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The Magazine for Drama, Theatre & Dance at York St John University

Issue 15 Autumn 2017



Celebrating 50 Years of Theatre

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Theatre Pages

Issue № 15 • Autumn 2017

Special Issue marking 50 years of Theatre
at York St John University.

Edited by Jules Dorey Richmond &
Alexander Kaniewski

www.yorks.j.ac.uk/theatrepages
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[@ysjtheatre](https://twitter.com/ysjtheatre)

Cover Image: 2010 York/Terni

Photo credit: Nathan Walker

Background Image: 1991 La Ronde

Dear Reader,

Picture this – it's September 1967 I am 3; Kurt Cobain, Nicole Kidman, Matt LeBlanc and Will Ferrell are newly born; BBC Radio 1 is launched; Sandi Shaw wins the Eurovision song contest with Puppet on a String, for the UK; the Beatles album *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Heart Club Band*, and Jimi Hendrix's, first record, *Are You Experienced* are released, as are the films, *The Graduate* and *Cool Hand Luke*, and the musical *Hair*; Gabriel Garcia Marquez's book *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Rolling Stone Magazine*; foods such as the Big Mac and Twix are first launched; table top microwaves, hand-held calculators and ATMs (cash-dispensers) first appear; in America anti-Vietnam demonstrations and race riots rage; the UK government secures entry into the European Common Market, and de-criminalises homosexuality between consenting adults; and in Yorkshire, Margaret Jowett leaves the teaching staff at Bretton Hall to run theatre modules for the College of Ripon and York St John (CRYSJ) and thus theatre, at what is now York St John University, begins.

Welcome to the 15th edition of *Theatre Pages*, a special celebratory issue marking 50 years of Theatre at York St John University. The contributors, for this special edition, are gleaned from past and, some, present teaching staff, encompassing all 5-decades of theatre, with photographs drawn from Tom Spencer's archive, which he maintained throughout his teaching career here. These also feature in an exhibition *Opening Up the Archive: Looking Back at 50 Years of Theatre at York St John University*, curated by Alexander Kaniewski.

As this is a themed edition, the articles are ordered chronologically starting with the earliest arrival at the University and ending with the most recent. My own first experience of working at York St John, was of an artistic residency I led at the Ripon campus in 1997. It ended in a performance happening featuring, paper costumes, copious amounts of water, audience participation and a sheep! It must have been OK because in 2001 I arrived back as a present lecturer.

I would like to thank all our contributors, for generously sharing their highly personal, reflections – recalling memories (contextual and poetic) of their time here, which, together and alongside the archival images, illuminate Theatre's history, legacy, and enduring appeal in this place.

Details of how you can get involved in celebrating 50 years of Theatre at York St John University can be found on page 54.

Jules Dorey Richmond is a senior lecturer in Performance and Applied Theatre

DAVID POWLEY
1968 - 1979

Prologue

I arrived in 1968 as a lecturer in the English department at what was then St John's College of Education. Our job was to teach English Literature to students training to be Primary or Secondary school teachers and to supervise their teaching practice. I discovered that a few other teachers with up-to-date experience of Primary and Secondary education and full of creative energy had already arrived on the crest of the 1960s' wave of educational spending — which, soon after throwing me ashore, collapsed and drained away. That was a particular worry for me. My appointment was for only one year, though people were pretty sure at the time it would become permanent. Well, five one-year temporary appointments later, they turned out to be right.

At this time 'Drama' was studied as literature. Drama in action was an extra-curricular activity. However, to meet the growing demand for drama in schools, the department had already appointed Margaret Jowett, who had been teaching at Bretton Hall, a college specialising in the performing arts. Her job was split between teaching 'drama-in-schools' and English Literature. She was joined by another lecturer, Neville Brown, in a similarly dual role.

I had been teaching in a Comprehensive School in Bristol with its own Drama department and studio. The College had no drama studio but Margaret's arrival had provoked the first flurry of spending on specialist equipment: six stage lights on stands and a specially made set of six collapsible rostra. As for teaching/performing space we were nomads, with Temple Hall being our most frequent port of call.

None of us foresaw at the end of the 60s just how extraordinarily turbulent, exciting and ever-changing the 70s were to be for all of us, out of which was born, among many wonders, the B.A. Honours Degree in Drama, Film & Television.

Act One : Emergence
Scene 1

With our meagre resources, but with great enthusiasm, we ran practical drama-teaching classes and visited students taking what they had learned into schools. Meanwhile, through extra-curricular work we rapidly raised the profile of theatre in general. Margaret specialised in big outdoor productions in the Gray's Court garden, including a production of *Oedipus Rex* for which she had procured the services of a well-respected Greek director. I opened my account in 1971 with a production of the Dudley Fitt's translation of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* in the Temple Hall (figures 1 & 2).



Figure 1 *Lysistrata* in the Temple Hall



Figure 2 *Lysistrata* in the Temple Hall

DAVID POWLEY

Scene 2

In 1972, after persistent lobbying, we were granted the use of a room, with an uneven, splintered floor and walls blossoming with damp, located in the heart of what is now the Design block. It was little used except by the Students' Union as a table-tennis room. It was big enough to house comfortably one full sized table.

This we transformed into a little studio, complete with a few overhead stage lights, a power pack, plus six-channel control desk and black painted walls. Thereafter known as the 'Black Hole', it became a hive of activity.

Here we ran evening courses for drama teachers, had student teachers devising plays to take into primary schools, ran improvisation groups, hosted performances of poetry and prose put together by the post graduate student teachers and created the St John's Theatre Workshop Group, which welcomed anyone interested in drama.

That group mounted several plays, including four one-act pieces performed in July 1972 first in the long gallery at Gray's Court and then taken on tour to eleven different locations in rural North Yorkshire (figures 3, 4 & 5), the company camping on most nights. Other work included *Princess Ivona* by Witold Gombrowicz (figure 6), a production of Charles Dizenzo's *The Drapes Come*, with performances in both the Studio and The Black Swan in Peasholme Green, York, and an adaptation of DH Lawrence's *Daughters of the Vicar*, with the script being developed by me and the company together over a number of weeks. One of the aims of the group was to involve everyone in the creative process.



Figure 3



YORK STUDENTS TO TOUR FOUR PLAYS

FOR the first time ever, a theatre workshop tour of Yorkshire has been organised by St. John's College, York, staff and students.

All 13 members of the company are in the college's English department. Two of their number are lecturers Mr. David Powley and Mr. Neville Brown. "We will be camping overnight at most places, though some people have been able to offer us beds in their homes," said Mr. Powley.

The theatre workshop will present a cycle of four one-act comedies - *The Bear*, by Chekhov; *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets*, by Shaw; *The Grand Vizier*, by Rene de Obaldia; and *Playing with Fire* by Strindberg - at places ranging from Malton to Ilkley and Sleights to Sessay.

● Picture shows Mr. Powley going over a script with members of the theatre workshop, who start their tour tonight at Copmanthorpe, near York.

Figure 4

ACTING TOUR OF NORTH YORKSHIRE, JULY 4th. - 18th, 1972.

st john's college = theatre workshop



1. July 4th. Copmanthorpe Women's Institute Hall, 7.30pm. *The Bear*, *The Grand Vizier*, *Playing with Fire*
2. July 5th. St. Andrew's School, Malton, 7.30pm. *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets*, *The Grand Vizier*, *The Bear*
3. July 6th. Ilkley College of Education, 7.30pm. *The Bear*, *The Dark Lady*, *The Sonnets*, *Playing with Fire*
4. July 8th. Rye, 7.30pm. *The Bear*, *The Grand Vizier*, *Playing with Fire*
5. July 10th. Danby Village Hall, 7.30pm. *The Bear*, *Dark Lady*, *Playing with Fire*
6. July 11th. Sleights Village Hall, 7.00pm. *Dark Lady*, *Grand Vizier*, *Playing with Fire*
7. July 12th. Kirkstall Village Hall, 8.00pm. *Dark Lady*, *Grand Vizier*, *The Bear*
8. July 13th. Newton-on-Ouse Village Hall, 7.30pm. *Dark Lady*, *Grand Vizier*, *Playing with Fire*
9. July 15th. Old Pool Bank Village Hall, 7.30pm. *The Bear*, *Dark Lady*, *Playing with Fire*
10. July 17th. Sessay Methodist Schoolroom, 7.30pm. *Dark Lady*, *Grand Vizier*, *The Bear*
11. July 18th. Sessay Village Hall, 7.30pm. *Dark Lady*, *Grand Vizier*, *Playing with Fire*

Several people have asked about the tour. This list should help them find us if they want to see us perform. We'll be pleased to see anyone from the College at any performance.

David Powley.

Figure 5

st john's college = theatre workshop

PRESENTS A COMEDY IN FOUR ACTS

BROOK STREET DRAMA STUDIO

Fri. 28th, Sat. 29th Nov.

Mon. 1st & Tue. 2nd Dec.

At 7.30pm.

Admission free



Figure 6

DAVID POWELY

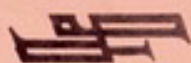
Scene 3

One of the delights of this whole period was the way staff from different departments enthusiastically collaborated with each other on joint projects. The set for my production of *Lysistrata* was designed by Mike Maynard, an artist colleague from the Primary Education department. Staff from the Music department joined in creating a mini arts festival of drama and music in different locations around the College.

High points for me were a production of Benjamin Britten's *Noyes Fludde* in the new chapel, with Grace Frankel directing the music and children from local primary schools being the animals, wearing masks made in collaboration with the Art department. And then in the summer of 1976 came the biggest show of them all, *The Wheel of the World*, with music by Gordon Crosse and text adapted by David Cowan from three of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (figure 7).

Anyone wanting to be in the cast was included, with or without previous acting experience, including a member of staff from the Theology department. The orchestra (conducted by Stephen Hartley) and chorus (conducted by Bryan Western) included a few musicians from the city. Some of the action was choreographed by Stuart Martin of the PE department and Head of Dance. I spent hours with a variety of colleagues creating the in-the-round arena in the Temple Hall with several tons of scaffolding and planks with walkways for actors above the audience. I doubt 'health and safety' would allow us to do it now.

