

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. Also listed are some of the Society's Milestones.

www.godalmingoperatic.org

Eddie Powlesland, June 2023.

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 13th 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, Robin 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 22nd 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.

UPDATE 2023

My previous update to The History of Godalming Operatic Society was in 2018. So much has happened since then. Of course, the COVID Pandemic was the cause of so many activities being put on hold. But, before turning to the resumption of productions in 2023 and the challenges faced we must not forget the intervening years.

2019

In 2019 the main production was **H.M.S. Pinafore** combined with **Trial by Jury**. Both operettas were directed by our newly appointed Director Ian Henderson and the Musical Director was David Wright. The whole production was unique as **Trial by Jury** was performed between Acts 1 and 2 of **H.M.S. Pinafore**. **Trial by Jury** was created as a dreamlike sequence taking place of the deck of the Royal Naval ship.

In April a **Mini-Pinafore** was staged for Sussex Gilbert and Sullivan Society. Also a summer concert took place at The Wilfrid Noyce centre in Godalming on 15 June entitled **A Night at the Opera** MD was David Wright.

It was for the production of **H.M.S. Pinafore** when for the first time online ticket sales became available for our productions.

It was in 2019 when we heard that we were also the NODA runner up for our 2018 production of **The Sorcerer**, this time in the de-luxe programme category.

Sadly, Alan Browning who was a stalwart in the GOS Orchestra passed away in 2019. Alan, who was a Life Member enjoyed participating in GOS activities. He was flautist in the orchestra for a magnificent 50 years from 1964 to 2013.

2020

Saw the Society performing **Ruddigore**, directed once again by the duo of Ian Henderson and David Wright.

Ruddigore proved to be another success for GOS but there were a number of challenges to overcome. There was a lot of difficulty sourcing scenery and then we had the loss of our regular costume supplier. Fortunately our amazing Wardrobe Mistress, Liz Atkinson saved the day by travelling far and wide to get the costumes we needed. At the last minute one of the principals, playing the part of Sir Roderic Murgatroyd became unwell. Lee Power, at very short notice, stepped in to confidently fulfil the role.

Soon after our production of **Ruddigore** the dreaded a COVID struck and in March severe lockdown restrictions were imposed.

We were also saddened to learn of the death of Mike Scanlon on 26 November 2020. Mike, like his wife Linda was an honorary Life Member of the Society and a highly valued member of the team. He joined the Society in 1977 and was for many years the Business Manager. Mike's contribution to the Society over the years was immense. Apart from sourcing scenery and costumes he was adept at making some of the all essential props for our productions. And in addition performing in the chorus.

2021

With the imposition of COVID restrictions we lost the opportunity to perform the next planned production, which was to be **The Pirates of Penzance**. In fact rehearsals began in September and continued through until December. But, with great reluctance it was decided to pull the 2022 performances due to rising COVID measures. With so much on hold the important thing to manage was the need to maintain membership contacts. This was achieved by the excellent work of Chair, Chris Howard, by setting up a regular Zoom link each week in order to maintain contact. The Zoom sessions consisted of singing exercises conducted by Simon Wilson, using the Vaccai Exercises, in addition there were contributions from other members, such as Desert Island Discs, GOS History and Quizzes.

Sadly, Barbara Hubble who had been a member of the Society since the mid 1980's passed away on 12 February 2021.

On 27 June 2021 a special summer entertainment took place at Holy Trinity Church, Bramley. This performance took place under the COVID regulations in place at the time and was limited to "professional" singers and a limited number in the audience.

It was also with great sadness we learnt that Jean Pratt passed away on 19 October 2021. Chapter 3 of the History has a complete page devoted to Jean and I hope this tribute written by Michael Hartnall at the time of her death will serve even more as the special recognition she deserved.

Michael's Tribute to Jean

The sad news of Jean's death closes a long era in the history of GOS. She was the 'mother' of the Society and much loved and admired by so many of us. In the last few weeks, she celebrated her 70 years as a member, having joined way back in 1951. Her talent was spotted quickly. In 1952 she first appeared in a small role in Princess Ida, with Betty Moat taking the title role. That was to be the end of minor roles! In the subsequent decades, she sang, with great distinction, all of the principal soprano roles and, in later years, some of the soubrette and contralto roles.

Undoubted she was one of the finest principal singers to appear with the Society. She was innately musical. I heard her many times and can confidently report that she never sang out-of-tune and she had a keen sense of rhythm. She told me once, that she could feel a metronome clicking away in her head, giving her the beat – a very useful accomplishment for a singer. As an actress, she probably had much to learn in the early days. When I saw her first, she was a confident actress and an actress who always knew her words.

I joined the Society way back in 1966. That seems a very long time ago to me but by then Jean had been a member for fifteen years. It so happened that we were producing Iolanthe that year and Jean was not playing the lead. The reason: she was singing in a professional tour of My Fair Lady. The tour had just finish and she helped serving cast refreshments, back stage at the old Tech. So, we met over a cup-of-tea. She was immediately warm and friendly to a very junior member of the cast. No sign of the diva with our Jean.

Subsequently we became good friends and colleagues. Pamela and I were very pleased to attend Jean's marriage to Keith Pratt (one of the Society's leading principals) in 1975, at Charterhouse. In addition to Society events, they both sang extensively for other organisations and with some of the leading London choirs. It was a happy and successful marriage but sadly a short one. Keith died in the late 90s, which meant that Jean had a very long widowhood. Having no children, I always felt that we, the members of the Society, were Jean's family. Many of the younger members will remember her as Secretary and then as prompter. She didn't want to be away from her family.

