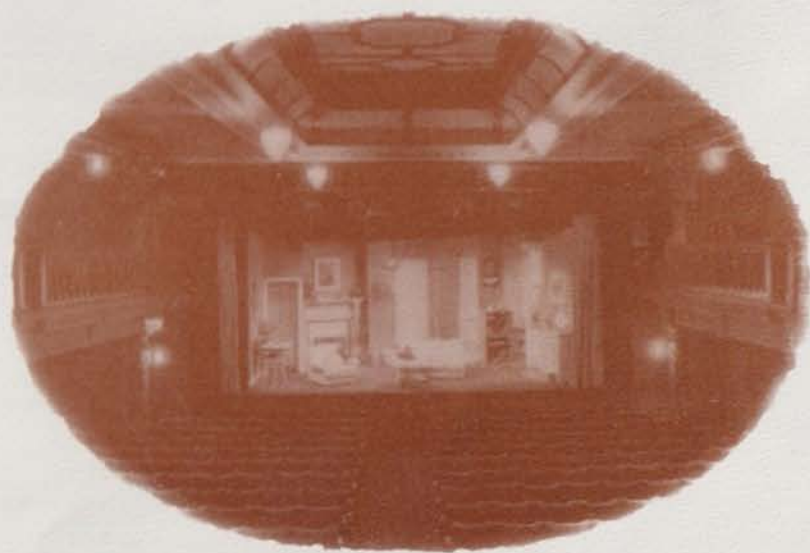


*A short
illustrated history
of the
Leas Pavilion
Theatre*



Folkestone

Eighty years old

Eighty years old! It trips so easily off the tongue and yet in that eighty year history of this fine Edwardian Theatre there has been an unbroken continuity of repertory since 1928 - fifty-five years! This is a repertory record unequalled anywhere in the world.

A tradition founded in 1928 by James Grant Anderson, an actor manager who is still a part of the theatrical scene. From 1929-1969 the halcyon days of the Leas Pavilion were under the aegis of Arthur Brough and his wife, Elizabeth Addyman for an astonishing forty-one years. In the seventies that heritage was carried on by the late Richard Burnett of the Penguin Players and, subsequently by Robert Howard and his family - Robert Howard himself now being a National Theatre player.

Since 1976 the Theatre has been under the control of Charles Vance, an actor manager in the old tradition, who has been so active both in the repertory and touring fields for over two decades. Indeed, in October 1981 he celebrated twenty-one years as an actor manager.

The tradition has always been of a family Theatre; the Brouchs, the Burnetts, the Howards - and now the Vances, with Imogen Vance being the Director of Productions for the Folkestone Theatre Company, the charitable company set up in 1978 to carry on the repertory tradition in this playhouse.

No souvenir brochure marking a birthday celebration could attempt to detail the wealth of theatrical history which has emanated from Folkestone's unique Theatre. In his forty-one years Arthur Brough presented over 1500 productions and, since 1928, the theatre has presented some 2000 plays.

As in every repertory theatre company, Folkestone has been the starting off point for so many distinguished careers and many who are now household names first set foot on the stage on the Leas. Again it would be impossible to list this distinguished roll, but let us remember a few - Michael Aldridge, Jill Bennett, David Tomlinson, Joan Hickson, Noel Howlett, Peter Walter and Peter Barkworth. After forty-one years of service to Folkestone, Arthur Brough himself, at the end of his days, was to find international fame through the television series "Are you Being Served?"

And now the Theatre goes into a new era - the last two decades of the century and to ensure its continued life at a time when it is the only repertory theatre left in Kent, the Folkestone Theatre Company will shortly launch an £80,000 appeal to secure the continuity of its great repertory tradition.

This small souvenir records a landmark almost unique in theatre history and the Trustees of the Folkestone Theatre Company are indebted to Julie Deller, Molly Kitteridge, Kerry Waymark, Peter Walter, the Folkestone Herald and the Folkestone Library, without whose unstinting help this could never have happened.

Happy birthday Leas Pavilion. Good luck and good fortune attend on Charles Vance and his Folkestone Theatre Company - and here's wishing many happy evenings at the Theatre for the patrons of the Leas Pavilion Theatre, Folkestone.



Charles Vance outside the Leas Pavilion Theatre Photograph by Courtesy of the Folkestone Gazette and Herald



Site of the Leas Pavilion

The Grand Opening

Folkestone was at the height of its prosperity and popularity as a seaside town in the late nineteenth century. its population in 1861 had been 8,507 yet forty years later, with the development of the railways, it had increased to 30,694. From a small fishing village it had grown into a lively, fashionable holiday town. The Leas were a particular attraction with their lovely green walks and views over the Channel and it became a ritual for a display of fashion and elegance to be held there after Sunday morning services.

With the opening of the wonderful, new and spacious Metropole Hotel in 1897 and the completion of a new harbour by the South Eastern Railway in the same year, it is easy to understand the optimism that led to the idea of a tearoom on the Leas where there would be music and light refreshment.

