

125 YEARS OF THEATRE AT AMPLEFORTH

1814-19139

Maximilian Fattorini OSB

The difficulty in writing an article on theatre at Ampleforth is to decide upon a date at which to begin. One could say that theatre began in 1814, when the first play on record, *Julius Caesar*, was performed; or one could take the date 1861, the year that the Study Hall building was opened, complete with a grand collapsible stage; or one could take the year 1910, when the present Theatre was opened. For the purpose of this article I will try to give a survey of dramatic activity at Ampleforth for its first 125 years, from its recorded beginnings in 1814 up until 1939. This does not claim to be in any way a fully comprehensive account, but it should give an insight into a part of life at Ampleforth which can often be taken much for granted, and which has, like so many aspects of Ampleforth life, never had much written about it.

The College never had many more boys than a hundred until the early part of this century, hence the number of students from which to choose actors was limited. The school may have been lucky with good acting talent, but this could not be guaranteed. In the nineteenth century people were used to devising their own entertainment: these were the days before film, television, radio and the Internet. The quality of the performer's talent was not necessarily an important issue when it came to providing light entertainment, rather it was a question of enjoyment both for the performer and the audience. Hence if lines were fudged, forgotten or out of order it might raise a laugh, but it wouldn't matter too much. The more professional approach towards the performing arts was not present then. An amusing article about Ampleforth's operatics in the latter half of the nineteenth century, illustrates this point; written by Fr Wilfrid Darby in 1893, in the *Ampleforth Diary*, it shows the lighter side of the amateur theatricals. He portrays the great amount of fun boys had in being involved in theatre and recounts many amusing anecdotes of incidents concerned with the stage at the time. I am not saying that the present attitude is one of serious puritanism, far from it, but rather that the possibilities we can entertain today are so far removed from those of the nineteenth century, that it is difficult even to try to compare the situations.

Our first insight into any dramatic activity at Ampleforth, comes from the single-copy, laboriously hand-written, school magazine of the early nineteenth century, called *To Pan*, which ran for about a decade. It says in the February issue of 1814 that:

Theatre at Ampleforth was last night (Saturday 21 February) opened with the play of Julius Caesar and afterwards a piece was performed from Moliere's comedy of *La Mariage Forcée*... We congratulate those involved on the establishment of a theatre under such auspicious beginnings. There can be no doubt of the best results flowing from it amongst the young members of the college who will have before their eyes at once copies to imitate of powerful motives to awaken their ardour.'

It was a great success, though there were complaints of disruption during the performance; the author of the article noted with humour: 'The audience are hereby requested to moderate their show of satisfaction - for the public good - and to remain silent 'till some interval from speaking admits of a noise, when they will be at liberty to laugh, applaud or hiss as best pleases them.' The 'theatre' for this performance would simply have been one of the rooms in the Lodge (the site of the present Central Building), transformed for the occasion, with the actors taking over one end of it. Lighting would have been with the use of oil or paraffin lamps, with the whole room illuminated: no electricity or gas then! The set was very simple: no more than a curtain or sheet backcloth; the costumes were of the most basic design (none of the elaborate or wide range of costumes the theatre is furnished with today), with perhaps cunningly adapted sheets for togas and plenty of imagination.

From these humble beginnings a group of dedicated monks and boys began to stage regular performances of plays, operettas and farces, which tended to be in the New Year or at the Exhibition. The standard of these productions varied. In the case of Shakespeare it was usually only selected scenes or a heavily edited production that was performed, which was the norm until the beginning of this century; as a monk earlier this century called it: 'the annual Shakespearian effort.' Many of the other pieces performed were topical farces written by monks or boys, relating to events in the school or in the world at large.

Our knowledge of these events comes from a variety of sources: from 1895 to the present day the *Ampleforth Journal* keeps us generally well informed about theatrical happenings in the school; prior to the *Journal* there is the *College Diary*, which began to be edited and published by subscription from 1888; prior to the *Diary* there are sketchy and fragmentary manuscript attempts at a 'School Diary', which are disjointed and incomplete, yet can occasionally furnish an interesting piece of information, though it appears to be more interested in cricket and football matches, than recording events related to theatre; yet this information only takes us back to the mid 1870s; hence from 1814 to about 1875 we must rely on the occasional surviving playbill, listing plays for the annual Exhibition and also on the occasional surviving manuscript magazine. From these sources it has been possible to build up a record of plays, farces, ballets, operas and operettas from 1814 to the present. This list is however not complete, due to the lack of source material for certain periods; there are large gaps from 1817-1826 and again from 1833-1845. From 1846 to the present day, there is, however, an almost continuous record of the major plays for each year with the exception of six years: 1847, 1851, 1864, 1891,

1892 and 1894, for which we have no certain knowledge of plays. It is likely that there were plays, but due to the scarcity of information we will never know what they were.

