

Faringdon Folly October 1998

# Fifty years of dramatic events!

*THIS year sees the 50th anniversary of Faringdon Dramatic Society. Here, TIM REEVES writes about its origins and its development.*

WAY back in 1948, Bill Reeves ran an Evening Class which proved popular and developed into 'Play Reading' sessions. Bill and Gilbert Gregson, joined by others such as Bill Carter and George Young, gradually formed a Dramatic Society. Rehearsals were held in the little Meeting House opposite the Duke of Wellington, sets were built in garages and back gardens and the productions were staged in the Corn Exchange. In 1952 the Society was able to rent an old Nissan Hut ex-cinema on the old Marines Camp (now Marines Drive and Town End Road) and begun its conversion into the Little Theatre.

After more than a year of hard work the task was completed and in December 1953 a production of 'The Late Christopher Bean' by Emyln Williams was the occasion of the official opening by Lord Faringdon.

During the next twenty years, the Society staged over fifty plays at the Little Theatre and this, of course, involved a considerable number of performers. Among them there appeared in 1970 and '71, an unknown amateur actress called Pam Ayres!

In 1972 the redevelopment of the old camp into the present housing estate was begun, the Little Theatre was lost, and the Society had to find alternative accommodation. Just at that time, the old Faringdon Social Club was wound up, the Pump House (now the Community Centre) became available and was offered as temporary accommodation.

The present Jubilee rooms were used by the Society for the storage of furniture and stage properties and what is now the bar served as a rehearsal room

and for the construction of stage sets. During this time a few productions were staged at Buckland Village Hall.

Plans for the formation of a Community Association and the conversion of the Pump House into a Community Centre were well under way by this time and members of the Dramatic Society took an active part in the discussions and preparations for this project.

Included in the plans was a fine new theatre for Faringdon and with the determined efforts of the town councillors and particularly of Mr Bill White, one of the Society's most loyal supporters, the theatre was designed and built.

The re-formed Faringdon Community Dramatic Society staged its first production in the new theatre in 1978 and since then over fifty productions have followed.

There have been over 300 'performers' over the years and of course many others have been involved back-stage.

☞ To mark the occasion of 50 years of continuous Drama in Faringdon, the Faringdon Dramatic Society is holding a Dinner Dance on November 21 at the Corn Exchange. Readers who would like to attend, but have not received an invitation (and can verify their association with the society) are asked to contact the Secretary, Debbie Lock.

Tim Reeves is also keen to obtain any photographs/programmes that readers may have to add to the archives. Please send any items to him including your name and address if you wish them to be returned, to