise’s father, was created a Baron of the Duchy of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha in 1889, in recognition of his valuable services to the European chemical industries. He died tragically in a train accident in 1903.

Much had to be done before moving in to the “charming little old house” – Herbie was due to go to the U.S.A. and Canada as manager for a protracted tour of *Journey’s End* (R.C. Sherriff) – and it wasn’t until after their marriage in 1931 that they were able to move in. All the alterations and modernisation had, by that time, been more or less completed.

Herbie immediately started working on the garden, and within two years it had changed out of all recognition. The grass ‘field’ had become a series of lawns and flowerbeds with trees, mainly apple, and very soon, having found water in abundance, a series of pools were dug which still form an important feature of the garden at Stockwells. He was greatly assisted in this project by Bob Lightfoot, Jimmy Ray and George Rich, and, no doubt, others.

I recall Paulise telling me that in the ‘30s when they first moved in they could see quite clearly All Saints Church from the garden room – with sheep in the meadow. The trees and shrubs came later. . .

During all this time Herbie was also very much occupied in directing for Robert Atkins in the open-air theatre at Regent’s Park, and he also produced plays for The Strolling Players at the Rudolph Steiner Hall in London.

In 1933 their only child, a daughter named Mary, was born.

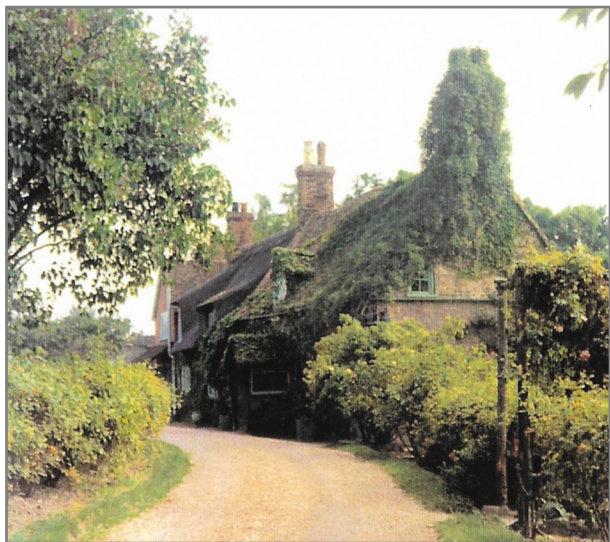
It was during the period 1934-1935 that Paulise suggested that Herbie should start producing plays in the garden of Stockwells - and thus it was that their first production took place in the summer of 1935.

Paulise, even as a child, had always been very interested in the theatre, and it was during her training that she met her future husband who was at the time stage director at the old Playhouse in Oxford. The Repertory Company formed by J.B. Fagan was all the vogue during the 1920s and early 1930s – his productions of Shakespeare plays laid the foundations for future generations to follow. As a young aspiring actress Paulise acted with Gyles Isham as well as a young and promising actor – John Gielgud. It was a time when the professional actors from the Playhouse combined with members of the O.U.D.S. to present productions of the highest level.

Paulise and Herbie always kept in touch with their friends involved with the theatre as well as the main drama schools – RADA, the Central School, the Guildhall, etc.

Another old friend was Nevill Coghill who was based at Oxford and did so much to foster verse speaking there as well as productions in the 1940s. If talent was to be found, they certainly passed on the word. . .

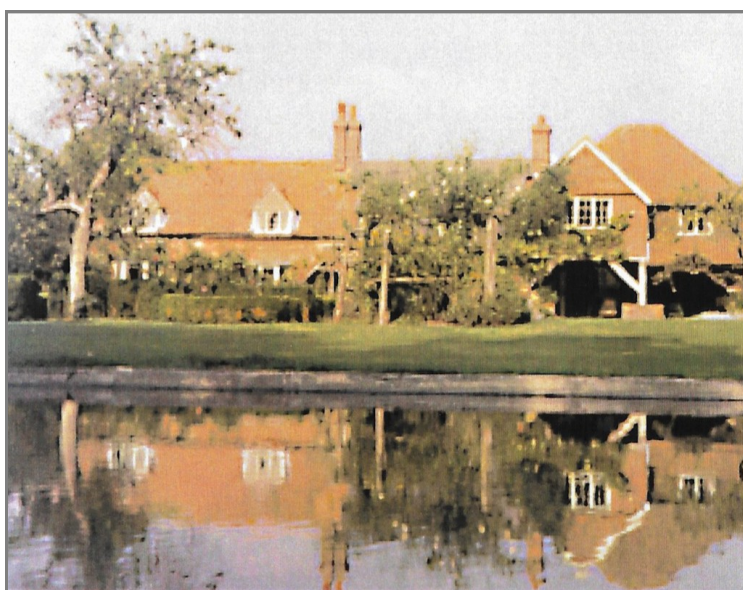
By the time the first production was envisaged, they already had a great friend of the family willing to help: Cecily Paget-Bowman, herself a professional actress; secondly Paulise’s first cousin, Eric Bush, who was a keen and able amateur actor and a director of the family firm. Another stalwart of those early days



The drive leading to Stockwells



The front of Stockwells



Stockwells from the far pool



Paulise under one of the 'stage trees'



Looking towards the stage area



View from the garden room to the pool and stage

was Stanley Jacomb-Hood, who continued to act with us in nearly every production until the final one in 1974.

The Luggs decided that if all went well with the first production, they would have a play in the garden each year, with three performances over the August Bank Holiday weekend (Saturday, Sunday and Monday). They naturally chose plays that would fit in with their garden's trees, shrubs and flowers as well as the general appearance of Stockwells. Certainly the first four Shakespeare plays (1936-1939) did not involve much need for scenery – the sets, I'm given to understand, were fairly simple: rostrums and wattles as backcloth, either dressed or natural. Lighting was equally simple.

The position of the stage area and audience area was different in those early productions; for the first production, *Comus* in 1935, the stage area was near the pond leading to Stockwells Cottage, and the audience area, which was quite small, was positioned near the large pond and facing the Cottage. From 1936 to 1939 the stage was situated in the eastern section of the garden, and the audience were near the larger pool with their backs to Stockwells Cottage. Certainly, after 1945, the positions of stage and audience had to be altered (for the better!) in order to allow for scaffolding and tiered audience area (see plan).

I'm quite certain that members of the nearby villages took part in the various plays, pre-war as well as post-war, a certain Mr. Pepall, amongst others. John Brown and Keith Foster I know took part – there was always a crying need for foresters and pages, singers and dancers in virtually every Shakespeare play! But the main roles were taken by student actors and actresses, ex-professionals and amateurs with much experience.

Paulise was always in charge of costumes – she either had them or she borrowed or hired them. If she thought that they were worthwhile, she bought them. On occasion costumes were made for specific roles or for a special production – by the 1960s the Stockwells wardrobe was quite important. All costumes and general wardrobe paraphernalia were housed in one of the ground floor rooms in Stockwells Cottage. Electrics, sound effects and music were the responsibility of Herbie.

During the period 1940-1945 it wasn't possible to put on plays by Shakespeare – so many of the players were away for the duration; nevertheless some sort of entertainment was presented in the form of one-act plays, sketches and musical improvisations, dances, etc. . .

