

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 SPAFF

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*

CECIL ARONOWITZ *viola*

TERENCE WEIL *cello*

VIOLA TUNNARD and MARTIN PENNY *piano duet*

RALPH DOWNES *organ*

Assistant Conductor JAN ČERVENKA

Repetiteur MARTIN PENNY

FRANCIS BAINES *double bass*

STANLEY TAYLOR *recorder*

JAMES BLADES *percussion*

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Framlinghamians**

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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.

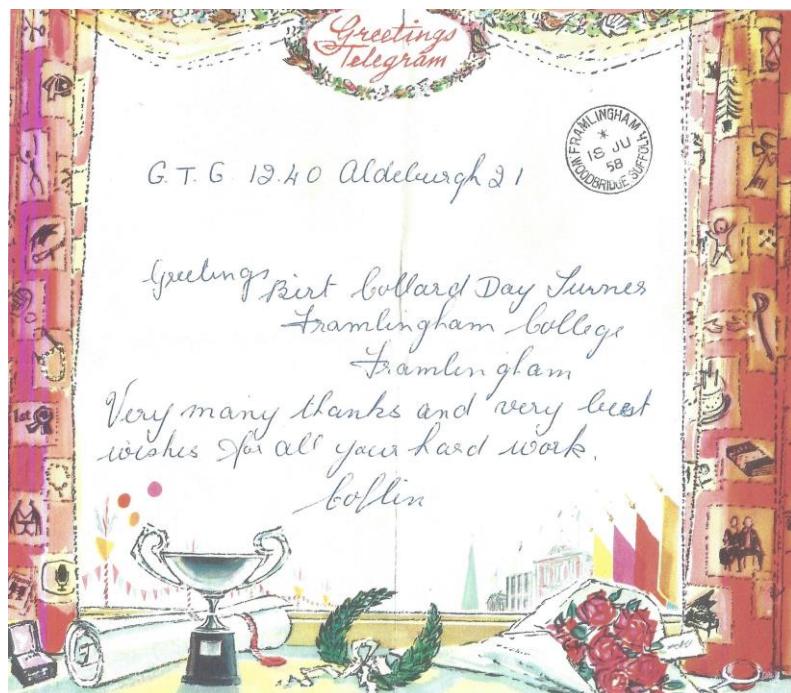
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When we started rehearsals in Orford church the television company soon moved in with their massive 1958 style equipment. It did not take long for them to blow all the fuses in the tiny Orford village. Some months after the production I was delighted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

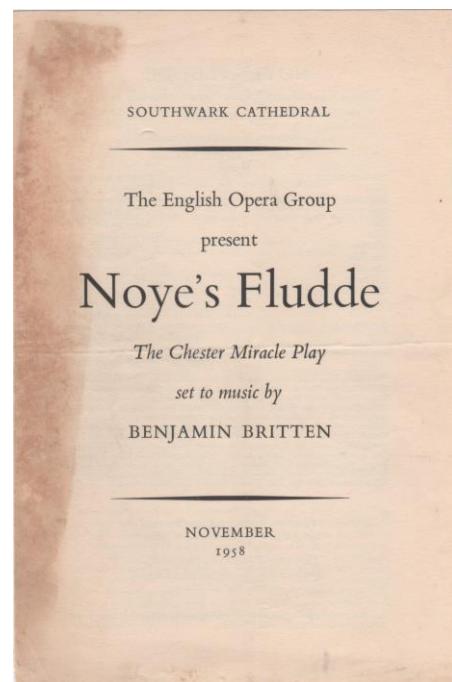
As a result of publishing the above article by Bill Collard, **Bill Payne (55-59)** was immediately in touch with the following additional recollections :

I have fond memories of my involvement in the premiere performance of Noye's Fludde in Orford church and subsequent performances in Southwark Cathedral.

As Bill mentions I had the privilege of leading the recorder section under the coaching of Margery Gillett and met Benjamin Britten when he attended a few rehearsals at the college. When I expressed disappointment that a recorder solo part was to be played by one of the professional musicians (it involved an intricate 'flutter tonguing' to represent the birds released from the ark), Britten actually wrote another solo for me to perform. I still have the original manuscript in his hand-writing but regrettably omitted to ask him to sign it!

The BBC included clips of our rehearsing at the college in the Sunday evening arts programme 'Monitor'. Our past president, Brian Smith, took a number of photos of the TV screen both of the Monitor programme and the televised (live) premiere in Orford church.

*I attach a copy of the programme for the Southwark Cathedral performances. You will see that the recorder section included **Ian Craig (K53-60), Alan Gates (K53-58), Bob Munro (R54-60), David Newson (S54-63), John Odell (S58-63), Gerald Oliver (S54-61), Nicholas Whiting (K55-63) and Mike Stott (K53-60).** **Roger Metcalf (R52-58)** also played in the performance in Orford church but I believe he left the college at the end of that summer term.*



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The Chester Miracle Play set to music by
Benjamin Britten

Production and setting by COLIN GRAHAM
Costumes designed by CERI RICHARDS

The Voice of God
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Mrs. Noye
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Ham
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The Raven
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Mrs. Noye's Gossips

TREVOR ANTHONY
OWEN BRANNIGAN
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THOMAS BEVAN
MARCUS NORMAN
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**

