

How It All Started (1942 – 1948)

In 1942 a concert party was formed to provide live entertainment for the war weary citizens of Stevenage and for Servicemen home on leave. There being no theatre in the town at that time, performances were staged at the town's largest factory 'The Educational Supply Association' in Fairview Road. By 1946 the group became known as the 'Stevenage Entertainment Society', catering for drama, music and variety. At this time a club, which had originally been opened for displaced war workers, was converted into The Lytton Club, open to any citizen of Stevenage over the age of 18. The premises were located in an old wartime hutment in Pound Avenue and the club jointly presented plays, variety and pantomime with the Entertainment Society.

Stevenage in 1948

In 1948 when our story begins, Stevenage had a population of just 6000 and was the market centre of a predominantly rural area. It contained a High Street of about 100 shops, and 20 Inns, dating back to the time when Stevenage, just 30 miles from London, was the first stop for a change of horses on journeys to the North of England.

Construction work on the New Town did not start until 1952, and the first houses were completed the following year. So for the first five years, our audiences were drawn from the existing 'Old Town' and rural surrounding population.

Although the 'Old Towners' were anti New Town, staging protests against its development and christening it 'Silkingrad' after Lewis Silkin, the responsible minister, they soon changed their mind when they began to prosper from the additional trade opportunities the construction workers and first arrivals brought – shopping in the town and drinking in the Pubs.

The two groups soon became closely integrated, with many members of The Lytton Club also being members of the Stevenage Entertainment Society. In May 1948, Officers of the two groups met and decided to call a meeting of all interested members of both groups, with a view to proposing a merger of the Entertainment Society and the Drama Group of The Lytton Club. The suggestion was a popular one, and so it came about that in June 1948, at a General Meeting of all interested parties, the drama and music section of The Lytton Club came into being. Mr. M.H. Tetley was the first president and Albert Perry the first Chairman. Bill Harding, Deneys Swayne and Morris Williams were also among the members of the original Committee.

Thus was formed the group that was eventually to be named '*The Stevenage Lytton Players*'

The Early Days (1948 – 1960)

The aim of the newly constituted 'Drama and Music' section of The Lytton Club was to encourage as many

members of the Club as possible to take part in stage work, and to provide the public with good amateur entertainment.

The Lytton Club Hall, situated in Pound Avenue at this time, had a maximum seating capacity of 170; this number was reduced to 136 due to the provision of portable tiered seats. The financial loss caused by the reduced seating capacity was soon made good by the installation of two front rows of comfortable armchairs at a very much higher price.

The stage was tiny, measuring 14ft x 10ft and only 10 inches high, with no stage lighting and no dressing rooms - but it had possibilities.

The new, completely inexperienced Committee, set about enlarging the stage in time for the first production in October 1948. The rebuilding was a major feat of construction as the original stage was of solid concrete, covered by a parquet floor and backed by a breeze-block wall, behind which were located two store rooms. The work was completed in 4 weeks. The end result was a stage 17ft x 14ft and 1ft 10in high. Also erected was a curved cyclorama, and a highly dangerous but fairly effective system of electrical wiring was installed, which gave a workable lighting layout.

All was now set for the first production '*Dover Road*' (see inset). This was followed in November by a Triple Bill consisting of '*Storm*', '*The Dark Lady of the Sonnets*' and '*The Jelly Fish*'. The production was not well attended with only 190 attending over 4 nights.

'*Little Red Riding Hood*' was the next production, the idea having originated with two members who met in a pub. When one suggested that they ought to write a Pantomime, the other replied



'Nothing to it, when do we start?'. It was as simple as that. One of the topics that came in for much treatment in this Pantomime was the Stevenage Development Corporation, then in its infancy.

The rehearsals for the production were shambolic, and leaving the hall before 11.00pm was a noteworthy event. The show itself, however, was an unbelievable success. Seven performances were given and a total of 1,040 people attended, which was 84 more than the seats provided! All of the 600 programmes printed were sold. The sceptics were silenced, the press went into rhapsodies and a profit of £150 was made.

Thus was that first 1948/1949 season an eventful and hectic one. The membership grew to 61, the Committee met 15 times in 9 months, a profit of £142.00 was made, and a good time was had by all.

**First Production
Dover Road by AA Milne**

The cast consisted of 8 members. Two of these were Doug McClymont and Nell Gwynne (now Mrs McClymont). The play was an undoubted success although audiences were small, with only 290 paying for admission. The prices of the seats were 3/-, 2/- and 1/-.

Quotes from local Newspapers

'Little Red Riding Hood 'promises to give Stevenage its biggest laugh, brightest piece of entertainment and best night out of the year...'

'Don't be disappointed, reserve your seats now. Tickets at popular prices (5/- to 1/6) with special reductions for children.'

'Don't delay, book today. You will find The Lytton Club a warm, friendly, homely and intimate little place, and refreshments will be available at most reasonable prices.'

1949/1950

The season opened with some new faces on the Committee, one of whom was Stanley Bunting in the position of Equipment Manager. A provisional programme was mapped out, comprising a Revue in October, full length plays in November, March and May, and a pantomime in January as well as nine play readings.

Teething troubles were soon encountered. The Revue, called '*We can't use that*', ran into rough water, the Producer being somewhat inexperienced and many of the cast apathetic. The production

was due to take place on October 26th to 29th and so, on September 15th, a special committee meeting was held to decide whether the show should proceed. On the casting vote of the Chairman, the production was given a second chance. This close shave had a dynamic effect on all concerned and rehearsals took on a new zest and sense of urgency. The show was a roaring success, running for 4 nights and generating a profit of £57. Stan Taplin made the first of many appearances with the Players, as did the 'Quondamn Quartet' (mixed gender in those days).

The pantomime was '*Babes in the Wood*', but unfortunately its standard was not up to that of the preceding season. The audiences and the Press showed moderate enthusiasm, but it was played to full houses and made a substantial profit. The play '*Arsenic and Old Lace*' was then cast and rehearsed, the production presenting one interesting technical problem in that it called for one character to ascend and descend a flight of stairs - this with a maximum ceiling of 10ft 6in. The play was a success and attracted an audience of 440.