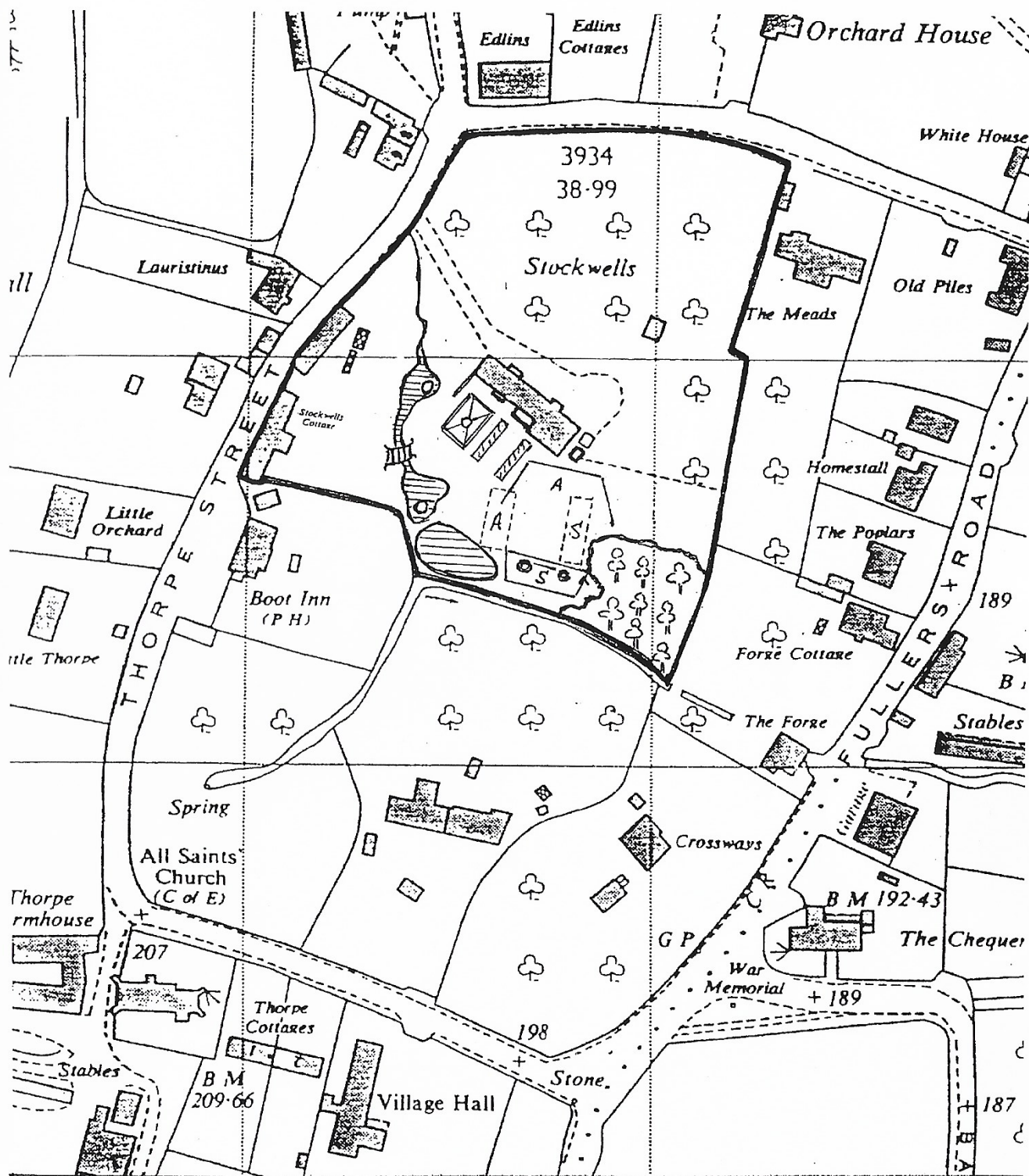
When peace returned, a production of *Twelfth Night* was suggested – and some new faces were to be noticed amongst those who had been part of the team in the 1930s: Patricia Lawrence, ex-RADA, a professional actress who left in order to raise a family, acted with us for a few years, after which she and her husband, also a good amateur actor, left the area to live on the Surrey/Sussex borders. When the children were old enough she returned to the professional stage; she starred with Anthony Bate in that excellent TV play *Intimate Strangers*; after which, among many credits, her portrayal of the nun in the TV serial *Tenko* will be remembered.

Geoffrey Carr from East Hagbourne, Robin Baillie and Kay Wysard, both from Pangbourne; John and Molly Hone from Essex, and Laurence Ounsted; James Collyer, the Fleming family, a young Roger Rich, son of Dorothy and George, and many others figured among the amateur actors.

Amongst the professionals and the drama students, Patricia Lawrence was joined by Michael and Heather Godley, Prunella Scales (she and Michael Godley played Perdita and Florizel in the 1951 production of *The Winter's Tale*), and also by Michael Vowden who was later to become a member of staff at the BBC covering production and presentation. Some of Herbie's best productions were presented during the years 1951 to 1958 – he was able to mix the magic of Stockwells with the enthusiastic and burgeoning ability among the young professionals and, let it be said, middle-aged amateurs also!

A few years later we were very happy to welcome a student from RADA - Alan Bates – as Romeo, and Eira Heath as Juliet in the production of 1955, followed by *Twelfth Night* in 1957, with again a young drama student – Sian Phillips – as Viola.

It should also be mentioned that Herbie was very happy to produce elsewhere, as and when the



The ponds or pools. Between the house and the pools, the flower beds.
 'A' and 'S', within dotted lines - Audience and Stage: 1936 to 1940
 'A' and 'S', within unbroken lines - from 1946 till 1973

Robin's map showing Stockwells' position in the centre of Aston Upthorpe, and the layout of the garden during the Players' summer season.

opportunity presented itself – for instance he was asked to produce *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for the Festival of Britain 1951 in Caversham Court, Reading – some of the actors were from the Stockwells Players and others were amateurs from Reading.

In 1954, with very nearly the same cast, he again produced *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in the garden of the Elephant Hotel in Pangbourne (now called The Copper Inn). I note that one of the players playing a fairy was a very young Jacqueline Bisset. . .she has come a long way since, as have so many others already referred to.

It was, indeed, in 1951 that I became involved with the Stockwells Players. I was still in the professional theatre when I was asked to play Oberon by the British Drama League in Herbie's production for the 1951 Festival of Britain – that was how we first met, and although my commitments in London precluded me from taking part in productions at Stockwells, I came down as often as I could, either to stay for a night in the cottage or watch rehearsals in the garden on a Sunday. Most of the actors and actresses were put up each weekend at Stockwells, Stockwells Cottage or by kind neighbours.

My old friend of many years, Michael Godley, was in a similar situation; in the autumn of 1951 we worked together in Tyrone Guthrie's production of *Tamburlaine*, Old Vic season 1951-1952, with Donald Wolfit in the title role. Both Paulise and Herbie followed our progress in the theatre with much enthusiasm, even when we were on tour in the provinces.

It should be mentioned that, in the years that I was involved with the plays in Stockwells, I also met many kind persons who all helped to make life easier: Mrs. Avery, always on a bicycle, arrived on the dot nearly every day to ensure that the house was clean; Roland Dearden ensured that the lawns were in good condition; George Rich made certain that the vegetable area of the garden was producing sufficient food for all the guests over a period of six to eight weeks. Those of us, like the Godley and Sewell families, who resided each weekend in the two sections (as it was then) of Stockwells Cottage, were delighted to find on quite a few occasions a basket of assorted vegetables left on the doormat! Lauristinus, owned by Herbie and Paulise, was inhabited by the Drewitt family.

Neither should we forget Robert Flear, butler, who always made certain that our glasses were regularly topped up! A very special aperitif was 'The Stockwells Special' – a glass of Cinzano Rosso plus a couple of splashes of Fernet Branca, both very difficult to find nowadays. . .

A word should be said concerning Paulise's mother, the Baroness; she was a very elegant and positive lady who lived in a beautiful house in Hampstead and also rented a house for the summer near Pangbourne. She would arrive as the special guest for the Sunday performance dressed as if for a London Gala performance; the Daimler would come purring down the drive and stop just in front of the house entrance; she would step down from the car on to a red carpet and, with her guests, be greeted by Paulise and Herbie. The Baroness died in 1954 but many of her friends continued to come every year. Amongst these friends figured Mignon Nevada and Eva Turner, both well-known opera singers of repute. Mignon died in 1971; Eva Turner continued to come every year to the Stockwells productions until the final one in 1974.

No Stockwells production took place in 1956 as Herbie had to undergo a serious operation, but he was back in harness for the next four years. The signs, however, were obvious that all was not well, and in 1961 Herbie died.

Herbert Lugg presented twenty-five Stockwells productions. We had come to the end of an era of much enjoyment and entertainment. Herbie as a producer was strict concerning the meaning of the text; he liked style and panache, but really wished to produce only plays that he knew and liked – he felt more at home with a pattern of his own making.

He could, on occasion, be quite acerbic and brittle when his players weren't doing exactly what he wanted; unfortunately some of his amateur actors bore the brunt of his criticism as he didn't differentiate between their status and that of the professional members, who were quite used to being torn to shreds when the moment arose! However, Herbie would always calm the troubled seas with a few words – and



The set for Henry V 1964

The set for Julius Caesar 1966



when everyone had a 'Stockwells Special' in their hand! His bark was always worse than his bite. I, personally, never had a problem - and I'm certain that many of my actor colleagues didn't either. If problems arose (and I can say with certainty they were very few), one could always rely on Paulise to calm any troubled waters.

