

THE WILMSLOW GREEN ROOM THEATRE

The story of the search by The Wilmslow Green Room Society for a theatre of its own, and a short history of the buildings in Chapel Lane, Wilmslow which now form that theatre.



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Introduction

Since it was founded in 1924 by Mr A B Mallinson and Mr W H Christian (the idea came to them as they walked home from church one Sunday), The Wilmslow Green Room Society has presented plays at many venues. It was not until 1990, when it was 66 years old, that the Society was to put on a play (Charley's Aunt) at its own theatre. Let us consider first the various venues the Society had used until then.

The Society will be referred to as "the Green Room" and references to "the Committee" will be to the Executive Committee or the former General Committee of the Society.

Venues

Before the Green Room had its own theatre, by far the largest number of plays was presented at the Public Hall, Church Street. This building, on what is now the site of Waitrose Supermarket, was known at various times as British Legion Hall, Legion Hall, Drill Hall, and even, briefly, as The Green Room Theatre. Eventually, when it became owned by Wilmslow U.D.C., it was called the Public Hall, and it will be referred to here by that name. It closed in 1981.

The first Green Room productions were held at the Conservative Hall, Wilmslow, in the autumn of 1924, but that venue was not used again after the Green Room moved to the Public Hall. The first play presented at the Public Hall ("Hawley's of High Street") was performed in February 1925. It was quickly followed by The Mikado (March 1925), the first of several Gilbert & Sullivan operas.

The last play performed at the Public Hall was "Bell, Book & Candle" in February 1981.

The Rex Theatre was opened in the mid-1930's, principally as a cinema. The Green Room used it for productions during the season 1936/7, but then returned to the Public Hall. No doubt to emphasise the

Green Room's return to the Public Hall, it was called "The Green Room Theatre" from March 1937 until March 1939.

Productions were suspended during the war.

In 1956 the Green Room was invited by the owners of the Rex (the Stansbys) to present plays again at their theatre. At first, this was declined, it being resolved at a Committee meeting on 9 January 1957 that "... in view of the financial results should our productions be presented at the Rex Theatre and the additional difficulties created by petrol rationing, we regret having to decline the invitation ... at the present time".

The Green Room did, however, subsequently return to the Rex, presenting there "The Love of Four Colonels" in November 1965, "The Happiest Days of Your Life" in March/April 1966 and "The Sleeping Prince" in February 1967.

The concern expressed about the financial consequences of putting on plays at the Rex is understandable, for in the 1950's it seems that most plays lost money. For example, it cost £243.3.7d to put on a play called "The Blind Goddess" in 1951 (at the Public Hall), while ticket sales and other receipts amounted to only £74.1.4d. In 1956, receipts from "A Question of Fact" (again at the Public Hall) were £44.17.8d against expenses of £141.9.7d. The minutes recorded "a net cost" of £96.11.11d, rather than a loss.

These facts caused little alarm. The losses on productions were comfortably eliminated by subscription income and other revenues (such as profit from the regular dances run by the Green Room). In January 1951 the Green Room had over 800 members. (By the end of the 1950's, the number of members had fallen to 674. This decline continued during the 1960's. In March 1965 the number was 610, giving rise to a proposal that a scheme should be prepared for attracting new members. Nevertheless, by May 1968 membership had dropped further to 562).

The venues used by the Green Room over the years were:

1. The Conservative Hall (then in Kennerley's Lane, where the Society's first productions "Nothing But the Truth", "Postal Orders" (a One-Act play) and "The Younger Generation", took place in October, November and December 1924);
2. The Public Hall;
3. The Festival Hall (later known as The Assembly Rooms) Alderley Edge, starting with "HMS Pinafore" in April 1932, followed by productions in 1981, 1982 and 1983;
4. Lacey Green Hall (a Junior members' production in November 1964);
5. Pownall Hall School (October 1955 until March 1977);
6. Wilmslow Guild Theatre (Youth Section production in March 1982 and joint pantomimes in December 1982 and December 1983);
7. Capesthorpe Hall (September 1983, October 1984, April 1986, April 1987 and March 1988)
8. Wilmslow Parish Hall (a revue in April 1984);
9. Wilmslow Leisure Centre (Evans Theatre) (December 1984 – December 1987 and December 1989);

10. St Mary's Church, Nether Alderley ("The Vigil" in April 1988); and

11. Wilmslow Parish Church ("Murder in the Cathedral" in April 1989);

The total recorded number of productions in each venue was:

•	Public Hall	163
•	Evans Theatre	11
•	Assembly Rooms	10
•	Pownall High School	10
•	Rex Theatre	6
•	Capesthorpe	5
•	Conservative Hall	2
•	Guild Theatre	2
•	Lacey Green Hall	1
•	Parish Hall	1
•	St Mary's Church	1
•	Parish Church	1
	Total	213

There seems to be no record of where 15 plays were performed; these were probably at the Public Hall.

These figures do not include the re-staging of some productions by invitation at other theatres, which included Altrincham Garrick (where the Green Room made several six-performance visits) and the Royal Exchange Theatre, where "The Lion in Winter" was performed on 24 July 1979, as part of an Amateur Festival. Also, the figures do not cover the many performances by the fundraising revue team in the 1980's. These took place at various venues, including the Victory Hall, Mobberley, the Assembly Rooms, Wilmslow Parish Hall, Wrenbury Village Hall (near Nantwich), Tatton Park (where a farm cart was used as the stage), Honford Hall, Handforth, the Club Theatre, Altrincham and (twice) the Village Club, Church Lench, Evesham, Worcestershire.

Plays have been presented at Gawsworth Hall since July 1972. A touring production of "The Importance of Being Earnest" was taken to Denmark in June 1969.

The production of plays was costly and involved huge effort. Sets had to be transported (along with furniture and props) and erected during a limited period. (Transport was provided by a local furniture remover, Oswald ("Ossie") Bowers). The Public Hall used to be booked for a 10-day period for final rehearsals and set construction. Four plays were usually produced each year in Wilmslow, with four performances (Wednesday to Saturday) of each.

Sometimes complete sets would be hired, but the Green Room did own its own scenery. Some flats were stored at the Public Hall.

Storage of scenery and props was obviously a problem. In 1949 some premises in Chapel Lane were rented for 12/6 per week (62½p) plus 1/- (5p) per week for electricity. In 1951 the Green Room bought a hut, presumably for storage purposes. This was kept in Chapel Lane, but the precise locations of the hired premises and the hut are not known.

The hut was erected by a builder called Sumner, who estimated a cost of £20 for moving the hut to Chapel Lane (from where?), erecting it and felting it. Perhaps he underestimated this job; at a meeting of the Committee on 8 November 1951 it was sternly reported that "the hut was up, but Mr Sumner ... had been neither quick nor efficient and it was thanks to the Stage staff that the hut would be completed by Saturday".

The problems of storage would largely be eliminated when the Green Room acquired its own premises in 1964, but the task (and cost) of transporting sets continued until plays were produced "at home" in 1990

In the meantime, the search for suitable storage, and even a place to convert into the Green Room's own theatre, continued.

In May 1958 the Committee discussed "the possibility of buying Potts Farm House and outbuildings, with the idea of the House being used as a club and store rooms, and either converting the existing barn into a small theatre, or erecting one on the site". No mention is made of where Potts Farm House was located. Within a week, the Committee was considering another site, a farm and outbuildings at Row of Trees, Knutsford Road, but it was decided that it would not be practicable to build a theatre on that site, and the matter was not pursued. (No further reference was made to Potts Farm House). It was, however, resolved to appoint a Building Fund Committee "to recommend the ways and means of raising money". This Committee included Margaret Savaage and Mabel Evans.

The momentum for the Green Room to find their own "home" had clearly begun.

A barn in Lacey Green was considered, but thought unsuitable for the Green Room's purposes. The Committee also looked at a house, No. 8 Grove Avenue, which included a large outbuilding. Due to the fact that the property was too expensive, and that the vendor was not willing to sell the outbuilding separately, the Green Room withdrew. This was in April 1959.

The next premises to be considered, in January 1960, were Dean Row School and House. It was reported to the Executive Committee that an offer of £2,250 had been made for those premises, which had been built in 1861. If the Green Room were to buy these premises, a bank loan would be required. The Treasurer at the time, however, advised the Committee "that the loan could not be made to the Society because it had no standing in Law". The Bank would require guarantees from officials of the Society, who in turn would require indemnities from other members. The minutes of the meeting ruefully record "This matter of guarantee raised difficulties which had not been foreseen".

Nevertheless (albeit only by 10 votes for and 8 against), it was decided to submit "a tentative bid ... of £2,275 and that the bid should have as many conditional clauses in it as possible". The maximum price the Green Room was prepared to pay was £2,500. A Building Fund appeal was launched.

The Green Room's Honorary Solicitor at the time, George Davies, was uneasy about proceeding on the strength of such a slim majority of the Committee. He thought, no doubt wisely, that a three quarter's majority "ought to be the rule" and he questioned the wisdom of going ahead without consulting the members as a whole.

A bid of £2,250 was, however, submitted to the Ministry of Education, but Mr Davies' colleague Tim Hall attended the next committee meeting (February 1960) and reported that the Ministry had received an unconditional bid of £2,500 from another source. After a short discussion the Committee decided to abandon the idea of buying Dean Row School.

Back to the drawing board.

The next premises to be considered (in May 1961) were the Hawthorn Street Methodist Chapel and School. Different opinions were expressed as to whether the whole site should be used to build a theatre, or whether it should be acquired for "a good club and rehearsal rooms", the Green Room continuing to use the Public Hall for plays. The latter view prevailed and it was firmly decided "that there should be no further discussion on the subject of building a theatre". It was nevertheless agreed that the Green Room should try to acquire the site for £5,000. (It apparently extended to over 3000 square yards).