The season had been highly successful, financially profitable, and the membership had grown to 68.

1950/1951

The year 1950 was a fairly momentous one in the history of the Players, being the year in which the name 'Lytton Players' first appeared before the public. It was also the year in which the decision was taken to make the Society much more comprehensive in its activities. This was the season in which Deneys Swayne became Chairman.

At the start of the season matters were not going well for the drama and music sections of The Lytton Club. There had been a major reduction of all activities excepting music and drama, subscriptions were not being paid and the Club was rapidly dissolving. After much deliberation The Lytton Club was wound up leaving the music and drama sections high and dry. Fears of having to look for new premises were dispelled

Lytton Players Presidents

M.H. Tetley	1948 - 1957
G.M. White	1957 - 1959
Alice Harper	1959 - 1962
W. Harding	1962 - 1965
R.S. McDougall	1965 - 1968
S.G. Bunting	1968 - 1971
R.A. Slessor	1971 - 1973
James Boyd	1973 - 1976
Brian Hamilton	1976 - 1979
Leonard Parkin	1979 - 1982
Ray Gorbing	1982 -

by the County Council agreeing to the buildings of the old Lytton Club being converted into a Community Centre, the name being 'The Stevenage Centre'. A meeting was held on September 25th 1950, and by an unanimous vote, the name 'The Lytton Players' was adopted. The Lytton Players became the first organisation to be affiliated to the Stevenage Centre at a subscription of £120 per annum.

Herts Pictorial 15/03/1950

'The Lytton Club team is far more than passable. It has a flare for comedy of the kind in which the play abounds and as a result Arsenic and Old Lace was certainly among the best shows the club has staged'

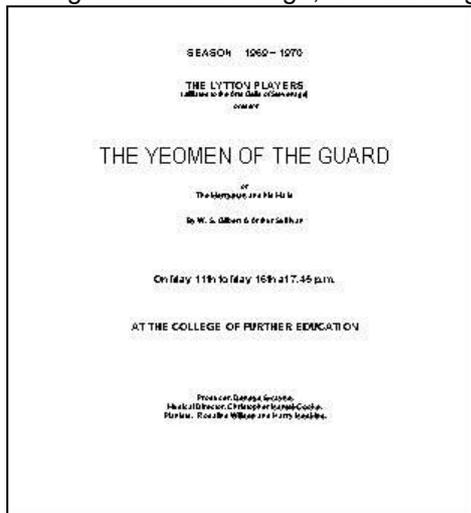
Soon an important further step was taken by the Committee, that of inviting the newly-formed 'Light Opera Group' to join The Lytton Players. At a joint meeting of both Societies on December 20th 1950, a merger was agreed and a constitution was drawn up. The subscription was 10/- for those between 15 and 18 and £1 for those over 18. The joint capital amounted to £22.3s.6d.

One member, Alice Harper, expressed the opinion that there might be enough members interested in light opera to make the production of Gilbert and Sullivan's 'Trial by Jury' a possibility for May 1951. There was little difficulty in forming the cast of 28 which was soon in rehearsal, also rehearsing for 'Cox and Box' which was to act as a curtain raiser. The show played to full houses and was a great success. In this show Brian Hamilton showed his remarkable acting ability playing the defendant. By the end of the run it was realised what great fun Gilbert and Sullivan could be and also what great box-office it was.

1951/1952

The programme for this season was both full and varied, comprising a twenty minute episode in the Hitchin Pageant, 5 stage presentations, outdoor play readings and a visit to the Savoy Theatre to see 'HMS Pinafore'. Also planned was cleaning and repairing of the wardrobe, a further enlargement of the stage, a revised lighting system and building of a covered way between the

stage doors and the Youth Club, which the Players were allowed the use of as a changing room.



Stan Bunting produced the November play, 'Fools Rush In'. It was extremely well done and attracted larger audiences than both its predecessors. Members who took part in this production included Jose Aked and Stan Staplin.

At this time the economics of amateur entertainment were beginning to assume a serious aspect, the cost of materials was rising and the rent for the Centre had been increased to £150 per annum. The bank balance reached an all time low of £14.16s., but financial stability was restored by the profits from the pantomime 'Jack and the Beanstalk', which generated £129.00. To achieve this the price of seats had to be increased, the new rates being 5/-, 4/-, 3/- and 2/-.

Income was further enhanced by the serving of light refreshments, provided by the 'Rangers' under the guidance of Dorothy Griffiths.

'Edward My Son' was the next production in March 1952 and was remarkable for a number of reasons. It had the largest cast of any play to date, it had 5 scene changes, the cast contained 3 members of the Music Section, and the Producer was ordered off stage by the Stage Manager and told to 'mind his own business'.

The season had been a great success. The Drama Section was in good heart, the Music Section had found its feet, membership had risen to 74, and the bank balance reached £95.7s.3d.

1952/1953

The season opened with a dance for members and friends. This was a great success with 80 to 90 people attending and making a profit of £7. Then followed the play, 'Bonaventure', which ran from October 29th to November 1st and drew a large audience of 425.

The pantomime '*Dick Whittington*' must rank as a major flop. The script was poor, the plot unsuited for pantomime, there was little music, the costumes were drab, and only the scenery was up to scratch. The press generously refrained from adverse comment, but the audiences, attending on the strength of previous pantomimes were disappointed. However a handsome profit was made.

In March The Lytton Players were invited to dress a float for the Coronation Procession which was to be held in June. '*Pepys - And so to Bed*' was chosen, having the advantage of requiring only a cast of one, the part of Mr Pepys, portrayed by Stan Taplin. '*HMS Pinafore*' and '*Trial by Jury*' were presented in May. The cast of 33 playing to near-capacity houses with 790 attending in all.

