

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
CECIL ARONOWITZ viola
TERENCE WEIL cello

FRANCIS BAINES double bass
STANLEY TAYLOR recorder
JAMES BLADES percussion

VIOLA TUNNARD and MARTIN PENNY piano duet

*RALPH DOWNES organ
Assistant Conductor JAN ČERVENKA
Repetiteur MARTIN PENNY*

 The Society of
Framlinghamians

www.oldframlinghamian.com

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.

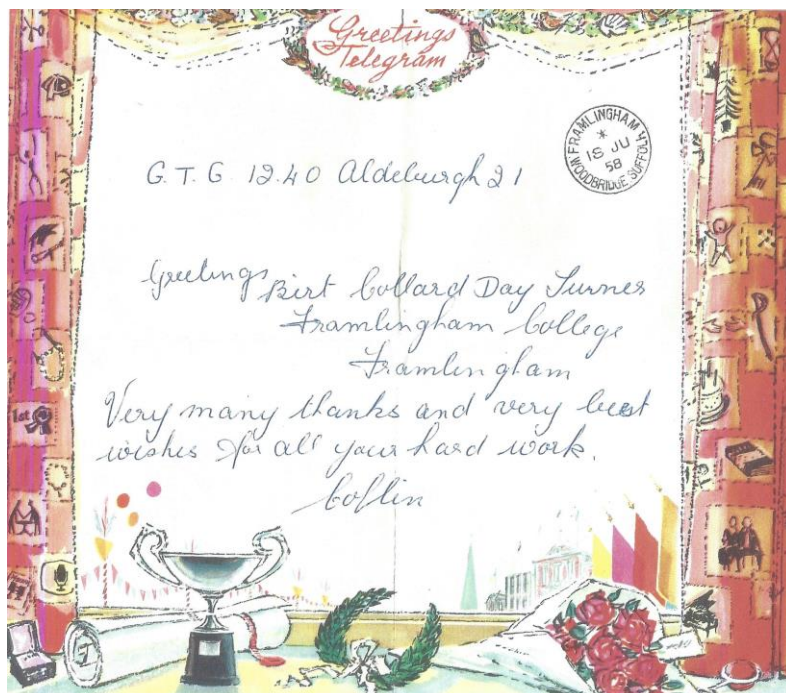
2

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

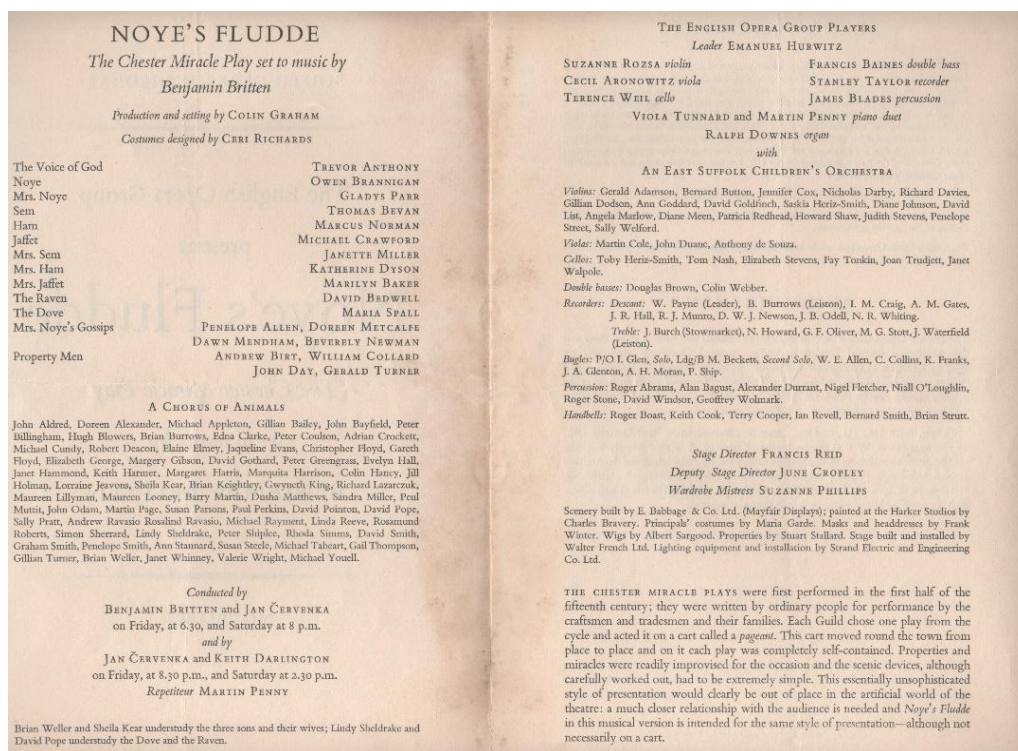
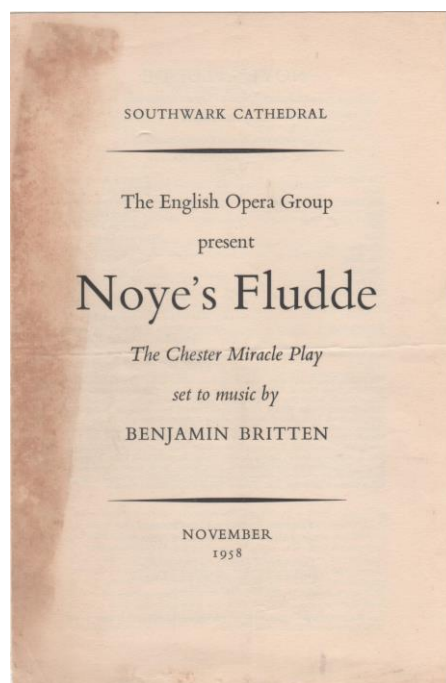
As a result of publishing the above article by Bill Collard, **Bill Payne (55-59)** was immediately in touch with the following additional recollections :

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.*