1814-1860

In the early years, theatre at Ampleforth consisted of a play, preceded by a farce, performed as part of the Shrovetide entertainments before the beginning of Lent. The play (in condensed form) was usually one of Shakespeare's historical or tragic plays (not until 1871 do we find a Shakespearian comedy, *The Comedy of Errors*) and the farce, often by Moliere (e.g. *Dr Longhead*, *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* and *Le Malade Imaginaire*). This would give both the junior and senior boys parts that would suit them. This is entirely in keeping with St Benedict's principle that 'the strong have something to yearn for and the weak nothing to run from.' (RB 64.19)

The year 1827 is the first indication of a change in the date of the plays for which a playbill survives. It lists *Henry IV part 1* and *Les Fourberies de Scapin* as the entertainment for the Exhibition on 31 July. The public Exhibition would have opened the school up for external scrutiny of its dramatic and musical talent as well as its academic achievements. More effort would have been put into rehearsals and perhaps costumes and scenery as well, though neither could yet be compared to later productions. Permanent scenery, properties and costumes only began to be seriously acquired with the arrival of the stage in the Study Hall in 1861. From 1827 until the late 1840s the annual Exhibition served as the forum for most of the dramatic activity, with the annual Shakespeare play and farce.

In 1848 there is another addition to the programme, with six plays (two by Shakespeare, one tragedy and three farces) listed for the Exhibition of that year. The Exhibition by now lasted three days, so each evening there was a junior play and a senior play. These were not full two or three hour productions, it must be remembered, but usually one act plays for the juniors, with perhaps the Shakespeare plays lasting a little longer. This being the case, the set would have had to have been a simple affair, to cope with the variety of the staged performances. It must also be remembered that the room used for the plays could not have been very large; it was probably the same one that had been used in 1814.

The next development in theatre at Ampleforth came in 1850, with the first production of an operetta, or musical play, an adaptation of Sir Walter Scott's novel *Guy Mannering*. This was the beginning of another kind of theatre at the College, which was to flourish over the next half of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, and which was the precursor of the Ampleforth Opera. Although *Guy Mannering* was taken from a novel, many of the operettas were home-grown affairs. We have an account of them from Fr Cuthbert Almond's *History of Ampleforth Abbey*.

In the beginning they were more after the style of pantomime extravaganza, a curious mixture of prettiness and burlesque, fairytale and topical allusion: *Ali Baba*, with its charming encomium of 'Tea, soothing Tea' and *Jack the Giant*

Killer, where the Ogre, captured, but not killed and convicted in the last act of being a Fenian, is condemned by a judge and jury to the hard labour of 'working at the Brook' (the first attempt at an outdoor swimming pool).

1861 - 1907

On Wednesday 13 November 1861, the new College Building was opened, amid much celebration, including the premiere of Dom Cuthbert Hedley's *Ode to Alma Mater*. The new Study Hall contained ample space for the Exhibition to be held and also for a new, specially constructed stage complete with its inscribed motto: *Conamur Tenues Grandia* ('We little ones attempt great things'), and artistic representations of Shakespeare, Sheridan, Otway, Massinger and Jonson. Having such a magnificent setting, the productions would have to do it credit. No longer was the stage merely the curtained off end of a room. This was the next best thing to a permanent stage, with a mechanical curtain that could be raised and lowered at the beginning, end and between scenes of productions - or at least that was the theory! In the 1890s a further improvement came with the introduction of gas lighting. There is in Fr Wilfrid Darby's article from the *Diary* of 1893 an entertaining description of this stage in the Study Hall and of its effects, as well as mentions of some of the productions that were staged:

The stage was a drop scene, with a curtain preceding it, which shut out wonderland from our expectant eyes. It was a strange curtain and its freaks were so unaccountable as to make it almost human in its perversity. When down it often chose to stay down and no amount of coaxing or coercion could make it rise, till it chose itself to do so . . . sometimes a used to tantalise us by falling halfway down and then sulkily refusing to go further. I have seen it fall thus on a gory battlefield when the corpses of dead heroes strewed the plain, and the dying captain slowly sank to the pathos of low music, and has had to die three times, and the spirits of the heroes have stalked away in anger, while the few vulgar boys, with no reverence for the dead, laughed loudly. It was indeed a wonderful curtain ... I am told however that it has abjured the madcap frolics that disfigured its youth, and settled down to the sober docility that is always such a pleasant feature of old age.'