By the end of the season membership had risen to 87, the bank balance stood at £123 and so, at the AGM in May, subscriptions for members over 18 were reduced from £1 to 10/- and for members under 18 from 10/- to 5/-

1953/1954

After the disappointment of the previous pantomime, a lot of thought was given to this season's production. It was decided to present '*Little Red Riding Hood Mk II*'. Many of the original cast teamed up again, with Deneys Swayne as producer. The show was an undoubted success running for 7 performances to 860 people. The March play was Noel Coward's '*This Happy Breed*' which had a cast of 12 and played to 400 people.

At the AGM it was agreed that the end of the financial year should be changed from 31st March to June 30th. Membership had risen to 92 and the bank balance stood at £158.

1954/1955

During this season the seeds of the future 'Music Hall' were sown. A dance sub-committee was formed with the brief of arranging a really good dance including a cabaret, but expected to lose money. It was decided to put on a 'Music Hall' style cabaret, providing free beer, cider and hotdogs to those attending. One member of the Committee was so convinced that the event would be a failure, that at the dance, he went as far as to advise fellow guests to remain in the bar. Happily he was proved wrong and the rest, as they say, is history.

Under the Chairmanship of Stanley Bunting '*The Interlude*', as it was called, went on. It consisted of 6 acts of the 'Music Hall' genre, including Olive Skells' new approach to the song '*Villia*', the Quondamn Quartet featuring Alice Harper, Brian Hamilton, Olive Skells and Deneys Swayne, and a fine female impersonation by Brian Hamilton. The show was a roaring success and the dance, which had been expected to make a loss, instead generated a profit of £22.

During the early months of 1955, due to steadily increasing rents at the Centre, the Committee was faced with making the difficult decision of finding some other less costly venue. It was decided to ask the headmaster of Alleynes' Grammar School if the school hall and stage could be

Shows in the period 1948/1959	
1948	The Dover Road A Triple Bill
1949	Little Red Riding Hood Arms and the Man We Can't Use That
1950	Babes in the Wood Arsenic & Old Lace Meet Mrs Beeton London Wall
1951	Toad of Toad Hall Laburnum Grove Cox & Box/Trial by Jury Our Songs Are Yours Fools Rush In
1952	Jack & the Beanstalk Edward My Son The Mikado Bonaventure
1953	Dick Whittington The Heiress Trial by Jury/HMS Pinafore Merrie England (Concert)
1954	Little Red Riding Hood II This Happy Breed Cox & Box/Pirates of Penzance The Holly & the Ivy Gaudeamus Igitur
1955	Babes in the Wood Relative Values Ruddigore Christmas Concert
1956	Iolanthe Christmas Concert Gilbert & Sullivan Concert Nativity Play Miracle Play
1957	Murder on the Nile The Gondoliers Gilbert & Sullivan Concerts Nativity Play Miracle Play
1958	Chiltern Hundreds The Mikado A Mixed Bill Gilbert & Sullivan Concert Carol & Poetry Concert Gilbert & Sullivan Concert
1959	Thunder Rock Princess Ida Gilbert & Sullivan Concert Reluctant Debutante The First Music Hall



used for future activities and this was agreed. 'Ruddigore' was the last show to be presented at the Stevenage Centre and every effort was made to make it a worthwhile finale. From the opening notes of the first night's Overture to the final chorus of the last, the show was a roaring success. Harry Heskins made his first appearance with the Society, and 760 people attended, providing a very fitting finale to the Society's activities at that venue.

During this time, owing to the increasing size of the membership, the collection of subscriptions was proving difficult. It was decided to appoint a Subscription Secretary, Brian Hamilton being the first of several to take on this role. At the end of the season, membership had risen to 91, and the bank balance stood at £114.

1955/1956

On 25th September 1955 The Lytton Players finally left the Stevenage Centre. Then on 13th October the much discussed reading of 'Macbeth' took place with only a handful of people turning up. It was apparent that a Shakespearean production was not yet a feasible proposition.

In April 'Iolanthe' was presented and played to packed houses, many being turned away at the door, including two bus loads from Bedford who arrived without advance booking. Over a run of 6 nights 1,070 attended. Even so a loss of £8 was made due to the high cost of production and low cost of seats, 4/- and 2/6.

The season drew to a disappointing close with the Treasurer warning that subscriptions might have to be raised from 10/- to £1.

Dry run of The Gondoliers

The 'Gondoliers' was the first major show staged by The Lytton Players in 1957, and in the first scene change, it was arranged that the gondola and gondolier would be smoothly and silently pulled off stage.

In the event, the Gondola got hooked up with the backcloth, dragging with it an expanse of Venetian water. The audience thought this hilarious and called for an encore.

1956/1957

This was a rather uneventful season for the Society. A few new members joined to take part in the Drama Section, which had rather fewer members than it liked. 'Gondoliers' was performed with a cast of 49; a notable point about this production being the number of members' offspring employed in small parts, one of these being Ian Hamilton whose father Brian also played one of the leads.

The bank balance stood at £183 and membership

had risen sharply to 113.

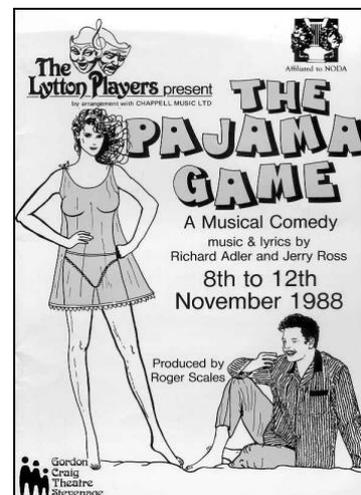
1957/1958

At this time The Lytton Players were very fortunate in being offered 2 rooms above Henderson's shop for costume storage. Prior to this they were being stored in Bill Harding's House and in Deneys Swaynes' surgery. The 'Mikado' went into production. The costumes, designed by Margaret Swayne, were conventional in style but not in colour. They were very effective and proved to be a valuable asset to the Society, hiring them to other societies and using them again some years later.

The season closed with a very cheerful and well-attended party at the 'Coach and Horses' with 88 members attending. At the end of a very successful year the membership stood at 101 and the bank balance was £255.

