

25 October 2022

It is with sorrow that I have to report a founder member of SYT, Corinne Richardson, died last month. Our thoughts are with her family.

I met Corinne on 6 May 2015 and this is my notes from our conversation.

In 2015, I tracked down Corinne Richardson, a founder member, writer and producer for The Shottery Youth Theatre. Ironically, she lived 15 minutes walk away but it had taken a while to trace someone, *anyone*, associated with the formation of SYT in 1975; the era of flares, longer hair and the Bay City Rollers (Google 'em, kids). We talked for about 90 minutes and I am indebted to her for her time, inspiration and creativity four decades ago.

In the Summer of 1975, a number of Shottery parents got together, concerned that the children and teenagers ('Young People' didn't exist then) of Shottery had nowhere to go as the nights drew in.

Two months writing, September arrived and about 40 kids were crammed on to the village hall stage (half the current size!), practicing dance routines and scenes from *Cinderella*, a self-penned adaptation by Corinne, for three shows to present to the village from **Thursday 27 January 1976**, for three nights only.

Tom Bloor, Hall Chairman (who stepped down as recently as 2020) had arranged for an RSC actor, George Baker, to present a poetry reading at the hall between the weekly SYT rehearsals and George discovered SYT by chance and provided Corinne with support and advice over the formative years.

Corinne and her fellow adult volunteers arranged to have free use of the Hall because they agreed any profits made from the performances would go to the upkeep of the Hall. They didn't think beyond the first year but SYT took off: they even took parts of the shows 'on tour' to entertain, visiting 'OAP's in care homes. Local brownies and hall playgroups were rounded up to participate and the former began to have their gangshows in the Hall, too, encouraged by the success of SYT.

Despite 'running out' of stories in 1983 that prompted the cast to create *The Land of Make Believe*, Corinne wrote 11 plays in 13 years, but her day job took over and she resigned her role as the Committee underwent several face lifts.

Through the late 1980s, it was becoming increasingly hard to entice Shottery youth to rehearsals. A number of adult volunteers drifted away but, thankfully, were replaced by a dad (CR couldn't recall his name) who happened to be a draughtsman at the RSC and was pretty handy as a backdrop painter!

There was the inevitable gap, in the 1990s, until someone, Corinne didn't recall who, decided to rejuvenate SYT. This person paid for a professional script and a pianist to play live but they never actually saw the finished performance because they always worked backstage.

Dress rehearsals were held on New Year's Day from 10-6pm and a Saturday matinee was introduced. Health and Safety didn't exist in the way it does today and at one point, the most children to appear on the stage (remember, half the size it is today) was 81! Yep, that's not a typo – EIGHTY ONE! The youngest to appear on the stage was three years old.

Fast forward to 2015, five ladies who volunteered through the Seventies and Eighties, *did* come to see the Christmas show (*Beauty and the Beast Boy!*). So much had changed: the non-traditional fairy story retelling, the stage had extended by about 90%, the technical side had, of course, modernised and the music and dance routines were more pop than traditional. But, they were quick to point out, the yellow curtains were the very same – and they had already had a previous life in the recently closed cinema at 8 Greenhill Street in 1983. It took us another two years before it was curtains for the curtains.

In 2017, I returned to Corinne with the stack of programmes and posters she lent me to digitise for our, then, yet-to-be revamped, website and three DVDs to replace the three production videos that got screwed up in the DVD burning process. They took out my two VHS-to-DVD recorders in the process.

You can find the treasure trove of past production memories alive in the members' section of our brilliant new website.

If you once were involved with SYT in any capacity, are reading this and you have any anecdotes, past production programmes, video or stills that you aren't too embarrassed to share, please, we implore you, allow us to place them on here for generations of former SYT-ers to share with their children, children's children and future generations of SYT-ers.

And, if you were once involved and you have never returned, please, come back and see us. Let us know in advance; we would love to host your return visit to a performance.

Thank you for your time.

Lucien Rivière