

**FROM EPIPHANY TO FAMILIAR: THE LIFE HISTORY OF THE  
THEATREGOER**

A Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **FROM EPIPHANY TO FAMILIAR: THE LIFE HISTORY OF THE THEATREGOER**

This study sets out to explore the life histories of long-term, regular theatregoers and their motivating factors over time. It follows an interpretive framework and innovates by using reminiscence workshops as the research tool. It argues that reminiscence workshops enable richer, deeper data to be obtained than alternative, interpretive methods such as interviews or focus groups, or quantitative surveys found in previous studies from Baumol & Bowen (1966) to Bunting *et al* (2008). Data are analysed using a phenomenological approach influenced by Schutz (1967) and the four-part life course model developed by Giele & Elder (1998).

The thesis examines key themes emerging from the life histories of thirty-one participants. The findings indicate the importance of a ‘theatrical epiphany’ which is effective in creating a turning point in an individual’s life trajectory. The epiphany occurs if factors such as play, magic, make-believe, religion, and the production’s visual impact and relevance, are present. Most individuals experience their theatrical epiphany after encouragement to attend by a ‘familiar’, a person well-known to them and trusted. The study indicates that many theatregoers are active participants in theatre-making after their epiphany. Their profile suggests a high level of educational achievement, and a career in education.

It is suggested that the theatregoer continues to be motivated to attend productions by seeking secondary epiphanies containing similar elements to those found during their original epiphany. In addition, many theatregoers look for intimacy of scale, the ‘magic’ created by the synthesis of make-believe and nature, and in particular, Shakespeare productions.

As theatregoers gain in cultural capital, they themselves become ‘familiars’ and initiate the young into theatregoing. This thesis suggests that Bourdieu’s (1984) theory of distinction can be expanded to include the concept of the ‘familiar’, and indicates that in contemporary Britain, cultural capital results more from education and play than class background.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION: THE STUDY AND ITS OBJECTIVES**

#### **1 Aims and location of study**

This study sets out to explore the life histories of long-term, regular theatregoers and their motivating factors over time. The research aims to provide a fresh perspective on knowledge that exists about long-term, regular audiences for theatrical productions. This is the market segment that is most likely to donate to the theatre, and act as an opinion-former within communities (Ostrower, 2005b), and is therefore a valued audience for theatre managements. From the earliest quantitative studies published in the mid-sixties, previous researchers have been consistent in their depiction of long-term, regular theatregoers. In Britain, theatre audiences, and particularly regular attenders, have been described as white, middle-aged, or older, and working in, or retired from, professional or managerial occupations. They are predominantly female, well-educated, often graduates, who live in affluent geographic locations (Baumol and Bowen, 1966, Mann, 1967, 1969, Wilkie and Bradley, 1970, Gardiner, 1991, Skelton *et al*, 2002, Fenn *et al*, 2004, Bunting *et al*, 2008). However, there has, in particular, been a gap in knowledge about the motivations of long-term, regular UK theatregoers due to the paucity of qualitative studies in Britain and about the factors that led them to their initial theatregoing.

Some motivations have been implied by interpreting personal characteristics of individuals. Bourdieu (1984), in particular, has been influential in suggesting that it is factors such as cultural and economic capital that form a person's taste for the arts. His research posits that a person's social and educational background propels a person along a defined cultural trajectory.

The literature (see chapter three) from a number of disciplines suggests there are many possible motivations for attending theatrical productions. Arts marketers (Hill, O'Sullivan and O'Sullivan, 2003) have shown interest in the Diffusion of Innovation model developed by Rogers (1983) which indicates that a person's motivation to adopt a new product is based on the willingness to take a risk. The five market segments that Rogers identified are themselves based on socio-demographic indicators that are not in conflict with the indicators suggested by Bourdieu (1984). Another model, also favoured by Hill, O'Sullivan and O'Sullivan (*op cit*) is the adaptation by Cooper and Tower (1992) of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Cooper and Tower suggest that a person's motivation is based on a hierarchy of needs, ranging from basic needs through socialising and esteem or status needs towards self-actualisation, that, if met by arts organisations, could lead to attendance. These needs can be both intrinsic (to do with theatre itself) or extrinsic (relating to other factors, such as meeting social needs, or the need to be esteemed).

Theatre-going motivations have been conceptualised in terms of escape (Tolstoy, 1995: 141, Nicholl, 1962: 24, Bunting, 2007: 4, Keaney *et al*, 2007: 39 - 40), entertainment and hedonism (Bouder-Pailler, 1999: 9), ceremony (Findlater, 1952: 194, Fowlie, 1954: 28, Sartre, 1976: 80), intellectual enrichment or to think (Bouder-Pailler, 1999, Osborne, Wheeler and Elliott, 1999: 14), emotion (Bouder-Pailler, *op cit*) and magic (Nicholl, 1962: 24). These motivations have been ascribed to certain demographics, for example entertainment is a motivator for the masses (Collingwood, 1938), whilst intellectual enrichment is for the elite (Ortega Y Gasset, 1968).

However, a different picture of theatre-goers' motivations emerges as a result of this study. By adopting the concept of the 'epiphany' from Denzin in this study (1989: 17) it has been possible to explore the determinants of a person's 'turning point' from non-theatre-goer to theatre-goer. This "wow" moment in a theatre-goer's life is the revelation where a person, having experienced a particular piece of theatre or drama, adopts the identity (Giddens, 1987) of a theatre-goer. A

key factor that is related to the experience of a theatrical epiphany is the prior influence of a trusted individual, often a family member or a teacher, who inspires the person to attend the production where an epiphany is experienced. This study creates a term for this individual: a “familiar”, for reasons outlined in chapter six.

This study analyses the life of the theatregoer prior to, and subsequent to, the epiphany. To do this, it utilises the life course/life history model from Giele and Elder (1998). Their four part model, described at length in chapter four, enables factors beyond the epiphany to emerge as motivators for life-long, regular theatregoing. It is for these reasons that factors such as magic, make-believe, and religion, constantly revealed as motivators by participants but which are not discussed fully in arts marketing texts, are analysed at length in chapter three. Magic is revealed in terms of “stage” magic effects, and also in the “magic of the real” in site-specific locations where the presence of natural phenomena causes a magical effect. This study suggests that, certainly for the older, regular theatregoers, an immersion in the works of Shakespeare, at home, drama club or school has become a motivating factor. Many long-term, regular theatregoers are travellers, who experience theatre in other cultures. Interpretation of the data also suggests that the majority of theatregoers who undergo a theatregoing epiphany are also, or will become, practitioners in theatre. They are doers: acting, directing, building sets, managing, organising committees, prizes, and friends’ organisations, or are arts professionals in some capacity.

### 1.1 Engagement with method

As well as contributing to knowledge relating to the motivations of long-term, regular theatregoers, this study has also made a significant contribution in terms of the methodology. This study favours an interpretive approach. It uses an innovative research method, that of the reminiscence workshop to learn about theatregoers’ motivations. In order to examine peoples’ motivations, Schutz (1967) argues, from the standpoint of phenomenology, that a person should apply

a “retrospective glance” to interpret his/her “past lived experience”. The reminiscence workshop is an appropriate research tool because it provides the researcher with a device for enabling participants to look back and reflect on their lives. Furthermore, participants in the reminiscence workshops interact with each other so effectively that the researcher is able to gather richer, more meaningful data, as is related in chapter four. The main reason for developing this innovative method is because previous, primarily quantitative research methods, have inherent limitations built into their models. These limitations are almost entirely due to the restrictive number of pre-set questions given to population samples, and to the narrowness of focus. Some studies focus on a person’s attendance at only one play at only one venue whilst general population surveys lack specificity. These studies create statistics, gathered from a snapshot, taken at one moment in time. They do not reveal a person’s motivation to attend over time. They do not identify the factors that enabled them to become theatregoers.

## 1.2 The outline for the thesis

In chapter two, the case is made for offering the reminiscence workshop as a research tool by critiquing current research methods for theatre audience research. The chapter indicates how quantitative research has been able to offer some element of what Schutz (1967) calls the “retrospective glance” by asking questions about theatregoers’ past lived experiences. It shows that some surveys (Bunting *et al*, 2008, for example) have become more qualitative in their approach, allowing for a wider range of possible findings. Other qualitative research in Britain involves oral history reminiscence interviews (the ongoing British Library Theatre Archive Project, nd). Theatregoers’ motivations are part of these studies’ remit, but only the latter project actively seeks out “past lived experiences”. Whilst the Theatre Archive Project examines the “retrospective glance”, it does so without the interaction of like-minded theatregoers, limiting the wealth of memories. The chapter continues by examining what is known about theatregoers from existing surveys. This examination serves to locate the participants within this study in terms of age, gender, education, social class,

ethnicity and frequency of attendance when they are introduced fully in chapter five. Finally, the chapter concludes that a fresh approach is needed, one that fuses the best elements of the focus group and the oral history interview: the reminiscence workshop.

In chapter three, there is an exploration of a multi-disciplinary range of theoretical frameworks for researching theatregoers' motivations. The chapter agrees with Boudier-Pailler (1999) that theatregoers define themselves by their motivation to attend the theatre. It utilises Cooper and Tower's adaptation of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs model (Cooper and Tower, 1992) as a framework for discussing what is known about motivations to attend the theatre, and the arts. As with Maslow's original conceptualisation, (Maslow, 1943), it is not argued in this study that theatregoers progress from one level to another, although a parallel is made between long-term, regular theatregoers and people whose motivation is self-actualisation, the highest level of Maslow's model. The literature suggests that a first level motivational need would encompass the concept of play, an activity that introduces a child to higher level motivational needs such as make-believe and magic. Level two needs such as social esteem and enjoyment are problematic because of the ideological bent in the discourse between definitions of high and low art, and between art and entertainment. Level two concepts such as magic, religion and ritual are caught up in this discourse, and it is argued, are keys to theatregoers' belief systems. Level three needs for education are conceptualised in terms of educational and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984), connoisseurship, sophistication and careers, all important motivators for the theatregoer who has attended for the long-term. Level four needs are conceptualised in terms of the power of the imagination, of make-believe and pretence and are examined in relation to Goffman (1974) and his theory of primary and secondary frameworks, where "make-believe" is a "key" to the perception of a secondary frame of existence. There then follows a discussion on frame-breaking, another activity that long-term theatregoers have to overcome in order to maintain a "willing suspension of disbelief" (Coleridge, 1817). Level five discusses the "highest" motivational need, that of self-actualisation, which is conceptualised in terms of emotional needs, aesthetical appreciation and

sensational needs. The chapter ends by indicating that there is little knowledge within the literature of which motivations are important at different stages of a theatregoer's life.

Chapter four discusses the research design for this study which uses a life history approach with the research tool being the reminiscence workshop. In so doing, the research is located within a qualitative and interpretive paradigm. Thirty-one participants took part in a series of one of four reminiscence workshops held over five or eight weeks during 2006 – 2007 at three theatres: two (including one pilot study) at the Oxford Playhouse, one at the Pegasus Theatre, Oxford and one at the Corn Exchange Theatre, Newbury. The research tool, the reminiscence workshop, is an innovative research method for this kind of study. The chapter discusses the methods of analysis, which initially follow a grounded theory approach (Corbin and Strauss, 1998) fused with the phenomenological approach of Schutz (1967). The four-part life course model developed by Giele and Elder (1998) and the concept of the epiphany (Denzin, 1989), are both used to analyse theatregoers' reminiscences. The study aims to make its third contribution to knowledge by advocating the use of reminiscence workshops as a research tool for qualitative, interpretive research.

Chapter five is the first of five discussion chapters. In this chapter, the participants in this study are located in terms of time and space, the first element of the life course model adopted for this study from Giele and Elder (1988). Their characteristics are compared with a range of primarily statistical information, gained from the sort of surveys discussed in chapter two. The participants' upbringing is explored in relation to theories of cultural capital and habitus (Bourdieu, 1984). The chapter indicates that participants broadly fit the stereotypes of both attenders and regular or frequent attenders for the arts and theatre. Seventy percent of the participants came from families where their parents also were theatregoers to some extent. The chapter concludes by arguing that having a profile of an attender does not sufficiently identify theatregoers,



because motivation relies on an examination of “past lived experience” (Schutz, 1967).

In chapter six, the process of analysing the “past lived experience” is begun by a discussion on the formative experiences of participants, prior to their realisation that they are theatregoers. The chapter argues that a young person’s patterns of play prepare the person to be receptive to the production that stimulates their theatrical epiphany, if the play is orientated towards drama. Other factors such as a receptivity to magic, usually at a production aimed at children such as a pantomime are important in the same way. An engagement with religion, through performances in church halls, nativity plays, playing religious figures, acting in Christmastime plays or charades, acting in church-managed amateur theatrical groups and attending religious ceremonies are also discussed as relevant pre-conditions. The chapter continues by identifying participants’ early engagements with professional theatre, amateur dramatics, and school performances.

Chapter seven explores the causes of participants’ theatrical epiphanies, or their “wow” moment when they came to the realisation that they are theatregoers. The chapter identifies that most participants had their epiphany either as a small child, or as a teenager, with a minority experiencing theirs as an adult. The concept of the “familiar” is introduced to define the person who introduces or enthuses a person about theatre. The chapter argues that the familiar is someone close to the eventual theatregoer, such as a parent, family member, teacher or close friend. Only a couple of participants had their epiphany as a direct result of a theatre’s marketing activities, in both cases, the receipt of free tickets to “paper” a production. The chapter identifies magic, the unexpectedness of the action, excitement, and the relevance of the production to the attender as the key elements that bring about the epiphany, although a number of minor factors are also briefly discussed.

Chapter eight uses the linked lives, and human agency elements of the life course model (Giele and Elder, 1998) to discuss theatregoers' motivation through their lives once they have had their theatrical epiphany. Linked lives is explored through the concept of homophily (Mark, 2003) where like people do like things, and undergo a shared experience with others. Human agency is conceptualised in terms of "the quest for self-identity" (Giddens, 1991a). The chapter argues that long-term, regular theatregoers are primarily motivated by the plays of William Shakespeare. This happens by studying or acting in Shakespeare at school, at home, in amateur dramatics, and later for some, at university. Shakespeare is linked to the concepts of magic, ritual, and make-believe. As theatregoers mature, they gain in cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) and start to collect Shakespeare productions. Shakespeare is used to discuss interpret and compare past productions more than any other type of theatre according to the reminiscences in this study. Another prime motivation for long-term, regular theatregoers is religion. Explicitly religious dramas, such as by Fry or Eliot, and Mystery Plays are important. Theatregoers also appreciate the connections for the theatregoer of the act of communion and theatregoing, and the iconic worship and reverence of the actors. The final concept discussed as a prime motivator of linked experiences is that of the "magic of the real" where theatregoers attend for the unique performance in a site-specific location, preferably outside. In terms of human agency, the chapter argues that long-term regular theatregoers tend to be participants themselves in the creation or management of theatre. Their theatrical activity is conceptualised in terms of their organising around their enthusiasm (Bishop and Hoggett, 1986) where motivations include social exchange, exchange of information, and meeting people, as well as the enjoyment and love of being creative. The chapter continues by examining how theatregoers will go to the theatre wherever they are, on holiday, or working abroad. In these instances they take the opportunity to engage with different cultures and for them, new forms of theatre. The chapter concludes by suggesting that Bourdieu's theories on cultural and educational capital are not entirely borne out by the data where theatregoing is determined by aspects of human agency.

Chapter nine is the final discussion chapter. Here the final element of the life course model, timing (Giele and Elder, 1998) is discussed in relation to theatregoing over the life course. Five 'markers' are analysed in relation to motivations and barriers to attendance. The chapter argues that a theatregoer's choice of partner is important as both a motivator and a barrier. If the theatregoer marries a non-theatregoer, a lapse in attendance is likely; if that theatregoer divorces the non-theatregoer, or the partner leaves, or dies, theatregoing patterns increase. Having children is a barrier to regular attendance, because of the additional financial costs of raising a family, or paying for babysitters. Family duties intervene creating a lack of time. When theatregoing resumes, it is mostly in the form of attending children's productions, or performances with their children in them, such as Nativity plays. The third 'marker', that of employment is inconclusive in its effects on theatregoing. The main barrier to attendance caused by work was created by inaccessibility. At most a heavy workload means only a temporary absence from attendance. More positively, work is perceived as an opportunity for attendance with work colleagues, either formally or informally. The chapter continues by discussing a fourth 'marker'; this is where the theatregoer becomes a 'familiar', to the theatregoer's children, later grandchildren, or other family members. If they work in education, they act as a familiar to their pupils or students. Some act as familiars to work colleagues. The chapter ends with a discussion on a final 'marker', that of ageing. Theatregoing may be reduced by the effects of illness, or infirmity, by where possible, these barriers are overcome by sitting in the stalls close to the stage, or taking wheelchair spaces in car parks and auditoria. As income is reduced, pensioners attend more matinees where tickets are cheaper. Subsidised venues in London are preferred to the commercial West End on cost grounds, whilst the lack of a car means attendance at local theatres is preferable to travelling longer distances. The study suggests that modes of theatregoing do change as a theatregoer ages.

Chapter ten concludes the thesis with an evaluation of the major arguments. The findings are reviewed and the significance of the study examined. This thesis suggests that Bourdieu's (1984) theory of distinction can be expanded to include the concept of the 'familiar', and indicates that in contemporary Britain, cultural

capital results more from education than class background. The chapter concludes with a reflexive analysis of the study with suggestions for further research proposed.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THEATRE AUDIENCE RESEARCH: AN EVALUATION**

#### **2 Introduction**

There are two aims of this chapter. The first is to evaluate the scope of research methods used in theatre audience research, and the second is to critique the current state of knowledge gained in this research about theatregoers. It is the contention of this chapter that there are still gaps in knowledge about theatregoers' motivation. This contention is reinforced by the position taken by Professor John Carey, in a provocative publication written after this study was planned. He invites researchers to undertake more searching studies:

The history of audiences and readerships is largely a blank. Arts research needs to change direction, to look outwards, and following the example of... Bourdieu – investigate the audience not the texts. It needs to link up with sociology and psychology... and create a body of knowledge about what the arts actually do to people. Until that happens, we cannot even pretend that we are taking the arts seriously (Carey, 2005: 167 – 8).

It has only been recently that there has been a large-scale qualitative research project in Britain that aims to find out people's motivations to attend or participate in the arts. The Arts Council England commissioned *The Arts Debate* in 2006 (Creative Research, 2007b) to cover a wide range of subjects from arts policy to philosophy of the arts through to motivation. Since the Arts Council was founded post-war with the ideology of widening the audience base for the arts, it has taken the arts body sixty years to undertake research of this kind. A rationale for the Arts Council's arts policy-makers is provided by Peter Hewitt, former Chief Executive of the Arts Council, who suggests that research is needed to analyse the "transformative" experience of the arts where the process is to:

... start with the individual. We should talk to a number of people about how a life-changing cultural experience impacted upon them personally. How they felt before and after, the nature of the experience itself, the difference it made to them as individuals. (Hewitt, 2004: 22).

Before the advent of regular audience surveys in the UK, analysis of theatre audiences was generally subjective and unfocused. The lack of knowledge and understanding of audiences is articulated by Findlater, who asks:

Who, then, are the playgoers of today and what is their role in the theatre? That is a subject on which few data are available, but which it is necessary to discuss... (Findlater, 1952: 194)

In the years that followed Findlater's question, in particular from the mid-sixties onwards, theatre audience research has been carried out in the UK. This study attempts for the first time a holistic understanding of a theatregoer's motivation through interpretation of a number of life histories.

## 2.1 Surveys

There are two kinds of data that can be obtained about theatregoers: survey data and box office records (Fenn *et al*, 2004: 20). Most audience research in the UK has been in the form of studies using questionnaires which fall into four types. These are, firstly, population surveys, which analyse a representative sample of a regional or national population which reveals theatre-going activities. Population surveys offer a "better understanding of the socio-economic make-up of arts audiences" by indicating "a clearer picture of overall levels of cultural activity than institution-derived data" (Feist, 1998: 34). The second type of audience research is the consumer expenditure survey. These are carried out on the general population. Thirdly, there are theatre surveys which analyse a theatre's audience where questions are asked of a representative sample of that theatre's audience

(*ibid*: 30). Finally there are surveys on specific forms of arts such as research on festivals, or ethnic minority events (Bridgwood and Skelton, 2002: 53). The strengths of these surveys are that they indicate broadly the characteristics of people attending the theatre, such as age, gender, social grade, education, children, and health (Fenn *et al*, 2004: 20). Their limitations are that they do not provide answers as to what theatres, or genres of theatre, these people attend (*op cit*). Box office data can profile attendance at a particular theatre, which is useful for that theatre's marketing or policy decisions. However, neither type of survey provides rich or meaningful data on a person's motivation to attend.

Early UK theatre audience research was carried out by sociologists and statisticians whose aim was to "show us ourselves as others see us" (Sweeting, 1969: 144). The first published quantitative theatre audience surveys in the UK were carried out by American academics Baumol and Bowen (1966) as an adjunct to their larger US survey. They carried out two surveys of the National Theatre audience at the Old Vic over two evenings in the spring of 1965 (Baumol and Bowen, 1966: 89). They undertook their research, which they carried out on behalf of the Twentieth Century Fund, as a commission from President Kennedy in order to discover more about the economics of the arts. Their aim was essentially evangelical in nature, to show the arts have a positive economic impact: "if the arts are "a good thing", we must concern ourselves with those who are deprived of the experience" (*ibid*: 71).

As pathfinders, Baumol and Bowen led the way for subsequent British audience research. As a study, although their British statistics are similar to their American findings, a result they find "remarkable" (*ibid*: 91), the work indicates many limitations. Neither generalisations, nor a deeper understanding of the audiences can be read from such quantitative research. The two performances may not have been typical of the National Theatre audience, let alone theatregoers in London and across the country.

Baumol and Bowen's statistics alone cannot truly describe the experience of attending the National Theatre at the Old Vic. The opening production took place on 22 October 1963. The Old Vic was not in the nicest part of London as its surroundings "still resembled a wartime bomb-site"; the theatre was a "ten-minute trek through the urban jungle of Waterloo with its street urchins and meths drinkers," (Lewis, 1990: 8 - 9). A qualitative approach is needed to bring to life an accurate profile of the theatre at that time. The statistics do not tell that the new National Theatre at the Old Vic featured a "slick and efficient front of house operation", "sumptuous new programmes", and a "surprisingly well-stocked bookstall" (Callow, 1997: 14). The Old Vic at this time represented "the Mecca of every true believing theatre-goer" (*op cit*: 17). What Baumol and Bowen (1966) do provide is a snapshot of two audiences for two un-named plays.

In terms of chronology, the most comprehensive, published, academic, audience surveys in British theatres in the 1960s were carried out by Sheffield University sociology lecturer Peter Mann (1967, 1969) and Strathclyde University lecturers Wilkie and Bradley (1970), from the Department of Administration. Mann's Sheffield survey is "unique in British research" primarily because it is the first theatre survey of a repertory theatre (Mann, 1966: 380) and "the first audience survey to be given wide circulation... Prior to this, statistical information about audiences was not readily available" (Gardiner, 1994: 70). Mann was critical of the Arts Council because despite its increased grants to repertories, "yet no one has suggested consumer studies of these institutions" (Mann, 1967: 75). Mann's original plan was to survey a children's show at the Sheffield Playhouse having received a grant from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation with the aim of "finding out something about the people who came to see the play" but then pointed out to the charity that if the play for young people, the Conan Doyle adaptation *Rodney Stone*, were surveyed alone, the audience would not be typical of the venue. An additional grant was given to include Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*. So unlike Baumol and Bowen (1966) the productions are known when the audience was surveyed.



Mann's next research, where he profiled audiences during the DALTA (Dramatic and Lyric Theatre Association) season at the Grand Theatre in Leeds from 6 February to 2 March 1967 was "probably the largest audience survey to be carried out in England" Mann (1969: 70). The aim of the research, undertaken for the Arts Council, was to develop audiences for DALTA to ensure the organisation's survival. The productions during the survey had toured from the National Theatre: Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* and Strindberg's *The Dance of Death*. The latter was to have starred Laurence Olivier, a major box office star, but he had withdrawn through illness. Having completed two innovative quantitative surveys, the conclusions Mann arrives at suggest that a different methodology is required for audience research. Questionnaire surveys such as the Leeds research are "a limited research tool... designed for *quick* completion... in general, therefore, the need now is to move on from the "headcounting" to the more probing interviews which can go much further into the interests, characteristics and motives of the theatre-goer" (*ibid*: 70 - 71).

Mann's influence is such that subsequent academic research followed his template, in particular Wilkie and Bradley (1970) whose audience surveys at the Glasgow Citizens' Theatre during the spring of 1969 attempted to discover more reliable audience data for their board of management over the issue of declining audiences. The next major quantitative research project was the "first ever full-scale piece of research on West End audiences" (Gardiner, 1991: 8) which took place in 1980 and 1981, repeated a decade later. The aim of the survey was to profile "ticket buyers" but the flaws in the methodology meant that some theatregoers were captured more than once if they attended on another surveyed performance. Further research by Myerscough (1988) was conducted to analyse the economic impact of the arts. Myerscough's survey at the national theatres, at musicals and at comedies and dramas indicate innovations from those in the 1960s. In particular, there are questions on the audience's perceptions of the arts. Museums and theatres were compared with other leisure activities such as going out to pubs and clubs, a trend that has continued to the present day with the Department of Culture Media and Sport's (2007) Taking Part research.

### 2.1.1 Limitations with theatre survey techniques

There are three kinds of theatre surveys: the collection of data by a theatre's marketing department, academic studies, and specific market research, usually accomplished in conjunction with a marketing agency, a trust fund or a funding body. Much of this information is not revealed to the public. Historically, theatre managers' knowledge of their audience was limited to information collected within their receipt and account books, and despite the many reasons for carrying out audience research, most theatres still collect data in order to generate sales and to discover what marketing methods are most successful in doing so (Gardiner, 1994: 72).

Can questionnaires be effective in learning about theatre audiences? Elizabeth Sweeting, a former General Manager of the Oxford Playhouse, is sceptical about questionnaires because “jokers” can give “frivolous answers”, whilst data are “full of hidden snobisme and social prejudice” (Sweeting, 1969: 143 – 144). Indeed, Sweeting asks: “Who is willing to disclose his hatred of the kitchen sink when he has the lurking feeling that he is not “with it” if he does so?” (*ibid*). Ironically, this very survey includes a finding where participants have indeed disclosed a dislike for ‘kitchen sink’ drama (see section 8.6).

Box office data suffer from double counting regular theatregoers (Fenn *et al*, 2004: 20). Some organisations pool their box office data, as in a project from Arts Marketing Warwickshire in 2000 (Bridgwood and Skelton, 2002: 56). However, this only partially analyses the nature of the audience. The technology exists to map the audiences onto ACORN (A Classification of Residential Neighbourhoods, created by CACI Ltd) or MOSAIC consumer classification indicators, the system used by Experian, where sixty-one types are aggregated into eleven groups (Experian, 2004: 4).

Regularity, or frequency of attendance, is a key concept for this study. Theatre surveys, as with population surveys (see section 2.2.6) demonstrate a varying definition of regularity. One measure would be counting the frequency of the same theatregoer attending across a year taken from the box office records; these figures do not tend to be regularly published. More usually in published, academic theatre research, the theatregoers who are within the survey are asked how many productions they have attended in the past year, and then classified. In Sheffield, they are grouped as ‘regulars’ and ‘casuals’ (Mann, 1967: 86 – 87), whilst in Glasgow the audience is divided into ‘irregulars’, ‘regulars’ and ‘hard core’ (Wilkie and Bradley, 1970: 48).

### 2.1.2 Limitations with population surveys

The earliest theatre population surveys in Britain were carried out by Mass Observation in December 1948 for the Daily Graphic (Findlater, 1952: 216). Respondents interviewed were asked when they last made a visit to the theatre, how much they paid and what theatrical preferences they had. These surveys indicate their limitations because the questions do not address regularity, nor people’s motivation for their attendance. Furthermore, the supposedly “amateur and innocent” Mass Observation research that took place in the 1930s has subsequently been criticised for their ethics, because of a supposed “hidden agenda” (Carey, 1992: 25). Carey has a low opinion of this research which he suggests was a campaign by elitist intellectuals to maintain the exclusivity of the arts and their society by “eliminating the humanity of the masses... by converting them to scientific specimens.”

According to Feist (1998: 34) population surveys as a form of research have their limitations. He cites a lack of specificity (they do not ask respondents about

venues, productions, genres, or whether the production was professional or amateur) and queries their reliability such as over a person's recall over the previous 12 months. Another flaw might be that casual attenders are not picked up if the surveys are of regular attenders (Throsby and Withers, 1993: 96). However, it appears that researchers such as Ostrower (2005a) have subsequently overcome these problems with a range of more specific questions in the survey, discussed later in this section.

The main limitation of some quantitative research is that the survey does not interrogate the respondent over their 'lived experience', therefore failing to fulfil Schutz (1967) and his criteria for discovering motives (see chapter three). An example of this limited research would be Skelton *et al* (2002: 89) where respondents are asked to pick from 8 categories of "reasons for going" to an event coded in a previous question. The choices given are: "see specific performer or event", "like going to that type of event", "special occasion/celebration", "social event", "invited to go", "recommended by a friend or relative", "accompanying children", "happened to be passing by" and "other". None of these choices enable the researcher to discover motives; furthermore, what is needed is an opening out of the "like going to" of the second choice. Skelton *et al*'s survey does not find out why respondents are motivated to attend.

A survey that does to some extent probe the past is Ostrower's computer assisted telephone interviews of the American National Survey of Cultural Participation. She asked respondents questions based on their "big reason" to attend certain art forms (Ostrower, 2005a: 34). These included the following options in Question 30: "low cost", "wanting to experience high quality art", "wanting to socialize with family or friends", "wanting to learn about or celebrate your or your family's cultural heritage", "wanting to support a community organization or event", "you thought it would be emotionally rewarding" and lastly "to gain knowledge or to learn something new". A qualitative element to the question follows with

Question 30, enabling respondent to add their own answer if there were other major reasons why they attended. In addition, Question 32 probes further “the artistic quality was high”, “this was an enjoyable social occasion”, “you learned or experienced something new from it”, “you liked the place where [it] was located” and “you found it emotionally rewarding”. Furthermore, Ostrower brings in to her study issues around cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984). Question 39 asks “when you were growing up, how often did your parents or other adults take you to art or cultural events? Would you say it was often, sometimes, rarely, or never?” and Question D2’s “Did you take any of these [*the respondent’s*] children to art or cultural activities or events during the last 12 months?” These questions are also asked in relation to this study, albeit within a different research framework. Ostrower also asks questions relating to interviewees’ participation as volunteers and donors, a subject that emerged during this study (see chapter nine).

The main limitation of Ostrower’s survey is the lack of depth within the responses; interviewees also are not interrogated over their statements to probe for other, meaningful data. There are only minor insights into a person’s lived experience (Schutz, 1967). Whilst it can be discovered if the respondents were taken to the theatre by a parent, there is no indication if in their formative experiences of theatre, they were taken by anyone else. What kind of production were they taken to? What did they think of it? What was their intention to the production (Heidegger, 1925)? What were the consequences of their attendance? Was there any one production that changed their lives? Does motivation to attend change as they go through their lives? Similarly about their children: what did they take them to? Why? Population surveys therefore have their limitations. The next section addresses limitations of consumer surveys.

### 2.1.3 Limitations with consumer surveys

Consumer surveys indicate inconsistencies over categorising genres. Up until 1987 the General Household Survey bracketed together theatre, ballet and opera but the category was reformatted in 1987 as “plays, pantomimes or musicals (including folk, rock or pop concerts)”. The re-categorisation led to an increase in the figures. For example, the number of working class groups attending theatrical productions increased but this increase could be the result of the change in questionnaire design rather than a change in working class behaviour towards the theatre (Willis, 1996: 69 – 70). Baldry argues for a more coherent categorisation so that policy decisions can be made with meaningful definitions of the arts; for him statistics are meaningless if attendances are artificially analysed by including lowbrow, or middlebrow entertainment as art (Baldry, 1981: 112).

## 2.2 Development of qualitative theatre research surveys

Some of the first qualitative theatre audience research took place in 1981 by NOP (National Opinion Polls) to discover why people did not attend the theatre. Structured group discussions were used to draw out opinions and concerns from a representative sample of the public. One of the primary uses for qualitative research is to find out what the audience thinks about a production, but any kind of audience research does not provide “conclusive” answers as to why people go or stay away from the theatre (Gardiner, 1994: 71 – 72). Gardiner is right – using the term “conclusive” does hint at a one hundred percent result.

Other qualitative studies use one-to-one interviews with a representative sample of a population as with Osborne, Wheeler and Elliott (1999: 1). A much larger oral history of audiences, and theatre practitioners is currently taking place analysing individuals' perceptions of theatre from 1945 – 1968 using one-to-one interviews (British Library, nd). The Arts Debate study recently published, included twenty focus groups representing the general population, some of whom are heavily involved in the arts (Creative Research, 2007b). This qualitative research is the first real attempt by the Arts Council to engage in gaining rich data from the public. It is interesting from a Zeitgeist perspective that the Arts Council's research took place almost simultaneously with the reminiscence research in this study. However, chapter four indicates how reminiscence workshops, fusing elements of the oral history interview, and the focus group, can be used to gain richer, more reflective data than either of these methods.

Despite the limitations of audience surveys, their data are very useful to identify snapshots of audiences. The profile of participants, as discussed in chapter five, can be mapped against the profile and trends in theatregoing as identified in this audience data. This section examines six key factors emerging from the literature relating to audience survey findings. The following factors are analysed: age, gender, education, social class, ethnicity and frequency of attendance.

### 2.2.1 Age

This section aims to answer the following two questions: what is the age profile of theatregoers today, and has this profile been consistent since the 1960s? Peterson, Hull and Kern (2000: 5) have identified six age cohorts – the “roaring twenties” for people born from 1916 – 25, the “War and Great Depression” (1926 – 1945), early “baby-boomers” (1946 – 1955), late “baby-boomers” (1956 – 1965), and

two “post-boomers” cohorts, (1966 – 1975), and (1976 to date). It is also important that the age factor should not be viewed in isolation. The motivations of different age cohorts changes over time. Discovering the motivation of one age cohort today does not mean that that people of the same age cohort were motivated in the same way in the past. According to the literature, among the pre-baby boomer cohorts, family income, education and gender are the most important factors predicting their attendance for theatre. Income and education are the relevant factors for musicals. For post-boomers, the most important factors are education, father’s education, student status, and being single for theatre. For musicals the factors are gender, ethnicity and living near a metropolitan area (*ibid*: 2000: 61 – 62).

American surveys suggest that there are today decreasing numbers of younger people, and increasing numbers of older people attending theatre, up to the age of seventy, after which numbers decline (*ibid*: 2000: 12). British statistics for plays and musicals support this, with people aged 55 – 64 the highest age category for attenders, followed by those aged 45 – 54 (Skelton *et al*, 2002: 22, Fenn *et al*, 2004: 38). These statistics also indicate that 25% of people aged 65 – 74, and 15% of those aged 75+ attend plays or dramas. It is, however, a limitation of Skelton *et al*, and Fenn *et al*, that their research does not identify the percentage of theatre audiences according to age categories. Their data refer to the percentage of people within the population of a whole who attend the theatre. That the theatre audience appears to be ageing runs counter to the most recent Arts Council England’s policies since its formation in attracting young people to the arts (Arts Council England, 2006). Age is an important variable in determining whether a person is likely to become a long-term, regular theatregoer. Early socialisation into the arts is more important for the development of an adult’s participation than a person’s income or education (Walker, Scott-Melnyk and Sherwood, 2002: 7). In chapter six, the age at which the participants in this study are socialised into theatre is discussed.



The literature furthermore indicates that the age profile of theatregoers has changed over time. In the first published quantitative study of British theatre audiences by Baumol and Bowen (1966: 92), the authors noted that “while the American audience was young, the British audience was even younger”. They found that theatregoers aged between 20 - 24 were represented by a factor of three and a half times their percentage within the UK population. However, Baumol and Bowen’s study only took in the National Theatre, and not the commercial West End, or regional venues. Their findings must accordingly be limited by their range. In the sixties, in cities with access to a student population, theatres attracted young people in significant numbers (Mann, 1967, 1969, Wilkie and Bradley, 1970, Lagden, 1971) but figures for those aged 65 and over were not high.

Over the next couple of decades, the age group participating in the largest numbers was those aged 50 – 64 (Myerscough, 1986, citing MORI statistics from 1981) whilst by the late nineties, the most dominant groups are aged 45 – 54 (Quine, 1999: 17 – 18, Keate, 2000: 35) and 55 – 64 (Skelton *et al*, 2002). Today, regular theatre audiences are likely to be older rather than younger (Bunting *et al*, 2008: 50), with a similar audience profile in the United States. However, the 35 – 44 group is also strong (Bradshaw and Mosier, 1999, Shugoll Research, 2000).

By cross-referencing the age of theatregoers with genres of productions attended, the literature suggests that younger theatre audiences prefer entertainments such as musicals to straight plays. The commercial West End attracts people aged 25 – 34 over other age groups, although that age group indicates a decline from 1981 to 1991, and there are relatively low numbers of people over 55 (Gardiner, 1994: 81 – 82). The percentages for younger people are about 10% lower when attenders are asked if they attended a “play” rather than attended “theatre” (Verwey, 1992: 1) reinforcing the suggestion that younger people prefer musicals. Younger audiences prefer experimental theatre, whilst older audiences prefer boulevard

theatre. This kind of theatre is costly, star-laden and classical (Bourdieu, 1984: 234).

The literature on the age of theatregoers attending the theatre indicates there are plenty of gaps in knowledge. At what age were theatregoers introduced to the theatre? What did they attend at that age? What did they go to at different ages throughout their lives? The data suggest an intriguing, but as yet, unproven interpretation. The majority of attenders at the time of Baumol and Bowen (1966) tended to be students, or people in their twenties or thirties. The majority of attenders today tend to be in their fifties or sixties (Skelton *et al*, 2002: 22, Fenn *et al*, 2004: 38). Could the bulk of British theatregoers, as reflected in the theatre surveys, be exactly the same people – over the past three or four decades? This question cannot be answered in this study. However, by focusing on some theatregoers who have attended the theatre over this period, greater insights into age-related attendance can be posited (see chapters six to nine).

### 2.2.2 Gender

The literature suggests that “it is inescapable... that attendance at theatre is predominantly a female rather than a male interest” (Quine, 1999: 17). Quine supports Gardiner whose West End survey data show that “most theatre audience surveys in the U.K. produce a result with a majority of women in the audience” (Gardiner, 1991: 25 – 26). This trend is also evidenced by Myerscough (1986, 1988), citing Gardiner (1982) and Arts Council research from 1984, Fenn *et al* (2004: 37), and Bunting *et al* (2008: 49). The pattern is similar in the United States, with Bradshaw and Mosier (1999), Shugoll Research (2000), Clopton, Stoddard and Dave (2006), Australia, with Roy Morgan Research (1996),

Osborne, Wheeler and Elliott (1999), Constantoura (2000) and New Zealand with Keate (2000) and Colmar Brunton (2006).

Historically this profile was different, however. Theatregoing was predominantly a male leisure activity in the mid-to-late nineteenth century when some women had to dress as men in order to see shows in London's West End. Theatre was not a space for women in the nineteenth century (Gardner, 2000: 26 - 27). In London's East End theatres such as the Britannia in Hoxton the venue attracted a majority of young, male working classes, especially early in the week after their Saturday pay-day (Barker, 1979). As the century progressed, the development in transport (trains, omnibuses), improved marketing, and the gentrification of the pit into stalls alongside other modernisations, changed the nature of the audience. Theatre became more female-friendly (*op cit*: 39; Davis and Emiljanov, 2001). By the time that Mann undertook his Sheffield audience research the audience consisted of one third males and two thirds females (Mann, 1967: 77).

Women dominate theatre and musicals attendances, and all higher art forms, in all age groups (Peterson, Hull and Kern, 2000). Webber and Challans (1992: 62), referring to the RSGB Omnibus Survey Report on a Survey of Arts and Cultural Activity in Great Britain (1991), suggest that the higher figures for women attending arts events is interesting because they attend despite the many disadvantages affecting women. These disadvantages include the lack of time due to working, bringing up families or finding child-care, money, transport difficulties, the lack of crèches at arts venues, and fear about going out at night in urban areas. The survey report also suggests that attendance at arts events declines "when children are involved".

Gender issues relating to the participants in this study are discussed in chapter five, whilst the effect of having children is analysed in chapter nine. The literature survey results indicating the predominance of females as attenders does not suggest reasons for this trend. By interpreting the reminiscences of participants in chapters six to nine, the motivation of both genders to attend theatrical productions is examined in more depth than in surveys from the literature.

### 2.2.3 Education

The literature from surveys in Britain (Baumol and Bowen, 1966, Mann, 1967, 1969, Wilkie and Bradley, 1970, Myerscough, 1986, 1988, Gardiner, 1991, Skelton *et al*, 2002, Bunting *et al*, 2008) indicates that theatre audiences are, and have been highly educated. This is significant because educational achievement is also a prime predictor of attendance for theatre and musicals in the United States in all age cohorts (Peterson, Hull and Kern, 2000), a profile also noted in New Zealand (Keate, 2000: 35). There is a greater correlation between the forms of culture appreciated by people as a result of their educational level than their social origin (Bourdieu, 1984: 1). More intellectual audiences prefer experimental work to classics in boulevard theatres with high ticket prices, for example (*ibid*: 234).

Theatre surveys also indicate high numbers of students, graduates or those with teaching qualifications in the audience (Baumol and Bowen, 1966, Mann, 1967, 1969, Wilkie and Bradley, 1970, Myerscough, 1986, 1988, Gardiner, 1991). Again, there is a similar pattern in the United States with Bradshaw and Mosier (1999), Clopton, Stoddard and Dave (2006), Australia with Roy Morgan Research (1996), Osborne, Wheeler and Elliott (1999), Constantoura (2000) and New Zealand with Keate (2000) and Colmar Brunton (2006). This “over-representation” of teachers and students occurs more in avant garde productions

than in the classical or boulevard genre (Bourdieu, 1984: 116 – 120). The importance of education as a factor in segmenting audiences is that educational levels are the “strongest and the most consistently significant factor in determining the level of arts attendance” (Bunting *et al*, 2008: 63).

These audience findings appear to have surprised the researchers of the first published survey, who describe the educational achievements of the audience as “extraordinarily high” (Baumol and Bowen, 1966: 91 – 92). Mann (1969: 1) discovered that “at present all indications from the subsidised theatres show a highly educated and overwhelmingly middle class audience”. In his Sheffield study Mann indicates that “the educational standards of both audiences [*Rodney Stone*, the play for young people, and *Uncle Vanya*] were... extremely high compared with the general population” Mann (1967: 80). One quarter of the audiences for both shows were still receiving full time education and a quarter of the *Uncle Vanya* audience had been to, or was at, university. Mann’s Leeds’ Grand Theatre study was skewed somewhat, however, because the night *The Dance of Death* was surveyed there was a large party of York university students present (*ibid*: 8 - 9). Mann discovered that 43% of Sheffield’s audiences had been to university or teacher training college. Two thirds of the student audience in the West End is female (Gardiner, 1991: 32). The educational level of the participants in this study is discussed in chapter five.

Educational status is viewed, along with earnings, as a proxy for a measurement of class (Chan and Goldthorpe, 2005: 197). Audiences analysed according to class are discussed in the section 2.2.4. Bunting *et al* (2008: 63) also admit that “we still do not understand what it is about education that influences people’s propensity to attend the arts”. One of the most important elements of this study is that it helps to shed further light on how educational levels affect the attendance of long-term, regular theatregoers. The “more in-depth study” requested by the authors (*ibid*) is partly the remit of chapter six.

#### 2.2.4 Social Class, employment, income and social status

This section examines social class, encompassing income, employment and social status. Social class is a “slippery” concept infused with aspects of power, prestige, money and culture (Haywood *et al*, 1991: 158). The middle class is a contested term due to the blurring of boundaries (Clarke and Critcher, 1989: 148). One conceptualisation of class has three elements. The first element consists of the causal factors that affect opportunities for people living in a capitalist society. The second element is the way of life that is expected by those wishing to join a certain circle of people. The final element is the status culture by which this group of people is able to remain cohesive and distinctive from other groups in society (DiMaggio and Mohr, 1985, citing Weber 1922).