With the departure of Herbie from the scene, we all wondered what would happen. 1961 drifted into 1962; Paulise felt that she couldn't summon up the enthusiasm for more productions without Herbie, which was very understandable. However, Paulise, on a beautiful summer evening in 1962, suddenly understood that she couldn't let her garden go through another year without actors rehearsing or learning their lines, without the sound of music, without the thrill of a new venture!

And so it was, with a certain amount of trepidation on the part of her friends, that she took the decision to present *Noah* in 1963 produced by Anthony Besch. Everyone was pleased to see the effect on Paulise: a new lease of life and much joie de vivre! It also gave all of us great pleasure to see how Paulise took over the management of the Players, which augured well for the future. She requested that we all attend a meeting to be held on a Sunday, I believe, in late summer of 1963 – so that we all could discuss any problems. Without a doubt we all knew that it was time to throw out quite a lot of the electrical equipment: it was, in some cases, becoming dangerous and we couldn't go on acting in a dim light! We actors all had a dislike of having to fight for a glimmer of light, so funds were put to one side in order to buy new lighting equipment. Michael Burr, who had been stage manager for Herbie for some years, and his team ensured that this was carried out. I recall Richard Myers, in charge of electrics, having to rebuild the dimmer board till such time as a new one was acquired.

Michael Godley had been giving much thought during 1961-1963 to the building of a structure resembling, to a great extent, the acting area of the old Globe Theatre of Shakespeare's day. It was a brilliant idea and exactly what was wanted: something that could be dismantled fairly easily, kept stored until the next year and erected once more for the following production. The basic structure would always remain the same but the front of the set would be dressed and painted differently according to the requirements of the new production, style, period and setting.

The whole structure fitted perfectly between two apple trees; the acting area was partly the stage and partly the grass area towards the audience. There was also a balcony with two single stairways at each end, hidden from the audience by two 'flats' or wings.

By having this structure, we did away with two problems which had always been tiresome: first, the open stage meant that the acting area was far too wide: many of us having to enter from either side would have to start walking well before uttering our first line! Second, entering on stage from the back and walking towards the audience meant a bit of an uphill climb! With this new structure both these difficulties were overcome. Moreover, it made the audience focus their eyes, ears and thoughts towards the centre of the stage. I'm certain that by the time Michael showed us a model of the structure we had already given much thought to a possible production of *Henry V*, which had never been presented at Stockwells before – I felt that we had the cast – and it was a challenge.

We had always made use of incidental music, either a small orchestra or quartet led by Margaret Rowlands or harp and flute played by Margaret Rowlands and S.S.W. Donnison. If a production required dances this was arranged by Ruby Ginner who lived in Blewbury. Certain productions used taped music whilst others involved music specially composed by the producer, as in the case of Dennis Arundell, and performed by a section of the Reading Concert Orchestra.

Wardrobe and Props were the domain of Paulise, who was very ably assisted by the sculptress Judy Massingham, who lived for some years in Crossways, Aston Upthorpe. I'm certain that many ladies were, at some time or other, roped in to assist, such as Vera Jacomb-Hood, Silvia Burr and Lalie Sewell. Judy Massingham also was much involved with set design. The ladies in charge of the Box Office over the years were Molly Mitford Hone, Deborah Farey and Barbara Engledeue.

It seems that K.R. Cross of Steventon was always in charge of setting up our lighting equipment,

and M.A.C. Scaffolding were responsible for the audience seating area. If it was felt that the production required extra costumes we were greatly assisted by Alex Graham, who had a theatrical costume service in Dorchester-on-Thames, and Peter Sheldon.

When Paulise gave her assent to *Henry V* everyone was galvanised into action – we were all much involved with a new chapter of the Stockwells Players. Nearly all our actors and actresses from previous productions came back including Glenys Arthur, Mary Faith Hubbard (later to marry David Raeburn), and David Mason, all from London, Ron Russell from Reading and Dennis Wood from Brightwell-cum-Sotwell. New faces also appeared, which gave us much pleasure: Dick Rowe, Jolyon Kay from Blewbury and Patrick Williams from Wallingford. Also, it has to be said, entire families became very much involved with all the action! The Godleys, the Wilkins from Didcot and the Sewells. . .

The production pleased everyone – we had marvellous weather and every performance was packed out.

The following year David Raeburn produced *The Taming of the Shrew* – again a great success. Maroussia Frank, wife of Ian Richardson, joined us to play the role of Katherine; she came to us as an ex-student of RADA. This was followed by *Julius Caesar*, also produced by David Raeburn, and Hayward Morse, son of Barry Morse, joined our team playing Mark Antony. Hayward was just about to become a professional and we like to think that his stay with us helped him towards his chosen career.

Peter Saunders also joined us, from Blewbury, as did Shirley Sheldon and several others. In 1967 we decided to present *Romeo and Juliet*. Two young aspiring actors were selected to play the ‘star-cross’d lovers’: Brian Robinson (who later joined BBC Regional Broadcasting) and Margaret Gouriet; both of them were supported by one of the best casts we ever had.

The basic structure had now been used for four productions, and the producer selected for 1968, Dennis Arundell, wished to present *The Tempest*, which really would not have married with our now well-loved stage. It was, therefore, stored, and a new set was designed by Judy Massingham, with a grotto as the focal point. A fine actor from East Ilsley came to join us, Eric Saxton, as did an old friend of Michael Godley and myself, from our younger days at the Old Vic: Maggie Bates, wife of actor Michael Bates. At the same time Paulise was delighted to have her two grandchildren as ‘dancers and nymphs’ – Muffin and Sean Jack.

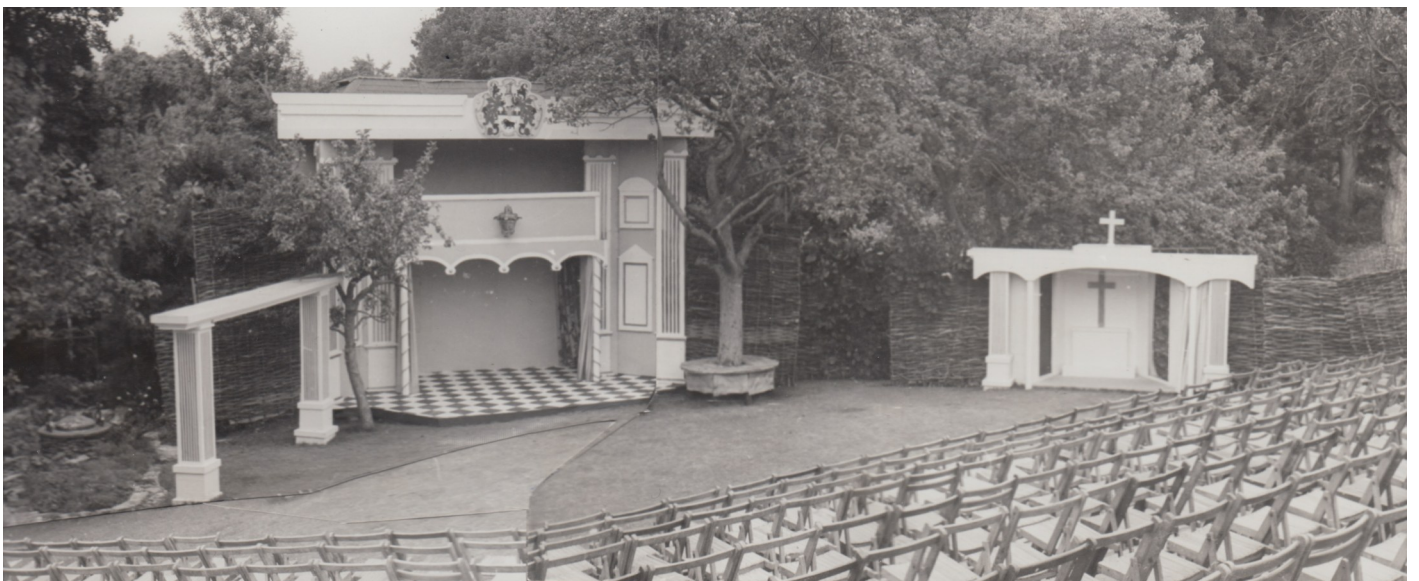
Dennis Arundell also produced *The Winter’s Tale* the following year, 1969 – again a different setting but making use of certain parts of our original basic structure but dressed differently. Dennis, himself a very fine musician and opera producer, composed special music for this production, and the dances were arranged by Molly Mitford Hone. Sybil Ewbank, a fine actress and close relative of Sybil Thorndike, joined our group to play the part of Hermione, and Stephen Whitwell, on leave from Africa, was also part of the cast.