The idea was that of Mr Frederick Ralph who had done much for the town. He approached a local architect, Reginald Pope, who propounded his idea for a tea-house to be built below pavement level on a piece of rough ground lying between two hotels on the East end of the Leas. These hotels enjoyed long leases from Lord Radnor which included the 'ancient lights' clause which meant that no building could be constructed next to them which would interrupt the flow of daylight to their windows. So if Mr Pope could not build upwards he decided to build downwards.

The contractor for the work was Castle & Son and five thousand loads of sand and soil were removed in the preliminary excavation and very strong retaining walls had to be erected on all sides before building work commenced. The overall cost was £10,000 and at the luncheon to celebrate the completion of the building all agreed that Folkestone should be proud for no similar place could be found in any other seaside town.

The Folkestone Herald of 28th June 1902 gave details of the luncheon on 24th June which heralded the opening of the Leas Pavilion. It was reported that the following menu was "faultlessly served": Spring Soup; Salmon Mayonnaise; Aspic of Prawns; Galatines of Chicken; York Ham; Ox Tongue; Pigeon Pie; Roast Beef; Forequarter of Lamb; Pressed Beef; Lobster Salad; French Salads; Chartreuse of Apricots; Strawberry Creams; Marachino Jellies; Port Wine Jellies; Ice Pudding; Cheese; Tea; Coffee; Desert.

On Tuesday, 1st July 1902, Lord Radnor, who had created so many of the attractive additions to Folkestone, performed the opening ceremony and the building was dedicated to the public on 10th July.



The Leas Pavilion as a Tea Room



Leas Pavilion Theatre 1982

Photograph by Courtesy of the Folkestone Gazette and Herald

Edwardian Splendour

The teahouse was fully licensed and proudly advertised itself as the only restaurant on the Leas. Luncheon was 2s 6d and afternoon tea 6d. High prices for 1902 but a covenant in the Lease required that the Lessees would 'use the room for the highest class tea and refreshment trade with a view to securing the best class of visitors only'.

The main hall, which proved to be larger than the Assembly Room at the Town Hall, was heated by open gas log fires and could accommodate 450 people dining at separate table. The wicker armchairs were in delicate shades of pink and green and tall palms, set in large brass containers, were placed around the cafe area and at the head of the stairway. A well-sprung floor, to allow for dancing, consisted of oak and walnut decoration and fine Indian carpets were placed about the floor.

At the far end of the gallery, beneath a stained glass window of floral design, the ladies orchestra were seated. Often a vocalist joined them to delight the customers. The late afternoon sun would shine through the patterned glass windows and when evening came, the electric pendant lights were lit.

The orchestra vocalists and entertainers proved popular and slowly the Teahouse began to be referred to as the 'Cafe Chanson' so that in 1906 a concert party was introduced on a make-shift stage below the gallery, where the stage is situated today.



The first Half Century

The concert parties proved very successful - performers Ronald Frankau, Naunton Wayne and Leslie Henson were particular favourites with the audience. The Leas Pavilion had become established as a place of entertainment.

A group called the Gipsies first appeared in 1906 and this seems to be the first taste the Leas Pavilion had of theatre. Their brochure described - "Burlesques etc. including 'The Butler - a miniature Musical Comedy and 'A Proposal' - a Screaming Absurdity in one act." They also claim to have "Everything to ensure success: Cultured Vocalists, Alert Artistes, Splendid Costumes, Picturesque Scenery, Endless Properties, Special Effects."

In 1911 a great new innovation was tried. The management introduced a cinematograph and films were shown at the end of each performance. But the regulars disapproved and many left as soon as the machine began to whirl. Then one night a little accident set the whole apparatus alight and few mourned its passing.

In 1914 the war broke out and it was at the Leas Pavilion that farewell concerts were held for the troops. They would march straight from the theatre down Remembrance Hill and onto the ships to take them to France.

After the war the concert parties continued until 1928 when a young man, 'Jimmy' Grant Anderson came to the Leas Pavilion and saw its potential as a theatre. He built the first proper stage at the far end of the hall and introduced not only plays but the famous Tea Matinees to the Leas Pavilion.

JUST A REMINDER

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FOLKESTONE.

Manager - D'Arcy Clayton.



CONCERT PARTIES
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1915.

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" 22—The Bats.
" 29—The Cigarettes.
Special Concerts on
Good Friday.
April 5—Pastoral Players.
" 12—Ditto.
" 19—The Chocs.
" 26—In Negotiation.
May 3—The Crackers.
" 10—The Biscuits.
" 17—The Curios.
" 24—Special Weeks
Attractions.
" 31—The Tweenies.
June 7—The Scamps.

June 14—The Mountebanks.
" 21—The Gipsies.
" 28—Ditto.
July 5—The Ideals.
" 12—The Court Jesters.
" 19—The Mad Hatters.
" 26—The Masquers.
Aug. 2—The Courtiers.
" 9—The Fashion Plates.
" 16—The Humoursques.
" 23—The Odd Folk.
" 30—The Crackers.
Sept. 6—The Mountebanks.
" 13—Les Superba.
" 20—The Gipsies.
" 27—In Negotiation.
Oct. 4—Ditto.
" 11—Ditto.