In the absence of specific data about an individual’s class, researchers can deduce a person’s class from details such as their home address, or their pattern of speech. Other “rough” definitions of class include how a person is paid: by a salary or wages. How the individual was educated - in a secondary modern or grammar school, or comprehensive or public school can also lead to a determination of a person’s class (Williams, 1969: 18 - 6). It is also possible to infer social class from a person’s occupation (Haywood, 1991: 158).

Survey data suggest that higher levels of education (see section 2.2.3) affect regular attendance more than social class factors (Bunting *et al*, 2008: 48). Social status, however, which helps construct a person’s identity, is almost as important a factor in arts attendance as education when people attend according to factors akin to “people like us” (*ibid*: 63 – 64). An individual’s income does not affect arts participation (Colmar Brunton, 2006: 18, Bunting *et al*, 2008: 57 - 60). However, the higher social classes and those earning higher salaries, attend the theatre more than other social classes and lower income earners (Baumol and Bowen, 1966, Mann, 1967, 1969, Wilkie and Bradley, 1970, Ramprakash, 1985, Myerscough,

1986: 303, Myerscough, 1988: 26, RSGB 1991:1, Verwey, 1992, Skelton *et al*, 2002, Matheson and Babb, 2002: 214, Fenn *et al*, 2004, Bunting *et al*, 2008). There are similar results in the United States with Bradshaw and Mosier (1999), Clopton, Stoddard and Dave (2006) and Australia with Roy Morgan Research, (1996), Osborne, Wheeler and Elliott (1999) and Constantoura (2000). It is also the case that theatregoers tend to live in the most affluent parts of towns and cities, or in well-off towns and villages (Mann, 1967, 1969, Wilkie and Bradley, 1970, Myerscough, 1986, Gardiner, 1991, Bunting *et al*, 2008).

Many surveys follow Institute of Practitioners in Advertising in what (Kolb, 2001: 8) describes as “the standard for marketing surveys”. In this model, the descriptor “ABC1” broadly represents upper middle, middle and lower middle class - people in professional and higher managerial occupations. “C2DE” denotes the working classes with those involved in clerical, skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled occupations (*ibid*). The model has its limitations in that it is primarily based on the employment of males who are the head of the household, and it does not take into account social changes in employment such as the greater employment of women, and the gradual erosion of the traditional working class (Haywood *et al*, 1991: 158).

The same limitations are found in the studies of Mann (1967: 81), Bourdieu (1984: 13) and DiMaggio and Mohr (1985). They define the social class of respondents by the occupation of the father on the basis that the father’s occupation is a stronger indicator of subsequent cultural capital than mother’s occupation. Bourdieu’s definition insufficiently reflects the gender role in determining cultural capital as it relates to the arts. The literature on gender (see section 2.2.2) indicates the predominance of females in both the arts and theatregoing. It is one of the strengths of this study that the influences of females are weighed equally as those of males when parental theatre attendance is analysed (see section 5.1).

A newer model has been devised by Chan and Goldthorpe (2005: 202) to overcome the limitations in previous models. This ranks over thirty employment occupations in order of social status from higher professionals to general labourers. The benefit of this model is that it reflects social and gender changes within the workplace. However, in this study where such quantitative data were not collected (see chapter four), the terms “middle class” or “working class” shall be used to describe people in class terms. This is because this is the terminology used by participants to define themselves, during the reminiscence workshops.

Much contemporary research on class and the arts (incorporating theatregoing) reflects an impact of Bourdieu’s theories of distinction. Bourdieu’s (1984) theories where highbrow arts are appreciated by the higher classes have been incorporated into discussions on the importance of homology and theatregoing. The theory of homology suggests that that the higher social classes arts consume the higher arts, and that a person’s taste is determined by a better education and his/her higher class (Chan and Goldthorpe, 2005: 194). The middle classes follow middlebrow tastes whilst popular tastes are favoured by the masses. Bourdieu’s claim is that a person’s class can be affirmed by the preferences of their artistic tastes. This appears more the case with music than theatre because of theatre’s division into bourgeois and avant-garde theatre (Bourdieu, 1984: 18). Bourdieu’s French survey in 1963, and then again in 1967 – 8, indicates a predominantly bourgeois audience for theatre. The higher classes prefer boulevard theatre to experimental theatre, findings broadly supported by other Francophone surveys in Belgium and Switzerland (Ravar and Anrieu, 1964: 20). Boulevard theatre consists of “tried and tested shows... written to reliable formulae and performed by consecrated actors, and which caters for a middle-aged, ‘bourgeois’ audience that is disposed to pay high prices, is opposed in every respect to experimental theatre, which attracts a young, ‘intellectual’ audience to relatively inexpensive shows that flout ethical and aesthetic conventions” (*op cit*, 1984: 234).

People of the “dominant fractions” display aspects of conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 1899). They buy the best seats, dress to impress, dine at the best



restaurants beforehand or afterwards, quaff champagne, and choose safe, well-crafted productions with high quality performers. They expect to be entertained with comedy (Bourdieu, 1984: 269 – 273). As a demonstration of their conspicuous consumption, some audiences may attend theatre productions partly in order to buy products such as mugs, t-shirts and programmes (Kershaw, 1994: 172 – 176). Kershaw's view is that theatre has "a rising social status" as a "symbolic commodity" which is also reflected in higher (West End) ticket prices.

The composition of theatre audiences appears not to have changed much in terms of class since the 1960s. Baumol and Bowen (1966) find that professional people made up the majority of the audiences London's Old Vic theatre. The number of professionals was eight times that of average population. "Blue collar" workers made up 4.6% of the audience. The authors conclude: "it should be clear by now that "the common man" is fairly uncommon among those who attend live professional performances" (Baumol and Bowen, 1966: 92 - 93). There were signs that British theatre was attracting some new audiences before Baumol and Bowen's survey, however. This trend was noticeable to writers of theatre yearbooks. Newcomers were able to attend because of the earlier start-times of shows, better public transport, summer runs, longer runs due to higher numbers of audiences, partly from the newly developed foreign tourist trade, and less dressing up for the theatre (Carter, 1959: 6 – 7).

Neither in London, nor in Britain's major cities have new, working class audiences been attracted regularly to the theatre. Mann (1967: 81) identifies in his Sheffield study that 50% of the audience was AB (the population of ABs at that time comprised 12% of the UK population). These statistics were confirmed by further research by Mann (1969: 8-10) in Leeds, by a study for the Phoenix Theatre in Leicester (Hayman, 1973: 308) and by Wilkie and Bradley (1970: 40) who compared audiences for three shows at the Citizen's Theatre in Glasgow. They found that a production with local relevance, *Clydeside 2*, attracted more "blue collar" workers (13%) than the two other plays surveyed - *Billy Liar* (7%) and *The Homecoming* (5%). Nevertheless the audiences for all three plays were

heavily from the managerial or professional classes, or students (73%), not including housewives. At the Victoria, Stoke, there was “a singular absence of near-formally dressed, middle-class, culture-seekers” with a wide spectrum of people attending the Christmas pantomime (Cheeseman, 1971).

In her survey with adult education students conducted roughly at the same time as Baumol and Bowen, Crane (1964: 32), notes that some provincial theatres “lack the friendly anonymity of the cinema and regular theatregoers give a cliquey, club like atmosphere to many theatre foyers. All too often the general atmosphere is middle-class both in the theatre itself and on the stage” whilst in their study of Glasgow Citizens’ audiences Wilkie and Bradley conclude; “clearly the social class of the audiences may be summarised in one word – “middle class”” Wilkie and Bradley (1970: 40). This finding was reinforced at Keele and Stoke (Lagden, 1970: 83).

The desire to attract new audiences to the theatre is shared by many artists. John McGrath, the radical director of 7:84, and playwright observed that “the audience has changed very little in the theatre, the social requirements remain constant, the values remain firmly those of acceptability to a metropolitan middle-class audience, with an eye to similar acceptability on the international cultural market” (McGrath, 1981: 15). Theatregoers are negatively described as the “3-M audience – middle class, middle-aged and minority” by Willis (1990: 10) whose aim was to improve the leisure activities of young people. Grotowski (1969: 28 – 29) suggests that the theatregoer “must show that he belongs to the best society where “Art” is a guarantee”. The implication is that if theatre audiences consist mainly of the elite in society, then theatre is inherently elitist. This is contrasted with “intellectuals” who go to self-consciously arty shows, with no other motivation than the show itself, gaining symbolic profit by discussing the production later with family, friends, students and so on (Bourdieu, 1984: 270).

If Bourdieu is correct in his assumptions, bourgeois or middle class participants in this study's reminiscence workshops should be indicating that their attendance at the theatre is motivated by their desire to show off symbolically their class aspirations or gains. Chapter five discusses the social class of participants in this study and assesses the importance of class to their regular attendance. The existing literature based on survey findings does not indicate how a person might have changed class over time, as income levels, or employment situations were altered. Longitudinal research relating to theatregoers has not yet been accomplished. If attendance in the arts, or theatre were a symbolic activity employed to demonstrate a person's status within society, how is it that more middle class, or wealthy people, do not regularly attend? It is the aim of this research study to discover from the life histories of long-term theatregoers their motivating factors over time. This study suggests in chapters six to nine that other motivations are more important than a person's class heritage.

#### 2.2.5 Ethnicity

The literature suggests that black and Asian people are less likely to go to the arts than white people (Arts Council, 1991: 11, Bunting *et al*, 2008: 11). There are no data on frequency of attendance denoting regularity of attendance by minority ethnic audiences in recent Arts Council surveys. In this study all participants are white which reflects the nature of older audiences at the Oxford Playhouse, and audiences generally at the Corn Exchange, Newbury.

#### 2.2.6 Frequency of attendance

There is no uniform measure of frequency of attendance. Different market research organisations have different definitions, so comparisons are difficult (Bridgwood and Skelton, 2002: 50 - 53). The diversity of measurements on frequency can be evidenced from the following range of surveys: Gardiner

measures the frequency of visits to London theatres over the past twelve months from ‘one’ to ‘more than fifty’ and then divides attenders into four categories: ‘first time visitors’, ‘occasional theatregoers’ (two – three visits over the past twelve months), ‘frequent theatregoers’ (four to eleven visits) and ‘regular theatregoers’ (twelve or more visits) (Gardiner, 1991: 33 - 34). Osborne, Wheeler and Elliott (1999: 3) also use four categories of frequency: none, light (one to three times over two years), medium (four to ten) and heavy (more than eleven). Constantoura (2000: 426) prefers a measure of “the past two weeks”, primarily because of doubts people could remember what they were doing beyond this two week period, and secondly because the researchers wanted to discover the importance of the arts to Australians either day-to-day or week-to-week (*ibid*). Ostrower (2005a: 39) measures frequency from “less often than once a year” through to “several times a week”. The Department of Culture Media and Sport measures frequency from “one – two times a year” to “at least once a week” (Department of Culture Media and Sport, 2007: 108). Arts Council England reports by Skelton *et al* (2002: 16) and Fenn *et al* (2004: 31) employ a range of five categories from once a year through to more than eleven. The most recent Arts Council survey measures high frequency by attendances of more than three (Bunting *et al*, 2008) suggesting a redefinition of frequency.

Consumer surveys indicate the same variations in assessing attendance over time as population surveys. Since 1986, the BMRB’s (British Market Research Bureau) Target Group Index (TGI), which surveys aspects of people’s lifestyles throughout the country, has included questions on arts attendance. The survey is of about 25,000 adults via a questionnaire booklet completed over a 7 – 10 day period. The TGI survey asks people about attendance “these days” compared with the Henley Centre’s “in the three months prior to the interview”, and MORI’s “twelve months prior to the interview” (Bridgwood and Skelton, 2002: 50 – 53). In addition, the RSGB (Research Surveys of Great Britain) Omnibus Survey in 1991, uses “nowadays”, as its preferred measure (Arts Council, 1991: 4). Further inconsistencies on the frequency of attendance can be found in the GHS (General Household Survey) which includes questions about the arts. This survey tends to ask about activities in the four weeks prior to interview, rather than over the last

twelve months. In more recent large scale surveys of theatrical attendance, adults were interviewed face to face in their homes by the Social Survey Division of the Office For National Statistics from 2000 and 2001. Cards with lists of events or activities were shown to respondents who indicated what they had attended in the last four weeks, and in the last twelve months (Bridgwood and Skelton, 2002: 50), thereby remedying previous defects over frequency in the design.

This study is one of the life histories of regular, long-term theatregoers. Frequency of attendance is a central concern for identifying the regularity of theatregoers. The literature indicates that only 2% of the British population attend the theatre as much as eleven times a year (Skelton *et al*, 2002: 16, Fenn *et al*, 2004: 31). There are very few regular theatregoers as a percentage of all theatregoers (Myerscough, 1986: 296, citing a NOP Market Research Ltd survey of London in 1981 which indicates that 1.3 million people went to the theatre each year but only 100,000 people attended as much as once a month). Of the most frequent attenders, the enthusiasts, who comprise 9% of the population, 94% of this group attend plays and dramas more than three times a year. Thirty-nine percent of enthusiasts attend pantomimes and musicals, reflecting the restricted programming of pantomimes to Christmastime, and the higher cost of musicals (Bunting *et al*, 2008: 28 - 29). Surveys elsewhere also suggest low frequency patterns with only 7% of the New Zealand population attending dance, ballet, theatre, concerts or circus more than twelve times in a year (Calmar Brunton, 2006: 34).

Theatregoers who attend theatrical productions frequently, or have attended over a number of years, have acquired extensive cultural capital in theatre because older, loyal arts-lovers have a greater education and knowledge of and in the arts (Bourdieu, 1984). Statistical data tend to reinforce Bourdieu's views. "Systematic theatregoing" also educates theatregoers in plays (Downs, 1951: 81). Frequent "seasoned", "sophisticated", "theatre-wise" attenders book tickets early in a play's run and tend to ensure that the theatre contains a more "perceptive audience" than those who book later in long-running shows (Rice: 1960: 273).

Surveys from the early sixties to the present have indicated a similar pattern: that regular, or the most frequent attenders tend to be well-educated, well-off financially, from professional occupations (Baumol and Bowen, 1966: 93, Gardiner, 1991: 33 - 38). Frequent attenders are more likely to be middle-aged, married, females, without young children, living in the “better” suburbs (Mann, 1967: 87, Colmar Brunton, 2006: 14). They are middle class (Myerscough, 1988: 28). Older audiences attend more frequently than younger theatregoers with the most frequent being over 55 years in age (Gardiner, 1991: 33 – 38). In 1992, frequent attenders tended to be aged 45 – 54 in 1992 (Verwey, 1992) whilst in 2002, the most prominent age cohort was 55 – 64 (Skelton *et al*, 2002). This suggests it is the same cohort a decade later showing most loyalty to the theatre. The age of participants in this study in relation to frequency of attendance is discussed in chapter five.

In terms of their theatregoing behaviour, regular attenders book ‘permanent’ tickets, reserving the same seats, usually for the same days, for each production with these seats being reserved for these loyal attenders (Mann, 1967: 76. Frequent attenders are more likely to participate in the arts in more varied ways than non-frequent attenders (Walker, Scott-Melnyk and Sherwood, 2002: 35, Colmar Brunton, 2006: 12, Bunting *et al*, 2008: 36). They can thereby be conceptualised as cultural omnivores (Peterson and Kern, 1996).

## 2.3 Conclusion

This chapter has indicated that despite the wealth of quantitative surveys, and the emergence of some qualitative research, there are significant gaps in knowledge. These surveys do not reveal much about theatregoers’ initial theatregoing motivations. British surveys have not sufficiently interrogated participants about their family backgrounds, the impact of their youth or education on their theatregoing lives. There is a paucity of data on the range of venues attended, the attachments theatregoers have for venues or companies, and the impact of family

life, employment and ageing on their theatregoing activities. Furthermore, where quantitative secondary research is used to discover wider trends within society, such as the social stratification of audiences, the findings are disputed because of the research's "reliance on the secondary analysis of data of a kind that is inadequate" (Chan and Goldthorpe, 2007a: 317). Whilst Chan and Goldthorpe make a robust defence of their methodology, it is another indication of the limitations of quantitative research.

Bourdieu's (1984) theories of taste rest upon his quantitative research questionnaires, the results of which have been contested by Chan and Goldthorpe (2007a: 317 – 318). They suggest Bourdieu's research has the following limitations. Firstly, the location for part of the survey was not mentioned. Secondly, the sample size did not reflect the population of France at the time of the surveys, conducted in 1963, and 1967 – 8. Thirdly, there was an over-representation of Parisians and upper, and middle classes, and an under-representation of the working classes. Fourthly, the data from the survey were not put in the public domain for further scrutiny. Nevertheless, Bourdieu's theories provide potential audience motivations in cultural and educational capital (see chapter three).

The Arts Debate research (Creative Arts, 2007a) indicates how, forty years after Baumol and Bowen (1966) published the first audience research about UK audiences, qualitative research investigations started to address questions of motivation in a meaningful way. As Ian Christie, deputy director of Demos, (an independent think-tank), suggests, in relation to audience development: "we have to understand the factors affecting our existing and potential audiences' lives as a whole." (Christie, 1999: 5 – 6). Chapter three discusses the literature on audience motivation from a multi-disciplinary perspective.

## CHAPTER THREE

### DEFINING THE THEATREGOER: MOTIVATIONAL CONCEPTS

#### 3. Introduction

This study aims to critically evaluate the motivations of regular, long-term theatregoers. This chapter provides the conceptual framework underpinning this qualitative study. The chapter is in two sections. The first section discusses motivational theories whilst the second focuses on key motivators that emerged from the study. A theory is defined as “the attempt to explain whatever is being studied, with the explanation being couched in more abstract terms than the terms used to describe it” (Punch, 2005: 16). The theories reviewed arise from a multi-disciplinary study of literature relevant to the examination of the motivation of regular, long-term theatregoers.

#### 3.1 Motivation

This section starts with a review of motivation theory from the standpoint of Alfred Schutz (1967) and his analysis of motives within the context of the phenomenology of the social world. Schutz provides an understanding of intentionality, which can be illustrated by a passage from Shakespeare’s *Love’s Labours Lost*. In this scene, Costard comically and obliquely, will not know what his motivation for undertaking Berowne’s task is, until he has “done it”:

|         |  |
|---------|--|
| Berowne | Do one thing for me that I shall entreat |
| Costard | When would you have it done, sir?        |
| Berowne | This afternoon                           |
| Costard | Well, I will do it, sir. Fare you well   |
| Berowne | Thou knowest not what it is              |
| Costard | I shall know, sir, when I have done it   |

(William Shakespeare, *Love’s Labours Lost*, 3.1.149 – 154)



Motivational intentionality occurs when a person reflects subjectively on his/her past actions in relation to his/her future goals. Intentionality derives from ‘intentio’ meaning ‘directing itself forward’ (Heidegger, 1925: 258) as “every lived experience... directs itself toward something.” In terms of his phenomenological argument, Heidegger is relating a person’s intention to the concept of perception. Heidegger suggests that there is a relationship between a person’s consciousness and an object that is perceived, but that object can be real, or an illusion. Heidegger relates intentions to acts, which are “those lived experiences which have the character of intentionality” (*ibid*: 264). The focus of the intention is the thing itself. Thus, the focus of participants’ intentions in this study is theatregoing, and the ‘entity in the manner of its being-perceived’ (*ibid*: 267), in this study, how participants perceive their theatregoing at a time when they were “bodily there” (*ibid*: 269).

To discover a person’s motivation, it is important to reflect retrospectively. A motive, or the intended meaning, is described “in order to” terms, where an act is projected in the future perfect sense, where a person fantasises about a future goal, and takes steps to realise it. However, the person is reflecting on an act that has already happened. Motives are also described in “because” terms which explain a person’s “past lived experience” (Schutz, 1967). A past experience is only “meaningful” when it is finished, or done with, and is then rationally constructed, or recovered in the process of remembering the experience (*ibid*: 53). Schutz (*ibid*) suggests that “the motivational context is by definition the meaning-context within which a particular action stands in virtue of its status as the project of an act for a given actor”. In other words, the “retrospective glance” (*ibid*) of a theatregoer enables his/her meaningful past experiences to be analysed in terms of his/her motivation to go to the theatre. There then follows the interpretation by the researcher of the memories related to him/her by the theatregoer. The researcher interprets according to his/her experience of his/her “past lived experience”, and explains his/her “past lived experience” of the theatregoers. The method by which memories were recalled, and for motivations of both a “because” and an “in order to” nature were revealed, was the reminiscence workshop. In chapters five to nine, the motivations of long-time, regular theatregoers will be

discussed, with Schutz (1967) “in order to – because of” model providing a template to discover theatregoers’ intentions.

### 3.2 Motivation to attend the theatre

Theatregoers define themselves by their different types of motivation to attend the theatre (Bouder-Pailler, 1999: 11 - 12). The motivation varies according to a number of individual factors. The first factor is the involvement of the individual in choosing the product according to the level of risks involved, the experience of the person to make that choice, socio-demographic factors, the personality of the individual and the benefits sought from the product. The second factor is the product itself, which for this research would be the theatrical production, and the third factor is situational such as time factors, the period when the purchase decision is made, the presence or absence of reference groups, the economic climate and place factors (Kotler and Scheff, 1997: 77). These three factors that lead to a person being motivated to participate in the arts could also be conceptualised as a coming together of a person’s individual motivations with community factors with pathways of engagement such as family, friends, community groups, memberships, marketing (Walker, Scott-Melnyk and Sherwood, 2002: 14).

Focusing on individual motivations, Mass Observation reports reveal that socially hedonistic motivations were a primary motivation for theatregoers in the 1940s and 1950s (Rebellato, 1999: 104 – 5). Here, “the performance was not then the sole focus of the theatrical event, but part of a web of pleasurable activities: eating, smoking, drinking, meeting friends, reminiscing and gossip”. This was a time which most likely led Goffman (1963: 18) to conclude that going to the theatre is a “social occasion” where theatregoers adopt the conventions associated with theatregoing. In this study, seventeen of the participants did go to the theatre during the forties and fifties; chapters five and six reveal that social hedonism was

not a prime motivation for them, at that time, although perhaps their youth was a factor in this discrepancy.

Twenty years later there is a suggestion, based on Hayman's own supposition, that many theatregoers are motivated more by the cast than by the play itself with older attenders wishing that their favourite stars still remained young thereby reminding them of their youth (Hayman, 1973: 299).

Research, especially quantitative research, appears to indicate that many of the motivations for theatregoing have little to do with the art itself. Skelton *et al* (2002: 2.3), Fenn *et al* (2004: 98) in a general population survey, and Bridgwood *et al* (2003: 43 – 44), offer respondents “reasons for attending the last event” from which they can pick from the following categories: type of event, specific performer, social event, invited to go, accompanying children, special occasion, recommended by friend or relative, passing by and other. It would be interesting to speculate why these categories were chosen when theatre and arts products are most likely to appeal to the “sensorial, hedonistic and emotional side of the consumer” (Colbert *et al*, 2001). Whilst statistics such as “people aged 35 – 44 were most likely to go accompanying children” result from this kind of survey, findings like these do not indicate motivation. They indicate a mode of attendance. The most recent qualitative research in the UK indicates five benefits that people gain from the arts: pleasure and enjoyment (discussed in section 3.4.1), enrichment (food for the spirit) – see section 3.7, communication (self-expression) – see chapter nine, a sense of identity – see chapters seven, eight, nine and ten, and improved health and well-being (Bunting, 2007: 6, Creative Research, 2007: 73). Creative Research derived its ideas from the general public primarily rather than entirely of arts attenders or theatregoers, which could indicate a lack of knowledge and understanding about the arts from the respondents.

A useful model as a framework for this chapter is Cooper and Tower's (1992) adaptation of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs model, which Maslow first articulated

in 1943. The authors argue that people's motivation to attend the arts is based on the level of their needs. Their model works as follows: when the needs have been satisfied at the entry (physiological) level, then a person is able to move up the ladder to the next level of needs, or as Kotler and Scheff (1997: 83 - 84) explain it: "gratification at each level contributes to a person's maturation".

At the entry level, a person's most basic needs relate to stimulation, and the motivation for new experiences in the arts means a change from routines and boredom. Level two is that of social needs where a person is motivated to attend the arts for reasons of interacting with others, for the ritual aspects of attendance such as dressing up, for social esteem and for entertainment purposes - enjoying a night out, for example. Level three relates to a person's personal development and their motivation is one of education, artistic nourishment and new horizons. Once these needs are fulfilled, a person's psychological needs can be met in Level four by unwinding and relaxing at an arts event, by escaping and entering a fantasy world, and by feeling a sense of catharsis or release by attending a performance. These four levels are outer-directed needs, in that individuals' "deficiency motivation" can only be satisfied by other people (Maslow, 1968: 39 - 41). The final level of the hierarchy is self-actualisation. This is inner-directed, in persons Maslow calls "growth motivated" people. Here a person relates to the aesthetics or beauty of the arts, and is transformed with a sense of heightened awareness, and achieves a "high" transcendence having been stimulated by the arts event. Maslow's motivational theory does not suggest universality because the evidence for his 1943 theories are based on eighty individual interviews and written responses by one hundred and ninety college students in the United States, in 1956 (*ibid*: 83). The model could be viewed as flawed. This is because Maslow's instructions regarding self-actualisation, or "peak experiences" could have led respondents to his concept of self-actualisation through terms such as "the most wonderful experience or experiences of your life", "moments of rapture", "being hit by a book or painting" and "great creative moment" (*ibid*). Despite the flaws, Maslow's model is useful because he researched the experiences of real people, and their stories are meaningful in themselves.

Having gathered prime motivations for arts attendance typologies can be devised such as entertainment seekers, self-improvers, trend-setters, status seekers, lonely escapists, inspiration or sensation seekers, extroverts or performers and social attenders (Hill, O'Sullivan and O'Sullivan, 2003: 49). These typologies enable theatregoers to be grouped by their attendance goals (Bouder-Pailler, 1999). A more complex grouping, also by typology, is by psychographic segmentation which analyses people by their values, opinions and interests to group people by their lifestyles (Colbert *et al*, 2001: 112 – 3). Lifestyle segmentation, as identified by Bourdieu (1984) with his concept of homologies, or similar relationships, has led recent researchers to follow Bourdieu's research and discover the connections between cultural taste and production in a range of activities from arts to entertainment, sport to cuisine (Gayo-Cal, Savage and Warde, 2006: 213 – 214).

The Diffusion of Innovation model creates typologies such as innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority and laggards which can be used to group people according to their motivation to take risks in adopting new products (Rogers, 1983). This model has been applied to the analysis of arts attenders (Hill, O'Sullivan and O'Sullivan, 2003: 40 - 43). Typologies relating to attitude and behaviour from "attenders" and "intenders", through to "the indifferent" and "the hostile" indicate a level of audience motivation (Diggle, 1994: 37 – 40). From the 1960s theatregoers have "transmuted" in their role from theatre patrons to clients, where they are subservient to a wiser entity, through to customers (Kershaw, 2007: 183). From an arts marketer's perspective, audiences are divided into being "available" or "unavailable" (*op cit*: 33 – 34). As well as being customers, theatregoers are also conceptualised as stakeholders (Hill, O'Sullivan and O'Sullivan, 2003: 37 – 38) but there are problems with these terms. Stakeholders (such as funders or educational providers) are abstract organisations removed from attendance, whilst customers, whilst making a choice to attend, are not specifically attenders of theatrical presentations.

Research into the social impact of participation in the arts reveals that individuals benefit from personal development such as increasing confidence, enriched social

lives, educational benefits, new skills, social empowerment whilst communities benefit with people being brought together, generating new community links and community regeneration. These benefits in turn create improvements for a location's sense of identity, enhance a place's creative outputs, and stimulate improvements in health and well-being (Matarasso, 1997). Many of these social impacts identified by Matarasso have been revealed as motivating factors for people to attend the arts (Creative Research, 2007a), although this finding could indicate that Matarasso's findings, and subsequent arts impact papers (Matarasso, 1998, Holmes, 2002) are now fully inculcated in the belief systems of the arts professionals who contributed to the Arts Council's The Arts Debate.

Cooper and Tower's (1992) model can be utilised as a framework for analysing a number of key motivations that have arisen from a combination of findings of the data from this study, and a reading of literature from a range of subject disciplines. It is not argued in this study that theatregoers progress through the levels, from one to five. Whilst participants may be described as self-actualisers, the analysis suggests that many of their current motivations to go to the theatre are unchanged from their earliest attendances, as will be revealed in chapter six.

### 3.3 Level one needs: play

Level one of Cooper and Tower's (1992) model relates to the stimulation of, and early experiences in, the arts. One of the earliest experiences for people is playing. That theatregoers attend a performance of a "play", and that people, and animals "play", reveals more than a semantic relationship. The functions of play are that it is a voluntary activity related to free time; it is time and space-limited, creating its own rules and a sense of order, and it is a secret activity for the participants (Huizinga, 1949: 9). This definition encompasses theatregoers attending a play in their spare time where the show is performed at a certain time, in a particular performance space, where specific theatre rituals are observed, and

where the drama can only be seen and heard by those theatregoers at that specific time.

Huizinga explicitly connects the concept of play firstly to the philosophy of Kant (1987) which states that art is beautiful. Huizinga then relates play to magic:

Play has a tendency to be beautiful. It may be that this aesthetic factor is identical with the impulse to create orderly form, which animates play in all its aspects. The words we use to denote the elements of play belong for the most part to aesthetics, terms with which we try to describe the elements of beauty... play casts a spell over us; it is “enchanting”, “captivating”. It is invested with the noblest qualities we are capable of perceiving in things: rhythm and harmony (Huizinga, 1949: 10)

Young children exert a “magical power” over other people (until they grow out of it) making them all “baby bourgeois” (Bourdieu, 1984: 54). Magic, a key concept in this study, will be discussed in section 3.4.4. Play is an activity that uses simulation, a copying of something real, the imitative nature of which becomes a learning activity. Play is a representation of “ordinary” or “real” life, imitative (Piaget, 1962). It has its own dimensions and “every child knows perfectly well that he is “only pretending”, or that it was “only for fun””. (Huizinga, 1949: 8). Play is autotelic or inwards-directed (Piaget, 1962: 148 – 149). Children create “an alternate, counterfactual state” such as “a world of their own”, living “out of this world” (Goldman, 1988: 16) but in their playing take on the roles of “a choreographer, stage manager, writer, co/director, co/actor within fantasy play” (*ibid*: 2).

The relationship between play and make-believe is important. Make believe, another key concept in this study, will be discussed in section 3.6.1. Children use their imagination and believe that representations of something are real (Piaget, 1962: 152). Young children have no conception of the make-believe of drama as their play is their own reality (*ibid*: 168). As children grow older, and gain in

intelligence, they start to lose their keenness to play and their need for imitation (*ibid*: 213). However, Piaget recognises that this development is viewed by sociologists as being caused by “language, myths, rituals and collective life” (*ibid*: 215).

Being able to maintain for “sometimes a whole lifetime, a child’s relation to the world” enables a person to “play the games of culture” (Bourdieu, 1984: 54), a statement supported by the analysis in this study. Therefore, if play does belong as a level one motivation, it is not an unusual finding that self-actualisers retain, as Bourdieu suggests, the view they held as a child. Older people immerse themselves in an activity, are engrossed in it, and find it fun. Goffman (1974: 53) finds in make-believe play activities such as daydreaming, fantasising and dramatic scriptings, which include live stage performances. Reality is “a default setting to be escaped from by use of the imagination, and then something returned to” with a person in his/her state of pretence (Goldman, 1998: 16).

There are three stages in the process from play to art; the first stage is where a child pretends to do something rather than acting impulsively. The second stage is where the child realises for the first time that play is only play, rather than a form of reality. The third stage is an acceptance of the fantasies of others, such as creative artists, thereby enabling the child to enjoy fairy tales or pantomimes (Courtney, 1974: 114, citing Ernst Kris, 1953). As an adult theatregoer therefore, “theatre should be regarded as a form of escape, just as the fairy-story is an escape for the child (Nicoll, 1962: 24). It is also the case that an artist is an escapist in the sense of an introspective flight from everyday life into the interior world of he artist (Read, 2002: 7 - 8). The nature of the audience pretending, in order to escape, is discussed in section 3.6.



### 3.4 Level two needs: attending for social reasons

Although people's attendance motivation varies from art form to art form, attending for social reasons is one of the main motivations for theatregoers (Ostrower, 2005a: 4, Colmar Brunton, 2006: 25, Skelton *et al*, 2002: 19, Fenn *et al*, 2004: 34). Most people go to the theatre as a couple (Myerscough, 1988: 28). More husbands and wives book "permanently" (Mann, 1967: 83 - 4), a finding supported by Ostrower (2005a: 24) whose data suggest that theatregoers attend more with family members than with friends. Likewise, boyfriend and girlfriend is the usual combination at the Glasgow Citizens with its high student profile, with 60% of the audience attending with a member of the opposite sex (Wilkie and Bradley, 1970: 43). The attendance patterns of the participants in this study will be discussed in chapter nine.

#### 3.4.1 Level two needs: enjoyment, entertainment and social hedonism

Many people value the arts for providing entertainment, enjoyment and relaxation (Keaney, 2007: 38 – 39). When going to the theatre, research indicates that entertainment is "certainly the most obvious goal" (Bouder-Pailler, 1999: 9). It does not matter in this study whether theatre is an art form or an entertainment, nor whether a particular production is art or entertainment, especially since it is difficult to tell art from entertainment (Dyer, 1992: 1). Shakespeare was a writer of popular entertainment (Leavis, 1930, Collingwood, 1938: 103) as was Molière, whose plays were "hedonistic, democratic, vulgar, easy" (Dyer, 1992: 12 – 13). The place for entertainment in theatre is widely recognised by artists such as Grotowski (1969: 28 – 29) who wrote: "to the average theatre-goer, the theatre is first and foremost a place of entertainment". Administrators like Findlater (1952: 193) agree: "the first function of a play is to entertain an audience". Entertainment is a stronger motivation for theatregoers than education (Downes, 1951: 13 – 27).

In researching entertainment as a key motivator, Boudier-Pailler (1999) approached theatregoers in Nantes who revealed that their main theatregoing motivations were either intrinsic (entertainment, intellectual enrichment and arousal of emotions) or extrinsic (social hedonism). In an extensive literature review, Boudier-Pailler cites previous studies to hers (Steinberg, Miaoulis and Lloyd, 1982, Nantel and Colbert, 1991, Bergadaa and Nyeck, 1995), all indicating that entertainment is a prime motivating factor, a finding supported by Constantoura (2000). Entertainment, denoting relaxation, having fun and a good time (Bergadaa and Nyeck, 1995) and social hedonism, (going to the theatre to be with other people), (Tinsley, Barrett and Kass, 1977) are, echoing Bourdieu (1984), motivations for less affluent people to attend theatre. More affluent people, however, attend for cultural and educational reasons (Provonost, 1991), again cited by Boudier-Pailler (1999: 5 – 9).

The motivation for entertainment or enjoyment emerges from the sensual response to an object where one is passive (Kant, 1987: 158). Theatregoers whose motivation is primarily hedonistic are responding to artists' own motivation, which is to please (Read, 1956: 16). Hedonistic, entertainment motivations only arouse a pleasurable feeling (Collingwood, 1938: 81) resulting in a corrupted and a diseased society (Tolstoy, 1995, Warburton, 2003: 52). Elitist arguments such as this are, however, demeaning to the masses, and totalitarian in outcome (Carey, 1991).

#### 3.4.2 Level two needs: attending for status and esteem reasons

Cooper and Tower (1992) as discussed in section 3.2, have identified esteem, or status needs as a motivation to attend the arts. There are important status markers about the arts where like-minded people can converse, or exclude others not sharing in the conversation (DiMaggio, 1987). This assumes that attendance at a theatrical production can satisfy these needs, and underlying this assumption must be a belief, in the role of theatre as an “esteem-engine”, as it were.

Bourdieu (1984) in his discourse on taste factors argues that there exists an “aristocracy of culture” that separates people who know culture from people who do not (*ibid*: 318). The argument that art is for the few, for the most intellectual people, is for the purest minds, and is a moral good, reinforces the benefit given to attenders for esteem or status reasons. Even if art is not for the moral good, there might be an esteem factor by being associated with people who have wonderful knowledge, capable of staging magic (see section 3.6.4). Bourdieu adopts the QD Leavis (1932) descriptors of distinction such as highbrow, middlebrow and lowbrow tastes because “popular categories of criticism – high, middle and lowbrow, for example – are now at least as much sociological as aesthetic” (Mills, 1967: 14). These terms are themselves a variation of “Barbarians”, “Philistines” and “The Populace” devised by Matthew Arnold (1994: 66 - 71). Arnold intends the descriptors to refer to “the three great classes into which our society is divided” (*ibid*). Barbarian culture reflects the values of the wealthy uneducated (the term originates from a German word used by students to describe non-students). Philistine culture reflects those of the Puritan middle classes (he counts himself as within that class) and The Populace reflects the culture of the rest.

Support for the view that art should be a ‘high’ art form emerged over two thousand years ago when Plato (2006: 31) advocated that “the fairest music is that which delights the best and the best educated, and especially that which delights the one man who is pre-eminent in virtue and education”. This was a man who “is not sitting as the disciple of the theatre, but in his proper place, as their instructor” (*ibid*). Could it be the case that theatregoers whether they have overtly studied Plato, or have subconsciously absorbed Plato’s philosophy through other social structures, gain esteem and status by being associated with concepts of virtue and education?

Plato associates beauty, virtue, perfect form, truth, education and moral goodness so that the philosopher is a higher appreciator of the arts, a “sightseer of the truth”, than theatregoers who “never go of their own accord to hear a lecture... but... rush around the festivals of Dionysus to hear every theatrical troupe, as if they

were getting paid for the use of their ears, and never miss a single festival” (Plato, 1993: 195 – 196). A discourse that Plato originates which promotes authentic, contemplative art and seeks to censor imitative, pleasurable, innovative, entertainment art forms has asserted a powerful influence over the way the arts have been conceptualised. Associating the arts with the intellect and contemplation of the divine (Plato, 1993, 2006) or with concepts of the sublime and genius (Longinus, 1965, Kant, 1987) places the arts with the ruling guardian class as identified by Plato in *The Republic*. Although Plato (1993: 344) in *The Republic* would have banned theatrical performances on the grounds that imitative art is what amounts to a thought-crime, in *Laws* (Plato, 2006: 165) performances of tragedies are allowed as long as they are licensed and of the best quality. Is there an esteem or status benefit from being a member of today’s guardian class? Only 2% of the UK population attend theatre as much as eleven times a year (Skelton *et al*, 2002: 17, Fenn *et al*, 2004: 31) so does a theatregoer feel esteem or a sense of status by being part of such a small minority?

In what has become a fierce dialectic, the first modern articulation of the primacy of the elite minority in relation to art, Matthew Arnold, writing in 1865, states that culture is “a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world” (Arnold, 1994: 5). The problem, however, is who is to provide the role outlined by Plato as instructor. It falls to FR Leavis (1930: 3 - 30) to provide a solution, which is: “in any period it is upon a very small minority that the discerning appreciation of art and literature depends: it is (apart from cases of the simple and familiar) only a few who are capable of unprompted, first-hand judgement”. This very small minority is sufficiently educated to choose their art through their own experience and knowledge. As the masses gained in literacy, however, so the artists had to strive to keep their art exclusive and distinctive, and developed more extreme, modernist forms (Carey, 1992: 17). Popular culture, when promoted by popular newspapers, magazines, television and pop music is viewed by cultural critics like Richard Hoggart (1992) as “cultural debasement” with pejorative concepts such as “cultural slumming” (Hoggart, 1992: 340 – 344) echoing criticisms of popular culture by Adorno (2001: 96), for whom

“participation in mass culture stands under the sign of terror”, indicating how citizens in Nazi Germany were swayed by mass events, broadcasts and films. So, it is possible that some theatregoers believe themselves to be members of “this very small minority” benefiting from this membership, especially as it results in a positive economic value (Bourdieu, 1984; Adorno, 2001) or practical payoffs (Clarke and Critcher, 1989: 149). The high arts share with Oxford University the “3e” traits: exclusivity, elitism and excellence (Bragg, 2003) where the accepted canon is “not above people’s heads but only meaningful to the bourgeois group” (Braden, 1978, 153 – 154).

Braden believes that the Arts Council’s policy has been “to insist to *all* people that this was *their* culture” (*ibid*), where the “this” is the official, funded high culture. Braden has not considered that theatregoers could still gain esteem and status from attending people’s art, such as street theatre. Revolutionary, Marxist theatregoers might gain esteem by denigrating all theatre with intellectual pretensions. The productions of John McGrath, for example were opposed to socialist playwrights such as Pinter, Beckett and Edgar because their plays contain “mystery”, “knowledge, and words, and facts” which alienate a working class audience (McGrath, 1992, 3 – 4). Blue-collar workers will attend productions reflecting their life, choosing plays like *Clydeside 2* over plays like Pinter’s *The Homecoming* (Wilkie and Bradley, 1970: 40). Indeed McGrath does not believe it possible for socialist theatregoers to feel any sense of esteem or status attending a comfortable theatre with its “articulate middle class men and sometimes women”, high prices, starting times based on middle class eating habits and intellectual atmosphere (*op cit*). The jury is out as to whether attending high arts to meet status needs is primarily a trend from the past. Some studies suggest today’s elite do not wish to be perceived as snobs (Peterson and Kern, 1996) whilst Alibhai-Brown (2008) has identified well-off Asians in the UK as desiring arts that signify “the more expensive, the better for status”.

There are three factors undermining the position of an elite perspective on art. The first is that Britain today is a less deferential environment underpinned by

equality legislation. The second is an embedding of the philosophy of postmodernism which downplays the value of narratives (Lyotard, 1984: 482). The third, also linked to postmodernism, is the philosophy of relativism, which states that “every belief is as good as every other”. Truth “is an equivocal term” and an ethnocentric view dominates (Rorty, 1985: 576). Against these developments, advocacy of a non-relativist position which posits that “some activities are better than others... an insistence on equality may be, in practice, a denial of value” (Raymond, 1993: 318 – 319) may be viewed as upholding the values of the cultural aristocrats. So, in attending perceived high-art theatre to gain personal esteem or status, the theatregoer could also be opposing the democratising direction of the prevailing ‘arts for all’ government policy. This policy promotes “cultural access as one of the egalitarian building blocks of society” (Smith, 1998: 3). If theatregoers did not believe in the New Labour government’s policies, attendance might be another esteem or status gain. Recent qualitative research indicates that in Britain there is much confusion about the definition of the arts, emanating from the arts community and the general public primarily because of the high/low debate and that many people involved in the arts (defined narrowly) believe them to be too elitist (Craig Ross Dawson, 2007: 32 – 47).

### 3.4.3 Level two needs: ritual, ceremony and theatre

Cooper and Tower (1992) place the ritualistic aspects of theatregoing as a second level need to be fulfilled. Findlater sarcastically suggests that “the Englishman” attends the theatre for ceremonial purposes of entertainment, seeing women in expensive dresses, the star names, to have “his prejudices confirmed and his senses soothed” in “a good show and a spiritual binge” (Findlater, 1952: 194). These criticisms equally reflect the common motivations for theatre attendance in nineteenth century Paris (Ireson, 2008: 10 – 25). Despite Findlater’s condescension and stereotyping of the English theatregoer, there is a debate about theatre and its ceremonial role.

Ceremonies are ritualistic, and rituals involve repetition and re-enactment but “whilst ritual re-enactment is intended to have magical properties which merely theatrical re-enactment does not, the latter is nevertheless important as a way of reinforcing belief and restating collective ideas” (Figs, 1976: 13). Whilst a ceremony is caused by repetition, a theatrical performance cannot be recreated identically because of the live nature of the performance, unlike a film where the artwork stays the same even if the audience changes (Sartre, 1966: 56). However, a ceremony is not likened to a play activity. This is because the performer acts as him/herself, or as Goffman puts it: “a play keys life, a ceremony keys an event” (Goffman, 1986: 5).

However, anthropologists such as Duvignaud disagree. For them, theatre is “first and foremost a ceremony” (Duvignaud, 1965: 82). The component parts of ceremonies are found in theatrical performances – solemnity of the place, separation of a secular audience from isolated, illuminated actors, actors’ costumes, specific gestures and language, role playing and symbols. Theatre becomes almost a religious experience where an almighty power (director, producer) creates a world to be believed in by the theatregoer. The actor performs “a sacramental act which will give spectators the presence of something unknown and mysterious” (Fowle, 1954: 28). Explicitly religious performances, such as a Mystery Play, or Voodoo dancing are ritualistic and are performed as ceremonies for audiences who attend to take part in their religion (Sartre, 1976: 80). Some playwrights such as Genet create plays like *Les Nègres* as ceremonies, in this case, as a black mass (*ibid*: 137). The ceremonial nature of theatre distinguishes theatregoers from other audiences, such as television audiences. This is because the public nature of the event, with its separation of audience and performer in a conventional theatre, heightens the ceremonial nature of the performance, especially if the performers have a high status (Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998: 72 – 78). This high status ensures that the ceremonial spectacle is one of domination of the audience who attend a ritual of the powerful (Kershaw, 2007: 214).