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.

Bob Munro (R54-60) was also in touch as a result of Bill's original note added to by Bill Payne. Here are his fascinating additional recollections :

Good morning to you all from a cold Winter's day (15C) in Mildura, Australia.

I was up early (for me!!) at 7am this Sunday morning to do some ghastly chores that I have been putting off for several days. But as I was having my 'heart-starter' coffee, and checking my email headings, I was immediately drawn to two words on one of them; "Noyes Fludde"!

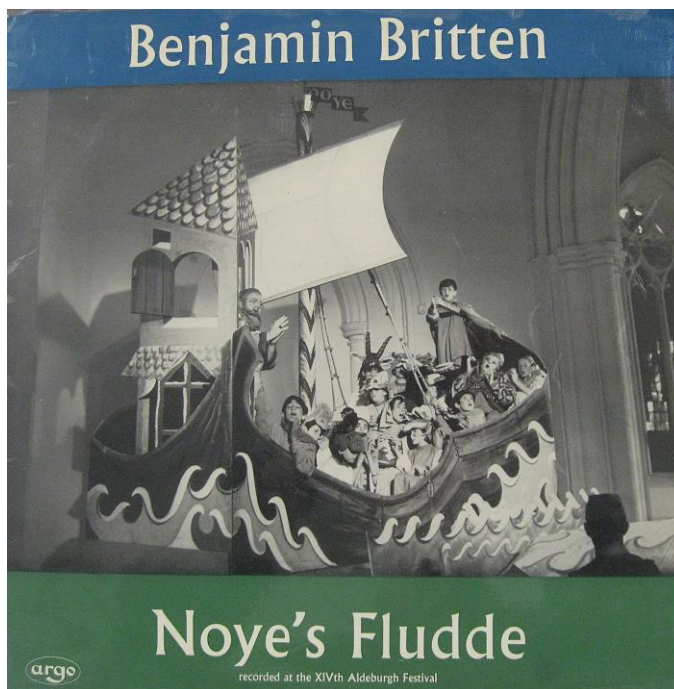
What absolutely wonderful memories those two words brought back. Part of the story has been told in the email and the attachments in the email, but I think I may be able to add a further few bits of interest.

