

Kingston Bagpuize Drama Group was started in 1949 and held its first meeting in the then village school. The first Chairperson was Mrs M Drew, the mother of Tony Drew who still lives in the village and attends many of our production.

Tony was himself a member for many years and directed the first play I appeared in 'Halfway up the Tree' by Peter Ustinov in January 1972.

For many years the group put on one act plays. The first production was two one act plays and a monologue given by one John Somerville who also produced the plays entitled 'In a Glass Darkly' and 'Villa for Sale'. 1953 brought the first full length play, Still Life by Noel Coward.

Readers will probably know the story better as Brief Encounter as it was called when it was made into a film starring Celia Johnson and Trevor Howard.

As a celebration of the group's sixtieth anniversary we shall be again staging 'Still Life' as our November production this year.

Since those days KBDG has put on over 120 productions for the village and has produced many a talented actor. Indeed one of the early members, Roger Timms, left the group in 1960 to go to the Central School of Speech & Drama and subsequently entered the professional theatre appearing not only at the Oxford Playhouse but also on television. He then left acting to become a monk, I believe I saw him once on the front of a custard tin.

When I enlisted for duty back in 1971, Graham Platt, the then head of John Blandy School was a member and older readers will perhaps remember such stalwarts as Dennis Anderson, Kay Foster, Denis Barker and Murray MacClean.

We used to meet in the bothy at Kingston House which also had facilities for the storing of props and costumes. Unfortunately when the owner Miss Raphael died so did the offer of the accommodation

Early successes included the group entering the Oxfordshire Drama Festival in 1967 with John Mortimer's 'Dock Brief' and reached the final, performing at the Kenton Theatre in Henley-on-Thames.

Over the years the group has offered the village dramas, comedies, tragedies, thrillers as well as Revues, Music Halls, Children's Workshops, a Murder Mystery Evening and even a football match back in the seventies.

We had a healthy social side with theatre visits, barbecues, treasure hunts, dances, annual dinners and weekends away.

We moved into the new village hall in 1987 and as plush as the new hall is much affection was still held for the old hall. The heating had to be turned off during the performance because of the noise it made. The tiny stage with often the only way to exit one side and come back on the other was to run round the building. There was the famous story of the production set in high summer and one actor exiting stage right and having to come back on stage left almost immediately. It was teeming with rain and many a whisper was heard asking why the poor man was soaking wet on his re-entrance.

A note about our backstage capabilities. In November 1982 we put on The Ghost Train. Shortly after our show the play was on at the Playhouse and I am not exaggerating when I say our effects were streets ahead of the professional production. We had smoke from the train coming through the broken window, they didn't, we had the lights of the train in the background they didn't. The quality of our sets and effects is of some pride to members as I am sure readers will agree should you visit other small village drama productions

We have enjoyed many successes over the years with such classics as Noises Off,

Barefoot in the Park, California Suite and Wait until Dark. More recently Ladies' Day and Accrington Pals were well received, but as far as audience feed back 'allo, 'allo still holds the record I fancy.

The group has put on some plays twice. The Importance of Being Earnest, a turkey called With Vacant Possession and Outside Edge a cracking comedy by Richard Harris which went down very well with the audience on both occasions.

This is an extract from a letter in the KBS news at the time;

.....we came out after two hours of constant laughter from a very professional performance, the casting of which we thought was far better than the performance shown on TV a few weeks later and did not even raise a smile on our faces....

Praise indeed.

The group goes from strength to strength. Recently members have won several awards. They include Linda Hudson for best director and Kate Belcher for best actress at the Shinfield festival a couple of years ago, and Andrea Spencer, Emily Eastham (nee Joyce) and Susi Dalton won the first Colin Dexter award at the ODN festival two years ago.

Our group is built on the blend of years of experience and new blood and we now have a thriving youth section who take an active part in all our activities and hopefully will carry Kingston Bagpuize Drama Group well into the 21st century. Any interested parties please note we put on two plays a year plus festival entries and meet every Tuesday night in the hall.