1958/1959

The October production 'A Mixed Bill' was intended to be a means for as many members as possible to get to know one another and also to employ as many on stage as possible - about 70 participated. One of the songs performed at this show was 'Baby



on the Shore', sung by Peter Currell, Brian Hamilton, Deneys Swayne, and Bob Wilson. The show achieved its objectives being both artistically and financially successful.

1959/1960

This was a very memorable season for The Lytton Players as their first ever 'Old Time Music Hall' was presented. A National 'World Refugee Fund' had been started earlier in the year, and at a public meeting it had been agreed that the target for Stevenage would be £500. The Lytton Players considered this sum somewhat small for a town the size of Stevenage, and indicated that they might well be able to raise that amount by themselves

A Selection from the first Music Hall	
Piano Overture	Harry Heskins
Don't Dilly Dally	Evelyn Vincent
Why am I always a Bridesmaid	Brian Hamilton
She was one of the Early Birds	Ray Gorbng
I'm E'nery the Eighth I am	Brian Hamilton
Can-Can	Nell McClymont & Others
Baby on the Shore	Brian Hamilton, Deneys Swayne & Others
Let the Great Big World Keep Turning & Dear Old Pals.	Closing songs

After much discussion and some small misgivings, it was agreed that The Lytton Players would attempt to raise as much of this as possible by putting on an 'Old Time Music Hall'. Some 900 tickets were printed and all were sold out in 3 days at a price of 6/- each. Waiters and waitresses attended the customers dressed in Edwardian style costume. John Austin was invited to be Chairman, and from the opening of the curtain on that historic first night, to the final closing on the Saturday night, the show was an unparalleled success. A cheque for £461 was handed over to the World Refugee Fund.

The Middle Years (1960 – 1988)

1960/1961

This was the season in which the Stevenage College of Further Education first permitted the use of their hall, and The Lytton Players were accorded the honour of staging the first full stage show there. This consisted of that old G&S favourite '*Iolanthe*' which sold very well indeed, even requiring extra seats to be brought in to accommodate everyone.

During the week of the show an American News Company were making a documentary of life in an English New Town and, wishing to include a short piece portraying live drama, invited The Lytton Players to participate. A short sequence from '*Iolanthe*' was chosen, and the whole process of recording took 5 hours for a 2½ minute scene. However the scene was not included in the finished documentary.

Around this time a number of the Players were busy assisting in the formation of a 'Stevenage Arts Guild'. It was to be open to any organisation concerned in the practice of the arts and handicrafts in and around Stevenage. The aims of the Guild were to be the promotion of cultural activities and interests, and the development of the knowledge, appreciation, and practice of the arts in Stevenage.

1961/1962

The highlight of this season was a trip by 51 of the Players to Ingelheim in Germany in order to perform Shakespeare and Gilbert and Sullivan during the Great Britain week.

They travelled by boat and train, departing on

The Stevenage/Ingelheim Link

The Stevenage/Ingelheim link originated in 1958, when the first links were formed between Alleyne's School, Stevenage Girls' School, and the Sebastian Munster Gymnasium in Ingelheim. This was arranged via the local education authority, with the aim of improving relations in the aftermath of the war.

In 1959, the townspeople of Stevenage formed a Stevenage/Ingelheim Committee which included representatives of groups such as local schools, the Rotary Club, and the Council of Churches. Visits involving Sports Clubs, Theatrical, and Dance groups were arranged, and in 1962 a 'British Fortnight' was held in Ingelheim.

All these contacts eventually led to the forging of links at a civic level, with Stevenage becoming officially twinned with Ingelheim, and the signing of a formal treaty on 28th September 1963.

Stevenage later became officially twinned with Autun in April 1975, Kadoma in August 1989 and Shimkent in June 1990.

the morning of April 12th. An uneventful train journey to Dover and an equally uneventful but crowded sea trip to Ostend preceded a long train journey to their final destination, finally arriving at 6.30am.

After the final curtain, the Chairman Deneys Swayne, offered to the people of Ingelheim the very sincere thanks of The Lytton Players and presented a volume of Shakespeare's works and a recording of 'Trial by Jury'. The Lytton Players were presented in return with a plaque bearing the arms of Ingelheim.

Also during this season the Players finally presented one of Shakespeare's plays, 'Twelfth Night'. The show was an enormous success and the financial result, a loss of only £7, was encouraging.

We were fortunate during this time to acquire our first home, which was a timber prefabricated building, originally Lloyds Bank, situated at the rear of Daneshill House. It was leased to us at a nominal rent by the Stevenage Development Corporation. At long last we had somewhere to meet, including a bar, kitchen facilities, and storage space for costumes and props.

Music Hall was performed for the second time with £488 being donated to charity for the benefit of the mentally and the physically handicapped.

1962 - 1968

The first newsletter was produced on the 1st August 1962.

The 1963/1964 Music Hall featured 'The Road to Mandalay' for the first time, starring Ray Gorbng and Stan Taplin. The Stevenage Town Band also performed in that Music Hall

The 1964/1965 Music Hall was also very successful with £450 being given to the Cheshire Home at Amptill and £250 to 'Stevenage Old People's Welfare'.

During the 1965/1966 season a Music Sub Committee was formed with responsibility for planning and organising the Society's musical productions.

At the start of the 1966/1967 season, the membership of the Players stood at 308.

'The Mikado' was presented in May 1967 featuring Ray Gorbng as The Mikado. Other cast members included, Di Barton, Claire Cox, Dorothy Gorbng, Stella Hill, Nell M'Clymont, Enid Newman, Margaret Walker, Mary Young, Bill Barker, Ron Newman, Peter Walker and Peter Williams.

The Lyttons entered the Stevenage Carnival in 1967 and were cup winners with a float entitled 'The Lazy Lyttons' Saloon'.

During the 1967/1968 season, a concert version of 'The Sorcerer' was put on in October with tickets selling at 5/- for adults and 2/6 for children. The Players also staged the play 'My Three Angels'.

