



A brief history of Ribchester Amateur Theatrical Society

Ribchester Amateur Theatrical Society better known as simply R.A.T.S. was founded in 1971 by Beryl Clark after the idea of forming a village theatrical society was put forward to her by the Reverend EMJ Cornish the then Rector of St Wilfrid's Parish Church in Ribchester. Beryl lived with her husband Peter and sons John and James at 16 Church Street Ribchester.

The first meeting of those interested in forming a theatrical society was held on Wednesday 10th November 1971. The Parochial Church Hall was to become home to the R.A.T.S. from its outset. The church wardens of the day very kindly agreed to let the society use the hall free of charge for the first year in order to help the society to get on its feet. The hall was a very cold and damp venue in those early days with an inadequate heating system. In the winter months rehearsals were rather chilly affairs with members having to keep their outdoor clothes on! Condensation would run down the walls of the kitchen and the one toilet which served both ladies and gents. The stage itself was very small and needed quite a bit of attention, lighting was at a minimum although the stage did have footlights in those days. The stage curtain was of the drop down safety type which much to our embarrassment had a tendency to stick halfway up or down from time to time!

In 1978 the R.A.T.S. raised the money to purchase new stage curtains and on January 24th 1979 television celebrity Madge Hindle duly performed the new stage curtain opening ceremony.

Early productions were a tight squeeze on the small stage and eventually an extension was built. At first the extension was hinged to enable it to be lowered when not in use but later, after Health and Safety inspections, R.A.T.S. was informed that it had to be made a permanent structure. In those early days R.A.T.S. audiences had to sit on wooden chairs which were rather uncomfortable after a while and so foam

cushions were made that had to be tied on before each performance. This was quite a performance in itself for front of house staff. The wooden chairs were later replaced by plastic stacking ones.

Such as the hall was in those early years it was home to R.A.T.S. and the society had to fight to keep it standing at one point. Eventually the powers that be decided that maybe the hall would benefit from a little renovating. A grant was obtained and so emerged a new kitchen area, new ladies and gents toilets and a new heating system. R.A.T.S. provided new curtains for the hall windows, stackable square tables and upholstered chairs to replace the plastic ones.

The society's first production was an Olde Thyme Music Hall, produced by R.A.T.S. founder Beryl Clark, which took place in March 1972, the price of a ticket was the princely sum of 20p this including refreshments. The show was a great success and proved how much talent there was to be found in this small village of Ribchester not just on the stage but also talent and flair for designing and making costumes and stage props and painting or creating scenery.

The society's emblem was designed by member Eileen Farnworth when R.A.T.S. had a competition in 1978 and is still currently in use on posters, tickets, programmes and newsletters.

The society has performed many productions over its thirty or more years including plays, pantomimes, musical plays and revues. R.A.T.S. rehearses on Wednesday and Thursday evenings in the Parochial Hall. The R.A.T.S. season runs from September to May and usually begins with a junior members production in September, the junior members having rehearsed throughout the summer months. The season then consists of a play in November, a pantomime or musical play in February and a further play in May. A recent addition to the R.A.T.S. calendar now also includes a performance during the Ribchester Festival of Music and Art in June.

Ribchester Amateur Theatrical Society constantly strives to maintain the standard of production that has been built up over the years for their own satisfaction and the pleasure and enjoyment of their audiences.

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