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Kentfield, Taylor & Co., Ltd., Printers, Folkestone.

The Brougs

James Grant Anderson only stayed a year. So in 1929 a young man was offered a contract to provide six weeks theatrical entertainment at the Leas Pavilion Theatre. That man was newly married and he and his wife arrived in Folkestone for those six weeks and stayed for over forty years. They were of course Arthur Brough and Elizabeth Addyman.

The Brougs became loved and respected throughout Folkestone and by 1949 the popularity of the company brought them permanent bookings which formed the backbone of the audience. Some Tea Matinee tables were booked by local patrons in advance for the entire season and the Box Office staff became accustomed to letters from all over England requesting "our usual seats" for forthcoming holidays.

The Tea Matinees were now part of the tradition at the Leas Pavilion Theatre. Three times a week every other row of seats would be removed and tables put in their place. Tea would be served to the patrons during the performances. The audience loved them but one cannot help feeling sorry for the actors who had to perform a serious drama amidst the clatter of tea cups.

In January 1951 Peter Walter joined the Brougs as their partner and co-director. Through the fifties repertory flourished but in the sixties even the Brougs were worried about the future. In their

1,000th production Souvenir programme of 1963 Arthur Brough says 'I do not wish to make a celebration the occasion for an obituary but the future is fraught with danger'. Well danger or no, repertory has survived at the Leas pavilion and long may it do so.



THE CAST of *Arsenic and Old Lace* at the Leas Pavillion Theatre in 1948. Arthur Brough is in the centre of the front row, with Peter Walter second from right, front row.

Quo Vadis

Times change and the Theatre cannot stand still and so, in the last four years, we have been slowly attempting a change in the pattern of the Theatre's role in our town. Three years ago this theatre ended its tradition of "weekly rep" and every production thereafter has run for at least two weeks. We have developed strong links with the schools and carry out an important educational programme, apart from our provision of entertainment for our regular theatregoers. We are proud of our links with the Folkestone and Hythe Operatic & Dramatic Society who present Christmas pantomime at our Theatre.

In this age of inflation there is no repertory company which can survive without some grant aid and we acknowledge gratefully the assistance we receive from Shepway District Council and Kent County Council - but this is not enough if the Theatre is to carry on to the end of the century. A time of celebration must also be a time for taking stock and to ensure this Theatre will carry on the tradition and develop its service to the community we will shortly launch a major appeal for £80,000 (an appropriate sum in an eightieth birthday year) - and that fund should generate enough income for its own investments to guarantee that by the year 2000 AD the repertory tradition will have been unbroken for seventy-two years since James Grant Anderson first came here in 1928.

CHARLES VANCE



James Charles, Deborah Snook, Charles Vance, Michael Cloughton and Juliette Kaplan in 80th Birthday Production of 'Come Blow your Horn' by Neil Simon. Photograph by courtesy of the Folkestone Herald and Gazette.

The Folkestone Theatre Company Limited
(Registered Charity No. 276513)

Trustees:

The Rt Hon. The Lord Brabourne; Cllr John Jacques, Cllr Mrs Ivy Allan; Mr Colin Hemsley, Mr Ian Hedges, Major C. Holloway (Hotels & Catering Assoc); Mr Charles Vance; The Hon. Mrs Imogen Vance.

Appeal Organiser:

Mrs Gwen Stone.

Artistic Director and Administrator:

Charles Vance.

Theatre Staff:

Production Assistant: Brianne Manktelow, Production & Liaison Manager: Sandra Wynne, Catering & Bar Manageress: Valerie Hogben, Box Office: Vera Burrows; Lee Howes; Hilary Murray Pearce, Catering: Daphne Heaver; Ann Roberts; Jane Stubbings; Tracey Hogben; Michelle Boreham; Sally Hogben; Dexter Hogben.

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Theatre Company:

Jane Bennett; James Charles; Michael Cloughton; Juliette Kaplan; Stephan le Marchand; James Milner; Michael Shallard; Deborah Snook.

Lighting & Sound:

John Cheriton. **Technical Assistant:** Theresa Robertson

Head of Design:

Adrian Smith. **Design Assistant:** Jackie Vance.

Supporters' Club:

Chairman: Miss Marguerite Ticehurst, Secretary: Major B.E. Tebbs.

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Founded in Folkestone in 1878 by John Oclee and in Sandgate Road since 1895 the Oclee family have served the Folkestone Community throughout the life of the Leas Pavilion Theatre. Photographed outside the shop in 1902 is the son of the firm's founder, Leonard Oclee (1873-1953). The family tradition has carried on for over a century and the shop (now renumbered 35) is run by his son Cyril and grandson Brian.

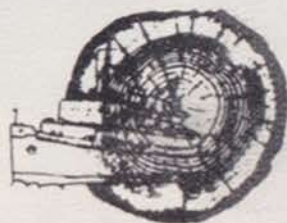
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