1968/1969

This was the season in which The Lytton Players celebrated their 21st anniversary. A party was held with Councillor Bill Lawrence (Chairman of Stevenage Council) and Mrs Hilda Lawrence at the Stevenage Headquarters behind Daneshill House.

Membership had by now risen to 351, and at the AGM it was reported that the excess of income over expenditure was £135, and that the accumulated funds stood at £1,389.

Quotes from local Newspapers

About the first 'Mandalay'

This was led by a most imposing reminiscent Ray Gorbng with the assistance of Stan Taplin (who was variously 'You British Soldier', a seller of filthy postcards somewhere east of Suez, and a couple of flying fishes), Sheila Moreland with a Whacking Big Cheroot (which she declined to light) and Stan Bunting who 'interfered' with noises off and on!

About the 1964/1965 Music Hall

'The Lytton Players production of Music Hall is becoming something of a tradition in Stevenage now, as it has been put on in 5 different years before this, when the proceeds have gone to various charities'

'What a rumbustious evening The Lytton Players have once again contrived to present! Their Old Time Music Hall has become part of the pattern of life in the Stevenage of the Sixties'

About 'The Mikado'

Ray Gorbng's terrifying flashing eyed Mikado had presence in abundance and his diabolical and demoniacal laughter in the 'Object all Sublime' song was quite spine-chilling'

1968 also saw the Players becoming a Registered Charity, the stated objects of which were '*To advance the public knowledge and appreciation of music and drama, and to encourage young persons to learn about theatrecraft*'.

1969/1970

The Development Corporation had offered a nominal lease on land adjacent to what is now the sorting office, and the building at No 3 Swingate was moved lock, stock and barrel. A further section of a similar construction was purchased from Barclays Bank for £50 to form a workshop. The move took place over the weekend of April 4th and 5th 1970 with all members being asked to help. Usual activities were resumed by April 15th.

Rehearsals were punctuated by the roar of Intercity trains. Unfortunately, due to the stress of the move and vibrations from the trains, the fabric of the building deteriorated rapidly with water leakages becoming increasingly common.

1970/1971

The Music Hall of 1971 was considered to be the best so far and made a profit of £1,550. '*Iolanthe*' was performed in May and attracted a large audience with over 1,800 attending.

Lytton Players ties were available for purchase at a cost of £1.1s.6d

1971/1972

In September, through the initiative of Peter Walker a new step was taken - the formation of the 'Junior Lytton Players'. Membership was to be open to the children of members aged 13 to 17, and the annual subscription was set at 25p. By January 1972 membership of the JLP stood at 20. Activities included play readings, talks on make-up and scenery design, plus stage dancing.

1972/1973

Stagehand Cyril Hildreth stole the opening scene of the Music Hall by scampering up a ladder with a pair of pliers in his hand. Puffs of smoke were wafting from the ceiling as the cast sang, and burning cable showered the stage. So Cyril dashed on stage with a ladder to cut away the burning wire for which he received a big round of applause. True to tradition, the cast continued whilst all this was happening.

1973/1974

The Drama Section's production of Shakespeare's '*Twelfth Night*' was very successful indeed, and a credit to the Society.

Shows in the period 1960/1970

1960	The Blind Goddess Patience Music Hall Dear Brutus Gilbert & Sullivan Concert Festival of Music Boy with a Cart
1961	A Touch of Fear Iolanthe Gilbert & Sullivan Concert When we are Married Festival of Music
1962	Music Hall Twelfth Night Twelfth Night/Trial by Jury Ruddigore Arts Festival Dido & Aeneas (Concert) Tartuffe or The Imposter
1963	Music Hall The Tempest Cox & Box /HMS Pinafore The Peasant Cantata/Hiawatha's WF Count Your Blessings
1964	Music Hall The Gondoliers A Midsummer Nights Dream King Arthur
1965	Music Hall Trial & Error Patience And No Birds Sing Tom Jones (Concert)
1966	Music Hall The Hollow Crown Tom Jones School for Scandal Merrie England (Concert)
1967	Music Hall Night Must Fall The Mikado The Sorcerer (Concert) My Three Angels
1968	Music Hall Thieves Carnival Princess Ida The Hollow Crown The Conspirators The Importance of Being Earnest
1969	Music Hall St Joan Trial by Jury/Pirates of Penzance Today & Tomorrow Getting and Spending/Then (Concert)
1970	Music Hall Yeoman of the Guard Fools Rush In

1974/1975

There were some suggestions that an alternative to Music Hall should be considered, possibly a Revue or a Pantomime. However, due to the continued financial success and the enhancement of reputation that Music Hall delivered it was decided not to pursue these ideas at this time

1975/1976

The Story of Gilbert and Sullivan presented in November 1975 marked another dramatic milestone in the history of the Players, for they were invited to perform at the newly opened Gordon Craig Theatre. The show was written by Vera Mallet, narrated by newscaster Leonard Parkin, and a cast of over 50 proudly took part under the baton of maestro Peter Wigfield.

After the performance, one of the soloists Ray Gorbing confessed his relief, for as the architect responsible for the design of the Theatre, he had some concerns regarding the accuracy of his acoustic calculations. Happily his fears proved unfounded.

During 1975 it became known that a future re-location of premises would be necessary as planning permission on the present site would expire in 1977; later extended to 1979. A Building Fund was established under the auspices of a sub-committee primarily charged with organising fund raising and acquiring information regarding alternative accommodation

1976/1977

Wagstaffs were appointed as professional auditors to the Society, and the end of year accounts showed an excess of income over expenditure of £1,140.

'*Pirates of Penzance*' and '*Oh What a Lovely War*' showed handsome profits of £675 and £184 respectively although '*My Fair Lady*' made a loss of £451.

1977/1978

At the 1978 AGM the idea of forming a list of Patrons was discussed. In return for a small subscription, Patrons would be sent information regarding the Society's activities, plus their names would appear in show programmes.