Another old friend of Paulise came to produce *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in 1970 and *As You Like It* in 1971: Leslie French – possibly the most famous Puck in living memory. It has to be said that the drawing power of the Stockwells Players had by this time grown to the extent that we were putting on four to six performances, which meant that we, the actors, actresses and indeed all those who were connected with the production had to put one week’s holiday to one side! My records show that ‘The Dream’ ran from August 4th to August 9th, and ‘A.Y.L.I.’ from August 5th to August 8th.

It has to be said that by this time the ex-professionals as well as the amateurs were starting to feel their age, and it was out of the question that they should undertake to play the young leads. As the London-based drama schools could no longer help us due to commitments and exams, we had to look elsewhere – fortunately the Bellairs Studio of Drama, Guildford, was able to lend us five promising young students to play the four young lovers and Puck in ‘The Dream’: Olivia Lodder, Joanna Doubleday, Charles Rogers, Michael White and Martin Coveney. The following year, again from Bellairs, we were very happy to welcome Alan Coates (Orlando) and Clara-Elizabeth Fenwick (Rosalind) in the production of *As You Like It*.



The set for Romeo and Juliet 1967



Another very promising young actress played the part of the First Fairy in 'The Dream': Deborah Makepeace, who later became well known on the radio. Also about this time we were joined by some very good actors from Blewbury, David Hollick and Norman and Robert Bending.

David Raeburn came back to produce *The Merchant of Venice*, which had not been presented since 1950. An excellent production used a very simple set which was designed by Judy Massingham and Georgina Godley, daughter of Michael. This production ran for four performances, and two young professionals joined us to play Bassanio and Portia: Tony Rickell and Rosemary Garlick.

In 1973 we gave our first presentation of *King Henry IV, Part 2*, having already presented Part 1 in 1958. We were very fortunate in persuading Timothy West to take on the production although he was very heavily committed in London as well as in the provinces. We little knew at the time that this was to be our final large-scale production... and, as if with prior knowledge, we were fortunate in assembling a large and exceptionally fine cast, including newcomers Diana France and David Rowe-Beddoe from Blewbury, and Gordon Harris, the then Minister of the United Reformed Church in the Astons, together with very nearly all our actor friends representing London and the villages near by. The set was devised by Michael Godley and decorated by Judy Massingham and Stephen Whitwell. Much fun was had by all.

Paulise had played in virtually all the productions although from 1963 onwards she preferred to concentrate on the organisation of the summer play. Nevertheless we always made a point of persuading her to join the cast in a suitable but not too arduous role. Thus it was that she took on the part of Mrs Noah in *Noah*, Alice in *Henry V*, the Soothsayer in *Julius Caesar*, the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*, Ceres in *The Tempest* and Paulina in *The Winter's Tale*, but from 1971 onwards she was happy to be a walk-on when the occasion arose.

By the beginning of 1974 it was obvious that all was not well, so we decided to have a mini-show on the lawn in front of Stockwells Cottage: 'A Georgian Evening' devised and produced by Stephen Whitwell and myself. There was no set but singing and dancing plus a mock sea battle and the second act of *The Critic* by Sheridan. I should point out that the mock sea battle was a miniature one which we devised, making use of models (which we built), floating on one of the Stockwells ponds!

This 'Georgian Evening' was for Paulise's benefit. It took place on one evening only: Sunday, 28th July 1974, at 8.15 pm. It also included her grand-daughter and her student friends in a special dance. All this gave her great pleasure, but even though we had occasion to discuss future projects, it was very obvious that she was not well enough to even consider them. And in March 1975 Paulise died. She was 74.

Paulise was a very kind and considerate person, much calmer than Herbie. She was astute and did not take kindly to being taken for a ride; she never forgot her friends or those in need of help; she loved to have her friends about her (and she had many), and the fact that fortune had smiled upon her meant that she wished to share it with as many as possible. Her greatest joy was to see all her guests and audience enjoying the productions in her garden, especially the younger generation. It was thanks to both Paulise and Herbie that so many young people were given the opportunity to enjoy and understand Shakespeare at its best.

It was fairly obvious that we could not continue as a group; although Paulise always remained hopeful, she did however make provision for the near future: the theatrical costumes were to be given to Alex Graham who had her own theatrical costume organisation in Dorchester-on-Thames (it is now the Oxfordshire Costume Service in Oxford and still run by Alex Graham). The electrical equipment as well as all the stage structure remained at Stockwells awaiting a decision. In the meantime we had been approached by our friends in Blewbury who expressed a desire to start a group (The Blewbury Players). I was in contact with the Trustees of Paulise's Estate: yes, they were in agreement. So all the equipment, stage structure plus Box Office filing system was passed on to them, together with much goodwill. Michael Godley and myself were asked to become Founder Trustees of the new venture in order to ensure the smooth transition and launch. We both acted for a few years and I was also involved in production. . .but that's another story.



The Tempest 1968

Top left, Robin Sewell as Anthonio, brother to Prospero. Top right, Glenys Arthur as Ariel

Bottom left, younger cast members, including Sean Jack, grandson of Paulise.

Bottom right, Michael Godley as Prospero.



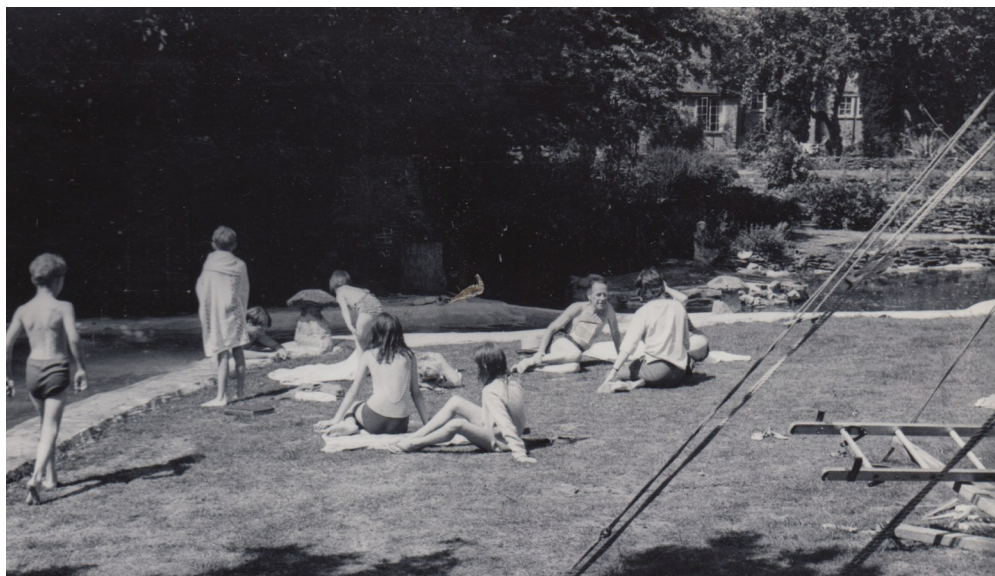


Midsummer's Night Dream 1970

Top left: Martin Coveney as Puck, top right Robin Sewell as Oberon, not quite in role!

Below, Glynis Arthur as Titania, with her fairies - Christine Sewell,
Sonia York-Pryce (Paulise's granddaughter) and Deborah Makepeace.





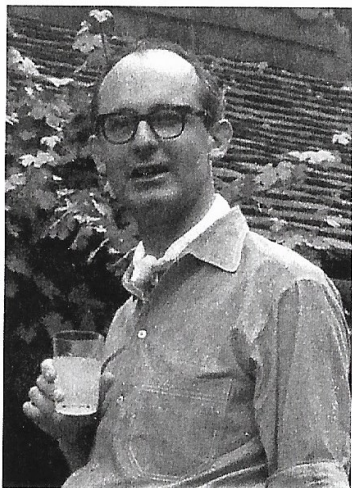
Down time during rehearsals for Henry V 1964.



