

Act 4: Alvena and the awards

Dickie and I became very involved in the local amateur dramatics in Whitstable. The highlight of each year is the Kent Full Length Drama Festival. The festival is open to all drama groups in Kent, and takes place in springtime. Each entry is judged by an adjudicator who makes his/her decision on which is the best presented play, and who should be the Best Actor, and Actress of the whole Festival. The Lindley Players of Whitstable, have won the Best Production on many occasions, and amongst the drama awards, they are keenly sought after.



Left - Alvena as Anne of Cleves

Below - The bedroom scene from 'The King's Mare'



I was very lucky to perform in a play at the festival, in 1975, called *The King's Mare*, and to win the Best Actress award.

The play was a riotous comedy based upon the meeting of Henry VIII and Anne of Cleves, and their wedding night scene. Neither of them spoke the other's language, so they had an interpreter on their night of their nuptials. Henry thought that Anne was the ugliest woman in the world and Anne thought that Henry was a big fat oaf. The script went something like this:

HENRY "She is uglier than anyone I have ever seen!"

INTERPRETER "His Majesty thinks that you are so beautiful.

ANNE " He is fat, ugly and so distasteful"

INTERPRETER " Your Majesty, Anne thinks you are the most handsome man she has ever met", and so the scene went on.

The final act: Entertainment today

I no longer take centre stage, but I will remember the smell of the grease paint for ever. I cannot smell it without being transported back to watching my parents perform, or to my own on stage experiences.

I still love the theatre though, but now I prefer to be in the audience. Each year there are plays in Whitstable that are up to West End standard. I would suggest that to see a Lindley Players Pantomime in January is a must. Each year the local papers give excellent write up's, and publish letters praising the productions, so why go to London, when you can see better in Whitstable?

In the 1980's the Lindley Players purchased the Congregational Church in the Town's High Street, and converted it into the Playhouse, and throughout the year local Groups use it to stage various productions, and during the Whitstable Oyster Festival (end of July) we have had many well known Acts, such as George Melly, who was a frequent visitor.

For more information about theatres, plays and festivals in and around Whitstable contact:

The Playhouse Theatre:

www.theplayhousewhitstable.co.uk

The Whitstable Oyster Festival:

www.whitstableoysterfestival.com/whats-on

Whitstable Library: 31 – 33 Oxford Street Whitstable.

www.thisiskent.co.uk/entertainment

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Entertainment A lifetime on the stage



by
Alvena Bird

Sounding Out Your Heritage

Act 1: Alvena steps onto the stage

I was born in Scotland (Aberdeenshire). Both of my parents were actors and we moved around a lot. We moved to Ireland for 10 years because my parents were in a travelling show. They played all over Ireland. The show was a mixture of a play and a variety show.

I had my début on the stage when I was three (I was carried onto the stage!) When I got a bit older, I used to sing and dance on the stage with my cousins in the variety part of the show. I also used to act with a friend of mine.



My brother and I worked a season at Butlins when I was in my 20s. We had a rock and roll trio. In the picture above my brother Rick is second from the left in the back row,

Act 2: The marriage of Alvena

I didn't stay working in the entertainment industry. I was working for British Rail when I met Dickie. We married and had three children. We lived in Croydon, but moved to Whitstable on 22 June 1970.



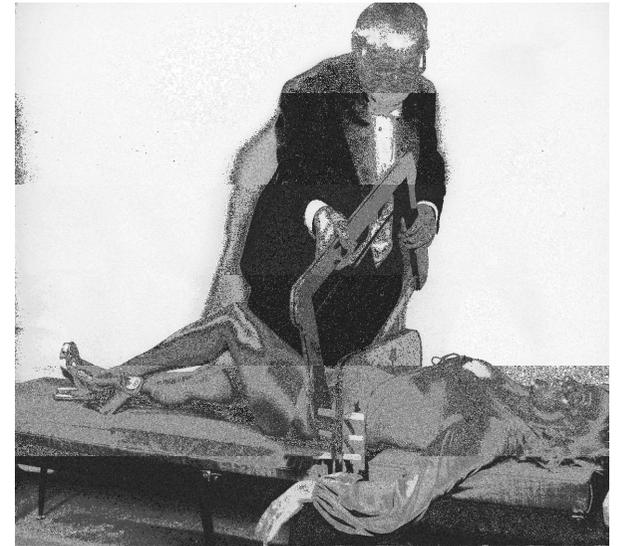
Above: Alvena and husband Donald (Dickie)

After we moved to Whitstable I joined the Phoenix Theatre Group. It was during this time that we met Peter Rae.

Peter was a magician. He was a lovely man but a bit chaotic. He asked me if I would like to be his magician's assistant. We had great fun, but he wasn't a very good magician!

Act 3: The magician's assistant

Peter was better at the illusions rather than the magic tricks. We used to have a very good illusion, which we perfected by practising. He would put me into a large cloth bag and then tie the top. After saying his magic words he would open the bag and I would step out wearing a completely different costume.



I remember one time when I was on stage with Peter and we were doing the zig zag trick. This is where I was put into a box and he then cut me into three pieces, pulling the three pieces apart to form a zig zag to show that he had done it. Unfortunately the box got stuck and I was left with my three parts in different directions!



Above: Alvena with Peter Rae. Right: Alvena at the Winter Gardens, Margate