

## “Mind the Gap”

The emerging gap between two generations of Riversiders was at the heart of the address that Ann Warr gave at her inaugural address to the members of Riverside Players who attended the 66th Annual General Meeting held on Sunday 3rd July. Anne spoke of the very different pressures upon the younger generation of members and she observed that older members needed to acknowledge the different social environment in which Riverside Players like all amateur dramatic societies, now found themselves. By the same token Ann suggested that the time poor younger generation could do more to include and use the older generation; “Put us oldies to work” was Ann’s plea, envisaging perhaps both generations coming to an understanding

of the need for change and collaborating to ensure that Riverside has a future.

Striving to close the emerging gap between the generations will take tolerance and understanding for both ‘sides’ and it requires all of us to ask searching questions about who is our audience. Clearly, the answer to some extent is, as it has always been, ‘our patrons’ but with the ranks of patrons inevitably shrinking and the costs (both monetary and personal) of putting on a programme of plays for a season becoming more expensive, ‘bums on seats’ will have to be sought from other sources and this will inevitably mean more populist choices of plays which attract new theatre audiences more used to television drama and comedy or school stu-



Ann Warr with outgoing Chairman John Welshman

dents studying set texts for exams. Inevitably this will involve thinking very differently about and widening the net of publicity for future plays.

Ann’s passionate plea to Riverside players to work together for the future ended with the statement “It’s your society! It’s up to you what happens to Riverside Players”

### *Dates For Your Diary*

#### Childrens Play Auditions

*Jason and The Argonauts*  
Sun 7th & 14th August  
7.30 pm at Richmond Hall.  
See Website for details

#### Opening Night

*Excerpts from all the plays.*  
Sat 17th September 2011  
7.30 for 8.00 pm  
Richmond Hall

£6 incl. light supper and drinks.

Book by Mon 5th Sept latest  
Contact:

Katie Welshman 07591 759610

#### Lady Windermere’s Fan

12th - 15th October 2011  
Curtain Up: 7.30 pm  
Gladstone Theatre.

## The New Riverside Committee

The 66th Annual general Meeting of the Riverside Players saw the following members elected to serve on the committee for the next season:

**President: Eric Murch**

**Chairman: Ann Warr**

**Vice Chairman / Honorary Secretary: Caroline Kay**

**Honorary Treasurer: Brian Jones**

**Play selection, Casting and Production Director: Wendy Lee Forrester**

**Stage Director: John Quirk**

**Business Manager: Helen Belcham**

**Social Secretary: Katie Welshman**

**Patron’s Secretary: Caroline Kay**

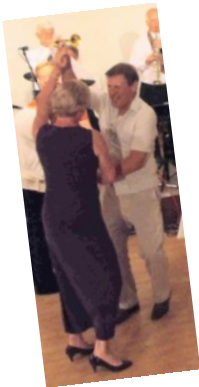
**Charity Representative: Brian Jones**

**Newsletter Editor : Martin Riley**

# End of season and all that jazz!



**Dancing the evening away!**



The excellent Peninsula Jazzmen - purveyors of good music all



Is this our esteemed President hiding behind the furniture to avoid dancing with John Welshman - perhaps a photo got misfiled (see page 5)



Janet Reed raffling a Renoir

**A**nother season comes to an end and Riversiders in their ten's turned out for the End of season party held at the Heswall British Legion on the 9th July. Food, music and good company abounded all expertly organised by Katie Welshman. A good and fitting end to the season.



Val Marshall in her accustomed position - at the bar



The table of heavenly delights - I think the instruction behind them refers to the door!



Katie Welshman - the party organiser. Many thanks Katie!

# The Future of Riverside

The letter from John Quirk published in the last edition of CentreStage has elicited an array of responses as well as a somewhat curtailed debate at the AGM. Although some of these opinions have already been aired, in order to foster a continuing dialogue about regarding Anne Warr's aspiration to close the generation gap and the future of Riverside, edited versions of the correspondence reproduced here.

From: Ian Maddock

Riverside has been a stalwart of amateur dramatics for many years and the next generation of Riversiders has a lot to live up to. We have a proud past of plays and players which have a wealth of experience to pass on to those that haven't been with Riverside too long and still have a lot to learn. Many people have criticised commitment to one society in recent times and I don't think Riverside can expect to have sole commitment from its membership any longer. That is not to say that its membership is any less loyal; we are still able to produce exceptional drama and solid hard work from backstage crews and all those involved in the processes. We can't expect all our members to reside in one village on the Wirral, we must accept that times change and attitudes to drama reflect this. We must keep up with the times and produce plays for audiences to enjoy in all of the capacities this infers. We have suffered from a number of significant outside influences

- 1) The changing demographic of West Wirral
- 2) The reduction in provision of adequate places to produce plays on the Wirral.
- 3) The continuing dilapidation of the assets Riverside have relied upon.