1978/1979

During the 1979 AGM proposals for changing the name of the Society were discussed. Suggestions considered were *The Stevenage Lytton Players*, *The Lytton Players (Stevenage)*, *The Lytton Players of Stevenage* or *The Lytton Players* with *Stevenage* underneath on all advertising. The last option was agreed on.

£900 was donated to Charity from the proceeds of Music Hall with the Stevenage League of Hospital Friends, Stevenage Branches of Leukaemia Research and St. Johns Ambulance benefiting.

Shows in the period 1971/1982

1971	Music Hall Macbeth Iolanthe <i>La Petite Messe Solonnelle</i> Strictly Business
1972	Music Hall Carmina Burana Toad of Toad Hall Rape of the Belt Gondoliers Dangerous Corner
1973	Music Hall The Mikado The Crucible Twelfth Night
1974	Music Hall Ruddigore Hobson's Choice Big Bad Mouse
1975	Music Hall Billy Liar Trial by Jury / H M S Pinafore The G & S Story White Liars & Black Comedy
1976	Music Hall The Gondoliers Pirates of Penzance Time & Time Again
1977	Music Hall Oh what a Lovely War My Fair Lady Iolanthe Hay Fever
1978	Music Hall The Deep Blue Sea Cabaret 1066 and all that The Merry Widow Move over Mrs Markham
1979	Music Hall Two Stars for Comfort Guys & Dolls Lock up your Daughters Princess Ida
1980	Music Hall Oklahoma Sweeney Todd For your Delight
1981	21 st Music Hall The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie The Mikado A Victorian Evening/Trial by Jury Wedding of the Year
1982	Music Hall Blithe Spirit GiGi The Gondoliers

1979/1980

In 1979 the Development Corporation informed the Society that the present site in Six Hills Way would be needed for development. Many possibilities were investigated before two were finally considered. One was at 'The Roaring Meg' and the other at 'The Sishes'. The Sishes site was generally considered a better fit for the Players' needs and so all parties were informed of our decision. We then embarked on the difficult task of raising the necessary funds - a great deal was estimated to be required - approximately £60,000.

And thus began the fundraising activity known as 'Operation Beaver' (see panel).

1980/1981

The 21st Gala Music Hall performed this season was a magnificent team effort.. The innovation of holding a nightly raffle was very successful and produced a profit of over £500 which was put into the Building Fund.

1981/1982

On 21st/22nd November 1981 the move to The Sishes took place with rehearsals commencing there on 23rd November. The first rehearsal was for Music Hall and a temporary bar was set up in the kitchen, as the present bar was still being built. The official opening was on Friday 26th March 1982 when the Mayor of Stevenage, Councillor Bill Lawrence, and his wife Hilda unveiled a small commemorative plaque which now graces the bar at the Centre.

On April 1st, 2nd, and 3rd the Society staged its first public performance, '*Blithe Spirit*' at the new Centre.

1983-1985

The 1983/1984 season was a difficult one for the Society as the President Ray Gorbing acknowledged in his AGM speech.

The 1985 AGM determined that all officers of the Society would in future be elected, rather than appointed as was previously the custom.

1985/1986

Operation Beaver Fundraising Selection

£10,000 donation from the Stevenage Development Corporation.
£3,000 donation from John Lewis.
£1,000 donation from the Borough Councils Lotteries Fund.
A raffle with a 1st prize of £1,250 and a 2nd prize of a weekend in Paris.
Folk evening arranged by Mary Hearman.
Quiz evening organised by Di Barton and Claire Cox.
Coffee morning at Jose Aked's home.
Cheese and wine party by Roy and Barbara Mugridge.
Sponsored bowl at the Bowling Alley.
Stevenage Day.
Jumble Sale.

An appeal to the 'Comet' in January 1980 reading:-

'Stevenage's Lytton Players sent out a cry from the heart to townspeople this week: Support your local amateur performers - or lose them'

Shows in the period 1983/1988

1983	Music Hall Kiss me Kate Dick Whittington & His Cat HMS Pinafore/Cox & Box Mixed Doubles
1984	Music Hall No No Nanette Round & Round the Garden Yeoman of the Guard Habeas Corpus None the Wiser
1985	Music Hall Billy Liar The Sound of Music Ruddigore They Call It Murder
1986	Music Hall Fumed Oak - None the Wiser Spring Soiree Music Hall Oh What a Lovely War Dial "L" for Laughter Farndale Ave Murder Mystery Die Fledermaus The Importance of Being Earnest
1987	Music Hall Tomb with a View Calamity Jane Flight of Fancy

In May of this season 36 members and friends set out once again to represent The Lytton Players in Ingelheim.

Frantic last minute rehearsals took place at The Sishes the week before departure. Three baskets of costumes, hats and props were skilfully packed by Barbara Mugridge alongside irons, ironing boards, lights and even a maypole.

The day of the concert started with a formal reception followed by lunch. The concert itself was

very well received, with the audience clapping rhythmically to any suitable tune, and a generous standing applause was given at the end of the evening.

German Pickle

In 1962 the Players went to Ingelheim to perform, amongst other things, 'Trial by Jury'. Our German hosts were very hospitable, and by the time the Players went on stage, they were to say the least a little "pickled", and the show turned out to be very boisterous. When the Defendant came on to sing his defence, one of the jurymen leant forward and stuffed half an orange in his mouth, completely preventing him from singing. During the two minutes it took him to remove the orange the Jury ad-libbed until he recovered. The audience never realised anything was amiss.

The Players spent much of the rest of their time visiting interesting and beautiful locations in the Rhine Valley. The feeling of all at the end, was that memories of this visit would be long treasured.

1986/1987

Music Hall this season had to make do without a performance of 'Mandalay' as Ray Gorbing was still recovering from a recent operation. Charities benefiting this year were The Cancer Relief Fund, Lister Hospital Scanner Appeal, and The Matthew MacMillan Appeal Fund.

1987/1988

The Lytton Players used their in-house facilities to the full on two occasions in the Autumn of 1987. The first of these was a polished performance of Oscar Wilde's classic comedy 'The Importance of Being Ernest' - a superbly constructed piece presented with style and polish. The second was 'Flight of Fancy', a compilation in which the Players gave the audience a lightning trip around the world.