#### 3.4.4 Magic and religion

Magic and religion are key concepts that emerged from the analysis of qualitative data in this study (see chapters five, six and seven). Being in a theatre audience is much like a religious congregation and in some cultures, such as Japan, theatres are found in religious shrines (Hayman, 1973: 304). In ancient Greek theatre, however, productions followed ritual sacrifices, integrating religious practice with drama (Figs, 1976: 17). Historically, the medieval Church imposed its hegemony over people by promoting religious dramas by placing religious dogma amidst stories that grip the imagination of audiences (*ibid*: 307).

Whilst religion binds together people who have a common faith, magic, on the other hand, does not create bonds (Durkheim, 1912: 223). In fact “the magician has a clientele, not a church, and it is very possible that his clients have no relationships with one another, or even do not know each other” (*ibid*). This is rather like the relationship between the performer or backstage team, and the audience, many of whom could be strangers to each other. Durkheim defines sacred items as “separate beings. Their principal characteristic is that there is a break in continuity between them and profane things... a whole group of rites has the object of ensuring that state of separation, which is essential, is maintained” (*ibid*: 232 – 238). Whilst it could be argued that theatre is both a sacred and a profane space, theatre rituals, which are discussed by the participants in the reminiscence workshops, do separate out the theatregoer’s time at a performance from their experience of “ordinary” life.

Another interpretation would be that the word ‘sacred’ is being used as a *metaphor*, - the application of a name or descriptive term to an object to which it is not literally applicable (Fowler and Fowler, 1972: 763). Theatre is *metaphorically* sacred in that it is regarded with such reverence *as if* it were a holy space or a place of worship. Theatregoers will either think that theatre is sacred which is a statement of the theatregoer’s belief, or will act as if it is sacred, in



which the theatregoer will perform rites or rituals in accordance with this belief. This Durkheimian distinction between practices and beliefs is of “fundamental importance” in analysing the nature of ritual and theatre (Rozik, 2002: 5 - 6). Nevertheless, whilst nativity plays at school do not have a sacerdotal function, they are a method of inculcating Christian beliefs to children through drama (Figs, 1976: 13). The theatre producer, an element in the “production of belief” aims to “consecrate” a work of art to give the art work an economic value (Bourdieu, 1986a: 76 – 80). It is therefore appropriate that art as religion sits within esteem needs as both, according to Bourdieu, led to enhanced economic capital.

### 3.5 Level three needs: education and intellectual motivation

This section relates motivations such as connoisseurship, cultural and educational capital (Bourdieu, 1984), and careers (Aschaffenburg and Maas, 1997, Pearce, 1988). The rationale for this lies in the fact that regular, long-standing theatregoers (as the majority of those partaking in the reminiscence workshops are), have a considerable history of attendance, and this knowledge and experience sets them apart from ingénues or sporadic attenders. The discourse relates to the cognitive paradigm where the role of art is to develop knowledge or understanding of the arts in the audience. Theatregoers to classical or modern drama tend to be “intellectuals” who like to analyse plays, discuss the interpretation by the actors and look for hidden meanings (Osborne, Wheeler and Elliott, 1999: 50).

#### 3.5.1 Cultural and educational capital

There are two modes of cultural learning: within the family, from birth, where a person acquires cultural capital, and then later, in school, where a person acquires educational capital via an established canon (Bourdieu, 1984). On the other side of the fence sits the artist whose aim is to express feelings and transmit

understanding (Read, 1956: 189), thereby completing the communication process. Understanding theatre denotes more than a mere reception of the artist's communication because for audiences, learning and education are key motivational factors (Cooper and Tower, 1992) along with intellectual enrichment (Bouder-Pailler, 1999).

Cultural capital is acquired “pre-verbally, by early immersion” (Bourdieu, 1984: 75) into the cultural world of the family. A child picks up his/her taste for culture from being introduced by the family in a process akin to picking up religious values. Bourdieu makes a case for music where a child is likely to appreciate music more if music is played at home on radio or record, and even more so, if a child hears music being played at home, especially on a “noble” instrument such as a piano. Taste then leads to the motivation to listen to, in this case, certain kinds of music.

Educational levels are measured by length of schooling or qualifications and have a primary bearing on cultural preferences. They legitimise a person's relationship with culture and that form of culture's position within society (Bourdieu, 1984). Learning about the arts inculcates what Bourdieu calls “the ideology of cultural veneer” (*ibid*: 66) where acquisition of a knowledge and understanding of the arts, or possession of artistic products, denotes a quality of excellence, a self-confidence or ease of familiarity which is passed down the generations like an heirloom or a cultural inheritance (see Bourdieu, *ibid*). There are four separate trajectories in life according to the mix of cultural and educational capital – the four being: a high cultural capital and low educational capital, and visa versa, and both a high cultural and educational capital, and visa versa (*ibid*: 81 – 88). According to this mix, and the trajectory, a person is motivated towards certain forms of art. Tastes and motivations vary because of the differences in factors such as when a person is educated or how long the education is for. Other factors include the equivalence in qualifications and the skills and enthusiasms of teachers. A person with low cultural capital but high educational capital, who is influenced by a middle class teacher in school, will adhere to that teacher's

“legitimate”, “pedantic” (*ibid*: 294) tastes. Teachers who “do not have the means to match their tastes (*ibid*: 287) have less conspicuous consumption expenditure. This difference also accounts partly for the divide between boulevard and avant garde theatre. Using financial terminology, Bourdieu proposes that a person with cultural competence invests in those forms of art that offer a return on that investment. This could be a genuinely emotional investment, with more “legitimate” forms of art being more profitable, or costly to the incompetent person. Cultural learning otherwise highlights the “conspicuous uselessness of education” where a person learns something archaic, of no use, or practical application that serves to indicate the distinction between the leisure class and the dominated class (Veblen, 1899: 93 – 103).

### 3.5.2 Connoisseurship

The result over time of the acquisition of cultural and educational capital is that a person becomes a connoisseur. A connoisseur has “an unconscious mastery of the instruments of appropriation which derives from slow familiarization and is the basis of familiarity of works, is an ‘art’, a practical mastery which, like an art of thinking or an art of living cannot be transmitted solely by prescript or prescription” (Bourdieu, 1984: 66). This mastery is developed from “repeated contact with cultural works and cultured people” and transforms a person into a “tastemaker” (*ibid*: 255). A theatregoer who gains in levels of sophistication as well as “learned competence and knowledge” is more able to “maintain the structure of the fabrication” inherent in maintaining the willing suspension of disbelief (Burns, 1992: 268). The longer someone stays in education, the more exposed s/he is to the tastes of the elite and believing in the canon – the accepted texts, artworks, histories and so on, found in educational syllabi (Bourdieu, *op cit*), and therefore becomes a person who understands the arts as opposed to those who do not (Ortega Y Gasset, 1968). However, formal education can play a smaller role in developing a taste for culture than the long-term “secret, mental and imaginative effort of, one’s own, continued day by day, and year by year until it becomes a permanent habit” (Cowper Powys, 1936: 318). One role the

connoisseur performs is in recommending a production to others as a trusted opinion-former, s/he assumes the role of a professional critic (Burns, 1972: 204). The experience gained also shortens the decision-making process about attending an arts event, or in recommending it to someone else (Colbert *et al*, 2001: 85).

Theatre-goers with a high level of connoisseurship will have a high degree of cultural capital and people with a greater cultural capital prefer more representational works of art to those which are less ambiguous or symbolic (Bourdieu, 1984: 35 - 40). People who learned about the arts or theatre in school tended to favour more “classical” works, which were safe and middlebrow (*ibid*). Bourdieu’s theories are reinforced by research undertaken by Mann (1967: 86 - 89) who asked regular attenders which plays they liked best in the season, what was well or poorly produced, and what playwrights they liked best. Mann concluded that regulars prefer “safe” plays such as those by Shaw and Shakespeare rather than those by modern playwrights like Osborne and Pinter.

Bourdieu’s examples of artworks as being either highbrow, middlebrow or lowbrow are not definitive. They are subjectively chosen, particular to their time and place. Bourdieu’s thesis has also been undermined by the omnivore-univore model (Chan and Goldthorpe, 2005). According to this model, people with high status occupations and better levels of education (cultural omnivores) consume more highbrow and more popular art and entertainment than other socio-economic groups. Moreover, people with low status occupations and lower levels of education (cultural univores) consume predominantly lowbrow forms of art and entertainment, but not at the same levels as cultural omnivores. Cultural omnivores shifted in their appreciation of the arts from holding snobbish views to acting as cultural omnivores. This is due to factors including changes in the social structure, values, the world of the arts, and generational conflict with cohort replacement where a younger generation supersedes an older (Peterson and Kern, 1996). Cultural omnivores are therefore, predominantly middle class (Roberts, 2004).

### 3.5.3 Sophistication

The sophistication of audiences can be categorised in terms of semiotics and reception aesthetics (de Marinis, 1993: 161 – 188). Spectators are classified into two types: open and closed spectators. Closed spectators are where the spectators correspond appropriately to the form of drama. An example would be a child at a children's show. De Marinis links these types to the concept of the “model spectator” or levels of competence. This translates as levels of connoisseurship. For de Marinis, the competence of an audience member depends on the audience member's ability to decode the codes that the sender (performers, writer, director, producer) is sending. In addition, de Marinis' models rely on the audience member recognising a performance as a performance (as opposed to another happening, in real life), and in relating the performance to a theatre type or genre. An audience member who chooses to attend a show with a liberal message but with a different ideology might only “enjoy the event as pure spectacle”. Frequent or regular intellectual theatregoers are most likely to attend for reasons of seeing the play, gaining in “cultural profit” from the work itself and any subsequent discourse about it whereas frequent or regular “dominant fractions” attend for reasons of showing off their wealth, and escapism (Bourdieu, 1984: 270). Therefore it is quite possible for a bourgeois theatregoer to go to a play by Brecht, or McGrath and enjoy it as a show, despite their personal capitalist ideology.

### 3.5.4 Careers

The effect of a parent taking a child to the theatre, and also of that child learning about the theatre in school increases the child's likelihood of educational success at school, and also, but less so, at university (Aschaffenburg and Maas, 1997). Participation with the arts therefore helps a person's educational career but there is also the concept of a theatre career. Although developed for tourism contexts, Pearce's model of a tourist career can be applied to that of a theatregoer. Pearce (1988: 27 - 8) suggests that “it is the notion that tourists have a travel career and it

provides both a short and a long-run account of motivation in the travel area.” The reactions of factors such as peer and reference groups with socio-economic, status, or educational factors “allow a person to enter a career at different points and move at different rates but also for individuals to regress, to stop at any point, to drop out or to change a career and to retire.” As with Cooper and Tower (1992), Pearce bases his model on Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs where a person follows steps or levels in a travel career from basic internally-oriented needs such as a need for relaxation, or externally-oriented needs such as excitement or new settings to fifth level self-actualisation needs such as experiencing peace and inner harmony (*op cit*: 31). He also shares a philosophy with that of cultural elitists such as Ortega Y Gasset (1968) and Collingwood (1938) with his concept of higher and lower careers where higher careers denote greater authenticity. In this case authenticity relates to art, rather than to entertainment. Higher career people find staged tourist activities less independent and less satisfying. The difference would be, for example between visiting an authentic Oxford college and the post-modern recreation experience of The Oxford Story. Repeat visitors indicate higher levels of self-esteem, and have a stronger loyalty to their destination (Pearce, 1988: 78, Wickens, 2002).

### 3.5.5 Fandom

The most committed of audiences can be segmented into fans, cultists/subcultists and enthusiasts (Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998: 138 – 142). Fans are audiences who become attached to artists and meet other like-minded individuals. Cultists are more involved – in the literature about the artists, immersed more in a network and network relationships whilst enthusiasts are involved more in activities than the artists. They are more involved in the arts and produce cultural artefacts for their fellow enthusiasts. It is likely therefore that audiences that repeatedly visit a venue are fans of that venue. More theatregoers attend the theatre to see actors than to see a play, with regular theatres “collecting” performers, identifying the emotion of “love” for the performer and a sense of ownership over them (Hayman, 1973: 299). Many theatre fans accordingly collect

programmes or flyers, write fan letters to artists, collect autographs at the stage door, and take photographs as souvenirs.

### 3.6 Level four needs: attending for reasons of escape, fantasy and make-believe

There are a number of inter-locking concepts which are crucial to understanding the motivation of theatregoers which are based on the power of the imagination. The concepts are often related to those of “escapism”, of turning to an amusement or a diversion which turns people’s eyes away from “the meaningless of their lives and saves them from the boredom that oppresses them” (Tolstoy, 1995: 141). Many people feel that they gain a sense of escapism from the everyday world of work from the arts (Bunting, 2007: 4, Keaney *et al*, 2007: 39 - 40). The most likely people to attend for the reasons of escape are the “experiential” cluster who are typically urban baby-boomers (see chapter five), or of university-age, university educated, well-off, having learned about theatre, belong to a theatre group, and are well-travelled. They go to the theatre for visually interesting performances where they can be made to think (Osborne, Wheeler and Elliott, 1999: 14). The first of these concepts to be discussed is make-believe.

#### 3.6.1 Make-believe

One of the characteristics of an audience is its “acceptance of theatrical make-believe and recognition of theatrical illusion”, but “make-believe is not a motive for action” (Nicoll, 1962: 26). Nicholl also recognises that an audience is dominated by emotions. The one prerequisite for a theatrical production is the presence of an audience where it is a common experience for the theatregoer to be “carried away” which indicates a sense of detachment from the audience as a group or a whole (Courtney, 1974: 202).

The concept of make-believe relies on the distinction between its world and that of the real (Collingwood, 1938: 135). Make-believe is viewed as entertainment and enjoyment, negatively and sourly, as some sort of compensation for a “felt dissatisfaction with the situation in which one actually stands” (*ibid*: 137). However, his argument is not universal. More positively, through make-believe the theatregoer can afterwards act the plot, characters or words of a play on a stage, or privately (Ferguson, 1949: 12). The concept of ‘escape’ is allied to that of make-believe where someone watching a popular television drama escapes primarily to gain an understanding of society rather than escaping from social obligations (Goodlad, 1971: 178).

Make-believe is one of the keys, or conventions that “already meaningful in terms of some primary framework, is transformed into something patterned on this activity but seen by participants to be something quite else” (Goffman, 1974: 43 – 44). Goffman’s theories were, however, developed without asking any audiences about their motivations (Manning (1992: 118) and have been criticised for a lack of evidence, something Goffman himself acknowledges, stating that his work is “too removed from fieldwork” (Goffman 1974: 13). Nevertheless, his concepts are worth exploring here, with other examples of keys being contests, ceremonials, technical redoinings and regroundings (*ibid*: 48), one of which, ceremonials, will be analysed later, in this chapter.

Frames are the organisational principles that govern social events and people’s subjective involvement in them (*ibid*: 10 – 11). They are mechanisms that help answer the question “what is going on here?” (*ibid*: 8). A primary framework describes what is going on literally whilst a key describes what is not literally happening whilst something is literally occurring. An example of keying is as follows: two men encounter three women, and one of the men sums up the meeting by saying: “And nothing is, but what is not” (*Macbeth*, 1.3.142). An observer thinks “what is going on here?” The choices seem to be between, one, Macbeth and Banquo have really spoken to three witches in Scotland, and two, it’s a play, a rehearsal of a play, or a reading of the play by performers. The observer



keys the encounter as make-believe if the observer is a theatregoer and is watching this encounter as a performance. The actors are only playing. The line quoted in *Macbeth*, “and nothing is, but what is not” also works as a metaphor for keying itself, because an activity which is meaningful in one framework is transformed by participants into something else. Macbeth and Banquo are not in reality encountering witches; actors playing Macbeth and Banquo are pretending, playing, making audiences believe they *are* Macbeth and Banquo. Central to the concept of make-believe is playfulness (Goffman, 1974: 48, Courtney, 1974: 81).

### 3.6.2 Pretence

Theatregoers accept that what they are going to is fictitious, an illusion of reality (Rice, 1960: 271), and unless the theatre piece breaks conventions, actors assume the theatregoers are not there. As States (1985: 206) argues: “the presentational basis of theater [*sic*] rests upon a double pretense: the play pretends that we don’t exist (the fourth-wall convention) and we pretend that the play does (the willing suspension of disbelief).” Coleridge’s term “willing suspension of disbelief”, coined in his essay on poetry, *Bibliographia Literaria* (1817, Chapter XIV) analyses the way the reader or audience develops “a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination” when reading a poem, leading to the emergence of “dramatic truth”. Part of the power of the willing suspension of disbelief lies on the theatregoer’s ability to accept theatre as a metaphor (Wilson, 1976: 34 - 6) – the actor acts “like” Macbeth, the set is designed to “look like” a battlefield; when this metaphor is successful in conveying its message, the theatregoer’s subconscious is able to suspend disbelief. The theatregoer’s belief is not a “real belief”. S/he knows that it is not Macbeth on stage. Instead it is “an auto-suggestion which also contains the certain knowledge that it is an auto-suggestion” where the feelings “are felt at the time as being definite but not real. This makes it possible for the spectators to feel frightened when going to see a play which deals in horror, and at the same time they are not necessarily indicative of the spectator’s real feelings” (Sartre, 1966: 58).

Theatregoers attend a “double occasion” (States, 1985: 106) which is where they accept for the duration of a performance the codes or rules of the social world being presented, whilst themselves living through the rules and codes of their world. The theatregoer, who in “real life” is an actor in many different circumstances has to, in order for the performance to be authentic (come across as real), relate the performance to experiences of theatricality in “real life”. Theatregoers in existing in their make-believe frame have to break conventions they uphold in “real life”. These conventions include staring at other people, but they are rooted to the convention of not crossing the line between performer and audience (Goffman, 1974: 124 - 5). Other conventions involve audience reactions such as laughter or heckling. This behaviour by the theatregoers does not stop the connivance in the make-believe. The audience connivance in the make-believe is usually enhanced by obvious signs that the performance is taking place – for example, lights being dimmed, a curtain being raised, and performers taking applause. As Burns (1992: 265) says, about Goffman’s ‘Frame Analysis’ of theatre audiences: “theatrical performances are a sort of make-believe which is foisted on, *and* fostered by, their audience.” Outside this framework, the theatregoer can inhabit the primary framework of ordinary life, with Goffman following the phenomenology of the working worlds of Schutz (1967).

An audience exists “between the points of reality and dreams, between the illusion of the stage and the reality of the real world” (Blau, 1990: 25 - 27). For States (1985: 158) “theatre is a license for a remarkable exercise in group imagination”. However, there is a paradox in the theatregoer’s ambition, as States (1985: 169) asks: “How does one see it as art when the art consists precisely in making it real?” States argues that theatregoers are not seeing illusions in the theatre but that “we do see style at all times; it simply emerges more beautifully at certain times than others.” Theatregoers, like everyone, can adopt a number of roles, often at the same time (Goffman, 1963: 20). Theatregoers are at a fictionalising event; they watch an “observed reality” which is at a remove from their own “lived reality” and that of the “lived reality” of what the playwright might have experienced (Ortega Y Gasset, 1968: 18).

This imaginary or illusory state found within play and plays has also been conceptualised as being ontologically negative. Plato's belief system as outlined in *The Republic* is critical of all representation and mimetic performance; the unreal is unnatural where the beholder of art lives in a "dream-world" where the likeness is mistaken for the real thing (Plato, 1998: 196-7).

In fact, the theatregoer has to comprehend a double mimesis as the performers are representing the representation of the original writer but "it is to move out of the real experience of the play if the spectator reflects about the conception behind a performance or about the proficiency of the actors" (Gadamer, 2004: 116 – 7). Such an activity can lead to the breakdown of the "willing suspension of disbelief" as a rational mind usurps the power of the imagination as theatregoers connive in the bricolage of a performance. A bricoleur is "adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks" (Lévi-Strauss, 1962: 17 - 22). In a theatrical context, the bricoleur understands how all the theatrical bits and pieces are put together to form the myth or theatre piece. These "orts and fragments – the bricolage of specular consciousness – which is the echo of Narcissus" reflect the "residual friction of self-reflection" (Blau, 1990: 1). The theatregoer must connive in the myth-making created on stage, pretending to believe in the authenticity, or reality of the social world being created. This connivance can become very complex depending on the type of production. For a play which a theatregoer may have seen before, the theatregoer has to make-believe that the play is new, in order to carry on the "willing suspension of disbelief". Yet theatregoers are assailed by artists who intend audiences to lose this disbelief. The next section on belief examines this process.

### 3.6.3 Breaking the frame

"‘There's no use trying,’ she said: ‘one can't believe impossible things.’” says Alice to the White Queen, who replies; ‘Why, sometimes I have believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast’” in Lewis Carroll's *Alice Through the*

*Looking Glass* (1998: 177). The paradox that lies at the heart of Alice's conversation is a debate between the power of rational thought, and realism against that of the imagination and theatricality. Amongst theatre practitioners this debate is between supporters of drama as articulated by Aristotle (1965) in *On The Art of Poetry*, and, those, like Bertolt Brecht, that believe that theatre can be used as a tool to convince theatregoers to change society, or themselves.

In terms of play theory, the frame-breaker is a "spoil-sport" who "shatters" the make-believe world and "by withdrawing from the game he reveals the relativity and fragility of the play-world in which he had temporarily shut himself with others. He robs play of its *illusion*" (Huizinga, 1949: 11). Theatre practitioners break or bend theatre conventions in order to do this, thereby creating a "negative" response in the theatregoer (Goffman, 1974: 420). Goffman (*ibid*: 379 – 438) identifies four techniques used to break a frame. The first is playing around with the brackets (such as placing an actor within the audience, who then heckles the cast on stage). Another example is pretending something fictional is true by presenting it as real (such as Orson Welles' *War of the Worlds*). The second technique is the character-audience line. This is where an actor seemingly leaves a character to address the audience. The technique is used by novelists in addressing the "dear reader". The third technique is the role-character formula. Here the performer draws attention to him/herself in the role by being a typecast actor, for example, or by stating the drama is make-believe. The final technique is the spectacle game (attacking the frame in the manner of absurdist drama such as Stoppard's *The Real Inspector Hound*). Breaking a frame, or "ritual sacrifice" (Bourdieu, 1986a: 80 – 81) is a mockery of art which is paradoxically "consecrated and celebrated by the makers of taste". Audiences find this form of art a "forgivable transgression" (*ibid*).

The rationale for breaking a frame, or being a spoil-sport is partly political. Working class and some middle class (bourgeois) audiences, or as Hayman (1973: 301) conceives of them – "the majority of that minority which goes to the theatre at all" - are motivated to attend theatre that offers "the 'vulgar' attractions of an art

of illusion”. They are also attracted by logical plots, happy endings and simply-drawn characters and situations (Bourdieu, 1984: 32 – 33). This audience is predominantly middle class, and this audience, as Bourdieu suggests, prefers Aristotelian drama.

Theatre practitioners have attempted to challenge this ontological theatrical belief. Erwin Piscator, a German theatre director who pioneered extreme forms of realism on stage by showing film, building magnificent, realistic sets, and by engaging audiences in debate, denounces traditional bourgeois theatre because:

It was a drama of make-believe. The theatre existed for three hundred years on the fiction that there were no spectators in the house” (Piscator, 1980: 188 – 189).

His problem was that the theatregoers who attended his revolutionary productions were bourgeois, and not the proletariat he wished for. Piscator’s one-time friend, colleague and ideological fellow-traveller, Brecht, in analysing his audiences, assumes that a more experimental approach to a performance is only appreciated by “a few connoisseurs” and “virtually the whole audience failed to take part in the moral decisions of which the plot is made up” (Brecht, 1964: 28). From Brecht’s perspective, a theatregoer who attends for Aristotelian drama thinks emotionally, like the White Queen, within the make-believe world:

Yes, I have felt like that too – Just like me – It’s only natural – It’ll never change – The sufferings of this man appal me, because they are inescapable – That’s great art; it all seems the most obvious thing in the world – I weep when they weep, I laugh when they laugh. (*ibid*: 71).

The attender, however, of Brecht and Piscator’s ‘Epic Theatre’, like Alice, who in Carroll’s story, is an agent of change, thinks rationally, out of the make-believe world:

I'd never have thought it – That's not the way – That's extraordinary, hardly believable – It's got to stop – The sufferings of this man appal me, because they are unnecessary – That's great art: nothing obvious in it – I laugh when they weep, I weep when they laugh. (*ibid*).

Artists, aware of the primary motivations of bourgeois audiences, following Piscator and Brecht, have attempted to deny theatregoers their motivational needs, such as relaxation or entertainment, within the theatre. Grotowski targets theatregoers' spiritual needs through "a collective experience of introversion" (Kustow, interviewing Grotowski, 1963: 11 – 12). Grotowski intends to negate the theatregoer's social and hedonistic needs – he is not interested in providing theatre to be discussed, or as a form of relaxation. For Grotowski, that is what film, cabaret and the music hall are for (Grotowski, 1969: 40).

The traditional middle class audience, and its preferred forms of theatre has been challenged to the extent of eradicating them from the theatre. Whilst Grotowski is at pains to point out that his theatre does not exclude audiences politically, Sartre could not be more explicit: "Above all, we must change the audience... I have nothing more to say to the bourgeois" (Sartre, 1976: 50). This feeling was also prevalent in Britain. Following the breakthrough of plays in 1956 such as *Look Back In Anger*, the Royal Court Theatre faced the paradox of attracting new audiences (new to theatre as well as the Royal Court) and then putting off these audiences - normal spectators (Nicoll, 1962: 26) with difficult or provocative drama, who would then leave hating the shows. Royal Court directors felt contempt for passive audiences, and gleeful if they did walk out (Eyre and Wright, 2001: 247).

However, it is not the case that frame-breaking artists ignore the make-believe and the pretend. Playwrights considered avant-garde deploy the full-range of theatrical techniques based on their understanding of what motivates audiences such as "repetitive ceremonies, unusual events, spell-binding through the creation of illusions... the glorification of the imaginary, by the sadism of reality (Sartre,

1966: 66 – 67). Ionesco, a playwright of absurdist dramas, attacks socialist realism for being “arrogantly imposed throughout by a ruling aristocracy, a special class of initiates who know or think they know in advance what the public needs. They even say to the public: ‘You must only need what we want you to need and you must think in the way we think’” (Ionesco, 1964: 45 – 46).

Brecht himself realised that in order to engage with “the sort of people who just come for fun” (Brecht, 1964: 14), he would have to make his plays fun, akin to the pleasure gained in a sporting contest (*ibid*: 6 – 9). This was a tactic originally proposed by Plato who advocates that “serious things cannot be understood without laughable things” (Plato, 2006: 164). The entertainment felt by an audience member is a by-product of the playwright’s intention “to shock, to dismay, to instruct, to get something off the author’s chest” (Hauser, 1959: 143 - 7). Hauser, who became artistic director of the Oxford Playhouse in 1956, had a policy of producing or hosting important new plays, providing the West End with its most “interesting” playwrights (Michener, 1959: 66). In these plays, “it has been possible for any Oxford theatre-goer to get a very good idea of the strength and variety of the off-centre theatre, in addition to seeing their own company give twenty new plays... And in every case, the new work being done was done because either I or the director of the other company urgently wanted it to be done.”

#### 3.6.4 Magic

The concept of magic is one of the key findings in this study relating to the motivation of long-term, regular theatregoers. Magic has an immediate effect on an individual (Mauss, 1972: 16). According to Mauss’s theories, magic is private, secret and mysterious, affects women more than men and is associated with people with wide knowledge and understanding (*ibid*: 30 - 40). Magic is believed by the individual to have taken place, sharing attributes with religious belief (*ibid*: 113). It involves actors and spectators and is the “most childish of skills” (*ibid*:

165 - 175). All representational art is magical in that it casts a powerful spell in the artist's creation of the image of reality (Plato, 1993: 352). A theatregoer attending a play enters "a world of illusion" (Nicoll, 1962: 24). Illusions are magical, creations of sorcery (Plato, *op cit*: 355). The concept of magic as a phenomenon is initially caused when young children who, because of a lack of knowledge, perceive ordinary phenomena such as the action of wind as magical until they know better (Piaget, 1962: 261). For young children, images enable them to have powerful control over the objects depicted and are viewed as magical to them (Courtney, 1974: 114, citing Ernst Kris, 1953). However, if children grow out of believing in magic, artists are often attempting to re-introduce it, and theatre audiences' attitudes remain "closely akin to that of a child listening to a fairy-tale" (Nicoll, 1962: 24). The naïve nature of a child believing in magic is the condition for best appreciating theatre, because older people become clear-sighted, acquiring a critical mind, where they become aware of stage tricks and blatant theatrical tricks (Ionesco, 1964: 19). For Ionesco, the theatre has to be magical but "what possible magic could justify the theatre's claim to bind us in its spell? There is no magic now, nothing is sacred" (*ibid*).

However, Ionesco, although in a frivolous mood, argues that "bourgeois drama is magic drama, spellbinding, drama that asks the audience to identify itself with the heroes of the play, drama of participation" (*ibid*: 209). Grotowski's form of theatrical magic includes actors whose physical and vocal feats are beyond the ability of the spectator (Barba and Flaszen, 1965: 173). It is the director who is "a sorcerer who enthralls the spectator through the unconscious as well as through his eyes and his intelligence. He must force the spectator outside of himself and make him part of the dramatic action – an action which is no longer narrowly limited by the stage and which necessitates a new rapport between actors and spectators united in the creation of a theatrical world" (*ibid*). For Bourdieu, the 'magic' of theatre lies in the power of the magician to promote the "miracle of the signature or personal trademark" thereby commercialising the production in an act of "social alchemy" (Bourdieu, 1986a: 81).



Artaud (1993: 58), a theatrical theorist and director, is critical of the magic inherent in theatre for whom “unworldly art” and “charm poetry” result in an emasculated audience. Collingwood (1938: 72 – 3) is also critical of artistic magic because it arouses emotions rather than cogitation. Magic aims to have a practical influence in a person’s life and has enduring emotional effects - fear, on seeing a black cat, for example - with the magical act being representative - a war dance is representative of fighting in battle (*ibid*: 66). The extent of people’s belief in witchcraft, fed by folk tales aimed at entertainment, created “reservoirs of dream and vision” from which motifs expressive of metaphysical, psychological and sociological truth are derived (Campbell, 2002: 769). Therefore Shakespeare’s contemporary audience would have reacted with less enjoyment and more fear when attending a performance of *Macbeth* which includes many incidents of magic. A fairy tale is a didactic story where characters are “projected symbols of the unconscious” (Courtney, 1974: 153) such as a bad stepmother, a sorcerer or a spirit and are distinguished from myth because they are inherently fantastical rather than authoritative (*ibid*: 155). In Britain, pantomimes are a popular form of theatre for young people, and the majority of pantomimes are based on fairy tales, with magic as a core element; magic therefore becomes one of the foundations of a theatregoer’s experience.

### 3.7 Level five needs: self actualising

In his analysis of mature self-actualising audiences Maslow (1968: 154) relates their personality traits to a range of motivations. In this profile, older, experienced theatregoers, typified by twenty-five participants in this study, are likely to have a superior perception of reality, and therefore are less likely to be ontologically challenged by the representational nature of theatre. For Maslow, self-actualising people indicate an increased acceptance of self and others, and are therefore less likely to be affected by status and esteem factors relating to the production. They show an increased spontaneity which enables them to respond favourably to the unexpected. They are stronger intellectually and have a greatly increased capacity

for creativity allowing for a strong empathy with the artist (Kotler and Scheff, 1997: 83 – 84).

Maslow (1968: 153) likens the creativity of self-actualising people in their 50s and 60s to the innocent and easy happiness of secure, free, children engaged in a game on the spur of the moment. These people “do not cling to the familiar”. Self-actualising people also put contradictory or mutually exclusive opposites together such as “duty” with “pleasure”, “pleasure” with “duty”, and “work” and “play” (*ibid*: 155). The limitations at the heart of Maslow’s concept of self-actualising people appear to be that they are defined by the greater frequency of episodes of self-actualisation, and they are likely to be “artists, intellectuals, and other especially creative people... profoundly religious people, and... people experiencing great insights in psychotherapy” (*ibid* 107).

### 3.7.1 Emotional needs

The ability of the arts to stimulate emotions, whether of joy or sadness, is a benefit to some people (Keaney *et al*, 2007: 36). Long-term theatregoers have emotional (as well as educational or learning) motivations (Bouder-Pailler, 1999). As a result of encouraging lifelong learning by attenders’ repeated contact with the arts, the relationship is one of “creating love affairs between artists and people” rather than just “educating” people about the arts (Kay, 1996: 5). It is not just in the field of relationship marketing that there is a discourse about the emotional motivation of theatregoers. An artist such as Brecht (1964: 77 – 81) believes that the audience, or mob “must be and can be reached only through its emotions”. He realises that certain audiences will not be motivated to attend productions if the benefits offered were purely intellectual. The most important impact of art on an audience is its emotional impact and expressing this emotion has been termed “expressivism” (Graham, 2001: 24). Emotions are expressed when an artist puts in front of the audience “a representation of the typical features” belonging to the particular emotion (Collingwood, 1938: 113). Collingwood seems to suggest that

emotions are catching, therefore, a metaphor he borrows from Tolstoy, who in his polemical *What is Art?* argues that the definition of art is when “the spectators or listeners are infected by the same feeling the author has experienced” (Tolstoy, 1995: 39). In describing art as a form of illness, in other words, something that is bad for a person, Tolstoy is allying himself with Plato and his view that art is a perversion (*ibid*: 141).

Aristotle argues that by attending the performance of a tragedy, the audience will be moved to feel pity or fear (Aristotle, 1965: 49 – 51), a belief shared with Plato (1993: 359) who describes the process of enjoying the pleasure of attending a tragedy as “we surrender ourselves, let ourselves be carried along, and share the hero’s pain.” People relate to a work of art primarily through an emotional response which leads to feelings of pleasure or pain. Many of these pleasures are already culturally in place, such as the attraction of a sunset or a foggy landscape (Butler, 2004: 36 - 7). A theatregoer’s emotional response to a production will vary according to an “emotional identification with characters” and depends on “their sympathetic consonance” with the theatregoer’s own experience (*ibid*: 43) with the emotions no less real for being derived in a piece of make-believe (*ibid*: 59 – 62). An emotion which is successfully portrayed in a work of art does not depend on that emotion being generated in an audience member, nor to have been felt by the artist (Graham, 2000: 28 - 9).

Since Plato, there is a body of thought which downplays the value of an emotional response to art. Kant (1987: 69) argues that one’s judgement of taste is not influenced by one’s emotional response to art. Emotion is relegated to forms of entertainment, or “magic” (Collingwood, 1938) because magic art aims at arousing people’s emotions rather than their imaginative expression. For Collingwood, “everything enjoys a purely mental existence” including any reaction to a piece of art (Ridley, 1998: 21).

### 3.7.2 Pleasure in beauty

The arts bring beauty to the world (Keaney *et al*, 2007: 38). True beauty is an expression of the virtue of the soul (Plato, 2006: 27). The desire for “beautiful” art is all about a person’s judgement of taste (Kant, 1987: 168) but the taste for such an aesthetic is subjective, and not imitative (*ibid*: 79). His definition of the beautiful is something “we like when we merely judge it” (*ibid*: 127). Where a person’s imagination and intuition come into contact with rational thought, a taste for the sublime is the result (*ibid*: 97 –100). The effect of the sublime is to “uplift our souls... with a proud exaltation and a sense of vaunting joy”, and that effect is “on all men at all times” irrespective of pursuits, ways of life, ambition, ages and language (Longinus, 1965: 107). So a theatregoer in experiencing the sublime will be stimulated by “a powerful and inspired emotion” where that sublimity is “the echo of a noble mind” (*ibid*: 108 – 109). It appears therefore that there is a crossover between the concepts of self-actualising, and that of the sublime.

An example of the sublime and beauty would be the nature in the way it plays upon the imagination (*ibid*: 121). Kant’s definition of the sublime is something “by its resistance to the interest of the senses, we like directly” (*ibid*: 127). Thus, a person thinks too deeply whilst contemplating nature, such as a sunset over the sea, cogitating about all the fish in the sea, or the science of cloud formation. This scene is not sublime. It only becomes sublime when viewed poetically, as something that is manifested to the eye (*ibid*: 130). What Kant advocates is the primacy of the mind or the intellect over the emotion and body.

For Kant, there is a difference morally in taking an interest in, in having a taste for, the beauty of nature, and the beauty of art; in the latter there is a moral good; it is “a mark of a good soul” (*ibid*: 165 - 166). A person contemplating the beauty of a flower, for its own sake, is therefore a good person. However, if the flower is artificial, a reproduction, then that interest disappears. Kant is essentially following Plato (1993) here in arguing for the primacy of the real over the

imitation. If a person is conscious that a work of art is art, but looks like nature, then that art is fine art, and fine art is the work of a genius (*ibid*: 174). However, the dialectic engaged in by Kant over taste is between concepts of high and low art, discussed at greater length earlier in this chapter. This is dismissed by Bourdieu (1984: 488) as merely showing disgust at art which is lowbrow, art which is motivated by audience enjoyment, and art which is deemed crude and vulgar. For Bourdieu, Kant displays a tendency towards philosophical distinction which is another form of class distinction between those with high cultural and economic capital, and those with low (*ibid*: 500). That same class distinction is apparent in the language used by Longinus (1965) to describe sublimity with its connections to nobility and grandeur, and concepts such as “elevation”.

### 3.8 Conclusion

In this chapter the concept of motivation has been explored in relation to theatregoing, and key concepts that motivate theatregoers to attend theatrical production have been critiqued. It is noticeable that as far as motivation research is concerned, the research has predominantly been carried out by arts marketing academics, whilst the latter emerge from disciplines as disparate as sociology, psychology, ethnography, performance study, literature, and philosophy. By using the framework of Cooper and Tower (1992) and their adaptation of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (1943) the level five self-actualisation motivations are able to be related to the most loyal and most knowledgeable of theatregoers: the regular, long-term theatregoers represented in this study. The main motivations have been identified. However, the motivations discussed in this chapter are generic. Chapters five to nine discuss the motivations of participants in this study as they reflect over a lifetime of theatregoing. This is the intention of this study: to provide some illumination into gaps in research. Chapter four will identify a methodology for such research.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **DESIGNING THE SET: METHODOLOGY**

#### **4. Introduction**

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the research philosophy and the principles which underpin the study as well as the way the research was carried out. The chapter will contain the following sections, which correspond to the steps suggested for qualitative research by Denzin and Lincoln (1994: 12): firstly, the research paradigm, secondly the research strategy, thirdly, the methods of collection and data analysis, and finally the interpretation and presentation of the data.

#### **4.1 Research philosophy: choice of paradigm**

The research aim was always clear from the onset of the study: to examine the motivations of long-term, regular theatregoers. Research questions had already been formulated: how, when and why did people become theatregoers? What factors in their family backgrounds, or their youth, made them receptive to a theatrical production? How, when and why did they maintain their theatregoing subsequently? The research method emerged by a process of reflection where a number of research methods were considered. Ultimately the choice came about by serendipity, as a sudden gift of the imagination. The solution did not lie in a textbook, as the research method used is not one that has been tried and tested in the field of audience research. It is the case that the reminiscence workshop, as the research tool in this study, is an innovative technique. This study is a test-run to examine its potential as a research method. To reach this point where the imagination revealed the existence of reminiscence workshops as a possible research method, various epistemological, ontological and practical decisions and positions had already been taken. These are discussed in the following sections.

#### 4.1.1 Definition of research paradigm

Epistemological concerns relate to the “acceptable knowledge in a discipline” (Bryman, 2001: 10). What would be acceptable for this study of theatregoer’s motivations? Taking an epistemological stance preferring to explain rather than merely to describe, led to the choice of a research paradigm. In terms of knowledge, explanations relate to the why and how events or situations come about (Punch, 2005: 15). A paradigm denotes “a set of assumptions about the social world, and about what constitute proper techniques and topics for enquiry” (*ibid*: 27 - 28). Within epistemology, there are three specific paradigms in social research: a positivist approach, an interpretive, or qualitative approach and a postmodern mix of the first two methods. The following two sections critique these paradigms in the light of the need for an explanatory research design.

#### 4.1.2 The positivist paradigm

The philosophy of the positivist paradigm promotes scientific methods for all forms of knowledge. Quantitative research is founded on the philosophy of positivism (Bryman, 1988: 14). Positivism favours an explanation of human behaviour over the understanding of human behaviour (Bryman, 2001: 13). There are five elements making up the positivist paradigm (Bryman, 1988: 14 – 15, Bryman, 2001: 12). Each of these elements was found to be incompatible with the aims of this study, as the following indicates.

In the first element, any phenomena and resultant knowledge, should be confirmed by the researcher’s own senses. This belief places scientific observation more highly than theory. This approach rejects subjective experiences of individuals (Bryman, 2001: 14). Since there was never any aim of attending theatrical productions with theatregoers and observing their behaviour, a scientific, observational approach could not be considered for this study. This was not

research that could take place in a laboratory. In any case, no historical, reflective experiences of other human beings could be observed by a researcher. Furthermore, since the study aims at understanding the motivations of individual theatregoers, their subjective viewpoints would be regarded as essential for the gathering of data. The first of Bryman's definitions of positivism therefore leads to the rejection of this paradigm for this study.

Secondly, the purpose of theory in positivist research is to generate hypotheses which are tested later. This is known as a deductive approach. Theory and the hypothesis come first in this deductive approach (*ibid*: 8). This study did not start out with theories or hypotheses to be tested. Instead, an approach was needed that favoured interpretation of data, without any determining theory dominating research processes.

Thirdly, knowledge is gained by gathering verified facts as a basis for laws. These laws are "empirically established regularities" contributing to the creation of theory (Bryman, 2001: 15). From a practical perspective, a positivist approach tends to favour quantitative, empirical methods, such as questionnaires (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983: 4 – 5). There are two definitions of empiricism (*ibid*: 8). The first definition states that an empirical perspective encompasses the belief that it is only acceptable to gain knowledge through experience or from the senses. Ideas must therefore be tested to be accepted. The second meaning states that an empirical approach denotes the collection of 'facts' such as opinions, beliefs, values and experiences. A research strategy using a quantitative approach measures or quantifies data. Measurement has three advantages. It enables researchers to ascertain fine differences or distinctions between people. It creates a consistent device for examining these distinctions. Finally it allows for "more precise estimates of the degree of relationship between concepts" (*op cit*: 66). An example of this relationship might be between frequency of attendance, and donations to a theatre.



However, it was not the aim of this study to collect facts. Chapter two has already suggested that a purely factual, quantitative approach to gathering data about theatregoers only reveals snapshots. These snapshots provide insufficient rich data about initial, and long-term, motivating factors. It has only been the advent of studies that include interpretive methods such as Bunting *et al* (2008) that there has been a greater understanding of British theatregoers. Practical considerations therefore suggested that this study should take an interpretive approach.

Fourthly, the research must be value free and objective. From an epistemological stance, an approach that favours the researcher's interpretation of data, cannot be completely objective. Therefore a completely value-free and objective form of research could not take place. Objectivism also relates to an ontological position which states that individuals cannot influence social phenomena. Organisations, cultures and subcultures are external to individuals and have a separate existence from them (Bryman, 2001: 16 – 17). The opposite view, known as constructionism, holds that social actors construct social phenomena and their meanings. These processes evolve and are in a constant state of flux (*ibid*). The emphasis in this study is on theatregoers' own construction of their life of theatregoing. It is not the aim to research the forces or structures within society (for example, the Arts Council, or local authority arts development officers) that may, or may not, influence theatregoers' theatregoing.

Finally, a positivist approach was rejected because positivism tends to be the realm of scientists. As well as favouring measurement, quantitative research methods have three additional concerns, which could be deemed criticisms of qualitative research (*ibid*: 282). The first of these is causality, or an explanation of the causes of a phenomenon. Longitudinal research often aims to create findings that allow for causal interpretations (*ibid*: 74 – 75). Reminiscence, like longitudinal research, is concerned with the effects of the passing of time. The second concern is that of generalisation. This means that the sample chosen for the research is representative of the population as a whole. The findings do not just relate to the group in the survey (*ibid*). A small sample size such as the

participants in the reminiscence workshops, is too small for the data to be generalisable. The final concern is that of replication, where a scientist, in particular, may replicate the original research. If the results were not similar, the original research may be deemed invalid (*ibid*: 76). It would not be possible to replicate a reminiscence workshop. This is because the workshop is determined by the specificity of its participants, its location in time, and the spontaneous nature of the stories and discussions held over its duration. The problems with generalisation and replication would suggest that, according to the quantitative approach, the research would be invalid and unreliable. However, as the next section suggests, other criteria are used to indicate validity and reliability.

