

Vicky Rees makes a welcome return after a long break, she has not acted with us since "Dead of Night" in November 1992.

Jeff Caunt was last seen as Foreign Secretary Ray Turnbull in Dead Ringer and before that was Hannibal in "The Curious Savage".

Reg Bee also makes a welcome return to our stage, his last appearance was in February 1993 as Sir George in "Dear Delinquent".

Jennie Davis makes her debut in this production, she last "did something at school" but has also taken responsibility for alternate issues of our Newsletter.

Freda Quinn has not been seen on stage since a brief appearance in "The Dame of Sark" but she has prompted many productions since.

Val Earlam also makes her debut in this production as well as co-ordinating the wardrobe and prompting.



To round off your evening, recommended by **EBDG**, The Royal Oak. Whilst on Sundays at 9 am and 6.30 pm....



ST PETER (13th Century) East Bridgford

Our next production will be **For Services Rendered** by W Somerset Maugham from 14 to 18 May 1996. Tickets will be on sale from members in March.

If you would like to join the Group, go on our mailing list for tickets or want to know more about us contact our Secretary, Christine Jackson on 0115 966 4088.

EAST BRIDGFORD DRAMA GROUP

PRESENTS

ROOKERY NOOK



by **BEN TRAVERS**

FEB 27 - MAR 2 '96

ROOKERY NOOK

by
Ben Travers

This play is a classic 1920s farce. As it is so long since EBDG performed a farce this struck us as a worthy example of the genre. It contains some classic set pieces that were very novel when it was first produced in 1926. We hope you will enjoy tonight's performance as much as we have enjoyed rehearsing for it.

CAST

(in order of appearance)

Gertrude Twine	Jean Starbuck
Mrs Leverett	Val Scott
Harold Twine	Mick Quinn
Clive Popkiss	Len Jackson
Gerald Popkiss	Dave Darby
Rhoda Marley	Vicky Rees
Putz	Jeff Caunt
Admiral Juddy	Reg Bee
Poppy Dickey	Jennie Davis
Clara Popkiss	Freda Quinn
Mrs Possett	Val Earlam

Directed by
Kate Thornburrow

The action takes place in the lounge hall of "Rookery Nook", Chumpton on Sea, Somerset. It begins on a night in summer.

- Act 1 Late on a summer night
- Act 2 The next morning
- Act 3 Two and a half hours later

There will be an interval of twenty minutes between Act 1 and Act 2.

PRODUCTION TEAM

Producer	Geoff Morgan
Stage Manager	Liz Morgan
Properties	Bill Marlin and Paul Gardener
Lighting and sound	Jeremy Rowe
Set Design	Geoff Morgan
Prompt	Val Earlam
Wardrobe	Val Earlam
Make Up	The Cast
Front of House	Members of the Group

The set was built by members and friends of the Group.

Refreshments prepared and served by members and friends of the group.

The Group would like to thank **The Royal Oak**, East Bridgford for rehearsal facilities; and **East Bridgford News** for selling tickets.

NOTES ON TONIGHT'S CAST

Jean Starbuck needs little introduction being well known on our stage, she directed our last play, "Dead Ringer" and was Gwendoline in "The Importance of being Earnest".

Val Scott made her debut as Florence in "The Curious Savage" and now swops that American accent for a Somerset dialect, all a long way from her native Newcastle.

Mick Quinn was Roy in "Salt of the Earth" and Eddie the carpenter in "Don't Lose the Place" and in between designs and builds our sets, props and even the new stage.

Len Jackson was Jack Worthing in "The Importance of Being Earnest" after making his debut as Harry in "Salt of the Earth".

Dave Darby was Gribsby in "The Importance of Being Earnest", Paul in "Salt of the Earth" and most recently directed "Forty Years On" for Radcliffe Drama Group.

ROOKERY NOOK
a Farce by
BEN TRAVERS

performed by East Bridgford Drama Group, February 1996

PLOT

Gerald Popkiss, his new wife Clara and her elderly mother are to spend a holiday in Rookery Nook, near to the home of Clara's formidable sister, Mrs Gertrude Twine. Gerald and family are delayed, but his cousin Clive has already arrived to stay with Gertrude and her hen-pecked husband, Harold. Gerald arrives alone; Mother-in-law is ill and Clara has stayed behind to be with her. Left alone in the house, Gerald is about to retire to bed when a young woman appears dressed only in pyjamas. She, Rhoda, has been turned out of her home by her irascible German step-father. Gerald, following a furious interview with Putz, instructs Rhoda to stay in the safety of Rookery Nook for the night.

Next morning, the priggish daily help discovers the young woman's presence and, believing the worst, makes her indignant way to inform Mrs Twine. Meanwhile, Gerald, Clive and Rhoda engage in increasingly frantic and futile attempts to find her some clothes so that she can leave the town and escape the clutches of her stepfather. In so doing, they involve the hapless Harold Twine, and neighbours Admiral Juddy and Poppy Dickey.

