

## THE HISTORY OF GODALMING OPERATIC SOCIETY

*Author's update to accompany "The History of Godalming Operatic Society", which was first published in 2012. It is intended for this update to be viewed via the Society's website and if required, printed as an insert for the book,*

*In chapter 17 of the book I wrote that: "The history of the Society was an unfinished story.....". Instead of writing a second edition, I am pleased to be able to contribute the following to continue the story. I have also included an update of the Society's Milestones.*

*[www.godalmingoperatic.org.uk](http://www.godalmingoperatic.org.uk)*

*Eddie Powlesland, August 2018*

In 2012 (in the book) I had reached the point of our production of the **Pirates of Penzance** and our successful visit to Buxton to perform at the International G&S Festival.

### Moving on to 2013

In 2013 we performed **The Gondoliers**. This was another successful production under the stage direction of Pat O'Connell and Musical Direction of Robin Wells.

The Summer Concert **Animal Magic** took place at the Electric Theatre on 15 June. The performance included a staged version of **The Zoo** (by Arthur Sullivan and Bolton Rowe) – directed by Pat O'Connell, with Robin Wells as accompanist.

On 29 June we gave a concert performance at Rake Court, Milford. The event, following the theme of our production of **The Gondoliers**, began with our host Alan Bott navigating the Duke and Duchess of Plaza Toro (Rev Canon Mervyn Roberts and Nora Price) and Casilda (Ruth Parr) across the beautiful lake towards their waiting audience. The evening continued in the fine surroundings of Rake Court with songs from G&S. In addition a staged production of **Cox & Box** (Arthur Sullivan and F.C. Burnand) was ably performed by Simon Cakebread, Richard Hales and Richard Arthur.

Christmas entertainment was performed at Eastlake Nursing Home on 13<sup>th</sup> December and again at Farncombe Day Centre on 18 December.

### 2014

Our production for 2014 was **Princess Ida**. We were proud to be invited to perform the production at the International G&S Festival in the Royal Hall, Harrogate on 20 August where we won the award for best costumes. In addition we learnt at a much later date that we had also been awarded the NODA Accolade of Excellence for the best G&S production in the South East for **Princess Ida**. Once again the production was in the safe hands of Pat O'Connell and Robin Wells.

A concert version of **H.M.S. Pinafore** was performed at the Royal Naval Club and Royal Albert Yacht Club, Portsmouth, on 8 May.

Also worthy of note for 2014 is, that upon the retirement of our long-standing Wardrobe Mistress, Geraldine Melhuish MBE she was awarded life membership of the Society for her dedication to the Society over 25 years.

On 18 October we performed a joint concert with Godalming Town Band at Charterhouse Hall in aid of the Mayor of Waverley's charity – Citizens Advice. The Town Band was directed by James Haigh and Robin Wells accompanied the GOS part of the performance, he also conducted both band and singers in a rousing finale of **Rule Britannia**.

A Christmas entertainment was performed at Busbridge on 9 December.

## 2015

**The Mikado** was our 2015 production with Pat O'Connell and Robin Wells directing.

A "**Mini-Mikado**" was performed at the Elmbridge Retirement Village, Cranleigh 22<sup>nd</sup> March and again at the Royal Naval Club in Portsmouth on 26 March

In June, Alexander "Leo" Lyon our lighting designer whose links with Society go back to the 1980's awarded life membership.

Also in 2015 we performed our **90th Anniversary Concert** at the Borough Hall, Godalming on 20 June. Unusually for a Summer Concert we had the benefit of a full orchestra and we performed songs from every G&S Opera, including **Thespis**, from a programme planned by Robin Wells and Eddie Powlesland. In addition we included a fully staged version of **Trial by Jury**. The whole evening was an immense success and due to an early sell out the intended afternoon dress rehearsal was turned in to a performance as well.



## 2016

**The Grand Duke** was our main production for 2016. Stage production was by Pat O'Connell. Although Robin Wells had led the music rehearsals he was, unfortunately, indisposed at the time of the performances. Robin's place as conductor was taken by Charterhouse colleague David Wright. David is currently Musical Director of Haslemere Town Band and Farnham Brass Band.

