SETTLEMENT PLAYERS

MINUTES OF THE 2015 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Held on: 13th July 2015 at 8.00pm

At the Settlement, Letchworth Garden City

Present: Jim Anderson, Jeni Gosling, Rob Evans, Stephen Charles, Graeme Bussey, Val Barber, Diane Morrad, Dave Smith, Roy Evans, Cliff Francis, Stuart Cocks, Douglas Harding, Patricia Phillips, Jackie Gough, Graham Frost, John Baskerville, Pat Baskerville, Margaret Bachini, Sam Powell, Nicole Ashbrook.

Apologies: Claire Hogan, Jo Roskilly, Tracey Rudeforth

Minutes of the previous AGM were accepted as accurate.

Matters Arising: There were no matters arising.

Chairman’s Report: Jim read out his Chairman’s report, attached below.

Treasurer’s Report: Rob presented the accounts which showed profits on all shows:

* Taming of the Shrew £983.88
* My Own Show £691.99
* The Ladykillers £1,513.41
* April One Act Evening £151.58

Cash in hand at the bank increased by £544.93 between July 2014 and July 2015.

There was a balance transfer of £1,633.70 from the Letchworth Little Theatre Drama Festival (a spin off from the Players many years ago), which has now wound up. It was agreed that this money be spent on something specific, rather than being absorbed into the general funds.

Rob proposed that the donation to the Settlement remain at £2,500. Seconded by Jim Anderson; Carried.

Rob also proposed that the ticket prices and subscriptions remained the same. Seconded by Jim Anderson; Carried.

The accounts need to be audited – to be arranged by the committee.

Theatre Club: Pat presented the Theatre Club report, attached below.

Committee: The existing members of the committee agreed to stand again and were re-elected. New members of the committee were elected:

Graeme Bussey

Claire Hogan

Tracey Rudeforth

Jo Roskilly

On-line Ticketing: During the year the committee has been exploring and discussing the option of having tickets available to buy on-line. Stephen presented a proposal to the group.

The service can be arranged via our existing web provider for a one off payment of £50. Different seating arrangements can be accommodated. Tickets would be purchased via Paypal at 47p per transaction (not per ticket). It was proposed that this be piloted at the November show. Some tickets will remain at David’s bookshop to maintain relations and the community feel of the Players. At the start of the trial there will be more tickets available at David’s than on-line. If one or other venue is selling more, tickets can be transferred to open up more on-line or reduce the on-line availability and transfer extra tickets to David’s. A Box Office team will be needed to monitor this. Tickets will be available in advance to Theatre Club members as usual.

The meeting discussed who should pay the 47p transaction cost, the Players or audience and whether people would object to paying a booking fee. It was agreed that audience members would be charged the booking fee, making on-line tickets £8.50 and tickets bought in person £8.00. Often tickets are slow to sell in advance, with a rush in the run up to the performance, it will be interesting to see if on-line availability will make a difference to this. Cliff suggested setting up a season ticket. It was agreed to explore this once the on-line ticketing was set up and working well.

Any Other Business:

1. John Baskerville raised the issue of backstage crewing for shows. There is a need for more people to help out backstage, otherwise the same people are carrying all the shows. Acting members are encouraged to have a go at operating the lights (not rigging!) during performances. We agreed that more members are also needed. Stuart suggested a newspaper ad. Pat felt that a face to face conversation was often more productive. Roy commented that it is also getting more difficult to find people to work front of house.
2. Roy offered to tickets to see Tom Jones (the play!) at the Open Air theatre.
3. Dave suggested that each play has more performances, for example a split run of two performances one week and then three the next. There was a lot of discussion around feasibility, performances not selling out currently and the availability of the theatre. It was agreed that this needs to be discussed by the committee.
4. Next season: a general discussion was held about the types of play that we should be putting on and why this year had seen our lowest audience numbers overall. Cliff is planning to do Goldini’s “A Servant with Two Masters”. Sam suggested that we need to do well known plays to bring in the audience. Pat agreed, adding that we can mix popular plays with plays that are less well known that we want to do. The cast can bring in a good portion of the audience and sometimes a popular play will carry that good will into the next, with more tickets being sold. Stuart and Cliff commented that if we do plays well, that will help to build the audiences. We also talked about whether the committee needs to increase the number of plays done each year to four. Eager directors might be put off if they have to wait for two years to get a slot to direct.

The meeting closed at 9.13

Chairman’s report – Settlement Players AGM 2015

We began our year in September at our Open Evening where I made my directorial debut with *Tis Folly to be Wise.* This one act play was great fun to produce and the actors involved all gave terrific performances. We were able to be a little more creative than usual with this play as we made quite a few changes to the original script. We even came up with three different endings before choosing the one we liked the best. The evening itself went very well and everyone enjoyed themselves.

Then in November we proved that we could do Shakespeare. Cliff Francis directed *The Taming of the Shrew*. This very colourful and funny production boasted a large cast, all of whom performed admirably. Sam Powell who took the lead in this one was brilliant. Our audiences enjoyed this production and, I think, because we did it so well the play only served to enhance our reputation.

In February, Pat Baskerville directed *My Own Show*. Because of casting difficulties, Pat wasn’t able to put on the play that she had originally wanted to. Pat showed great determination and skill despite this disappointment though and managed to come up with a very creditable alternative. The all-woman cast was superb and reminded us again how lucky we are to have the actresses that we have in our group.