Gertrude however has alerted Clara, who arrives with her mother. However, in Gerald and Clive's absence, Rhoda has borrowed a dress from Poppy, who then emerges from upstairs in her underwear to add further confusion. All is resolved in the end, Gerald's chivalrous deed is recognised as such and all is forgiven.

The play consists of three acts, the third of which is much shorter than the others. Total running time approximately one hour and forty minutes. One of the Aldwych farces, it was first performed in 1926.

CASTING

The roles of Clive and Gerald demand a heavy commitment from the actors - the characters are on stage for much of the time, and they each have a great many lines to learn, which need to be mastered early enough to allow rehearsal time for "business" and props. For example, Gerald's unpacking scene in Act One requires careful timing, both with the contents of his luggage and with the "large and small whiskies" business; this can only be achieved when books are down. At the other end of the scale, there are several "cameo" roles, such as Admiral Juddy, Poppy Dickey and Clara, which allow actors with limited availability to miss two-thirds of the early rehearsals. Mrs Possett, who has one line only in Act Three, doubled as prompter, and was relieved in that duty by the Stage Manager during her brief stage appearance. The roles of Rhoda and Poppy were taken by younger women in the group, whose similar build enabled a convincing exchange of frocks. Generally a play for "posh" voices, but Mrs Leverett the daily woman should have a West Country accent. In common with many amateur groups, the average age of members can be conservatively estimated as nearer to forty than thirty. However, reports that Tom Walls, Ralph Lynn and Robertson Hare continued in their roles well into middle age gave encouragement, and all actors in this production were convincing.

REHEARSALS

By plotting an "actor availability chart" it was possible to break the play into small sections in which fewer actors needed to be called for individual rehearsals in the earlier stages. There are many scenes which require only three or four characters and it was useful to concentrate on these at times, thus accommodating those performers whose other commitments made it difficult to attend every rehearsal. It soon became clear that rehearsal props were vital, and the director's car quickly became a mobile props store.

There is no opportunity to rehearse on stage until the weekend before the first (Tuesday) performance - and furthermore the stage must be built first! Therefore the performers have just three evenings to practise with real doors, walls and furniture. In a play like *Rookery Nook* with many entrances and exits, the imagination of the cast is greatly exercised when rehearsing in a skittle alley with bar stools as furniture and to mark doorways and stage limits. It might have been possible to manufacture a few more comic moments with longer access to the proper set, however, the speed with which the actors adapted themselves to the stage did everybody great credit.

SET/SCENERY

It was apparent from the beginning that any attempt to show five downstairs doors, not to mention those of the upstairs rooms, would be doomed on a stage with overall measurements of 18ft deep by 22ft wide. Clearly the front door, and those of the kitchen and study were desirable, so the set design used archways on either side of the stage, in which the latter were visible as practical doors upstage, with unseen doorways in the downstage part of each arch. This gave the added advantage of an unprecedented (for a traditional box-set) view of the action for the stage management team through these openings.

The front door was built upstage left, with a "garden scene" in the space behind it, and was very securely hinged and braced to allow Gerald to slam it in Gertrude's face, and for Twine to make his high-speed entrance when pursued by a dog.

The staircase led off upstage right to imaginary bedrooms. To achieve an impression of height on a stage with a "ceiling" of 8ft, two steps led to a 1ft block, and a further two steps to the 2ft high platform offstage where actors in the "bedroom" could stand out of sight but remain audible.

A large window with stained glass effect to obscure the lack of depth behind it was placed centre back at the foot of the stairs.

Although set building time is limited to the weekend immediately before a production, East Bridgford Drama Group has always prided itself on the quality of the set; and prefabrication of the staircase, use of real moulded timber doors, and the creation of an archway with an apparent wall thickness of 9" created the illusion of a solidly built room. Wood mouldings for the panelling had the double advantage of giving three-dimensional depth to the walls and also of reducing the set-painting time.

The finished set was of a room panelled in wood to door-top height, with a plate rack above carrying blue-and-white willow pattern plates. A rather dingy deep cream/yellow paint was used above the panelling and in the recesses behind the arches. Heavy oak-framed watercolours and family photographs from the period occupied spaces in the panelling and on the stairs. Furnishing was minimal to allow maximum space for the actors, but not out of keeping with a hall where other, doubtless better-furnished, rooms lay behind closed doors. An oak table, leather armchair and Turkey rug on the floor comprised the items of furniture. The desired effect was achieved of a somewhat sombre but luxurious house.

COSTUMES & PROPERTIES

It was agreed that a play of this nature would need to reflect the period in which it was first performed to be convincing. The acquisition of the 1920's costumes and props was a difficulty, and certain compromises had to be made. Eventually a "pre-war" ambience was achieved, and the date of the play more firmly indicated by the choice of incidental music.