The musical 'Oliver' was performed in May at the Gordon Craig Theatre, and made a profit of over £3,000. It was arguably the most successful show the Players had staged to date.

Those attending that year's Annual General Meeting heard that The Lytton Players were 'fit, well and raring to go'.

In Recent Times (1988 – 1998)

1988/1989

In March 1989 it was discovered that the Licence to sell alcoholic beverages had expired 18 months previously. Following a mad panic and a short spell of serving only non-alcoholic drinks, Brian Cox and Ray Gorbing took over as joint Licensees. The Arts Club, under which the bar had previously operated, was re-organised and a Lytton Players' Bar Committee was formed.

The Lytton Youth performed 'Grease', at the Gordon Craig Theatre, directed by Keith Pitts with Mike Payne as Musical Director. The hard work and dedication put in by all concerned was rewarded with a highly successful show, reflected in the high ticket sales which yielded a profit of £2,209, and gained a great deal of recognition for the Youth Section.

During that season a Special General Meeting was held to once again discuss a change in the name of the Society to include the word 'Stevenage', and accordingly the Players became 'The Stevenage Lytton Players'.

1989/1990

A 40th Anniversary Dinner Dance of The Lytton Players was held at the Hertfordpark Hotel on Friday October 6th 1989, with tickets costing £14.50 each and many members attending.

In May, Roger Scales produced an updated version of 'Iolanthe' subtitled 'The Triumph of the Greenies'. Starring John Dunleavy as Strephon and Annette Andrews as Phyllis it was very much in tune with the environmental issues of the times. Although the music remained largely unscathed, the lyrics, dialogue and settings were totally revamped by Roger, with for example, the opening scene taking place, not in a woodland glade, but in a room full of exercise bicycles and rowing machines!

Lytton Players Chairmen

Albert Perry	1948 - 1950
Deneys Swayne	1950 - 1972
John Austin	1972 - 1976
Ray Gorbing	1976 - 1982
Enid Newman	1982 - 1986
Roy Mugridge	1986 - 1991
Brian Cox	1991 - 1993
Keith Pitts	1993 - 1994
Carol Williams	1994 -

1990/1991

'*Blithe Spirit*' directed by Maxine Holmes in November 1990 at the Sishes was an excellent production, enjoyed by all who came to see it. The Lytton Youth staged the musical '*Bugsy Malone*' at the Gordon Craig Theatre, by all accounts a highly regarded production reflecting well on the cast of almost 70. The rock musical '*Godspell*' was staged at Barclay School to great artistic acclaim.

The most spectacular production of the season however was '*The King and I*' performed at the Gordon Craig Theatre in May. A rip-roaring success both financially and artistically, it boasted a cast of over 70, with 30 of them children split into 3 groups, each having to be rehearsed separately.

1991/1992

In October the Players staged a musical compilation entitled '*For Your Delight*' dedicated to the memory of Dr Deneys Swayne who had died in 1990. Deneys had been Chairman of the Society between 1950 and 1972 and was one of the founder members of the Society

The Lytton Youth staged the popular '*West Side Story*' at the Gordon Craig Theatre in July, bringing together a total of 29 Youth and 12 adult members. Despite some early concerns that the production was too ambitious, the production team dispelled all fears and went on to produce a first class show.

1992/1993

This was a disastrous season for the Players financially. The two GCT productions '*Wizard of Oz*' and '*Fiddler on the Roof*' between them made a loss of £7,500. A concert version of '*Carmen*', held at the Church of St Andrew and St George, contributed a further loss of £1,500. Despite in-house shows and Music Hall generating a joint profit of £5,000, an overall loss for the year was incurred.

The auditors, Wagstaffs, wrote a letter to accompany the accounts for the year. A quote from the Managing Partner stated:-

'I wish to forcibly make the point this year concerning the precarious financial position of The Lytton Players. Losses suffered over the past 3 years have totalled £23,000, and with no cash reserves, and the assets represented by the Sishes being virtually un-realizable, the Society is almost at the point of being non-viable. Radical action needs to be taken or the Society will not survive.'

1993/1994

At a Special General Meeting in September 1993 proposals were put forward to try to resolve the financial crisis and also to re-structure the committee organisation as many posts were unable to be filled. It was accepted that no shows would be performed during the 1993/1994 season at the Gordon Craig Theatre. The proposals were accepted at an Emergency General Meeting in January 1994 and new committees were elected in February.

Shows in the period 1988/1995

1988	Music Hall Post Horn Gallop Oliver Much Ado About Nothing Charlie and the Chocolate Factory Our Town Pajama Game
1989	Music Hall Farndale Avenue Macbeth Half a Sixpence Grease Smoke gets in your Eyes The Miracle Worker
1990	Music Hall School for Scandal Iolanthe Bugsy Malone Godspell Blithe Spirit
1991	Music Hall The Late Late Christmas Show A View from the Bridge The King and I West Side Story A Midsummer Nights Dream For your Delight
1992	Music Hall The Early Early Easter Show God /Erpingham Camp Brigadoon Wizard of Oz Carmen Farndale Ave. A Christmas Carol
1993	Music Hall The Nearly Nearly Valentines Show A Grand Night for Singing The Ghost Train Fiddler on the Roof Time & Time Again Westenders Twelfth Night
1994	Music Hall Ms Anastasia's School of Fame Red Hot & Cole Confusions Man of La Mancha A Chorus of Approval Shut Up!
1995	Music Hall This Happy Breed Blitz Carousel Nasty Neighbours

The planned Autumn production of *'Orpheus in the Underworld'* at the GCT was cancelled, and a musical compilation entitled *'Westenders'* was staged as a table show at the Sishes. This proved a wise decision generating a profit of £974.

Thanks to the hard work of many, the end of year accounts for 1993/1994 indicated a turnaround in the Players' fortunes. A profit had been generated, the balance sheet was stronger, and a small cushion of cash held in the bank. The treasurer stated that he felt that a path had been found leading out of, rather than further into the woods.