Recently, her health deteriorated yet she was able to remain in her home, supported by some very good friends and neighbours. I continued to visit her regularly and a morning outing to a local coffee shop, was always much appreciated. Jean never complained about the problems of old age. She was a 'chin-up', 'half-full', 'no-nonsense' person, which coupled with a natural warmth and charm, made her the fine lady we all remember.

It is hard to think of anyone who has done more for GOS. We shall miss her.

Her funeral took place at Guildford Crematorium on 26 November 2021. GOS Members who attended the funeral sang **When the Foeman Bares His Steel** from **The Pirates of Penzance**.

2022

Unfortunately due to the ongoing COVID restrictions and uncertainty we could not stage our annual G&S production. We were able, however, to reunite in order to perform a summer concert on 18 June, **A Regular Royal Celebration** in the Borough Hall accompanied by a full orchestra. MD was David Wright.

We then celebrated that new beginning in September and reunited once again to start rehearsals for our 2023 production, the long awaited **The Pirates of Penzance**

At the AGM, long serving life member, Linda Scanlon, whose first show was in a concert version of **Patience** in 1981 and then **Princess Ida** in 1982, was appointed Vice President of the Society.

It was in July 2022 that we learnt of the death of Yvonne Budd. Yvonne joined the Society 1972 and sang in the chorus in our production of **The Yeomen of the Guard**. She was a great asset to the Society and in recent years many will remember her sterling work with the Front of House team along with her husband Tony.

2023

Much to the delight of our loyal supporters, patrons and cast we were back on stage with a stunning performances of the **Pirates of Penzance**. The legacy of COVID was still lingering and affected some cast members. Despite all of this the show was an absolute triumph. Tickets sales, too, were excellent. The long awaited Pirates was directed by Ian Henderson with David Wright directing the music.

Sussex G&S Society invited us to perform a concert version of Pirates. The performance was on 23 April in Adastra Hall, Hassocks.

It was in February that we learnt that our President since 2006, Michael Hartnall intended to stand down. Michael joined the Society 1966. The first production he appeared in was **Iolanthe** in 1967. He was Treasurer from 1969 to 1977 and Chairman from 1981 to 1988. He also served on the main committee in 1968 and again from 1977 to 1980. At the AGM on 19 June, former chairman and life member, Hammy Sparks paid tribute to Michael's long and invaluable support over the years. Simon Wilson on behalf of the Society presented Michael with an inscribed crystal whisky glass and a specially prepared card from members of the Society and in a further gesture, he was awarded Life Membership.



(Photo Chris Howard)

It was also in February we heard that the Society had been left a substantial legacy from a Family Trust.

Our summer concert **Midsummer Music** took place at the Wilfrid Noyce on 17 June. The programme included excerpts from G&S, Mozart and well known musicals. Musical Director was once again David Wright and the Accompanist was Joanna Shepherd the rehearsal accompanist was Andrew Harrap.

On 1 January 2023 William Llewellyn MBE, B.Mus, FRAM ARCO passed away. William was a distinguished musician at Charterhouse. He was Musical Director for the Society from 1963 to 1968. Apart from his committee roles and chairmanship he was president from 1970 to 1991.

QUALITY & TRADITION AND SOCIAL

Quality is a byword for GOS whether it be the annual production, the singing, the orchestra, costumes, scenery, back stage, lighting, front of house, the printed programme and its website – It is no wonder that GOS is regarded as one of the best G&S Societies in the country.

That quality shone through, when, at last we resumed our annual production in 2023.

Much of the Society's continued success can be attributed to the fact that the G&S operettas have always been presented in a traditional way.

In addition, apart from the shows Godalming Operatic Society has so much to offer its members and we have a wide variety of social events including a Christmas Party, Summer Garden Party, summer evening walks, visits to other G&S performances and in 2023 the Tower of London for a special guided tour. In addition we benefit from the occasional workshop in order to enhance and maintain our high standards.

For your information a copy of **The History of Godalming Operatic Society** is also in the library of the Gilbert and Sullivan Society in the Music Library at the Barbican Centre, London.

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 " The Yeomen of the Guard ".
5th February 1947	Our first production following WW2 " The Gondoliers ".
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 " Iolanthe ".
15th February 1974	First performance at the Guildford Civic Hall " The Mikado "
20th March 1975	Our Golden Jubilee Year, celebrated with a special dinner at the Hogs Back Hotel.
19th September 1981	A concert version of " Patience " 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, " Upstairs – Downstairs ", Clandon House.
20th February 2004	Our first performance at the Leatherhead Theatre " The Mikado "
22nd August 2005	Performed " Iolanthe " at the International G&S Festival, Buxton Opera House.
24th September 2007	Performed " Utopia Limited " at the Waterford International Festival of Light Opera, Theatre Royal.
20th February 2010	Robin Wells special presentation celebrating his 40 years Musical Director after evening performance of " The Yeomen of the Guard " Godalming Borough Hall.
10th July 2011	Presented with NODA "Accolade of Excellence" for our district for the 2011 production of " Patience ".
15th August 2012	Again at the G & S International Festival, Buxton Opera House performing " The Pirates of Penzance ".
20th August 2014	Performed " Princess Ida " at the International G & S Festival, the Royal Hall, Harrogate. The Society won best costumes award.
20th June 2015	90th Anniversary Concert including " Trial by Jury ". 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 " Princess Ida ".
July 2016	NODA runner-up award for best programme " The Mikado " 2015 production
July 2017	NODA Trower Trophy awarded for best G&S production In the South East for " The Grand Duke " 2016.
March 2018	NODA Runner up award "Best Traditional Musical" category for our 2017 production of " Iolanthe "
March 2019	NODA runner up for our 2018 production of " The Sorcerer ", this time in the deluxe programme category