I still have the music 'sheet' we used for the performances at Orford Church and Southwark Cathedral, and still have the photos of the recorder group playing on the BBC. But I guess some of the ensemble would still have them, too.

A year or two after our world première performances, (and I think after I had left Fram.) there was an encore performance by a different group of Fram. pupils, which was recorded onto a 12" vinyl record. I have a copy of this record, which is still playable. I was standing at a bus stop outside a music store in High Barnet, when I noticed the N.F. cover. I went in, missed my bus, but bought the record on the spot! Interestingly, the music did not sound the same as 'our' original. Still very good, but you can't beat the best!!

A few months ago I was actually listening to that recording, and whilst sitting at the computer, I thought I would check out Mr./Mrs./Ms. Google for anything on Noye's Fludde. There is!! Heaps of information on Benjamin Britten, of course, and quite a lot on N.F. Including some photos from 'our' time, and in one of the docs. on Ben. Brit., a short excerpt from the BBC showing us playing our recorders. If anyone is interested, it would be well worth surfing the net on the material available. There is a later performance of the Opera, in full and in colour, on YouTube. Don't you love the digital age?

Thanks Bill Collard, William Payne and others for retrieving this bit of our history. I remember you both and the others of course, and the whole N.F. thing very well indeed. For me, it has been one of my life's highlights! And especially to you, Chris. for passing it on.



Below is the back of the album listing recorder players, which include **Edward Belcher (R58-63)**, **Nigel Burnip (R58-65)**, **Nicholas Flowerdew (K57-65)**, **Stephen Llewellyn (R57-64)**, **John Odell (S58-63)** and **Neil Utting (G58-65)**. Sadly Flowerdew and Utting are no longer with us. John Odell is the only one who also performed in premiere.



Subsequently Bob Munro was back in touch to confirm that the video he was referring to was this one <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QfRS56VzV58> and the recorder group appears after 9 minutes

Here is a still of the recorded group taken from this video and Bob has had a go at naming some of those shown.



Bob goes on to say "I have a couple of photos in an album, which I have dug out of the shed. If you are at all interested (or think anyone else may be), I'll copy them as best as I can and forward them on to you. They have a slightly different angle than the one in the YouTube doco. May jog some memories from another quarter.

I also have a copy of the programmes from both Orford (WORLD premiere!), and from Southwark. I am quite happy to copy those too, if you like. I think I'm on a roll here!"

David Newson (S54-63) was also in touch from New Zealand with the following recollections :

I have fond memories of my involvement with Noye's Fludde in November 1958 at Southwark Cathedral.

John Odell and myself were in our first term at Fram and we joined the other more senior members of the recorder team. Marjorie Gillett (wife of Bob Gillett) was our recorder tutor and did a brilliant job in getting us up to a reasonable standard of playing. I have many happy memories of Sunday afternoons spent at the Gillett household having tea and cake and the odd recorder practice.

Two incidents I recall: -

1) After our rehearsal at Southwark Cathedral which involved music for the storm, Marjorie Gillett apologised to Benjamin Britten for the recorders going out of tune on the high notes. The composer was quite relaxed about this as this was the sound he wanted, he was expecting young inexperienced players to lose their tuning on those higher notes! What a brilliant mind!

2) Tea cups were used to create the sound of rain drops - unfortunately one broke during the rehearsal. The composer apparently spent a few hours visiting all the tea shops and street stalls in

the area armed with a tuning fork looking for a cup or mug with the correct pitch! He was successful in his quest and all went well for our four performances.

I have the recording of the 1961 performance in Orford Church, which I was not involved with as I was busy with my O level exams. I also have a copy of the programme for the Southwark Cathedral performances in November 1958.