There were detailed discussions about how a purchase might be financed, and about the possible acquisition in the name of a company. Then, strangely, the matter died, there being no further reference to it until January 1962, when the selling agents apparently asked the Committee whether they were still interested. (Perhaps the cost of the Hawthorn Street premises was causing Committee members to have cold feet; £5,000 equates to almost £90,000 today). The Committee's interest does seem to have waned, and they were instead considering the possibility of leasing the Public Hall, or anyway part of it. Nothing came of that.

By April 1962 the Committee was seeking storage accommodation "at Hawthorn Street" (but it is not clear whether this was at the same premises, which had been a potential acquisition a few months earlier). Also, premises at the Community Centre in Handforth were inspected ("too small"), as was a hangar at Ringway Airport (too large?).

The hunt continued. At the Committee meeting on 10 May 1962 Mrs Savaage reported that "... it was vital to get accommodation ... for rehearsals and for putting up flats ...". There might possibly be rooms at Chancel Lane (this presumably being a reference to the School there, now the site of Wilmslow Parish Hall).

About this time (1962) it emerged that the owner of Providence Works in Chapel Lane (now the theatre auditorium) might be interested in selling. He was Frank Rigby, who carried on a furnishings business called "The Craftsman". There was uncertainty about whether the Green Room would be able to obtain planning permission for change of use, the indication from the local planning authority being unfavourable. (They had concerns about noise).

Mr Roberts of W H Robinson & Co was advising the Green Room. He valued the premises at "only about £2,000". He recommended that the Green Room should play a waiting game, and should anyway not make an offer in excess of this figure, which, he acknowledged, "the owner would certainly not accept at this stage". (July 1962).

The fact that Mr Roberts did not seem to sense any urgency may be explained by the possibility that the Green Room were already occupying part of the Providence Works site (i.e. probably the hut mentioned above). Also, there is reference in the minutes of the Committee meeting held on 17 January 1963 to notice having been given to the Green Room (presumably to vacate the space it was occupying). The notice had (happily!) not conformed to statutory requirements. A fresh, valid, notice would apparently have allowed the Green Room a further six, or possibly twelve, months' occupation.

There was therefore perhaps no need to rush things in July 1962, but the Committee nevertheless decided that the premises should be purchased at a sum not exceeding £2,500. Mr Roberts was accordingly instructed to proceed on that basis "at a time recommended by (him)", subject to satisfactory planning permission being obtained.

This offer related to Providence Works. Mr Roberts also advised that it would be "worthwhile" to buy the cottages at the front. Without them, the Green Room would only have a 3 feet wide right of way as

access to the premises at the rear. He warned, however, that both cottages were subject to controlled tenancies, and it would not be possible to obtain vacant possession of them.

The important meeting of the Committee at which the decision to purchase Providence Works was taken was held on a Sunday (8 July 1962).

The Annual General Meeting would follow soon after. A member of the Committee asked what should be said on the subject at the AGM. The minutes record that "... the Committee's feeling was, as little as possible".

It seems that, although armed with the Green Room authority, Mr Roberts was in no hurry to proceed. No offer had been made by the time of the next Committee meeting (4 September 1962). It was agreed that no further action should be taken "at the present moment". When it emerged that an invalid notice had been served on the Green Room to vacate the space it was occupying, the Committee thought that the time had come to strike. An offer of £2,000 was made (this would probably have been in January or February 1963). It was rejected. Indeed Mr Roberts was told that even an offer of £2,500 would be turned down.

Interest had been maintained in acquiring premises in Chancel Lane, owned by the Parish Church. Canon Reeman told the Committee that a price of £2,000 would be required. The Green Room's long term plan would have been to demolish the existing school buildings, if they could not be satisfactorily converted to meet the Green Room's requirements.

A planning application was, however, refused, the Council having in mind for the site at the time (Spring 1963) the erection of flats. (This never materialised. The site was subsequently used for the new Parish Hall). The Green Room's interest in the Chancel Lane idea nevertheless continued, but the possible acquisition of Harden House, which had also come on the market, was not pursued because the asking price (£9,000) was definitely not right.

The Chancel Lane project was also closed, when, in May 1964, the Ministry of Education, whose consent for the sale was required, indicated that they would not approve a sale at £2,000.

So far as Providence Works was concerned, Mr Rigby confirmed that a bid of £3,500 could well succeed. Unfortunately, the Green Room secretary reported to the Committee meeting on 16 April 1963 that "he believed the valuation to be £1,500 and ... and the building to be unsafe". A fresh valuation was commissioned and came up with a figure of "not more than £1,750". Mr Rigby was duly advised of this. It was generally agreed that the Green Room's top figure should be £2,250. The Press should be approached, "stating the Society's need for premises to rent or buy" (7 May 1963).

Discussions were held with Mr Rigby resulting in a gentleman's agreement that the Green Room "may continue our tenancy on a fortnightly basis at the same rental for as long as is convenient to both parties". This confirms that the Green Room was using the Providence Works site. (August 1963).

When the Committee decided not to pursue the Chancel Lane premises, the focus turned fully upon Chapel Lane. The Green Room was to be instructed to seek a twelve month tenancy of the Providence Works (5 May 1964). (The minutes record that the premises had been offered to the Green Room "on revised terms" but do not state the price then being asked). Soon the pendulum swung back in favour of buying.

The Treasurer advised the Committee meeting held on 11 June 1964 that he thought a figure of £4,500 would be needed for the purchase and necessary renovations. About £1,760 was held in the Building Fund. This had taken five years to accumulate. (It is not known how enthusiastic the fundraising effort

can have been. Ideas that had been considered to increase the Green Room's funds included the investment in Premium Bonds and "football pools". (This was a reference to a scheme which the Green Room would run itself, at a profit, and not a reference to Littlewoods Pools!). In 1962 the Committee discussed applying for a licence to sell tobacco, so that cigarettes, as well as chocolates, could be sold on performance evenings. However, no doubt having regard to recent adverse comments on smoking "the President said that psychologically this was not a good moment to consider selling cigarettes, and the Committee ... decided to leave the matter over"). It had been decided to seek interest free loans from members, and Mrs Savaage (who no doubt had much to do with drumming up this money) reported that she had been promised interest free loans for ten years totalling £2,050.

Consideration was given to acquiring the cottages, which were (wrongly) understood to be available for £500. This was wisely considered to be a worthwhile long-term investment, even if a larger sum was going to have to be paid (£850).

The Committee felt that the Green Room was in a position to proceed with the purchase of Providence Works (and the cottages) and two ladies (who otherwise play no part in this story), Miss Richardson and Mrs Aston, proposed and seconded a resolution to purchase Providence Works for £2,750 or, if necessary, £3,000. This was passed, with two abstentions (un-named) out of sixteen present.

Mrs Savaage handed round slips of paper to members, for them to return to the Treasurer, John Heap, "indicating what they would do in the way of financial help". Another £690 was needed to meet the target of £4,500 to cover the cost of purchase and renovation.

The contracts were signed on 11 August 1964. By then the aggregate price for Providence Works and the cottages had reached £3,850 (£63,000 in today's money). The purchases were completed on 1 October 1964. (Little reference can be found to the acquisition of the cottages. Negotiations for their purchase were presumably conducted by the Green Room's agents, W. H. Robinson & Co).

The properties were vested in John C Heap (a Bank Manager and the Green Room Treasurer), Frank Savaage and Mabel Evans, M.B.E. as Trustees for the Green Room. The current Trustees are Olive Bradbury, Jeremy Cleverley and Ronnie Dykstra.

At its meeting on 5 October 1964, the Committee approved a suggestion that the name of the premises be changed from Providence Works to "The Green Room". (Other names had been considered: Chapel Lane Theatre, the New Theatre, the Emerald Theatre ("because it was a little gem") and the Green House. The resolution to adopt "The Green Room Theatre" was passed by 7 votes to 1 against, with, oddly, 3 abstentions).

Much work would be required on the premises, some of which (e.g. re-wiring) would have to be done professionally, but much would be done by members. The heating system was reported as "virtually unusable". But, at last, the Green Room had a home. It would be 26 years before that home was also a theatre.

The Cottages

If you had told the men building the cottages which were to become 87 and 89 Chapel Lane, Wilmslow, that one of the cottages (No. 87) would one day become part of a theatre, they would probably have thought that you were mad. It would have seemed a highly improbable site for a theatre. It was

surrounded by open fields and well away from St. Bartholomew's Church, which was regarded as the centre of Wilmslow at the time.

The cottages were built at some time between 1858 and 1883. The population of Wilmslow would then have been about 6000 (according to the 1871 Census). The people living in the Chapel Lane area (Fulshaw) numbered less than 400 in 1851. They were mainly involved in agriculture (about one third) but many were handloom weavers. The population was mostly working class and craftsmen (85%), the remaining 15% being middle class (land owners, shopkeepers and teachers).

As the 19th Century progressed more and more people in the Wilmslow area became involved in the expanding textile industry. The 1851 Census showed that 794 worked in cotton, 350 in agriculture and labouring, 268 were farmers (and their relatives), 119 worked in silk, while 285 were in domestic service. One fifth of the population of Wilmslow lived in nine streets in the centre of the village; these streets now have less than one-sixtieth of Wilmslow's population living in them (under 2%).

Wilmslow's importance and prosperity had started to grow with the arrival of the railway from Manchester in 1842. If you owned a house within one mile of Wilmslow or Alderley Edge stations, which was worth at least £50 p.a. letting value, you became entitled to free travel on the railway for 21 years. The number of professional men in the area grew from only 8 in 1851, to 16 in 1861 and to 49 in 1871. The number of Wilmslow's pubs grew, too: 10 in 1851, 16 (probably including the Farmer's Arms) in 1861, and 23 in 1871.

While it is difficult to be precise as to when the cottages were built, the likelihood is that it would have been c. 1860 (see post).

