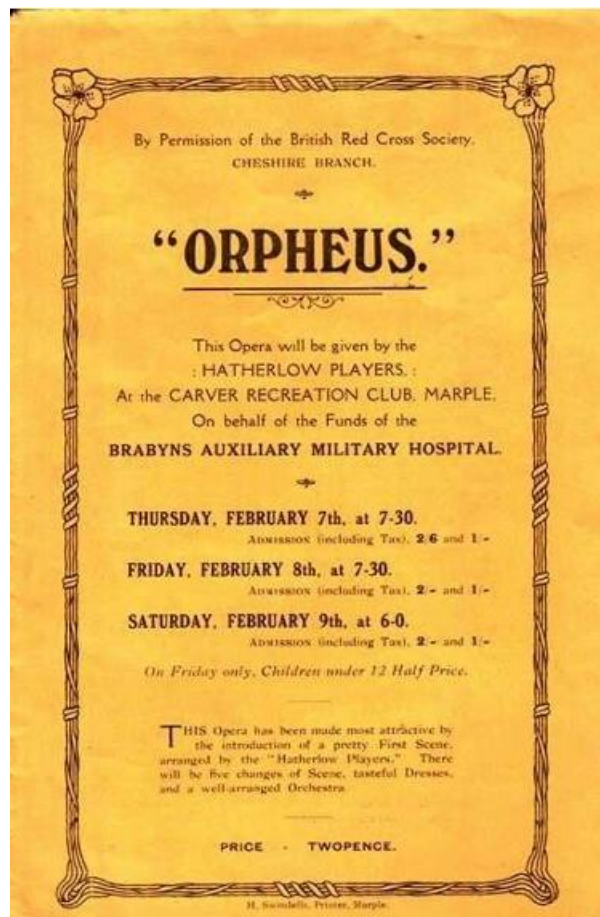


We are 120 years old!



It is a memorable year for members of the Carver Theatre in Marple as they celebrate their 120th anniversary.

They began life as the Marple Dramatic Society which was formed in 1906 and presented their first production, Sheridan's "The Rivals" at the Shepley Hall, the upper room of the Conservative Club on Church Lane. For weekly meetings and rehearsals, the Society rented rooms further down Church Lane in the current Theatre building which was then the Carver Institute This was a gymnasium, or Recreation Club, founded by brothers Thomas and Oswald Carver whose aim was "to promote healthy minds in healthy bodies in the young men of Marple" — namely to keep them off the streets!

The Marple Literary Society did likewise and eventually the two societies amalgamated to become Marple Dramatic and Literary Society and pool their resources to produce readings and plays to enhance the community.

The Society was "of no fixed abode" and their productions moved between Shepley Hall, The Old Tannery and various church halls until in 1930 the opportunity arose for the Society to purchase the building. Through great endeavour, enough money was raised to

buy The Carver Institute and for the first time the Society had a permanent home and the transformation began Gradually the draughty old hall was turned into a COSY little theatre with a separate foyer, a good sized stage with apron front, several dressing rooms, refreshment rooms, seating, lighting and sound equipment and the venue became The Carver Playhouse.

There have been times over the years when the Carver has been threatened with closure. Audiences dwindled with the advent of television, thus income diminished and without a generous donation from a member, the theatre would have dosed. There have been several instances since then when dosure threatened due to lack of funds and plans for building development in the area but thankfully due to the pertinacity of the members, the Society has not only survived but thrived.

In the 1960s 'The Marple Dramatic and Literary Society performing at the Carver Playhouse' was considered too unwieldy a title and it became The Carver Theatre. However, the conditions had become less than satisfactory and the Carver embarked on its most ambitious venture so far. The scheme was to remove the existing foyer, rake the floor of the auditorium and change all the seating so that the audience had an uninterrupted view of the stage. This was a huge undertaking and although some of the structural work had to be done by professionals for insurance reasons, most of the work was carried out by members who were expertly rallied and organised by a devoted member, Eric Parker. Night after night, weekend after weekend working parties toiled until there was a triumphant reopening of the theatre, a "black tie" occasion with local dignitaries, on 3rd November 1979. All this had to be paid for of course and a "Sign a tile" scheme was instigated whereby donors each paid E15 to sponsor a seat and their Signed tiles were put on display to recognise their generosity.

To date, regular updates of lighting and sound equipment and all theatrical facilities take place to ensure the Carver keeps pace with most professional theatres. In 1998, the entire stage and Green Room area was rebuilt. The Revolve was installed and ever since used to great effect in many pantomimes and plays. This was a major engineering exercise which required precise measurements and a great deal of effort by members For many years Marple Guides and Scouts have produced their annual Gang Show at the Carver and many of their number made a much-valued contribution to this mammoth exercise.

During their 120 years, the Carver has presented over 600 productions covering many diverse subjects both from long established playwrights and also budding new talents, sometimes 'homegrown', for whom the Carver has provided their first step to dramatic success. A record of all productions is displayed in a series of frames in the Library of the Theatre.

In searching through the archives, one thing became clear — there would be no Carver Theatre without the dedication of countless individuals throughout these 120 years. However successful the Theatre may have been recently, the foundation was laid many years ago and its very existence has depended upon many who, over the years, have volunteered unsparingly of their time, effort and often money to maintain the continuance of the Carver Theatre and its valuable contribution to the local community.

If you are interested in joining this well-established successful community theatre, please contact The Registrar at The Carver Theatre.

Heather Baguley

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