BUT! We have made money on some plays in recent history and have produced some challenging plays for audience and society members alike. We have won awards from the few competitions we have entered and we have done our best to put on FIVE plays a year which is a considerable drain to any amateur dramatics society. We have never yet failed to meet any of the deadlines we have set ourselves over recent years and this I believe flies in the face of any idle backroom chatter regarding the membership who consistently commit themselves and their time to representing the Riverside name.

I believe that constructive criticism is welcome to any society but I feel even as the positive voice of developments of the last few years I believe there are some members of the society who are determined to believe that we are on the edge of a precipice in terms of the future of Riverside. I would say but this: Consider the number of members over the last five years we may not see them consistently but a reflection of the membership lists say to me that we have a plethora of names to be called upon to act in service of Riverside. We have a strong potential future as long as those decisions that are made, are made with the societies best interests not those which are a reflection of decisions made in the past.

From Michael Corfe

I do not want to specify individual groups but almost all of those that I am involved with are suffering similar problems to Riverside. Workers, committees and audiences are without exception 'the grey-haired brigade'. Older folks who have given enthusiastically for decades but who are getting tired and are certainly not in the best of health are looking to the non-existent younger generation. On almost all fronts the younger generation are not getting involved. One has to ask why?

There are many reasons. Enormous pressures exist on younger people. Many are studying. Many are distracted, sidetracked or preoccupied by the media – be it their ipods, blackberries or very sophisticated mobiles giving them access to instant entertainment without bothering to join any society or groups. Many are short of time and money due to unemployment or the already-mentioned expensive technology. Many are burdened with debt after university fees and highly unlikely to start volunteering any of their valuable perceived 'free-time'. The breakdown of family life and the new socially accepted domestic models mean that family pressures and very young co-habiting parents cannot possibly devote time to what we older generation love and cherish.

Who is to blame? Do we need to 'blame' anyone? Do we need to change? The conservative (small 'c') mentality, which has led many to create today's society, is, like it or not, a straightforward fact of life.

To summarise: being conservative in our mentality may have created a society that we don't like or approve of. This is not a political comment – it is more an observation on age and maturity with all its advantages but inherent dangers. Can you not just hear so many of us saying: "What is wrong with young people? Or "It wasn't like this in my day!"

Who needs to change - the young people or us? Does either need to change? Should we be reaching out in new and more modern ways to attract the young? And will we be prepared to make the changes that they demand? Should we be reaching out to sixth forms and local colleges, not just to advertise what we have on offer, but also to attract and involve them?

Now everything I have written to this point seems either to be stating the obvious or highlighting the negative so let me finish by perhaps making some positive suggestions:

Is it worth considering a brainstorming session in preparation for a totally new approach to recruitment?

If brainstorming produces useful ideas – would it be an idea to approach the principals of all local schools and ask if they would be interested in allowing you to hold a repeated brainstorming in front of their fifth and sixth formers? Since Riverside Players has many accomplished actors and actresses in your ranks, would an element of acting out resentments and then defence of young people's non-involvement at such sessions provoke audience involvement in a workshop environment or a question and answers session?

Is it an idea to ask these same young audiences what they would like to see you tackle?

Should you be liaising with schools and preparing plays that coincide with their curricula?

I hope I am not being too presumptuous in offering these thoughts as you may have already explored these avenues.

Continued from page 3

From Charles Riley

I write partly in reaction to the letter of John Quirk published in the last newsletter. John has identified the need to address the problems that faces the society and there needs to be some tough decisions taken. The following is a summary of my views. I accept that some or none of the suggestions may be acted upon. However, they are suggested to foster dialogue and allow the society to flourish:

1. Reduce productions to 4 a year

I cannot agree with John's comment about the overall quality of Riverside productions. I didn't see many bad productions either at Heswall Hall or the Gladstone Theatre in the past few seasons. One man's meat is another man's poison. What I saw was several badly attended productions. The fact is that numbers of audience attending and members participating are dwindling for most groups everywhere. If we reduce by one production per season we can marshal our resources better. If we wish to maintain 5 productions a year, which I would prefer, we are going to have to cast our net wider by inviting guest directors, holding joint productions, accepting a loss on some productions and recouping funds via other sources and a number of other ideas which might occur to others more skilled than me.

2. Bring in youth

We must find innovative ways to market ourselves and raise our profile. One of those 4 productions must be the children's play with children in it. It is easily our most profitable production. Youth is our lifeblood. Even if many children who participate once don't come back as members they may come back as audience. I find the curious antipathy towards the involvement of children very disappointing. The existence of our base at Richmond hall is predicated on youth, so why is there not a direct conduit from the youth drama group into riverside? We should be welcoming them with open arms. Along with kids come parents to help who will stay in the area for years. Welcome the kids and you will win some parents forever.

