

Bill Collard (S55-58) writes to tell us of a long lost telegram which he recently found while clearing his loft prior to substantial roof repairs. The telegram is dated 18th June 1958 and concerns four College pupils who were performing as part of the Aldeburgh Festival.

Here is his full story and photos.

As I returned to the College for my last term I had no idea that I would be one of four Stradbroke House students chosen to take important parts in a new Benjamin Britten children's opera which was having its televised world premiere in St Bartholomew Church, Orford during June 1958. Our house master Dickie Dykes called us together and explained that we would be under the direction of the Opera's producer Colin Graham and would be collected by taxi as and when we were needed. Most of the rehearsals would be at Aldeburgh or Thorpeness and we would be known as Property Men (handling and using theatre props).

The Opera was called Noye's Fludde and was based on the Chester Miracle plays of the early fifteenth century. There would be a number of professionals in the cast most of whom had worked with Britten on previous projects and they included the well known operatic singers Trevor Anthony, Owen Brannigan and Gladys Parr. Charles Mackerras was appointed as conductor.

Wednesday 18 June

In Orford Church at 3.30 pm

*The English Opera Group
presents*

NOYE'S FLUDDE

The Chester Miracle Play set to music by

BENJAMIN BRITTEN

*Costumes designed by CERI RICHARDS
Production and setting by COLIN GRAHAM*

The Voice of God
Noye
Mrs. Noye
Sem
Ham
Jaffet
Mrs. Sem
Mrs. Ham
Mrs. Jaffet
The Raven
The Dove
Mrs. Noye's Gossips
Property Men

TREVOR ANTHONY
OWEN BRANNIGAN
GLADYS PARR
THOMAS BEVAN
BRIAN WELLER
MICHAEL CRAWFORD
JANETTE MILLER
KATHERINE DYSON
MARILYN BAKER
DAVID BEDWELL
MARIA SPALL
PENELOPE ALLEN, DOREEN METCALFE
DAWN MENDHAM, BEVERLEY NEWMAN
ANDREW BIRT, WILLIAM COLLARD
JOHN DAY, GERALD TURNER

Conductor CHARLES MACKERRAS

*THE ENGLISH OPERA GROUP PLAYERS
Leader EMANUEL HURWITZ*

SUZANNE ROZSA violin FRANCIS BAINES double bass
CECIL ARONOWITZ viola STANLEY TAYLOR recorder
TERENCE WEIL cello JAMES BLADES percussion
VIOLA TUNNARD and MARTIN PENNY piano duet
RALPH DOWNES organ
Assistant Conductor JAN ČERVENKA
Repetiteur MARTIN PENNY

I later learned that the College would supply a recorder section as part of the East Suffolk Children's Orchestra. Mrs M Gillett would coach and conduct the recorders and I seem to recall **William Payne (R55-59)** was the leader.

Over 60 years have passed since the summer of 58' but there are still a few high lights that have stuck in my mind and I will be interested to see if my fellow property men **Andrew Birt (S55-58)**, **John Day (S56-59)** and **Gerald Turner (S54-58)** make contact with the web site and share their memories.

As property men we were expected to work closely with the producer who had designed the setting. The final construction of Noah's Ark was difficult as it was carried out while the cast of professionals and school children sang and marched around the stage. At times there were long breaks when we got to know some of the younger professionals, one of whom was Michael Crawford.

I well remember being taken to the Jubilee Hall, Aldeburgh to see the animal headwear being made to the designs of the famous Welsh painter Ceri Richards. Many of the superb costumes from the 1958 production are still preserved at Britten's home, the Red House museum in Aldeburgh. I recollect Britten and percussionist James Blades tuning hanging tea cups to mimic the sound of rain drops. Again the actual tea cups are displayed in the museum.

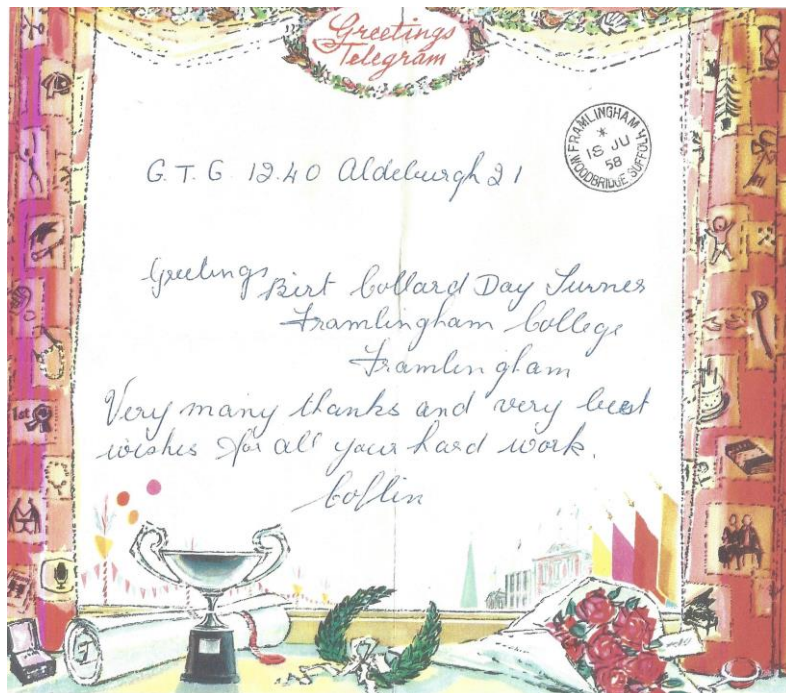
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When we started rehearsals in Orford church the television company soon moved in with their massive 1958 style equipment. It did not take long for them to blow all the fuses in the tiny Orford village. Some months after the production I was delighted to receive a £5 cheque from ATV.

A week or so before the first performance, Colin Graham took me and the other three property men to a thank you dinner at the Wentworth hotel, Aldeburgh. The owner of the Wentworth and a slightly mysterious gentleman who was introduced as John Cranko, joined us. I later found out that Cranko was a South African ballet dancer and choreographer who had worked with Britten on a ballet project. During the evening, Colin told us that depending on the success of his production, four more performances might be staged in Southwark Cathedral during November and we would be needed.

I assume that we all received the 'best wishes' telegram sometime during the 18th June. The first performance was a great success and very well received by the critics. We performed the production three more times during the Aldeburgh Festival and it is recorded by Britten that tickets for the London production sold out immediately.

Telegram text © Estate of Colin Graham.



In April this year, I handed over my copy of the telegram and other documents to the Britten- Pears Foundation, housed at the Red House, Aldeburgh.



I met Michael Crawford at the book signing of his autobiography in 1999. We had quite a chat and as you see below he had happy memories of 1958.

PARCEL ARRIVED SAFELY: TIED WITH STRING

My Autobiography

Michael Crawford

T. Bill

Happy memories of
Summer '58!

Mike Crawford

CENTURY