There was no way I could get home at night so I camped on the floor of my office, by now on the Lord Mayor's Walk campus on the ground floor of the Wilmott block. I had warned the cleaner that she might find me there in the morning. And sure enough she did, but to my amazement she came bearing a silver tray with breakfast and tea. Such thoughtfulness was a feature of life in the College at that time.

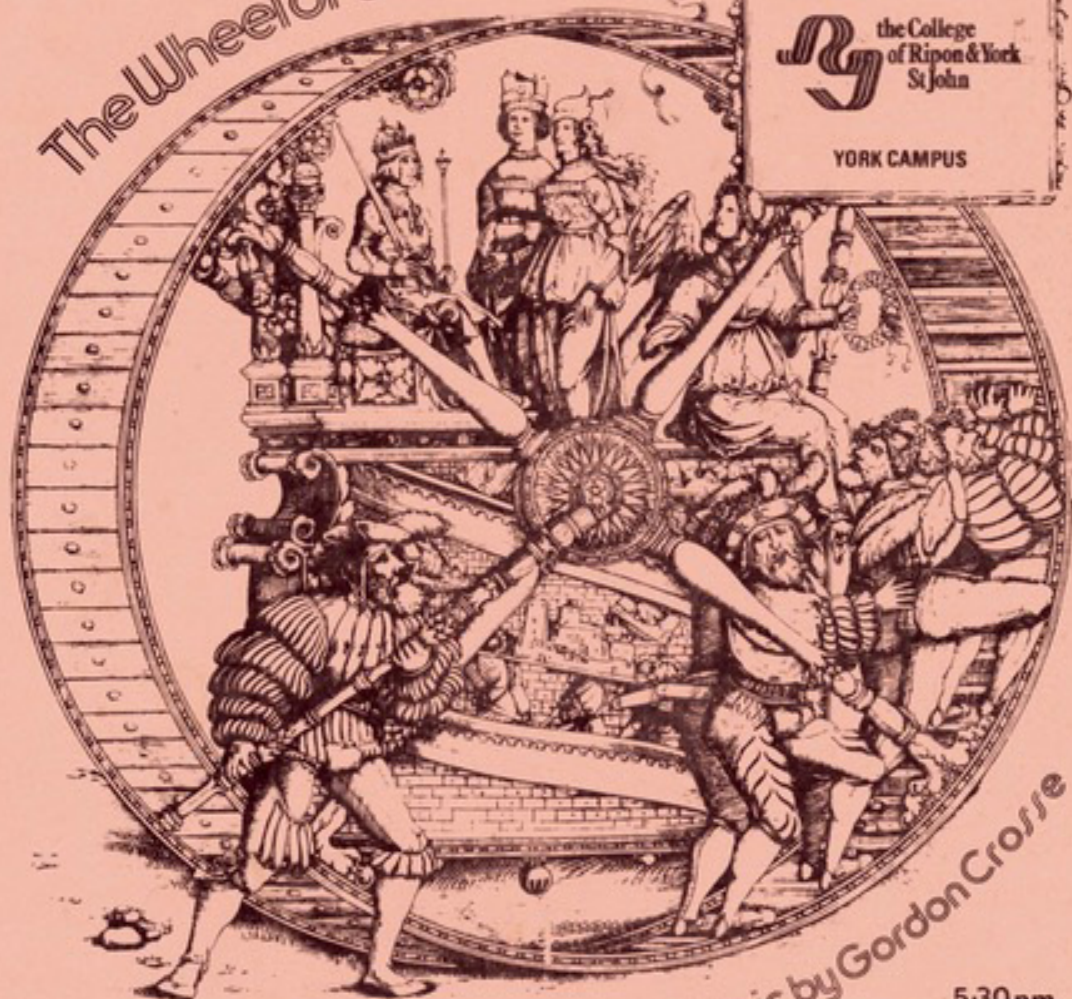


an Entertainment
based on three tales by Chaucer

The Wheel of the World

 the College
of Ripon & York
St John

YORK CAMPUS



music by Gordon Crosse

5:30 pm

Admission 40p.

in the College Hall

(pensioners, children & students half-price)
(² but only if booking through the College)

Monday 14 June - Saturday 19 June, 1976

Tickets from Miss J. Valentine, The College of Ripon & York St. John, York
or from the Festival Office, York

Figure 7

DAVID POWELY

Act 2 : Growth Scene 1

During the years I've been describing lots of other things were happening that heavily influenced the emergence of Drama as a degree subject. The most explosive and exciting was the government decision to expand the availability of BA & BSc degree courses and to authorize St John's to create some of them with the co-operation of Leeds University, who would monitor and validate them. Many of us eagerly welcomed the challenge.

In addition, in 1974 St John's at York amalgamated with the Training College at Ripon to create the College of Ripon & York St John. As drama was also a part of the Ripon curriculum their staff and York's began to work together. So it was that Harold Robinson became one of our team. And so it was in 1975 that the Ripon campus gained a new drama studio.

However, there was a further element whose growth ran parallel to that of Drama at York — film and television — and which, during this period, became entwined with Drama. The television unit had been created in the 60s to serve a consortium of six colleges, including our own, all of which contributed to its cost. It made specific programmes at their request in support of their teacher training courses; some of our own staff, especially from the department of Education, regularly made tapes (of the old 2-inch wide variety!), the best of which were sold to other institutions.

I was actively interested in film myself and had worked with Harold Robinson on a few programmes, including one with the York Theatre Royal TIE team on *Macbeth*. I was a founder member of the York Schools Film Society, which provided regular 35mm film showings for schools.

In 1973 money for expansion was dwindling, and it seemed the film courses would fade away, however, at coffee break one morning the Principal asked me (in the middle of my fifth temporary year of employment) if I would accept a permanent appointment teaching a combination of Drama and Film. Yes, I said. Eventually the two sections came together to emerge as the Department of Drama, Film & Television.

Scene 2

The shape of teaching in the College was radically changed at this time — from three terms a year to two semesters and to a modular system. Students could take four modules in Drama in their first two years (as part one of their degree) to make one of the two major areas of study required at that time to gain a B.A. or B.Ed. degree. Or they could make a broader mix by combining Drama

1968 - 1991

modules with those offered by Dance or Film & Television courses.

In 1976 the Black Hole was taken over by the growing Design & Technology department so we took over the Model School from the department of Professional Studies. It was literally an old primary school building, with a main hall flanked on either side by classrooms. It was there that we taught a new module Play in Production for the first time with a mixture of B.A. and B.Ed. students.

Our first production was *The Insect Play* by The Brothers Čapek (Figure 8). This was memorable for an incident midway through the performance. The lighting and sound controls were set up in one of the side classrooms at the stage end of the hall, all plugged into a thirteen-amp socket. On this occasion, just as the army marched up the aisle, the fuse blew and the entire building was plunged into darkness. Long minutes passed before I managed to restore the power. But the cast was so disciplined that as darkness fell they came to a military halt and remained silent and still until light returned and then snapped into action and speech once more as if nothing had happened — a proud moment that earned a round of applause. It was a great success.



Figure 8

DAVID POWELY

Scene 3

In 1977 the new Occupational Therapy department nudged us out of the Model School and we in turn replaced the Art department's fabric printing section in the Old Chapel. And by now Bill Pinner, who had been production set-designer at York Theatre Royal, was officially a part-time member of the Drama staff.

In 1977, now housed in the Old Chapel, a new module titled Plays in Production worked on three plays: Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine*, Strindberg's *The Stronger* and René de Obaldia's *The Late*. Bill designed the composite set and led the set-making team (figures 9 -12).

Then in 1978 the Old Chapel had its first major conversion into a proper drama studio, mostly with new rostra seating designed by Bill and made by the students who also built the Pinner designed set for two Greek plays: Euripides' *The Women of Troy* and Aristophanes' *The Poet and the Women*. By now we had 38 students on the course (figures 13-15).

Meanwhile, in the summer of 1978, the course Theatre Workshop One, launched with a mixed media presentation in the Old Chapel — *Clifford's Tower, 1190*. It was an exploration of the background to the massacre in that year of the Jews in York. The course was taught jointly with the History department, thus carrying on the co-operative tradition. A History lecturer led the research, with some specific help from Professor Barrie Dobson of the University of York, and I led its theatrical shaping. The students built up a number of interlinking scenes through improvisation and the show included 8mm film and back-lit silhouettes. To celebrate the installation of a plaque at the Tower, commemorating the Jews killed there, we invited members of the York /Leeds Jewish Society to a special performance of the documentary, followed by discussion, coffee and cake.