3. Target our audience

I am no marketing man but why not take one play from the school syllabus most seasons or identify trends or productions linked to well known films. I don't think it is a coincidence that "Pride and Prejudice", "Of Mice and Men and a number of Hillbark Productions had larger audiences. Popular pieces are vital and can subsidise the more esoteric shows. Such a mix is possible. Nobody wants to do 'safe' plays all the time do they? But a balance of challenging, traditional, populist and modern is common sense. Can we collaborate with other groups to put on a 'blockbuster'? It is undeniable that musicals are very popular. I recognise we are not a musical society but that doesn't mean we cannot use music in the way it was used in "The Red Barn" or "Mice and Men". Turning our back on such a rich vein is making a rod for our backs. Long before I joined I understand musicals formed part of the theatrical season of the society. There is plenty of musical talent out there.

4. Plan further ahead

Plan 2 years in advance for productions if need be. We may not have the dates at a venue at that point but we may have the enthusiasm.

Larger casts and crews bring larger audiences.

5. Heswall Hall/Gladstone Theatre

I do not think a full return to Heswall Hall will be a solution. There is no guarantee of the hall's future. The facilities are sub-standard. In short it is a hall and not a theatre. The rent is almost certainly going to rise to parallel that of Gladstone. At Heswall Hall the cast and crew have to contend with a stage that is too low, poor acoustics, sight lines, sound, lights, inadequate dressing rooms and other user groups banging and clattering during the show. It is not fit for purpose and any investment, which will only ever partially remedy those defects, will have to be recouped in higher rents. I do accept it is better as theatre in the round, a distinct advantage over Gladstone. However we do not need to anchor ourselves to one venue. The motto of the Society is "Bringing theatre to the people of Wirral". The argument that Riverside is for West Wirral is short sighted. The population of Heswall and surrounds is aging fast and we need to look further afield geographically and demographically. Therefore my view is that we keep a presence in Heswall Hall and the Gladstone for the time being but in the long run I favour supporting a theatre into the future, not a hall.

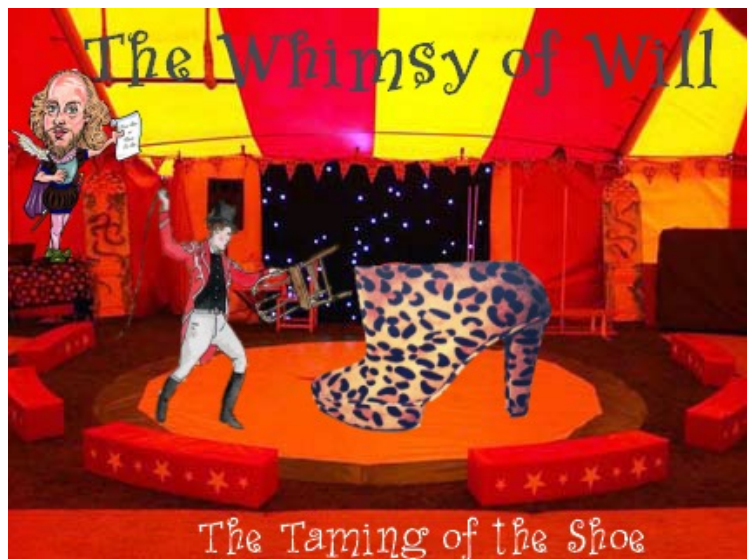
I'm sure there are other issues but those above are uppermost in my mind; particularly the involvement of younger members and the venue we play in. I hope the decisions taken are in the best interests of the Society.

## Childrens Play Auditions

### The Adventures of Jason and the Argonauts



Auditions will take place on  
Sunday 7th & Sunday 14th  
August at 7.30 pm at Richmond  
Hall. For more information contact  
Ian Maddock 07779280051 or  
Kate Maddock 07866637516



# Youth, talent and industry rewarded



Vaughan Taylor - winner of the Nigel Pegrum Award

The Riverside Players AGM annually presents Riverside Players with an opportunity to pay tribute to members who have made significant contributions to the society over the last year. This takes the form of the Nigel Pegrum

Award for the best contribution by a younger member of Riverside Players and the Murch Cup presented for the most significant contribution by any member.

This year the Nigel Pegrum Award went to Vaughan Taylor whose technical expertise and accomplishments especially with regard to lighting has been peerless.

Vaughan has been involved in some shape or form in most of the plays this season, but in particular, who could forget the extraordinary effects he created for the play Mill on The Floss?