He goes on to remark about the scenery:

Then, if I remember rightly, we had only three scenes. One, a venerable old scene that survives was memorable for farces. It represented a room built in the domestic style of architecture, painted green, and decorated with a solitary picture by some very old master. It was indispensable in farces because unlike modern houses, it had a door that would shut and a window that could easily be opened, and, in those times, a farce was not a farce unless one, at least, of the characters entered by the window. We looked for that as naturally as we did for the fight in the tragedy, or the coloured light at the end. It was a very convenient window, too; one could step in and out quite easily, though sometimes we were told it was four stories high! And the burglars, like the boys, were polite in those days, they always raised the window, and never

broke the glass. Why they did so always puzzled me until I discovered in after years that there was no glass to break. The second scene did duty impartially for the Senate house at Rome, a modern drawing room, Hamlets Castle, and the "Halls of Walter de Brand"; while a forest scene served equally well for the plain of Agincourt, the witches' cavern in Macbeth, and the sandy shores of the South Sea Islands. But then you see, we had free imaginations then, and were not fettered by the trammels of a despot realism.'

On the costumes:

Historical accuracy in the costumes was not much of an account. To people gifted with our fine imagination, it could matter little that the same dress did service for a Roman soldier, a mediaeval knight, and a cannibal king. As there was not much choice, the dresses were distributed on a 'first come, first served' basis. This often led to sad regrets and fierce heart burnings among the latecomers, who thereupon flung chronology to the winds and seized upon any and every scrap of attire not yet appropriated. The result was often comical, and 'motley was the only wear'.

On making-up:

The art was in its infancy. Paints, cosmetics and enamels were little known. Honest rouge et noir contented us; burnt cork and red raddle supplied all our wants, and I may say, supplied them abundantly. *Multum non multa* was our motto, and quantity certainly concealed the want of variety.

In his 'Recollections of 1861-1886', in the Journal of 1936, Fr Hilary Willson recalls the getting-up of the Study Hall stage for performances:

By New Year's Day, the stage was ready in the space between the west oriel window (from below which the Master's desk had been removed) and the doorway by the Prefect's room and the [clock] Tower stairs. The two top classrooms were available as dressing rooms, and the open space behind the stage, led up by steps on either side to the side wings.' He also directs the interested reader to Fr Wilfrid Darby's article, which he says: 'should be read, and though it is coloured somewhat by the authors imagination, the present writer can testify to its substantial veracity.

The early operettas were actually musical burlesques. Though much of the music was borrowed from popular sources, a part, and perhaps the greater part, was either by Fr Cuthbert Hedley (later bishop of Newport) or Fr Romuald Woods, with verse by Prior Stephen Kearney. *The New Boy*, produced in 1863, appears to have been a very popular opera, due to its stirring Football ballad and other College songs. Topical allusions abounded, and prominent officials were caricatured in a way that modern theatrical propriety would not allow. From these early 'operatic' beginnings, came what might be termed 'legitimate opera', developed out of the 'King's Night'. For a description of this tradition I turn to Almond's account in his *History*:

This, as the name denotes, was a shapeless survival of the 'Boy-King', one of the Christmas institutions of the English Colleges in the days of old. At Ampleforth it consisted of a full dress procession before the theatricals commenced, in which the actors and others took part. There was always a 'King' of some sort as an excuse for the name; and generally an extemporaneous

interlude or some prearranged buffoonery ended the show. A little later, following a prevailing fashion, some minstrelsy, with the newest of old jokes and the most ancient of riddles, wound up the procession. This gave way to little musical interludes: *The King of the Cannibal Islands*, *The King of Hearts* and *Solyman the Magnificent*, all well put together; the last being a three act piece not wanting in dignity and dramatic pretence. They were sufficiently successful to warrant bolder and higher efforts.

VON TUGGINER

The arrival at Ampleforth from Leipzig of Herr Placide von Tugginer as Professor of Music, in the late 1860s, saw the dawn of the first 'real' opera. He saw some of the operettas produced and surprised the school by not showing my great admiration of them. He promised he could do better and was not slow in keeping his word. He began with *The Miller of Sans Souci*, which had its first performance at Christmas 1868 and was performed at the Exhibition the following year on 13 July. The piece, with a libretto by Fr Placid Whittle was a complete success:

Tugginer's music was tuneful and spirited; the plot was sufficiently striking to command interest, and the mounting was picturesque. Some of the visitors were so enthusiastic about it, that they talked of putting it on the stage in Liverpool during the summer holidays . . . Professor von Tugginer has energy and knowledge and a facility in writing graceful and expressive music, yet he not only composed the music and organised the orchestra, but he painted the scenes, designed dresses and arranged the theatrical effects.'

