

Behind the Scenes with the Trimley SAINTS Players

Heather Rodwell, Dressmaker in charge of the Saints Wardrobe



Heather stitching a costume for "Guys and Dolls"

It was Rosemary who expressed the opinion that we in Trimley, *"do very well for entertainment"*. Carnivals, Travelling players, Model Railway exhibitions, Open Gardens and theatrical productions may be listed amongst what is on offer and all are part of the pleasures of our village life. Having seen the hugely successful *"Out of Time"* Pantomime production staged by Trimley Saints Players in February 2018, I wanted to find out more about this dedicated band of skilled Actors, who add such colour and fun to the Village during the dark winter nights and the soft summer evenings.

Heather Rodwell, has several roles in village life but on this occasion, the focus was on Saints. Heather has been a member of the Company for over 30 years and gave me a warm welcome amidst a hectic schedule. She took time out to describe her own involvement in the life of the company; its people, the performances and her commitment to both and the contributions she makes to its considerable achievements. Together with her husband Tony, Heather has been involved for over thirty years with Saints.

Sometime secretary, backstage manager and actor, Heather certainly has a rounded view of the life of Saints but it is her role as the Wardrobe Manager for the Company, which captured my attention. The responsibility seems almost overwhelming to the uninitiated. All theatrical companies need good costumes to delight the eye, whilst delivering the lines which please us. It is true lines take time to learn but the Wardrobe is as time-consuming an activity as may be imagined and Heather fulfils her role with great aplomb.

How did Heather manage to produce clothes for twenty-two people in the forthcoming production of *"Guys and Dolls"*, I wondered? Surely this must involve costly expenditure for the company? Every production the company presents has to pay for itself. In addition to maintaining balanced books, £1,000 of money raised is treated separately. It is not ploughed back into funds to support the next stage production nor to supply costumes as I had supposed. It is donated to a rolling choice of charities and is the company's generous gift to the Community. Being an amateur company, Saints observe careful financial management and operate on a finite budget.

However, Heather has been stitching, snipping and altering for many years and is accustomed to producing the goods seemingly out of thin air. The work required in acquiring costumes for each production is spread out over the months, weeks and days preceding the performances.

"I need at least three months preparation," Heather informed me, "and source clothes by borrowing or buying them from the Internet. Sometimes I may hire them."

This activity as well as costume alteration may take an average of one or two nights a week for at least three months. Nips, tucks and embellishments are all part of Heather's work, with some clothes requiring additional thought and input. Without wishing to destroy the mystery of the Theatre, it is reasonable to say last year's production of the farce "Out of Order" by Ray Cooney depended on all of Heather's skills, especially the highlight of the show, the dropping trousers. Heather smiled at me as she quipped,

"I worked hard on 'them trousers' in order that they should drop at just the right moment."

She didn't elaborate on just how she managed this technical feat but clearly it worked as last years' audience can testify. Not only did her skills bring the trousers down but also the House. Her work is not confined to simply obtaining and altering the clothes but also on last minute adjustments and in-production repairs.

"I had to sew the Princess Cinderella into her dress by the time of the last performance, it had been taken on and off so many times the zip was completely broken."

I went to the Memorial Hall on a rehearsal night to discover Heather sitting and stitching at the back of the room with one eye on the dramatic action and the other on her sewing. You might think her needlework would be affected but this was not the case. The small, neat running stitches evoked admiration as her fingers moved quickly across the fabric, blurring the sharpness of the needle. They were evenly spaced and almost invisible to the eye.



Heather's double-layered workbox was full of threads, French chalk, thimbles, Petersham ribbon, measuring tapes and at least three pairs of scissors. Needles and pins pierced multiple cushions, all

ready for active service and standing to attention. These simple tools combined to create the magic we will enjoy on the opening night when the Company step on to the stage to sing and act their hearts out. The dashing ensembles will undoubtedly give the players confidence as they move into character and it will be Heather, the consummate team player, who has made this possible. At the end of the show, the Company will receive well deserved applause and adulation. Will Heather be on the stage or might she be repairing costumes. Perhaps now is the time to say,

“Step into the spotlight Heather and take a bow. You deserve it.”

Heather's Sewing Box



Heather's workbox ready for action



The pin cushion given to Heather by Princess Cinderella,