Figure 9

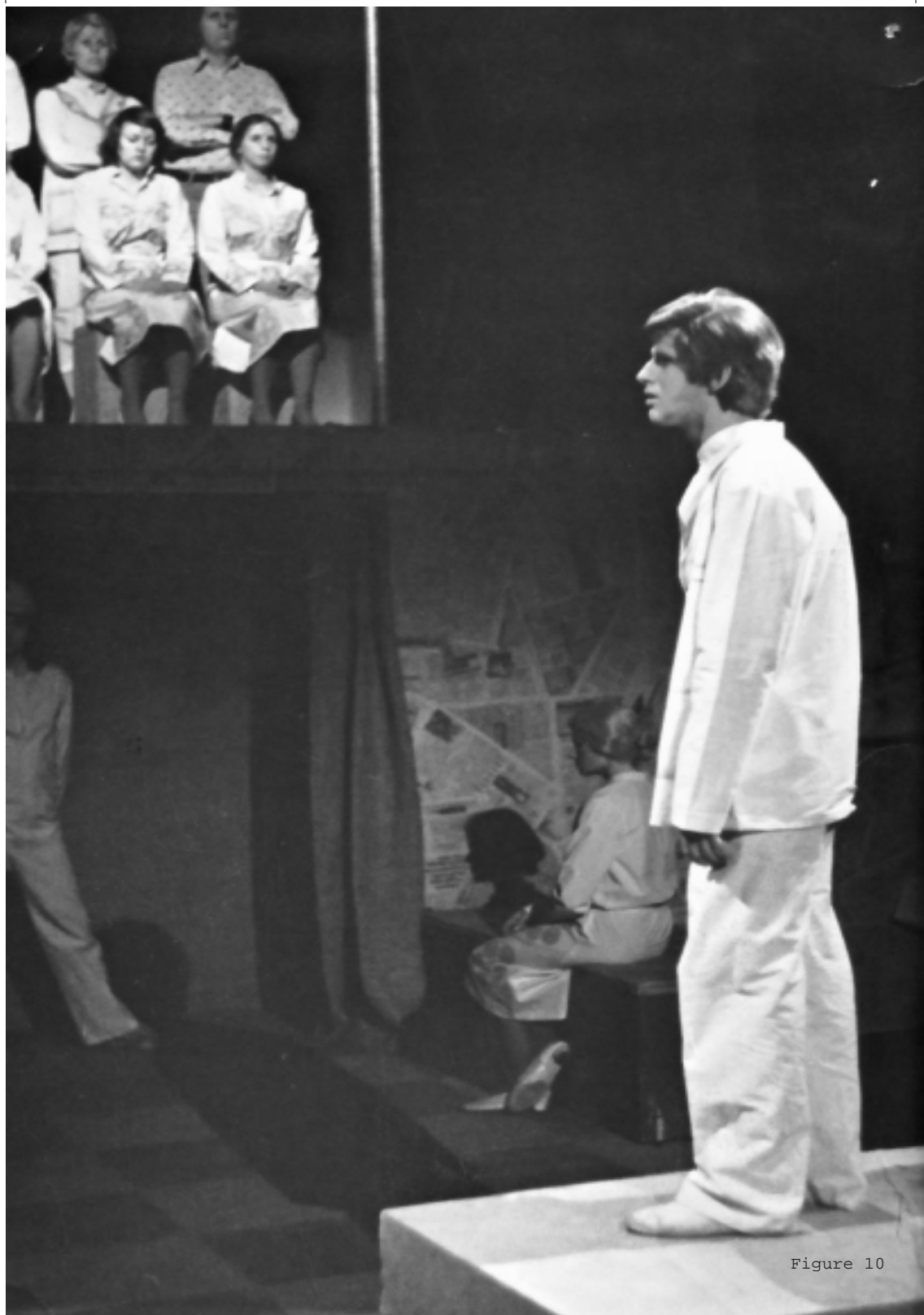


Figure 10

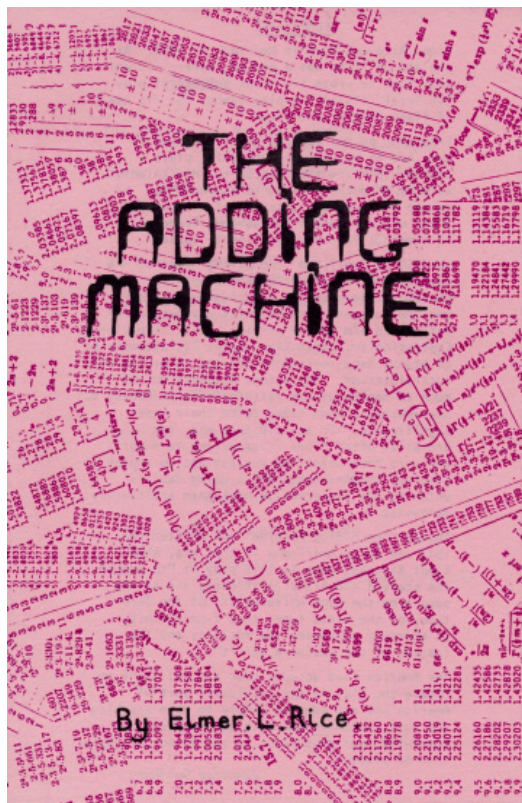


Figure 11

NOTES ON COURSE 341Y

All those taking part in this production are students in their first and second years, attending a course called 'The Play in Production'. It is one of several semester courses in Drama offered by the College. It can be put together with at least three other Drama courses to make one of the two major areas of study required to gain a B.A. or B.Ed. degree. Or it can be mixed with Dance or Film and Television courses to make a wider ranging but equally valid major group. Or it can be taken on its own by anyone, no matter what their main areas of study may be. Our cast represents a fair cross-section of such interests.

Because it is part of a course this production differs considerably from a normal amateur production. To start with, there are no auditions. Everyone who opts to do the course has a part, however inexperienced they may be. (This year, as last year, we've been lucky!) Secondly, everyone has to take responsibility for something other than acting their own part, and everyone is expected to help with the countless odd jobs in all departments.

At the end of the course files of work have to be presented containing at least two detailed pieces of research or criticism arising from the production, in addition to notes and comments on the experience itself. Students are assessed on a number of things: the way they cope with their parts; their ability to recognise and to adapt to the needs of the group, and of the production, as a whole; their contribution to the technical side of the production; and on the work in their files. There are no examinations.

David Powley



Figure 12

Scene 4

Hitherto, our areas of study were classed as minor. However at a meeting in May 1978, the Academic Board resolved that 'Dance, Drama, Film & Television [...] should be offered to the 1979 entry as major areas of study in the BA/BSc Honours Degree'. This did not happen without a fight. Some opposition came from those who thought they were not proper academic areas of study.

The trouble with being born as a new 'subject' was that suddenly on the doorstep we had a very hungry baby, rapidly outgrowing old clothes and clamouring for space. Money was scarce and already it was clear to some that the College was offering more areas of study than it could properly support, so our subject's growth could only be funded at other subjects' expense. That was not popular.

However, the Head of our Subjects, Margaret Jowett, had done a wonderful job to get us this far, handling the ever-changing dynamics of College politics and encouraging our staff to develop our programme of courses. Decisions about giving us more space took another eight months of fierce debate, in which time I took over from her in 1979 as Head of Department and at last the dice fell in our favour.

What clinched the argument, of course, was recruitment — we were attracting ever more applicants, at one time more than any other department. Our first year intake rose from 15 (including B.Ed.) in 1976 to 56 in 1981. Our total number, major and minor, across the four years in 1982/3 was 195.

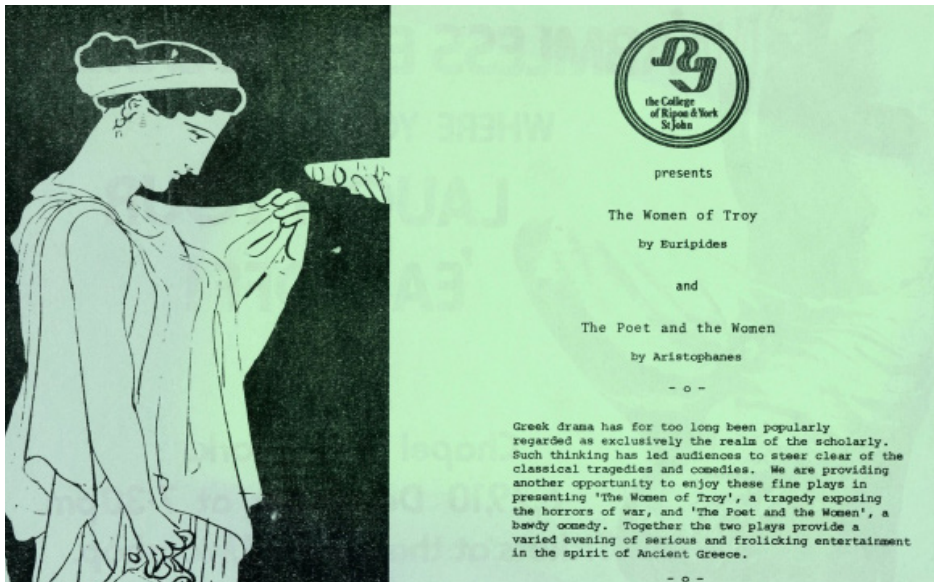


Figure 13

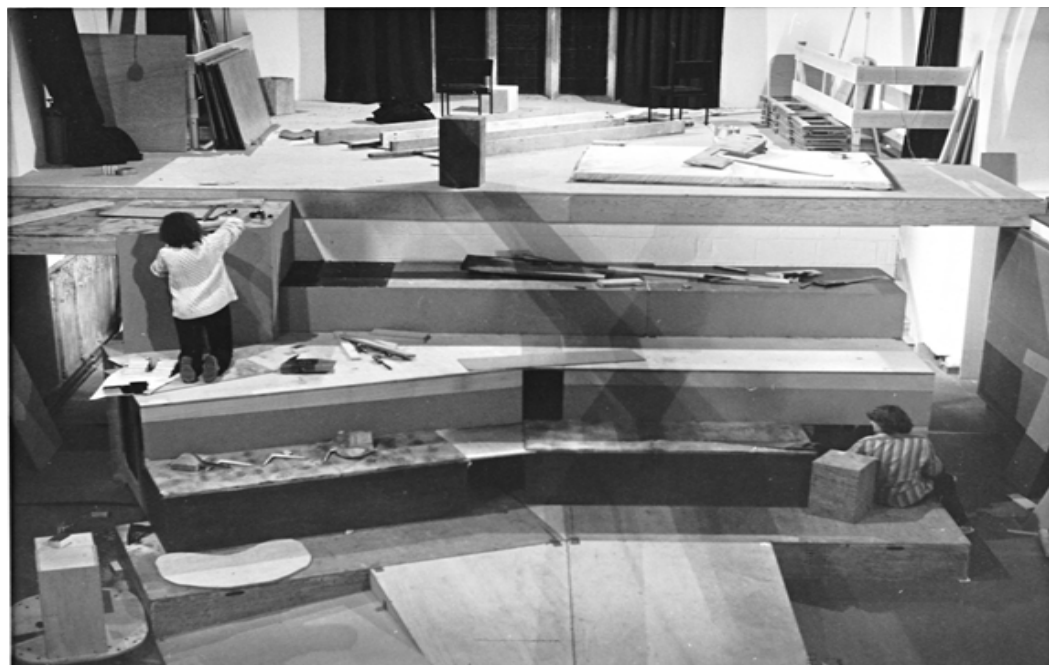


Figure 14



Figure 15

Scene 5

I cannot over-emphasise the importance of Bill Pinner's work during the 70s and 80s at College. By 1980 he was with us full-time. Not only did he raise the standard of set design and construction but he also did the design and construction of each phase of the chapel studio conversion, in which he was well aided by our theatre technician and students.