In awarding the Murch Cup to Caitlin Hare, President Eric Murch drew attention to Caitlin's consistent and high quality contribution to the theatrical life of Riverside Players. Considering she has been studying for A levels (and now has an offer of a place at University) she has made significant contributions to the Childrens Play in January taking on the lead role and immediately went into

rehearsals for Mill on The Floss where she drew plaudits as one of the three actresses portraying the heroine Maggie Tulliver.

It is people like Vaughan and Caitlin who represent the talented and hard working younger generation in whom we can place the future of our society. We must surely do all we can to retain such talent in Riverside Players.



Caitlin Hare - winner of the Eric Murch Cup

# A Presidential Gift to Riverside

For those of you who have been living under a stone or perhaps otherwise unacquainted with the recent history of Riverside Players, you will not be aware that this year marked the 90th birthday of our president Eric Murch. Though we paid tribute to him in an earlier edition of CentreStage and Riverside Players have all wished him well on this momentous anniversary, Eric could not let the opportu-



Eric Murch

nity pass to commemorate his many years with Riverside Players by causing a scroll to be designed and framed which documents the history of the founding of Riverside Players in 1943 and some of the high points of its many years of "bringing theatre to the people of Wirral".

Accepting the scroll on behalf of all the members of Riverside Players, John Welshman spoke of the long association between Eric and Riverside Players and his significant contribution to all aspects of the history of Riverside Players. That he has commissioned a commemorative document of Riverside's illustrious past is a generous gift which all Riversiders will be able enjoy as they pass through Richmond Hall where it will hang as a reminder of past glories and a

spur to those who take Riverside into the future.



John Welshman accepting the scroll on behalf of Riverside Players

# News from the Andes

News comes from Belinda Bettam (daughter of Helen and Malcolm Ash) of her accomplishments in undertaking a charity hike through South America with a group of friends, raising money for Macmillan Cancer Support.



Belinda Bettam

*asked Pacha Mama (Mother Earth) for help and our patience soon paid off – the clouds lifted and the magnificence of Machu Pichu came into view – awesome!*

She tells CentreStage that the trip had its high's and lows for all the walkers including surviving 'Dead Woman's Pass' (a 6 hour climb to 4,200m); watching the Inca runners run pass them by to set up camp; meeting great new friends; eating fantastic local food; sharing celebrations for the lives of loved ones and drinking beer on the train.

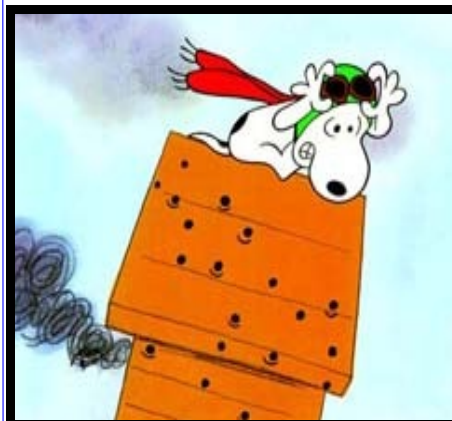
An extract from her diary tells a tale:

*14<sup>th</sup> May 2011 – our wake up call was 5.00am and we had a 2 hour trek along the most dangerous section of the Inca Trail (with vertical drops) before arriving at the Sun Gate. This was where we were to get our first glimpse of Machu Pichu (the Lost City of the Incas) – all we could see was mist! We all*

Belinda also reports darkly of altitude sickness, sleepless nights and the horrors of 'long drop toilets' over which we pass without further comment.

The group of which Belinda was part raised a total of £155,000 and Belinda's very respectable contribution was £4,000, a proportion of which was raised through the generosity of members of Riverside Players who sponsored her and to whom Belinda sends her grateful thanks.

## Errata - mea maxima culpa



Well! It's a tired old beagle wheeling the trusty Sopwith Camel back into the hangar. But once the flak holes have been repaired another season will beckon. Mind you, there has been only light small arms fire about errors in CentreStage so I must be getting something right. Either that or the newsletter is ending up unread in the box marked firelighters or worse still consigned to the outer darkness of the deleted mail or spam filter.

That may all change after people have read and fulminated about this months responses to John Quirk's letter but this Beagle is in full agreement with Ann Warr that the 'young' and 'old' factions of Riverside Players must somehow find a way of working together and closing the generation gap thus ensuring that the many talents of Riverside Players continue to offer an exciting and challenging range of plays to as wide an audience as possible. As Benjamin Franklin said, "We must indeed all hang together, or most assuredly we will all hang separately".



## Preview Night



Excerpts from the new season's plays.

Saturday 17th September 7.30 pm for 8.00 pm at Richmond Hall

Tickets £6 incl. Light supper and drinks

Contact: Katie Welshman on 07591759610



**Bringing Theatre to the People of Wirral**

[www.riversideplayers.org](http://www.riversideplayers.org)

The Riverside Players is a Registered Charity No. 514741

# Centre Stage

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