On 28 July, sadly, Robin Wells the Society's much loved and respected Musical Director and Vice President died. Robin's long service as Chorus Master and then as Musical Director, spanned 50 years. During that time and under his direction, many of the Society's magnificent achievements were realised. A specially commissioned book: "**A Tribute to Robin Wells**" was compiled to present to him at the Society's Garden Party on 7 August. Regrettably, Robin, who had also been awarded life membership of the Society at the AGM, died before receiving the Society's heartfelt recognition.

The planned Garden Party took place at our President, Michael Hartnall's home on Sunday 7 August. Members (past and present) were delighted that Robin's wife Stephanie was at the party to receive the tribute book. Michael gave a moving speech about his dear friend Robin and then presented the book to Stephanie. In addition there were copies for Robin's daughters Alison and Rebecca.

On 13 August for Godalming's Staycation we presented a "Come and Sing" concert version of **The Pirates of Penzance** at the Wilfrid Noyce Centre. We were accompanied by a mini-orchestra and Jean Stevens, piano. David Wright was our Musical Director.

On 10 September we planned to perform at the Godalming Bandstand in the Jack Phillips Memorial Park, accompanied by the combined Haslemere and Farnham Town Bands, with David Wright as our Musical Director. Unfortunately due to inclement weather, the entire event was moved to the Parish Church of St. Peter & St. Paul. Although it was disappointing for many that the event was in the church instead of at the bandstand, it enabled the Society to take advantage of excellent acoustics including a superb rendition of **The Long Day Closes** as part of the programme. This was a fitting tribute to Robin.

David Stone, a former GOS MD (1958-1962) and resident of Godalming died on 12 November at the age of 94.

A Memorial Service was held for Robin Wells on Saturday 3 December at Charterhouse Chapel. It was clear at the well-attended service how much Robin was respected in the field of music throughout his life and for the encouragement and help he gave to many musicians. As a tribute to Robin, GOS members sang **The Long day Closes** again.

## 2017

The annual production for 2017 was "**Iolanthe**". It was directed by Pat O'Connell and the Musical Director was David Wright. The rehearsals for this production saw the re-introduction of a Chorus Master competently fulfilled by Richard Arthur.

On 25 March representatives from GOS with Stephanie Wells attended the Godalming Music Festival Gala Concert to make a presentation of a new trophy donated by GOS in memory of Robin Wells.

We performed a special concert **Gilbert & Sullivan's Greatest Songs** accompanied by a small orchestra with Jean Stevens on piano and David Wright as our MD. The concert was performed at the Leatherhead Theatre on 10 June and was in aid of the theatre restoration fund. We raised a total of £3,614.85.

On 11 June we repeated **Gilbert & Sullivan's Greatest Songs** at Elmbridge Retirement Village. The piano accompanist was Jean Stevens

On 23 June at the AGM Jeff Holiday was awarded life membership in recognition of his valuable contribution to the Society on the Main Committee as well as the Social Committee.

A Godalming Staycation event took place once again at the Wilfrid Noyce Centre on 12 August with Come and Sing **Gilbert & Sullivan's Greatest Songs**. The concert also included a special staged performance of **Cox and Box**. The Musical Director was David Wright accompanied by a small orchestra.

## 2018

The main annual production for 2018 was **The Sorcerer**. This production (excluding Thespis) completed the full G&S canon at GOS for Director Pat O'Connell. He is the only GOS Director to achieve this magnificent record since the Society was formed in 1925. Musical Director was David Wright. The role of Chorus Master for rehearsals was again fulfilled by Richard Arthur. After curtain down on the final night of **The Sorcerer** at Leatherhead there was a celebration back stage and following a speech from Michael Hartnall, a presentation was made to Pat O'Connell.

At the NODA AGM in March we received an award as runner up in the "Best Traditional Musical" category for our 2017 production of **Iolanthe**. Pat O'Connell collected the award on our behalf. This was the sixth award we have achieved during Pat's 12 years as our director.