They were built on part of a plot of land containing 836 square yards, which extended from the cottages site to South Oak Lane. This plot was sold by John Bradley to Joseph Cumberbitch on 28 July 1858 for £25. The area of the site of the actual cottages was 226 square yards, including the front and back gardens.

Joseph Cumberbitch was, according to the Conveyance to him in 1858, "a labourer and a Bachelor". He presumably bought the land with a view to building his home on it, and it may perhaps be reasonably assumed that he built the cottages about 1860. He was to live in one of them until his death, when he was still described as a "Laborer" (sic). He left a gross estate of £82.5.0d.

Mike Bullimore, an Architect, who is a member of the Green Room, considers that the style and construction of the cottages are compatible with their having been built around 1860.

The first actual reference in the deeds to a building on the cottages site appears in Joseph Cumberbitch's Will dated 15 December 1883. He bequeathed to his wife, Catherine Louisa (wrongly spelt Catherine Louesa) Cumberbitch a cottage then in the occupation of Edwin Bentley (as tenant). He bequeathed the second cottage (which he occupied) to his son, William Cumberbitch. Joseph died on 16 December 1883, the day after he had signed his Will.

Subsequently (28 June 1884) Catherine bought from William for £85 the cottage left to William by his father's Will. This cottage was then said to be tenanted by Edwin Bentley, who must have moved next door.

Now owning both cottages, Catherine remarried on 11 March 1885. Her second husband was called George Greaves. She and George lived in one cottage while Edwin Bentley continued as tenant in the other.

Almost immediately, on 30 March 1885, Catherine sold the two cottages to James Birtles, continuing to live in "her" cottage as tenant. The price was £180.

The cottages subsequently became vested in John Birtles (James' son) who was a tailor living in Blackpool. He (John) sold them on 28 July 1911 to James Bunning Brooke for £200. By this time, J B Brooke owned land at the rear of the cottages, with access to it from Chapel Lane along the existing driveway running alongside No. 87.

John Birtles agreed with J B Brooke that the purchase price (£200) could be paid over a period of 5 years. This agreement was recorded in manuscript on the back of one of J B Brooke's business invoices. The invoice states his address to be "Shuttle Works, Chapel Lane" and describes his business as "Power Loom Shuttle Manufacturers". (The land at the rear owned by J B Brooke was, of course, the site of what eventually became the Green Room auditorium. As will be seen (post) J B Brooke was described in the deeds as a Professor of Music. This would not seem to have any connection with the manufacture of power loom shuttles. There is some uncertainty here. Could the Green Room premises have started life as the "Shuttle Works, Chapel Lane", mentioned on J B Brooke's invoice?).

John Birtles retained the title deeds as security. He died on 16 February 1912 (leaving a gross estate of £1,379.5.11d) having appointed his son George Birtles as Executor.

The money owing by J B Brooke was not paid, so George Birtles took action against him seeking possession of the cottages. The total owing by J B Brooke was, with some costs, £244.8.2d. That sum was paid by one Henry Glossop to George Birtles on 29 October 1917, and the title to the cottages was transferred directly to Henry Glossop, who was a butcher in Church Street.

Two years later J B Brooke was to sell the premises he owned at the rear of the cottages.

During the period of J B Brooke's ownership it seems that the cottages were in single occupation, the tenants being John Birtles' daughter Fanny and her husband, William Sant, who was a Newsagent with a shop in Church Street. The rent at the time of Henry Glossop's acquisition in 1917 was 6/- per week. This would have produced an income of £15.12.0d (£15.60) p.a. which represents a return on the purchase price he paid of just under 8%.

Henry Glossop did not enjoy this yield for very long as he died, intestate, on 22 October 1920. He left a net estate of £3,635.8.3d, a tidy sum in those days, (equivalent to about £146,000 today).

There was a long delay before the cottages were legally vested in Henry Glossop's son, Harry, who was also a butcher. This was on 24 September 1928. (The delay might have had something to do with problems arising from Henry Glossop not having left a Will). It seems that, by then, the cottages were again in separate occupation.

In 1935 Harry Glossop borrowed £150 on the security of the cottages at an interest rate of 4%. This was repaid in 1943.

The rents from the cottages were collected on behalf of Henry Glossop and subsequently (between 1920 and 1929) on behalf of Harry Glossop, by Charles Austin Bowers, Estate Agent of Bank Chambers, Wilmslow. Thereafter, Harry held the rents upon trust for his mother, Florence Mary Glossop, and Mr Bowers collected them for her.

Harry Glossop sold the cottages on 10 October 1964 to the Green Room. The price paid was £850.

It will have been noted that apart from occupation of one of the cottages by Joseph Cumberbitch and his wife Catherine as owners for a period to March 1885, the cottages have apparently always been tenanted. This continued after the Wilmslow Green Room Society acquired the cottages in 1964 until they became vacant in 1982 (No. 87) and 1987 (No. 89).

There are no former tenants still alive, but one or two people recall having lived at the cottages as children.

One is William ("Bill") Whittaker. He was born in 1920. He went to live at 89 Chapel Lane (which was then numbered 37) when he was 6 or 7 years old (1926/7). The cottage differed slightly from No. 87 (then 35) but both were basically "two up, two down" houses with stone floors. There was a step down from the ground floor front rooms to the kitchen. This area benefitted from (as the Estate Agents would say) a shallow brown sink and a cold tap. Lighting was provided by gas mantles. There was an outside lavatory in the back garden. Water was heated on the kitchen range and baths were taken in a tin bath.

In 1928, Bill's father went off with Emma, the wife of the man next door (at No. 35). Her husband was called Joby Waters. Joby "looked out for Bill", perhaps feeling concerned about Bill's father abandoning his family. Joby was a painter and decorator. He subsequently helped Bill to obtain an apprenticeship when he (Bill) left school at 14. As an apprentice Bill earned 7s 6d (37½p) per week.

Bill's mother, Mary, slept downstairs, as her legs were bad. His brother, Gordon, had the rear bedroom, while Bill and his elder sister, Joyce, shared the front one. The view from this room was very different from what it is now. Buckingham Road did not exist, and Bill would look out onto open fields. Chapel Lane (the main road to Mobberley) was used by horse-drawn carts and occasional cars. (Even the light traffic of those days involved danger.. The taller building adjacent to No. 89, now part of Jones's showroom, was once a sweet shop called Honeybills, (later Dale's Sweet Shop). Mrs Yvonne Honeybill was French. One day her son ran into the road and was struck by a passing car, and killed. The driver of the car was a Captain Reid).

The annual Wilmslow Carnival procession used to go past the cottages on its way from the Carnival Field, down Oak Lane and along Chapel Lane then on to Wilmslow Village. People would stand at their doors to watch and marvel at the floats, which were entered by local businesses.

As a young boy, Bill used to run errands for the confectioner, Mr Chummy Coburn, whose shop was where the Chocolate Whirl came many years later.

When he was 15 (in 1935) Bill's family moved to a house in Moor Lane. By this time he was an apprentice decorator with a firm called Broadhurst's on Hawthorn Street. Four years later he was called up and joined the Navy. He served as an engineer, for a time on the same ship as Prince Philip.

Bill's sister Joyce worked for Greg's, at Styal Mill. She walked to and from work each day. Their mother earned extra money for the family by laying out dead people. In 1935 she laid out some local children who had died from diphtheria. Bill contracted diphtheria at the time, but fortunately survived.

After Bill's family moved out of 89 Chapel Lane, George Hall and his new wife, Lucy, became tenants. They were to live there for over 50 years. George was a porter at Wilmslow Station. He was rather a grumpy chap, as the Green Room would later discover.

Mrs Dorothy ("Dot") Groves was tenant of No. 87 Chapel Lane. She lived there with her son Trevor McBain. Her tenancy probably started about 1939. Trevor's father left his mother, who divorced him and re-married, becoming Mrs Groves. Trevor's father used to keep budgerigars in the greenhouse at the rear of No. 87. After he left, Trevor's mother used it as a conventional greenhouse.

There was a rat problem at No. 87. The family owned a large cat, which Trevor's father would starve for days on end, so as to encourage its appetite for rats. He then released the cat to do its work.

Milk used to be delivered to the cottage by a black man called Tom (black milkmen must have been rare in those days). Mysteriously, the name "Tom" was engraved in the glass of one of the front windows of No. 87. Mrs Groves said she never knew how it got there.

The cottages were acquired by the Green Room on 1 October 1964 for £850. At the same time, the Green Room acquired the premises at the rear. It was, of course, the rear premises which the Green Room really wanted, but great foresight was shown in the acquisition of the cottages as well, for without them it would never have been likely that a theatre could one day be built on the site. Great credit is accordingly due to the Green Room Chairmen in 1964 (Kenneth Frost and John Mark) and the Committees they led.

It was to be many years before the value of the cottages came to be appreciated. The tenants enjoyed security of tenure, the rents could not for many years be increased, and it was said that, over the years, the Green Room spent more on repairs to the cottages than it received in rents. One can sympathise with the Chairman of the Green Room in 1976, Jack Frith, who "... felt that there was very little we could do about these cottages, they were just a liability".

They were certainly not ideal homes. In 1972 the Green Room had argued that No. 89 was not fit to be lived in (no doubt hoping that the Council would have to re-house the tenants). The Council disagreed, saying that essential repairs would only cost £25. The Green Room eventually carried out the repairs "at the lowest possible cost". This turned out to be £195.

According to references in Green Room minutes the tenants were paying 45p (9/- in "old" money) and 42½p (8/6) per week. It is not clear which cottage attracted the slightly higher rent. Trevor McBain thought that his mother paid 10/- (50p) per week, which was approximately right. This figure is also recalled by Peter de la Wyche (former Green Room Treasurer). According to the Green Room accounts, the income from the cottages in the year to May 1978 amounted to £45.78. This rather odd figure equates to 44p for each cottage. It possibly reflected net income after the cost of some repairs had been deducted.