#### 4.1.3 The interpretive paradigm

From an epistemological position, an interpretive approach is where the researcher interprets meanings which are embodied in the language and actions of social actors by constructing a reading of the meanings (Schwandt, 1994: 118). Interpretivism incorporates the concepts of ‘Verstehen’, or understanding, as conceptualised by Weber, hermeneutics, phenomenology, and symbolic interactionism (Bryman, 2001: 13). It is concerned with people’s lives, lived experiences, social movements, cultural phenomena and interactions between nations (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 10 – 11). The researcher tends to “get close to” the people who are being studied whereas in quantitative research, the researcher is an outsider, looking in (Bryman, 1988: 96). In reminiscence workshops, the researcher is an integral part of the workshop group, with close relationships growing with participants over the weeks of the workshops.

The research strategy associated with an interpretive approach is that of qualitative research. Schutz (1967) argues that in qualitative research it is valid to interpret the meanings that people have about their environment. Qualitative researchers can view events and the social world “through the eyes of the people that they study” (Bryman, 2001: 277). Therefore it is appropriate for this study to view

theatregoing through the eyes of long-term, regular theatregoers. Within the field of audience research, few research projects have set out to discover “what their patrons find pleasurable or objectionable, either on stage or as part of their theatregoing experience... ‘how’ patrons attend the theatre” (Olsen, 2002: 261). Selecting a qualitative method to research the motivations of theatregoers enables the researcher carry out the more “probing” research that Mann (1969: 70 - 71) requested forty years ago, but as Olsen states, has not been widely carried out.

Qualitative research often involves the description of a phenomenon as this enables people’s behaviour, or values to be interpreted in context (Bryman, 2001: 278). In this study, the description is presented in the extensive, selected reminiscences of participants. These reminiscences have the additional benefit of providing authentic accounts. Authenticity, or *vraisemblance* is a criterion for the evaluation of qualitative research (Adler and Adler, 1998: 88) especially where the style of writing is able to draw the reader into their subjects’ worlds. It is intended that the reminiscences imbue this study with a sense of ‘*vraisemblance*’ as if the participants are addressing the reader directly.

There are two other advantages of the qualitative paradigm for this study. The first is that qualitative research views social life in terms of processes (Bryman, 2001: 279 – 280). Processes show how events (such as theatregoing) take place over time. Ethnographic research, in particular, is concerned with processes over time, but more significantly, for this study, so is the life history (see section 4.4 concerning data analysis). The second advantage is that of flexibility. Data collection is more unstructured than in quantitative research allowing for data to be less contaminated by the researcher’s imposition of a frame of reference on people (*ibid*: 280). Section 4.2.3 shows how the rationale of reminiscence workshops is to instigate a shared and democratic control over discussion topics over the series of workshops. This flexibility and lack of predetermined structure enables greater access into the world of the participants (*ibid*). This study is interpretive, where the aim is to be able to “balance the keen observer’s eye and ear with a sense of history and a lively imagination” (Borenstein, *ibid*: 60 – 72).

An interpretive approach using life histories moves away from science towards the humanities (Plummer, 1983: 3 - 9), and therefore this study is primarily located within the humanities. This study has an expansive research aim because its objective is to discover the motivations of long-term, regular theatregoers to attend the theatre. The desire to capture the “past lived experiences” with a “retrospective glance” (Schutz, 1967: 53) as discussed in chapter three, means that an interpretive, qualitative approach was needed for the collection of valuable rich descriptions of the theatregoers’ social world (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994: 6).

## 4.2 Research strategy

This study examines the life histories of long-term, regular theatregoers. There are a number of definitions of the life history. One definition is that the life history is based on a transcribed account taken by a researcher which is then edited, interpreted and presented (Roberts, 2002: 177). Another interpretation is that it consists of many elements that make up the biographical research field which includes (auto)biography, biography, and narratives, amongst others (Denzin, 1989: 27). The life history is also used as a synonym for these perspectives or approaches (Miller, 2000: 1). Life histories incorporate private archival records, which are “the most important data for the life history” rather than public archival records which include: “autobiographies, questionnaires, interviews, verbatim reports, diaries, letters, artistic and projective materials” (Denzin, 1970: 224 – 236). The term “life history” and “life story” are often used interchangeably (Bertaux, 1981: 7) although Bertaux states that for some writers, they are separate concepts, as life stories may not contain life history documents. A life history is an account that a person gives someone else of their lives, or part of their lives as a result of an interactive experience with a researcher (Roberts, 2002: 177). It is this final interpretation by Roberts that is used in this study.

Employing a life history, or life course approach has caused researchers to question their views about social reality and knowledge as this approach changes

the focus of the researcher from the present to the past, and people's experiences of the past (Miller, 2000: 2). However, without the "retrospective glance" (Schutz, 1967), it would not be possible to learn about a lifetime of regular theatregoing. It was important in this study to learn as much as possible about theatregoing across the years. Accordingly, a group of theatregoers who attend regularly at one theatre might also attend a range of other venues which the others do or did not go to. As people who have lived through historical events reconstruct their life histories so the researchers have a greater ability to interpret those historical experiences (Hareven, 2000: 327). It is not possible to tell a life history without "constant reference to historical change" (Plummer, 1983: 70), a focus that helped shed light on the changing theatrical influences over the past sixty years and their effect on the theatregoer.

#### 4.2.1 The development of the life history

The term "life histories" denotes "a series of substantive events arranged in chronological order (Miller, 2000: 19). Many American researchers embrace a wider range of sources than European researchers who favour only those documents which relate to narratives about a person's life (Bertaux and Kohli, 1984: 216). There are three types of life histories – the complete (the entire sweep of the subject's life experiences), the topical (a focus on one phase of a subject's life) and the edited (interspersed with comments and interpretations) (Denzin, 1970: 220 – 223). Life histories are also a major element of life course research where researchers study "groups of individuals who were born at roughly the same time and experience approximately the same historical events at the same time of life" (Giele and Elder, 1998: 16). One further distinction can be made – that between 'oral histories' and 'life histories'. With oral histories the aim is to "recapture the detail of the past, to discover and document how it was lived" whilst life histories are "the life and circumstances which have shaped it that are the objects of interest" (Cornwell and Gearing, 1989: 36). Much of twentieth century life history research concentrated on forms of deviancy (Bertaux and Kohli, 1984: 220). It is a coincidence that both the research strategy (life history,

or life course research) and the method of collection (the reminiscence workshop) are being applied in this study to theatre-goers having originated in the discipline of health and social care.

The chosen method was the reminiscence workshop. This section discusses firstly reminiscence workshops as a biographical research technique. A useful definition of reminiscence work for the purposes of this study is: “the stimulation of social and creative activities, that values people as individuals, and that make positive uses of their reminiscences” (Arigho, 2005). In what follows, the process from learning about the technique to the practicalities of using reminiscence workshops is explained and the advantages and disadvantages are discussed.

#### 4.2.2 Reminiscence and biographical techniques

Biographical research “has the important merit of aiding the task of understanding major social shifts, by including how new experiences are interpreted by individuals within families, small groups and institutions” (Roberts, 2002: 5). The forms of biographical research include the life history, autobiography, biography, and oral history (*ibid*). It could be argued that the reminiscence research in this study is oral history where oral history contains “groups of older people... whose main concern is the retrieval of past experience and its recording and preservation” (Bornat, 2001: 5). However, it should be noted here that the groups in this study do not consist entirely of “older people”. Bornat’s definition of oral history also includes the researcher, or interviewer, who “focuses on a life history with a view to finding out about the past and an individual’s life in that past” (*ibid*). In this case, this study does, without doubt, fall under the umbrella of oral history. However, Bornat’s primary concern is with reminiscence in the realm of social care, and she does not refer to the utilisation of reminiscence workshops as a research tool. The omission of reminiscence workshops in Roberts (2002), Elliott (2005), Gillham (2005) and other recent texts on narrative

or biographical research indicate that reminiscence as a research method is relatively rare. This omission clearly indicates how an analysis of its deployment as a research method in this study acts as a contribution to knowledge to research methods by testing and evaluating the reminiscence workshop as a research tool.

Histories are narratives, and telling a story is a feasible way of collecting data because narration is part of everyday interaction (Punch, 1998: 52). Drama has been analysed to discuss society (Denzin, 1983). Reminiscence workshops are not dramatic in nature but “they may be social, or they may be part of a programme of activities designed to develop or use the skill of the particular participants, or the sessions may work towards an exhibition or a book as an end product” (Osborn, 1999: 5). Experiencing the “delights and traumas of reminiscence... promotes communication and opens people up to each other in a specially personal and usually positive manner” where participants “understood what it is like to agree to relay in the context of a group quite personal things about one’s own life” and recognised “the need for a rather special quality of listening on the part of those involved in this area of work” (Schweitzer, 1986: 10).

#### 4.2.3 Reminiscence workshops

The research method chosen, the reminiscence workshop, aimed for a fusion of creativity and applied social scientific rigor, in order to satisfy what Mills (1967) conceptualises as the “sociological imagination” and follows his dictum of “every man [*sic*] is his own methodologist! Methodologists! Get to work!” (Mills, 1967: 123). Mills argues that researchers should not be bound by restrictive or uncreative methods: it is for this reason that reminiscence workshops were chosen as the research method. For Mills, the ordinary stories of people enable the researcher to make the connections that ordinary people cannot between their own lives and the course of history (*ibid*: 3 – 4). What Mills indicates is that researching the life history of theatregoers enables the wider context of the social

structure to be better understood. As Mills says (*ibid*: 5), “the sociological imagination enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals.”

Reminiscence workshops have been developed by Age Exchange in Blackheath, London, an organisation inspired by Baz Kershaw to produce productions based on the reminiscences of older people (Kershaw, 2007: 142 – 144). Reminiscence enables the researcher: “to understand the past by listening to the people who lived through it” with the aim to “improve the quality of life of older people by emphasising the value of their reminiscences to old and young through pioneering artistic, educational, health and social care activities (Age Exchange Programme, nd). Formal reminiscence activities have been well-established as a means of “encouraging communication and understanding in most places where older people gather together” (Osborn, 1999: 1), mainly due to the programmes managed by Age Exchange.

Up until the late 1960s reminiscence was believed to be a detrimental activity for the elderly where thinking about happier days could cause depression. The elderly would be viewed as not being ‘in the swing of today’ (Coleman, 1986: 50). Coleman asserts that reminiscence is “a worthy and creative activity in its own right” where the elderly could be categorised into “those who enjoyed reminiscing”, “those who saw no point in reminiscing” and “those who could not bear to reminisce” (*ibid*: 53 – 58).

More recently, there has been a great deal of interest in reminiscence work, especially in the field of health, from the 1980s in particular (Bornat, 1989: 19 – 22). Reminiscence work implies “a more active role for those whose memories are sought” introducing “goals and objectives which can be personal, social and, of course, historical” (*ibid*: 20). There is an “overwhelming” range of research that indicates that reminiscence has a positive outcome for participants (Bornat, 2001: 6). One outcome is where the participants are able to see themselves



differently having encountered like-minded, and lively individuals within the reminiscence group. Harmful, negative stereotypes about the elderly can be dispelled, thereby proving therapeutic to the participant. During the reminiscence workshops, there was a reflexive exercise in the final sessions which enabled the views of the participants to be heard about the benefits to participants. For the first time in this study, before they have been introduced formally (see chapter five), the real voices of some participants will be heard to justify, in this case, the benefits of reminiscence as therapy. Maureen reflects from the point of view of age:

I find this that, treating older people as if they can still vocalise about their lives, [*laughter*] it's terribly important socially to do this because you become, well, you think sometimes in the domestic world you are seen as a certain kind of person, and then you come to something like this and you realise you are part of another group of people (Oxford Playhouse, 21 December 2006).

The feedback from the participants in every group suggests that reminiscence workshops do indeed have positive outcomes, supporting Coleman (1986), Bornat (1989, 2001) and Osborn (1999). Attendance was therapeutic according to Kate (Oxford Playhouse, 21 December 2006) who felt “part of a group which has something useful to say.” The therapy appears to flourish when reminiscing in the way that Schutz (1967) calls the “retrospective glance” over a “past lived experience”. The process of reminiscence allows the participants the opportunity to reflect on their lives, and the important influences on theatregoing. Margaret, one of the older participants, gives her response to the reminiscence workshops:

Part of my experience has been really just to think “what a rich and fortunate life I’ve led” you know. It was a feeling of great gratitude really... I’ve really enjoyed it, that’s the best of all for me (Oxford Playhouse, 21 December 2006).

Reminiscence has also proved valuable to younger participants who are working people with busy lives. Many participants, in telling their life stories, reflected on

the significance of family members or teachers in developing their theatregoing. They usually indicated their gratitude to these individuals which they also found therapeutic. The findings support Osborn (1993: 2) in that older people feel a sense of well-being and comfort when through reminiscing they can recall memories they had forgotten, thereby reinforcing their self-identity and confidence. Other therapeutic benefits for the participants include making memories clearer, locating them in a firmer context. The reminiscence process enables older people to cope with loss, by allowing the participants to recall and share happy memories about their loved one. In this study, four participants had lost a partner, or other loved ones, two participants within months of the workshops beginning. Attending the reminiscence workshops in these circumstances was therapeutic according to the feedback of at least four participants.

Overcoming loss also became easier as a result of friendships gained during the workshops. Several participants carried on meeting up socially, and those friendships would not have been brought about without the workshops, and the sharing of common interests within them. The reminiscence process enables a grieving participant to focus his/her mind on an activity that has given them so much happiness throughout his/her lifetime, both within the reminiscence workshop and back at home between workshops.

One participant also benefited therapeutically from an enhanced self-esteem and identity by attending the workshops, a finding that supports Bornat (2001: 10) in her belief that reminiscence is empowering. Osborn (1993) argues that older people may not be very active in the present and that talking about the past is an excellent focus for social activity. The data from this study suggest that conversations over a period of time reinforce the interconnectedness that each participant feels as a fellow theatregoer.

The feedback from reminiscence participants therefore indicates that the process itself was beneficial. The positive feelings generated having attended the workshops is also an indication that participants were willing to share their reminiscences for the purposes of research. The next section identifies how these participants were targeted for the workshops.

#### 4.3 The sampling process

Having undergone reminiscence workshop training with Age Exchange, the next element of the research process was to find a sample of regular, long term theatre-goers. Sampling means “abandoning certainty for probability” (Mann, 1968: 103) where the sample size is able to indicate “with a sufficiently high degree of probability a fairly true reflection of the sampling population that is being studied (Kumar, 1999: 19). With qualitative sampling, the emphasis should be on “trawling for a *range* of information than trying to establish a representative sample” (Gillham, 2005: 43).

There are no definitive guides for sizes of reminiscence workshop groups used for research purposes; for reminiscence work generally, in care homes, six to eight people is advised, whereas in adult education classes the numbers could be ten to twenty (Osborn, 1999: 5 - 6). Following Arigho (2005) the size of the group was considered alongside the size and atmosphere of the rooms where the reminiscence workshop took place, along with the total number of workshops – between five and eight, and a different theme for each workshop. Reminiscence workshops lasted an hour and took place in a quiet environment with few distractions. The reason for this was Osborn’s (op cit) warning about the possible frailty of older participants regarding excessive duration of sessions, and noise.

The decision was made to make use of personal connections within theatres to find the sample of long-time, regular theatregoers. Having been a theatre reviewer for the Newbury Weekly News for well over a decade, having links with a number of theatres as a senior lecturer in music and arts management, and living in Oxford were advantageous. The initial decision was to hold a pilot study at the Oxford Playhouse to see if reminiscence workshops were a viable method to discover through the life histories of the participants their motivation for attending the theatre for many years. A second series of reminiscence workshops subsequently took place following the success of the pilot study.

The Oxford Playhouse is a presenting house, located in the city centre, opposite the Ashmolean Museum, and within the entertainment quarter of the city. It is accessible with public transport, and parking, nearby. The current theatre was originally built in 1938 (TABS, 1964: 24) and then reconstructed in 1964 when the theatre was conceived as a “university theatre for professionals and amateurs” with 849 seats in two tiers (TABS, 1966: 44). The capacity is about 200 seats less now. It has a café in the foyer and a bar upstairs.

The Playhouse Head of Marketing and Head of Education were approached informally on a press night at the theatre in late 2005 to explore if a joint reminiscence project was viable. Ultimately the Playhouse would receive transcripts for marketing purposes. A formal plan was submitted to the Head of Marketing in February 2006 and in early April 2006 to the Head of Education. Arranging and agreeing the research was at times frustrating as the Playhouse, like many theatres, has very busy times when staff are producing brochures, or covering for staff sickness. Two months’ potential research time was lost waiting for a decision, however, ultimately, the Playhouse Director and other members of the management team were supportive. One agreement was that the data could be an important element of a project to celebrate the Playhouse’s 70<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations in 2008. Subject to certain conditions, the research took place on agreed dates (see next paragraph) when the theatre was not being used for

conflicting activities. One of the conditions was that the research did not take up the time of senior staff of the Playhouse, another that participants could not be targeted at plays for young children, and student productions. For health and safety reasons, no evening productions were to be used to target participants. The reminiscence workshops became part of the Playhouse education programme for the year, thereby integrating the research with the annual objectives of the Playhouse. It would be difficult for similar research to be undertaken without a strong partnership between researcher and theatre.

Both the Head of Education and the Head of Operations, whose remit covers the box office, used box office data to pinpoint appropriate times to target potential participants. As a result of their advice, four hundred invitations (see appendix 1) were photocopied and distributed to audience members as they left the auditorium at the end of the show; five workshops from Thursday 1 June 2006, and eight from Thursday 12 October 2006 were offered. Since this study has identified a limitation within Baumol and Bowen (1966) for lack of detail on the productions involved in their research, this section will provide a full account of the sampling process as it relates to individual productions. Invitations were distributed during Edward Albee's *Three Tall Women*, a Playhouse production on Thursday 11 May 2006, which had a total audience of 165, and the Watermill, Newbury production of Molière's *Tartuffe* on Thursday 25 May 2006, which had a total audience of 216. Further invitations were distributed on matinees on Thursday 17 August 2006 (audience of 270), Saturday 19 August (audience of 189), Thursday 24 August 2006 (audience of 262), and Saturday 26 August (audience of 186) after the Playhouse production of Brandon Thomas' *Charley's Aunt*, and Thursday 7 September (audience of 251) after the National Theatre's production of JT Rogers' *The Overwhelming*. The audience figures were taken from the box office and supplied by the Head of Marketing.

An invitation to join a reminiscence workshop, whose wording had been agreed with the Playhouse, was handed out. The copy was designed according to the

AIDA formula of “attract Attention, create Interest, generate Desire and provoke Action” (Colbert *et al*, 2001: 176). Logos of the Oxford Playhouse and Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College stressed the joint nature of the research. Mann (1966) was followed to encourage theatregoers who are enthusiastic to help their local theatre. It was important to engender the impression that audiences would “feel more strongly a part of the total social group” and could “feel they were contributing to the theatre” (Mann, 1966: 386). Regular, long-term audiences would have loyalty to the Playhouse so the invitation was addressed in this way: “Dear Playhouse Theatregoers: An invitation to our regular theatregoers”. The invitation was designed to be friendly for the average attender, so regularity was not spelled out. As regularity is contested in theatre research – see section 2.2.6 – theatregoers could decide for themselves if they attended regularly. This wording would at any rate filter out theatregoers who did not consider themselves “regular”. In this case, all resulting participants at the Oxford Playhouse did attend regularly, as defined by attendance at the highest level – over eleven attendances in a year, as used by Osborne, Wheeler and Elliott (1999), Skelton *et al*, (2002: 16, Bridgwood and Skelton (2002), and Fenn *et al*, (2004: 31).

The next message was an inducement: “FREE COFFEE, CAKES and REMINISCENCES!” The aim of this was to offer additional benefits to attendance, at minimal cost to participants, attract the attention of the theatregoer, and generate desire, as well as follow reminiscence good practice (Osborn, 1999). Regular Playhouse attenders in all probability know how tasty the cakes and coffee are at the Playhouse. The aim was to promote a certain middle-European café culture “*gemütlichkeit*” where reminiscence would take place.

The copy continues: “We would like to offer you, our regular theatregoers, an opportunity to become part of theatre history and make new friends at the same time!” which would indicate the importance of the research both to the theatre and for audience research generally, create interest in the reminiscence research, and

offer social benefits. The central part of the invitational letter enlarges on the reasons for the research and then gives parameters for the reminiscence groups – size of eight to ten – and suggests: “Why not bring along souvenirs such as programmes, posters and other memorabilia which the group could enjoy browsing through?” The aim here is twofold: firstly to inculcate a feeling of involvement with the reminiscence process, and secondly to contribute historical materials to the reminiscence box (Arigho, 2005). Action was provoked by providing space for contact details, and contact could be made by letter, email or by submission of a slip to the box office in the foyer. The invitation ends with a confidentiality statement (see ethical issues in section 4.3.1) and an enrolment form.

The advice was taken from the Playhouse Head of Operations to hold the reminiscence workshops on Thursday mornings, 11.30 – 12.30, before the matinees started, in the Circle Bar. There was no fee to hire the Circle Bar (cost of research is a limitation to many researchers; contacts in this case were invaluable). Coffee, tea and cakes were priced reasonably, delivered by catering staff with different cakes provided each week, thereby enhancing the culinary experience. The Circle Bar is fully accessible to elderly or disabled persons, and was a familiar environment to Playhouse regular attenders. By holding the reminiscence workshops on the same day as the matinees, theatregoers did not have to pay for two separate visits to the Playhouse. By starting at 11.30am, participants missed rush hour traffic, which is slow in Oxford, and by finishing at 12.30pm, they were able to have lunch prior to the matinee. The pilot workshops were held over five weeks from 1<sup>st</sup> to 30 June 2006. The second set of workshops took place for seven weeks from Thursday 12 October 2006 with the eighth and final workshop postponed until Thursday 21 December 2006 because of researcher illness.

Five theatregoers responded for the first reminiscence workshop, the pilot study, and nine for the second. All were accepted. The attendance for the pilot study was smaller than hoped. Another limitation to this pilot study was that there were

two sets of spouses. Robin is married to Audrey, and Gwilym to Sheila. In addition, Geraldine knew Robin and Audrey, but her attendance did not depend on theirs. Her attendance was a motivating factor in theirs. The decision was taken to treat all five as individuals; they are all theatregoers in their own right. This was partly the result of the short time gap between invitation and start of the reminiscence workshops. It was important to see if the reminiscence workshop worked as a research method. Other factors reducing the numbers who could attend were the relatively high number of repeat attenders over the matinees, and coach parties from nearby towns such as High Wycombe which were too far away to attract participants. Within the second Oxford Playhouse group, Ophelia and Henry are a married couple. They attended only the first two workshops. By the time the second Oxford Playhouse series of workshops had ended, some significant data analysis had already taken place with certain concepts emerging from the research process.

In June 2006, the Artistic Director of the Pegasus Theatre Oxford was approached after a chance meeting. Having reviewed shows for the Newbury Weekly News at the Pegasus for many years there was a friendly response from the management of the Pegasus. At a subsequent meeting with the Artistic Director and the Head of Marketing it was agreed to carry out a similar study to that at the Playhouse. The Pegasus had, by coincidence, already decided to research its past where the resultant data were to be used for a publication and exhibition to coincide with the venue's National Lottery-funded rebuilding, due to begin at the end of 2008. Here was an opportunity for the Pegasus to carry out research without paying for a consultant. As with the Playhouse, the reminiscence workshops were built into the Pegasus' annual objectives.

The Pegasus Theatre is an arts centre that was initially built to provide a home for the Oxford Youth Theatre in the early sixties. It subsequently began programming professional companies to perform, but its primary role is that of providing youth and community participatory opportunities. It has a capacity of about 120 seats.



It is located in the suburbs of East Oxford, about one mile from the city centre, and has a small bar, with offices nearby. The bar is not a suitable location for holding reminiscence workshops as it is not a private space. Reminiscence workshops took place in one of the large offices in the annexe.

A different sampling process was needed as the Pegasus does not programme productions regularly. The invitation to Playhouse audiences was adapted for the Pegasus and can be seen in appendix 2. Long-standing supporters of the theatre were targeted by the Head of Marketing from data from the box office and were sent the invitation by direct mail. The Pegasus issued two free tickets per performance to attenders as an inducement. The workshop aims also appeared on the Pegasus website, along with an appeal for participants. Handing over the sampling process to the Pegasus was unsettling as the outcome was out of the hands of the researcher. The first reminiscence workshop took place Friday 27 October 2006 at 6.30pm. As with the Playhouse the aim was for participants to attend prior to performances, which usually occur on Friday and Saturday evenings at 7.45pm. Six participants responded to the Pegasus requests for participants. However, at the first workshop only two participants turned up. Reminiscences were captured from the two participants, but after the missing four people were phoned up to find out why they did not attend, it was discovered that work or family commitments stopped their participation. They did not inform the Pegasus of these reasons. Another appeal to Pegasus audiences was made and five participants committed themselves to workshops which commenced from Wednesday 21 February 2007. Subsequent workshops were held on the 7<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> March 2007. The workshops took place in Pegasus's offices, sitting around a large table and biscuits, cakes, and refreshments were provided by the theatre. One limitation of the resultant reminiscence workshops was that participants talked about their theatregoing in relation primarily to the Pegasus Theatre in at least one workshop.

In September 2006 there was agreement with the Marketing Manager of the Corn Exchange, Newbury, to hold a series of reminiscence workshops. As with the other two theatres, there was much familiarity with the theatre since it re-opened in the mid nineties. The Marketing Manager then moved to manage another theatre but had seconded the negotiation to the Community Arts Co-ordinator, who took over the project from him. The Corn Exchange is a receiving house with approximately 400 seats and is located in the heart of Newbury, a market town in Berkshire, in the market square. The theatre, like the Playhouse, has a café within its foyer and a bar upstairs. It was its centrality with ease of access for participants swung the decision to choose the venue for reminiscence workshops, rather than the Watermill Theatre, a repertory theatre which is located in the countryside about two miles from the town. A car would be needed to attend workshops there. The Corn Exchange promotes a range of arts and entertainments which often are one-night shows.

The rationale for choosing the Corn Exchange was firstly, to find a venue that was not in Oxford, with a different demographic. Secondly it was in a location that was only about twenty-five miles from Oxford. Thirdly, Newbury is a town that has a strong theatregoing tradition. As with the Pegasus, attenders were targeted from the box office database. The Pegasus invitation was used as a template, changing logos and other information as appropriate. The workshops took place on a variety of days, chosen by Corn Exchange management according to their proximity to a drama or dance performance, whereupon a participant was offered two complimentary tickets as a tangible benefit of participation.

Whilst the problem at the Pegasus Theatre had been finding sufficient, committed participants, the Corn Exchange had the opposite problem. Too many theatregoers applied for the workshops. It was decided to offer a dozen places, on the assumption that one or two people might not attend in any week. The only bias in the selection of the sample size was that all the male applicants were accepted. This decision was made to ensure a male voice was heard within the

reminiscence process. The remainder of the participants were selected randomly. By the time that the Corn Exchange and Pegasus workshops were finishing, it was becoming clearer what was motivating long-term regular theatregoers. Indices of saturation were becoming evident such as the repetition of material and data collected at the Oxford Playhouse was being confirmed or expanded upon. The decision was made to hold no more reminiscence workshops for this study. Reminiscence workshops were held on Wednesday 14 February, Wednesday 28 February, Saturday 10 March, Monday 19 March and Thursday 20 March 2007, all at 6.45pm with exception of the Saturday, which began at 11am. The location was the Upstairs Bar which was quiet for the majority of the hour, but began to fill up with theatregoers prior to the performances towards the end.

#### 4.3.1 Ethical issues

It was important to gain the voluntary consent of all the participants for their reminiscences to be cited within this study. Fully informed voluntary consent is dominant in the discourse on research ethics, and is related to philosophical concepts such as autonomy, self-determination, privacy, respect and trust (Gregory, 2003: 35 - 41). Accordingly, a consent form was devised, checked by the Head of Education of the Oxford Playhouse, and given to all participants with amendments for each of the other two venues. The form became a sort of contract which clearly outlined the boundaries of the research, issues of confidentiality, and the respondents' control over the final findings. Consent was asked for the transcripts to be used for research and marketing purposes on the proviso that the transcripts were first checked by the participant. The participants had the right to change, delete or add to anything they said. Every participant signed a consent form.

One issue that was decided during the workshops was whether to use the participants' names within this study. After discussion with participants, every

participant who attended the last sessions agreed that their names were used. It was suggested that participants could use stage names if they wished. The overwhelming feeling was, however, that they decided to participate in this research knowing that the research would help the theatres they attend. It was also strongly felt that the reminiscences told were their own stories, and they wanted their names attached to them. Accordingly, with the exception of the three participants who did not attend to the end of their workshops, the first names given are authentic. The three who left early have stage names. Generally in social science, participants would be anonymous. However, it is often the case in reminiscence work or oral history, that participants wish not to be anonymous. Historical diaries and letters, for example, are not treated with the same levels of confidentiality (Bornat, 2008).

#### 4.3.2 The reminiscence workshop process

In total thirty-one participants took part in the four reminiscence workshops, although two people attended as guests, one for one workshop at the Oxford Playhouse, and one for two workshops at the Corn Exchange, having been invited by other participants. Whilst these guests made contributions to the overall reminiscences, their stories are not being used for this research as they did not sign any consent forms. Of those who originally signed up for the workshops, one participant, Laura, only attended for the first Corn Exchange workshop and then had to go to hospital. Kay attended only the first Pegasus workshop, and then had work commitments. Ophelia and Henry only attended two Oxford Playhouse workshops before commitments took them elsewhere. In each group, theatre managers who had been co-ordinating the research came in to meet the groups, stressing the theatres' approval and integration of the research. In the case of the Corn Exchange, the Community Arts Co-ordinator observed one of the workshops and took photographs for the archives. Running reminiscence workshops is fraught with problems, especially with older participants who could become ill, or even die over the weeks of the workshops (Arigho, 2005). These participants'

stories are being used, even though they are partial recollections. Two of the Pegasus participants, Pat and Ted, who also did not attend one workshop, also revealed themselves over the course of their reminiscences not to be regular theatre attenders. Ted used to attend regularly over a decade from the 1960s but is deterred by money and inertia, now. They are more accurately described as theatre participants, having acted with the Pegasus Youth Theatre.

One of the most important elements to holding a reminiscence workshop is the creation of the 'reminiscence box' (Arigho, 2005) which can contain objects which can be handled, looked at or smelled. Their primary use is to jog people's memories (*ibid*). From January 2006 second hand bookshops across the country were trawled for items such as period theatre books, production photographs, programmes and promotional literature. The first series of workshops at the Oxford Playhouse took place in the Circle Bar. Reminiscence box items were laid out on coffee tables. Two camcorders with hour-long tapes were used to record sound, one roving, one static. Recording the workshops (taping, camcording) helps with a subsequent verbatim transcription (Miller, 2000: 81 - 88). The visual aspect was not used, but the audio quality was very strong. Piped music was turned off and coffee, tea and cakes, starting with scones with jam and cream, were carried into the bar. Refreshments served at the beginning of a session act as an inducement for participants to attend (Osborn, 1999: 20).

To help the introductions, participants' first names were written onto adhesive labels. Two participants arrived very early, one on time, and two just late. The group was arranged in a circle around the coffee tables, and a convivial atmosphere was encouraged. Being seated in a circle enables participants to "see and hear each other and communicate" (Osborn, 1999: 6 - 9). After introductions, the parameters of the research process were outlined. The first workshop was used for issuing confidentiality and consent forms, which all participants read at their leisure, and returned signed (see examples in appendix 5).

Each week had a different theme; in week one participant reminisced about the “wow” moment, the epiphany, or turning point. This enabled the participants to start reminiscing about an activity about which they are passionate. It was hoped that if loquacious in the first workshop, subsequent workshops would be equally lively. This was indeed the case, with subsequent weeks following a chronological order through life from childhood, education, post-education, and finally the present, with a reflection of theatregoing, and an analysis of the reminiscence process. This template worked so well during the pilot that it was repeated for subsequent workshops at the other theatres.

Each workshop was designed to last an hour. The researcher and participants had to show flexibility during the workshop process. Following a request from two participants, one workshop was moved forwards a day because they had all-day tickets at Stratford for the Thursday. An alternative venue - the café of the Ashmolean Museum, was chosen for ease of access. It is located below ground - a noisier space but one with excellent coffee and cakes. The same flexibility was needed during the second Playhouse workshops when one session was started early to enable a participant to deliver a lecture, and for the final workshop to be moved back three weeks due to researcher illness. This workshop was held at the second home of one of the participants, in the lounge. The terrace house was in a road adjacent to the Playhouse, and was accessible to all participants. One of the Pegasus workshops was cancelled due to every participant and the researcher having other obligations on that day, but the final workshop was extended in time to make up for the difference. The penultimate Corn Exchange workshop took place during a blizzard, with a strong attendance, but one participant arrived late after being in a traffic jam for over ninety minutes. That day, the participants were to be photographed in a photo call arranged by the Corn Exchange for publication in the Newbury Weekly News. The accompanying press release had been jointly agreed and by consenting to be photographed, anonymity for the participants would subsequently be impossible. However, this was another indication how integrated the reminiscence research was with the aims and objectives of the theatre’s outreach and marketing departments.

Participants brought their own items for the reminiscence box – photographs, programmes, diaries, workbooks and archive materials which were passed around for perusal; reminiscences were stimulated by the reminiscence box. Second-hand bookshops were still trawled as texts were found that related to the reminiscences told by participants. Kemp and Trewin (1953) and Trewin (1963), for example, both contain photographs and listings for Robin (Oxford Playhouse) when he acted at the Birmingham Rep and Stratford in the 1940s.

Emergent themes from the first Oxford Playhouse workshops were deliberately introduced into conversation or as subjects for discussion for subsequent series of workshops to enable theoretical sampling to take place. Comparisons began to emerge once sufficient reminiscences were gathered. Each workshop started the reminiscence process once refreshments were taken. Each started with different participants so that a person who spoke last the previous week had an early slot the next. Often items in the reminiscence box encouraged a participant to begin a story. At other times a participant's reminiscence led to an item for the following week's reminiscence box, as with Priscilla's Second World War story about her flying teddy bear which prompted a memory of a recent exhibition about the Poet Laureate, John Betjeman, at the Bodleian in Oxford:

And later with the same brother I had tried to fly with in *Peter Pan*, um, we had dramas with our koala bears which were also religious. One of the bears was turned into the Pope. And I can remember one, I think it was June 1940 at the height of the fall of France and Dunkirk, beautiful weather, having a wedding of one of the bears in the garden and um my brother was manipulating the Pope and I was manipulating the bride and the Pope was – it was like a sort of nightmare – the Pope who was this little bear got bored with being the Pope and marrying people, his daughter, and it was a very elaborate wedding, with handkerchiefs and things and then he suddenly decided to dive bomb the stage which we had made [laughter] and of course there was tremendous darkness behind that. Because it was Dunkirk. It was just, it was a little while before the Battle of Britain. But um you know, bombing, air raids and aerodromes and um the German destruction of Rotterdam and of Warsaw by their air forces was of course our daily diet of news. So psychologically it was quite interesting how we were dealing with this in forms of play which were acceptable and very enjoyable for us (Oxford Playhouse, 19 October 2006).

At the exhibition, illustrations of Betjeman's Archie stories were for sale, including Archie flying over Oxfordshire. Post cards were brought to the next workshop to join the reminiscence box. This set the mood for reminiscences of theatregoing during the Second World War, as well as indicating the extent of immediate research which impressed participants.

It subsequently emerged that there were a high number of participants who had been involved in education (see chapter five for a detailed profile) so a poorly managed workshop would probably have led to discontent. The perception by participants was that workshops were an encouraging environment for reminiscences where there was a strong rapport between researcher and participants. The Newbury Weekly News reviewing, a strong knowledge of world theatre and arts, and excellent contacts within theatres, helped with researcher credibility. Nearly two decades of being a lecturer managing seminars meant that workshops ran professionally, as Priscilla, a former lecturer pointed out in a feedback session:

... although it could easily have developed just into a formless but charming chat if you like, you have, in fact, given it a structure week by week. I think this has been quite remarkable and how you have given each of us our time and yet we have all mingled together so, thank you Jon (Priscilla, Oxford Playhouse, 21 December 2006).

Notes were made prior to each workshop of the main points that participants made in previous sessions. These were referred to during the sessions to prompt further reminiscences. Prompted reminiscences as a result of questions that encourage people to describe their memories are the commonest form of reminiscence (Osborn, 1999: 20).

At the beginning of the first session, and at the end of the last session, the process for transcription and checking the transcripts, along with the participant's role



within the research process was set out. At the end of each workshop, after thanking everyone, the main reminiscence subjects were summarised and ideas were suggested for the next workshop. There was often informal, unrecorded chatter to participants prior to packing up and moving the furniture back to the original positions in the rooms. It was also important that participants realised their shortcomings in memory, and during the checking process, once first drafts of transcripts were given to participants, errors were picked up by participants to be altered for a “clean” draft. Once each workshop series was finished, the transcripts were sent to participants for checking, giving participants a “shared voice” in the process, a practice not usually evident in academic research (Bornat, 2001: 12). Three participants from the first Oxford Playhouse group returned transcripts with alterations with five from the second group, two from the Pegasus and five from the Corn Exchange. Most of the changes included crossings out of hesitations. For examples of the changes suggested see appendix 8, along with respondents’ covering letters. Some of the participants who responded wanted additional material to be enclosed, either as a result of missing a workshop, or because the information related during the reminiscence was felt to be lacking details.

It was a learning curve from the very first reminiscence workshop to the last. Early workshops indicate limitations in research technique such as asking a leading question about being “in love” with theatre to define the “wow” moment (see appendix 9 for an example of the dialogues). By the latter workshops, if there were leading questions, they tended to be more deliberately inserted, to follow up themes raised during previous workshops.

In each workshop session, once a participant had finished reminiscing, another participant was encouraged to start a narration. In a dynamic, fluid and loosely structured workshop it is very difficult, and even counterproductive for the researcher to maintain a neutral stance; at times it was necessary to interrogate points further, spontaneously. Questions enable a researcher to reveal a participant’s “own meaning contexts” (Schutz, 1967: 113) and so are an integral

part of interpretive research. Interrogations took place across all the workshops as in the following example:

Kate: “But I can’t remember going to anything then, apart from the pantomimes.”

Jon: “You would have been too young to have gone somewhere like the Birmingham Rep. Would your parents have gone?”

Kate: “Um I doubt it very much actually because it was quite a distance into Birmingham and we didn’t have a car at the time so, cos you know, it was all sort of petrol rationing and things...” (Oxford Playhouse, 26 October 2006).

At these times, the reminiscence workshop resembled an interview, where the interviewee shared his/her responses with the group. One of the main features of oral history reminiscence work is its interrogatory nature (Bornat, 2001: 7). At other times, the workshop was a free-flowing conversation. However, the conversations were not all researcher-led, as all group members were encouraged to ask questions, supporting Bornat (*ibid*: 7) who asserts that it is in doubt who is in charge in a reminiscence session, and often, participants have their own agendas. In this study, participants were encouraged to comment on others’ stories.

An important advantage of the interaction between the group members is where one participant can help explain the dynamics of a concept. By holding regular workshops a certain time apart, it allows for a deepening of the quality of data as participants can reflect on the topic being discussed and carry out “homework” by adding to the reminiscence box. This research by the participants enabled the stories discussed to be deepened, and verified. Other participants were able to ask family members about their stories to either widen their own memories or to verify points made. Others looked at diary entries, which enable them to make informed judgements about their reminiscences.

Participants listened to each other's reminiscences closely, and responded to them with anecdotes or points that deepened the concepts under discussion. It is a benefit of reminiscence research that this interaction can occur: this kind of dialogue was not evident in any of the studies discussed in chapters two or three. One participant's reminiscences often triggered off another person's, which would have been forgotten otherwise, and not told during the workshop. The reminiscences highlight the interplay of memory and time. Participants do glance backwards retrospectively as they recall an actual past event. Often the story, and the associated images live in the present. This immediacy through memory enables the reminiscence to be more vividly described, and more accurate in that description. Indeed, reminiscence workshops appear to regress the participant back to their past in such a way that their recollections as recounted are akin to an eyewitness account without the biases of age and reflection to alter the original perceptions.

The reminiscence workshop process was enjoyable for researcher and participants as evidenced by the feedback from every participant in the final workshop of the series. Half the battle is won to convince people to relate their personal reminiscences if they enjoy the telling. Rather than paying respondents to attend focus groups as with *The Arts Debate* (Bunting, 2008), providing people with an enjoyable, and therapeutic, context to reveal their rich and meaningful stories has worked well in this study. The next section reveals the process of analysing the data from the study.

#### 4.3.3 Limitations of the reminiscence workshop

There were three main limitations of the research design using reminiscence workshops. The first was the compromise that meant that the researcher could not control every aspect of the process. In order to gain access with participants, there had to be a sharing of the project with the three theatres. Each theatre had its own objectives in agreeing to the workshops, but compromises had to be made over the

sample chosen. The Pegasus, in particular, was not able to deliver on its optimistic targeting of appropriate participants. This was most evident in the October 2006 workshop when only two of the proposed six participants that the Pegasus had found, arrived at the workshop. They provided two participants in the re-arranged 2007 workshops who were not regular, long-time theatregoers. With the Playhouse, their day-to-day commitments meant that they did not promote the workshops internally, for example to their volunteers. At subsequent press nights, many Playhouse attenders, and volunteers voiced regrets at not learning about the workshops. However, no further workshops took place at the Oxford Playhouse.

The second limitation is that since participants tell the stories that they wish to tell, certain factual information about their lives is omitted. This means that comparisons between all participants over some factors, such as parental occupations, or marital status, could not be made.

The third limitation is of the reliability of the research instrument. The researcher is not an impartial observer in a reminiscence workshop. The participants may be questioned by the researcher, or may, as occurred, be asked questions by participants. The enabling role of the researcher in facilitating participants' reminiscences at times, especially in the initial workshops, led to too many concepts being introduced by the researcher. They did not always emerge from the reminiscences. The reason for this was partly researcher inexperience in an experimental research design, and partly the need to promote subjects for discussion. This limitation was outweighed by the confidence that participants could have in the researcher's knowledge of theatre. This confidence enabled richer reminiscences to be related as a result.

#### 4.4 Analysis

The analysis of the data began immediately the first workshop began as participants began to narrate their reminiscences. As this is a qualitative study, two interpretive approaches were used. Firstly, in trying to understand the meaning of the reminiscences, a phenomenological approach proposed by Schutz (1967) was employed. It was important to find out the “because” motives by understanding “the other person’s point of view” (Schutz, 1967: 217). The process involves two senses of meaning: firstly, the meaning that the participant has for his/her reminiscence, and secondly, the meaning that the researcher has for that reminiscence.

The two elements – the participants and the researcher – are both critical to interpreting the data. For analysis of the participants’ data, the structure of the epiphany and life course models, enabled the “original actions” of the participants, their “subjective experiences of the inventor” (*ibid*) to be interpreted within a concrete framework. The researcher, on the other hand, is an “agent” who is “capable of intervening causally in the stream of events that constitutes its environment of behaviour”, acting as a “motor of events” (Giddens, 1987: 216). Acting as a reminiscence workshop co-ordinator was primarily this motorised role as conceptualised by Giddens. Reflexivity in terms of a research methodology is concerned with the nature of the self, or the identity of the researcher. The researcher has to become “more methodologically self-conscious” with the aim of producing “an analytic discussion of how their own theoretical and biographic perspective might impact on their relationships with research subjects, their interpretation of research evidence, and the form in which the research is presented” (Elliott, 2005: 154 – 5). To fulfil this reflexive remit, a research diary was kept throughout 2006 and up until Easter 2007 whilst primary research gathering was underway. Personal thoughts and interpretations of the data were written down alongside a chronology of all activities pertaining to this study. Within the reminiscence workshops, the researcher is “not... the central character, but... one of the key protagonists alongside the subjects of the research” (Van

Maanen, 1988, cited by Elliott, 2005: 162 – 165) lending the interpretation an “impressionistic” style. The intention was to “draw the audience into an unfamiliar story world and allow it, as far as possible, to see, hear, and feel as the fieldworker saw, heard and felt” (*ibid*); the wealth of quotations from participants, ensuring that participants’ own voices are heard clearly, is a strength of this study’s research methodology. There is nothing else but interpretation in the social sciences (Denzin, 1988: 313). In this study, the data from the reminiscence workshops have been interpreted into the partial narration of the life histories of the participants insofar as the life histories relate to theatregoing.