Our Festival entry this year was the very dark *After Midnight, Before Dawn*. Directed by Cliff Francis this gloomy little play was very well received at the festivals it was entered into. This year unfortunately, we were up against stiff competition and, despite several nominations, we didn’t win any prizes. Once again though, amazing performances from everyone involved and a great set that proved you could do a lot with very little.

In April, we showcased our festival entry at the Settlement. It’s always a good night when we play our festival entry in front of our home audience and this was no exception. On the evening, Helen Faulkner made her directorial debut with two short plays *Doggies* and *Cupboard Love*. These short but very funny little plays were in sharp relief to the darker *After Midnight, Before Dawn*. As always, the audience enjoyed their evening.

In June we closed the year with my proper directorial debut, *The Ladykillers*. John Baskerville and the backstage crew pulled out all the stops for this one and gave us an amazing set which was great fun to play on. As always, everyone worked really hard and we managed to put on a very ambitious production with great success. Everyone in the play performed brilliantly, making the most of the comedy in this piece and the audience enjoyed it.

This year we have continued to put on drama that we can be very proud of. We have had good audiences at everything that we have done. Our technical people continue to give us whatever we ask for. There seems to be no limit to their skill and ingenuity. This year, as always, we have introduced several new faces to our stage and the existing core of talented actors that we already have continued giving the amazing performances that we have come to expect of them.

Throughout the year we have tried to make everyone feel that they are part of things even if they are not directly involved in a production. We had a Christmas party which was well attended and enjoyed by everyone. We have organised theatre trips. We are currently organising a free voice coaching session and we hope to have a picnic later in the summer. We have also expanded the newsletter and made it a regular event. I have tried to put news which is of interest and useful information in the newsletter so that everyone knows what is going on. With the promise of a bigger committee in the coming year then I hope that we shall be able to do more.

We have also done extensive work on the Settlement Players website. I would like to thank the team of people who have worked with me on this. Stephen Charles, Jenn Groves and, whenever we break it and we need his help, Stuart Cocks. Thank you all. If you have looked at the website recently you will have noticed that the past plays archive goes back, with a few exceptions, to 1973 and that we have started to add one act plays on the site as well. We are currently filling in as much extra information as we can get hold of. Many of us now have our own pages on the site detailing all the plays at the Settlement that you’ve worked on. All of these plays and people are linked. There is now a next show page which details our next production. There are maps and other aids to finding us and information about joining us. The news blog is kept up to date with news of what we are doing. There is even now video on the website. If you look at the *Ladykillers* and *Breaking the Code* pages you will find video tabs on which there are links to the videos that we’ve made. We are planning to make more use of this site in the future. For example we want to set up an on-line ticketing facility so that people will be able buy tickets for our productions directly from us easily and quickly. We are also looking at a facility which would enable you to pay your subscriptions on the website. In the coming year we are going to concentrate more on the members’ area, adding more tools to make our lives easier and making it available to all our members.

So, all in all, I think that it’s been another very good year for the Settlement Players. We have continued putting on great plays and enjoying ourselves while we did it. As to next year, we haven’t got a complete programme that I can give you now but I hope to be able to do that soon. What I can tell you though is that in September we have yet another directorial debut. Jo Roskilly will be directing three parts of *Duets* by Peter Quilter at our open evening. Then in November, David Smith will be directing *Ladies of Spirit* by Georgina Reid. Both directors have held their auditions now and announced their casts and I am sure that these plays will be a great opening to yet another good year for the Settlement Players.

Thank you

Settlement Players’ Theatre Club 2014/15

The Theatre Club consisted of 56 members this past season, compared to 59 the year before.

Following the trend of many years now, numbers have decreased although they still account for nearly one whole night’s audience during a performance period.

This year out of a possible 168 tokens only 117 were actually used. Theatre club income was [56 x £17 =] £952, value of vouchers used was [44x£7 +73 x £8 =] £892, so the Theatre club made a profit of £60 (excluding the very small running costs of paper and postage costs (a few pounds) and the free drink at the Open evening).

The lower usage of vouchers could be a worrying statistic as 136 tokens were used over the same period last year. If people are not using the vouchers then they may consider not renewing membership and we will lose part of our guaranteed audience.

However, this may simply reflect the fact that we have had a very poor year for audiences, the lowest numbers in 10 years.

Vouchers used: 44 vouchers were exchanged for Taming of the Shrew, 35 for My Own Show, 37 for The Ladykillers and 1 at the April showcase.

The Opening Night continues to be very successful and is important to continue as a means of collecting money, distributing tokens and making the club members feel included in our plans. Adding in the voucher for a free drink for Theatre Club members was well received. Is it worth adding a raffle to the mix to maximise income on the night? Opinions please.

The ability to use their tokens at the April show should also add to the attraction of joining the Theatre Club.

As we no longer make any interest on the subs collected from the Theatre Club, I do not think it is necessary to add any extra benefits to Club members. At present they receive Newsletters three times a year which are delivered electronically where possible with the rest mainly hand-delivered to keep postage costs down.

Last February we increased our tickets prices to £8 and, as the Theatre Club members had already paid their subscriptions, they got a very good deal on the ticket price.

I propose that we increase the subscription for 2015/16 from £17 to £19 per person.

Pat Baskerville

Theatre Club Secretary