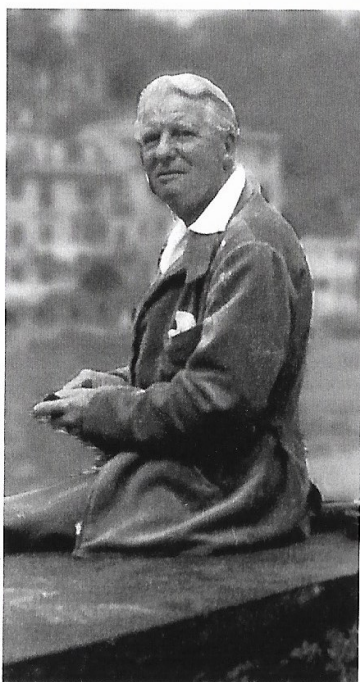
The last Stockwells Players production,
Henry IV Pt.2, in 1973.

Michael Godley as Falstaff, with Stockwells stalwart
Glenys Arthur, another long-standing player, Robin
Baillie, Robin Sewell as King Henry IV with Tony Rickell.





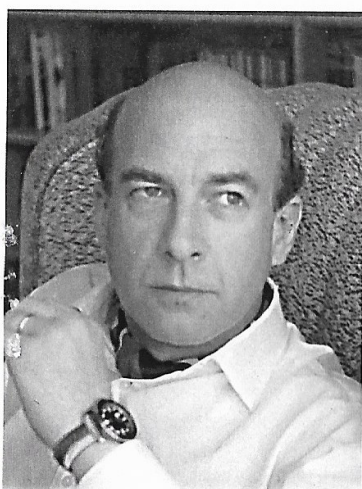
Anthony Besch



Herbert Lugg



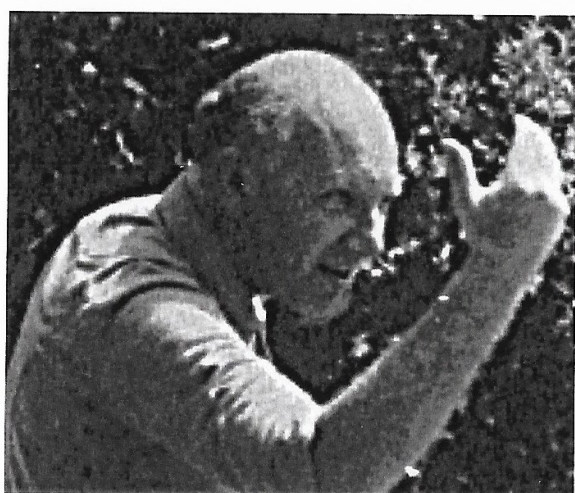
David Arundell



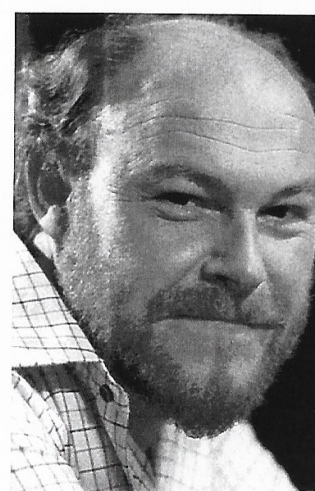
Robin Sewell



Leslie French



David Raeburn



Timothy West

Stockwells Players directors

(Timothy West directed Paulise's last production in 1973)

THE PRODUCTIONS OF THE STOCKWELLS PLAYERS 1935 to 1974

		Producer
1935	COMUS by Milton	Herbert Lugg
1936	AS YOU LIKE IT	Herbert Lugg
1937	MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING	Herbert Lugg
1938	THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR	Herbert Lugg
1939	LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST	Herbert Lugg
1940	SLEEPING BEAUTY & A MAN OF DESTINY	Herbert Lugg
1941	ELIZABETHAN MASQUE	Herbert Lugg
1942	THE BELLS OF ASTON	Herbert Lugg
1943	STOCKWELLS SCRAPBOOK	Herbert Lugg
1944	HARVEST HOME	Herbert Lugg
1945	PASTORAL PAGEANT & OVERRULED	Herbert Lugg
1946	TWELFTH NIGHT	Herbert Lugg
1947	A MIDSUMMER'S NIGHT'S DREAM	Herbert Lugg
1948	LOVE'S LABOURS LOST	Herbert Lugg
1949	THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR	Herbert Lugg
1950	THE MERCHANT OF VENICE	Herbert Lugg
1951	THE WINTER'S TALE	Herbert Lugg
1952	HAMLET	Herbert Lugg
1953	MACBETH	Herbert Lugg
1954	MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING	Herbert Lugg
1955	ROMEO AND JULIET	Herbert Lugg
1956	No Production	
1957	TWELFTH NIGHT	Herbert Lugg
1958	KING HENRY IV, Part I	Herbert Lugg
1959	A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM	Herbert Lugg
1960	THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR	Herbert Lugg
1961 & 1962	No Productions	
1963	NOAH by André Obey	Anthony Besch
1964	KING HENRY V	Robin Sewell
1965	THE TAMING OF THE SHREW	David Raeburn
1966	JULIUS CAESAR	David Raeburn
1967	ROMEO AND JULIET	Robin Sewell
1968	THE TEMPEST	Dennis Arundell
1969	THE WINTER'S TALE	Dennis Arundell
1970	A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM	Leslie French
1971	AS YOU LIKE IT	Leslie French
1972	THE MERCHANT OF VENICE	David Raeburn
1973	KING HENRY IV, Part 2	Timothy West
1974	A GEORGIAN EVENING in STOCKWELLS (arranged by)	Stephen Whitwell Robin Sewell



Reflections
on a July Night, 1956

TODAY the garden is empty—strangely silent. Roses spill their blossom with no one to admire their short-lived loveliness, the blue spears of the delphiniums stretch upwards to the sky. But only the wind sighs through the apple trees, whispering remembrance of past summers.

Not for twenty-one years has this garden, made with love and happiness out of a tangle of weeds and briar, been so unnaturally quiet. At this time of year on Saturdays and Sundays there was always a great coming and going of people and clamour filled the air. Strange voices rang right through the village, raised in anger or in grief; and sometimes loud laughter rent the stillness of a Sabbath afternoon, occasionally music and singing joined the confusion of mixed sounds.

The inhabitants hearing these unnatural noises, would say to one another "The Luggs have begun their summer play." Should any by chance come into the garden, they would see a concourse of assorted people busy rehearsing on the lawn, some maybe clad in bathing costumes, shorts and sun tops, or perhaps enveloped in woolies and mackintoshes, according to the vagaries of the English summer. In their midst stands the Producer, his silver hair shining in the sunshine, script in hand putting the actors through their paces.

Sometimes rather a strange variety of actors seem to be going through a scene—"Where's so and so?" cries the Producer in great anguish, as someone obviously unsuitable comes forward, book in hand, reading a part for which he was not cast.

"He can't come this week-end, he's gone to Henley," he is told, "How can we put this play on, when I never even get everyone for one scene"! He rails and storms, "We'll never do it" he cries, but we do.

Presently someone whispers to him "Why not do Act III, Scene 2? Everyone is here for that. "If only I could go through the play in order" he mutters, still, poor darling—hardly put upon—but in the end the miracle happens and it comes to life. Soon there is a break for drinks and half the cast are seen diving in the pool, before they sit down to their midday meal, chickens perhaps, fresh peas or broad beans, followed often by a blackcurrant summer pudding and thick cream, or strawberries or raspberries of a Sunday.

The afternoon may be warm, we try to put an umbrella over our Producer to shield him from the sun, or maybe it



is showery and just as we get going we are sent scuttling to the garden room to shelter from the rain. More people begin to arrive, dear old Pepall, twenty-one years faithful, the only Berkshire native left, sits in a corner with his book, Mr. Collyer with his dog Peter, who, very much at home in the garden, now joins up with the actors, and sometimes our own old Penny or late lamented Prince have to be told to get off the set as they follow me on to do a scene. Other figures are seen walking up and down in odd corners of the garden among the raspberries and vegetables muttering to themselves, brandishing books and gesticulating wildly.