#### 4.4.1 The life course approach

This study adopts Giele and Elder’s life course model as a framework to analyse the life histories of regular theatregoers in order to discover their changing motivation over time. Giele and Elder (1998: 10) define life course research as the effects of the interaction between age and the historical period on cohorts or generations. Age relates to a period (a historical period experienced by a person), a cohort (the socially shared experiences, the linked lives, of one’s peers) and the biological age of a person (the time since birth), although the stages of a person’s life course are social in nature in addition to being biological (Giddens, 1997: 36). The life course involves another dimension – that of timing, which is the medium for integrating historical, social and individual experiences. Life course research is promoted for its ability to tease out how people can perceive their lives in relation to historical events and to understand their role in historical events. Whilst some life course research uses quantitative analysis to compare different cohorts, this study relies on interpreting reminiscence data.

Giele and Elder’s (1998) life course model comprises a four part paradigm: firstly, location in time and space, secondly, linked lives, thirdly, human agency and lastly, timing. Whilst the model was developed for a holistic analysis of a person’s life course, in this study, the model was scaled down to focus on the life

course, or life history as it relates to participants' theatregoing. All the elements of the model are "funnelled" through timing because everyone has to adapt their motivations to "concrete situations and events" (Giele, 1998: 10). It is for this reason that "timing" is the final discussion chapter in this study.

'Location in time and space' refers to the cultural background of groups of individuals. A person's cultural experience is affected by his or her location in time and space where lives are "individually patterned in ways that carry through time" (Giele, 1998: 9). For example, a person born during the Second World War would have experienced a different historical era to people born earlier or later, would have been among the first children to be educated after the 1944 Education Act, would have been among the first children to experience the National Health Service or Arts Council policies to widen access to arts events. It was this generation, aged between 20 and 24 that was going to the theatre in the early 1960s more than other age groups - three and a half times that of their percentage within the UK population (Baumol and Bowen, 1966: 92). This generation of theatregoers is therefore located in time and space differently to, for example, the age group 35 – 44 and so on.

The second part of the paradigm is 'linked lives' – in other words, the way individuals react with societal institutions and with social groups. Individuals are influenced by many levels of action. Analysis of linked lives exploring cultural, institutional and social interaction highlights the way people are influenced by contact "with other persons who share similar experiences" (Giele, *op cit*: 9 - 10). People from different social backgrounds would have experienced events in a different way; people of the same age living in different geographical locations and from different socio-economic backgrounds would have had different experiences (Harris, 1987: 19). The frequent attenders at the Old Vic in 1965, "people who are well-educated, well-to-do, and who are engaged in professional occupations" who "constitute a particularly large proportion of those who attend performances frequently" (Baumol and Bowen, 1966: 93) were able to experience the recently founded National Theatre under the artistic direction of Laurence

Olivier. Other social groups will not have had the same theatrical, or artistic experiences in the mid-sixties.

The third part of the paradigm is human agency – the study of people’s individual goals, their sense of self where “the motives of persons and groups to meet their own needs result in their actively making decisions and organising their lives around goals such as being economically secure, seeking gratification and avoiding pain” (Giele, 1998: 10). Giele offers an example of human agency - deprived girls who had lived through the Depression set out to be homemakers whilst wealthier girls found education and combined work and family lives.

‘Timing’ is the fourth element of the paradigm – the events (a mix of personal, group and historical markers) of an individual’s life in chronological order. People will adapt strategically to these markers, either actively or passively. Markers can be important life events, such as getting married, or starting a family. People’s behaviour will change accordingly: spending more money when there are children. Giele (*ibid*: 10 - 11) discovered that poorer people in the Depression started families earlier than wealthier people who tended to undertake an education and then work prior to starting a family. Individuals will intersect through their life course with three dimensions of time: biographical time which marks critical moments such as epiphanies (see section 4.4.3), generational time, a shifting category linked to an individual’s position within a cohort, or generation, through time, and historical time, which relates to external events, or markers such as seasons, anniversaries and so on (Neale, 2008). Generational time is a shifting category because an individual’s interpretation of a generation is subjective, and fluid (*ibid*).



#### 4.4.2 Cohorts

Giele and Elder (1998) determine the elements of ageing and the life course, as, firstly, age, defined as the time since birth, secondly, historical period, which describes the larger society, such as the 1930s, and lastly cohort, which means the “aggregate of persons of the same age” (Giele and Elder, 1998: 15). People who grew old in the past will have had different work histories, health problems, standards of living and different arts opportunities from those people who have attained those ages today so “cohort differences refer to lives of people and their link to macro-level societal trends and events (history)” (Riley, 1998: 39 – 42).

It is important to relate the age of the person to the historical events that they have lived through as age is used as an indicator of historical experiences (Harris, 1987: 19). Giele and Elder’s four part model analysing the life history of theatregoers alone is insufficient because it does not explain how a person becomes a theatregoer in the first place. In order to do this, another model is required - that of the epiphany (Denzin, 1989).

#### 4.4.3 Epiphanies

Epiphanies are defined as “existentially problematic moments in the lives of individuals” (Denzin, 1989: 17) in that they cause a person to regard their lives differently having experienced the epiphany. There are four types of epiphanies (*ibid*: 129):

- a) *The major epiphany* - moments that are major and touch every fabric of a person’s life
- b) *The cumulative epiphany* - those that represent eruptions, or reactions, to events that have been going on for a long period of time

- c) *The illuminative, minor epiphany* - moments that are minor but symbolic, representative of major problematic ones
- d) *The relived epiphany* - episodes whose effects are immediate but their meanings are only given later, in retrospect, when reliving the event.

An epiphany can be relived and given retrospective meaning. In addition, these four types may build upon each other where “a given event may, at different phases in a person’s or relationship’s life, be first, major, then minor, and then later relived. A cumulative epiphany will, of course, erupt into a major event in a person’s life” (*ibid*). These epiphanies can be related to the concept of “turning points” in people’s lives. An accessible synonym for use in this study with the participants is “wow” moments.

It is important to discover how pervasive “turning points” are within people’s lives. By identifying a number of “critical turning points” (Bourdieu, 1983: 65) in a person’s career (see section 3.5.4), in this study, participants’ theatregoing careers, biographies, or social trajectories can then be constructed. Turning points are the decision points that affected a person’s life and behaviour and it is important to determine the source of the turning point. These could be a failure in a person’s role, a new opportunity arisen, time of war and so on (Clausen, 1998: 202 - 4). The timing of the turning point would relate a person’s age or phase of life to the turning point. An epiphany is not the same thing as a transition. There is a distinction between transitions as part of the life course perspective, and turning points. Transitions are normative; most people experience the same transitions (such as getting married, getting a job) and society expects that most people have these experiences as most people conform to the norm. Turning points on the other hand are “perceptual road marks along the life course, representing the individuals’ subjective assessments of continuities and discontinuities over their life course, especially the impact of special life events on their subsequent life course” (Hareven, 2000: 129). The revealing of epiphanies,

even the researcher's, are a factor within reminiscing, when older people talk about their own lives (Bornat, 2001: 6).

The epiphany has been conceptualised in terms of the value the art form has on a person, where cultural organisations “have a duty to create epiphany” (Hewison, 2007: 37). This conceptualisation did not influence the decision to discover participants' epiphanies, since Hewison's text was published after the primary research in this study was carried out; it does strengthen the rationale for such an approach. It is after the epiphany that the now-theatre-goer is able to adopt what Bourdieu (1983: 61 – 67) calls a ‘position’, which in this case is the person's self-identification within the genres of theatre. Bourdieu, describes positions within theatre in terms of opposites such as ‘bohemian/bourgeois’ and ‘left bank/right bank’ but assumes that such a “special study” of “critical turning points” would be difficult or impossible to undertake (*ibid*: 65). Despite Bourdieu's reservations, this study discusses participants' epiphanies in chapter six, whilst their positions regarding genres they identify with, are analysed in section 8.6.

It was decided therefore to provide a fresh perspective on Giele and Elder (1998) and Denzin (1989) when analysing the life history of theatre-goers. Initial questions were framed, waiting to be put to theatre-goers. The next decision was: what method would enable these questions to be answered? The next section discusses the method chosen for interpreting the data.

#### 4.4.4 Interpreting the data

With the wealth of data being generated, a model was needed to analyse the data incrementally. The grounded theory of Strauss and Corbin (1998) appealed, primarily because their opt-out clause: “we present only one way of doing analysis, and it would be unrealistic to assume or even suggest that researchers will use every procedure described in this book” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 8)

allowed the research to be undertaken with a freedom of choice. The transcription process followed Strauss and Corbin and their grounded theory approach up to a point, which was the coding of data. Whilst this theory advocates starting the research process with data collection, and writing a literature review subsequently, this aspect of the process was rejected in this study for practical reasons (the requirements to produce a literature review) as well as the desire for the literature to provide a “map of available resources” (Hammersley, 2008).

There were twenty-three reminiscence workshops over the four groups, and the analysis in this study is grounded in the data from these workshops. Each hour of tape was transcribed verbatim which took twelve hours per each hour’s workshop, and approximately 280 hours in total. This might put off other researchers from attempting a study of this kind, however, this time is not wasted as the data are being internally analysed as each word is written down. In total, the four reminiscence series of workshops created transcripts of 461 pages amounting to 207,500 words. Following Gillham (2005: 123 – 124), the tapes were not left to accumulate, but were transcribed over the weekends after the workshops. Transcription took place at intervals so freshness was ensured. Tapes were clearly identified with dates and names, and multiple copies of transcripts were made, dating all revisions.

The transcription process aimed to reflect what was said exactly within the reminiscence workshops. Whilst it is legitimate to omit speech hesitations, such as “um”, “er”, “you know” and “I mean” (Gillham, 2005: 124 – 125) these remained in the transcripts because they provided context in terms of thinking time, identifying the manner in which words are spoken (Elliott, 2005: 52). The aim was to reflect as far as possible the flow and the meaning of the dialogue so that the reminiscences would emerge fresh and authentic to the reader. Inaudible sections of the tape, or interruptions, were clearly identified. For reasons of clarity the transcription was as straightforward as possible, reflecting the form of a play text, since there was so much dialogue. This had the aim of validly reflecting the reminiscences and discussions in the participants’ own words.

As time would allow, as soon as was practicable after transcribing the reminiscence workshops, a microanalysis was attempted which involved an examination and interpretation of the data (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 58 - 71). Theoretical memos were written during the transcription process whilst ideas were stimulated on first listening to the tape; it is usually this stage of the analysis when researchers are struggling for a holistic sense of what the research is all about (Wengraf, 2004: 209). An example of a memo written in this way, about the constant use of words associated with the concept of magic is found in appendix 11.

The examination of small bits of data is called data mining, which is where the researcher aims to discover answers to questions of property, dimension, condition and consequence by converting the data into abstract terms (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 58 - 71). The next stage is to develop theoretical comparisons where the imagination is used as well as the knowledge and experience of the researcher (*ibid*). The process promoted by Strauss and Corbin (1998), was attempted by the writing of open and later, of axial codes. Open coding is where “the analytic process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in data” and the “thoughts, ideas and meanings” within the data are opened up and exposed (*ibid*). Labels (the naming of concepts) are added to the transcript. All interpretation is an art according to Schleiermacher, (1987: 157 - 171) and thus it is that “conceptualizing is an art and involves some creativity, but it is an art that can be learned” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 106). The process was one of category formation where “the reality and the robust character of these categories only become apparent as you move from one transcript to another (Gillham, 2005: 137 - 138). The categories were descriptive and not too abstract so that the essential character of the category was not lost (*ibid*).

Axial coding is where categories are related to subcategories, explored by the extended use of memos. Axial coding answers questions such as “why”, “how come”, “when”, “where” and “with what results” thereby relating structure to process. Understanding the structure, which is the stage or the circumstances

relating to the phenomenon of theatregoing, answers the “why”. Comprehending the process between theatregoers and the theatre, which is the interaction over time between people and organisations, answers the “how” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 123 – 142). It is not possible to answer the question “what is going on here?” with the phenomenon of theatregoing, without assessing the relationship between structure and process. The choice of the reminiscence workshop enabled the process and structure to be revealed over the weekly sessions.

The translation of text to label is an “artistic” one of “imaginative reconstruction” (Elliott, 2005: 37) interpreting key words from the narrative. Open and axial coding was attempted at the same time, as, since the aim is to study categories and their relationships, there seemed a synergy in looking at both. Also Strauss and Corbin (1998: 142) indicate that research is undertaken better by not rigidly following a process. The interpretive analysis of the text began with a melange of labels, and the identification of certain multidisciplinary categories. For an example see appendix 10. Following Gillham (2005: 137 – 138) it was when certain concepts were repeated in a different group, at a different time, with no chance of influence from participants, that patterns started to form. There then began a process of coding. An example would be where there was a comparison between the excerpts, and dimensions of make-believe and play emerge, firstly from “pretend” play, and secondly from attending a professional production. As other participants told their stories, so these dimensional examples were collected and filed, in order to assess the scale and importance of make-believe, or play in the formative experiences of long-term regular theatregoers.

As Wengraf (2004: 210) suggests, undertaking a “highly creative one-shot activity” during the “inevitable drudgery of transcribing” enables the researcher to follow a process of creative transcription. The artistic and creative nature of this kind of research appealed immensely whilst trying to interpret the data. Firstly, the life histories of all the participants were written, with the main biographical points taken from the transcripts. These life histories can be seen in appendix 13. Then, in an act of creativity, inspired by the labels relating to categories of magic

such as fairy tales, the life histories were written in the style of a Bildungsroman. A Bildungsroman is “a story of moral, intellectual and emotional maturation” (Wengraf, 2004: 271). For a retelling of Audrey’s life history as a fairy tale, where terms and phrases from her narration are inserted in the tale, see appendix 12. There is not space for relating all the re-imaginings of life histories in the appendices; suffice it to say, it was a more enjoyable occupation doing this activity, such as retelling Sandra’s life history as a novelty-seeker with commitment problems. However, due to the large amount of data, it was impossible to memo constantly about every aspect that emerged, nor to write sketches of every participant; only those stories that leaped out were re-evaluated. This is what Wengraf (2004: 210) calls a balance of attention which is given to a smaller amount of interviews [*sic*].

Much of the evaluation of the transcripts happened when transcripts were not being studied, but happened as ongoing analysis, walking into the city centre on the way to review a production, for example. The mind was free on these occasions to work subliminally and “aha moments” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 142) did occur. One such “aha” moment occurred whilst walking past a shop on the Cowley Road where esoteric, fantasy role-playing games are sold. Immediately, the concept of the familiar - a fantastic, magical being - emerged in a theatregoing context (see chapter six). After a period of reflection, these thoughts were written up in the research diary. Being a regular theatregoer, and looking around at the audiences, it was possible to eavesdrop into conversations. These new observations were tested out on theatregoers who were unwittingly supporting theory derivation.

#### 4.4.5 Social construction of research

Reliable interpretation of texts is predicated on the researcher bringing no bias into the text’s production or analysis (Denzin, 1997: 241). With fifteen of the thirty-one participants editing the transcripts from across all the groups, it can be

assumed that the transcripts do relate what went on during the twenty-three reminiscence workshops. The nature of the interpretation is an artistic one, as was argued earlier in this chapter. In this study the researcher who interprets the data has also taken part in the reminiscence workshops as a facilitator and an intervener. This is not a neutral stance, but the researcher does gain an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the data. The message sent to the participants is that the researcher is “one of us” with a shared passion and knowledge of theatre. The search for epiphanal stories within a framework of a reminiscence workshop creates a context where the researcher is at the same time an audience member and a co-performer to the text (*ibid*: 268). In this study, it is evident that the researcher took part in the reminiscence workshops and intervened in the stories with questions, and sometimes was asked questions by the participants. The workshops were a free-flow, shared between researcher and participants. The researcher has selected excerpts from the transcripts to build a theoretical model of theatregoing behaviour over a lifetime. This again is not neutrality. However, the subsequent chapters, including this one, contain the real voices of the participants. In subsequent chapters the credibility emerges from the participants’ life histories. The reader will be able to interpret, or re-interpret the reminiscences quoted without any biases from the researcher because the voices of these long-term theatregoers are authentic.

#### 4.5 Conclusion

In order to learn about the motivations of long-term, regular theatregoers it was necessary therefore to discover whether the participants had a theatrical epiphany. Their life history was obtained by a series of reminiscence workshops. It is not a coincidence that James Joyce uses the epiphany to great effect in his novels, and also that Joyce has influenced the interpretive methods of Norman Denzin. In “the lessons James Joyce teaches us” Denzin says:



We should not take ourselves too seriously. We should have fun doing what we are doing. We need to understand that writing is inscription, an evocative act of creation and of representation. We can invent a new language... personal, emotional, biographically specific, and minimalist in its use of theoretical terms. It will allow ordinary people to speak out and to articulate the interpretive theories that they use to make sense of their lives... this language will always be interactive as it moves back and forth between lived experience and the cultural texts that shape and write that experience (Denzin, 1997: 24 – 27).

It could be argued that the reminiscence workshop is a “new language” for an interpretive method which does allow theatregoers, ordinary and extraordinary, to articulate during the workshops their understanding of the concepts they supply. Chapters five to nine represent different stages in the participants’ life history from which a theoretical interpretation of their behaviour can be introduced.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CAST LIST: INTRODUCING THE PARTICIPANTS

#### 5 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the participants of this study. This chapter will be in seven sections, which will profile the thirty-one participants. To profile the participants the study adopts the first part of the life course model created by Giele and Elder (1998) – location in time and space, described at greater length in chapter four. This is where the cultural background of the participants is analysed. A person's cultural experience is conditioned by when and where they live their lives (Giele and Elder, 1998: 9). The profile aims to situate the participants within the broader context of theatregoers emergent from the literature on theatre attendance (see chapter two).

The chapter then follows the format of the second section of chapter two with an examination of participants' age, gender, education, class (encompassing occupation), and frequency of attendance. Brief mention is made of ethnicity. The chapter seeks to answer the questions: were the participants' parents theatregoers themselves? Do parents provide an *a priori* reason for their not-yet born progeny to discover a taste for theatre? The section firstly examines those participants whose parents were not theatregoers, before proceeding to participants whose parents were attenders.

#### 5.1 Cultural background of participants

It emerges from the reminiscence workshop data that nine participants, Gwilym, Geraldine, Henry, Kay, Janet, Ted, Jane, Sandra, and Richard, from diverse socio-economic backgrounds grew up in households where their parents never went to

the theatre, of any kind. Of this group, Gwilym, Geraldine, and Janet describe their family background as working class, and Gwilym and Geraldine state that class was a barrier to their parents' attendance at theatre. It is a limitation of reminiscence workshops that formal, structured questions were not asked to every participant, for example, asking about the occupations of parents or grandparents. It is, however, a strength of this method that when participants did reminisce about their backgrounds, the information provided tended to be rich and deep, giving an insightful understanding of participants.

For instance, one participant, Geraldine, (Oxford Playhouse, 1 June 2006) stated that she "didn't come from a family that did go to the theatre". One of her parents' non-attendance of theatre could be an inherited view of taste deriving from one set of grandparents. She recalls her family background:

I suppose the greatest influence on me in childhood was really my grandmother rather than my parents... I suppose the drawback of that was that my grandmother was very much working class, and now by drawback you'll see in a minute. She used to be a Lancashire mill girl. And she worked in the cotton mills um then when they closed, you know, foreign cotton, cheaper cotton coming in, she became what um she called a skivvy. So she went cleaning for people. And her husband, my grandfather, worked at the local Co-op in the grocery department. So the drawback of that was they were not people who thought theatre was for them at all. So I had no background like that from there (Oxford Playhouse, 8 June 2006).

However, Geraldine's story also introduces another idea, one that indicates weaknesses in research that draws a straight line from parents' behaviour and beliefs to that of their children's. Geraldine was left with these grandparents when her parents went off to work (of her other set of grandparents, one had died, the other was elderly and infirm), and this is why she recalls that their influence is greater on her early years than her parents. It is these grandparents' internalised dispositions, or forms of behaviour, which Bourdieu (1984: 101) labels 'habitus', namely their beliefs that theatre was not "for them" which are passed on to Geraldine. At this stage of Geraldine's life, when she goes to stay with these

grandparents it is not possible to foretell that she will, in fact, become a theatregoer. As the study will show, play, and religion will help to create Geraldine's emergent taste for theatre.

For another participant, Gwilym, there is, however, a direct influence of his parents' habitus, and his inheritance of their cultural capital. In his reminiscence, Gwilym strongly believes that class played a decisive role in his parents' non attendance of the theatre:

My father was completely uneducated... never went to the theatre as far as I know... I came from um very poor, working class area, um er street, with terraced houses, where nobody ever shut their doors, you know, and everybody knew everybody else. And my father and mother were from Wales and they were resettled in Hertfordshire. And they never had a huge amount of confidence... It did have, [*arts centre*] yes but um it was not working class and [*they*] didn't know about it. [*laughs*] We didn't know anything about what they did... that was them over there that lived in the private houses. My father and mother had never seen a professional play in their entire lives. It was very much and us or them... (Oxford Playhouse, 1 June 2006).

However, Gwilym's working class parents were not ignorant of drama, as he relates:

My father was completely uneducated but he'd been taught things by rote in school and so my theatre, my first experience of theatre was at five or six, or a bit older, asking my father if I could go, have some money to go to the pictures. I think it was about sixpence or something. And he said: [*putting on accent*] "you call me misbeliever, cutthroat, dog, spat upon my Jewish gabardine, now you come to ask me to lend you money!" You know, all this that he'd learned at school came out (Oxford Playhouse, 1 June 2006).

From these two reminiscences it appears that there is a disconnect between his working class father's formal appreciation of culture, gained from school, and his attendance in a venue which he feels, echoing Geraldine's grandparents, is "for

them”. Gwilym, like Geraldine, was not conditioned by his parents’ habitus not to become a theatregoer. It could be that he inherited some cultural capital from hearing his father’s recitations of Shakespeare and as a human agent, as conceptualised by Giddens (1987: 3), becomes a theatregoer because he “could not have acted otherwise”. Giddens’ concept of agency allows for people to “feel free” to “decide upon our actions in the light of what we know ourselves” (*ibid*). Also like Geraldine, it was to be other factors, such as religion, and the influence of school, that brought out the theatregoer in Gwilym.

Of the other participants with no, or minor, parental interest in theatre, Kay’s mother died young, and her father was a photographer in Kenya, later a teacher. Ted hails from rural Oxfordshire. His mother attended his youth theatre performances but apart from supporting amateur theatre where he, or his sister were involved, there is “no history of interest in theatre in the family whatsoever” (Pegasus, 21 February 2007). Diana’s parents, although not originally from the countryside, moved to a hamlet in Cambridgeshire near the air force base where her father was a pilot during WW2. Diana (Corn Exchange, 28 February 2007) recalls: “So there was nothing. And we didn’t go anywhere. We stayed in the village” typifying the life her family led there. Another participant, Henry, did not talk about his family. Janet (Pegasus, 28 March 2007) recalls that her family “lived in Hull in like *Coronation Street*”, but did not mention her family’s theatregoing. Sandra’s family came from Croydon but it seems they did not go to the theatre. Richard’s parents, from suburban West London, were non-attenders, although his uncle was a theatregoer. Jane, (Corn Exchange, 28 February 2007) from a village near Abingdon, had parents who did not own a car and does not “remember my mum or dad ever going” to the theatre.

Twenty-two participants had a family member who was a theatregoer, and from whom it can be surmised that they inherited elements of cultural capital. Of these Maureen, Anne, Pat, Irene and Laura describe their parents as coming from working class backgrounds, or working in a traditional working class job. Maureen’s parents, living in South London, “were not interested in theatre

necessarily but they were very political” (Oxford Playhouse, 12 October 2006). She reminisces about her father, who was:

very young, he was nineteen when I was born. So he was a very young father who had never worked, become a Communist, so he had a lot of bitterness, and a lot of Puritanism as well because he wasn’t happy with his marriage (Oxford Playhouse, 19 October 2006).

This Puritan streak meant that her father “never went to a dance. Or anything like that. Every emphasis was on... moral education”. Accordingly, Maureen’s parents only attended theatre when it was in accordance with their political beliefs, in venues such as Unity Theatre, a Communist Theatre founded in 1936, which “prided itself on the ‘social significance’ of its plays” (Samuel, 1985: 61). Examples of theatregoers such as Maureen’s parents indicate that there is a segment of low-status, working class populations who have attended high quality theatrical productions. Audiences like Maureen’s parents were aimed at by Piscator and Brecht, in Germany, as discussed in section 3.6.3 relating to breaking the theatrical frame. In Britain, artists and producers such as Joan Littlewood, Ewan MacColl, and Gerry Raffles, founders of Theatre Workshop aimed to “look for our audience among the ninety percent of the British population who were not regular theatregoers” (Raffles, 1958: 168). Maureen’s parents would not have been in this minority of theatregoers, because although they had such a working class, political profile, and although the primary audience for theatre pre-War, as indicated in chapter two, was upper or middle class, it seems that Maureen’s parents sought out radical theatre for themselves in London.

Like Maureen, Anne (Oxford Playhouse, 2 November 2006) “came from a very poor family”. Brought up outside Oxford, Anne reminisces about her family:

... it was Depression for us... My father lost his job, lost his home, everything and we had to move out to a village nearby. And there was nothing there (Oxford Playhouse, 19 October 2006).

However, despite the lack of family income, Anne's father "went to vaudeville... he loved that" whilst her godmother "liked um *No No Nanette* and *The Desert Song* and silly, soppy romantic things and my mother liked cinema." Vaudeville was more of an entertainment than a high art, but star theatre names also performed in vaudeville alongside popular singers, comedy solo and double acts, and, in later years, film stars (Hartnoll, 1983: 860).

Irene's family from Leeds were solidly working class, but many in her family had artistic natures and participated in amateur dramatics:

My father was a miner and my mother worked in various worsted and woollen mills so um money was tight but we were always well fed and were always well-clothed so in actual fact um that production um on the picture, she's in *Ali Baba*. And um my great uncle, his brother apparently, he wrote the script for that particular um production, which again is quite interesting cos that's another section of the family so um there must have been a lot of artistic people around in those days, you know. Maybe because they had to make their own entertainment, you know, unlike we do now, it's there for us, isn't it? (Corn Exchange, 28 February 2007).

Participating in theatre, in amateur dramatics will emerge as a key finding of the reminiscence workshops, where participants are creators as well as attenders (this will be discussed in chapter eight). It would appear from Irene's family background that a taste for participation in theatre can lead to a child's later appreciation for theatregoing.

Pat, from central Oxford, talks only about his mother, who worked in a local hotel. She did go to the theatre, but it is unclear if she went before Pat was born. One form of theatregoing she definitely follows is that of supporter, as she attended Pat's Oxford Youth Theatre performances at the Pegasus Theatre. She attends with him at professional theatre productions in later years having received free tickets which are given to the hotel. With the serendipity of complimentary tickets, and the low price of amateur tickets, her relatively low-paid job was not a

deterrent to her theatregoing. Similarly, Laura's father was a postman, and took his family on post office outings once a year to the pantomime in Newbury. With Laura, then, the price deterrent was removed for these annual treats, and there is the additional factor of attendance being motivated by social needs as conceptualised by Maslow (1968), and discussed in chapter three.

Two of the study's participants, Sheila and Audrey, have one parent whom they describe as working class, and one whom they suggest was middle class. In the case of Sheila, from South London, her parents' taste were for popular live entertainments:

I wouldn't say we were working class. My father probably was but my mother certainly wasn't. Um she her mother had been educated and she was too... My father was very musical and um um he liked the musicals. Um they used to see *Annie Get Your Gun*. Er I'm not a keen musical fan, personally, no. But he was and they used to go and see all the new productions. Used to go a couple of times a year. But we didn't go, um because, I guess, there wasn't the money to do it (Oxford Playhouse, 8 June 2006).

From Sheila's reminiscences about her parents, it would appear as if they went to the theatre in London as a treat, and that lack of income was a barrier to further attendance and to taking Sheila. From her reminiscence, it can be inferred that her middle class, educated mother preferred art. On the other hand, her working class father preferred theatrical entertainment. It appears that his tastes prevailed over her mother's when the choice to go to the theatre was made. Sheila seems to have inherited her mother's taste for the arts. Following Bourdieu (1984), who determines class by the occupation of the father, it could be assumed that Sheila came from a working class background. However, during the reminiscence workshops, Sheila strongly stresses the middle-classness of her mother, and Sheila's passion for reading, literature and the spoken word. For Sheila, the nature of her class is her subjective judgement.



Audrey, from the Essex-London borders, recalls that her mother:

was brought up in an orphanage... She had a terrible life until then, but when she was fourteen she went to live with an uncle and aunt (Oxford Playhouse, 8 June 2006).

Through their churchgoing, Audrey's mother met her future husband, a bank employee, working in the City of London. Her mother, however, had a very artistic nature, and acted in theatrical performances. A poor upbringing does not denote a personality without creativity. It appears that Audrey was brought up in a middle class home and inherited, like Irene, a taste for theatre from the amateur theatrics undertaken by her mother.

Of those participants whose family were middle class (or higher), and whose parents were theatregoers, Cora's remembrances of her family echo those of Anne. This is what (Giele and Elder, 1998) calls 'linked lives', albeit linked many thousands of miles apart. Cora's family lived in the suburbs of Cincinnati. This is what she says about her family life in the 1930s:

Luckily my father was employed. And um, just about the time um before the Depression actually, he had changed positions and it, they were building a new union terminal in Cincinnati. He was an electrical engineer, designer, and so that was kind of a blow. Prohibition was repealed and he started working really getting all the old distilleries back into operation. I mean, they had to be modernised and so forth, and Cincinnati, on the edge of Kentucky, and that area which there were a lot of little distilleries and things, so things began to get better but um, it was a time when you saw so much around you that was very sad. I remember one area that I travelled through going to high school and um it was a really deprived area, breadlines, and of course it affected other children in school as well. And it was, I was very fortunate... We were not on the breadline, but a lot of people around us were which was very sad (Oxford Playhouse, 19 October 2006).

Cora recalls that “in the American Mid-West where there was no theatre” but:

The first live theatre was um they opened a new cinema in Cincinnati, um the Albie, which was very modern and they had Vaudeville performances. You’d go to the film and then there’d be music or acrobats or various variety things (Oxford Playhouse, 19 October 2006).

Vaudeville was originally an American form of entertainment (Hartnoll, 1983: 859 - 861) and Cora does make the distinction between vaudeville as entertainment and the lack of theatre with an art content. It appears that the middle classes of Cincinnati preferred classical music when attending live arts performances. However, the Depression years during her youth would have impacted on her access to the availability of professional touring theatre.

Ophelia’s mother was a violin prodigy, aged six, in Australia. She joined a concert party playing in Egypt during World War One with actresses Gwen ffrancon-Davies and Marjorie ffrancon-Davies. And after two marriages, she wed Ophelia’s father, who took her to live on a remote ranch in Argentina. They visited the nearest village, and Buenos Aires, once a year. It was a Victorian-style farm in that it was strict. One of Ophelia’s aunts was the famous character actress Martita Hunt, who sent letters to Argentina about the London stage. Another aunt, a headmistress, employed Viola Compton, who with her sister Fay, managed a well-known theatre company in the United States during the Depression. Despite these theatre connections, the analysis from Ophelia’s reminiscences suggests that her father was too busy with managing the ranch, and her mother too rapt in music to be interested in theatre. In any case, the remoteness of the ranch would have meant a lack of theatre. The evidence therefore suggests that theatre is on the periphery of Ophelia’s parents’ existence, but nevertheless a presence within the family.

Another participant, Margaret reminisces that her parents had season tickets to the New Theatre in Oxford, and were constant theatregoers at:

...The New Theatre, and I don't know how long this went on for, but my parents certainly had... a kind of standard reserved seat, and this was a kind of inertia selling if you like. So... they always went to the next production unless they positively did not want to go to it. The seat could possibly be sold to somebody else for that evening although they could get friends to go. But I think they paid a sort of basic subscription (Oxford Playhouse, 16 November 2006).

Margaret's parents display a habit-forming attitude towards their theatregoing, possibly encouraged by the pricing policy whereby it is cheaper to buy subscription tickets than single tickets for each production. The New Theatre hosted pre-West End productions with starry casts and had a mixed repertoire of plays, musicals, operas and ballets.

Priscilla, a participant from Oxford, and Robin from Birmingham, had parents who were constant theatregoers. Priscilla's father was a don, and a well-known writer. The family had many friends within the arts and theatre world, many of them referred to by Priscilla during the reminiscence workshops. Robin (Oxford Playhouse, 8 June 2006), grew up in the "sort of the dormitory of the wealthy middle classes", in Sutton Coldfield. His parents went to theatres in Birmingham, and Stratford. They attended the Birmingham Rep, which under Barry Jackson was "one of the most envied theatres in Britain" (Trewin, 1963: 97). The theatre was much smaller than the "handsome" Alexandra Theatre, rebuilt in 1935 to provide four months of pantomime, "as many weeks of ballet as there are ballet companies" (Fraser, 1948: 69 - 72). The theatre also staged farces, dramas and comedies from London. Fraser argues that Birmingham had no professional theatre "which can serve Art for art's sake alone" (*ibid*). It therefore speaks volumes about Robin's parents that in the late 1930s, at the time that Fraser is describing the Birmingham theatregoers' attitude as "who are you to dictate my tastes to me?" (*ibid*), Robin's father was literally constructing the Highbury Little

Theatre. According to Robin this was a “very famous Little Theatre” that “really flourished” during the war when they put on “wonderful” high art plays there. Robin recalls:

But I just loved it all there and um. The first play we did was *Arms And The Man*. The play – I was trying to think about this – because I think this was the prime motivation for my love of drama, um they were very good amateurs, some of them became professionals (Oxford Playhouse, 8 June 2006).

Of the remaining participants, Genevieve, from Oxford, spoke about her mother’s support of traditional English culture, which includes attending plays by, for example, Shakespeare. Her traditional English cultural taste was reinforced because the family moved to live in France. Genevieve’s mother held onto her tradition strongly.

Kate, originally from Leeds, reminisced often about her parents’ interest in theatre, and as a family which moved around the country (Leeds, Birmingham, Nottingham), made sure that they attended theatres in each location. Helen (Pegasus, 28 March 2007) came from “an educated but poor family” in Cookham Dean, in Berkshire. Her father worked as an illustrator for the publishers Rockliff. Catherine, originally from Kent, had a family that travelled up to London for shows. Barbara, from Manchester, similarly had a family with easy access to many venues. Phil, from New Malden, in Surrey, spoke about his mother’s interest in theatre, again, with London theatre nearby.

Another participant, Rachel, from Devizes, had parents and grandparents who had a keen interest in amateur dramatics. June, from Newbury, (Corn Exchange, 28 February 2007) recalls that her parents “were married nearly twelve years before I was born so their theatregoing as a couple went on a long time”. Danielle, from Harare, had a father who was a photographer. Her parents were involved in

amateur dramatics in Rhodesia, where professional theatre was not available. These participants therefore grew up in middle class households where their life trajectories were likely to conform with those identified by Bourdieu (1984) in his analysis of the bourgeoisie.

Like Thomas Sterne's *The Adventures of Tristan Shandy*, the reader has been introduced to the family backgrounds of the *dramatis personae*. Unlike the novel, more is to be learned about the central characters' life histories. Clearly the study shows that the majority of the participants who had parent(s) attending the theatre, came from a middle class (or higher) background. The syllogism cannot be made, however, that participants who had parents who went to the theatre, came from middle class homes. The analysis of the qualitative data suggests that to become a regular, long-term theatregoer does not depend on parents belonging to a higher social class or having a high status. The foregoing analysis suggests that the participants come from a variety of socio-economic and status backgrounds. The analysis appears to corroborate the findings of Chan and Goldthorpe (2005) in that a family's high socio-economic background does not *a priori* lead to a person engaging with high culture. The chapter now profiles the participants according to the range of factors that situates them in time and place (Giele and Elder, 1998).

## 5.2 Age

Not all participants in this study mentioned their age although their reminiscences indicated an approximate decade in which they were born from which it is possible to infer age cohorts. Although there may be some inaccuracies, Maureen, Cora, Ophelia, Henry, Audrey, Robin, Gwilym, Sheila, Priscilla, Margaret, Anne, June, Kate, Geraldine, Helen, Diana and Richard would be classed as belonging to the "War and Great Depression" cohort (Peterson, Hull and Kern, 2000: 5), Genevieve, Janet, Pat, Ted, Catherine, Philip, and Irene are early baby-boomers, Danielle, Kay, Barbara, Rachel and Jane late baby-boomers, with Sandra and Laura post-boomers.

The average age of the Corn Exchange Theatre and Pegasus Theatre participants was lower than that of the two groups at the Oxford Playhouse. That is not surprising considering that audiences at the Playhouse were targeted at matinees, which the Oxford Playhouse box office data revealed during discussions with the operations manager, have a consistently older profile of attenders. The Corn Exchange and Pegasus Theatres are much more varied in their programming, and do not programme weekly runs where matinees could take place. Maybe a venue such as the Everyman Theatre in Cheltenham or the Watermill Theatre in Newbury would have provided a similar base to that of the Oxford Playhouse. However, it was not the intention of the study to be so prescriptive over finding participants of exactly the same age, as long as participants were long-term theatregoers.

A third of the participants would have been young during the Second World War with the majority growing up within the construct of the Welfare State and the advent of the Arts Council. This cohort of participants would have been “socially and individually patterned” (Giele and Elder, 1998: 9) by their experiences of the war, leading to a different ideology from the following generation. Age is thus a central concept for life history research. The age that participants or cohorts are at points in their life cycle, or at landmarks in social or theatrical history are important, not least as indicators of the genres of theatre that they are motivated to attend. Age and genre motivation is not a new idea: Plato differentiates the theatre scene in his day according to stages in the life cycle:

Small children... will decide for the puppet show...the older children will be advocates of comedy, and young men, and people in general, will favour tragedy... and... we old men would have the greatest pleasure in hearing a rhapsodist recite well the Iliad and Odyssey or one of the Hesiodic poems (Plato, 2006: 30 – 31).

About two thirds of the participants in this study would have been in their teens, twenties or thirties at the time that Baumol and Bowen (1966) were identifying in

the 1960s that audiences were predominantly in their twenties or thirties. During the reminiscence workshops, only Robin and Audrey talked about attending productions at the National Theatre at this time. The Royal Shakespeare Company on the other hand, was attended by thirteen participants during the sixties. It appears significant that nearly half of these long-term theatregoers attended national companies' productions, and are still regularly attending today. These are the sort of theatregoers that if Baumol and Bowen (*ibid*) had wished to study qualitatively and longitudinally, could have been research subjects. As it is, reminiscence workshops in this study have been able to capture their stories and examine their motivations for attendance (see chapters six to nine).

Arts marketer Keith Diggle (1996: 5) states that “people born during the years of the Great Depression or World War 2 show a far greater preference for classical music, opera and theatre than do people born later”, citing American studies by the National Endowment of the Arts, and the President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities. It is of importance, therefore, that seventeen participants in this study are members of the age cohorts that predominated in the 1960s. A further six were students during the early 1960s, another dominant attendance group. Diggle, in desiring to promote the “higher arts” is perplexed by the changing nature of theatregoers’ tastes according to their age cohort. He asks: “what causes this change in tastes, this cultural watershed, that appears to occur in people born after, say, 1945, so that significantly fewer of them are inclined towards what we have to sell?” Since this study focuses on the most committed of theatregoers, possible answers to his question are suggested in chapters six to nine.

Genevieve, Geraldine, Helen and Ted all reminisced about their theatregoing as students in the 1960s. They were all attracted to contemporary writers, the avant garde or the modern classic. A decade earlier, Margaret, Maureen, Robin, Audrey, Gwilym, Ophelia, Kate and Anne represented the new, young theatregoers aimed at by the managements of venues such as the Royal Court, or

the Theatre Royal, Stratford East. It is likely that people like these participants attended venues such as the Citizens in Glasgow which had a largely student audience (Wilkie and Bradley, 1970) and the Victoria in Stoke, where its youthful profile was caused by 60% of its audience being under the age of 25, many of them students (Cheeseman, 1971). It was whilst Catherine studied at Keele University that she became a regular attender of the Victoria Theatre.

From the participants in this study, three - Richard, June and Diana from the older age cohorts - reminisced about attending the popular shows, such as musicals, in the West End from the fifties and sixties. They most accurately represent the bourgeois audiences described by Bourdieu (1984).

### 5.3 Gender

Of the thirty-one participants in this study, twenty-four are female, and seven male. Although females are over-represented in this study, the numbers of females are consistent with Gardiner (1991: 25 – 26), Quine (1999: 17) and others examined in section 2.2.2 whose surveys demonstrate more significant numbers of women in audiences. A discussion of how gender affects Bourdieu (1984) and his theory of distinction follows in section 5.3.

### 5.4 Education

Twenty-three participants studied at higher education, gaining either HND, degree, masters, or teaching qualifications. Kate and Irene gained qualifications through their work. Diana went to secretarial school. Sheila, Pat and Sandra went straight from school into employment. Ophelia and Laura never mentioned education due to their brevity in the workshops. The participants in this study are overwhelmingly well-educated, and therefore conform to the majority of



quantitative survey data from Baumol and Bowen (1966) to Bunting *et al* (2008) which point towards a highly educated audience. That the majority of participants in this survey are well-educated could be a predictor for their attendance (Peterson, Hull and Kern, 2000). It is certainly a more relevant factor than social origin or class (Bourdieu, 1984: 1). Since educational achievement is viewed as a proxy for a measurement of class (Chan and Goldthorpe, 2005: 197) it could be argued that the four groups for the reminiscence workshops consist of predominantly middle class people. The effect on the reminiscence workshops was that each group had a core of people with high levels of education. Discussion points were often around subject areas which reflected the educational levels of the participants.

### 5.5 Social class, employment, income, and social status

In analysing the employment of the participants in this study, one profession outnumbers all others: education. As educators, these participants are “priests of culture” organising the worship of “cultural prophets” (Bourdieu, 1968: 226). However, education was not always the first choice of employment. Prior to teaching in the East End of London, and later in Oxfordshire, Robin acted professionally at the Birmingham Rep and at Stratford. He then had to go into the navy for National Service, working on an aircraft carrier. He was stationed in Malta working in psychological profiling where he placed other servicemen in jobs. This position enabled him to land himself the job of being the ship’s official photographer. He could have returned to Stratford, but instead decided on a career in education.

Another participant, Kate became a teacher after she trained to be a professional librarian for the first part of her career. Margaret was a psychologist prior to lecturing. Priscilla worked as a probation officer before lecturing. Genevieve was a publisher and then lectured at an Oxford college. Helen trained as a visual artist before teaching art in a school. Audrey, Geraldine, June and Gwilym were

school teachers directly after gaining their teaching qualifications. Cora trained as a journalist, and then became a librarian. She did not subsequently teach but worked for the American Universities in Europe in marketing. Janet currently works in a college of further education as a theatre technician.

Henry was an officer in the Royal Navy for thirty years. Kay works as a scenic artist. Danielle is an arts administrator. Phil works in pharmaceuticals. Catherine has had a varied career embracing hospitality training, and hotel development. Barbara is a buyer in retail. Richard was in management. Irene trained as a chef in a hospital to become a private caterer, especially in cake decoration. Rachel, Diana and Sheila worked as secretaries, as did Sandra, who later moved into public relations. Pat works as a traffic warden. Maureen, Ophelia, Anne, Jane, Laura and Ted never mentioned their employment. In reminiscence workshops people tell the stories they wish to tell. No participant was required to give up personal details (see chapter four).

Salary or wages was not a subject for discussion. This is not a limitation as income does not affect arts participation (Colmar Brunton, 2006: 18, Bunting *et al*, 2008: 57 – 60). However, whilst not always wealthy over their lifetime, the analysis supports Bourdieu (1984) on his assertions about theatre audiences. The participants are, or have become, predominantly middle class. They are mainly working in professional or managerial occupations. Since more females attend the arts and theatre than males (see section 2.2.2) and since participants in this study are overwhelmingly well-educated females who have worked in professional or managerial jobs, this study is able to expand upon Bourdieu's theories on the effect of social class on arts attendance. The female voice can be represented more strongly. Bourdieu defined the social class of his respondents by the occupation of the father on the basis that the father's occupation is a stronger indicator of subsequent cultural capital than the mother's occupation (Bourdieu, 1984: 13). Chapter nine in particular, examines how these mostly female theatregoers have attempted to pass on their cultural capital to their children or grandchildren.