In addition, he was a very good director, he was especially keen to mount productions outside the confines of the courses, in and outside College. In the Temple Hall he directed Barrie Keeffe's *A Mad World My Masters* and he took C P Taylor's *Gynt* to the York Arts Centre (alas, long ago closed) at the bottom of Micklegate. I acted in both those and our theatre technician played Gynt in the latter. Bill also took Stephen Lowe's play, *Touched* to the Arts Centre, and taught our first Drama for Television course, in which he produced a full TV production of part of Steve Gooch's *Female Transport*, building a section of the wooden ship transporting the women to Australia that could be made to lurch realistically to and fro as in a heavy sea.

Without him I am sure we would not have made such progress or have sustained it so well under the increasing financial pressures of the 80s. Those pressures also led to staff cuts, fewer staff / student contact hours and bigger group sizes, which made it increasingly difficult to teach such practice-based courses. Hence when a notice appeared about voluntary redundancy (with enhanced pension), it felt like I'd found my exit line.

Act 3 : Consolidation Scene 1

Meanwhile, in the 70s, another line of development flowed from our teacher training tradition in the form of two new B.A. courses, both of which I wrote and taught: Drama and Social Awareness and Drama and the Disadvantaged. (I don't imagine we would call it that now!)

The former encouraged students to discover through observation and experiment about the way people behave and interact, the roles they play, sometimes going into town and then re-enacting and developing scenes they had observed. Or examining the dynamics of their own group. The latter involved preparing for and then practicing drama work in various institutional settings, such as a mental health day-centre or a hospital, in much the same way as was carried out with student teachers.

DAVID POWELY

In the late 70s I met and had a long discussion with Sue Jennings, the founder in this country of Dramatherapy. She was introduced to me by a teacher enrolled in one of my evening drama courses. Sue observed that much of what I did in these courses and the way I approached drama and improvisation generally was similar to what she did as a Dramatherapist. I began to train with her.

That led to her being appointed in 1979 to the College as a Reader so that she and I could set up a number of short courses on Dramatherapy to see how much interest there might be in a two-year part-time post professional certificate. The venue for them was in Lowther Street, another space we used for some of our courses when needed.

They were so successful that we were able to recruit for the first year of the course in 1981. It later became a post-graduate Diploma. It was officially a part of the DFTV Department and I was its Director and taught on it. I became an active member of the rapidly growing professional association. In that role I organised an annual series of week-long Dramatherapy summer schools at the College, attracting not just Dramatherapists but practitioners from other psychological therapies and people interested in theatre, music, dance and voice. The evenings were very lively. Dancing, music-making and singing took us well into each night. They continued thus for ten years until 1991 — the year I decided to resign and go freelance as a therapist, trainer and workshop leader.

Epilogue

Thinking about the twenty-three years of my life at St John's as a whole, I'm very aware of the rise and fall and rise again of change and fortune, the ducking and weaving, the unexpected moments of simple good luck. We have had to be fleet of foot, ready to improvise, take the initiative, and know which way the wind is blowing. That's what anyone working in the arts has to be able to do — now more than ever.

I believe we achieved a lot that was good and worked successfully. We created an honours degree based heavily on practical work with no written exams and a good deal of creative flexibility, something that no other university was able to offer at the time.

It is good to see that in spite of difficult times Theatre is alive and well at York St. John in its own new clothes. I have no doubt the present staff team will do all the adapting, ducking and weaving necessary to prosper in their own way.

David Powley is a therapist, actor & director and member of York Playback Theatre Company.

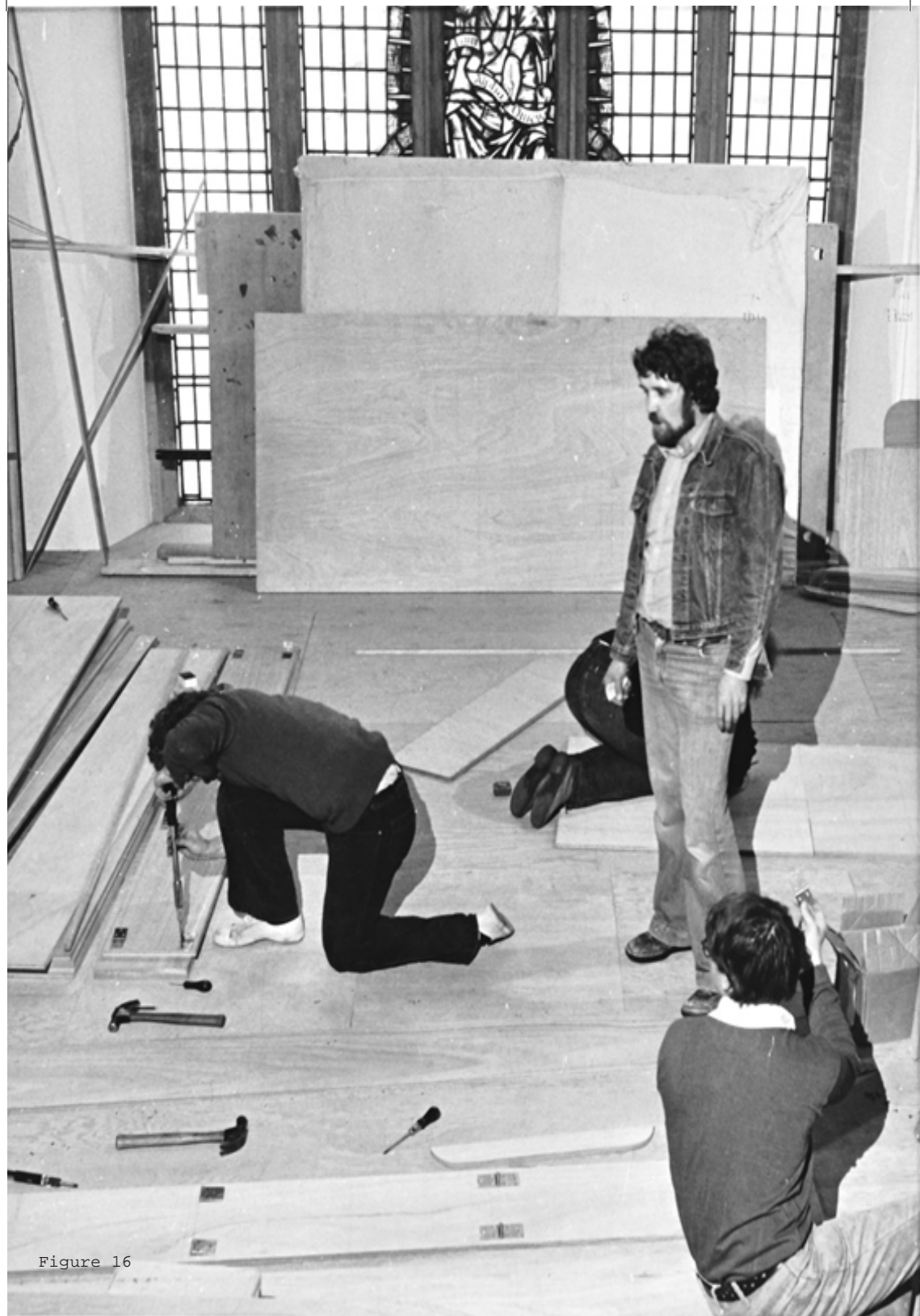


Figure 16

MARILYNNE DAVIES
1974 - 2001

Drama in the School of Performance Studies

This School came into being as the result of one of the academic re-organisations of the College. Divided into two programmes one on each campus it set out to provide an opportunity for inter-disciplinary study through two very different pathways.

At York the Drama Film and Television programme brought even closer the strong relationship between the subjects and at Ripon the Communication Arts Studies in Media and Performance programme provided, for the first time, the opportunity for students in Drama, Dance and Music to work collaboratively across the disciplines as well as to develop their skill within their chosen subject. Two very different programmes on separate campuses united under one Head of School.

At York Drama, Film and Television was well established – recruitment was always good and the staff, a closely knit group of colleagues, had been led by one of their own – Marion Orchard. With the arrival of the new programme David Browne – Film and Television accepted the challenge of leading the programme which he did with great charm, knowledge and understanding.

At Ripon the CASMAP programme brought together colleagues from different disciplines for the first time led by Alan Clarke who was not a musician, a dancer or involved in drama, but who embraced the interdisciplinary nature of the programme with conviction and enthusiasm.

For me (a musician, a woman and from ‘the other campus!’) it was not only one of the most challenging roles of my career but also one of the most interesting and enjoyable.

Who would have thought that I would agree to spend a dark, damp November evening in a graveyard in York with a group of Drama students led by Tom Spencer, or that I would watch Bill Pinner and students transform the Quad at York into an open air Theatre for students to perform in the round (or maybe the square!).

Harold Robinson decided to move back to Ripon to lead Drama in CASMAP and he was joined by Simon Murray. Here in the splendour of the former Senior Common Room (not a popular decision!) Drama students experienced a wide range of different styles of dramatic performance and delighted – and sometimes perplexed – the local community with their performances in places like the Market Square at Ripon or in Fountains Abbey.



1997 Quad Show 1789 French Revolution

In both programmes Drama was popular not only amongst the students but also in the community.

Such expertise was recognised by the Higher Education Funding Council who awarded the School a high score and by the Research Council who awarded the School a high rating in 2001.

It was a privilege to work with colleagues who had vision, individuality, determination, commitment and a belief in the power and effectiveness of Drama.

Long may it continue.

Marilynne Davies is a musician adjudicator, conductor and kitchen Bridge player!