Costume items which proved particularly successful included Poppy Dickey's red, white and blue dress and hat which, together with paper Union Jacks decorating the Lifeboat flags tray yielded a delightfully patriotic image as she entered. The flags (about postcard size) were later used to great effect in her futile attempt to cover herself in the cami-knickers scene. The golfing outfits of Twine and Juddy were deliberately "over the top" with loud Argyle socks, plus fours, Fairisle sleeveless pullovers, the actors crowned by oversized flat caps. Putz borrowed authentic Bavarian leather knee-breeches, knitted socks and Loden jacket. Mrs Leverett's shapeless cardigan afforded wonderful opportunities for shrugging it indignantly across the bosom, Les Dawson-style.

Properties included several more costume items, particularly the contents of Gerald's luggage which had to be unpacked and strewn about the room untidily. This required ironing and careful folding by the backstage team each night to create the impression of neatly packed clothing. The problem of a whisky bottle which looked authentic for the period was solved by using that of an obscure malt whisky which had a cork stopper and a label which would not be too obviously recognisable to the audience.

LIGHTING & SOUND

No complicated lighting effects are required - a shaft of "sunlight" streaming through the front door in Acts Two and Three was non-essential but very effective in setting the mood. Since some very significant parts of the action take place on the stairs, which in this design lay upstage, adequate lighting of this area was important, as were the interiors of offstage rooms and the archways leading to them. With restricted angles imposed by the nature of the stage and available mounting points for the lanterns, the lighting designer must have suffered some considerable headaches in planning his rig.

Sound effects were partly recorded, but live effects offstage were used wherever possible. The cat in the kitchen, impersonated by the Stage Manager, became a more significant member of the cast with each performance. An authentic motor horn was used in conjunction with recorded sound for the arrival of Gerald's car. The recording used was that of a diesel-engined London taxi, which oddly enough sounded totally convincing as a 1920's "banger". The dog barking was also recorded; this and the car were played through a separate loudspeaker set behind the front door to "locate" the sound correctly.

Music was chosen to reinforce the 1920's atmosphere of the play. *Polka* from Walton's *Facade Suite* was used as opening music for each of Acts One and Two. Charleston music recorded by the Savoy Orpheans was played during the interval which took place between these acts. A short break between Acts Two and Three was covered with *Popular Song* from *Facade*.

PERFORMANCE

Much consideration was given to the "First Curtain" and "Second Curtain" business as outlined in the script. Since the play was to be done as much as possible as a period piece it was felt desirable to retain these tableaux at the end of each act. Physically closing and re-opening the curtains was too long-winded, and experiments with short lighting black-outs appeared too contrived. The solution was achieved by fading up music chosen from the Charleston selection, followed after a few seconds by dimming the lights and closing the curtains. The tunes selected reflected as far as possible the mood: to close Act One, *Someone to Watch Over Me*; Act Two, *Crazy Words Crazy Tune*; and for Act Three and continuing through the curtain call, *Has Anybody Seen My Girl?*

The ending of Act Three was generally considered to be weak, and efforts were made to add "business" to liven it up a little. Putz is moved to downstage centre, where he empties the bag of clothes on the floor during his outburst. Gertrude, seeing that the bag's contents include items of her underwear, dives to gather up her belongings and conceal them. Putz kneels to argue with her, thus clearing the sight lines for Gerald and Clive's handshake further upstage.

In the line-up for the curtain call, a rehearsed extra "scene" was introduced. Harold Twine was placed next to Poppy Dickey, with Gertrude on his other side. Mrs Twine observes Harold flirting with Poppy, and quickly inserts herself between the two, scolding poor Harold all the while.

DIRECTOR'S THOUGHTS

Altogether a very happy play, with great fun to be had in rehearsals. It is vital to have a clear conception of the set design at the very beginning, because much of the play is to do with entrances and exits. On a restricted set careful consideration has to be given to motivation for moves which are really intended to clear space on stage for the next entrance or piece of business. For example, when Harold meets Rhoda for the first time, it was found that Clive was required to move across the stage, which was achieved by asking him to present her with a flower from the vase on the table. This vase had in turn been introduced to give Gertrude some "business" while Gerald and Clive, unseen by her, reacted to her announcement that she would be out for the day.

It was helpful to have the costumes in advance of production week, so that the actors could become familiar with items such as hats and gloves. Particularly important were Twine's plus fours and socks to rehearse his scene after the encounter with the angry dog.

Traditionally in East Bridgford, the members of the cast make a collection to present the director with a memento of the play. Their gift of a pop-up book of a furnished house, annotated with comments appropriate to the play was an inspired choice, and will revive many happy memories in years to come.

Written and submitted to "AmateurStage" magazine at their invitation. March 1996.