## 5.6 Ethnicity

All participants in this study are white. The majority of the participants were born in the UK. The exceptions were Cora, who was born in the United States, Ophelia in Argentina, Kay in Germany, and Danielle in Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia). It may be viewed as a limitation of the study that the ethnicity of the participants does not reflect the ethnicity within the UK's population, or indeed, of Oxford or Newbury.

## 5.7 Frequency of attendance

Twenty-nine of the participants in this study are frequent attenders. As such, they are thus more likely to attend a wider range of arts and entertainments than infrequent attenders (Walker, Scott-Meknyk and Sherwood, 2002: 34 – 35). Exact attendance patterns were not requested in this study as the aim was to collect participants' stories during the reminiscence workshops. However, the Pegasus and Corn Exchange participants were targeted by their box office attendance regularity. The Oxford Playhouse participants all state that they attend more than once a month.

## 5.8 Conclusion

The analysis of the participants taking part in this study indicates that they are very similar to the profile of regular theatregoers that has emerged from national surveys (Skelton *et al*, 2002, Fenn *et al*, 2004, Bunting *et al*, 2008). The regular theatregoers in this study are mostly in the older age brackets, middle class, well-educated, white, predominantly female and work or worked in professional or managerial occupations with many in education. They accurately represent the 2% of the population who do regularly go to the theatre (Skelton *et al*, 2002: 16,

Fenn *et al*, 2004: 31). The similarity in the profile between participants and national survey data reinforces the sampling of the methodology because the four groups of participants are an appropriate reflection of the theatregoing population from which to gather qualitative data.

Some participants had parent(s) who were not middle class. Their interest in theatre was developed by the education system (and is discussed in chapter six). Analysis of the participants' heritage shows that being middle class is not a prerequisite for theatregoing. The reminiscences about parental influence mostly support Bourdieu (1984: 75) who says that the family is central in shaping cultural tastes. The majority of participants (twenty-two) had a parent who was a theatregoer. The analysis suggests that Bourdieu (*ibid*) cannot be universally applied because nine participants did not have parental theatregoers.

The numbers of middle class people in Britain exceeds the 2% of the population (Skelton *et al*, 2002: 16, Fenn *et al*, 2004: 31) who are regular theatregoers. Being a regular, long-term theatregoer is very much a minority activity. Chapter six begins the examination of the factors that led a person to adopt the role of theatregoer. These factors, developed from the analysis of participants' formative experiences of theatre, also reveal the extent of the influence of families and the education system on their subsequent theatregoing.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **THE FIRST STAGE: THE FORMATIVE LIFE OF A THEATREGOER**

#### **6. Introduction**

In chapter three it was proposed that if a researcher wishes to learn about a person's motivational intentionality (Heidegger, 1925), an exploration of a person's "past lived experience" (Schutz, 1967: 53) would need to be undertaken. In chapter four, the method of discovery of a person's "retrospective glance" (*ibid*) was chosen: the reminiscence workshop. Chapter five has indicated that a person's motivation to attend theatre is only partially likely to be shaped family background, a range of factors, and cultural or educational capital (Bourdieu, 1984). It is intended that this chapter explores the participants' early years - prior to, or concurrent with, their realisation that they are theatregoers. The formation of a person's self-identity is a "reflexively organised behaviour" (Giddens, 1991a: 5) in which the person reflects on his/her biography. This self-identity has to be created and sustained in the reflexive activity of the individual (*ibid*: 52). Therefore, in enabling participants in this study to reflect on their lives, they have been able to reaffirm their identity as theatregoers. For many participants in this study, it is within their early lives that they were able to create their identity as a theatregoer. In undertaking this exploration, key early motivators for long-term, regular theatregoers are discussed.

The chapter is divided into six sections. In the first, there is an exploration of participants' development of play, and these findings can be best understood using the model of play developed by Huizinga (1949), (see chapter three). The second section examines an emergent theme from the reminiscence workshops when discussing youth - the importance of 'magic', (see chapter three). The third section discusses another theme from participants' stories, that of religion, and theatre as a sacred space (see chapter three). The fourth section explores

participants' formative experiences in theatre, whilst the fifth examines their attendance pattern as older children. Finally, the sixth examines participants' relationship with theatre at school. At this stage in their life history, participants are, with a few exceptions, unaware that they are theatregoers. This awakening of this awareness will be the subject of chapter seven with its focus on the participants' epiphany. The chapter aims to answer the question: what factors within childhood may have helped develop a theatregoer's taste for theatre?

## 6.1 Play

A key concept to emerge from the reminiscence workshops was that of playing, and playmaking. In chapter three it is explained that children create worlds of their own (Goldman, 1988), exercising their imagination in believing that the worlds they create are real (Piaget, 1962). The concept of play (see section 3.3) encompasses the concepts of beauty, enchantment, secrecy and captivity (Huizinga, 1949). The functions of play are similar to those of attending the performance of a play or theatrical production, whilst the element of secrecy, also a component of magic (Mauss, 1972: 30), is another condition necessary for initiating life-long, regular theatregoing.

Cora, Maureen and Pat were the sole group members to say they were only children. They therefore had no siblings within their families with whom to play. Ophelia's upbringing was very strict, and play was discouraged. Henry did not mention his youth. For twenty-five participants, playing at theatre was a strong memory of their early years; the stories are too numerous to relate in this study, but the following recollections are indicative of the reminiscences.

Rachel recalls her childhood around Christmastime:

... We lived in an old house, and I remember my parents had a sort of a large alcove in their bedroom with a curtain that went round it and we – I have two sisters and a brother – and every Christmas when my cousins came over, we used to put together a little play. We used to perform it in my parents' bedroom and the adults would come in and watch us. I remember that was really, really good fun. I can't remember what we did, it was probably around some religious story as it was Christmas and we just made it up, rehearsed it and then performed it to the adults. We did that for quite a number of Christmases. And then my mother was involved in the Soroptimists, and er because there were four of us children, I remember she and my father used to write plays that the four of us used to act in at the town hall in Devizes for charity. My grandmother used to make all our costumes with crepe paper which I can always remember being worried about, because you always expect it's going to break and you're going to be left on stage with no clothes on [*laughter*] but we never did. My mother had some lovely evening gowns which we used to dress up in... (Corn Exchange, 28 February 2007).

From Rachel's account certain factors congruent with playing at theatre emerge: these Christmastime plays, which were enjoyable to stage, were enacted in a simulacrum of a theatre, with the alcove with curtains recreating the theatre. The family takes the playing seriously enough to become audiences for their children's performance, albeit in a make-believe theatre. They had a religious theme in which pretend, dressing-up activity took place. The importance of the theme of religion will be evident as this study continues to analyse participants' life histories. Because the family takes Rachel's Christmas plays seriously, the playing may not be primarily "art for art's sake" but an indication of the value of religious capital that the parents intend Rachel to have when older. The plays took place regularly over years, bringing the concept of regularity of theatrical attendance to Rachel. Rachel also recognised that she was following in her family's amateur theatre heritage, supporting Bourdieu's (1984) concept of inherited cultural capital. The plays included make-believe costumes from crepe paper as well as high quality gowns, reinforcing Huizinga's (1949: 9) suggestion of play being beautiful. Foremost, however, playing at theatre reflects Goldman's (1998: 16) analogies of children playing theatrical roles such as directors and writers, and refutes Piaget's (1962: 148 – 9) observation that play is autotelic, or inwards-directed (*ibid*). At this age, Rachel and her siblings are playing outwardly, to an audience. Rachel, and other participants who are playing at

acting when young are indicating pointers towards their future activity as a theatregoer. Rachel perceived her acting experience as “really good fun”; it could therefore be interpreted that Rachel would in later years continue to seek in theatre elements which were “really good fun”.

Margaret recalls her childhood, and with it, the importance of play, with the simulation of an actual theatre:

... But I think um it goes back also to things like hiding behind the sofa and jumping out and sort of being theatrical in the family and then later on charades. But I suddenly remembered that actually er we had a little tiny theatre which, wooden, folded and you could unfold it, stood up, had a proper blue velvet curtain that you could pull up. It had footlights and we used to make the scenery. I had a friend, of course, the daughter of The Times music critic boarded with my family in Oxford for the week and so she and I were the same age and we did all these theatre productions and we got more and more ingenious with scenery. The thing that I remember was, I don't remember the actual story of the drama, but we created this dark tower with a light burning in it and then... the tower fell down at the end of the drama because the forces of good somehow triumphed over it [*laughter*] so um I feel actually I had an incredibly lucky childhood and stimulation of the imagination, just going, starting right at the beginning earlier than one can really remember. So that's a bit of my childhood (Oxford Playhouse, 19 October 2006).

There are similarities with Rachel's reminiscence regarding performing to others as a child, but Margaret's story elicits other factors. She alludes to the excitement of theatre, “hiding” and “jumping out” from behind the sofa; excitement will be a reoccurring theme of the findings. In terms of Margaret's intentionality, excitement, and “stimulation of the imagination” would be key ingredients of her motivation to go to the theatre. The theatre, although a simulation, attempts to be as authentic as possible with its “proper” velvet curtain. The make-believe aspect of the drama occurs on the make-believe stage, but the stage itself is meant to be believable in the Platonic (1993) sense. Her productions are created with a friend (daughter of someone with high status) and the play is intended to conclude with a feeling of redemption, an allusion as in the above example, to a religious concept,



but also a motivating factor mentioned at a later stage of participants' theatregoing life histories. Margaret, as befits a psychologist, has recounted her reminiscences with insightful glimpses into the significance of her stories; she realises how her imagination was stimulated by this play, and relates her current theatregoing directly to these early experiences. Both participants as children could be regarded as 'bricoleurs' (Levi-Strauss, 1962) because as young children, they understand, by doing, how the whole play is put together.

Kate also reminisced about a miniature theatre, which she links to dressing up:

... I remember having a little theatre at some age, you know, out of a cardboard box sort of thing, that I was always sort of playing with. Um I don't suppose it was very brilliant as I look back on it, but I enjoyed doing it, I think my mother made little curtains, you know, that pulled backwards and forwards. I can't remember much more than that. Um she had a dressing up box which I vaguely, which had, I remember she had a gypsy costume with a sort of flounced skirt and a little bolero thing with money tied you know, all round it which she must have worn at some fancy dress party um then I used just to dress up in anything that was around at all. Just couldn't stop myself. I was always dressing up (Oxford Playhouse, 19 October 2006).

Kate's miniature theatre was not as grand as Margaret's, but she stresses the enjoyment of the activity. Unlike Margaret who created her theatre with her friend, Kate was aided by her mother, who also encouraged her to rummage through her dressing-up box. The involvement of the audience (Kate's mother), brings an element of Freudian analysis to Kate's play, in that both the actor and the audience need and identify with each other (Courtney, 1974: 120). Kate's compulsion to dress up indicates her engagement with the simulation of the adult world, and her readiness to enter the make-believe frame (Goffman, 1974). That she "could not stop" herself indicates her immersion in role-adoption (Goffman, 1963) as she imitates the reality of the adult world around her. She also exhibits her desire for self-expression, a key component of play through "learning responses" (Mitchell and Mason, 1948, cited in Courtney, 1974: 208) as she responds to the characters created as she wears each costume, leading her to

display one of the “universal wishes” that Mitchell and Mason suggest are essential to the learning responses gained from play. Mitchell and Mason suggest universal wishes: new experience, security, response, recognition, participation and the beautiful. It is not unlikely, from Kate’s reminiscences, that all six wishes could be fulfilled by her play.

Audrey, a generation older than Rachel, shares with Rachel the desire to perform in front of her parents at Christmastime, and with Kate, the enjoyment and appreciation of dressing up. Like Margaret, she directs and produces friends in the performance. Audrey’s rich descriptions of the clothes from the dressing up box are mirrored in her descriptions of the costumes and set during her theatre epiphany, indicating her receptiveness to the visual aesthetic. Audrey remembers her earliest theatre-playing experiences:

... from the time I was tiny, I mean charades at Christmas, and when I was about six, my mother suddenly produced a large suitcase and it was full of dressing-up costumes that she had made for herself, sort of amateur stuff at her church. And it was all beautifully hand-sewn costumes. And from then on I was always making up plays, and um pretending to be a Russian Cossack or lavender girl, or a jester [*laughs*]. All these costumes she got and I was directing my friends in made-up plays in which I played the wicked witch and the beautiful princess. [*laughs*] And my friend came on at the end as the prince who awoke me. And the parents would sit there having to watch and my father would be saying “it’s bed-time, bed-time.” And I said “no, no, we haven’t finished! We haven’t finished.” And he would say: “right, five minutes.” As they sat through probably half an hour of gruelling histrionics. [*laughs*] Quite embarrassing for them. But um, um then was when I really enjoyed drama a lot. It was, sort of, part of me really (Oxford Playhouse, 8 June 2006).

The new factors to emerge from Audrey’s story are themes of magic and fairy tales, reflecting Plato’s (1993) evocation of the “powerful spell” cast by the creation of images of reality. Since Audrey has already let her group know that her mother was artistic, and had acted before Audrey was born, it is most likely that her parents enjoyed the experience, rather than being embarrassed by it. That drama was “part of me” suggests that Audrey was aware at a young age that her

future motivation towards drama and theatregoing is self-propelled, and that she is an agent in the sense conceptualised by Giddens (1987), and discussed in chapter three. She has in her reminiscence reflected upon her past and suggested that this is a youthful moment where she has noticed that her identity (Giddens, 2001a) is linked to theatre. Her intention will be directed to ensuring that theatre becomes part of her.

Often the play-making was in the form of shared games, such as charades, as articulated by Helen:

... my first experience would be watching my father and uncles and when I was old enough, joining in the charades, in the rather small sitting rooms. Um it was all something you shared. It didn't matter about the stage. It was doing it together. And it was fun (Pegasus Theatre, 21 February 2007).

Helen's reminiscence indicates how play is imitative, as Aristotle (1965) argues, a stance that is not opposed to Bourdieu's (1984) concept of cultural capital as Helen adopts the nature of play from her family. It is also possible that Helen's acceptance of small spaces for performances informs her later preference for small-scale theatres and the explanation for her subsequent epiphany which takes place at the intimate black box theatre that is the Pegasus. The shared experience of theatre-making is also important for Helen's subsequent intentions towards her involvement in theatre. Helen's experience is echoed by Barbara in Greater Manchester:

I suppose my first theatrical experience was within the family. Our social life was mainly family or church and I grew up in a large family. And um we used to meet up at my grandparents' every week and when the weather was good we played team games and when it was bad we used to write plays and act them for grown ups so that was really good fun (Corn Exchange, 28 February 2007).

However, as with all these examples, there are little differences in the mix. Barbara conforms to the current pattern of family-oriented play, one which supports Bourdieu (1984) in that her interest in playing is inherited directly as a young girl from her grandparents and parents. However, she also mentions the influence of the church as being important to her family life, and it may only be coincidence, but her subsequent theatrical epiphany will emerge as taking place at an amateur theatrical production in a church hall. She, like Helen views her playing as fun. Janet recalls her childhood playing as being of an improvised nature, and also taking place in a small space:

... my mum let us play theatre and we used everything in the back yard and we put on little plays and we just made them up and said 'you do that, and you do that' and we all played sort of different characters, and got our bits and things... (Pegasus Theatre, 28 March 2007)

Janet is another participant whose theatre-playing during youth has an echo in the choice of story for her theatrical epiphany: hers is also at the Pegasus Theatre, like that of Helen, acted by a performance artist whose work is essentially experimental and improvised. Of Huizinga's (1949: 9) functions of play, discussed in chapter three, it is the sense of order that seems out of place; improvised play would appear to promote randomness over an orderly process, however, Huizinga's model fits better in all its categories with Margaret, Kate and Rachel, all participants whose theatregoing tends to indicate straight plays rather than experimental shows. The data suggest that an individual's subsequent realisation that s/he is a theatregoer has its roots in the nature of the playing in their formative years.

## 6.2 Magic

The concept of magic, often linked to fairy tales, emerges from the reminiscence workshops very strongly, or more specifically, the magic of theatre. Theatre as a

profane space has been arguably a more accessible key concept emerging from the reminiscence research. The profane, where the sacred is treated with irreverence, disrespect, or even violation, something that is not sacred (Fowler and Fowler, 1964: 975) could be related to the world of dreams, of make-believe, the imitation, and thus, the impure (Collingwood 1938, Rice 1960, Lévi-Strauss, 1962, Nichol, 1962, Barba and Flaszen, 1965, States, 1985, Blau, 1990, Plato, 1993). Almost all participants used adjectives such as “wonderful” or “amazing” to describe productions or theatre experiences. However, one word dominated as a descriptor: ‘magic’. Magic is the “most childish” of skills (Mauss, 1972: 175), a point that might make it relevant to participants who suggest that theatre is magical for them from a young age. Margaret, reminiscing on herself as a girl, distances the magic of the theatre then to a more mature approach today:

It’s so hard to know what the quality of things one saw in the past actually was because one was so prepared to enter the magic (Oxford Playhouse, 19 October 2006).

Margaret seems to suggest that for her, magic is related to the naivety of youth, with a certain lack of knowledge and understanding. However, most participants still describe magic as being an essential part of current theatregoing, as discussed in chapter seven. Could it be theatregoers find the magic of drama takes them back to their more innocent youthful days?

What is it that makes these lifelong theatregoers receptive to the magic? Since women are more prone to magic than men (Mauss, 1972: 35), and since females are more prevalent in theatregoing (see section 5.3), perhaps the magic inherent in some theatre productions relates strongly to this core theatre audience. It could also be the case that magic emerges powerfully from this study because so many of the participants are female. Some common elements merge with the magic in the reminiscences; pretence and dressing up when young are a shared activity as Audrey recalls:

It was just magic, I mean, every summer we would be out in the garden, with these costumes (Oxford Playhouse, 8 June 2006).

For Audrey there is the hint that magic occurs when the real (the garden) collides with the pretence (the make-believe resulting from wearing costumes). There is an analogy to Plato's Cave (Plato, 1993) where the unreal shadows are projected onto the concreteness of the cave wall. Plato cautions against these false shadows because for him this other, magical world is not benign, as fairy tales are not. Priscilla refers to the dark side in the following reminiscence:

So I think that's... and having been brought up from the very, very earliest age, on fairy stories, and realising their hardness, as well as their beauty. I always remember being taught this by my father that they are extremely hard, they are not sentimental in the least (Oxford Playhouse, 21 December 2006).

Whilst Priscilla's youth would have been unusually full of her father's own stories, as well as Anglo-Saxon and Celtic folk tales, her reference indicates that evil is part of the content of the pantomimes Priscilla attended when young, but darkness was a constant factor of life during the Second World War. During the reminiscences, Priscilla spoke of how many Oxford colleges were given over to London hospitals, or were used by various governmental ministries. London was too dangerous to visit. The evil of the pantomimes was a relevant emotion for her generation.

Part of the appeal of children's theatre is the separation of the real, adult world and the fictive, magical world of the theatre, as Kay explains:

It's quite fantastic and that takes me back then to my own childhood memory when you're surrounded by grown-ups and you look up to grown-ups and then you go to theatre and you kind of like, "wow, I haven't been to this world before" (Pegasus Theatre, 27 October 2006).

The reminiscence workshops indicate strongly that during childhood, it is the association with magic that stands out in the memories, and therefore, magic is significant for these long-standing theatregoers. The importance of magic will be further highlighted when it appears as a factor in a person's theatrical epiphany (see section 7.3) and as a motivation in later life (see section 8.3).

### 6.3 Religion

Seventeen of the participants came from families where members, usually parents or grandparents were churchgoers. It has emerged strongly from the reminiscences that an association with formal religion has helped to develop a theatrical awareness during the formative years of these participants. St Francis Xavier, the sixteenth century Jesuit was reputed to have said "Give me the child until he is seven and I will show you the man"; theatre and religious observance share many of the same attributes (Hayman, 1973, Figes, 1976). Mallarmé believed that theatre was a substitute for the church as a "lieu absolu" (Champigny, 1954 – 1955: 58). For many of the participants, the two are synonymous, or complementary.

Participants interfaced with religion in five modes, when young. The first of these modes is that of performing in plays in a religious establishment. Barbara (Corn Exchange, 28 February 2006) reminisced that her "“wow” moment was a church amateur dramatic thing but that was a different church from the one I went to” whilst Robin was inducted into the theatre partly because of his parents’ attendance at church:

There were very happy meetings at our church. There was something on every night there. My mother was a Unionist... in those days we had a church hall. There was a Monday night club and the Women’s Unionists, and all that going on. And we also did plays there on this very small stage. I think the stage could be about the width of that bar [*pointing at the other end of the Circle Bar*]. And we used to scatter round the furniture when we

did plays... the church did them...but later when I was a teenager, we produced plays in the church... (Oxford Playhouse, 8 June 2006).

The pattern of church halls, in particular, as venues for theatre activity, or readings, is repeated across all four groups. It is the amalgamation of the ceremonial aspects of theatre, the association of a space linked to religious ceremony, and the repeated, almost ritualistic attendance at rehearsals and productions, which makes participants' childhood theatrical participation more than "merely theatrical re-enactment" (Figes, 1972). These young people are performing, or observing a "sacramental act" (Fowlie, 1954: 28) in a church hall, not an entirely secular space. At an impressionable age, could it be that many potential theatregoers' subsequent beliefs about theatre are formed from their association with the "charm poetry" of magic (Collingwood, 1938: 72 – 73) with the sacerdotal function (Figes, 1976: 13).

The second mode is acting in a play with religious themes, or playmaking with religious, ritualistic themes, as described by Priscilla who was brought up in a religious household:

One of the ways we entertained ourselves for hours was playing church. And we extremely um, we went to a lot of trouble and we had our own liturgy. We had some actual proper church toys that had been got from a church shop but we also made up some things out of plasticine and we made up some Latin because it was the old Catholic Latin mass and one of the big moments in the old Latin mass is *Dominus Vobiscum*. And the congregation replied *Et cum spiritum tuo*. And so we had our own version and we'd go around the house singing *Tantum Biscum* waving a little [*big laughter*]... I thought it was tremendous. But fortunately our parents didn't think it was naughty at all. They thought it was wonderful. They didn't make us feel we were being naughty (Oxford Playhouse, 19 October 2006).

As in other instances of children's play, the parents are encouraging. Here the activity conforms to Huizinga's (1949) model of play, with Priscilla and her friends ritualistically creating their own rules adapted from the Catholic liturgy.



Whereas Priscilla brings the religious play back into her home, Kate (Oxford Playhouse, 19 October 2006), and other participants, recall that it was at school where they were involved in religious drama: “We did a Christmas play every year”. Pat recalls with affection annual Christmas plays that again reinforce the regularity of theatrical activity:

I remember when I was little... I was quite on the big side and I had quite a deep voice, I was always the voice of God in the school play. And I would be behind there thinking ‘da da da and this is decreed!’ I remember that. I will always remember that (Pegasus Theatre, 21 February 2007).

Anne associates religious plays with the sense of enjoyment, a positive connotation opposed to Collingwood (1938) and his negative conceptualisation of entertainment theatre:

... Nativity plays were quite fun and I suppose... children get to get that experience, playing a shepherd or whatever (Oxford Playhouse, 19 October 2006).

Richard and Diana recall performing readings in church, which, in Richard’s case, led to a later interest in amateur dramatics, which in turn fed his enthusiasm for theatregoing as an attender.

The third mode is or acting (or playing charades) during family Christmas gatherings. Rachel’s story of performing a Christmas play in her parents’ bedroom has already been recounted in section 6.1, and similar stories occurred in every group.

The fourth mode is where there are specific church-managed theatre groups. Gwilym, in Letchworth in Hertfordshire, and Geraldine, near Bolton in Lancashire, both, attended St Paul's churches for their drama groups. This is a reinforcement of participants' linked lives (Giele and Elder, 1998), and the mechanism of homophily (Mark, 2003). Gwilym reminisced that:

There were several local amateur groups, the one which I got involved with when I was about fifteen, fourteen, was St Paul's Church Amateur Dramatic Society, SPADS, they used to call themselves. And they used to do almost all Whitehall Farce sort of things. And they would do er Agatha Christie, and they just, the woman who was partly responsible for running it, she wanted to do Shakespeare and they said, "oh, we'll never get an audience with Shakespeare" (Oxford Playhouse, 8 June 2006).

From Gwilym it seems as if SPADS were middle-brow in outlook, as if the church community in Letchworth would not be attracted by the pull of Shakespeare. It has already been noted in section 5.1 how Gwilym has identified his neighbourhood as a working class community with prejudices against art. It appears that in Bolton, Geraldine attended a group with similar aims:

So, I suppose I did quite a lot of amateur things, through the church too, not Methodist church, Anglican. And we were called the PADS, because we were Paul's as well. So it was the PADS, St Paul's, amateurs, and we did Christmas shows. And we did a thing called *The Island of the Winds*. It wasn't really a pantomime, it was a kind of a fantasy thing. And I played the South Wind. And we had to have awful body make-up to make me look as if I had just come in from the Mediterranean, and piles of plastic fruit... (Oxford Playhouse, 8 June 2006).

The fifth mode is where explicitly religious ceremonies are intrinsically and intensely theatrical. Helen refers to her experience of attending a Church of England church in Cookham Dean:

Going to the village church, it was theatre... because you were far too young to understand the... deep philosophical, theological reasons why one's parents might have gone. I just remember the beautiful vestments the priest wore and the smells... (Pegasus Theatre, 28 March 2007).

In another example of linked lives (Giele and Elder, 1998) and homophily (Mark, 2003), Geraldine and Barbara related stories about the same religious ceremony – the Whit Walks. Geraldine believes that the Whit Walks enhanced her early receptiveness to drama. She recalls:

... there were things like the Whit Walks which aren't done in the south of England but at Whitsuntide um all the churchgoers and children just walk through the streets with those enormous, beautiful banners, you know, on the two poles, like the ones the TUC have, the very old ones... Yes and the little girls dress up in white and go through the streets. You're a kind of audience when you're watching all this. So, that was my grandmother's influence. She took me to church. My parents weren't really churchgoers. And I think perhaps that and the dressing up box were the really young influences (Oxford Playhouse, 8 June 2006).

Barbara also describes the effect of this ceremony:

Well, yes, it is sort of theatrical, isn't it. Oh huge. Absolutely huge events, the Whit Walks. And the rest of you had a new outfit... Really, really common in the North West... Well, you sort of walk through the streets with your church and you carry banners, and there are bands and you sometimes have a Rose Queen and a Harvest Queen, who is all dressed up and it is really um you are bearing witness to your faith. And it was absolutely huge when I was a child... they were called the Whit Walks... the girls dressed in white, yeah, with veils, yeah, there were Catholic Walks one week and then the next week it would be the Protestant Walks... I hadn't really made the connection, but it was very theatrical. Yeah, and everyone participated in it. And even if you weren't dressed in white you always had a new outfit, top to toe, everything was new clothes. That was your outfit. Yeah, huge, it was for everyone. It was the main social event... (Corn Exchange, 28 February 2007).

It appears that the majority of the participants in the reminiscence workshops were influenced by the theatricality of their religious involvement at an important time in their emotional and intellectual development (as identified by St Francis Xavier). As Giddens (1997: 82) points out, “all interaction is situated – it occurs in a particular place and has a specific duration in time”. In this case, the interaction occurs in a place for organised religion, or in an imagined religious environment and at a significant time during childhood.

#### 6.4 Formative experiences of theatre

Every lived experience is directed “towards something” (Heidegger, 1925: 258). This section attempts to indicate how the formative theatre experiences of the participants, are in most cases, directed towards their moment of theatrical epiphany, which is the subject of chapter seven. Twenty-five participants were taken to the theatre as a child although the opportunities were limited for those living during World War Two, with either theatres closing, or participants’ evacuation to places where theatre was inaccessible. Osborne, Wheeler and Elliott (1999: 55) suggest that about a third of heavy attenders in Australia had their interest in the performing arts aroused by their parents, and about a quarter by their school. Walker, Scott-Melnyk and Sherwood (2002: 24) indicate that long-term, regular theatregoers participated in theatre early in their lives; furthermore, people who are taken to the theatre as a child have a significantly higher attendance at theatre in later years than those people who were not taken as a child (Bunting, Keaney and Gottlieb, 2007: 65). The findings in this study are consistent with Ostrower (2005: 5) and Constantoura (2000a: 210), where the latter suggests that “the people most likely to place a high value on the arts are those who were encouraged by their parents”. However, the percentage of people likely to be encouraged to become interested in the arts is small as indicated by Bradshaw (1998: 42) whose findings indicate that only 5% of Americans said that their parents took them “often” to live arts performances, although a limitation to

this finding is the lack of a definition for “often”. People who appreciate the arts the most, a segment Constantoura terms “arts lovers”, were the segment most likely to be encouraged to be involved in the arts when growing up.

The pantomime at Christmastime was for thirteen of the participants, their introduction to live theatre. Theatregoing in the 1950s, for example, was “for most Englishmen, whether they wear caps or trilbies, a holiday treat” (Findlater, 1952: 194). Pantomimes are aimed at mass audiences, and therefore attract a wide demographic, including lower socio-economic groups. Therefore wealthy or well-educated parents or relatives taking children to the pantomime around the Christmas holidays would suggest culturally omnivorous behaviour. Furthermore, this attendance indicates more than children being entertained, or becoming socialised to attending plays or musicals in theatres. It inculcates the concept of regularity into young people with repeat attendances. Attending regularly, which for her was once a year, was a pattern noted by Rachel (Corn Exchange, 14 February 2007). She recalls: “as children, we used to get taken to the pantomime every year by my parents”. This annual occasion was for some participants, also valuable in encouraging interactivity. Sheila relates how attending the pantomime enabled her to change her character:

I mean for a child who didn't like um to be in the centre of anything um remember standing up and, you know: “look out, behind you!” You know, and er that kind of thing. So, absolutely engrossed in the play, but it was just once a year, um we went (Oxford Playhouse, 8 June 2006).

The data suggest that early theatregoing was a routine activity, and one that was accepted as a regular part of family life, as articulated by Priscilla:

For me, [*it was*] a perfectly normal thing that we went to the Playhouse or we went to the pantomime. One was taken, like, almost as normal as going to school (Oxford Playhouse, 16 November 2006).

Attending a pantomime enables a young person to learn about theatre, after which, still young, there is a progression to other forms of theatre for children, as explained by Irene:

... my first taste of the theatre was pantomime, and then I went to see things like um *Wind in the Willows*... and these are things that you've read and the characters are coming to life before your very eyes on the stage (Corn Exchange, 14 February 2007).

Irene stresses that pantomime was a first taste, where the drama is a literal act of creation “coming to life” and believable to her because it is in front of her “very eyes”.

Danielle, approximately forty years younger than Priscilla, shares the normality of theatregoing, but attended a wider range of plays when young than most participants when she was growing up in Rhodesia:

My parents were theatregoers and so it was always part of my life. My father was a photographer and he used to take the photographs, do the theatre photographs so I used to go along with him, to, you know kind of carry the flash, when he was, or just to watch, when he was going to take the photographs. I've always sort of seen backstage and my mother did sets as well. Right from early on I was involved in watching her kind of making sets and designing sets and my father photographing so it was a normal part of my life growing up (Pegasus Theatre, 27 October 2006).

For those participants who came to theatre late, however, cinema-going was a popular pastime when young. The engagement with drama may not have been live, but an interest in performance was being generated. Of the participants who spoke about their youth, it was only Ophelia, brought up on her remote ranch in Argentina who had no performance or play in her early life. As the participants grew up, and became schoolchildren, so their patterns of engagement with theatre

began to change. Two key themes emerge from schooldays: the first is where the participant is acting in amateur dramatic productions. The second is related to school: learning about plays at school, acting in school plays, and being taken to the theatre by the school. They are the subject of the next section.

## 6.5 Amateur dramatics

All individuals in their everyday lives are divided into two parts: performers and character, and they have dual roles giving ‘performances’ and behaving as ‘audiences’ (Goffman, 1959). The participants in this study eventually become regular audiences for a leisure activity beyond ‘everyday lives’. The data suggest heavily that part of their journey to become theatregoers lies in their performance activities as well.

Eighteen participants took part in amateur dramatics as a child, and so participated in theatre-making, whilst another two took dancing lessons. This finding supports Constantoura (2000b: 21) in his results which indicate that “there appears to be a relationship between an interest in participating in creative activity and an interest in enjoying the creativity of others. People are more likely to place a higher value on the arts if they are also involved in the arts, either directly themselves or through friends or family.” Only five participants actively stated that they did not take part in any performance activities voluntarily, away from school. It is not necessary to recount all the reminiscences about amateur dramatics. However, one participant’s experiences stand out as unusual. Robin (Oxford Playhouse, 8 June 2006) attended one of the most prestigious amateur theatres in the country, one of the “serious hard-working groups” (Priestley, 1947: 66) that his father, as has been noted in section 5.1, helped to found:

The drama came from an amateur group called the Highbury Little Theatre. It was a very famous Little Theatre and we’d taken a building, right near my

house, really. And we'd cut the shed, the long shed in half, and then we gradually raised one half up. And I helped build this theatre. As a boy of eleven I was, I'd been taught to lay bricks... The audiences were amazing. We did five plays and we did them for three weeks. And I remember the opening night of booking, there were so many in the queue that we used to sit them in the theatre. And we used to sell out on the first night. You see, theatre was absolutely essential in the war, and it was absolutely essential. We couldn't go into Birmingham very often because Birmingham received a lot of bombing. And so a local theatre, and Sutton Coldfield, of course, is, was sort of the dormitory of the wealthy middle classes and still is, I mean, there are millionaires there now. So, so there were people who loved theatre, and it was essential... (Oxford Playhouse, 8 June 2006).

From Robin's reminiscence it can be seen that he has an ongoing stake in the Highbury Little Theatre, having helped in its construction. There would have been considerable esteem needs satisfied in generating passionate audiences for an activity deemed "essential" as a morale-booster during the War. The foundations of the Little Theatre were also the foundations for a life-long association with theatre with artistic, strategic and theatregoing results. In terms of his life history trajectory, at this stage in Robin's life he has already had his theatrical epiphany, so it is not serendipitous that Robin has associated himself with theatre at this young age.

## 6.6 Drama at school

A good state education is important in developing traditional cultural tastes amongst children who are not from the highest social classes (Bourdieu, 1984). The data suggest that it is a matter of serendipity whether a child's imagination and interest in theatre occurs at school. This study suggests that gaining a taste for theatre at school depends on having an inspirational teacher. Recent literature is consistent that early socialisation through school, and gaining qualifications leads to a greater chance of appreciating the arts and theatre, (Constantoura, 2000a, Walker, Scott-Melnyk and Sherwood, Bunting, 2008) and that many attenders were socialised into going to the theatre because they were taken there as a child (Bunting, Keaney and Gottlieb, 2007: 65). The position of arts in the



curriculum, and within life-long education is valued (Keaney *et al*, 2007). This study is able to be more specific about who the inspirer is for long-term, regular theatregoers. The relevance of this is considerable for the development of a theatregoer's taste (see section 7.1.2). Gwilym, who it has been noted, came from a working class home of internal migrants stresses the life-changing influence of a teacher:

I didn't go to school until 1947. So um my first experience of theatre at school was um... we had mostly women teachers, mostly older women teachers. And then a young man came on the staff. And nobody wanted to have the man teach them because you didn't he wasn't a proper teacher. Proper teachers were older... and he was a bit silly and he showed off a bit. But he was um er the music teacher, but he also introduced us to um drama and he, he somehow latched on to me because I had this 'show-off' thing... He was the teacher really changed my whole... and I'd never seen a professional play until much later (Oxford Playhouse, 8 June 2006).

Ophelia, who had not been to school until she was a teenager, had a succession of inappropriate tutors on her remote ranch in Argentina, also stresses the importance of her teacher:

When I came to England I went to boarding school and I was inspired immediately, I was hooked by our drama teacher, who was Fay Compton's sister. And I think we were all hooked. At the age of fifteen I should think that half the school wanted to go on the stage, because she inspired us so much (Oxford Playhouse, 12 October 2006).

For participants who came from middle-class homes and did not have a disrupted education due to war or illness, an inspirational teacher is still important in enabling the child to imagine further, as Margaret recalls:

I think um the encouragement of one key teacher is absolutely crucial to our sense of what is possible. I mean we somehow expected to be able to do all sorts of things and expected to be able to speak in public and expected to be

able to paint scenery um. We had a lot of creative encouragement which felt like creative freedom but of course we were being taught more than we realised (Oxford Playhouse, 19 October 2006).

For some participants, an inspiring English teacher was the only aspect of school they recall with gratitude. Bourdieu's (1984) point about pupils accumulating the cultural capital of legitimate, state-approved high art, and in particular, the stimulation of an interest in Shakespeare, is identified by most of the participants. This is indicated by Kate:

And then I was sent to boarding school in Sutton Coldfield and um there we had two teachers... They did between them absolutely marvellous productions and it was the redeeming feature of that place because I hated it apart from that um. And we did *Midsummer Night's Dream* – I think I was about nine or ten. And I was Titania, and I absolutely revelled in it (Oxford Playhouse, 19 October 2006).

Kate's experience is mirrored by that of Priscilla, where the engagement with Shakespeare was less active, but compelling:

I went to the Oxford High School for Girls and there was... a lot of um reading of plays and parts, the Shakespeare plays, and things like that, and a very devoted English teacher who I was very fond of, who I think was a sort of classic um kind, good, dedicated English teacher of her day um. And I can remember reading, taking part in classroom readings of *Macbeth* (Oxford Playhouse, 19 October 2006).

Audrey recalls how her inspirational teacher led her to go to the theatre to see a Shakespeare play on stage:

We had a brilliant English teacher and I found I really loved Shakespeare. I loved that play [*Macbeth*]. And she took us to the Aldwych to see it with Michael Redgrave (Oxford Playhouse, 1 June 2006).

This interaction with theatre is depicted in terms of the imagination, and make-believe, as with June (Corn Exchange, 28 February 2007): "... she really opened the world to me of poetry, and Shakespeare..." and the influence of inspirational teachers is, therefore, a key factor in developing these young minds for a life-long relationship with theatre and the arts. Looking back on these days, participants are grateful for the education they received as illustrated by Maureen:

And I think, all of us here as well, our teachers gave us, I feel very conscious of what the teachers gave us. All this access to the theatre and music, and something to carry for the rest of our lives (Oxford Playhouse, 19 October 2006).

This metaphor, used by Maureen, of 'carrying' the cultural inheritance from her education is akin to the clothes a character dons for a role. In Goffman's (1959) terms, Maureen, and the other participants who were prepared for their theatregoing through school, are collecting their props, ready for their 'performance' as a theatregoer. Part of the learning of their lines for this role is the development of their knowledge and understanding of Shakespeare, and other playwrights from the canon.

However, school was important for developing an interest in theatre without the inspiration of a teacher. Sometimes it was sufficient to be proactive because of the study of plays themselves, as with Irene:

We didn't have um actual drama happening at school... but we did go to theatre. Um we used to go and see um because of the um books that we were learning for our coursework, we went to see various productions in connection with those. And again um I really, really enjoyed the theatre. So

those occasions were very special to me as well... I don't think that was a teacher who brought that alive for me (Corn Exchange, 28 February 2007).

School encouraged the attendance at theatre if this was not happening through the family, as with Kay, who moved from Kenya to a school in rural Germany, near the Belgian border:

... as soon as I had the first experience of theatre, as I think my parents weren't theatregoers, and it was like, I didn't really know what it was until a school trip took me to theatre and that is precisely this one that I can remember as a child. And I didn't know that world existed before I went on this school trip (Pegasus, 27 October 2006).

For Henry, his private school encouraged performance, although this was of a populist nature, and not at all highbrow:

We really didn't go for school plays so much as school pageants. I mean I remember very well how we did *1066 And All That*. You see we had um two very good music masters who also had um er dramatic capabilities. We had another Latin master actually who was a very successful producer and we went on from there (Oxford Playhouse, 19 October 2006).

Helen recalled how school drama visits led to the development of her aesthetic awareness:

I remember we were taken on school trips. My first real going to the theatre was on school trips. And we were taken to Stratford. And again, I was about fourteen and I had no camera, but I was already training my visual memory, and um we were taken to see *Twelfth Night*, but I didn't listen to a word because I was looking over the balcony and visually memorising all the costumes and when I got home I drew them all from memory. I've got some of those original ones, and my teachers were so astonished they sent them to the company at Stratford and I've, I think I've got somewhere a programme signed by all the actors (Pegasus Theatre, 21 February 2007).

Helen's reminiscence is similar to that of Robin's in that a special engagement with drama leads on to both a career choice at a high level, and also to a 'career' of theatregoing as conceptualised by Aschaffenburg and Maas (1997) and Pearce (1988), as discussed in chapter three. Helen continued to attend theatre as she developed her education as an artist:

... so always my primary orientation was with the visual and when I was a student at The Slade, seventeen, eighteen, we did go I think over those years, went to see *Oh, What A Lovely War!*, that was Joan Littlewood wasn't it? I went to the theatre at Stratford East... (Pegasus Theatre, 28 March 2007).

By taking participants on school visits to the theatre, schools play an important part in shaping the cultural capital of young people. The data support Bourdieu (1984) up to a point. Participants such as Helen, Gwilym, Audrey, Geraldine and June did not come from wealthy families, and schools did inculcate within them a taste for theatre. Bourdieu tends to suggest that such taste is an establishment one, and by taking Helen, for example to Stratford for Shakespeare, promotes an understanding for established writers on the curriculum. Other participants, such as Priscilla, who had a wealthier, highly academic background, were limited in their visits because school coincided with the Second World War, and people were not so mobile. However, she went with her school regularly to watch plays at other schools, and when the war was over, recalls a sixth form visit:

I do remember being taken by my classics teacher, at the High School, to Cambridge. It was a big expedition and we were a rather select little group who were doing sort of more advanced Latin and I think there might have been the odd person who was doing Greek which I wasn't. But she took us to see the Greek play in Greek at the Arts Theatre which was a lovely theatre I remember... I thought it was awfully parallel to the Playhouse in size and such um. But that's a very long time ago and um we saw *The Frogs* and I can remember that we, we all um regressed quite a bit on the way back [*big laughter*] because we all, she couldn't get us to be sensible or get us to get to kind of talk about the play because we had fallen in love with the chief man I think in the chorus and the sound of the frogs. And we spent the whole journey which was quite a long way in those days singing 'rkkkkkk' (Oxford Playhouse, 26 October 2006).

Four participants studied at schools where there was no drama, and where plays were not enacted out in class. Genevieve lived in France during her school years where “there was absolutely no drama of any kind” (Oxford Playhouse, 19 October 2006). Cora in Cincinnati studied at “a fairly medium sized school I think, suburban. But no theatre at all, and even in high school, which was a larger school, I can’t remember... there was um a choir and various musical things but not any drama” (Oxford Playhouse, 19 October 2006). The homology argument holds that “social stratification and cultural stratification map closely on to each other. Individuals in higher social strata are those who prefer and predominantly consume ‘high’ or ‘elite’ culture, and individuals in lower social strata are those who prefer and predominantly consume ‘popular’ or ‘mass’ culture” (Chan and Goldthorpe, 2007b: 1) does not seem to apply at this stage in a person’s life history. Forms of theatre can be both high and elite, and popular. Henry’s public school staged popular entertainments, whilst Gwilym’s grammar school promoted Shakespeare. A taste for theatre does not appear to reflect back on a person’s social status or class; a preference for a certain kind of theatre, however, might do this.

## 6.7 Conclusion

This chapter has suggested that formative experiences with theatre prepare the ground for a life-long engagement with theatre. If young people are encouraged to play at theatremaking, they are likely to be receptive to other forms of drama, which they probably perceive as magical in some way. An introduction to theatre by the way of religion is also a model for many in this particular sample. Being taken to the theatre, usually to a pantomime, as a child is an important introduction to professional attendance, whilst performance at school, or in amateur dramatics strengthens a young person’s involvement in theatre. In their study of young people in the UK, Harland and Kinder (1999) indicate that young people who attend arts events tend to be encouraged by their parents, but that attendance declines as a child goes through the teenage years. They return in their early twenties (Harland and Kinder, 1999: 36).

