

ENTERPRIZES THEATRE GROUP

Birchington – begun in 1965

From an article in the Residents' Newsletter Jan. 1990

Enterprizes' Silver Jubilee

The Pantomime "Tom the Piper's Son", being presented at Birchington Village Centre from January 11th to 13th and from 18th to 20th, marks a special event in the Enterprizes Drama Club's calendar, for it is one of the highlights of the club's silver jubilee year. Club chairman John Milgate, co-founder with Ray Macpherson, recalls how the club got its name.

"I was an ambulance cadet officer and we needed to raise funds for first-aid kits for the unit. We formed a group to put on "Red Riding Hood" in Birchington Methodist Church Hall. We used papier maché for scenery, because we couldn't afford anything better.

On the night, the unit's commandant, the late Francis Rolfe, congratulating us, said we had been "very enterprising". Everyone was keen to carry on, so Ray and I called the club "The Enterprizes" – using a 'z' instead on an 's'. We switched to Kearns Hall, Minnis Bay to perform a play written by Ray as our first drama production."

The club then moved to Church House, where, in December 1965, The Enterprizes staged its first pantomime "Cinderella". Church House was the club's home until it was demolished (in 1971). In the early 1970s the club moved to King Ethelbert School, but they also put on shows at the Congregational (now URC) Church Hall, Westgate, Hartsdown School, Margate and at Ramsgate's Granville Theatre.

"One of our successes at the school was "Sweeney Todd", which we also took to the Granville Theatre, at the request of the old Ramsgate Council", recalls John Milgate. "The script said that a certain chair in the play must be screwed to the stage, otherwise the plot would not work. Of course, we were not allowed to do that, but we found a way round the problem. We told the publishers and in later editions that instruction was dropped."

In January 1975 The Enterprizes staged its first production in the new Village Centre – "The Sleeping Beauty". Interest in the club was shown by playwright Tudor Gates, who then lived in Minnis Road. He wrote a play specially for the club, which was entered for the Kent One-Act Play Festival. He also made a film of members in action, for which local actor Carl Conway did the sound commentary.

Tudor Gates became a vice-president, as did Mr Ron Young, while the late Cllr. Bill Beerling was president. In 1980, journalist Marion Evans became president and Cllr. Neville Hudson is now (in 1990) vice-president.

Notable productions in recent years include “The Wizard of Oz”, “Oliver” and our summer “Seaside Follies” Shows. At one time the club had a touring concert party entertaining in old people’s homes and in hotels, which were much appreciated.

In August the club took part in Thanet Arts’ Council’s season of Plays at the Granville, Ramsgate, where it presented the comedy-thriller “The Ghost Train” to appreciative audiences.

Over the years members like Simon Archer, Peggy Cleminson, John Williams and Michael Bonsor have won acting awards in the Kent Drama Festivals.

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The Editor of the Magazine has added the following note:

We congratulate the Enterprize Drama Club, for 25 years of their enterprising entertainments for Birchington residents – we look forward to the next 25 years and wish them continued success in all their productions,

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2006 : In the last two or three years, the club has found it harder and harder to keep going and has now closed down – if only temporarily – as there was not enough enthusiasm among members to overcome the difficulties they were facing.

Jennie Burgess 24 - 1 - 2006