In the 1970's it became possible to apply to the Rent Tribunal to have a fair rent registered. Application was accordingly made for this, and the Tribunal ruled in 1981 that each tenant should pay £4.75, an increase of over ten times. This decision was met with great indignation by Mr Hall, whose grumpiness reached new heights. He might have been slightly mollified to learn that the law allowed the Green Room to collect only one half of the increase immediately (November 1981) and the full increase a year later.

The rents were collected by a Green Room member, Flo Moores, a task no doubt calling for courage and tact!

Mrs Groves vacated No. 87 on 22 May 1982 and died shortly after that date.

Mr and Mrs Hall were re-housed by the Council in September 1987, having lived at No. 89 Chapel Lane for 52 years. They were reluctant to leave their home, despite its lack of an internal toilet and its narrow staircase, which poor Mrs Hall, who was seriously overweight, could ascend only with the greatest difficulty.

No. 87 was retained by the Green Room and now forms part of the theatre buildings. No. 89 was sold to S. C. & P. Jones in January 1988 and now forms part of their bathroom showroom.

The Theatre Buildings

The site of what is now the theatre auditorium was bought by James Bunning Brooke from John Birtles in three tranches: a plot containing $267\frac{1}{3}$ square yards, which J B Brooke bought for £25 in 1905; an adjacent plot containing $48\frac{1}{3}$ square yards (£7.5.0d) in 1908; and $34\frac{2}{3}$ square yards (the passageway from Chapel Lane leading to the first two plots) (£5.5.0d) in 1910. Those plots had, prior to John Birtles' acquisition, belonged to John's father, James Birtles, who had died on 26 May 1900.

J B Brooke mortgaged the site in 1911 to secure a loan of £165, made to him by a Stockport Pawnbroker, Janes Hampson Stansfield. By this time there was a "messuage" erected on the land. This term usually meant a dwelling, but it must simply have referred to the building J B Brooke had erected or was in course of erecting, because there is no evidence of a house being there. The interest rate payable by him on the loan was 10% per annum.

It can therefore safely be said that the building was erected between August 1908 (when J B Brooke acquired the second plot) and 1911. He could have started before acquiring the passageway because he had enjoyed a right of way over this to gain access to his first two plots "with barrows or other vehicles".

For what purpose was it built? The clue might lie in the fact that J B Brooke was described in the deeds as a Professor of Music. There was great interest in dancing at that time. The floor of the building was made from maple, which would have been suitable for dancing. A former Wilmslow resident, the late Lucy Woodcock, who lived from 1923 at 69 South Oak Lane, recalled having been told by her mother, Mrs Worth, and her Aunt, Elizabeth Worth, that they had attended dances at the building in Chapel Lane during, and just after, World War One. Those dances used to be called "tuppenny hops". They danced to piano music, Lucy's Uncle, Leonard Worth, occasionally playing the piano.

A sketch prepared by J B Brooke (unfortunately undated) shows the layout of the building. It included a "Ladies Cloak Room" and a "Men's Cloak Room". The term "Cloak Room" would surely not have appeared in the plan of a factory, so the sketch is compatible with a dance establishment. It does, however, also refer to a "Preparation Room", and one wonders what this might have been used for. Many years later it became the Green Room's kitchen. We have already noted J B Brooke's business as "Power Loom Shuttle Manufacturers" and the possibility that "Shuttle Works" could have referred to what is now part of the Green Room's premises, but there is no reason to doubt Lucy Woodcock's clear recollection.

J B Brooke owned the site until 1919. On 1st September he sold it to Frank Collier, a Shirt Manufacturer. He had not reduced the mortgage sum he had borrowed, but had cleared all the interest due. The purchase price paid by Frank Collier was £290, £165 of which was paid to J H Stansfield to redeem the mortgage. The sale included the three plots of land "Together with the messuage buildings and other erections erected on the said plots of land ...".

J B Brooke cannot have made much money out of his transactions. He paid a total of £37.10.0d for the land, presumably met the cost of putting up the building, paid interest on the mortgage of around £140 over 8 years, and recouped only £290. Perhaps his dancing operations were more successful, even at tuppence a go.

Frank Collier converted the premises into what was to be called The Long Dura Factory. He carried on business there making shirts until he transferred the premises to the family company, Edward Collier & Son (Manchester) Limited, on 23rd December 1930. The Company paid Frank £500. It was soon to sell the premises in 1931 – at a slight loss. This perhaps reflected the difficult economic situation at the time.

The premises were next to be used for a very different purpose. They were bought by Charles Herbert Grimshaw and Arnold Grimshaw of Providence Works, Tame Street, Guide Bridge, who carried on business there as Veterinary Chemists. They acquired The Long Dura Factory for £475 on 15 October 1931. At some point during their ownership (which ran from 1931 until 1948) they changed the name of the premises to Providence Works. They used to mix their veterinary products for horses and other animals on the (precious!) floor, using shovels. The product they made was known as "Uritica". This product was sold by Bourne's in Grove Street, Wilmslow, for many years. This was a fascinating shop. Much of its merchandise was sold from sacks packed around its straw-covered floor. Sadly, it closed many years ago. The Grimshaws also produced a medicine for humans. Perhaps it was the same as one of their veterinary products, with a change of label!

Frank Rigby of 19 Hall Road, Wilmslow, a House Furnisher, bought Providence Works from the Grimshaws on 12 March 1948 for £2,350. Frank Rigby had a shop in Rex Buildings called "The Craftsman", where he sold household furnishings. He used Providence Works for repairing and upholstering chairs and settees. Stuart Burns, who now lives in South Oak Lane, used to work for Downes (who ran the Buckingham Road premises now owned by S C & P Jones) and he did some of the furniture repair work, either at Downes' premises, or at Providence Works.

The premises were acquired by the Green Room (at the same time as the cottages 87 and 89 Chapel Lane) on 1 October 1964. £3,000 was paid plus £850 for the cottages.

In 1968 the Green Room bought from the owner of 5 South Oak Lane, Nora Winifred Linn, the portion of her garden which was adjacent to the rear of the Green Room's premises. The price paid was £150 and the purchase was completed on 31 December 1968. Great foresight was shown here (although this might not have been appreciated at the time!) because, many years later, the theatre auditorium was to be extended onto part of this land. This development was challenged by James Victor Bradley of 7 South Oak Lane, who had sold No. 5 to Mrs Linn. He had imposed a covenant upon her, which should have prevented any building being erected on any part of her garden. Unfortunately for Mr Bradley, this covenant was not registered at the Land Registry and so was unenforceable against the Green Room.

The Theatre Dream Comes True

The Green Room's premises in Chapel Lane were mainly used for rehearsals, wardrobe, storage and meetings. The need for the Green Room to have its own theatre was constantly on the agenda, but the focus was usually on places other than the Green Room's own premises. These were not exactly luxurious. The kitchen (located in part of what is now the wing area) was somewhat cramped and primitive. A ladder was used to gain access to the roof space above it, which was used for storage. A mezzanine floor was later constructed over part of the auditorium. This accommodated the ever expanding Wardrobe Department. It called for frequent trips up and down stairs, and no doubt contributed to the fitness of the Wardrobe ladies!

The main difficulty about developing Chapel Lane was that the cottages were occupied. Without being able to use the cottages, the Green Room faced access and space problems. Nevertheless, in 1973 enquiries were made of the Planning Officer, about developing the premises "on the lines of a small club theatre". The Planning Officer's opinion was that "... there is little chance of permission ... being granted and there would most certainly be objection from the Police and Fire Officers". Another obstacle was the location of the premises in what was considered to be "a housing environment".

Various other possibilities were explored.

In 1972 it emerged that Mr Harry Greg (one of the last survivors of the Greg family of Quarry Bank Mill fame) might be interested in selling Styal Village Hall (where Styal Players performed their plays). He was said to be anxious that the Hall should continue to be used for theatrical productions. The Green Room commissioned a survey on the Hall by D C Goodenough & Co. It was not too promising: "...considerable evidence of settlement of the main brick structure ... weakness of the foundations ... evidence of penetrating damp ... The existing boiler does not inspire confidence ... the gas supply pipe could be dangerous ... " and so on.

Goodenoughs, no doubt aware that Green Room members were made of stern stuff and would not be easily put off concluded that "we feel the idea to be a good proposition, subject to ... a long lease being available at a rent the Society can comfortably afford".

This was to be the problem. Mr Greg was only willing to grant a five year lease (the Green Room wanted 20 years, to give some security). Further, Mr Greg would not have agreed to there being a bar on the premises. This would have competed with the Ship Inn next door, which he also owned. Car parking could have been a problem; the bowling green adjacent to the Village Hall was to be converted into a car park for patrons of the pub, not the Hall.

The Styal project was accordingly not pursued at that time. The Green Room was however soon to have a connection with Styal. When Styal Players had to close (their continued use of the Village Hall for plays no longer being permitted by the Local Authority, because of the Hall's condition) several members of Styal Players joined the Green Room in 1977. Pat Barrow, Ronnie Dykstra, Mike Fairley, Angela Lynham and Alan Robinson of Styal Players were immediately co-opted to join Green Room committees.

Although the Committee was still looking round for suitable theatre premises, the Green Room, in the mid-seventies, seems to have had considerable financial worries. It was reported at a Committee meeting on 8 June 1976 that there was only £99 in current accounts, and rates of £55 were due for payment. The loss on the year just ended had been £141. "Mr Chapman raised the question of why we were existing at all and should we re-think our reason for existing. Mr Seddon asked if we could still survive financially next year ... " (The Green Room did, of course, survive. Two years later there was a surplus of income over expenditure of 70p!).

Undaunted, the Committee later that year (1976) considered buying Lindow School (Knutsford Road), for which the Education Authority were asking £35,000. It was subsequently sold elsewhere.

Then, in 1979, attention turned again to Styal Village Hall, which had still not been sold. Goodenoughs had another look at it. By now the Hall was very neglected and would require a considerable sum spending on it to make it weather-proof and habitable. Goodenoughs valued the Hall at £15,000.