Although, Harland and Kinder's research took place several decades after many of the participants in this study were young, the conclusion from this chapter tends to confirm their findings on the social class and parental encouragement. However, this study does not indicate a falling off of theatregoing during the teenage years. Theatregoing depends on a person's knowledge that s/he has the identity of theatregoer. This identity is formed when theatregoers experience their first theatrical epiphany and thus can begin to define themselves by the motivation to attend (Bouder-Pailler, 1999) and they have created their self-identity (Giddens, 1991a) of being a theatregoer. In reflecting on themselves in the reminiscence workshops, participants have reaffirmed in their reminiscences that they remain theatregoers. That moment where they realize that they are theatergoers is the subject of the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **THE THEATRICAL EPIPHANY - BECOMING A THEATREGOER**

#### **7 Introduction**

In chapter six a number of predicators were indicated which, if present, prepare a person for their theatrical epiphany. Chapter six has shown that participants were receptive to the magic of theatre, related religion or religious contexts to theatre, and played at theatre in a variety of formats. The epiphany therefore seems an appropriate term to deploy for the “turning point” with its religious and magical connotations, defined from the Greek as “an apparition of a divine being” (Bozman, 1961: 64) with people attending the magical, otherworldly, make-believe, quasi-religious apparition in a performance area. The third of the themes emerging from chapter six, play, also relates to the epiphany because the Feast of Epiphany happens on 6<sup>th</sup> January. This date is otherwise known as ‘Twelfth Night’, the title of one of Shakespeare’s plays. Shakespeare as a theme will be discussed in chapter eight.

Although some participants did experience their epiphany at a very young age, often at a pantomime, most were older. The epiphany is a moment when a person realises that s/he is a theatregoer, and that moment becomes a turning point in life. These turning points, known as epiphanies (Denzin, 1989: 17), and discussed in chapter four, include some participants who have their epiphany at a very young age, even pre-school, and others who have their epiphany at school. Most of the participants revealed their exact age. Eleven mentioned age descriptors such as “primary school age”, or “teens”. Of the teenagers, the most common age was fifteen, with four of the eleven stating that age, whilst the under tens were more varied in their ages.



One limitation of this study could be that participants were led in the workshops to reminisce about their initial “wow” moment in theatre; this could have meant that the type of epiphany related was major, or relived (*ibid*) because participants described immediate impacts of the production. However, many participants in later workshops talked about “multiple wows”, in that later productions were equally memorable and had a strong effect on them which could be indicators of the cumulative epiphany (*ibid*). Denzin argues that people experience turning points differently at different stages of the life cycle, so the nature of the epiphany could be different. Participants did reminisce how their second, or later epiphany, even if not as powerful as their first could prove to be a turning point. An example of this would be Sheila (Oxford Playhouse, 1 June 2006) whose major epiphany, when she realised she was a theatregoer, was when she was four or five, attending *Where The Rainbow Ends* and who then experienced a minor epiphany after a long, fallow period of lapsed attendance, when she had children, encountered free children’s shows in parks in Crystal Palace. She then began going to the theatre regularly again. Eight participants describe “wow” moments later on in life: Cora, Sandra, Henry, Janet, Helen, Danielle, Sandra and Jane, however, only Cora, Sandra, Jane and Henry experienced a turning point and became theatregoers.

The Pegasus group stands apart from the other three reminiscence workshops in that as well as being audiences, they are practitioners. It emerges from the reminiscences that Pat and Ted are primarily performers, and that Pat only rarely attends the theatre; Ted used to be a regular attender but lapsed in the eighties. Danielle, Kay, Helen and Janet all enthusiastically reminisce about the greatest theatre experiences of their lives, but all were by that time, committed to the theatre through their work. Danielle is, and was, an arts administrator, whilst Kay and Helen are artists and scenic designers, and Janet is a theatre technician. Their journeys to the audience differ from the other three groups, and, as will be examined in the later chapters, their engagement and motivations differ as well. The next section attempts to answer the question: what are the causes (Clausen, 1998: 202 - 4) of the turning point for theatregoers? During the course of the reminiscence workshops, the participants all related their individual epiphany, or

multiple epiphanies, and the data suggest that the following factors enable a person to commence, or maintain, life-long theatregoing. The participants do this by describing their intention (Heidegger, 1925) towards theatre. The participants' current theatregoing behaviour can be related to their motive (Schutz, 1967) where present behaviour is the effect of previous "causes". This chapter suggests that it is the epiphany which is the most significant cause of future theatregoing behaviour.

## 7.1 The familiar

The first of the factors emerging from the data suggests that, except for those who experienced their epiphany as an adult, the participants were inspired, encouraged, or converted, to attend a theatrical event by, or with someone, who is close to them. But what term could be used to describe this introducer, without whom there would be no intention towards theatre, and no motive to become a theatregoer? This is a person who is already receptive to the magic of the play. S/he knows and understands the rules, and the secrets, of the play, and is a regular to the prescribed places of the play (Huizinga, 1949).

There is a strong relationship between this person and their attendee. They know each other well. Accordingly, this study is coining the term 'familiar' to describe this person. It is a triply appropriate term as, like the concept of the 'epiphany', it has its magical connotations. In this case, the familiar is a magician's magical creature, or supernatural spirit over which the magician has some sort of inspirational power, like Aladdin with the genie of the lamp (Bozman, 1961: 207). The familiar is "the personal and effective agent" of the magician (Mauss, 1972: 99) therefore the analogy could be made that the theatrical familiar provides a role far greater than that of an opinion former or advocate: s/he is indirectly associated with the 'magical' artists involved in the creation of the production. The familiar is initiating someone new, someone known, into the magic circle.

Also, like the epiphany, there is also a religious connotation to the familiar. Epiphany is the twelfth day of Christmas. The familiar has a darker religious significance. It is the term for an official of the Holy See who captures and imprisons an accused person (*op cit*). It could be argued that the theatrical familiar does ‘capture’ the person for theatregoing. The familiar is distinct from the family or friend ‘arts organiser’ (Osborne, Wheeler and Elliott, 1999: 29) who ‘pushes’ individuals into attending the performing arts generally. One participant who spoke of his general inertia, Ted, only attends when ‘push’ comes to ‘shove’ and a friend is assertive in ensuring his attendance. The familiar, by comparison, has an influence which lasts a lifetime, and is remembered as a major contributor to the forming of the identity of a theatregoer. Further research would be needed to ascertain the presence of familiars in epiphanies occurring in other fields of leisure.

The majority (eleven) of the familiars are parents, or a parent, of the participant. Other family members also provide this role: an uncle or aunt (three), and in one case, a great uncle. Other familiars are a teacher (or school) (four), drama group leader (one), friend (one), and godparent (one). These findings support Creative Industries (2007: 43) whose research indicates that attending the arts is moulded by parents or the family who took them to an arts event. The findings also refine those of Colmar Brunton (2006: 23) who suggest that children living with parents who are high arts attendees “doesn’t appear to have an impact on the performing arts”. In this study, eleven participants became theatregoers because their theatrical epiphany occurred as a result of parental encouragement.

The position of the familiar as a parent, family member or teacher supports Bourdieu (1984) in his concepts of trajectories through life. Thus, a bright working class lad such as Gwilym, one of the participants in this study, who attends a good state school, encounters a familiar who intervenes significantly in his life. At school this familiar reveals the world of magic to Gwilym (*Hamlet* at the hallowed, sacred space of the Old Vic, with its iconic actors) and Gwilym’s life trajectory veers off in a theatrical direction. Each of the participants’

experiences, related in this section, explains how the intervention of the familiar sets them off along a trajectory of theatregoing.

Of the participants who did not reminisce about a particular theatrical epiphany when young, Margaret, as a child, saw the film *The Thief of Baghdad*, which obliquely caused her to be interested in performance. Of those who experienced an epiphany as an adult, Cora arrived in London from America, in middle-age, attending *Underneath the Arches*, in the West End. Henry, when middle-aged, was affected by Wagner's *The Valkyrie*, performed by Stockholm Opera, with Birgit Nilsson's voice being the "wow" factor. Helen and Janet, in middle age were strongly affected by physical theatre one-woman shows at the Pegasus, from Rose English, and Bobby Baker respectively. Jane, again in middle age, was wowed by the avant garde physical theatre company Hoipolloi and their show *Dead on the Ground*. Finally, Sandra, aged thirty, had her introduction to theatre with her self-organised works outing to *Chicago*, Kandor and Ebb's jazz-age musical in the West End.

#### 7.1.1 Family members as familiar

It has already been noted that twenty-two of the participants had theatregoing a parent/parents or other family members who were theatregoers. It was on a visit to the theatre with one of these family members that thirteen participants had their "wow" moment of epiphany. Pat and Catherine, had their epiphany watching respectively, Russian dancers and Spanish dancers, rather than theatre, but it led to their interest in attending theatres.

Parents taking the participants to children's shows is a model for initiation to the moment of epiphany, as recalled by Priscilla:

... my parents. They took me first of all to pantomimes in both the New Theatre and here but I think some of my most powerful early memories are still very young, three or four, was of the old Playhouse um in Woodstock Road. I can remember we saw *Dick Whittington* (Oxford Playhouse, 12 October 2006).

Kate recalls how it was special that she was taken by her father to the pantomime in Leeds when her mother was occupied giving birth to a sibling:

I must have been no older than five I think um and we lived in Leeds and it was just the end of the war and my father took me to see um *Peter Pan*, and er it was at the Grand Theatre Leeds, which was a huge theatre and we were up in the er circle (Oxford Playhouse, 12 October 2006).

June reminisces about her “wow” moment at the age of four, when she was taken to the Corn Exchange for the Christmas pantomime:

I remember I sat on my father’s lap, but the moment for me was when Cinderella’s rags fell off and she turned into the wonderful princess. And that really was... it started me off on my theatregoing (Corn Exchange, 14 February 2007).

The performance of *Cinderella* is the cause (Schutz, 1967: 28) for June’s future actions. She is not the only participant to make her motivation explicit from the moment of her theatrical epiphany. For June, it is the interaction of sitting on her familiar’s lap whilst being receptive to the transformative magic on stage as Cinderella appears in her new apparel, that sets her off on her theatrical trajectory. Another participant, Laura, remembered that her epiphany included a surprise at the theatre:

... every year, I used to sit there and really enjoy it and they used to grab people from the stage, take them up onto the stage, sorry, and I used to think, ‘I wish, for once, they would pick me out of the audience’ and I

remember when I was eight years old they actually did! And I went up onto the stage and it was actually *Cinderella*, and I tried the slipper on, and the slipper fit me! (Corn Exchange, 14 February 2007).

It is indicative of pantomimes that they are interactive, with involvement of the audience across the ‘fourth wall’. Pantomimes involve actors playing, often conniving with the audience in their contrived naughtiness. A character such as Buttons conspires with the audience who cheers, boos or shouts out ‘behind you’ in a way that highlights that Huizinga’s (1949) inclusion of secrecy as a determinant of play fits in this context. Pantomime develops the concept of exclusivity. Traditional pantomimes divide up the audience into sections, each section singing or shouting something unavailable to other parts of the audience. However, during all the reminiscence workshops, apart from one comment from Genevieve, there was no indication that any of the participants held views that theatregoing is an exclusive activity.

It was already noted in chapter six how many participants played at theatre at family gatherings, or to members of the family. For those participants taken to pantomime when young, this activity could be viewed as an extension of playtime at home. Theatregoing would thereafter have a connotation of enjoyment, the most common motivation for attendance, as suggested in section 3.4.1. Theatregoing takes place during leisure time, the play has a duration, it is limited to the theatrical space, pantomime has its rules, and it conforms to its sense of order (Huizinga, 1949). Laura explained above how after years of never getting to try on the slipper, at last her moment came, and it gave the show the extra magic that made it “wow” for her.

Sometimes the experience of being taken by a relative is serendipitous. Sheila recalls being taken, almost as a hanger-on, by an aunt to a children’s play, but her introduction to the theatre was not the motivation for her invitation:

I think from really early age um, sort of four or five, um er I can remember going to see *Where The Rainbow Ends*... And I had this aunt, who was a maiden aunt, who didn't like me very much. But she liked my brother, um who was older than me. And so he got the pick of what, you know, what we went to see (Oxford Playhouse, 1 June 2006).

It was not always children's shows that participants were taken to. It has already been noted in chapter five how Robin's parents were involved in the foundation of the Highbury Little Theatre, and that they were keen theatregoers. It appears that they had the level of connoisseurship to know when to take Robin to a professional production for adult audiences. Robin reminisced about when he was ten, he went to *The Comedy of Errors* at Stratford, a production with "operatic and balletic touches" (Kemp and Trewin, 1953: 185):

In 1938 I lived in Birmingham and my parents took my brother and I to Stratford to see *Comedy of Errors* believe it or not. That's my wow. And it was Thomas Komisarjevsky's famous production which is often quoted as sort of the turning point in Shakespearean production... So I fell in love with Stratford before the War and I've been going ever since every year and I go to everything, absolutely everything (Oxford Playhouse, 1 June 2006).

Robin's experience demonstrates how the effect of a powerful production can last a lifetime. From this landmark production onwards, Robin is on his trajectory as a committed theatregoer. Moreover, as Robin says, he "fell in love" with Stratford. Although he does not mean it in the sense implied by Robin, Bourdieu (1984: 243) suggests that "taste is a match-maker". It appears that the cultural tastes of Robin's parents have made a life-long match between Robin and Stratford. Robin's parents' behaviour appears to be one where their cultural capital is being deposited with Robin from him to draw on in future years. As with June, the motivation to go to the theatre, and especially to Stratford, can be explicitly discovered to be caused from the moment of his theatrical epiphany.

Maureen was also taken to serious theatre, aged eight, when her parents took her to the Unity Theatre for Tom Thomas' *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist*, originally written for workers' theatre in 1927, and "unashamedly propagandist", (Thomas, 1985: 83 – 85). Maureen's lifelong theatregoing enables her to make connections between that moment of epiphany, and her more recent theatregoing:

I remember that as a period of, through these plays, as a very, very moral period in which people really had very intense, strong ideals and I feel that those experiences at Unity Theatre then linked up with Complicité in the Pegasus sixty years later (Oxford Playhouse, 12 October 2006).

Unity Theatre staged new and unusual plays which were often better in quality than plays staged in the West End (Noble, 1946: 93 - 95). Its aim was to "create a new and different world" (*ibid*). The roots of Maureen's taste for theatre are found at Unity Theatre, as she suggests. As she says, she attends performances of companies like Theatre de Complicité, whose style is "between avant-garde experiment and a popular mainstream", and known "for the physical dexterity and darkly comic inventiveness of its collaboratively devised work" (Williams, 2005: 247). Maureen's future life history does not only show the impact of Unity on her theatregoing. She has become a left-wing peace activist, involved in activities such as Levellers' Day in Burford. Maureen is an example of a working class girl appropriating the highest quality theatre as her inheritance of cultural capital from her familiar, her unemployed, radical father. The reasons for her motivation (Schutz, 1967: 28) in multiple areas of her life are therefore to be found at Unity Theatre.

Amateur shows were equally likely to be a participant's initial introduction to theatre when taken by a family member where they experience their theatrical epiphany. At primary school age, Barbara was taken by her great uncle, with her brothers and sisters, to *Hobson's Choice* at a church hall. It also had a life-long effect:



... it was packed and hot and sweaty and just everyone laughed all night. It was great. Yeah, and I just knew I wanted to go, you know, keep doing it (Corn Exchange, 14 February 2007).

Again, in the nature of Barbara's reminiscence, she indicates her motive (Schutz, 1967: 28). Some participants who went with a family member had their epiphany in their teenage years. In Genevieve's case, as with Gwilym, the drama tended to be more serious, a Shakespeare production, at the same venue, the Old Vic, in an example of linked lives (Giele and Elder, 1998):

The watershed experience for me was when I was seventeen when in the last week of would have been the school holidays my mother took my younger sister and me to see *As You Like It* at the Old Vic... (Oxford Playhouse, 26 October 2006).

The importance of Shakespeare to theatregoers' life histories is examined in section 8.1. The causes of Phil's attendance occurred when he was a teenager, when he discovered he liked theatre, serendipitously. He attended with his mother having gained complimentary tickets but the experience was sufficient to give him the motive (Schutz, 1967: 28) to become a theatregoer:

I got a pair of tickets for a CP Snow play and I can't remember which one it was now, and I went with my mother and I thought 'well, we'll see'. And she came up and met me and we were going to go in the evening and they gave out the first free for the first few to get an audience in, and um I said "I think this is good" [*chuckle*] and so I started... (Corn Exchange, 14 February 2007).

Richard's epiphany occurred when he was taken with his sister by a "kindly uncle" to Bernstein's *West Side Story* which opened in London's West End in December 1958 at Her Majesty's Theatre. Richard's reaction (Corn Exchange, 14 February 2007): "I was absolutely transfixed by this. I would never have thought that I would do anything like it and indeed I haven't, but it really turned me on to

musicals in a big way”, was also experienced by actor Keith Baxter, quoted in Secret:

There was no question in young people’s minds that *West Side Story* was not only a far more shattering experience, but that it was a seminal evening in the development of musical theatre... in London its success was like a blaze. We had seen nothing like it (Baxter, 1998: 129).

When Richard’s familiar, his “kindly uncle”, intervenes in his life, he experiences a magical moment of being “transfixed”. Richard also indicates that the gap between his own theatre-making where he could never himself replicate the magic on stage for *West Side Story*. One of the motivations for attending musicals for him is to become transfixed by the stage phenomenon. He does not have the magic touch to create such a show himself.

This section has indicated the importance of family members in inducting participants to the theatre where their intentions towards theatre are stated clearly. It has suggested that the theatrical epiphany resulting from these occasions provides the causes for subsequent theatregoing motivation. The next section introduces the second mode of theatrical introduction: that of a schoolteacher.

#### 7.1.2 The schoolteacher as familiar

If a participant was not taken to the theatre by a family member for the production which emerges as a turning point in their lives, the reminiscences suggest that the next most likely influence is a teacher, or the school. This finding supports Creative Industries (2007: 43) whose research indicates that members of the general public are switched on to the arts by a specific individual such as a teacher. Kay (Pegasus, 27 October 2006) went with school when she was ten to a fairy tale, a specifically magical play. Rachel was influenced at school by her

participation rather than being an audience member. Rachel's epiphany at school created a desire both to act, and to watch theatre:

... my interest came by getting involved in school plays and I remember I had the part of Gerda in *The Snow Queen* when I was probably about twelve (Corn Exchange, 14 February 2007).

Her participation at school in *The Snow Queen* has led to a lifetime trajectory where theatregoing acts as a replacement for her acting need:

I think my interest comes because I would really have loved to have been an actress. I haven't got the talent and that's why I did the amateur dramatics but I would loved to have been an actress and that's why I like going to the theatre because I just like everything about it and that's the nearest I can get (Corn Exchange, 29 March 2007).

Another participant, Geraldine, revealed that Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey*, opening in a little theatre in Salford in the same year the play premiered at the Theatre Royal Stratford East, was her "wow" moment:

... fifty-eight, I think it was... it was via school, a teacher, who started off a kind of theatre club, I suppose, and I went along, I suppose I was about fifteen... he was very into theatre himself and encouraging us. Um, it was a grammar school, an old-fashioned, traditional mixed grammar school. And a group of us went and then we started going to other plays ... (Oxford Playhouse, 1 June 2006).

For Audrey, her teacher took her to *Macbeth*, as mentioned in section 6.6, and for Gwilym, as mentioned in 7.1.1, it was *Hamlet*:

And the person who ran the drama group took me to see *Hamlet*, and I was fifteen, and I went to the Old Vic, and I saw John Neville playing Hamlet... (Oxford Playhouse, 1 June 2006).

The data from the moment of epiphany echo that of formative experiences of participants concerning the role of school or teachers. The association between a teacher, and a “wow” moment could also be suggestive of another life trajectory; Geraldine, Audrey and Gwilym will later have careers in education, with all three involved in teaching English or drama in some way.

### 7.1.3 A friend as familiar

If not a family member, or school teacher, the person most likely to introduce the participant to the production which gives the participant their epiphany is a friend, as a teenager, as with Ophelia:

At the age of fifteen... that was at the Royal Court... *The Deep Blue Sea* by Terence Rattigan... I was invited by a friend... (Oxford Playhouse, 12 October 2006).

In the case of Anne, the friend is the familiar because the friend’s sister was, serendipitously, an usher at the theatre:

... my school friend and I were sort of, Playhouse groupies in about the fifties, forties. I came here and collected um autographs and came whenever we could... we saw *The Seagull* here (Oxford Playhouse, 12 October 2006).

The use of the word “groupies” suggests a trajectory with a passionate engagement with theatre. Diana (Corn Exchange, 14 February 2007) had an epiphany which was remarkable for being a doubly important occasion. She went

with her then boyfriend at the age of eighteen to *Oliver!* in the West End, which was the night he proposed to her. Diana therefore associates theatregoing with a highly significant romantic occasion.

If participants were not introduced to theatregoing by the intervention of a familiar, then it appears that they were influenced to attend by traditional theatre marketing techniques.

## 7.2 Theatre marketing

One method of introduction to the theatre accounts for two participants. There is an element of serendipity about the marketing because neither participant was captured by a promotion for a particular production. Their theatregoing began because theatres who have not been able to sell all their tickets, paper their shows by giving free tickets to community organisations and local companies. Philip availed himself of West End tickets when working as a student in London:

They gave out the first free for the first few to get an audience in, and um I said “I think this is good” [*chuckle*] and so I started taking... and I got some shows and so ever since, I have occasionally, I wouldn’t put myself down as a strong theatregoer, but still a cheapskate, so I will still take free tickets from anybody! [*chuckle*] It gave me actually, not having liked anything to do with literature, and theatre... I am still extremely badly read, I know, I’ve been told that, but I do like going to the theatre (Corn Exchange, 14 February 2007).

In a similar fashion, Pat attended regular shows, primarily at the New Theatre which stimulated his motivation for attendance as a teenager:

When I was a kid my mother worked at the Isis Hotel, and I worked there as well, used to help out, and there were always complimentary tickets going

for the theatre because a lot of the theatre people would stay there, or they would issue out free tickets every so often. I got into the habit of going to the theatre (Pegasus, 21 February 2007).

Having been introduced to the theatre by the familiar, or by marketing, the participants who had an epiphany undergo a life-transforming experience. Whether the epiphany occurs when they are young, or as an adult, they are changed by their reaction to the production. The ingredients creating this epiphany are explored in the next section.

### 7.3 Magic

Certain conditions appear to be necessary in order for individuals to experience a theatrical epiphany. The concept of magic, already seen to be important in the formative years of many participants, is a recurring factor in the creation of the theatregoer's epiphany. The connections between the familiar and magic have already been examined in section 7.1. Participants repeatedly describe the theatrical event as using vocabulary such as "magic", "out of this world", "amazing", "fairy tales", "different world", "fantastic", "extraordinary", "wonderful", "transfixed" and "mesmerised". This attests to the illusory, transformatory effect of the productions. What causes the magic to strike? One instance is where an act of staging so intrigues the spectator because s/he does not know how the effect was achieved as with Audrey:

... the curtain goes up, and there is this absolute magic on the stage... the ghost was somehow phosphorescent. And I didn't know how they *did* it, you know and I was always so very interested after that in *scenery* apart from the acting. But that was the biggest wow for me (Oxford Playhouse, 1 June 2006).

Audrey is watching the drama in a state of ignorance, one conceptualised by Goffman (1974: 134 – 7), discussed in chapter three, as being in a different “information state” from the makers of the drama who do know how the trick was done. For Goffman, stage performances are “benign fabrications” because any tricks onstage are “keyings” because the audience never believes that what is onstage is real. The theatregoer is in a state of ignorance akin to the “willing suspension of disbelief” (Coleridge, 1817) because the “onlooker” is “willingly”, “temporarily” “kept in the dark” (*op cit*). This ignorance is of the outcome to the drama as well as relating to special effects magic. That Audrey refers to “the curtain goes up” also denotes when the curtain comes down, the time when “everyone knows the same what-has-been-happening” (*ibid*). The “absolute magic” on stage that Audrey describes is therefore an unreal keying, a convention which is meaningful in terms of Goffman’s primary framework, and seen by Audrey here, as something else. The moment is also magical for Audrey because magic has an immediate effect (Mauss, 1972: 16).

Seeing something as something else is where the effect of magic causes a scene of transformation (*ibid*: 76). It was noted in section 7.1.1 how June was affected by Cinderella’s clothes transforming from rags to gown; for Priscilla, the theatre magic draws out prior experiences of magical transformation:

... so I think the magic scenes of the pantomimes, particularly which coincided with fairy tales that I was brought up on at home, those wonderful scenes of transformation and magic... (Oxford Playhouse, 12 October 2006)

For Cora, (Oxford Playhouse, 12 October 2006) who experienced her epiphany as an adult, the magic relates to the “atmosphere that just enclosed”. She could empathise with the audience around her for whom the play brought back memories. With Helen (Pegasus Theatre, 7 March 2007), it was her own memories of childhood fairy tales stimulated by Rose English, the performance artist who “was looking as if she was an illustration from a children’s fairy book”

that created the magic. The magical effect of the production emerges from primarily visual or aural effects, caused often by the extravagance of the costumes and the splendour of the set, the music, and the transformation of a character by changing a costume.

#### 7.4 The unexpected

Another key theme emerging from the data, and therefore another necessary condition for the epiphany, is the unexpected nature of the performance, as articulated by Catherine:

I suppose it was the total emotional involvement and never knowing what to expect next. The element of surprise almost. And I will never forget when I was about six or seven, and the birthday treat was to watch a Spanish group of dancers and there was a dish of water in the middle of the stage and somebody bumped into it and it smashed (Corn Exchange, 14 February 2007).

If the Spanish dancers had performed their dance as they had planned, their “dramatic scripting” would “play the world backwards” (Goffman, 1974: 133). If Goffman is right, the dancers would have arranged their dance so that the future would be predictable, unlike real life where life is unpredictable and outcomes are left to fate or chance. However, despite all the dramatic scripting planned by the company, fate did play a part in the production along with the dancers leading to the dish being smashed and the water being spilled. The surprise was sufficient to lend an aura of magic to the production. Without this magic, which also occurred on a special, ceremonial occasion, Catherine’s birthday, Catherine would not have had the intention (Heidegger, 1925) towards theatre that includes the magic of surprise. Her motive (Schutz, 1967) to become a theatregoer is directed towards the unusual, or the foreign, as will be indicated in chapter eight, and can be directly linked back to this moment of epiphany. That theatregoers look for the



unexpected supports recent qualitative findings that people seek a richer experience in life by being surprised by something innovative (Arts Council, March 2008: 7).

The previous concept of magic connects with the unexpectedness, as indicated by Barbara:

I loved all the little tricks as children do, you know, the shock of people turning up in places I hadn't expected to see... (Corn Exchange Theatre, 14 February 2007).

Barbara's intention towards the drama includes one of shock; again, her motive in seeking out theatre in the future, for example productions by prisoners within high security prisons like Wormwood Scrubs, can be rooted in this epiphany. For some the unexpectedness is created by a use of a prop or scenery, as described by Jane:

... you just put a bit of white material on the floor and suddenly it's a trap door down to the earth, and they are just white tubes on canes with white material that folded up, folded out... (Corn Exchange Theatre, 14 February 2007).

Again, Jane's later attendance pattern at small-scale, avant-garde productions in arts centres can be related to her "wow" moment in just this kind of theatre, albeit as an adult rather than as a child. The environment of the theatre was a surprise to some participants who had previously held firm views of theatre. For Sandra, she had perceived theatre as "this big, really getting dressed up, an expensive night out" but when attending *Chicago*, had this epiphany about theatre:

I just remember um because I have worked in an office, all my life, Monday to Friday, nine to five, it's my job, and it just struck me that these people are up on stage and this is their job. This is their day job in the evenings, you

know, and weekends, and how hard they worked and they are just dancing around, and just giving it their all, and it was just so um strange to me, you know, just so different to what I had seen every day, so it was a great one to start with, definitely, because it was so in your face. And nice and loud and full of music. And I didn't know what to expect, I really didn't. And what the theatre was all about and musicals... (Corn Exchange, 14 February 2007).

Although not entirely analogous, the concept of the unexpected could be related to Barthes' concept of 'punctum', "an accident that pricks me" (Barthes, 1981: 27). It is a phenomenon that jolts a spectator into thinking about (in this case study, theatre) something in a different way, and therefore goes on to change the person's life as part of the epiphany. Sandra's intention towards theatre from this moment was for it to be "loud" and "in your face" with her motive for attending in the future mainly leading her to popular West End musical hits. Alone of the participants in this study, Sandra typifies the "big night out" attender who "really loves" the liveness and the visual spectacle, preferring to attend big hits and familiar shows for motivations of relaxation and fun (Osborne, Wheeler and Elliott, 1999: 16). The profile of this cluster tends to be female, under forty, not necessarily university educated, working, listening to rock and pop, and belonging to a work social group (*ibid*).

## 7.5 Excitement

The data from the reminiscences suggest that along with magic and the unexpected, excitement is an important condition for the epiphany to occur. This finding, as with the unexpected, discussed in the previous section, supports recent qualitative research into what people want in the arts (Arts Council, 2008: 7). It could be that the production itself was exciting, as in the case of Richard (Corn Exchange Theatre, 14 February 2007) who went to *West Side Story* and recalled

“we were in suspense the whole time... What was going to happen next?” This excitement is, according to some of the participants, linked to the two preceding factors, as illustrated by Kate who recalls both the unexpected nature of the children’s show, and the magic of the effects:

I had absolutely no idea what I was going to. You know, it was the first time. And er we sat in this utter darkness, and this story unfolded in front of me, and it was absolutely brilliant. Even now, I eeeeeh get the shivers thinking about it. Um and there’s this Tinkerbell, you know, and there was nobody there but there was this Tinkerbell [*laughter*] and where do they get this from? Um it was just so overwhelming. I mean that was really my time. ‘That’s it. I must go to the theatre.’ So, since then, I’ve just been devoted really. It’s the magic of it... the hook, yeah, I remember that scared me, absolutely terrified me, and um flying yeah the flying as well. It was the whole experience, it was just something out of this world... (Oxford Playhouse, 12 October 2006).

According to Barthes (1981: 19), excitement is a slighter factor in a person’s interest in an art form (he is describing a photograph) than a sense of adventure. Previous audience research indicated that young people enjoy “the excitement of a strong plot” (Crane, 1964: 30). However, this excitement could also be related to adventure because the excitement is caused sometimes by factors extraneous to the show, such as travelling in a coach with the class to the theatre for the first time (Geraldine, Oxford Playhouse, 1 June 2006), or going to the theatre independently from parents (Genevieve, Oxford Playhouse, 26 October 2006). It was not the show alone that was exciting for Sandra (Corn Exchange, 14 February 2007) – her achievement in being there was what caused her excitement when she recalls: “To me it was just ‘I’m going to the theatre. At last, I’m going to the theatre.’”

## 7.6 Relevance

Six participants experienced their epiphany because the production they attended had a particular relevance to them. With Geraldine the production brought the play into a connection with her lived experience:

... this was the first play that triggered off in me, Sheila Delaney's *A Taste of Honey*. And I come from the north of England, from near Bolton, and we saw *A Taste of Honey* at a small theatre in Salford... I think it was... fifty-eight... I saw it when I was about fourteen it was via school, a teacher, who started off a kind of theatre club, I suppose, and I went along, I suppose I was about fifteen, something like that and I was just completely bowled over by it... It was such an eye-opener. And I suppose because it dealt with ordinary people, in inverted commas, like I'd been doing Shakespeare and things like that at school but that was all about kings, and princes and dukes and here was this girl, unmarried, pregnant, you know, struggles in Salford, you know, and seeing it in Salford where the playwright came from. She was only young when she wrote it she was like a late teenager, I think and I would say and that was, that was the moment for me... (Oxford Playhouse, 1 June 2006).

Although many of the writers of the 1950s and 1960s were Socialist rather than Conservative in their politics, many of them looked "at the world from the standpoint of a low income" (Arden, 1961: 196) and were more inclined to be sympathetic towards the working classes. It is possible that because Delaney was writing about a world she knew intimately, this realness was able to create for Geraldine her "wow" moment in theatre, transforming a similar working class teenager into a theatregoer. Also, the realism of the production, alongside relevant subject matter makes the assertion that the "mock-up of life" where "at no time is the audience convinced that real life is going on up there" (Goffman, 1974: 136) both right and wrong. Geraldine knows *A Taste of Honey* is not real because it is an imitation of life, as conceptualised by Aristotle (1965) and Plato (1993). But for Geraldine the play speaks to her because it seems like her lived experience.

This relevance is the catalyst to provide the motive for her to carry on theatregoing.

It has already been noted how Maureen's formative theatregoing was based around Unity Theatre productions. It was her attendance at one of these plays that caused her epiphany, a production which made sense of the political world brought home by her Communist father:

... it was... *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist* that they did as a little play there and I was probably what seven or eight and found it very...it slotted in with everything. But it also justified all the emotion of seeing headlines, you know, which I can remember, you know, very clearly, the Spanish Civil War, and the work up to the war, and all these upheavals that were going on. And of course my father talking from a political point of view... which made me see that you could put on a stage very, very relevant emotions... (Oxford Playhouse 12 October 2006).

Maureen responded emotionally to the production because the subject matter and the staging were relevant to her life in London in the 1930s. Most of the connections were personal, and sufficient to create the epiphany. For Ophelia, it was the synthesis of a painful subject matter and the trauma of a similar lived experience within "real" life:

At the age of fifteen... That was at the Royal Court. And *The Deep Blue Sea* by Terence Rattigan. The trouble with that was that I was invited by a friend who still had to deal with her son who had tried to commit suicide, and because it was all about suicide, I was sort of sitting at the edge of my chair (Oxford Playhouse, 12 October 2006).

Ophelia indicates two factors common with other participants in creating the epiphany – relevance and excitement, because she was “sitting at the edge of my chair.” In a lighter vein, Priscilla (Oxford Playhouse, 12 October 2006) found that the stories like *Dick Whittington* coincided with the fairy tales with which she was brought up on at home, and therefore were relevant for her at a young age. Familiarity, this time with the text, is another form of relevance, according to the two participants whose turning point occurred whilst watching a play they had studied in depth at school. Gwilym (Oxford Playhouse, 1 June 2006), who related to *Hamlet* because he shared Hamlet’s youth, “was waiting for the one speech I did know. And it had almost gone past before I realised he was saying it” and was “completely absorbed in the characters and the relationships.” Audrey (Oxford Playhouse, 1 June 2006) already “loved” *Macbeth* prior to her teacher taking her class to the Aldwych to see the play with Michael Redgrave “sitting in there with all my friends around me and knowing it, having to learn chunks of it” beforehand.

### 7.7 The production itself

It is difficult to draw out commonalities based on the shows themselves that the participants attended whilst having their theatrical epiphany. Nine of the participants, as young children, attended productions aimed at children such as pantomimes, fairy tales and in one case, the film of *The Thief of Baghdad*, a fantasy with a fairy tale setting. Three participants, as teenagers, went to Shakespeare productions, at prestigious venues – Stratford, The Old Vic and The Aldwych. Eight participants went to straight drama ranging from contemporary to classic plays. Of these, a couple were performed by amateur dramatic companies. Three participants who all had their epiphany as an adult, attended small-scale, avant garde productions; the remaining eight participants attended either a musical, a dance, or in one case, an opera, all in large-scale venues. It would seem from the data that the “wow” factor can occur at any kind of performance.

## 7.8 Conclusion

There were other factors related by participants that helped create their individual theatrical epiphany. These include group social activity, the fame or the iconic nature of the production, a feeling of superiority having attended the production, freedom and independence in attending theatre without parents or school, the shared experience with other audience members, the fact that the production stayed in the memory, being part of the experience, dressing up to attend the show, and the liveness of the show.

However, the data overwhelmingly suggest that individuals are encouraged to go to the theatre by a “familiar” person who is familiar to the theatrical, magical world. The familiar makes an important intervention in their lives that affects their future life trajectory. Once individuals experience their theatrical epiphany, they relate to, and thereafter seek, the inherent magic, unexpectedness, and excitement of a theatrical production. They have a receptivity to the theatrical magic from their previous playing at theatre, where they played at pretence and make-believe, and their absorption of fairy tales, and magical connotations of religion (see chapter six). It could be that the people who undergo a theatrical epiphany, when there is a conjunction between the elements of the show, and the elements of their play, have an enhanced level of competence. At this time, they have a “mastery” of the “set of instruments” (Bourdieu, 1968: 220 – 221) appropriate for the appreciation of the production. The effects of a production which causes an epiphany last a lifetime. The production is likely to be relevant to them, speaking to them in some way that is appropriate for their age or life stage. These factors create the new theatregoer’s intention (Heidegger, 1925) towards theatre productions. The presence of magic, unexpectedness, excitement and/or relevance in turn leads the newly self-identified theatregoer (Giddens, 1991a) to have a motive (Schutz, 1967) to attend further productions. Having examined the past lived experiences of the participants in their youth, and up to their epiphany,

the next two chapters indicate how a theatregoer remains motivated over a lifetime.



## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **THE MAIN ATTRACTION: MOTIVATION TO ATTEND AS ADULTS**

#### **8 Introduction**

This chapter uses two elements of Giele and Elder's (1998) model - linked lives and human agency to discuss how long-term, regular theatregoers are motivated to attend once they have had their theatrical epiphany and have assumed their identity (Giddens, 1991b: 211) as theatregoers. The emphasis here is to discover the similarities that people have in common, or to borrow the name of a touring theatre company, the Shared Experience. Participants from different backgrounds will have experienced similar theatrical events, but will have reacted in subtly different ways to them. The uncovering of some of the links that emerged during the reminiscence workshops from the participants gives a fresh perspective on theatregoing motivation throughout the life course.

The element of human agency analysed in this chapter relates to the theatregoing goals of the participants. Theatregoers, as people, incorporate a "quest for self-identity" (Giddens, 1991b: 211) where they can be self-fulfilled or can self-actualise by their theatregoing. The chapter helps answer the question why the participants carried on with their theatregoing. Because people have "the capability to have done otherwise" (Giddens and Pierson, 1998: 78), their choices are not determined by the structure of society, or by their economic or social heritage. The motivations that link the lives of the participants, and form part of their self-actualising desires are investigated in this chapter.

Unlike many of the factors discussed in the literature in chapters two and three which form a person's motivation to go to the theatre, two factors in particular emerge from the reminiscence workshops as significant motivators for long-term, regular theatregoers. These motivators, which link the lives of the majority of the

participants, are Shakespeare, and religious drama. These form the first two sections of the chapter, followed by the magic of the real, participation, holidays, choice of production, and other motivating factors.

## 8.1 William Shakespeare

One thread above all weaves its way through all four groups, and almost every workshop: William Shakespeare. Above all other playwrights, he stands out pre-eminent amongst all four groups for discussion. Shakespeare was a genius akin to being a magician (Bate, 1997: 180) and a religious icon (*ibid*: 251 – 293). Giddens has identified life as a quest for self-identity (Giddens, 1991b: 211) whilst Maguire (2007) has suggested that Shakespeare enables theatregoers, or readers to help them identify who they are, better. Shakespeare, above all other writers, enables someone to “see better” (Maguire, 2007: 143). This ability to see better has its magical connotations; by interacting with the make-believe, or the imagination inherent in Shakespeare’s plays, audiences can change the way they see others, and themselves. Shakespeare makes this clear in plays such as *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* where characters learn to “see better” having being administered with some fairy “love juice” from the pansy. The pansy derives its meaning from the French “pensée”, meaning “imagination” or “vision” (*ibid*). As chapters six and seven have indicated, participants responded to the magic and religious aspects of theatre, and engaged when young in the play world of the imagination.

Only Phil, Sandra and Jane reject Shakespeare as something boring and not for them, but they nevertheless realise his importance as a missing element in their lives. The overwhelming majority of these long-term, regular theatregoers view Shakespeare as an essential part of their cultural lives. Shakespeare appears to have interfaced with the participants from schooldays onwards in many ways. Margaret’s reminiscence indicates the magical power of Shakespeare to transform

for her the nature of the day. She went to the Royal Shakespeare Company's *Macbeth* in a small, intimate theatre:

They did that in the Judi Dench – Ian McKellen *Macbeth* too. They sat around in a circle. So I don't know whether that links, you know, the audience and the actors into one body, when you are all in the same circle... Well, I remember going out of that production, and it was a matinee, and to find that the sun was shining and ordinary people were going around [*laughter*] really weird. And I actually felt such a relief at being out of the evil atmosphere. I didn't actually embrace the passers-by but I felt like ordinary people to say 'oh, you're all right, you're normal, nor are you about to be murdered'. You know, and it was so very, very powerful (Oxford Playhouse, 12 October 2006).

Margaret's story attests to the hypnotic power of the play, and how, as related in chapter two, theatregoers are taken to another world, inside another frame (Goffman, 1974) of the imagination and make-believe. This journey, in this case to the dark side of pretence, begins at school, when theatregoers first interface with Shakespeare. It is also the case that Shakespeare writes a great deal about magic in his plays, not least in *Macbeth*, thereby strengthening the argument that both Shakespeare and magic are conditions necessary for long-term, regular theatregoing.

Whilst chapter six outlines how important school is towards the creation of a theatregoer, it did not identify every aspect of drama at school. The data suggest that life-long, regular theatregoers are inducted to Shakespeare at school, either by acting at school, studying the plays at school, or going on school trips to see Shakespeare. The reminiscences so powerfully reflect the importance of Shakespeare as a shared experience that an interest in the playwright's work appears to be a major component of becoming a life-long theatregoer. Robin acted in *As You Like It* as a forester, sharpening spears in the forest, and being told off for leaving shavings all over the stage (Oxford Playhouse, 1 June 2006). Ophelia acted with her school in school competitions such as the Kent Festival, performing Shakespeare still dressed in her school uniform and made her debut

“as a rather plump Touchstone in *As You Like It*.” (Oxford Playhouse, 19 October 2006). Margaret also took part in school competitions acting in Shakespeare plays but it was when she produced the deposition scene in *Richard II* that she “learned more about Shakespeare at that point” (*ibid*). Kate performed as Titania in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* when she was ten, arguing with a teacher about what she had to wear, and having to kiss another girl, playing Bottom “and that was the bit I was really terrified of it went off all right so that was fine” (*ibid*). With her school, Genevieve went to the Dragon School to see their schoolboy production of *Romeo and Juliet* where “one of the best Jessicas I’ve ever seen was a Dragon School boy” (*ibid*). Genevieve also acted in Shakespeare plays out of school with her cousins. Anne read Brutus in *Julius Caesar* where she was affected by “the power you get from the words which you thought you couldn’t understand” indicating how Shakespeare was suddenly accessible to a country girl from a poor background (*ibid*). Helen played Portia in *The Merchant of Venice* where she “was so nervous about going onto the stage” (Pegasus, 21 February). Diana knew a third of *Twelfth Night* by heart after studying and acting it at school, whilst Richard recalled that:

We did Shakespeare at the school um and it was an all-male school I went to so the cast was all-male just as it was in Shakespeare’s day. Um and the younger boys whose voices hadn’t broken took the female parts and the older boys took the male parts (Corn Exchange, 28 February 2007).

Catherine played Portia in *The Merchant of Venice* and reminisced also about *Romeo and Juliet*:

We acted out, in our case, all-girl casts, um you know, the balcony in *Romeo and Juliet*, people were standing on the top of the classroom cupboard and that sort of thing but that was part of the English syllabus (Corn Exchange, 28 February 2007).

Shakespeare has been accessible as Margaret describes: “as an Oxford child there was talk about the theatre going on at school. We did producing Shakespeare, we did acting in Shakespeare, we did Shakespeare texts” (Oxford Playhouse, 12 October 2006). Participants’ attendance at Shakespeare productions at school is also discussed in chapter six in relation to the importance of school to theatregoing. Most participants went on school trips to theatre, often associated with their exams. Jane was a theatregoer at the Open Air in Regents Park. June stayed overnight at a youth hostel with her class for *As You Like It*, a production in which, had she have known at the time, she probably saw Robin act.

Shakespeare was also made accessible by films such as Olivier’s *Henry V* which Maureen recalls seeing alongside newsreel about the concentration camps; it was a film which aimed at interesting and enthralling its audiences in Technicolor (Clayton Hutton, nd : 44). Shakespeare was also studied and acted at university by eight participants; Margaret created costumes and sets, once for a Magdalen College production of *Measure For Measure* where Dudley Moore played the Provost. Priscilla, who read English at Oxford, saw “as many stage versions of Shakespeare as I could” (Oxford Playhouse, 2 November 2006). The influence of Shakespeare in linking lives is perhaps deepest in those participants who studied Shakespeare at university, such as Priscilla, who recalls:

One was very interested in having studied plays and very much concentrated in academic study, in seeing them um actually performed in a theatre by professionals as distinct from student productions here. Seeing the great names in Shakespeare was very exciting. Going in the fifties I saw um John Gielgud and Peggy Ashcroft in *Hamlet* which came to the New Theatre and so on. There was quite a lot of touring theatre at that time (Oxford Playhouse, 2 November 2006).