The success continued with von Tugginer's production of *King Robert of Sicily* with a libretto by Fr Paulinus Hickey, produced for the Exhibition of 1870, and an oratorio, *The Martyrdom of Saint Lawrence*, for the Exhibition of 1878. After von Tugginer's departure these productions were succeeded by *Robin Hood*, *The Silver Cross*, *Saul and David* and others, the joint productions of Fr Anselm Burge, author of the music and Fr Placid McAuliffe, the librettist. Up to a certain point the success of these productions was cumulative with the progression of the years. Each fresh effort was undertaken with riper experience, greater mastery of musical difficulty and richer and more elaborate stage effects. Often there were laudatory reports in the local newspapers. This extract from the *York Herald* of 1876 is representative:

The getting up of dramatic representations at Ampleforth involves much labour and study. First and foremost, elocution is the great aim; and secondly, the gaining of a correct knowledge of times, events, men and manners, costume and character. What are commonly known as 'stage properties,' are studied with care and exactitude; hence it happens that dramatic representations on the impromptu stage at this college have attained no little celebrity in the past, and, judging from what I have seen, it certainly does not indicate any likelihood of loss of future prestige. The boys' study, a large and lofty Gothic hall, is proportioned to the dramatic representations, and a pretty little theatre is built within it. The stage and orchestra occupied nearly one half the room, the

rest being devoted to the audience ... we have no hesitation that the audience was exceedingly gratified.

The operas and operettas of the nineteenth century continued into the beginning of the twentieth century, but with less vigour than in earlier years. More serious full-length productions of Shakespeare were now absorbing much energy. This approach to theatre demanded new attention not only to the quality of the acting, but also to the details of the set and costumes. It required extra work for each production, and boys who had previously not been involved in either singing, acting or playing a musical instrument in the orchestra discovered that they too could become involved in a production. There was the need for artists and carpenters, properties and wardrobe assistants and general help in the construction and deconstruction of the stage. The first mention of a dedicated back stage staff is made in the *Journal* of 1905, in connection with its tenuous existence:

Our indefatigable Green Room manager, Fr Maurus (Powell) is to be congratulated on securing a department whose existence threatens from time to time, to become merely an ideal.

There is also a reference to the donation of Elizabethan style dresses, for the representation of Shakespeare. In the next volume of the *Journal*, we read that the Ampleforth Society gave the princely sum of £10 towards the expenses of the Green Room; it is noted that the money was used in erecting 'a fine wardrobe with sliding doors, which [Fr Maurus] hopes will be, like Thucydides' *History*, "a possession for ever". Indeed it can be confirmed to be still in use ninety-one years later. Yet if any one was in doubt as to why such effort should be expended, Fr Maurus wrote:

The expenditure of time and thought and labour and money over the production of a play, acted maybe only twice before the public, may appear to be out of all proportion to the pleasure felt and expressed by the spectators, but the good done to the boys themselves is beyond all price.

The cultural, constructive, team-building and educational good that comes of any worthwhile production wholly justifies itself.

1908-1939: THE THEATRE

Those involved in the theatrical side of Ampleforth had had to produce plays and operettas without a permanent stage or dedicated room since its beginnings in the early nineteenth century. Even when the Study Hall was built in 1861, the stage would be hurriedly constructed little more than a week before the performance, with a short time to construct the set and get the actors used to the stage. With productions becoming more and more ambitious and with numbers increasing in the school, the space of the Study Hall was becoming noticeably inadequate to fulfil so many different requirements, from concert hall to theatre, not forgetting its prime use for study. Thus it was to great excitement that, early in 1908, Mr Peter Feeny, an old boy of the school, with a brother in the community (Fr Basil), approached the Abbot and community of Ampleforth and offered to pay £2,000 towards the erection of a permanent Theatre for the College. There had been discussion of a

project the previous year for the housing of a permanent stage for both concerts and plays, but the estimated cost of £2,500 had put an end to further discussion. Mr Feeny's donation encouraged the community to go forward with proposals which would provide a permanent stage, adequate green rooms and seating for 400 people. Mr Feeny did however make two conditions on his offer: i. That the theatre should be entered from the ground floor; and ii. That his own architect, Mr Gilbertson of Liverpool, an old boy of Fort Augustus, should be employed in its design.