ALAN CLARKE
1977- 81 & 1994 - present

Drama at YSJ - Two memories, Two people: Both Me

One

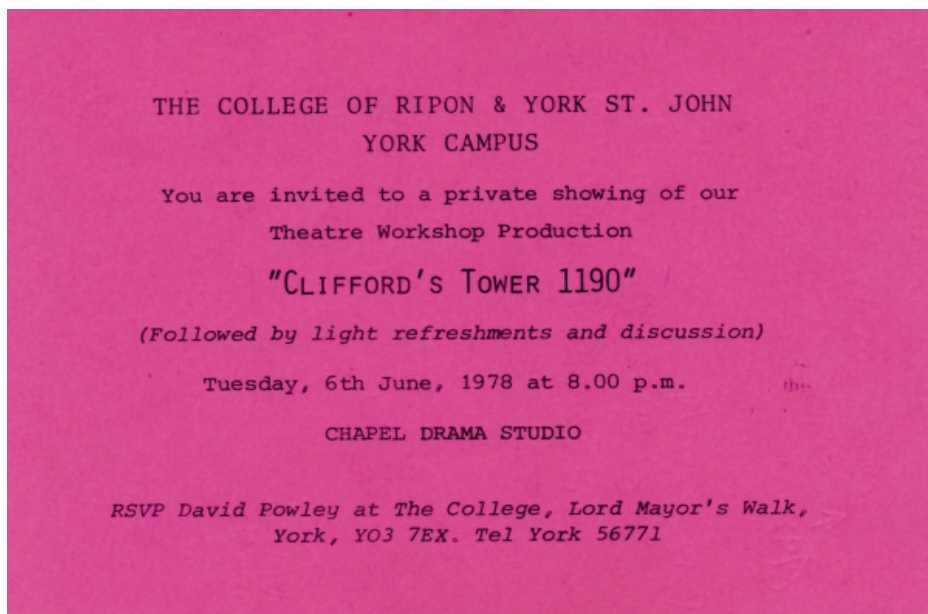
My diary entry for 16th September 1977 informs me that I began my student life at YSJ (then 'The College of Ripon and York St John' – 'CRYSJ') studying Drama as a major with a minor in English Literature. At interview (almost exactly 40 years ago as I write this), I told them I was interested in mime (mime!?) and stage lighting and was informed that I would have plenty of opportunities to study both at CRYSJ. This turned out to be completely untrue. However, I did learn how Drama could be used to fight injustice, promote peace and help rid the world of the evil fascist witch known in this dimension as Margaret Thatcher.

My memories of this time are a little vague and there are good reasons for this: primarily, it was of course a long time ago, but I was also dedicated (appropriately enough, in the year following the release of The Sex Pistols' *Anarchy in the UK* and the birth of British punk) to wearing cowboy boots and growing my hair as long as possible which necessitated, amongst other things, my lying in bed for long periods and not going to any lectures. But I'm getting ahead of myself; this is supposed to be about my memories of Drama at YSJ and not about my hair. Thatcher doesn't become a central figure until two years later. So, I remember it as being a very exciting and challenging time and the course, led by David Powley and Margaret Jowett, as being everything I thought drama should be – tough, thought-provoking and creative.

Whilst I thought studying drama and devising pieces was just wonderful, my tutors considered me to be more or less a waste of space – David considered me to be lazy (I was), and Margaret thought me disturbed (the jury's still out). Eventually, there were new tutors – Bill Pinner and David Haines – and I remember much more about this part of my course, possibly because by now, 1979, I had woken up to the fact that long hair wasn't really appropriate and consequently I was able to devote more time to my studies. It was also, however, because Mrs Thatcher had become Prime Minister and I had joined the Communist Party. I was much more interested in smashing fascism than in exploring my inner self; 'Art is not a mirror... but a hammer' as Bertolt Brecht said.

Drama at this time (in my memory at least) was very political; 'agitprop', vaguely Brechtian theatre groups such as 7:84 (named after the statistic that 7 % of the population own 84 % of the wealth. This hasn't changed much). Incidentally 7:84 were touring extensively and were seen by many of us as the whole 'point' of the arts.

I remember as part of a module, devising a publicly performed piece – *Jobopoly* – which attacked the then Conservative government's policies; unemployment was at a record high and the various structures set up to 'encourage' people 'back' to work were humiliating, Kafka-esque and brutal. The show was centred around Monopoly of course, and involved an 'Everyman' (me, since you ask) having to negotiate the traps and pitfalls of the Social Security system. I also remember another publicly performed piece in which we addressed the murder of the Jews by citizens of York in *Clifford's Tower in 1190*.



The climax of the production involved a set depicting the Tower, within which flame effects were visible whilst the citizens of York circled it intoning the names of WWII Nazi concentration camps to hammer home the point that anti-Semitism has always been with us. The only other things I remember was a play about the IRA in which I played a corpse (a role I had practised for in my hair-growing years) and another, performed in Gray's Court garden, in which I wore green tights for some reason, probably more to do with Elizabethan drama than frogs, although you never know.

[An interlude follows where I go to London, make documentaries for Channel 4 on subjects like AIDS, Child Abuse and Famine, fight Thatcher a bit more, return to York and re-train to work in HE.]

Two

My diary entry for 7th October 1994 has me starting work at the University College of Ripon and York St John (they'd added 'University' to the title since I'd been away) on what was known as the 'CASMAP' inter-disciplinary performance degree programme based at Ripon (the campus itself was sold off for reasons more to do with real estate and cash efficiency than education in 2001). 'CASMAP' stood for 'Communication Arts: Studies in Media and Performance' and was named this way to get maximum subject entries in the UCAS handbook ('Handbook'? Yes! Google and search engine optimisation are at least 5 years away). It was a broad-based performance degree with specialist strands in Music, Dance, Drama and something called 'Word and Image' which eventually became the current Media degree at YSJ. Students chose a specialism but could (and did) also opt for other modules in other specialisms to complement their programme and all students followed common or 'core' modules which were important to an understanding of the performance arts in modernism, postmodernism, semiotics, community arts and other fun stuff.

The times – political, artistic, cultural and intellectual – were very different at this point. Many intellectual fashions come and go and, before drama, and other arts could do battle with injustice and hate during this period we had to deal with meta-theatre, the simulacra and floating signifiers. Damn! (General advice for students and teaching staff: if Raymond Williams doesn't talk about it, it probably isn't very important). The work produced in the rarefied (for 'rarefied', read 'supportive, appropriate and educational') atmosphere of the Ripon campus was some of the most challenging, adventurous, daring, stimulating and enjoyable I have ever been privileged to be involved with and the teaching staff encouraged multi/ inter/ cross disciplinary performances without fixed subject boundaries and with a spirit of exploration, rampant creativity and fun.



1999 Ripon campus devised show



1999 Ripon campus devised show for school tour

I remember – one example amongst many – assessing a group presentation within the core module on postmodernism where I and my co-assessor, Simon Murray, were wheeled around on office chairs as part of an ‘experiential’ exploration of the subject of the postmodern where various tableaux lit up as we passed and certain themes of the postmodern (‘nostalgia’, ‘inter-textuality’, ‘irony’ etc.) were ‘performed’ through a mixture of dance, drama, music, art, film, TV): I have rarely seen such daring and wonderful work. CASMAP was a large degree, which doubled in size over the time of its existence, and the staff who contributed to it came from many academic subject, as well as industry, backgrounds (not just the performing arts, but also French, Art, Television and Film, History, Linguistics, Literature, Photography, Cultural Studies etc.) and there were an awful lot of them. It would be impossible to list them all but I would like to mention two in particular – firstly Marilynne Davies, the then Head of Department who encouraged and protected the whole crazy enterprise and also my good friend Harold Robinson who taught drama on both campuses and who sadly died in 2015. CASMAP was an extraordinary adventure – amazing students, amazing staff.

Alan Clarke is a senior lecturer in media and film studies at York St John University.

JOHN MERRYLEES
1977 - 1980 & 1996 - present

One Arrival and One Return

Arrival

In September 1977 I arrived at the Ripon campus of the College of Ripon and York St John (CRYSJ) as a mature student. I was the product of a Secondary Modern education where the expectation was that boys studied science and I left school with 'A' levels in Maths, Physics and Chemistry. However, there was a glimmer of hope, I had managed to study 'A' level Art as an extra subject and was a keen contributor to the annual school play. My first encounter with higher education was to study Building Engineering at Liverpool University. I hated it and left after one term. Over the next three years I pursued a number of diverse jobs including a long spell as a laboratory technician at my old school. Being involved in an educational community was life changing and I took advantage of the availability of numerous night classes (sculpture, photography, painting) and I became the lighting designer for the Meridian Players, the local amateur dramatic society. My former teachers (now friends) encouraged me to consider a return to formal education and the penny finally dropped – I could go and study the subjects I was really interested in, Art and Theatre. CRYSJ offered all the things that inspired me and I was accepted on a Combined Honours degree in Fine Art and Drama.

Now Ripon was never going to be the centre of the world, however it was only 9 miles from the brewery in Masham and there were many local pubs to visit and much beer to drink. Unlike the larger, politically volatile campus in York, the Ripon campus was a small community and, as the saying goes, we had to make our own fun. It consisted of mainly trainee teachers but there was a core of arts students who tried to give the place a bit of a buzz. So regular discos came into being, bands were brought in, a drama society emerged, rag week was established, the annual pantomime was revived and generally things started to happen. We even managed to attract students from York to come to events.

I spent half my time in the Art Block, ceramic sculpture became my forte, but what really inspired me and dominated my thinking was theatre and the way it could relate to the visual arts. Over the next three years with the help of tutors, and particularly Harold Robinson, I came to recognise that theatre is the ultimate sculpture: it is a constantly changing three-dimensional picture due to the inclusion of living, moving, thinking beings – the actors. This revelation has influenced the rest of my professional life.



1979 *Story Theatre* at Gray's Court garden.