It was hoped that financial assistance might be forthcoming from the Evans Trust. This had been set up following the terms of the Wills of Harry and Mabel Evans. She had been a leading member of the Green Room for many years. She left a legacy which, it was hoped, would provide a theatre for Wilmslow. Unfortunately the Evans money was generous but insufficient to meet the cost of a theatre, so the Trust's objectives were to assist the promotion of the Arts in the Wilmslow area.

Funds would not, however, be available to assist the Green Room in buying Styal Village Hall. It had been decided that the Evans money would primarily be directed towards contributing to the cost of building Wilmslow Leisure Centre, which would offer dual use: sporting facilities and a theatre.

The Green Room had some discussions with Alderley & Wilmslow Amateur Operatic Society regarding a possible amalgamation and joint purchase of Styal Village Hall, but the Operatic Society were perhaps

understandably more interested in the facilities which the Leisure Centre might offer, and the discussion petered out.

By now the price being asked for the Hall was £17,850. It was eventually sold for conversions into offices.

The possibility of a Styal venue for the Green Room arose again. Part of Quarry Bank Mill was considered for conversion to a theatre. This was not pursued, but it was thought that part of Oakfield Farm (which was being developed for sports use) might be extended to include a small theatre. After some discussions with the Sports Club Secretary, Jim Barrow (Pat's husband) it emerged that theatre use would not be feasible.

Later in 1979 (a busy year for the Green Room Committee) attention turned to the possible conversion of the Assembly Rooms, Alderley Edge, into a theatre. This was thought to be a better proposition than using the proposed Wilmslow Leisure Centre. It was hoped (in vain!) that Evans money could be diverted to the cost of converting the Assembly Rooms. This would have amounted to £250,000.

In March 1981 the Public Hall in Wilmslow was closed. The sale by the Council of this building was expected to produce £100,000. It was suggested that this money be spent on the Assembly Rooms. This suggestion did not impress the Council, which was concentrating on Phase 2 of the Leisure Centre (sports hall/theatre) which opened in February 1983. In theatre mode it could accommodate an audience of 528.

The Evans Trustees invested £100,000 in Phase 2 (Phase 1 was the swimming pool). This money was mostly spent on seating and lighting.

By 1982, unsurprisingly, any ideas of developing the Assembly Rooms had been abandoned. The Green Room therefore turned to the new Leisure Centre (now known as the Evans Theatre). Its first production there was of Toad of Toad Hall in December 1984.

The cost of using the Evans Theatre was eye-watering. Weekly hire costs started at £950 in 1984/5, rising to £1,050 in 1987/8. Every play presented there lost money, ranging from the relatively successful Bedroom Farce, which lost £360, to the relatively disastrous Sleeping Beauty, which lost a whopping £1,487.

The Green Room was kept afloat by the profitable Gawsworth productions, and grants from the Evans Trustees, who no doubt felt that, having helped to create the Evans Theatre, they ought to help those brave enough to use it.

The cost of using the Evans Theatre, and doubts concerning its suitability for the production of plays (as opposed to 5-a-side football!) acted as a spur to the efforts to create the Green Room's own theatre.

At a Committee meeting held on 27 February 1985 it was decided "to investigate the possibility of having a theatre of our own at the Chapel Lane premises". This was going to need a change of heart on the part of the Planning Officer, who had advised a Green Room member, Ken Sawyer, "that the chances of change of use to a Club Theatre would be remote, as car parking facilities (none) had to be in accordance with planning guidelines, which would have required 16 spaces".

At the Annual General Meeting in July 1985 the Chairman, Peter Janes, presented plans for the conversion of the Chapel Lane premises into a theatre. (By this time, vacant possession had been obtained of No. 87 Chapel Lane, which had been vacated by Mrs Groves in May 1982. No. 89 was still occupied by Mr and Mrs Hall. They were eventually re-housed in 1987). The plans for conversion had been prepared by a member of the Green Room, who was an Architect, Barrie Wood. They involved the

use of No. 87 as the entrance foyer, a new building linking the rear of this cottage with the existing building at the back, which would provide the auditorium, seating 70 people, and the stage. Barrie's proposal for seating had 7 rows of 10 seats, the rear three rows being raised, the fourth row being at floor level, and the front three rows being below floor level, there being sufficient space underneath the floor to allow for this. This would have provided satisfactory sight lines. The stage would have a conventional proscenium arch.

Barrie's plans also provided for the link building to have windows in zig-zag formation beside the passageway. This feature was externally attractive, but wasteful of precious internal space, and the wall in question was later (2001) to be demolished and replaced by a straight wall.

A resolution to proceed with these plans was proposed by David Reynolds, seconded by Sheila Hine, and passed unanimously. David said "the only way the Society can go forward is to have its own theatre" and Sheila "we must have the courage of our convictions".

The total building cost was estimated at the time at £35,000.

The Green Room's planning application came before the local planning committee on 25 September 1985. (It had been decided to go ahead with this application, even though the Green Room could not afford to proceed at that time. The permission, when granted, would remain "live" for five years and that should allow enough time for the necessary fundraising).

Barrie Wood had had discussions about the project with the Planning Officers, who were "quite encouraging". A theatre was generally thought to be "a good thing". No further mention was made of car parking guidelines. Members were confident that permission would be granted.

(An internal note by someone in the Planning Department recorded that this was "a very interesting proposal. In principle this is the sort of proposal we would want to encourage, but is this the right location?" Wilmslow Trust wrote on 25 July 1985 describing the proposals as "interesting and worthwhile, albeit with problems. We are concerned that there is no provision for parking").

The Green Room had circulated neighbours in Chapel Lane, Buckingham Road, Oak Lane and South Oak Lane, with details of the plans. An encouraging response was received, except from Mr Bradley (mentioned earlier), whose garden abuts the rear of the Green Room's premises. On 25 July 1985 he sent the one objection to the planning application, claiming that a theatre "would cause noise and parking problems".

It therefore came as a shock to the Green Room members attending the Planning Committee meeting to find that most Councillors on the Committee were opposed to the application. Their hostility might have been influenced by a campaign run by one of their number, Councillor Thompson. He had accused the Green Room of being heartless landlords by putting an elderly couple (the Halls) under appalling stress and fear for their home (89 Chapel Lane) due to the Green Room's development plans. This charge was emblazoned in the local paper in an article which must have stoked anti-Green Room sentiment. The Green Room chairman, Peter Janes, was obliged to write to the paper to refute the ludicrous allegations that had been made.

The plans had, in fact, been carefully explained to Mr and Mrs Hall long before they were made public. The Halls were given repeated assurances that they were secure in their home. In any case, there was no way that, as protected tenants, they could be evicted. Further, the Green Room's plans did not require possession of No. 89.

The proposals were described at the planning meeting as being "insensitive" so far as they affected the Halls. This was a somewhat surprising complaint, for the Green Room had also applied for permission to extend the Hall's home by breaking through the upstairs wall into No. 87 and installing a bathroom and toilet there for their use. (They thought about the luxury of having an internal toilet, but eventually decided that this would be unhygienic!).

Councillors also were very concerned – or said they were – about the lack of car parking arrangements. (This was admittedly a difficult area. To try to meet this anticipated objection, discussions were held with the Council with a view to parking being offered to patrons at the Remenham Council Car Park (in Chapel Lane, but about 300 yards away). It is unlikely that patrons would have found this solution to be satisfactory!).

The Councillors were on the verge of rejecting the application (to the dismay and disbelief of the Green Room members present), when Councillor John Talbot spoke up. He told the Committee that he was not familiar with the site, and would like to inspect it before coming to a decision. One by one, most of the Councillors present admitted, somewhat shame-facedly, that they had no knowledge of the site, either. A site inspection was therefore proposed, and the meeting was adjourned.

The inspection took place on 8 October 1985. In the meantime Green Room members carried out research on car parking numbers in the vicinity. Counts were made on 18 occasions after 30 September of cars in areas likely to be used in connection with the theatre. The average number of cars in these areas (Chapel Lane, Lindow Parade, Buckingham Road) during daytime was 24.8, evenings 16.8. Of the latter figure, cars belonging to people not attending the theatre averaged 5.8. i.e. the theatre attracted an average of 11 cars during evenings, and a further 8 cars could be accommodated to bring evening usage up to daytime usage.

Encouraged by what they saw, and fortified by tea and biscuits, the Councillors began to understand the potential of the proposed development. They also grasped that theatre usage would not attract daytime parking in competition with Chapel Lane shoppers. Their car parking worries were eased, and planning permission was granted on 21 November 1985. (A condition was imposed restricting the Green Room to 12 performances each year. After several trouble free seasons of performances at the theatre, this needless restriction was duly removed).

Fundraising gradually got under way.

It was starting from a modest base. As at May 1985, apart from the value of its land and buildings, the Green Room's assets comprised £1,057 in current account and £3,376 in a National Savings account. A year later these monies had only increased by £300.

A Theatre Building Fund was started in 1986, and by the end of the next season (1986/7) it contained £9,701. Things were gaining momentum, but it was not until February 1988 that fundraising really took off.

An appeal was launched that month, directed at local businesses. This featured a brochure, entitled "Theatre Project '88", setting out the Green Room's plans, an architect's drawing, Deed of Covenant form and (importantly) a message of support from Ken Dodd, whose fiancée, Ann Jones, had been both a Bluebell Girl and a member of Styal Players.

This brochure was sent to 237 firms mostly, but not all, based in the Wilmslow area. There was about a 10% response, which apparently was slightly above average for this sort of appeal. The names of companies and individuals who contributed appeared in a Roll of Honour which was displayed at the

theatre. Those include some who contributed in kind: Charnleys the Chemists, who provided First Aid equipment; Hoopers, who provided the original curtains for the Link Building; and Manley Wright of Chapel Lane, who framed the Roll of Honour.