The fulfilment of the first condition proved to be difficult. The ground immediately to the east of the existing College Building, the present site of the science laboratories and the Lower Building, did not belong to the College and the owner, who did not die until 1918 at the age of a hundred and one, declined to sell, despite a handsome offer having been made to her. The land was acquired on her death, but at the time expansion eastwards was blocked, so that the Theatre had to be built running north and south, which required something to be built underneath it, to bring it up to the level of the 'Square'. Suggestions for a small indoor swimming pool, changing rooms and clothes drying apparatus were thus put before Mr Gilbertson and the design which he submitted was accepted. The contract was given to Messrs Armitage and Hodgson of Leeds. The builders took possession of the bounds in February 1909 and by the Exhibition of that year, the foundations had been laid. In the settlement of the account there was a discrepancy between the architect's quantities, taken from his drawing and the measurements of the actual building. The solicitors agreed upon a final account without taking the case into court. However this experience showed the necessity of having a qualified surveyor for future contracts and incidentally brought the community in touch with Messrs Daniel Powell and Worthy, to whom was given the planning in later years of the next extensions. Meanwhile, there was speculation in the Journal as to what the 'new building' would be called:

We presume that our brethren at Downside would have called it the 'Palace'. Our forefathers at Dieulouard would doubtless, following the French custom, have spoken of it as the 'Salon'. We fancy Drs Baines and Burgess would have called it the 'Academy' or the 'Athenaeum'. At Oxford or Cambridge it would be called simply 'the Hall'. This last seems to us to be the most august title. But we are not likely ever to dine in it, and that seems to be the most important use of the College Hall of our Universities. Moreover we have a Hall already, though only a very little one.

The first recorded use of the Theatre (as it simply came to be called), was for the Exhibition of 1910, on 27 July, just after its completion. The remarks in the Journal about the 'new building', were favourable, that it was both handsome and elegant, both within and without, and was regarded as a welcome luxury:

Only as a perfect razor, or a good fountain pen, a large-type edition, or (Mark Twain's ideal) 'as a separate pair of braces to each pair of trousers is a luxury'.

It was also remarked with relief from some quarter that the Study Hall would no longer have to be pulled about and 'stripped of its dignity, and disguised with

painted canvas, in order to masquerade for a few hours as a place of entertainment and frivolity!' As for the new indoor heated swimming pool, the comment made in the *Journal* was, "'Tis not so deep as a well, nor so wide as the Channel, but 'tis enough, 'twill serve and serve admirably" On 1 March 1910, Wilkin of Liverpool estimated that the raked stage would cost c.£225, which was accepted along with a gas lighting tender of £68 (electric lighting would have cost £242, and there was no electricity at Ampleforth anyway until 1923).

The first play in the Theatre was Monsignor Robert Hugh Benson's *Mystery Play*, in honour of the Nativity of Our Lord. The play was relatively new, having had its first performance at a school in Cambridge in December 1907. The play was performed at Ampleforth on Sunday 18 and Wednesday 21 December 1910. The play had a marked effect on one critic in the audience, who composed a prose-poem review of the play, which appeared in the *Tablet* on 24 December.

At the Exhibition of 14 June 1911, it was noticed how infinitely superior the setting of the new Theatre was for plays, compared to the former temporary erection in the Study Hall and perhaps for the first time in Ampleforth history, the audience was able to sit through the performance without feeling 'cabined, cribbed, or confined' for want of room. However a few years later, in 1915, the Exhibition was cancelled due to the war. Instead of the annual play, there were various smaller productions of the revue type, which were generally fund-raising events for various charities whilst the war went on. Thus in December 1916 there was a performance of Fr Benson's mystery play *Bethlehem*, in aid of the Red Cross Society, and an entertainment was arranged in June 1918 again for their funds and in November there was an entertainment in aid of the Public Schools Hospital. In 1916 Fr Stephen Marwood took on the running of the Theatre, with the assistance of Fr John Maddox, inaugurating the long run of the distinguished 'Marwood-Maddox' productions of the time.