1994/1995

In tribute to Peter Walker who sadly passed away in 1993, a production called *'A Chorus of Approval'* was performed in October 1994. Peter joined the Society in 1962 and had been a stalwart member appearing in many productions. The show featured a complete performance of *'Trial by Jury'* followed by semi-staged excerpts from *'My Fair Lady'*, *'Calamity Jane'*, *'Brigadoon'*, *'Pajama Game'*, and *'Oklahoma'*

The spring production of *'Blitz'* coincided with VE Day Commemorations, with everyone getting into the spirit of the 40's and performing to packed houses.

All shows for the 1994/1995 season generated a profit.

1995/1996

The musical *'Carousel'*, staged in the autumn, saw a welcome return to the GCT for the Players. However, although an undoubted artistic success, and despite extensive publicity and a low budget, a loss of over £3,300 was made. High theatre hire and orchestra costs, plus low ticket sales were the prime causes.

Fortunately, *'Nasty Neighbours'*, a very funny and successful play performed at the Sishes, made a substantial profit of over £1,200.

Through the Years	
1948	Prince Charles born (14 th Nov). 33 ¹ / ₃ records launched. British Comprehensive schools established.
1952	'Mousetrap' opens at the Ambassador Theatre, London. 'Singin' in the Rain' opens in Hollywood.
1954	Elvis 'That's all right Momma'.
1960	Royal Shakespeare Company founded.
1963	Beatles 'She Loves You' - UK No 1 hit.
1964	'Mary Poppins'. Sun Newspaper launched.
1965	'The Sound of Music'.
1966	England win the World Cup.
1967	'Half a Sixpence' opens in London.
1970	'Oh! Calcutta' brings nudity to the London stage. Coronation Street - 1000th episode.
1973	'Joseph and his Technicolour Dreamcoat' opens.
1975	Bell-bottoms, platform shoes, kipper ties.
1976	National Theatre on Southbank opens.
1978	'Evita' opens. 'Glad to be Gay' by Tom Robinson banned by the BBC.
1983	'A Chorus Line' becomes longest running show on Broadway with 3389 performances.
1995	Ginger Rogers the US dancer and actress dies.
1997	UK win The Eurovision Song Contest.
1998	The Stevenage Lytton Players 50 th Anniversary

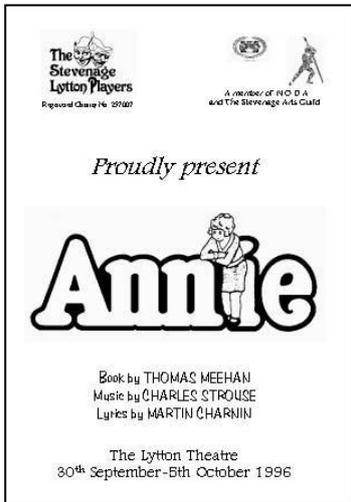
Shows from 1996 - Apr 1998	
1996	Music Hall Anyone for Breakfast The Mikado The Mechano Annie
1997	Music Hall Showpieces The Caucasian Chalk Circle Watch this Space Anything Goes Murder in the Cathedral Cabaret
1998	Music Hall Cole Three in One

This was a very ambitious project and a breakthrough for the Drama Section. It was a brand new play, sponsored by BT Biennial and contained adult themes with adult language. BT supported the Players, assisting with fundraising, by organising a raffle with proceeds being kept by the Players.

Both Music and Drama sections were involved in the Stevenage Festival of Arts and Leisure held at the GCT in which the *'The Mikado'* and *'The Mechano'* were performed.

1996/1997

At the AGM in 1997 members heard the good news that through the hard negotiations of the treasurer, Linda Friis, a VAT refund had been made to the Society of £27,460 by HM Customs and Excise. The Lytton Players have been diligent in the use of this windfall and have stashed away £18,000 for a rainy day. The rest was spent on much



needed capital purchases, repairs and improvements. The Centre has been redecorated, a new photocopier, lights and a vacuum cleaner purchased, and the technical team bought new tools and equipment.

'Annie' was staged in the Autumn of 1996 at the Sishes with a cast of 15 adults, 22 children and 1 dog. With a lot of hard work from the cast and production team, a profit of just over £700 was made.

The Cole Porter classic 'Anything Goes' was staged at the Gordon Craig Theatre in May. It proved to be a well presented show, with



many excellent performances.

1997/1998

In October 1997 'Cabaret', with Mike Payne as Emcee and Tracey Gwynne as Sally, proved a huge success and a credit to all involved, generating a profit of over £1,160. Letters poured in from people who had seen the show with most making very favourable comments.



'Murder in the Cathedral', a joint venture between the Players and St Nicholas Church was staged in the Church in the autumn. The show made a profit of £1,600 split 50/50 between the Church and the Players.. The choir and organ enhanced the religious setting, and the whole show was a credit to the Director David Slade, and Producer Laurence Arnold.

What they said about 'Cabaret'

'Just a few lines to thank you for inviting us to the above event, which turned out to be a most enjoyable evening; but for the surroundings we imagined ourselves watching a West End Performance'

'I have never seen so much meat since Dewhurst closed their Town Centre shop, and it was all prime'

In Times to Come (1998 and onwards)

At the AGM on the 26th July 1990, the President Ray Gorbing, delivered his address in song to the tune of 'My Object All Sublime' from 'The Mikado', and the lyrics are still appropriate today.

*'I'm sure you will agree, how Lucky it is to be, a member of this family, this great family.
So let us all give heed, when our Chairman stresses the need.
For each of us to play a part, to play a vital part'*

The success of the Society has been due to the efforts and dedication of many people over the past 50 years, too numerous to mention individually. So to all those individuals, from past and present times, we raise our glasses and say 'THANK YOU!'.

As we reflect on the last fifty years we harbour the hope that the Stevenage Lytton Players will continue to flourish, and will continue to provide entertainment for the good citizens of Stevenage.