JOHN MERRYLEES

Return

Without fully realising it the three years at UCRYSJ had provided me with a whole range of skills and experiences which equipped me for a career in the Arts. It was sheer chance that I came across a small-scale touring theatre company based in an old warehouse in the back streets of Hull who were looking for a stage manager. They took a chance on me and for the next 16 years I was fortunate to play a major part in the development of Hull Truck Theatre Company and help them to national and international recognition. However, as often happens, Hull Truck hit a funding crisis in 1996 and myself and all the production staff were made redundant.

So here begins my second encounter with Ripon and York St John. I had gained some experience of teaching in Further Education so I sent my CV to a number of educational institutions and it just so happened that Ripon was looking for someone to provide technical support on the newly created CASMAP programme. I was lucky enough to be appointed. It was strange returning after so long – much remained the same but much had changed and there was a lovely new drama studio. The really exciting development was CASMAP (Communication Arts: Studies in Media and Performance) which brought together Drama, Dance, Music, Word and Image. This programme attracted a large cohort of creative and energetic students who were encouraged to work across disciplines. When I arrived Harold Robinson and Simon Murray were the two drama lecturers but soon David Richmond was recruited as a replacement for Simon. We were able to bring in visiting artists and I recall memorable sessions from Lee Hall, Forced Entertainment and Clanjamfrie. The programme offered both contemporary and traditional drama modules and the quiet, rural setting of the campus allowed some bizarre and interesting performances. We really did assess durational work out on the lawn in the middle of the night and visit stone circles up on the moors at dawn.

The decision was taken to close the Ripon Campus and we moved to York. Since then Theatre at York St John has evolved from a combination of CASMAP and the Theatre, Film & Television programme on the York Campus. I have been fortunate to be part of this evolution that has seen Theatre adapt to the ever-changing higher education landscape in this country. Recently, with my years of experience at York St John, I have become subject director and now lead a team of dedicated professionals who are taking the subject to greater heights. My wonderful colleagues have helped me come to understand the importance of Drama and Theatre as a tool for social change and the Drama programmes continue to produce graduates who leave York St John University and go out into the world to make a difference.

John Merrylees is Subject Director for Drama and Dance at York St John University



2006 York Mystery Plays *Bite On Boldly*
 The story of Adam and Eve and the fall from grace.
 Photo credit: Jen Todman



1988 *Tis a pity she's a whore*



1989 *Rita Sue and Bob Too*



1991 *Come and Go*



1991 *Massa*



1995 *The Love of Don Perlimplin*



1993 *The Love of Don Perlimplin*



1995 *Transfiguration*



1998 *Marat Sade*

SUE JENNINGS

1979 - 1985

Dramatherapy at York St John

The Conception

At the beginning Dramatherapy was a loosely woven jacket with diverse pockets, textures and colours. There were various initiatives of drama teachers and performers creating programmes for children with special needs and gradually there were increasing numbers of practitioners from theatre, psychodrama, creative group-work, special education, occupational therapy, psychology.

I became frustrated with the increasing clinical focus of applied drama and went back to further my studies study. I believed social anthropology would give me another focus, especially on ritual. After 2 years at LSE, I transferred to SOAS and took off for the Malaysian rain forest with my three children.

I was excited to discover a context where dramatic performance was used both preventatively as well as curatively. Dance, song, trance and drama are integrated into performances which bring the village together: children, teenagers, adults and families. I was also invited to be a village midwife. This meant I was able to start at the beginning of life! It felt highly symbolic in relation to my life as a whole!

On my return to UK everything began to gather momentum. I called an inaugural meeting of the Dramatherapy Association, (now British Association of Dramatherapists); Hertfordshire College of Art and Design invited me to design and implement a Dramatherapy training, and then David Powley contacted me to offer me a part time post at York St. John.

I was living in Rugby and each week had to remember to point my car south on the M1 to reach St Albans on Mondays, and then Wednesday to face the M1 north to travel to York. These years were turbulent in many ways. On the M1 I had to drive past coach loads of police being sent to control the miner's strike. And one week I could not travel at all because the hurricane.

The Pregnancy

My first year at York was such fun: diverse short courses from Kathakali Dance to Drama in Special Education. David was very supportive as we innovated as many ideas as possible to raise awareness of drama and therapy and special education. The Department was very stimulating with drama, dance and film. I had to acclimatise to working in an institution (the same as St Albans) as I had never worked for an organisation before. I made firm friends in the Occupational Therapy Department and we collaborated with some workshops.

The Birth

The second year we launched the one day a week, 2 year Dramatherapy training: a post-professional Diploma that was approved by the Dramatherapy Association for full membership. How things have changed over the years with MA programmes, supervision training and State Registration. Many of the senior Dramatherapists started their Dramatherapy career with the training at York. They have advanced the profession in many ways and have achieved doctorates and published books.

I enjoyed teaching on the Dramatherapy course immensely, especially as it was within a Department of Drama. Mime artist Geoff Buckley, Tara Rajkumar, the first female Kathakali dancer and other performers contributed to the course. It was recognised that the artistic core of drama and theatre lay at the heart of Dramatherapy and staff were encouraged to be in their own performances, drama clubs and workshops.

Endings

Sadly my time at York drew to a close. St Albans wanted me to take up a full-time Senior Lectureship and York were not in a position to offer me full time work. The course continued with very fine staff including Jane Puddy. I missed the discourse after I left as David and I, and others were able to have time to debate and challenge. And David also took on the Editorship of the Journal of Dramatherapy.

I was sad when the course finally closed. It had served its purpose as having a pioneering strength and spirit. But rather like mushrooms when they disappear only to re-appear elsewhere, we now have a solid set of training courses not too far away.



Dr Sue Jennings is Professor of Play for the European Foundation of Dramatherapy

NICK ROWE
1984 - 87 & 1996 - present

Mental health, Dramatherapy and theatre

I was working as a nurse in a long stay psychiatric ward in 1984 when someone handed me a leaflet about a Dramatherapy course at 'The College of Ripon and York St John'. My experience of drama was sparse: Shakespeare at school, a course called 'drama for absolutely anyone' in Newcastle and leading a play-reading group on the ward. Despite this I applied and got a place in 1985; thus began the most personally challenging course I have ever done. It was a one-day a week, two-year course led by David Powley and taught by Sue Jennings, Jane Puddy and others. The day was usually split into three parts: theatre in the morning, dramatherapy practice in the afternoon and a 2-hour therapy group each evening. It changed so many things for me that over 30 years later I still draw on what I learned then: the potential of drama to illuminate, the exhilaration of making theatre with others, and the opportunities and limitations of therapy.

Judy Donovan led the dramatherapy course in the 1990s and she gave me the opportunity to teach on it in 1996, and then eventually to lead it until its demise in 2001. This was an exciting and challenging time; even though the course was always vulnerable, and not always recognised even by the theatre department at the time, the students and tutors made it a great learning environment. When dramatherapy became a state registered profession in the late 1990s, the demands on the course providers increased substantially and it became unfeasible for us to continue it.

In 2006, David Richmond invited me to teach applied theatre on the undergraduate theatre course and latterly to develop the Master's programme with Kay Hepplewhite (now working at Northumbria University), Matthew Reason and David Richmond.

With the support of staff and some remarkable students, most notably Gemma Alldred, I began what became Converge in 2018. From small beginnings in theatre, Converge is now a partnership between York St John University and Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Trust delivering educational opportunities to adults who use mental health services in York and the surrounding area. Students and staff teach our courses and support those who participate. Converge has offered educational opportunities to over 1000 people since 2008. In the academic year 2016-17, 336 people completed our courses and 85 university students were involved in delivery and the support of participants. We offer courses in sports/exercise, music, theatre, dance, fine art, creative writing, psychology, life coaching, stain glass making, research methods and storytelling. We run a choir with over 40 members and a theatre company, Out of Character (19 members). We employ 3 members of staff, 13 graduates on casual contracts and work alongside 4 secondees from the NHS.

It is no coincidence that Converge started in theatre: the course has always allowed risks to be taken and new ideas to develop. If the roots of Converge lie in play-reading sessions in a back ward of an old style mental hospital and in the Dramatherapy course, the soil that has nurtured it are the traditions of theatre at York St John. Long may they continue!



2009 Out of Character Theatre company with Gemma Alldred

Dr Nick Rowe is an Associate Professor and Director of Converge at York St John University

TONI LUNN
1990 - 1994 & 1997 - 2004

A look back...

In 1990 I came to York to study Drama, Film and Television with English – a four year honours degree at the York campus of what was then University College of Ripon and York St John. I fell completely and utterly head over heels in love with theatre, performance and the many uses of drama. You could choose your own pathway through the degree to focus on either predominantly theatre/drama courses or film and TV or a mixture, navigating your way through your four-years to make the programme fit for you and your specific interests. Led at the time by Marion Orchard with Harold Robinson, Bill Pinner and the wonderful Tom Spencer the drama and theatre courses were all I focussed on. I can still feel the heaviness of the Chapel Drama studio door as you shoved it open to go inside to discover what the day would hold. Some courses were a mixture of our year (1990-1994 - we were the final year of the four year programme) and others were with students from the year above. Productions were given a great focus. Tom directed Lope de Vega's *Fuente Ovejuna* in 1992 with high levels of cross dressing (lovingly known by us as Twenty Old Vaginas). Tom's productions were legendary and the thing of nightmares for Tony Wilson the technical stage manager of the course. There was always a trapdoor and a lot of lights. I think my character Frondoso was nearly hanged (probably quite literally).

In the first year I took the module 'Drama, the Group and Personal Change', led by Dramatherapist Judy Donovan, and I can honestly say that the course changed my life, my way of thinking of what drama could do and what it can be for. The concept of the impact of play through drama affecting change in oneself and others was fascinating to me and has remained a core of my practice over 25 years on. This course led to the poorly titled but excellent 'Drama and the disadvantaged' in the third year which set me onto my career path. Tom Spencer, a bearded mischievous dungaree wearing inspiration, completely took me under his wing and shaped where I was going to take my work. His office was a cave of wonder with groaning shelves of books, plays, video tapes and cassettes. It was incredible and he sort of knew where everything was but you often had to come back in a bit! The memory of his phlegmy bellow, 'Come in!' brings a misty tear to my eye. He loved fire and fireworks and was a wonderful teacher. I spoke about him so much on the phone to my mum (from actual phone-boxes – no mobiles!) that she asked me if I was having an affair with him! Ha-ha. I wasn't. But I was falling in love. He introduced me to the work of Interplay Theatre Company, a Leeds based company specialising in touring theatre for special schools and also touring to community centres and village halls.