On 19 May at Guildford Rugby Club a special dinner and concert in honour of Pat O'Connell took place. During the evening Michael Hartnall, our President, made a speech relating to and praising the achievements of Pat during his time as Director. You only need to look at the Society's Milestones in order

to grasp the significance of Pat's contribution to the Society since 2007. Pat was presented with a photo-book featuring the fourteen shows he had directed for us. The dinner was interspersed with a selection of G&S songs chosen by Pat. The evening ended with a superb rendition of The Long Day Closes.

On 17 June we took part in a concert with the massed bands of Godalming and Haslemere under the direction of David Wright.

When our AGM for 2018 took place on 18 June it was unanimously agreed that Julian Hubble be awarded life membership of the Society for his excellent work both on and off stage since his first performance with the Society in 1986. Julian's life membership award was presented to him by our chairman Nora Price at our garden party on 22 July.

It was at this AGM that Life Member Michael Scanlon stood down as our Business Manager. Michael's first performance with the Society was in 1977 and as well as performing he had been Business Manager since 1985. Grateful appreciation was shown for Michael's valuable work over the years and he was presented with an engraved glass together with a little supply of Irish whiskey to enjoy.

So we move to a new era for our 2019 production of **H.M.S Pinafore** and **Trial by Jury** with our new director Ian Henderson. Ian is not entirely new to GOS as way back in 2007 he joined our cast of **Utopia Limited** as **Scaphio** at the Waterford International Festival.

### An added note

Our Chairman, Nora Price, acknowledged the Teamwork needed to ensure that the Society remains successful in the June edition of The Peeper. An important element of the Teamwork, apart from the shows and the behind the scenes work entailed, is the superb vitality shown and given by the Social Committee. Their efforts ensure that members and guests have much to enjoy throughout the year and there is no doubt that it contributes greatly to that success.

*LOOK FOR THE ENJOYMENT OF*

*GILBERT AND SULLIVAN*

*AND FIND IT WITH*

*GODALMING OPERATIC SOCIETY*

## The Society's Milestones

19th February 1925	Our first ever performance " <b>The Yeomen of the Guard</b> ".
5th February 1947	Our first production following WW2 " <b>The Gondoliers</b> ".
15th March 1947	The first Steering Committee meeting for Godalming Music Festival.
26th February 1949	Society's first performance in Guildford at the Technical College " <b>Iolanthe</b> ".
15th February 1974	First performance at the Guildford Civic Hall " <b>The Mikado</b> "
20th March 1975	Our Golden Jubilee Year, celebrated with a special dinner at the Hogs Back Hotel.
19th September 1981	A concert version of " <b>Patience</b> " was performed to celebrate Godalming's centenary as being the first town in the world to have a public electricity supply.
7th May 1983	Our first Summer Concert, " <b>Upstairs – Downstairs</b> ", Clandon House.
20th February 2004	Our first performance at the Leatherhead Theatre " <b>The Mikado</b> "
22nd August 2005	Performed " <b>Iolanthe</b> " at the International G&S Festival, Buxton Opera House.
24th September 2007	Performed " <b>Utopia Limited</b> " at the Waterford International Festival of Light Opera, Theatre Royal.
20th February 2010	Robin Wells special presentation celebrating his 40 years Musical Director after the evening performance of " <b>The Yeomen of the Guard</b> " Godalming Borough Hall.
10th July 2011	Presented with NODA "Accolade of Excellence" for our district for the 2011 production of " <b>Patience</b> ".
15th August 2012	Again at the G & S International Festival, Buxton Opera House performing " <b>The Pirates of Penzance</b> ".
20th August 2014	Performed " <b>Princess Ida</b> " at the International G & S Festival, the Royal Hall, Harrogate. The Society won best costumes award.
20th June 2015	90th Anniversary Concert including " <b>Trial by Jury</b> ". Performed at the Borough Hall, Godalming.
5th July 2015	Presented with NODA Trower Trophy for best G & S performance in South East England for our 2014 production of " <b>Princess Ida</b> ".
July 2016	NODA runner-up award for best programme " <b>The Mikado</b> " 2015 production
July 2017	NODA Trower Trophy awarded for best G&S production In the South East for " <b>The Grand Duke</b> " 2016.
March 2018	NODA Runner up award "Best Traditional Musical" category for our 2017 production of " <b>Iolanthe</b> "