Numbers have grown for tea—it is almost a cast. The Producer is a little less despairing, he still gives little hope of a production, though he has gone as far as to say one or two scenes are "coming along." Hope springs anew among the actors. Robin arrives with a car full of recruits, mostly for walking on, some of them have funny names, we call them "Robin's boys."

By seven o'clock activities are generally packed up for the day, the exhausted Producer is borne headlong to the "Boot", to be plied with liquid refreshment and the private bar is filled to bursting point with the Stockwells players, a condition it constantly bears for the next few weeks. Strangers trying to enter see a vast number of assorted people all talking at the tops of their voices—give one look and hastily vanish.

Such is the pattern of those early Saturdays and Sundays. Jokes begin as people become familiar with the text; anxiety still continues as to how many characters are absent, some we never see until the end, and not always at a dress rehearsal can we be sure that everybody's there. Still with all the worry, a shape begins to emerge out of the chaos; life and humour light up a comic scene; there is sudden beauty in a quiet one as the lines take on their meaning—and with it all there is friendliness and growing excitement as the week-ends pass. The company at meals argue and joke, conversation is lively, everything is talked over and the affairs of the world are pulled to pieces.

The Sunday approaches when the play is to be put together. At last the distraught Producer will be able to go through the scenes in the right order. One hopes—Oh how one hopes for this to be a fine day, and one prays—how one



prays everyone will turn up and that no one will disappear before the end; odd bits of scenery have been assembled and some properties. Margaret has arrived and sits in a corner making notes about the music. The play starts after lunch, we hope people will not be too sleepy after a good meal; slowly we plough through; I scuttle about from one side to the other seeing people are not day dreaming at the moment they ought to be ready to go on; many times they are and I have anxious moments.

In my anxiety for other people I nearly miss my own scene and arrive on the set in such a flurry I can hardly remember a word I have to say. If there is a dance there is renewed confusion, a long delay, everyone seems to be in the wrong place, either there isn't enough music or too much, the Producer tears his hair or has a rest and lets the Choreographer take charge, but generally has to play the piano.

But somehow or other the form of a play emerges; the Producer still is full of doubt but in his heart a faint ray of hope has begun to kindle. The day over, exhausted, we watch the actors disappear one by one into the dusk. One can relax a little before the final effort that leads to the great climax. During the week there is great activity, more bits of scenery are put together on the set, rostrums erected, steps in place, all ready for the coming Sunday. I sort the costumes finally, having spent many a day quietly and peacefully doing the work I love, mapping out all my bits and pieces alone and unhampered in the cottage with my wardrobe; the clothes are selected and put in little heaps in the places where the actors are to dress. It is extraordinary how everything straightens out and I find the most unlikely things for people to put on.

This Sunday, the last before the play, is a rehearsal in costume, time is then found before the proper dress rehearsal for all the necessary stitching, all our willing helpers through the years, Gladys, Molly, Vera, wait, needles in hand for the endless applicants, elastic, buttons are necessary, this is uncomfortable, this is too long, this is too short, some are fussy some are easy going. When first the costumes are put on everyone looks awful; the cold light of day makes illusion impossible; nothing fits, everything looks tawdry, skimpy—I am filled with momentary depression, but I know that with some undefinable magic everyone will grow into their clothes and all these discrepancies will disappear.



Some Sunday rehearsals in costume progress reasonably smoothly, despite the flatness and the harsh daylight, the unfinished bits of scenery and the people who seem to look too ghastly in their clothes. Others are overtaken with disaster, it starts to pour with rain, and we have to rush pell mell to the village hall to finish the play off there, only to return to a very late tea in the garden room, very over-full with all the cast and their relations squeezed in to take shelter from the rain. The speed of preparation takes on a fresh impetus in the last fateful week. In later years we see the stand erected for the audience grow in two days before our eyes; what a satisfaction, the knowledge, that everyone can see. Our faithful Cross, the electrician, comes to wire up the floodlighting fixed on a gantry high above the stand.

Lay, the wireless expert, is busy testing the loud speakers and the tent arrives to house the orchestra. Thus, in a few days, the garden is transformed into a theatre. People arrive late on Friday, many from their London offices, so the dress rehearsal cannot start till they are ready; while we are waiting to begin we hear strains of music from the tent, Margaret and her orchestra are practising their bits. The musicians all seem happy to be here again, our Producer keeps them contented with a cheering word and Fleat takes them mugs of beer. When we at last get going the rehearsal progresses as most dress rehearsals do, flat, dull and generally dreadful. We say we feel depressed, but in our hearts we hope things may improve tomorrow, adjourn to the garden room to be comforted by the soup that awaits us there and afterwards to bed exhausted.

Saturday is true to pattern, all the things that were wrong must be put right; the cast spend most of the day putting up the screens of juniper we have brought down from the downs to screen our entrances, a difficult and tiresome task and very prickly. The experts are still touching up the scenery and the sewing ladies are still busy with last stitches to the costumes. If it is hot we plunge into the pool to refresh ourselves for further effort.

At last all is set for the performance to be off; it is the village night, there will be a sprinkling of enthusiasts and perhaps some would-be rowdies and even maybe a baby or two, but the stand is full and the night reasonably fine and quiet. The Producer gives the word to go, and we see him



standing quietly with his book beside his "board" replete with its dimmers and switches. It gives us confidence as we go to our various entrances, for good or ill, we must go through it now—our stomachs give a heave as we hear the sounds of the overture floating from out the tent. As I wait I see most of the actors in my dresses look quite well, and I am pleased, but occasionally I see someone has got on something back to front or a pair of baggy tights and it gives me a pain.

Miraculously, suddenly a play is born, life surges into it as the evening progresses, a laugh, a sudden silence tells us the play is getting over. As the evening lengthens and the darkness grows, the lights flood the green sward and the apple trees with their swelling fruit—the illusion is complete, magic has come over actors and audience alike and time is forgotten. Suddenly the garden at Stockwells has become an abode of fairies—Venice, Forest of Arden, the ramparts at Elsinore, a blasted heath complete with witches cauldron, fair Verona, or what you will.

The play is done and wonderful to relate nothing awful has happened, even the Producer is pleased—it has gone better than he expected, "Quite well," high praise from him. We troop in for our quantum of soup, an assortment of cheeses and bowls of Har-well cherries, the usual accompaniment of the summer show. When the outside actors have departed the privileged few stay up, have a whisky or two and the show is picked to pieces, criticised, praised and discussed; we stay up much too late but it is such pleasure, such a relief that it is over, and no disasters happened.

Sunday, all sleep late, little to do, breakfast goes on for hours, people come trickling in, sometimes someone is forgotten and arrives when everyone has finished. Perhaps this is the best lunch of all, we all feel free to enjoy it, sleep perhaps a little after if we can, nothing to worry about except the weather, though (touch wood) this is generally kind and we have never yet been washed out on a Sunday.

After a brief rest some of us get busy getting food ready for the buffet, friends and relations will soon be arriving in their car loads all the way from London, until quite lately, Mamma with her car full of friends, expecting and receiving the red carpet, sitting in the middle of the front row like a queen. We go early to dress after the buffet tea and from



upstairs watch the early arrivals; some have come from a distance and bring picnics and we see them sitting out on the grass in the orchard; sometimes we hear the popping of a cork, and hope perhaps they have brought wine or champagne to make them cheerful.

People begin to pour down the drive, I go to the other side and see the stand is filling up and soon it is full from top to bottom and there is an S.O.S. for more chairs, every available one is put in every possible place, and there are many standing; we are set fair with a full house and the prospect of a fine evening. The signals go and we are off—this time to a select and selective audience, everyone is on their toes, the atmosphere electric, not a point dropped or missed, what a feeling of warmth and friendliness, it is thrilling!

During the interval we hear the people chattering, alert and interested but we wonder how much money they are putting into the till. The end brings great enthusiasm; if a comedy we trip lightly across the stage; if a tragedy we bow in a more seemly fashion. Calls for the Producer bring him out, he bows in a characteristic fashion, and takes us in as well. Afterwards we are set upon by friends "Better than ever" they cry, and we hope it is true and that next time we may deserve it even more. Night and silence fall suddenly as the lights go out, and Cross, ever helpful, stows the furniture and properties in the tent; the cast having again refreshed themselves, gradually fade away and the London cars make their way into the darkness.