At that time, the company was directed by Jon Palmer – an ex YSJ student from many years before I was there. I suddenly saw in the flesh what drama and theatre could achieve for other people. It wasn't the self-involved narcissist world of 'actors' who couldn't see further than their own shadow; I witnessed work where young people were coaxed out of their shell, where beautifully created multi-sensory work engaged children with profound and multiple disabilities and connected with them. It was mind blowing. I focused on theatre for people with learning disabilities for my dissertation in the fourth year and made relationships with all the Leeds based companies who were doing that sort of work and my path was set.



Devised theatre project featuring Toni Lunn, Susy Dunne and Bev Veasey.

TONI LUNN

At the same time as this I had become involved with the fantastic Youth Theatre Yorkshire and also York Theatre Royal. I realised that opportunities were not going to be handed to me on a plate, I wasn't from that sort of background, I knew I was going to have to graft and get to know people, organisations and companies and that's what I did. I knew York as well as I knew UCRYSJ and my advice to any students, don't get sucked into the, sometimes, insular world of any institution – get out there and see what else is going on that can enhance and add to your degree experience. I left University and became self-employed straight away. I toured the UK for Interplay to many special schools, acting and workshopping for children with profound and multiple learning disabilities. After the tour I was freelancing full-time, setting up Interplay's first youth theatre for young people with severe learning disabilities, running sessions and directing youth theatre under the amazing Jill Adamson at Youth Theatre Yorkshire and supporting youth theatre development for Leeds Drama Umbrella Project. The next couple of years are a dizzy blur of making work with and for people of all ages, backgrounds and experiences. I worked in schools, community centres, libraries, prisons, youth clubs all across Leeds, York and North Yorkshire, it was amazing and I was never out of work.

In 1997 I had a call from the College asking if I would come and deliver some visiting lecturer sessions on a new course in Ripon. I had never even been to Ripon before, during my degree there was very little integration between the two campuses, and no one really wanted to get on the minibus to be driven over for a 9am start! The CASMAP programme was new, the drama element designed by Harold Robinson, erudite, witty, often hilarious, but utterly terrifying. I had never been taught by him at York but he had marked a piece of theatre I had been in where I had been naked scrubbing myself with a brush, lit from behind with a light bulb, so there was a relationship of sorts! I taught the first-year students with the wonderful Simon Murray, physical theatre fountain of all knowledge, a man so bright and talented that the students just adored everything that he said, even if he was making them do their shocking versions of his salute to the sun. I taught the third-year module 'Drama and Theatre in the Community' with Harold. He was also a terrific teacher and the most precise marker I have ever known. 'That was a 58.' My memories of this time are mainly of laughing, which I think is a good thing, I had phenomenal colleagues and I loved teaching the students. They made work for schools and work for community groups, some of it dreadful and some of it breathtakingly brilliant. It was a great piece of course design by Harold that after a couple of years of them looking inwards the final year was about applying their practice, seeing what it could do for others. I was lucky enough to be able to offer some paid work opportunities to ex-students, namely Pavla Beier and Lucy Tomlin who both worked for me at Leeds Drama, then The Project and I am delighted that I am in contact with them still, plus many other students, and they are continuing their own practice.



Marat Sade 1992

À MARAT.
DAVID

TONI LUNN

I was teaching two days a week during this period (1997-2004) with the rest of the week devoted to a million other projects, my practice developing to work with more challenging participants, abuse survivors, runaways, directing youth theatre and youth arts/dance performances in many venues including the West Yorkshire Playhouse and Stephen Joseph at Scarborough, and also leading young people on international youth theatre and dance exchanges. At the College we were able to bring in practitioners to support the teaching of the modules and so it was that some of our students got to work leading professionals from the field. Simon Murray in particular was amazing at bringing in week long residencies from Forced Entertainment! When Simon left we were so sad but then immediately we were delighted with the tour de force that replaced him – David Richmond! I will never forget his first day teaching with me, a day of drama games where his incredible height and energy made for some hilarious moments. The embodiment of the gentle giant I am privileged to have become great friends with him.

When the Ripon campus closed the course was brought over to York and sat alongside the existing Theatre programme. I taught on both courses during this period but truly felt that the CASMAP drama degree courses gave the students an opportunity that I had relished which was identifying what drama and theatre can achieve. Rachel Conlon (then Rachel Frank) joined me at this time teaching on the Community programme and it was wonderful to share the course with someone who was also a practitioner first and foremost.

It is easy to be overly sentimental about these times but they really were great days as both a student and a lecturer. I am so delighted that I was offered to work there in the first place having only graduated three years earlier, I don't know how I got the offer – Tom maybe or Harold? but I am glad that I did because for those seven years I was able to facilitate projects and workshops for three/four days a week and then teach how to make them on the other two. (Yes I was often working six days a week, my CV is impossible to write down. Journeys to and from Ripon with Harold and sometimes Alan Clarke were always entertaining and often very informative. I left in 2004 to move to Herefordshire and start my family where I continue to work as a drama/ theatre practitioner, creative arts consultant and film maker, working with incredibly challenging participants but again always seeing how creativity can impact on their lives. I am delighted to be able to celebrate fifty years of theatre at YSJ, I owe much to the institution for sparking something in me that has never dimmed or wavered. I made life time friends with a wonderful set of colleagues and students and I feel privileged to have been involved.

Toni Cook (was Toni Lunn) is a freelance drama / theatre practitioner, creative arts consultant and film maker.



Lorca's

BLOOD WEDDING

Chapel Drama Studio
Lord Mayors Walk

8th, 9th, 10th
December
7.30pm

Tickets : £ 2
(£1.50 : concs.)
From S.U. shop
- or on door

Production
Workshop

SIMON MURRAY
1996 - 2001

CASMAP at/in UCRYSJ: what's in an acronym?

I joined the Drama staff at what was then the University College of Ripon and York St John (UCRYSJ) in 1996 and left in 2001.

The stimulus to write this short piece has prompted much churnings of memory and, undoubtedly, misremembering. Most certainly, these were good times I think. Some stresses, but a great gang of colleagues, a beautiful campus in Ripon and adventurous, off-the-wall and sometimes wildly creative students. Many were not hugely academic, but that did not seem to matter too much in terms of the ethos of the institution, or the requirements of the curricula. aware that UCRYST was one of the Church of England Higher Education colleges, I remember before, and at my interview, being anxiously exercised by how I would respond to the likely question: 'how will you teach drama in a Christian way?', or 'how will your faith shape your teaching?' As an agnostic and cuspy atheist I was deeply troubled as to how I might honestly answer such a question. Needless-to-say it was never posed and I was appointed.

I remember on the interview day being taken to lunch in the staff dining room at Ripon – white table cloths, silver service and choices across three courses. I assumed then that this was how all members of staff dined on a daily basis and that it was always free. I felt I'd arrived at a North Yorkshire version of an Oxbridge college. I was wrong, of course, about daily free lunches in the staff restaurant. The other thing that particularly exercised me in terms of preparing for my interview was how would I explain, or justify, my criminal conviction which I had learned – to my cost in another context – that I absolutely must come clean about on the application form. It wasn't raised, but within a week of starting the job some months later I was invited down to the York campus by the delightful faculty Dean, Finlay Coupar, to meet colleagues who taught art, film and drama. It was a liquid lunch in a pub, about 15-20 were there and I was a mite overwhelmed. Finlay started the conversation by saying something like 'you are the first appointment in the history of the institution to have a criminal record. We are delighted, but now tell us the details'. My 'drunk and disorderly' conviction in Newcastle – even the night in Gosforth gaol - some 10 years previously was perhaps a little disappointing to the gathering, but I told (some of) the story which initially gave me a little kudos amongst my colleagues. I think they had been hoping for 'robbery with violence' or something equally reprehensible.



1998/2000 CASMAP devised performances

SIMON MURRAY

I taught on the newly launched CASMAP programme. Communication Arts: Studies in Media and Performance – the acronym was always infinitely more mellifluous than the full title – was, if I remember correctly, in part driven to help populate the Ripon Campus with students and to protect staff jobs following a reorganisation at York. Neither, in themselves, dishonourable motives. Whilst CASMAP was cunningly constructed to touch almost every base across the spectrum of performing and media arts, and thus could be cleverly cross-referenced in the prospectus, it was also imagined as a new kind of degree which was to be cross (if not inter-) disciplinary in philosophy and practice. So, the impetus behind CASMAP was not simply pragmatic and instrumental, but ambitious, imaginative and responding to new currents in the academic world of performance, media and theatre studies. To his credit, Harold Robinson, who designed and led the CASMAP drama pathway, was trying to do something different and move away from some of the intellectual and curriculum constraints he perceived to characterise the theatre programme on the York campus. Harold, a supremely waspishly witty man, was at his best a provocative and gifted teacher.

I was, for sure, cutting my teeth as a university lecturer, but CASMAP enabled me to explore and experiment – sometimes way out of my depth – with pedagogy and practice based, heuristic teaching. The core modules enabled a certain amount of team teaching, or certainly team imagining, and with Alan Clarke I hugely enjoyed playing fast and loose with postmodernism, whilst remaining critical of some of its propositions and assumptions. I also began to delve into site specific theatre and encouraged third year students to do bizarre things in strange spaces off campus. In fact, I have etched in my memory some excellent and imaginative work made by at least two student groups around and in ruined buildings on the Ripon canal basin. Getting permissions was tiresome and I had to circumvent health and safety anxieties, trying to match honesty with excitement and ambition. I introduced Feldenkrais inspired movement classes to the drama programme and, indeed, for a year or two had a compulsory movement ‘class’ at the beginning of the working day. My bastardised – via yoga and David Glass – ‘salute to the sun’ routine became legendary and indeed was performed by a group of students with a mixture of comic pastiche and affection (I still like to think) at my Ripon leaving party. Our young, energetic, profane and gifted community practices part-time tutor, Toni Lunn, would mercilessly take the mickey out of my movement teaching. I remember Toni once storming into one of the halls of residence at about 9.10 one morning to drag (almost literally) an oversleeping student into the drama studio.