A seat sponsorship scheme was introduced, whereby seats in the new theatre could be sponsored for £50 each (this raised £1,200). Members were invited to sign Deeds of Covenant. A "100" Club was started (by March 1990 it only had 60 members, but subsequently the 100 member target was reached. The 100 Club continues to flourish). Many fundraising events took place including jumble sales, fashion shows, a highly successful street collection in May 1989 which produced £536, a sponsored swim by Sheila Hine, and raffling off champagne bottles at Gawsworth during the production there in 1987. A

"Shakespearathon" (a 24-hour al-fresco reading of Shakespeare's plays) took place on the 5/6 June 1987, raising over £1,000 (around 70 members took part, supplemented by the Parliamentary candidates for the Tatton Constituency; the event taking place shortly before a General Election. The Conservative candidate, Neil Hamilton, and Bill Roache of Coronation Street – a former Green Room member – read a scene from Taming of the Shrew). A similar "Ayckbournathon" raised £1,266 in 1991.

The largest sources of capital came from an interest free loan by Macclesfield Borough Council of £10,000, a grant by the Evans Trustees of £9,000, and the proceeds of sale of No. 89 Chapel Lane to S C & P Jones (£27,000).

By 1987 the projected total cost of building works and fitting out the new theatre had risen to c.£100,000. This would be equivalent to £230,000 in 2012. Reasons for the increased costs included the need for repair work to the rear wall, extra wardrobe space and, of course, inflation.

As late as May 1987, the Committee decided to investigate a proposal for a theatre at the Union Club in Alderley Edge. After brief, but detailed, consideration it was decided to stay with the Wilmslow plans.

In January 1988 No. 89 Chapel Lane was sold to Jones's. They wanted to extend their bathroom showroom. The Green Room's plans did not incorporate that cottage (although the rear garden would be required) so a sale made sense. This, together with the proceeds of sale of some fittings from No. 87, yielded £27,077.

The Green Room Treasurer at the time, Peter de la Wyche, reported to the 1988 AGM that the Green Room had available finance of £65,000, and this would be sufficient to commit to a start on building works.

The works went out to tender in February 1989. It was recognised that the Green Room could not afford all the necessary work and much, including some site preparation, would have to be done by members.

Eight tenders were invited. Four responded:

E. Henshall (Wilmslow) Ltd	£38,626
E. Higginson	£41,945
Macclesfield Joinery	£42,799
Hockley Construction	£78,652

Henshall's tender was accepted. The Building Contract was signed on 29 March 1989. This covered the construction of the Link Building, including toilets and bar, and new front access. (The toilets would be

located near where the Halls' outside toilet had been, so the existing pipes proved convenient). Henshall's started work on 15 May 1989.

Much preparatory work was done by members, for whom a new theatre was an inspiring target.

As fundraising continued, the decision was made that Henshall's contract should be extended to the provision of a rear extension to the existing building to provide additional stage space, to construct extra wardrobe space including a 2-storey extension to the (then) existing kitchen and toilets. This would create dressing rooms at ground level and storage space above. The old kitchen and toilets were to be converted to form wing space.

These extra operations called for extensive site clearance, involving some demolition work and dramatic bonfires, which members carried out with much enthusiasm.

During the autumn of 1989 and into 1990 there were two teams of members working each Saturday and two teams on Sundays. Some 55 members were involved, working under the direction of Robin Watkinson.

The completion date specified in Henshall's contract had been 15 September 1989. This was extended to allow for the extra works, which were completed in February 1990.

Henshall's final account totalled £75,833.50.

The theatre opened on 2 May 1990 with a Gala Performance of "Charley's Aunt".

However, there was more work to do. After the building work had been completed, there was a considerable amount of interior work, especially painting, required. This was done by members, but also by Community Service workers, who joined weekend working parties. It was recorded that the liaison between the Green Room and the Probation Service had been most successful.

In 1995 the wardrobe area was further extended and the storage shed was erected. This work was carried out by a company called Carmont Construction at a cost of £17,360 plus £3,950 for the shed.

Then in 2001 Mike Bullimore designed and supervised work carried out by Wavecourt Ltd involving the construction of the canopy over the passageway, straightening the bar area wall (i.e. removing the "zig-zag"), relaying the forecourt and installing bollards, bricking up the window on the passageway side of the auditorium, and inserting a new exterior door to the dressing rooms. The contract price for these works was £21,420.

Later, the remaining window in the auditorium (on Jones's side) was bricked up.

The theatre has now been operating successfully for 22 years. Plays make profits and the Green Room's finances are strong.

The theatre was created thanks to the foresight and efforts of members in the past, and it is now the duty of members to protect the theatre so that it continues to thrive.

Perhaps they have in mind further developments ... ? The story may not yet be complete!

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to the following, who helped by providing information and checking facts:

Jim & Pat Barrow, Jacque Bilsborough, Mike Bullimore, Stuart Burns, Jeremy Cleverley, Peter de la Wyche, Peter Janes, Trevor McBain, Sue & Alan Offer, Bill Whittaker, Bruce Williams, Lucy Woodcock and the excellent Green Room website (thanks, Charlie Cook!)

Thanks also go to Lindsey Barker for typing everything out from my often wayward manuscript

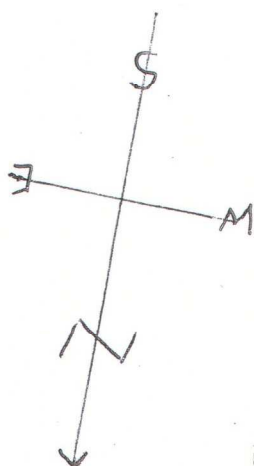
Any mistakes are mine

Ronnie Dykstra

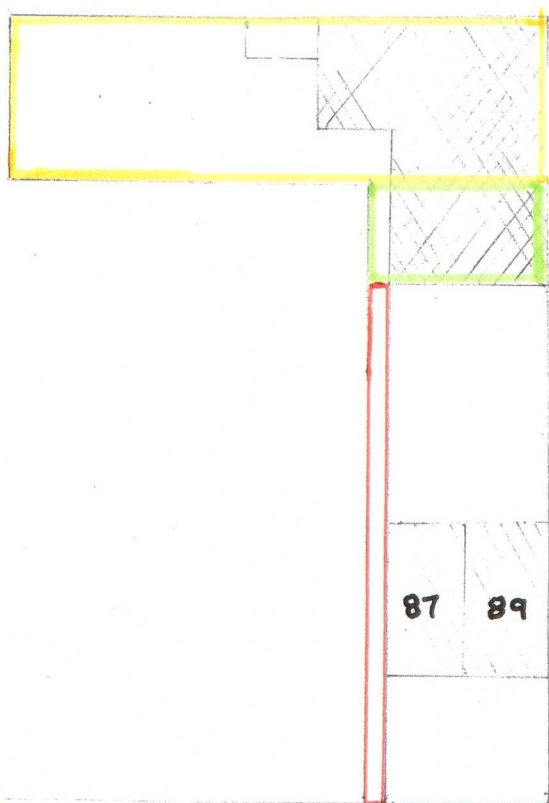
July 2012

Appendices

1. Plan showing J B Brooke's acquisition 1905 – 1910
2. J B Brooke's plan of the premises, probably about 1910
3. Site layout plan in the 1920's
4. Photo of Mary Whittaker and her friend Maude Allmark outside 89 (then 37) Chapel Lane in the 1920's
5. Layout plan of proposed new theatre prepared by Barrie Wood, 1985
6. Section drawing prepared by him, 1985
7. Lists of working party teams - 1989/1990
8. List of street collectors - 20 May 1989
9. List of main donors
10. List of guests invited to opening Gala Performance in new theatre – 2 May 1990
11. Photographs