A CHORUS OF ANIMALS
John Aldred, Doreen Alexander, Michael Appleton, Gillian Bailey, John Bayley, John Boyden, Peter Billingham, Hugh Blowers, Brian Burrows, Edna Clarke, Peter Coulton, Adrian Crockett, Michael Cumby, Robert Deacon, Elaine Elmer, Jacqueline Evans, Christopher Floyd, Gareth Floyd, Elizabeth George, Margery Gibson, David Gohard, Peter Greenaway, Evelyn Hall, Janet Hammond, Keith Harmer, Margaret Harris, Marquise Harrison, Colin Henry, Jill Holman, Lorraine Jevons, Sheila Kean, Brian Keightley, Gwyneth King, Richard Lazarck, Maureen Lillie, Michael Lacey, Barry Martin, Michael Matthews, Michael Miller, Paul Morris, Odile Martin, Sue Martin, Paul Peckin, David Polman, David Pope, Sally Pratt, Andrew Ravaixa Rosalina Reaves, Michael Royston, Linda Reeve, Rosemond Roberts, Simon Sherrard, Lindy Sheldrake, Peter Slipkin, Rhoda Simms, David Smith, Graham Smith, Penelope Smith, Ann Stanward, Susan Steele, Michael Tahart, Gail Thompson, Gillian Turner, Brian Weller, Janet Whinney, Valerie Wright, Michael Youell.

Conducted by
BENJAMIN BRITTEN and **JAN ČERVENKA**
on Friday, at 6.30, and Saturday at 8 p.m.
and by
JAN ČERVENKA and **KEITH DARLINGTON**
on Friday, at 8.30 p.m., and Saturday at 2.30 p.m.
Repetiteur **MARTIN PENNY**

Brian Weller and Sheila Kean understudy the three sons and their wives; Lindy Sheldrake and David Pope understudy the Dove and the Raven.

THE ENGLISH OPERA GROUP PLAYERS
Leader **EMANUEL HURWITZ**

SUZANNE ROZSA *violin*
CECIL ABONOWITZ *viola*
TERENCE WEIL *cello*
VIOLA TUNNARD and **MARTIN PENNY** *piano duet*
RALPH DOWNES *organ*

with

AN EAST SUFFOLK CHILDREN'S ORCHESTRA

Violins: Gerald Adamson, Bernard Button, Jennifer Cox, Nicholas Darby, Richard Davies, Gillian Dodson, Ann Goddard, David Goldfinch, Saskia Herz-Smith, Diane Johnson, David List, Angela Marlow, Diane Meen, Patricia Redhead, Howard Shaw, Judith Stevens, Penelope Street, Sally Welford.
Cello: Toby Heris-Smith, Tom Nash, Elizabeth Stevens, Fay Tonkin, Joan Trudgett, Janet Walpole.
Double bass: Douglas Brown, Colin Webber.
Recorders: *Dessout:* W. Payne (Leader), B. Burrows (Leiston), I. M. Craig, A. M. Gates, J. R. Hall, R. J. Munro, D. W. J. Newson, J. B. Odell, N. R. Whiting.
Trebble: J. Burch (Stowmarket), N. Howard, G. F. Oliver, M. G. Stott, J. Waterfield (Leiston).
Bagpipes: PJO I. Glen, Solo, Ldg/B M. Beckett, *Second Solo*, W. E. Allen, C. Collins, K. Franks, J. A. Gleeson, A. H. Moran, P. Ship.
Percussion: Roger Abrams, Alan Baguet, Alexander Durrant, Nigel Fletcher, Niall O'Leighlin, Roger Stone, David Windsor, Geoffry Wilmart.
Handbells: Roger Boat, Keith Cook, Terry Cooper, Ian Revell, Bernard Smith, Brian Strutt.

Stage Director **FRANCIS REID**
Deputy Stage Director **JUNE CROPLEY**
Wardrobe Mistress **SUZANNE PHILLIPS**

Scenery built by E. Babbage & Co. Ltd. (*Myfyr Papalys*); painted at the Harker Studios by Charles Bravery. *Principals' costumes* by Maria Gérde. *Masks and headresses* by Frank Winter. *Wigs* by Albert Sargood. *Properties* by Stuart Stoddard. *Stage built and installed* by Walter French Ltd. *Lighting equipment and installation* by Strand Electric and Engineering Co. Ltd.

THE CHESTER MIRACLE PLAYS were first performed in the first half of the fifteenth century; they were written by ordinary people for performance by the craftsmen and tradesmen and their families. Each Guild chose one play from the cycle and acted it on a cart called a *pageant*. This cart moved round the town from place to place and on it each play was completely self-contained. Properties and miracles were readily improvised for the occasion and the scenic devices, although carefully worked out, had to be extremely simple. This essentially unsophisticated style of presentation would clearly be out of place in the artificial world of the theatre: a much closer relationship with the audience is needed and *Noye's Fludde* in this musical version is intended for the same style of presentation—although not necessarily on a cart.

There was an additional boy, James Hall (R54-62) also in recorder group. Sadly he died in 1966 at the age of just 22 and Ian Craig has also died. The whereabouts of Alan Gates, Gerald Oliver and Mike Stott is unknown.