1998/2000 CASMAP devised performances

SIMON MURRAY

Having subsequently taught in three universities, the CASMAP experience at UCRYSJ can almost seem like a 'golden age'. And, of course, that is ridiculous. Like many degree programmes, CASMAP's cross disciplinary rhetoric often exceeded its lived daily practice and there were inevitably considerable difficulties in satisfactorily translating plans and ideas on paper into productively functioning regimes of teaching and learning. But an ethos and culture of trying things out on a campus 25 miles distant from its 'parent' site was generative and often great fun. CASMAP was led by a respected, effective, energetic, witty but occasionally stern musician and choir conductor, Marilynne Davis, with whom I still exchange Christmas cards. From my perspective, Marilynne was an imaginatively supportive boss and leader who was always ready to back developments and ventures if a case was energetically and cogently presented. Quite how Marilynne found budgets which allowed me to bring Cathy Naden, Claire Marshall and Terry O'Connor from Forced Entertainment for week-long residencies over three or four consecutive years, I shall never understand. Marilynne was a fine and imaginative champion of new ways of thinking and teaching.

The Ripon campus is no more – sold in 2001 in a cost saving exercise as 'real estate' and to fund ambitious building developments on the Lord Mayor's Walk site. My time in Ripon is less than 20 years distant, but often seems a different age, both personally and in terms of university life. I left UCRYSJ so as to be able to live from home on Tyneside just after my daughter, Isla, was born. She is now 17. When I left UCRYSJ the REF/RAE was in its infancy, KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) were not yet part of the language of assessing academic value, students did not pay fees and were not signed (literally or metaphorically) as 'customers', promotion was not dependant on income generation and having a PhD not an 'essential criteria' for getting a university post. I have subsequently got a doctorate and I would not be at the august University of Glasgow without one, but Ripon, CASMAP and its associated wonders and eccentricities provided me with a portal through which to enter university teaching. Lucky me!

Dr Simon Murray is a Senior Lecturer in Theatre Studies at the University of Glasgow.



1998/2000 CASMAP devised performances

DAVID RICHMOND 2001 - present

Drama & Theatre @ YSJU

It may seem rather indulgent to be writing about a subject like drama & theatre being taught in a small university in the North of England. Perhaps it is, but in a time when the arts and creativity are being challenged by government policy that seems intent on removing them from the social realm, stripped out of school curriculum, reduced funding and support in the profession (it begs the question – What is the Government scared of?) it appears to me to be essential. This is why we celebrate drama & theatre at York St John University (YSJU) for the past 50 years and to draw threads out of that history: the clear social agenda from the earliest of days, that ‘it’ matters this thing we do; that it is important that we offer the opportunity of drama, theatre, creativity, expression to those communities that may not have access to these process, so they can speak for themselves; that we engage in the world and grapple with the big ideas, difficult issues; that we make beautiful work that doesn’t always have to exist in the theatre building; that we experiment, that we take all kinds of risks; and that we know whose shoulders we stand on.

I have worked as a senior lecturer in theatre & performance at YSJU since February 2001 to now. I was head of programme for BA (Hons) CASMAP; drama; dance; music from 2001 to 2003, for BA (Hons) Performance: theatre; dance; music from 2003 to 2009, for BA (Hons) Theatre from 2009 to 2013 when I stepped down as head of programme. In 2013 I was instructed to lead the development of theatre to BA (Hons) Drama & Theatre, BA (Hons) Drama: education & community, BA (Hons) Drama & Dance, BA (Hons) Dance and BA (Hons) Dance: education & community. As part of the development of CASMAP to Performance I also over saw the dissolution of theatre from TF&TV. Through each iteration of the subject from the various threads we attempted to distil what was best practice and take it forward with the best of the new – each time becoming stronger and more potent.

The annual quad show a tradition started 50 years ago with Margaret Jowett in Gray’s Court onwards via Tom Spencer. We have continued to develop the applied theatre (community theatre) via Sue Jennings, Toni Cooke (née Lunn) to today where we have students making theatre for, by and with communities such as refugee, people with learning difficulties, schools, nursing homes, old people’s homes, pupil referral units. The work we have been doing in this area over the past 50 years has reached national and international prominence. Through working with those of us who access mental health services has grown the world leading projects – Converge and Out of Character. The work we have been doing with people within the criminal justice system has developed into the unique Prison Partnership Project, and the work we do in schools and with young people has developed into the extraordinary It’s Not OK project, working with young people to protect themselves from sexual predators online.

We ask students to think outside the black box studio (conversely described as black box thinking). Every year we take the 1st years to a castle near Hadrian's Wall for four days to make work in an immersive situation. When students get to their 2nd year they all go to Poland for four days spending a day at Auschwitz and Birkenau. In their 3rd year the students spend four days interviewing artists and theatre makers and witnessing their work. Students perform in clubs, pubs, streets, galleries, museums, mountain tops, rivers, kitchens, beaches, front rooms, caravans, minsters and at times even in theatres. Every year we bring in artists of world renown to share their work and thoughts with the students at Performing House. Every year we produce at least two issues of *Theatre Pages* of which this is issue 15. Every year we put on more than 180 performances.

These practices come out of the work of colleagues here at YSJU now – Claire Hind, Eirini Nedelkopoulou, John Merrylees, Jules Dorey Richmond, Matthew Reason, Nathan Walker, Nick Rowe and Rachel Conlon. The work also comes out of the legacy of artist/scholars who taught here before us; Margaret Jowett, David Powley, Sue Jennings, Harold Robinson, Bill Pinner, Simon Murray, Misri Dey, Toni Cooke (née Lunn), Tom Spencer, Tim Haunton, Miles Plant, Kay Hepplewhite and many others who passed through YSJU. In these complex and precarious times we ask the students to stand up and speak out for those less fortunate than themselves, to speak truth to power, to make us laugh, cry, think, to challenge preconceptions, to be brave, bold and beautiful. To engage in what I like to call practical philosophy.



2016 *Harlequin in the Ghetto* performing *The Jewish Archive*

Photo credit: Samuel Gray

KAY HEPPLWHITE
2006 - 2013

Fantastic

adjective:

1. Extraordinarily good or attractive.
2. Imaginative or fanciful; remote from reality.

During the summer, when many students have finished for the academic year, there is enough lavender in the flowerbeds at York St John University to scent the whole world's underwear drawers. It was here on a baking hot day that John Merrylees parked up the cart for a rehearsal of the York Mystery play we were directing. Bees loudly moved around each flower and some Japanese visitors came to watch.

In spring, hosts of daffodils arrive under the city walls opposite York St John theatre studios, running down the grassy bank to the moat. One dark October, Helen Turner draped the walls with silk flags to be unrolled during a lantern procession we facilitated for the Diwali festival.

In the quad between the old buildings, the grass was mowed into the York St John acorn and oak leaf logo by a visiting artist, Jane Greenfield, viewable from the first floor windows. Do I remember a black crow made by Jules Dorey Richmond suspended in the bell tower and a life-size wolf's head appearing in an outdoor performance?

Sitting at my desk one day, a man came in to the office to locate the very spot under the window where his dormitory bed used to be some 50 years before, when he was training to be a teacher.

And was it a fantasy that I processed through York Minster, reflecting that this would be the only time I would walk down the aisle with a man? We sat in rows dreamily watching tall shoes and rarely-worn ties accompanying flowing gowns up the steps to graduate.

Was my first office really a submarine tube only wide enough for a desk and chair, where each lecturer had to climb over the other? Is the exam board really convened in an old lady's wood panelled drawing room, complete with glass cabinets of dusty books and silver goblets? Did I really make a performance with students in the basement of the city archive after we touched a medieval play script?

I do clearly recall that the theatre work is consistently fresh and innovative, involving communities of the city in mutually beneficial activity; and that world-leading artists and brilliantly skilled staff really do collaborate with students, making a rich learning experience.

Working in Theatre at York St John University allowed me to experience a unique blending of heritage and innovation, in a wonderfully creative environment, traceable through the fantastic place and the fantastic people. Fantastic fifty.



2010 York Youth Mysteries
Photo credit: Jen Todman

Dr Kay Hepplewhite is a senior lecturer in performing arts at Northumbria University



We Need You!

Help us celebrate 50 years of Theatre at York St John

Send us your *Snapshots* - photographs and memories of your time at here, these will be posted throughout the year on the theatre blog – if you wish to contribute please contact Alexander: alex.kaniewski@yorksja.ac.uk

Come and perform in *Performance Re-call*, re-perform works first made at YSJ or make something new – if you are interested contact Jules: j.doreyrichmond@yorksja.ac.uk

See the exhibition *Opening up the Archive: Looking Back at 50 Years of Theatre at York St John University*, Arts foyer 18th September - 1st October and touring the region see theatre blog for further details.

**Drama & Theatre
BA (Hons)**

**Drama: Education and Community
BA (Hons)**

**Drama & Dance
BA (Hons)**

Photo credit: Jen Todman

PERFORMING HOUSE 2017-18

Wednesday 4th October 2017

Peter McMaster presents:

27

Wednesday 18th October 2017

Alumni: Amy Gledhill presents: *The Delightful Sausage: Cold Hard Cache*

Friday 3rd November 2017

As part of the event *Queering Ritual*

Gary & Claire present:

Lost in a Sea of Glass and Tin
&

ATOM-r presents: Kjell Theory

Wednesday 8th November 2017

Jackie Hagan presents:

Jumble Soul

Wednesday 24th January 2018

Shonaleigh presents:

Between the Words

Wednesday 14th February 2018

Michael Pinchbeck presents:

Concerto

Wednesday 26th February 2018

Alumni: *tbc*

For more information and tickets visit:

<http://blog.yorks.ac.uk/theatre/>