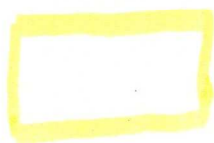


J.B. Brooke's acquisition
1905 - 1910



CHAPEL LANE

Scale 30' to 1 inch



Acquired by James Bunning Brooke 1 September 1905
For £25

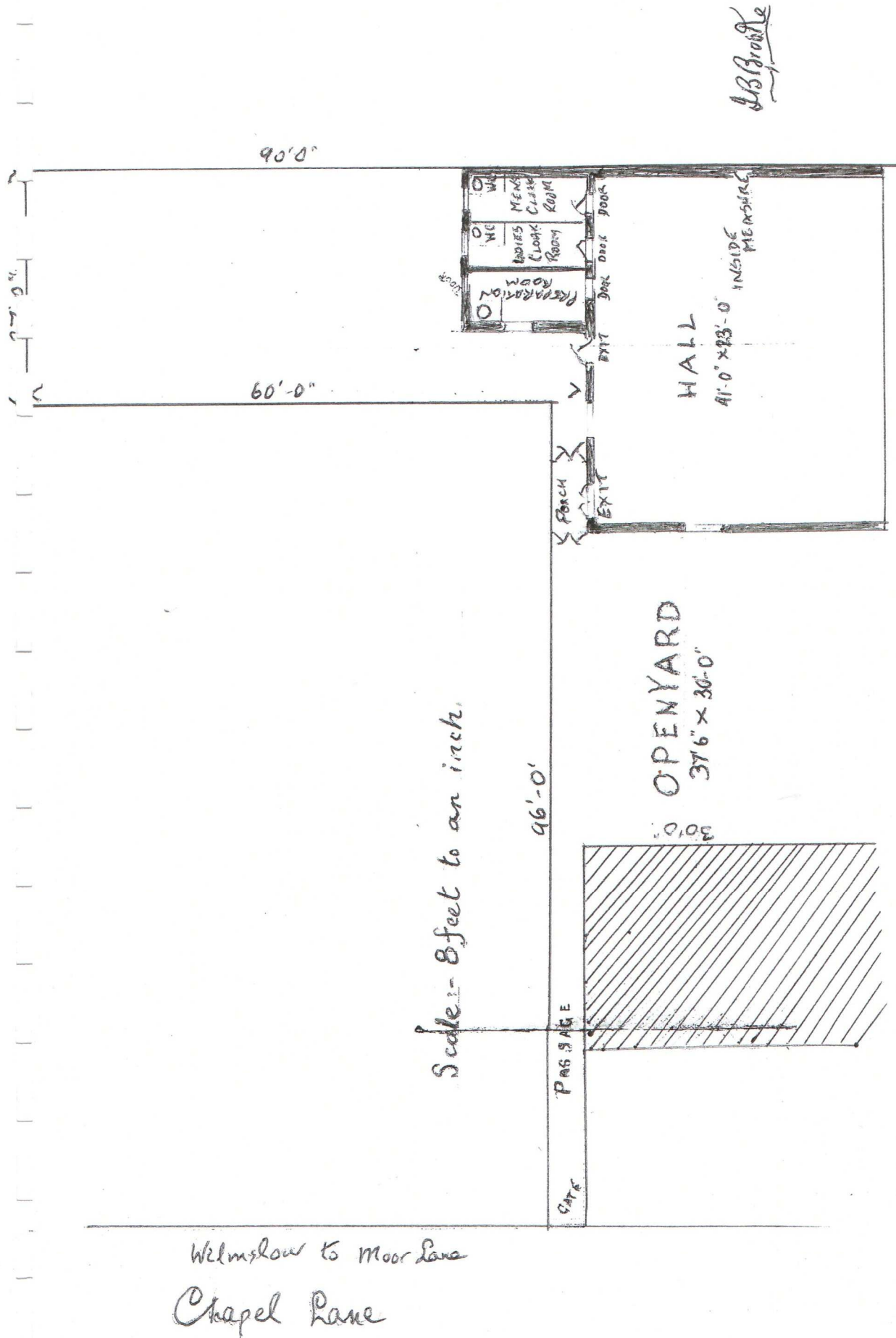


Acquired by JBB 25 August 1908 for £7.5.0d.



Acquired by JBB 4 December 1910 for £5.5.0d.

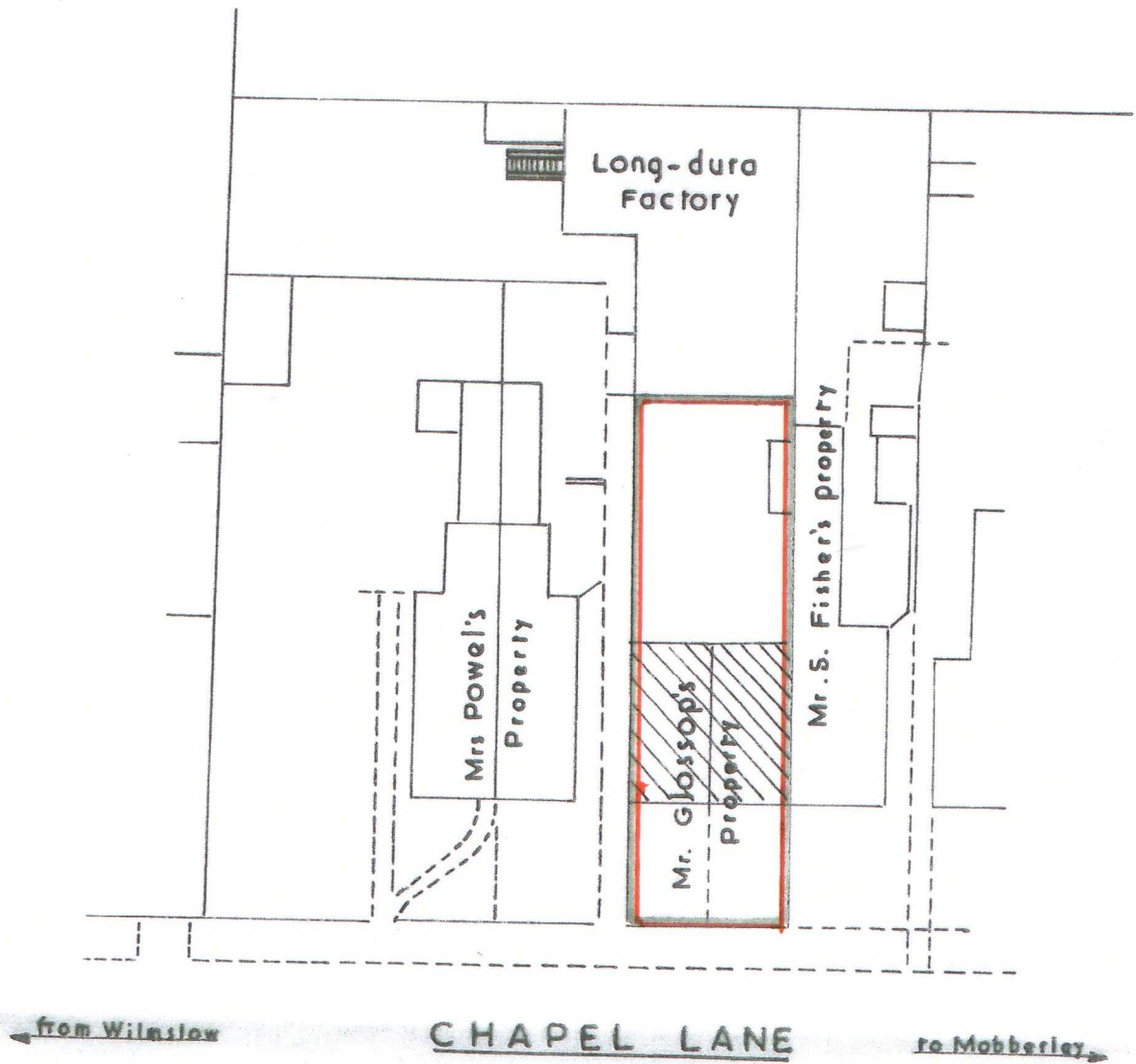
Site of Long-dura Factory (? built 1910/11)
All sold to Frank Collier, shirt maker, 1 September 1919 for £290



Copy (reduced) of J.B. Brooke's plan of the premises, probably about 1910.

PLAN REFERRED TO.

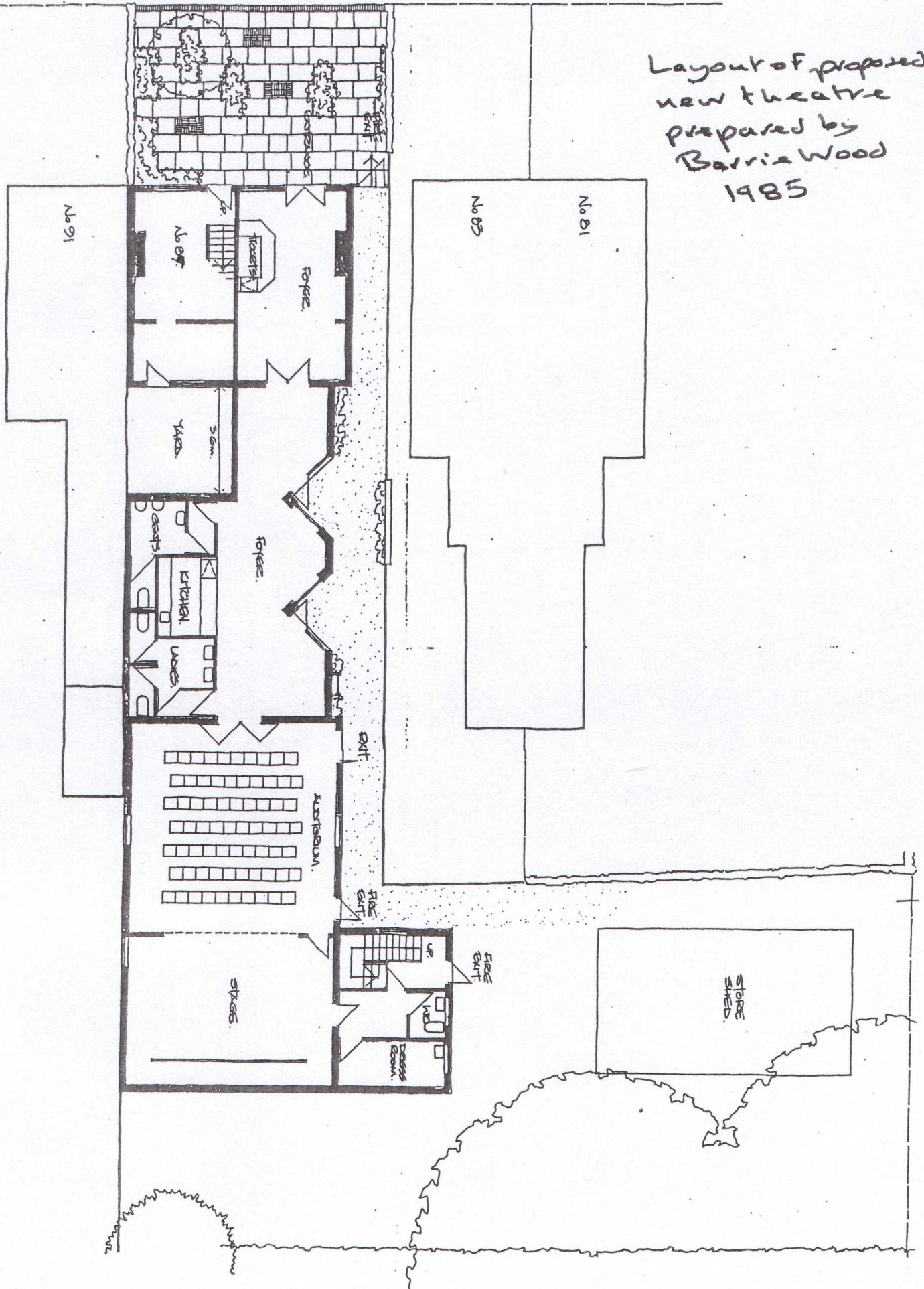
Site layout of the cottages
in the 1920's.