Theatrical competitions between boys were also held for the first time during the war, which kept alive the dramatic spirit, until finally the Exhibition returned in June 1919, with a production of the *Merchant of Venice*. But in 1921 the Exhibition had again to be cancelled, because of a national coal strike. The boys did not complain, for they had an extra week of holiday after Easter. It must be remembered that there was no electricity at Ampleforth at this time, and coal was essential to the production of gas for the college, which had its own gas works (the present site of the two lower tennis courts). To supply this there was a tram-line from the railway station at Gilling across the valley to the gas works, to supply the coal, which came by rail. It was this same tram-line that led to several boys being punished at the Exhibition of 1898, for 'riding a wagon down the tram-line in the middle of the night.' The question of having a proper electricity supply had been raised when proposals for the Theatre had first been made, because of the obvious advantages it would give in stage lighting; the question had come up again with concern over the coal strike in 1921 and the possibility of further strikes; later in 1921 the absence of electricity was again noted when the school was given a cinema projector, which

could not be used to its full potential, though it was able to give a satisfactory picture, with the use of a generator. Thus it was with great excitement that the Journal recorded that electricity was to be installed in 1923: 'The Theatre will benefit greatly by the efficient lighting arrangements and controls supplied. Floats and footlights have been installed for three colours, each with its own dimmer. In addition, four 'spotlights' have been provided. To supply the arcs for these and also for the cinema, now permanently established in a fire-proof box in the gallery, a special generator has been installed giving 75 amps at 70 volts.' The installation of electric lighting and central heating at Ampleforth did however mean that the Exhibition was again cancelled, with hope that it would be restored in 1924. The first play to benefit from the new lighting was produced on 8 December 1923; called *The Thirteenth Chair* it was produced on the evening of the annual 1st XV match against Stonyhurst.

In February 1924, the school received its first visiting drama company, Mr Ben Greet & Co, who performed *Twelfth Night* to a full house, in order that the school might benefit from a professional representation. The night must have been a success, for the players were invited back in October, to perform *Julius Caesar*. In between the visits of the 'Greet Players' in 1924, the school produced *Macbeth* for the Exhibition, with: 'a serious effort to bring the production into line with the best modern ideas of staging. The unsightly false-proscenium and all the 'old-wings' were abolished and the stage was hung instead in grey and black curtains. This gave more height and depth to the scene, and the stage seemed more spacious than before.'

From the early 1920s, the Dramatic Society had a flourishing membership and the Green Room had become more adventurous in the use of lighting and use of the stage. However by 1929 there was obviously a feeling in a certain quarter that the quality of the productions as described in the pages of the Journal was not actually so brilliant as it was made out to be. This criticism was not confined only to reviews of plays, but applied to all reviews of school entertainments. To dispel even the suggestion that the Journal had been too easy-going and uncritical in its appreciation, a second critic was appointed by way of experimentation. Consequently there appeared for the Exhibition play and concert two reviews, a feature that continued in the *Journal* until 1932, presumably on the departure of the aforementioned critic from the school.

On the 13 March 1931, a new beginning was made in school theatre, with the production of *Journey's End*. Technically speaking, this was not an official event, but was the inspiration of two or three boys who had never taken an active part in the theatricals, but wanted to show the kind of performance that 'non-actors' could present, without assistance of any kind from more professional authorities. The play was wholly produced by boys, with a simple set also designed by them and was carried off with remarkable success, much to the surprise of the previously condescending. This was the first occasion that boys had been given such a free rein in any production and it was to pave the way for future ventures of a similar kind.

In December 1937 the Theatre and productions were taken over by Fr James Forbes and Br Robert Coverdale. In 1938 the first list of Green Room members appears in print in the Journal, under the various titles of 'Stage Lighting', 'Sound Effects' and 'Stage Management.' The electricians among their number had been busy in adapting the existing system for the Exhibition production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1938. They began the work during the preceding Christmas holidays and continued until early on in the summer term; the results were a great improvement, giving more versatility to the lighting arrangements.

By the year 1939, the Theatre had become a centre of culture within the school that would continue to develop throughout the remainder of the twentieth century. In the 125 years since the production of *Julius Caesar* in 1814, theatre at Ampleforth had undergone a progressive evolution: from the converted school room in the Lodge, to the Gothic setting of the Study Hall in 1861, to the neo-ecclesiastico-gothic look Theatre of 1910. A temporary theatre had been superseded by a permanent stage, oil and gas lighting had been replaced by electricity: things only dreamed of in the nineteenth century were now a reality. Ampleforth had progressed from Shakespearian sections to full scale productions, operettas and 'operas' had come and gone, awaiting their revival in later years, but the 'King's Nights' were part of its history. Ampleforth's colourful past was to continue into a challenging future.

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