Monday is a restful day, twice we have been washed out, several times nearly, but what matter? It is a risk to take and we have done the play twice before; when we do have that last performance it is full of light-hearted gaiety, untouched with nervousness and may turn out to be the best performance of the lot. A gaiety tinged with sadness though, it is the last time, the happy companionship, the hopes shared, the agonies gone through and surmounted, all have come to an end, and even as the last cup of soup is drunk several will have disappeared into the night to start work in a mundane world next day as we to the task of dismantling and clearing, and all illusion finished for another year.

What things stand out in memory over the space of all these twenty years? It would be invidious to single out any one performance but there are always moments that can



never be forgotten. For me the first, when I saw the supper table of the Banished Duke in "As you like it" and heard the "seven ages" and I knew then that the garden had indeed become the forest of Arden. And what a thrill to hear the audience gasp as Stanley, in the part of the oaf William pursued by Touchstone, dived into the pool. We were younger then, colds and rheumatism had no terrors, though he did do it only once, and we did have a glass of rum ready for him after. . .

I can see two village boys, now grown men, sitting singing "It was a lover," etc., the beginning of the magic. A riotous first "Merry Wives" full of spontaneous laughter and the discovery of the charm of "Loves Labour" the year war broke out, the beautiful summer of 1939. Twenty-nine people to lunch on the Sunday, Rosabel Watson brought her Ladies' Orchestra from Regents Park. The war, an interlude, when we kept the flag flying as best we could with songs and dances and scenes, lots of children and plenty of fun but no lights, no magic, but it was a bridge to better things.

"Twelfth Night," the first long play after the war, and the picture of Greville, sitting cross-legged in the darkness in what is surely the loveliest end to any play, and was he not one of the most charming Festes? 1947, a glorious summer and the "Dream." Many are the pictures here—fairies flitting in and out the trees, Bottom garlanded with flowers, with Donnie a slight graceful silver figure leading him into the shadows. And dear old Silver, the other Berkshire stalwart; surely Snug the joiner as Shakespeare knew him, the genuine product of the English countryside with a ripe accent none could imitate, gave to the play an unforgettable moment—"If I should, as Lion, come in strife into this place, 'twere pity on my life" he cries, and taking off his lion's head showed to the audience his own pink round beaming face. Most of us had a lump in our throats as well as laughter.

Second "Loves Labour" and a lovely country dance beneath the stars. Second "Merry Wives" and Ford banging the Buck Basket hoping to find Falstaff. "Come forth you varlet," says he, and out hopped our white pussy 'Kay. He brought down the house. . . On to Venice, next, and audiences enjoying the good old meaty drama. Geoffrey makes his debut as a magnifico! and Eric has a wonderful entrance as the Doge, as I see him far off enthroned



impressively, I get quite a thrill before my entrance, it has indeed become a court and the garden is forgotten.

From Venice to the fairy-tale atmosphere of the "Winter's Tale." Surely the country scenes never had such reality, such a young and handsome pair, Michael and Prue, as Florizel and Perdita dancing on the greensward. A step to tragedy and "Hamlet." Michael, so handsome, so young, so vigorous, carrying all before him in the open air. What a revelation to find that the ghost could be real and thrilling even in broad daylight. Such magic can the words of Shakespeare bring when properly spoken; and what a thrill the last scene, with no limitations of space as in a theatre.

Macbeth, too, could be got over, despite the beauty of a summer garden. The night gave a new reality to the witches cauldron, and the kings were indeed spectres in the gloom. Long will I remember Vowden's speaking "The crow makes wing to the rooky wood" as the darkness fell around us. In the bushes Thanos appeared to be charging perpetually from one side to the other, and indeed when they did appear, bearing their branches, it did, indeed, seem as if Birnam wood had come to Dunsinane. Back to comedy again in "Much Ado" gayer and better than before and shall we ever forget Robin's "And moreover. . ."

And last "Romeo and Juliet" with two young things Alan and Eira, on a perfect summer night. The moon rising obligingly behind the balcony-hectic rush over its construction, but beautiful in the end—dear Geoffrey as Capulet, Stanley quiet, sympathetic, as the Friar . . . beauty, illusion, magic all the way, everything contributed and the thrill of the biggest audience ever . . . and then the figures fade into the darkness and are silent.

July again and an empty garden. No voices, no fairies, ghosts, rustics or Thanos, only the wind in the trees. Will these figures come again and the greensward turn once more into a stage for the two hours traffic of our play? I like to hope it may.



*To all
who have assisted
at Stockwells in the
Summer Show in affection
and the hope that they
will do so again*



*Stockwells,
Aston Upthorpe,
Nr. Didcot.*

A Personal Tribute by Stephen Whitwell.

Spoken at Paulise's Thanksgiving Service at All Saints Church, on 13th April 1975.

I wanted the other day to check a date of a trivial administrative happening last year and consulted my diary. I found this – which is not what I was looking for, “Paulise telephoned, furious about a pompous letter from the planners. She asked me to help her draft a reply, and wanted to talk about Jane Austen”

That was last November – such a short time ago. Until the last few sad weeks, Paulise never stopped doing things. She did so much, with and for so many people, that it is impossible in a very short address to do any sort of justice to her life.

It seems natural to think first of the incomparable plays. Do you know that there were thirty-six productions, from 1935 to 1973, one every year except for the year of Herbie's death and the one following. I am told that there was a very special magic about the earlier ones, which I never personally knew, with the audience sitting on the grass and many village people taking part, but, my goodness, the later ones were fine too. I once took a sophisticated friend from London, who thought it very kind and condescending to patronise a village Do. To her credit, she quickly changed her tune. We have just heard some music from “Midsummer Night's Dream”. I expect if you shut your eyes, as I did, you will have seen the player coming through the trees in Stockwells garden.

But just now I am thinking less of the superlative productions than of all the people at Stockwells during a play, the tremendous extent of Paulise's hospitality, the sheer numbers who stayed with her or were entertained to meals. And I am thinking of her kindness and practical help, particularly to the younger players, her endless ideas. Yes, and her despair too when things seemed to go wrong as always they did at some stage – and then of her intense delight at the final triumph.

This love of drama, in which she had been brought up and trained, extended to active support for other local drama groups, and was complemented by a great interest in music, opera and ballet. What a pleasure it was to drive her to Oxford or elsewhere for a concert or a visit to the opera.

I think it was through drama – dressing up- and her wide reading and increasing knowledge of history and literature that the costume collection came to be such an important thing to her, although as you all know it started with the famous bonfire at Filberts and the gradual acquisition of costumes from Mr Ainger. Setting all these up at Edlins was a tremendous work, rewarded by the delight of those who came to see them. It gave enormous pleasure to Paulise, as to so many others here today, that last year the costumes were on show for longer than usual and were visited by so many people. She took so much trouble, and gave so much original thought, to the arrangement of the rooms. This wasn't always very scholarly – the nursery in the attic, Jane Eyre, the parlourmaid with the tea things – but people loved it. (That was what Jane Austen was about. We were to have had a display round her this year, the bicentenary of her birth).

Paulise admired above all beauty in everything, perhaps chiefly in the works of man, but also in nature. She travelled very widely, to Sicily, Greece, Turkey, Cyprus, Persia, Ceylon, Mauritius, and East and South Africa as well as nearer to hand in Europe. She sketched, photographed and recorded her impressions.

But it was here that she lived for forty-four years, and it is her life and work in this village for which we are specially thankful today.

Those of you who come to our family service here will remember the prayer for Aston, in which we thank

God that we live in such a beautiful place and pray that we may keep it beautiful. That was something that Paulise felt very strongly about. She most actively supported the C.P.R.E, and the Women's Institute of which she was the local president. As a tribute to her its members have arranged the lovely flowers in church today. She loved expeditions to old houses and gardens and was always interested to see ones newly opened. Last year I took her to Stratfield Saye. But as always, she came back to this village, which was so much in her thoughts. On the foundations, literally, of the Nissen hut which had long been schemed and subscribed for she built the Village Hall, now the pride of the locality and used gratefully by many outside the Astons.