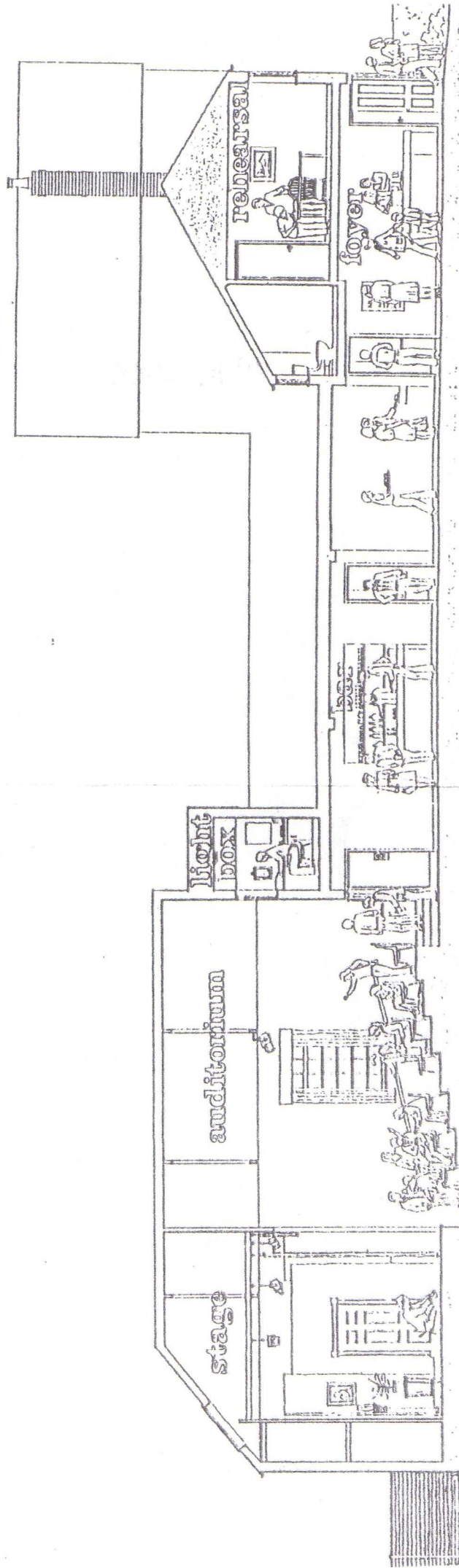


SCALE: 30'-0" = 1 INCH.



Layout of proposed
new theatre
prepared by
Barrie Wood
1985





Wilmslow Green Room Theatre

Section of drawing of proposed
new theatre prepared by
Barrie Wood
1985

The Wilmslow Green Room Society

PRESIDENT — MRS F. SAVAAGE

CHAIRMAN — VICTOR HASSAN

Affiliated to the British Theatre Association

Greater Manchester Drama Federation

Reg. Charity No. 506041

WORKING PARTY TEAMS

Team 1 - Saturday am

Christina Howarth (527591)
Eric Smith
Fred Donnan
Pat Barrow
John Foreman
Al Fowkes
Mike James
David Reynolds
Caroline Melliar-Smith
Bernard Wallis
Olive Bradbury
Sheila Hine
Edmund Hine

Team 2 - Saturday pm

Ronnie Dykstra (525856)
Sonia Dykstra
Mavis Carlisle
Jeremy Cleveley
Caroline Schofield
Mike Waterhouse
Pat Barrett
Val Fentem
Dilys Slater
Peter de la Wyche
Helen Chadwick
Sheila Chatburn
Louise Hamilton-Welsh
Doreen Johnson

Team 3 - Sunday am

Victor Hassan (061 434 4500)
Jacque Bilsborough
Cherrill Wyche
Peter Wyche
Graham Boswell
Gill Burrows
Sue Lee
Adele Taylor
Geoff Martyn
John Smith
Margaret Savaage
Debbie Irving
Margaret Seddon
Barbara Loughton

Team 4 - Sunday pm

Trevor Jones (535688)
Clare McGlashan
Barrie Wood
Sue Wood
Gordon Bennett
Sue Offer
Julian Rawel
Andrew Long
Sheila Tighe
Clive Williams
Bill Mitchell
Kathryn Ryan
Eileen Volp
David Eady

*N.B. These Teams worked at weekends from
November 1989 into 1990*

THE WILMSLOW GREEN ROOM SOCIETY

Re Macclesfield Borough Council Street Collection Regulations

STREET COLLECTION ON 20 MAY 1989

List of Collectors

Patrick Barrett
Pat Barrow
Diana Boswell
Graham Boswell
Darren Castellani
Peter de la Wyche
Fred Donnan
Ronnie Dykstra
Sonia Dykstra
Val Fentem
John Foreman
Victor Hassan
Michael Janes
Andrew Long
Clare McGlashan
Caroline Melliar-Smith
Kathryn Ryan
Peter Simpson
Adele Taylor
Sylvia Turner
Clive Williams
Cherrill Wyche

Also assisted : Jacque Bilborough, Sheila Hine and Margaret Savaage

THE WILMSLOW GREEN ROOM SOCIETY

The construction of this theatre was completed in April 1990.

Builder	-	E. Henshall (Wilmslow) Limited
Architect	-	Barrie Wood
Quantity Surveyors	-	Poole Dick Associates
Stage Lighting Installation *	-	Lee Colortran International

* - Kindly donated by Evans Arts Trust

The Society gratefully acknowledges the generous contributions made by the following to the building of this theatre:

ADDLESHAW SONS & LATHAM
 ADIE WILLIAMS & CO
 BANK OF SCOTLAND
 BARCLAYS BANK PLC
 THE BELFRY HOTEL
 BODDINGTONS' BREWERIES LIMITED
 BRITISH SYPHON INDUSTRIES PLC
 CHARLES CHARNLEY LIMITED
 JOSEPH CROSSLEY & SONS
 DEANPRINT LIMITED
 MRS. M. DICKSON
 DICO FURNITURE LIMITED
 JOHN ECCLES
 EMERSON DEVELOPMENTS (HOLDINGS) LTD
 EVANS ARTS TRUST
 GIBSONS GARAGE
 F. GRANGE & SON LTD
 HILSON WIRE PRODUCTS LIMITED
 J.B. HODGSON
 HOOPERS OF WILMSLOW LIMITED
 IMPERIAL CHEMICAL INDUSTRIES PLC

J.P.D. ASSOCIATES LTD
 ALAN LANG
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 MANLEY WRIGHT & CO. LIMITED
 JOHN MARK
 MIDLAND BANK PLC
 NEIL E. MYERSON
 NATIONAL WESTMINSTER BANK PLC
 PJP TRADING LIMITED
 REFUGE ASSURANCE PLC
 FREDERIC ROBINSON LIMITED
 THE ROYAL BANK OF SCOTLAND PLC
 ARTHUR ROYLE LIMITED
 MRS. N. SLACK
 W.W. STANSBY & SONS LIMITED
 STUART PHARMACEUTICALS LIMITED
 JOHN R.N. TRAVIS
 UMBRO INTERNATIONAL LIMITED
 HAROLD WALKER (MOTRAX)
 WHITECROFT PLC

THE WILMSLOW GREEN ROOM SOCIETY

List of Guests invited to the opening Gala Performance of Charley's Aunt on 2 May 1990

Representatives of Royal Bank of Scotland (sponsors)
Mr. Brian Longdon (Chief Executive, Macclesfield Borough Council)
Mr. John Blackburn (Greater Manchester Drama Federation)
Miss Liz Blatt (ditto)
Mr. George Davies (Evans Trust)
Mr. R.S. Lloyd (ditto)
Councillor Cyril Allen (ditto)
Councillor Jack Thompson (ditto)
Mrs. Hilary Broomhead (Royles, Alderley Edge)
Mr. Tulk (Hoopers)
Mr. & Mrs Barrie Wood
Mr. John Hulme (JPD Associates)
Mrs June Janes
Mr. Victor Hassan
Mr. Robin Whyte (Bank of Scotland)
Mr. & Mrs . Frank Savaage
Mr. & Mrs. Edmund Hine
Mr. & Mrs . Ronnie Dykstra
Mr. Nigel Burrows
Miss Adele Taylor
Mr. & Mrs. Eric Johnson
Mrs. Diana Boswell
Mr. Jeremy Cleverley
Mrs. Iris Abbott
Mr. Kenneth Frost
Miss Corinne Hill (Greater Manchester Radio)
Mr. David Wilson
Mr. Ian Booth (Henshalls, Builders)
Mr. & Mrs. Anthony Riley (A. & W. A. O. S.)
Mr. & Mrs. Eric Bilsborough
Mr. Trevor Jones
Mrs. Fenella Fowkes
Mr. & Mrs. Ken Sawyer
Representatives of Local Press (Express Advertiser & Messenger)



Summer
1988



Green Room President, Margaret Savage,
in action, Summer 1988



Old entrance to Green Room premises
(cottage rear garden on right)



Rear of premises (looking towards
South Oak Lane) 1988



Members demolishing the outside toilets
June 1989



The link building takes shape
8 July 1989



The link building, July 1989. Note the "zig-zag" wall on right



The rear, looking towards South Oak Lane, October 1989



November 1989. Looking towards Farmer's
Army Car Park. Note old shed



The auditorium, January 1990.
Note (remains of) old mezzanine floor



The auditorium - 13 January 1990



- ditto -



Wing area, 20 January 1990



Rear of building, February 1990



Green Room Chairman, Victor Hassan,
receives cheque for Macclesfield Council's
interest free loan of £10,000, 18 March 1990.
The Architect, Barrie Wood, is on the left
of the picture.



Job done!