

BUILDING THEIR OWN THEATRE

AMBITIOUS VENTURE OF THE FARINGDON SOCIETY

THE producer wiped his hands on a piece of old sacking, artistes and technicians rested on their mops, brooms and scrubbing brushes, and the secretary sat in a wheelbarrow. Another evening's work was over and the day when Faringdon will have its own theatre had drawn just a little nearer.

From the outside the grimy ramshackle Nissen hut in Butts Close which had been leased for seven years to the Faringdon District Dramatic Society looks like an old steam engine about to leave the goods yard, but to a thriving, ambitious company, tired of staging one-set plays in the Corn Exchange, its possibilities are unlimited.

They will tell you that this former camp cinema will accommodate 150 people; that it has a stage—15ft. by 15ft.—dressing and make-up rooms, a box-office and a workshop; and in fact, all that is needed to convert it into one of the cosiest little theatres this side of the Old Vic is a lot of hard work and £500.

Dust and Rust!

The dust and rust of long neglect hangs heavily over the hall and outbuildings and all around is broken ground and thriving weed. And yet within this dismal picture are the essentials of a modern little theatre and the Faringdon players have cheerfully undertaken the work of transformation. Incidentally they hope to attract many new members.

A fairly large Nissen hut, the building is in the Agricultural Training Camp at Butts Close. It was built by Royal Marine Engineers during the war and was used as a small cinema and for concerts. Lately it has been used by the agricultural authorities as a storage shed.

"We have resolved to do all the work ourselves — the cleaning, adaptation and decoration, as well as the laying-out of the grounds and approaches," explained Mr. W. G. Reeves, hon. secretary. "No-one outside the Society's membership will be employed and we are hoping that, this summer, our members will really get down to the job.

"Until the place is completely ready for use as a theatre proper, we intend using it as our headquarters for rehearsing and scenery making."

In all probability it will take two years to complete the job and the members then hope to persuade some leading personality in the theatrical world to perform the opening ceremony.

Mammoth Task

The hard work has already begun. Teachers, clerks, civil servants and others are giving up their leisure hours and knocking down to the mammoth task.

Society membership fortunately includes Mr. C. Burtwell and Mr. A. G. Drew who are in partnership in an electrical shop in Coxwell Street. Messrs. Burtwell and Drew have undertaken to completely rewire the premises. Another useful member is Mr. R. Wright, a carpenter, who is busy repairing the roof. Most of the 30-odd members have few trade qualifications, but their keenness cannot be doubted.

There is a real, enjoyable sense of thrill about the whole project. The Society found this out when their first working party reported for duty last week. Actors are funnier off-stage than on it. There is always a laugh and beyond it all they are building for the future.

Somewhere of their own to rehearse, and to present plays, and somewhere where sets may be constructed. Despite extensions to the Corn Exchange stage by the Parish Council only one-set plays have hitherto been possible. Earlier productions such as "The Chiltern Hundreds" and "The Happiest Days of Your Life" have been very successful, but the Society needs to explore new fields if its success is to be progressive. In future Mr. G. R. Gregson, chairman and stage manager, who has designed and constructed all the previous sets, will have greater scope for his undoubted ability.

Raising the Funds

Biggest worry is that of raising the necessary funds. For this purpose a financial committee has been formed, and it will not be long before Faringdon folk hear about forthcoming dances, rummage sales and other events in aid of the new theatre.

Faringdon will benefit by the theatre's completion and Butts Close may in time become a regular and popular venue for local people.

In the meantime, the Society would welcome new members. Mr. Reeves, is particularly anxious to rope in some of the younger members of Faringdon's community.

"People never realise the work which goes into producing a play," he said. "We need actors and actresses, back-stage helpers and anybody else who is willing to do something. The 5s. annual subscription pays off handsome dividends in the fun, interest and companionship to be found in amateur theatricals."

Mr. Reeves' belief is shared by every one of the spare-time troupers who are building for the future of amateur dramatics in Faringdon.

Faringdon District Dramatic Society is affiliated to Swindon and District Amateur Theatre Guild several of whose officers attended to see the first working party in action and to convey the greetings and good wishes of the other affiliated Societies.

The Company

Founded in July 1949, the Faringdon Society has already produced seven three-act plays: "Busman's Holiday," by Dorothy L. Sayers; "Quiet Week-End,"

Esther McCracken; "Distinguished Gathering," James Parish; "When we are Married," J. B. Priestley; "The Chiltern Hundreds," W. Douglas Horne; "Who Lies There?", Philip Johnson and "The Happiest Days of your Life," John Dighton.

Officers include Mr G. R. Gregson, chairman and Mr. W. G. Reeves and Mrs. R. C. Venn, secretary and treasurer respectively. Mrs. Allan Haines is President and Patrons comprise Lord Faringdon, Mrs. Allen-Stevens, Mr. A. A. Watkins, Mr. D. L. Lansdown, Mr. L. B. Lodge, Miss A. H. Moore and Mr. A. Saunders.

On the roll of members are the Misses K. M. Allanson, M. Heavens S. Gaule, J. V. Howse, D. Willis P. Purcell, E. Davidson, J. Emery Mesdames N. B. Reeves, A. K. Holfield, C. Burtwell, E. M. Bolton, E. Drew, M. Carter, J. Perkins and Messrs. C. W. R. Dee, W. Perkins, W. C. M. Carter, C. Widdnam, G. Young, R. Wright, A. Probert, A. G. Drew, G. Gibson, A. Ansell, C. L. Burwell and R. C. Venn.

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