She was also a major provider for this little church, which is why we could have had this service nowhere else, however tightly we have had to pack ourselves in. It was for the church that, year after year, Paulise organised 'Spring in Aston', usually with the costumes on view at Edlins, an evening's entertainment in the hall, and Judy Massingham's sculptures somewhere in Stockwells garden.

I think she particular enjoyed the one four years ago when, with the enthusiastic backing of Jim Crowther – now also alas no longer with us – we celebrated with more enthusiasm than historical accuracy the eleven hundred anniversary of the Battle of Ashdown, and Paulise's own play on the subject was performed in the village hall.

All the proceeds of these activities, most lovingly thought up, went to the maintenance of this church. So we are now indeed on our own, as the diocese will give us nothing, and we must look to our own shrinking purses and our 'pride of place' (a virtue, I have always thought, though some would have it otherwise) if a congregation which has existed for over a thousand years is to continue here.

In doing all these things, Paulise was all the time involving other people. Perhaps my strongest impression is of her saying, whether about the casting of a play, or some other activity 'He will do so and so. She would be good at doing this. They would do that so well.' (If it were not for that memory of that kind of encouragement, I should not have dared to get on my feet here today, after I had learnt that others who could have spoken so much more adequately were unable to do so). Not that she was uncritical. Can't you remember her saying 'Oh, he - or she – was awful.....' But those who could not do one thing well enough for her could nearly always do another. Because of her knowledge, enthusiasm and encouragement it was a pleasure to do things for her.

Looking back on this, I am sure that our gratitude and pleasure should quite overcome our sadness that it is over. I wonder how many of you have seen the letters which schoolchildren wrote to Paulise after visiting the costume exhibition. They are splendid.

Although Paulise was such a lover of history and tradition, and hated the concrete jungle, and like most of us occasionally despaired, setbacks did not stop her. Adversities did not dry up her interests and enthusiasms. She went on. Only last autumn she was thrilled to get some new costumes. We unpacked them together, discussed their likely origin, whether they were correctly labelled and ascribed, and so on. When she regretfully decided that a play last year would be too much for her, she revived marvellously at the prospect of the Georgian Evening which we had instead. I remember buying a copy of 'The Critic' and reading it with her. How she laughed at it all, and on the night how enormously she enjoyed Muffin's dance to the Water Music. In all one's memories of the times at Stockwells laughter keeps breaking in. We simply can't help being grateful for it all.

She said once last year, when she began to be very ill. 'I don't want to be old'. She never was. Let us be thankful that it was so.

A Tribute to Robin Sewell, by The Blewbury Players. June 2012.

We are sad to report the death of Robin Sewell, a founder trustee and a key figure in the early years of the Blewbury Players. Trained at RADA, he acted at the Old Vic in the early 1950s under the stage name Robert Welles, at which time he also became involved with the Stockwells Players at Aston Tirrold, whose remarkable tradition of 40 years of garden theatre productions, mostly Shakespeare, was the seed out of which the Blewbury Players grew.

It was through Robin that we inherited the lighting equipment from the Stockwells Players, as well as a significant contribution to our launching costs from the Trustees of Paulise Lugg, the owner of Stockwells and, with her director husband Herbie, the inspirer of the Stockwells Players. Most importantly in the early years, we also inherited their box office filing system and extensive mailing list, including the names of some who we are still delighted to welcome to our productions, nearly 40 years later!

But it was as a director and as a brilliant actor that he helped create the high production standards of which we are so proud. I have one splendid memory of an extended embrace in *As You Like It* between him as Touchstone and Meta Wiggins as Audrey. The audience thought they were seeing a bit of brilliant acting, but what was actually happening was a desperate discussion about what the next line was and who should speak it! Thank you, Robin, for everything you did for us and for so much fun.

Robin Sewell was a brilliant and hilarious Master Ford in our first ever production, the *Merry Wives of Windsor*, in 1976. His reaction to the smell of the buck-basket, when it did contain Falstaff, on his way to being tipped into the Thames, and his frustration when he failed to find him later, in the same buck-basket, having flung its contents all over the stage, are well captured in these earliest photos of Blewbury Players productions.



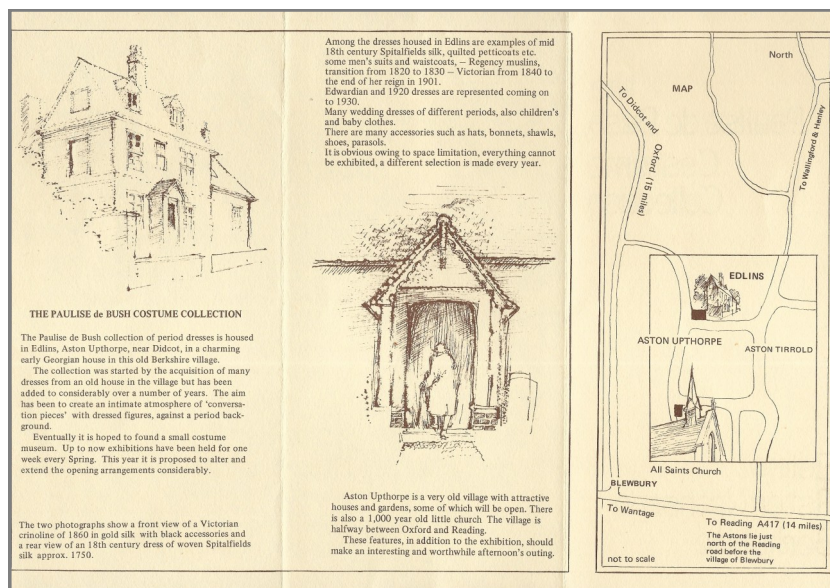
Postscript: Edlins Costume Museum.

During the Second World War many villages welcomed people moving out of London to escape the bombing, and the Astons were no exception.

The owners of one house, Filberts in Aston Street, found that their upper rooms were full of old clothes and started clearing them out to make room for their visitors - a bonfire was their intended fate!

But Paulise de Bush realised that they were in fact period costumes, some going back to the 18th century. She bought many of them for use by The Stockwells Players, but also became an enthusiastic collector of theatrical and historical costumes, indeed, she bought Edlins, a neighbouring property, to house the growing collection.

Paulise wanted to ensure the collection went to a place where it could be seen and enjoyed by all, and after her death the collection was gifted to the National Trust's Killerton House in Devon. Her collection still forms a significant part of the Trust's historic costumes collection.



ASTONS HISTORY GROUP PUBLICATIONS:

Aston Tirrold and Upthorpe: a history, by Lucy Fuller. (1921). A fascinating record of village life, given as a talk to the Astons Women's Institute. An Astons History Group reprint. Reprinted 2026.

Sir John Leigh Hoskyns: Rector of St. Michael's Church Aston Tirrold 1846 to 1911, by Vivien Biggs. The life of a Victorian rector whose 60-year tenure saw many changes in village life. 2006.

Sir John Leigh Hoskyns' Diary of a village. Extracts, selected by Vivien Biggs. 2000.

The Stockwell Players, by Robin Sewell. 2000. Re-printed with new material 2026. Compiled by Jancis Smith. A drama group who performed outdoor productions for nearly forty years, with early appearances by Prunella Scales and Alan Bates. Forerunner of the Blewbury Players.

Wee Joe: From Galloway to Flanders Fields. 2018.

Astons Fallen Soldiers. *Lives of the sixteen Astons soldiers who lost their lives during WW1.* 2018.

The Astons Home Front: the Role of Women during WW1. 2018.

An Astons Journal: The 'diary' of Stephen Elliott and Tom Powell: 1885 to 1984, transcribed and annotated by Judy Barradell-Smith. Compile. 2019.

The Astons Poor Relief Book, 1788-1821. A partial transcript, with research and annotation by Stephen Whitwell and Judy Barradell-Smith. 2023.

Astons Fallen Soldiers. *Lives of the ten Astons soldiers who lost their lives during WW2.* 2025.

The Forgotten War: Frederick Ernest Ray. 1914-1944, by Judy Barradell Smith. 2025.

A History of the Aston Tirrold and Aston Upthorpe War Memorial: 1921-2021, by Jancis Smith. 2021, updated 2025.

Aston Tirrold and Aston Upthorpe Village Hall A History: 1944-2026, by Jancis Smith. 2026.

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