The proximity and ease of access of Stratford to Oxford and Newbury has meant that Shakespeare plays have been seen regularly by participants since leaving school. Shakespeare productions staged in Newbury, especially by Edward Hall’s Propeller company at the Watermill Theatre, were a topic for conversation at the

Corn Exchange reminiscence workshops, whilst Oxford Colleges, Oxford Theatre Guild, Creation Theatre Company, New Theatre tours and Stratford were prominent for Shakespeare in Oxford. Reminiscences were often about some of Britain's greatest Shakespearean actors whom participants saw at Stratford, London or the New Theatre. Pat, whilst working as a traffic warden, reminisced about seeing a street performance of *Romeo and Juliet* in Summertown, indicating how Shakespeare is pervasive, occurring in unexpected locations. This show had:

a gang of youngsters, teenagers, and they had, you know, a guy on keyboards, guitar and they were singing and dancing in the front of Marks, and that was quite a nice bit of entertainment while I was working up there. And people were buying tickets, you know, and it was quite nice because it was, it was done in a rap, but a rap which you could understand what was going on, not guns and nastiness. You know, it was quite good (Pegasus Theatre, 28 March, 2007).

Geraldine recalls a particular Hamlet:

And I've got two *Hamlets* that are kind of my, not favourite ones, but which I feel were the best *Hamlets* I saw. And one of them, was Mark Rylance up at Stratford, about ten years ago, I don't know exactly where, and the most extraordinary thing to me was he managed to do all those famous speeches as if he *was* just thinking them up. As if he really was this young man and how can I express my feelings? And I've never seen any other actor do it quite like that (Oxford Playhouse, 1 June 2006)

What Geraldine also highlights here is another trait of long-term theatregoers: the collection of different productions of the same play. The motivation to compare and contrast overcomes the difficulty to fall for the "willing suspension of disbelief" (Coleridge, 1817), a potentially negative aspect of attending the same play again discussed in chapter two. Geraldine's repeated attendance at *Hamlet* enables her to gain in cultural capital regarding this play, Shakespeare, the performers, directors and so on, until she becomes a connoisseur (see chapter two). As people get older, they get to see the same Shakespeare play from

different subject positions, (Maguire, 2008), having experienced different life roles. Geraldine confirms her motivation for repeated attendance of the same play saying: “I like to see the different interpretations” (Oxford Playhouse, 1 June 2006). Geraldine returned to this subject, expanding her motivation for attendance, in a later reminiscence workshop:

If I go and see a Shakespearean tragedy, I may have seen *King Lear* for umpteen times, but I will still be reduced to tears and be quite agonised by Cordelia’s death. I’m horrified by the gouging out of the eyes and so on. So it still works time after time... (Oxford Playhouse, 23 June 2006).

This collecting trait also enables theatregoers to discuss their collections with like-minded people, with the discussions deepening the links between the theatregoers. An illustration of this is where Robin has joined Geraldine to talk about his Hamlets:

My worst *Hamlet* was when we [*laughs*] unfortunately hadn’t much money and we were up in the gods at Stratford and they did *Hamlet* four hours without an interval... David Warner. The one with a long scarf in it. That famous *Hamlet*... It was just the sheer uncomfortable... the gallery in those days was pretty awful. It was sort of like benches with no arms. And I was longing for a break. But apparently, I mean I’ve read since, it was a very good *Hamlet* (Oxford Playhouse, 1 June 2006).

The importance of Shakespeare is strengthened by the participants’ understanding of the rituals linked to the myths relating to Shakespeare. Rituals were discussed in chapter three, as a concept relating to religion and magic; perhaps the most pervasive myth in Shakespeare relates to the magic within *Macbeth*: that it brings bad luck. Accordingly, the play is ritually referred to as “the Scottish play” within theatres, and since workshops took place within theatrical environments, participants did their best, without prompting, to follow this ritual. Robin provided a stronger motivation for this ritual:

I remember Sir Barry Jackson and the company and I played in this play, um, the son of Banquo, I think. And it was a catastrophic thing for me. When I fled, I, I fled the wrong way, and fell into the orchestra pit; and all sort of things like that. It's always been tremendous bad luck (Oxford Playhouse, 1 June 2006).

In chapter five it was found that the most common profession within the participants was education; it was in schools and colleges that these participants discussed Shakespeare and directed students in Shakespeare plays. If Shakespeare is viewed as foremost in the canon of theatre plays, this could be conceptualised as a formal 'consecration' of Shakespeare into becoming an orthodox form of literary worship (Bourdieu, 1985: 122), a concept that long-term theatregoers with their receptivity to magic and religion, are able to adopt.

In section 8.4 participation in amateur dramatics is discussed because acting or directing in Shakespeare was a topic for reminiscence. Gwilym reminisced how Shakespeare was satirised into pantomimes for the Thame Players, whilst Henry recalled how Shakespeare formed part of his naval training:

I was at Greenwich, the Royal Naval College Greenwich um at the time when the Navy began its annual drama competition and we were very fortunate there because we had a um an ex-West End actor as one of our English masters and he um produced the fifth act of *A Midsummer Night's Act* as a competition piece, and won the show. I was one of the Royal Marines just standing around being a Royal Marine. But um it was all done in naval dress with the count as an admiral of course, his staff gathered around him and the daughters, um the play within the play was really manned by the ship's company. A real naval event! We won the competition... (Oxford Playhouse, 19 October 2006).

This reminiscence indicates the ubiquity of Shakespeare in so many areas of theatregoers' lives. Pegasus participants, who are the most avant garde of the groups interfaced with more adventurous Shakespeare productions – Danielle attended *Othello* which was performed in an art gallery, and enthused about Kneehigh Theatre's revisionist version of *Cymbeline*. The Oxford Playhouse



participants, particularly Robin and Audrey, were more likely to go to Shakespeare productions by foreign companies; Genevieve attended a Hungarian production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Oxford Playhouse which she criticised for excessive nudity amongst the female characters and Margaret saw Ninagawa's Japanese *King Lear*.

One particular production that exemplifies the links between participants is the Royal Shakespeare Company's *The Taming of the Shrew*, recalled by Geraldine but also seen by Audrey and Robin in the same group:

The funniest thing I remember about a fancy set, was at Stratford several years ago. I took a school party with me. We were up in the circle and I was very surprised when I saw an extremely elaborate set. It was *Taming of the Shrew*. And it was piles of baskets of fruit, it was a Mediterranean sort of look. And then it was all like houses that looked like flats all along and I sat there thinking oh this is strange. Stratford hasn't been doing things like this. It's been pretty bare stage, so I thought it was funny and then minute, I mean at the time you're asked not to say anything about it if you knew what was happening. It was like a trick start. There was like a drunk came down from the back of the circle, moved right to the front, it was Christopher Sly, but of course, oh, everybody was terribly worried about this chap [laughter] and he was swaying about, shouting and yelling. Then two like ushers came in, or whatever you call them, tried to bundle him out, then he rushed downstairs, rushed onto the stage into the middle of all this elaborate stuff. This of course was just the way of it starting with the Christopher Sly thing. And then all these flats fell down on top and like the old silent films where they stand there, and the windows fall over you, and all the figs rolled down out of the baskets into the audience, and of course, that was all shifted away and we started with hardly anything there. But it worked brilliantly (Oxford Playhouse, 1 June, 2006).

The same production was recalled by Anne, from a different group, who in her reminiscence, assumes that others have seen the same production as, indeed, Margaret had. Anne highlights its attraction to her children as a form of pantomime:

... we did take our children, very bravely, to Stratford to see *The Taming of the Shrew* in about the eighties. I don't know if anyone saw it? And it was a Boxing Day and we all sat in a row, and we thought well, they're not going to like this, they were about that age, and suddenly er, you probably saw this one, someone in the um downstairs started arguing with the usherette as the lights had gone down, and we were as naïve as they were, you know, we thought 'it's terrible, what are the children going to do?' And this man got on stage and pulled all these, all the drapes down, everything, the set that was set, came down, and he turned out to be Christopher Sly... And the children all remember this, and I thought this was better than a pantomime... And then a motor bike came on board, you know, so it's all those sort of things that were breaking the conventions then (Oxford Playhouse, 16 November 2006).

## 8.2 Religious drama

The second thread that weaves through the reminiscence workshops was first discussed in chapters six and seven when discussing the importance of religion in the early lives of the participants. Religious plays emerge as a theme in their own right, as a shared experience. Two religious plays were prominent in reminiscences; the first was a topic for the second Oxford Playhouse group and is Christopher Fry's play *The Sleep of Prisoners*. Priscilla, as has been previously stated, is an observant Catholic recalls the production in Bristol:

When I was in Bristol I saw *A Sleep For Prisoners*... in a bombed church in Bond Street. Because Bristol had been the most fabulous and beautiful city, I believe, I only saw it after the bombing, it was absolutely terrifying. The shells of all these Hawksmoor churches and they chose one of them, because he wrote it to be in a real church, so I remember seeing that um, and extremely at very, very... all these four very four young men (Oxford Playhouse, 2 November 2006).

The play was relevant because of its themes, and location; it spoke to the post-war generation, and is a genuinely shared experience that other generations could not feel. Margaret had attended the same production, in Oxford, at St Mary's, which

was the venue for the world premiere (Stanford, 1952) whilst Maureen went to the play in a church behind Piccadilly, in London:

it must have been Piccadilly and Carnaby Street. I can't sort of remember exactly where, I just remember I had made a skirt, a mustard-yellow dot, really good, and I went along and queued and hooked it and split it, you know, you couldn't replace them then... And it linked to me because in 1939 when I was evacuated to North Wales, a young man called George Ballantyne came to visit his aunt and I was eight or nine and remembered this, even then he was a youngish man, he was probably seventeen or eighteen, wasn't he? After that I didn't see him and after the war I went back to visit the woman I was evacuated with and I remembered seven years later, I said to them, where's George Ballantyne? He'd died on the Burma Road. And these sorts of plays bring out this feeling even when you're young that even people as young as you have lost their life, and their future, isn't it? (Oxford Playhouse, 2 November 2006).

For these participants, the play spoke to them because of their remembrance of the Second World War, but that the plays were designed to take place in churches, is also relevant. It was the case that from the late 1940s to the early 1950s, British religious playwrights were popular (Findlater, 1952, Shellard, 2000, Billington, 2007). These playwrights believed that "theatre is a ritual, a consecrated form of propaganda for the suffering of Christ... and going to the play has a therapeutic value and a religious significance" (Findlater, 1952: 198). For Priscilla, a regular churchgoer (Oxford Playhouse, 26 October 2006) "it's a great loss if you don't have that communion" and Margaret (Oxford Playhouse, 16 November 2006), who says about repression "it makes... some theatre the keeper of the sacred flame", their interest in religious theatre was a reflection of both the dominant form of high quality theatre, and of the post-war zeitgeist. Their views are also in accordance with some participants from the Arts Council's *The Arts Debate* which indicates that the arts fulfil a spiritual need (Keaney *et al*, 2007: 36).

The second example of lives linked by a religious play is the Medieval Mystery and Passion play. Participants relate to these plays in a number of ways; as a teacher, Geraldine refers to the Mysteries academically:

... and that's why the Mystery Plays ended up outside because at first, stupidly, the Church threw them out when they thought they were irreverent and then they suddenly began to realise and then welcome them back again. So that why you get Passion Plays in churches again but you also have The Mysteries outside (Oxford Playhouse, 30 June 2006).

The plays for Geraldine are part of her life as an English teacher; her desire to contextualise the plays contrasts with the experiences of having seen the plays themselves. Sheila, Gwilym and Margaret reminisced about the National Theatre production of the Mysteries with Margaret recalling that:

The most exciting promenade thing I ever saw was the *Mystery Plays*... That was amazingly moving. Because the Disciples, all the time you saw the Disciples as part of everybody, and um the Virgin Mary's funeral was extremely moving. And the last judgement was absolutely staggering. Jesus was sitting up on a great sort of silver wheel taking up the whole sky and what was very terrifying was the separation of getting the sheep from the goats... I think that was one of the most wonderful things I have ever seen... It started in complete darkness and you could hear somebody laughing. Like somebody who is having a really bright idea... And God's bright idea was to create the world, you know, and when Adam and Eve arrived they looked around thoroughly terrified because they were all grown up into the world, you know... And God kept having to adjust his plans, didn't he? (Oxford Playhouse, 23 November 2006).

This production therefore created a feeling of excitement, amazement, and wonder, was emotionally moving, and contains an element of the unexpected; these are all elements identified as motivators for theatregoers when young, in chapters six and seven and they are still relevant as theatregoers age. In addition Margaret's inherent knowledge of the Old Testament emerges from her descriptions. Priscilla, and Anne went to the Royal Shakespeare Company's *Mystery Plays*, at the Swan, in Stratford. Anne also responds with an inherent knowledge of the Old Testament:

... Adam and Eve. And God. God was really fed up, you know, Adam and Eve, he's given them everything and look at them! And he sort of went off,

fed up with the whole thing and the Eve, she was actually very beautiful, a coloured girl [*sic*], very sinuous, I can't remember if she actually had anything on, but she gave the impression that she hadn't (Oxford Playhouse, 23 November 2006).

Whilst these shared experiences cannot be comprehensive without a full check on every play a participant has seen over a lifetime, the data indicate that participants with an interest in religion, and theatre, would be attracted to a theatre for a religious play. Newbury participants have more local outlets for similar productions. Jane "did" the Aldermaston Mystery Play, recalling:

I wouldn't need to go again. I wanted to go the once, and I enjoyed the singing and the acting was all right, but once was enough... People from the village... in the little church which is in the grounds of Aldermaston Manor. They do it every year. I think they have done it for years and years and years (Corn Exchange, 19 March 2007).

Aldermaston is a village not far from Newbury. And attending this mystery play indicates another linking experience for regular theatregoers because supporting a local event emerges as a common factor in the behaviour of every participant in each group, a finding that supports Walker, Scott-Melnyk and Sherwood (2002: 38) in their study of American theatregoers. Jane is aware of the historical significance of the production, seemingly from her reminiscence, something a theatregoer attends only once in life. A larger-scale mystery play, in York, attended by three participants, emerges from the reminiscences as another significant linked experience. Catherine recalls her experience of the York Mystery Play:

I have to admit that I went under duress. I hadn't been that excited about going. I wasn't rampantly Christian at the time but the whole feeling in the city of York, there were Morris dancers, there were people in medieval dress selling things, playing medieval instruments, and I don't know, it was in a field somewhere... It certainly wasn't far from the town centre and it was in ramped wooden seating that we had taken cushions and stuff and once it got going, it was just spellbinding. It was kind of, pulled in all the things I could

remember from childhood about nativity plays, cos it goes from the birth of Christ through his life and it was carefully timed so that the actual crucifixion happened with the setting of the sun on the day that we were there. So they jiggle things a bit you know, depending on the weather, and what's happening and it was just a very, very moving experience (Corn Exchange, 19 March 2007).

Catherine's description of her experience recalls key themes discussed in chapters six and seven: the spellbinding magic of the production initiating memories of theatre in her childhood regarding nativity plays and her now-recalled Christian upbringing. Catherine also points to the collision of the real – the setting of the sun, the weather, the field, and the pretend – the medieval dress, the crucifixion – causing the performance to be ultimately moving. Danielle describes below her motivation to attend the York Mystery Plays in terms of undertaking a pilgrimage, itself a religious concept for a religious play, fulfilling a long-standing dream when she went to York in the late eighties:

One that comes to my mind are the York Mystery plays which are performed against, set in the ruins of the old abbey in York. And they have one professional actor and the rest are members of the community... They have them once every four years. And I caught it... And I saw it in the late eighties. And so it starts in daylight and then ends in darkness and so you have that drama of the real elements. And the local community acting... So it was quite long, and there was a good chunk in daylight and in dark and we had a fantastic sunset against the ruins of the abbey and the drama of it all and the fact that there were ordinary people as the crowd thronging as well as the people who were professional... it's a tradition that's been going for centuries... what took me to the York Mystery Plays was that I had studied it at university in South Africa and ever since I studied it in South Africa I had this kind of yearning to see it for real... When I was in England, it was a pilgrimage to get to there to see it having studied it before so yeah, it was a pilgrimage for me... I was doing a BA with English and it was part of my English degree and yeah, it was a pilgrimage to get to York at the right place and time, and because they only have, it's a cycle and it's only every four years, and the fact that I was in England at the right time was hugely fortuitous to get there... (Pegasus, 7 March, 28 March 2007).

Like Catherine, the merging of reality with the daylight and darkness, the setting of the ruins, and the ordinariness of the crowd, with the production made the occasion special for her. In addition, factors unique to Danielle emerge from her reminiscence – her current role in arts development causes her to pick out the community element to the drama. Her university education enables her to understand and appreciate the play at a deeper level, reinforcing her high level of cultural capital. Ted, a Church of England attender, also travelled to the York Mystery plays, part of the York Festival, in the early seventies but recalls the hedonism of the occasion rather than the pilgrimage described by Danielle:

I remember my friend and I, it was getting a bit late, and in those days the pubs closed at a certain time, [*laughs loudly*] so we missed the Last Judgement in getting in our beer! (Pegasus, 7 March 2007).

The interest and upbringing in religion in youth has carried on throughout the participants' lives. The data suggest that the drama implicit in religion is a factor in attending such plays, as Priscilla suggests:

But there's a drama in regard to religion. Tremendously dramatic. I am a Catholic too (Oxford Playhouse, 19 October 2006).

The data suggest that having a religious and theatrical youth affects the way these theatregoers perceive theatre when older; Gwilym, who, as has been seen in chapter six, attended the St Paul's amateur dramatics club in Letchworth, conceptualises theatre in religious terms: for him, theatre is like a congregation:

It was like people who have the Church, you know. You go along to a group of people who speak the same language. They're very cliquey these

groups. You find a clique you can join into. Yeah, I like the society of these people (Oxford Playhouse, 15 June 2006).

In chapter two, the connection in the literature was made between theatre and ritual. Every participant spoke in awed terms about a well-known performer, director, designer or choreographer. The role of the theatre as a place for worship is highlighted by Robin, who had a working relationship with the artistic director of the Birmingham Rep having been an audience member prior to his subsequent engagement as a juvenile actor:

But um Barry Jackson really was my idol of those days. I just worshipped the ground he trod on (Oxford Playhouse, 15 June 2006).

This reverence for theatre where inspirational artists are conceptualised as idols to be worshipped creates a theatre which almost becomes a holy writ. The artists whose aim is to break the frame (see section 3.6.3) and make it hard for audiences to maintain their ‘willing suspension of disbelief’ are conceptualised as iconoclasts by Priscilla, who likens these artists from the sixties to anti-religious bigots:

... as part of the sixties, the whole, there was a huge movement which I felt was um adolescence where the huge desire was, whether it was iconoclasm, er to smash icons, to get at the world which they felt had held them down, and so on, I felt there was an enormous amount of anarchic iconoclasm, which went through all sorts of life, including theatre (Oxford Playhouse, 9 December 2006).

Priscilla emerges from the reminiscences as a conservative in her theatregoing tastes, a position not out of tune with her deep Catholic beliefs. As long-standing,



regular theatregoers, the emergence of the relevance of religion as a motivating factor supports Ostrower (2005: 7) whose findings indicate that “those who attend cultural events more frequently tend to be more involved in social, religious, and civic activities”. Whilst Walker, Scott-Melnyk and Sherwood (2002: 42 - 43) suggest people are more likely to attend community centers such as churches to participate in the arts, frequent attenders do not attend for “social or religious commitment” reasons. Equally in this study, the majority of participants in this study may have a religious background and an engagement with drama in a religious context, but that religious context is secondary to the theatre production itself. Walker, Scott-Melnyk and Sherwood’s findings reflect the communities where the research took place, namely Kansas City, the rural Humboldt County, California and three suburbs in Silicon Valley, California where access to professional venues would be limited, and churches abound.

Finally, religion and theatricality can occur at events that Kershaw (2007: 214) calls ‘a spectacle of domination’. Robin found such a spectacle when watching the Coronation:

it was a tremendously theatrical experience, these huge services at Westminster Abbey (Oxford Playhouse, 30 June 2006).

### 8.3 The magic of the real

The data in the previous section relating to the York Mystery Plays suggest that when the realness of a theatregoer’s everyday world coincides with the make-believe of the theatre, mature theatregoers’ intention towards theatre again is magical. This is a feeling supported by Stafford-Clark (2007: 245) when in his production of *Macbeth* in Brecon, two RAF Harriers flew over during the climactic battle scene creating a “fitting salute to a magical evening”. Participants

also spoke of similar magical events. The evening or night is an especially magical time because of sunset (Mauss, 1972: 56). This coming-together of the real and the unreal links twenty-one of the participants. Sometimes the production picks up upon magical imagery already inherent in the play, a play discussed in section 8.1 as one of Shakespeare's most magical, as recalled by Priscilla:

I do remember we went to see a simply wonderful production of his in The Grove, at Magdalen during the war of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* where Hippolita and Theseus rode into the Grove on horseback. And the fairies, Oberon's and Titania's fairies were dressed in green and red respectively and had little matching lights. Although they looked so sweet it was actually very frightening. They came in hostile ranks on either side to back up their master and mistress and they were Christ Church I think and New College (Oxford Playhouse, 26 October 2006).

Outdoor performances, or those within Oxford colleges' gardens are a shared experience that links fifteen of the Oxford Playhouse and Pegasus participants, articulated by Margaret (Oxford Playhouse, 9 November 2006) as "there's something about outdoor experiences, with the light changing which have a magic, don't they? It can be a very Oxford thing too" which is also shared by two of the Corn Exchange participants. Sometimes the magic of the outdoors is combined in the shared experience of a religious production, as with the York Mystery Plays related in the previous section by Danielle for whom dusk falling was an integral aspect of the magic, and by Maureen, who recalls the 'wonder' of another Oxford college production, again with a religious theme:

... the Miracle Play. There was one at New College which is one of those whole memories, you know, of a summer evening. I don't know if it was the creation of the world or whether it was the beginning but when the beginning happened we sat and it was just dusk and suddenly tumblers began to come across the lawn, and they were rolling the world, and they rolled this world across the grass, and up on to the stage. It was a wonderful evening. And that was in New College gardens, I'm sure" (Oxford Playhouse, 23 November 2006).

The aspect of fantasy created by the Worcester College lake in a production was also recalled by Anne:

And that lovely production in um Worcester, is it, right down the bottom, here with the lake? And er Caliban suddenly appeared out of the lake because they had made a little chamber for him to hide in and the people ran across what looked like lily pads and they're meant to be rafts and things. Fantastic. Better than in any theatre I think (Oxford Playhouse, 9 November 2006).

There was a parallel shared experience evoking wonder, in the same location, as Ted reminisced about an:

... open-air production again in the late sixties. It was the Oxford Theatre Guild doing um *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* in Worcester College Gardens. They used the lake there. I can't remember what happens but various people came across the lake in boats and there were Turkish dancing girls and... with diaphanous costumes, yes. Um that was memorable... it was partly the setting, it was the twilight setting. I mean, you don't associate Molière with open-air productions, really do you. Shakespeare yes, but not Molière but this worked wonderfully (Pegasus Theatre, 7 March 2007).

The site-specific nature of outdoor productions enables 'magical' effects to be created, causing rational belief to be questioned as in the following student production recalled by Margaret:

There was a production of er Milton's *Samson Agonistes* which wasn't a thing that was often advertised and it was in the quadrangle of All Souls and for, all the temple wall was pulled down by Samson in the interval as it were and it was in the early days of magnified sound, amplified sound and I was sitting in the very back row of these sort of scaffolding seating at the top so I had all the towers of Oxford around me and there was this tremendous noise and you couldn't help looking round and thinking 'god, you know, it's all falling down'. It was the most wonderful production. That will stay in my mind forever (Oxford Playhouse, 26 October 2006).

Again, this production combines a religious theme with the outdoors, in a location which is transformed into a magical space; the use of early technology helped create a unique event which was able to stay in the memory. From analysing emotive or intellectual themes that link participants, the next section discusses a motivational factor that emerges from the reminiscence workshops as both a linked experience, and a facet of human agency.

#### 8.4 Participation

Twenty-four of the participants have participated in theatre in some form. There is a “considerable crossover” between people who attend arts performances and participate in the arts through joining groups (Skelton *et al*, 2002: 25, Fenn *et al*, 2004: 43). The literature suggest that the percentage of the UK population that attends plays regularly is identical to that which participates in performing or rehearsing a play at least once a year - about 2%; few people regularly run arts events or perform in plays (*ibid*: 26). Participation, like regular attendance, is a minority activity; only 1% of Australians participate in drama (Constantoura, 2000a: 206), 5% in New Zealand (Keate, 2000: 35), and 0.6% perform in musical drama, with 1.4% performing in straight plays in the US (Bradshaw and Nichols, 2004: 32 – 33). The most active people in the arts are motivated primarily to participate in the arts because they want to put something back into their communities (Creative Research, 2007: 45).

From the first Oxford Playhouse group, Robin and Audrey managed outreach drama groups for working class children in the East End of London in the 1960s. Geraldine has helped out with an amateur dramatic society in Abingdon and Gwilym has been involved in the Thame Players, amongst other groups. In addition, Gwilym is part of a playwriting group based at the Oxford Playhouse. Gwilym and Sheila both act as volunteer ushers at arts events. From the second Playhouse group, Margaret and Priscilla used to manage the Friends of the

Playhouse, which became the Oxford Theatre Club. Anne has been heavily involved in the Oxford Theatre Guild, and was involved in adjudicating rural theatre competitions outside Oxford. Kate helped out with her father-in-law's amateur dramatic group. Ophelia acted in amateur dramatics in London, and Maureen and Anne became active members of Peace movements, organisations which promote peace-related arts activities. Every member of the Pegasus group has been a member of an amateur dramatic organisation or has worked in a voluntary capacity. Pat, Ted and Janet are former members of the Oxford Youth Theatre. Helen designed sets for Oxford Youth Theatre. Danielle is a trustee of the Oxfordshire Touring Theatre Company and the Oxford Literary Festival Trust and has worked for other arts organisations. From the Corn Exchange group, Phil, Rachel and Richard have all acted, directed or created sets for amateur groups. Catherine and Rachel have been ushers and worked in front of house at local theatres. Sandra organised outings for her work to the theatre and Jane has been prominent in the campaign to build Newbury's multi-screen cinema.

It appears to be the case that regular, long-term theatregoers are involved in arts-related organisations, with amateur dramatics prominent as an outlet for performance, technical and back stage creativity, and writing or directing. These findings also support Hill Strategies Research Inc (2003: 5) which indicates that volunteers in the arts are predominantly female, well-educated, older, earning within the highest income bracket and employed: a profile that, apart from high income levels, reflects the participants in this study. This is also the profile that, because of their commitment to the arts, donates most to the arts (Ostrower, 2005a: 5). Geraldine donated to the Oxford Playhouse, and June to the Corn Exchange so that their deceased husbands, both avid theatregoers, would be commemorated by a brass plaque on the back of a stalls seat. Since twenty-four of the participants are involved in theatre in some way, this could also account for their willingness to be involved in the reminiscence research: long-term, regular theatregoers appear to want to be involved with theatre in as many ways as possible.

Five participants' reminiscences will be analysed in detail about their participation in theatre, illustrating the different engagements with theatre. Robin, rather than going to Oxford or Cambridge like his best friends at school, "escaped to the Birmingham Rep... Barry Jackson had started the Birmingham Theatre School in forty-three and so I joined it" (Oxford Playhouse, 15 June 2006). This was at a time when the Rep was "long at the forefront of provincial theatre under the benign supervision of Sir Barry Jackson" (Billington, 2007: 43). For a year, Robin worked at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, his "escape" from the trajectory of university and safe employment where "we could all be in the plays or be the stage manager in the evenings". He acted with Paul Scofield and was directed by a young Peter Brook, notably in Ibsen's *The Lady From The Sea*, a production recalled by a fellow actor to Robin, John Harrison, as "one of the most remarkable productions I ever played in" (Trewin, 1963: 138) and Shakespeare's *King John*, where Robin (Oxford Playhouse, 15 June 2006) "played this monk who Peter Brook insisted murdered King John for some reason and then um I used to have to go right to the top of the Birmingham Rep Theatre and dong this bell on his death at the end of play" (*op cit*). Robin moved to Stratford the following year, taken there with Paul Scofield and John Harrison by Barry Jackson, who took over as Artistic Director. Among the plays Robin was in was Peter Brook's *Love's Labour's Lost*, by Shakespeare, a production which "set beauty stirring" (Kemp and Trewin, 1953: 216), and described by Robin:

Peter Brook had been to the Louvre and seen this picture by Watteau and the whole production was based on this one picture of the Louvre, Watteau. That's why you see a clown there... if you look in this picture... I've often looked at it... if you look at this picture in the Louvre, you can see characters. I was one. In this picture there is a courtier strumming and so, um that was a great success. I mean, it's iconic in Stratford's history (Oxford Playhouse, 23 June 2006).

He had to leave Stratford and its "iconic" (see section 8.3) productions for National Service in the Fleet Air Arm, where he was stationed on an aircraft carrier in the Mediterranean. Robin (Oxford Playhouse, 23 June 2006) reminisced

that: “I saw quite a lot of theatre in Malta which was loud, noisy” and even on the ship, Robin found time for acting:

And I can remember being in a play on board an aircraft carrier in Malta, where they lowered the thing that brings the aircraft up. They’d load it down and that became the stage. I can’t think what the play is but I know I was playing *My Fair Lady Elizabeth* (Oxford Playhouse, 15 June 2006).

With Robin’s subsequent career as a drama teacher, and then lecturer in drama, and running drama workshops in Russia, theatregoing is an integral part of his craft. He has had the experience of performing in significant productions, and as a teacher, worked with directors of the calibre of Joan Littlewood at the Theatre Royal, Stratford East, “the first theatre to stop pretending that the audience didn’t exist” (Coren, 1984: 61). Robin provided the original cast of Lionel Bart’s *Oliver!* with its Artful Dodgers. With Audrey, Gwilym and Geraldine also teaching drama, their theatregoing informs their day job and provides an additional motivation for attendance.

Primarily a visual artist, Helen gravitated into set design serendipitously:

I taught it [*art*] in schools I became the person who did the sets and props and I just loved it so much I sort of started at Pegasus and did all these things with them... mainly after school and it could have been Saturdays as well. I will have to go through all this. It is all here. It is all documented. It is because I am so incredibly busy. I haven’t had the time to sit down and analyse. And also because they were here. And working with Cecilia MacFarlane [*dance choreographer*] and Carolyn Harrison-Ganberg, the composer, over a period of about eight years, I think we did two or three things at the Playhouse but the initial one, we started at the Pegasus and worked on many productions at Pegasus (Pegasus Theatre, 14 March 2007).

Helen also collaborated with MacFarlane on a children’s book. Helen had written *The Wolfman and the Clown*, and her attendance as a theatregoer is infused with

her fascination for its visual impact. Like Helen, Danielle is both an insider, and an audience member, but of all the participants, she is the only one whose primary employment is in arts administration, although in the following reminiscence, her role is voluntary, and strategic:

I am on the OTTC board... one of the things that drew me into OTTC, Oxfordshire Touring Theatre Company, early on was that they did an outdoor performance in a park and I remember somebody walking by, walking their dog or something or other, and just getting caught up in theatre despite themselves. They never intended to watch a play but they just kind of got drawn in because they were wandering around the park at the time... immediately I think of Oxfordshire Touring Theatre Company because it takes productions into village halls and the floral curtains, and the cupboards with things stacked to the ceiling, and the dust and everything else around. And then you get caught up in a completely different world. And I suppose one of the most memorable productions of OTTC was *The Little Prince*. They took this really surreal set into village halls, and you really were taken into another world with *The Little Prince*, despite the floral curtains and the radiators, and no raked seating either. OTTC quite often performs in the round so there is this real intimacy. You are within spitting distance of the actors (Pegasus Theatre, 14 March 2007).

Like the drama teachers, Janet is a participant who in adult life has worked in theatre and education. She was motivated at first to produce amateur dramatic shows after she was married:

I didn't do things for a while, after I got married I took it more seriously, and started um producing shows in the local village (Pegasus Theatre, 21 February 2007).

Later, as a mature student, Janet enrolled on a Performing Arts course specialising in technical theatre. It was observing the performance of actors that convinced Janet that her career should also be in the theatre, as she says in her reminiscence:



I think what made me go into it... just after I got married I had a friend who was an opera singer in London and I spent a weekend with him and went to see a show and then he was rehearsing for um *The Horse And His Boy*, or something, I don't know if it was one of those *The Lion*, *The Witch and the Wardrobe*, those sort of plays. And he was rehearsing to be a horse and he'd spent weeks just going studying how horses walk and moving their head and er it was in one of the big theatres. I used to love going and seeing them because he would take me here, there and everywhere, behind the scenes, and meet people, but one afternoon I was just sitting watching him rehearse and you know, people go, it's a long time and nothing happens quickly does it, and I just watched for hours, and hours and hours and I just thought, 'I loved this.' I just loved the way they do something and it just doesn't work so they will try it another way and then that doesn't work so they'll try it another way, and then someone else will come in and then something else will happen, some sort of energy will come in, make something else happen, and it was that that made me, really made me go and do the BTEC. And then I started studying (Pegasus Theatre, 14 March 2007).

Like Janet in the move towards amateur theatre, but unlike her in that he did not work professionally in theatre, Ted found that participation in amateur theatre was his dominant theatre activity:

I have on occasions throughout my life been in the audience at a theatre but to be honest, I've been more involved as a performer... (Pegasus Theatre, 21 February 2007).

Eighteen of the participants took part in amateur dramatics when they were children, as related in chapter six. In later life, amateur theatre was also to play a significant role for Ted, Pat and Janet, all who were inducted into the Oxford Youth Theatre. Other participants reminisced that amateur dramatics enhanced their life-long theatregoing attendance, as indicated by Rachel, who also found part time work in theatre:

... That really got me started with amateur dramatics, which I really enjoyed and I got a lot out of getting involved, and as a result, I've always being a theatregoer. When I lived in Guildford um I used to help behind the bar at Yvonne Arnaud and at the Watermill Theatre here in Newbury I have done

front of house. It's just the whole feel of the theatre. I just love it (Corn Exchange, 14 February 2007).

Joining an amateur dramatics organisation is a social activity, where theatregoers can gain a greater appreciation of theatre. Phil reminisces about the benefits for him on joining a company in Zambia:

I went out there to do a university postgraduate certificate in education followed by a government contract for teaching in Zambia and er because we had two children we were fortunate enough to stay in Lusaka un which is where the university is, the capital of Zambia, and um one of the things we did was sport and theatre, about the only two real things to do, so I joined the theatre club , the Lusaka theatre club and er there's an old adage in Africa, are you married or do you belong to a theatre club?... so I got very involved on the other side of theatre which I found very interesting seeing how much work has to be put into it (Corn Exchange, 10 March 2007).

The three main reasons for people to join amateur groups are, firstly, they are a vehicle for social exchange, secondly a forum for people with similar enthusiasms to exchange information, and thirdly, an opportunity for people to make friends and meet people (Bishop and Hoggett, 1986: 33), all factors alluded to by Phil in his reminiscence. Involvement in amateur theatrics leads, as Phil has indicated, to a deeper appreciation of the craft that helps create a production. Richard joined the Newbury Dramatic Society where in addition to performing, he also directed:

... it all came to a finish when I retired, and I got divorced as well at more or less the same time, and it was a fresh start for me at that time. And I was also a member of an amateur dramatic society. I took part in some plays and they even persuaded me to direct one play which was a nerve-wracking experience for me at any rate... (Corn Exchange, 19 March 2007).

Other participants became involved in the management of amateur dramatic organisations such as festivals, as described by Anne:

... there was a very strong amateur dramatic um something called the Rural um Rural Arts Council or something which encouraged play readings and play groups to go out into the villages and you just came back and there were, I don't know if you came across these, where you went to the festivals, and you acted and then you were an adjudicator. It was great fun (Oxford Playhouse, 2 November 2006).

Anne also indicates how the community of amateur players would attend professional productions together, in the days when she started working in Oxford:

... earning a little money, so you could go up to London very easily. You could go to Stratford fairly easily. Amateur dramatics was very important and we used to go as a group and go standing at Stratford because it was cheap and saw, you know, *Macbeth*... It was the Theatre Guild, as it is now, which is now fifty years old so they had their celebration the other day. So that's strong too. It wasn't just professional. It was everybody taking part, and queuing up for the ballet and the opera, outside the New Theatre, which they don't do now (*ibid*).

## 8.5 Holidays

The second theme that links lives and emerges as a facet of human agency is theatregoing when on holiday or working abroad. This was a pattern of behaviour common to eighteen participants. Holidaying takes place somewhere different from normal; they are an occasion for daydreaming, fantasy, and pleasures (Urry, 2002: 3), just like theatre performances. However, whilst Urry does not analyse the tourist gaze at theatre productions, the data from the reminiscence workshops suggest that participants will go to the theatre when on holiday. Outdoor performances were especially prevalent with five participants recalling the Minack Theatre in Cornwall; Kate recalled an “amazing”, “staggering” production on a hot evening in an amphitheatre in Lyon (Oxford Playhouse, 9 November 2006), Catherine, Anne, Margaret and Jane, productions in Greek amphitheatres. Anne saw an “incredible” production of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* in a small venue amidst thermal springs smelling of sulphur, in Rotorua, New Zealand (Oxford

Playhouse, 23 November 2006) whilst Margaret and Priscilla attended a piece of documentary theatre in a small theatre in Sydney, Australia about a mining disaster, written by the son of a friend, and an “incredible” production of Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* in another small space (*ibid*). Ophelia and Henry regularly attended the Edinburgh Festival. Jane, who has spent many years living with her family abroad, has seen *Stomp* in an amphitheatre in Greece, and Noh and Kabuki in Japan, Chinese opera in China, ‘son et lumiere’ in Luxor and circus in Moscow. Catherine has been to Bunraku, Noh and Kabuki in Tokyo, and like Jane, the Chinese opera in China. From a random sample of the Corn Exchange’s audience to be attracted to the reminiscence workshops, the links between Jane and Catherine, living in China and Japan, and Irene and Phil, moving to Zambia, are serendipitous examples of like people doing like things. The majority of this theatregoing when away therefore tends towards the unfamiliar, or the novel. As such, theatregoing on holiday (or working abroad) reflects the rationale for travelling to these locations.

## 8.6 Productions and companies

Often, productions recalled in the reminiscence workshops are described as “wows”. They are for many participants a secondary epiphany, or an illuminative, minor epiphany (Denzin, 1989: 17). The productions themselves are a motivation for attendance. The literature suggests that the main reason theatregoers give for attendance is their liking for the type of event they are attending (Skelton *et al*, 2002: 19, Bunting, Keaney and Gottlieb, 2007: 64). The examples of productions reminisced about ranged from artistic landmarks (*Look Back in Anger*, *Waiting for Godot*, Trevor Nunn’s *Macbeth* with Ian McKellen and Judi Dench) to controversies (*Hair*), popular hits (*Oliver!*) and local productions.

Participants are not pigeon-holed exactly into following certain genres alone, as tastes tended overall to be catholic. Participants indicate that they enjoy attending more than one genre. The overall impression from all four workshops is that long-

term, regular theatregoers attend all the genres, whether highbrow, middlebrow or lowbrow, supporting Bourdieu (1986a: 84). Catholic patterns of attendance appears to be a trait that began early according to those who reminisced about their post-epiphany theatregoing. The availability of funded and commercial venues within reach of Oxford and Newbury enables these audiences to maintain this wide range of tastes.

Whilst Oxford Playhouse participants regularly attend the Playhouse, their emotional attachment lay primarily either with Stratford, or with amateur companies such as the Oxford Theatre Guild. The Corn Exchange group were the most diverse but there was more emotional engagement with the repertory at the Watermill than the bought-in shows at the Corn Exchange. Pegasus Theatre attenders indicated the greatest emotional attachment to their theatre, in part because of the social remit of the venue. They appreciate the artistic policy aimed at staging both professional and amateur productions and the theatre's emphasis on community and diversity.

One immediate benefit in terms of reminiscence workshops as a methodology is that where participants have discovered they have attended the same production, a fuller debate with different points of view can be obtained. There was a remarkable harmony of opinions on *Look Back in Anger* where every participant who saw it, perceived Osborne's play as a poor one, and that its position as a landmark production which changed the face of British theatre incorrect. For them, the more significant playwrights of the 1950s were Fry, Rattigan, Beckett, Brecht, and Ionesco. It could be that these participants could be grouped either as reactionary conservatives, for whom *Look Back in Anger* was a rude and unsubtle shock, or avant gardists, for whom it was basic and uninteresting. However, no contemporary playwright was as discussed as much as Shakespeare.

## 8.7 Other motivations

Escapism, make-believe, excitement, entertainment, enjoyment, socialising with others, education and self-esteem were all expressed as motivators throughout all four groups, along with magic and religion, already discussed in previous chapters. The only other motivator, not hitherto mentioned, was suggested by Genevieve: a desire for independence. This is where theatregoing represents breaking away from the family. Theatregoing is a leisure activity, and leisure suggests a sense of freedom (Torkildsen, 1992: 25). Being free independently to visit a theatre denotes a move towards adulthood, and a loosening of the reins of the family unit. Genevieve relates how theatregoing liberated her from her family:

I saw in the programme they were doing *The Importance of Being Earnest* the following week which would be after my mother and sister had gone back to France and I was staying in London to go to a crammer's. And I thought 'I must go to that' and I can remember just that feeling 'this is something I can do. I can go to plays by myself in the afternoons.' And that has been terribly important for my whole life doing things on my own. And that is a huge thing, isn't it, not feeling that you've got to find someone else to go with. It's immensely liberating and that definitely happened to me with *The Importance of Being Earnest* at the Old Vic (Oxford Playhouse, 26 October 2006).

## 8.8 Conclusion

The evidence from the reminiscences about continued attendance therefore suggests that current, long-term, regular theatregoers are likely to respond to Shakespeare, religion, and the magic of the real. The latter two factors are similar to those that affect theatregoers in their youth and at their theatrical epiphany. It could be argued that one of the motivations for continued attendance is the hope of experiencing another epiphany (Denzin, 1989: 129) containing the elements of their original "wow" moment.

The long-term, regular theatregoer shows a dedication to theatregoing that extends to their holiday-making. If they are able to, they attend theatre wherever they are in the world. They show their high levels of connoisseurship by engaging in conversation with others about productions that they have attended. They are participants as well as attenders, involved in amateur and professional organisations. They are thus highly aware of how productions are created and are in tune with the ideas of the artists involved. These theatregoers respond to the intentions of the artist in their creation of stage magic, or magic related to a site-specific location, or to religious imagery. Their interests are more about self-actualisation (Maslow, 1968) than esteem or lower physiological needs. Chapter nine discusses theatregoing through the perspective of timing (Giele and Elder, 1998), and the effect on theatregoing of families, work, children, and grandchildren.

## **CHAPTER NINE**

### **LIFE IS A STAGE: TIMING**

#### **9 Introduction**

Timing, the fourth aspect of Giele and Elder's model, refers to the events of a person's life – markers such as going to school, getting married or having a family (Giele and Elder, 1998). In this section it will be possible to understand the theatregoing activities of the participants over their lives, looking at sections of a film rather than a snapshot of an album. The study has already indicated how participants are initiated into becoming theatregoers, by having a powerful epiphany during or following a particular production and has examined the formative years of theatregoers. This chapter follows the participants once they have left the family home and full time education, examining the following 'markers'. It is in five sections. The first section discusses the effects of theatregoing of finding a partner, or getting married. The second examines the effect of children on theatregoing whilst the third looks at the effect of employment on theatregoing. The fourth section discusses the effect of the participant's theatregoing on their children, or grandchildren whilst the fifth examines the process of ageing on theatregoing.

#### **9.1 Partners**

Every participant, with the exception of Cora and Genevieve, prefers to go the theatre with someone else. In chapter three the literature suggested that socialising was one of the leading motivating factors for arts attenders (Skelton *et al*, 2002: 19) and theatregoers (Ostrower, 2005: 8) with most people attending as a couple (Myerscough, 1988: 28), with theatregoing an activity which is more likely to be friends than family (Ostrower, 2005: 7). Furthermore, theatregoers are more likely to be unmarried than married (Peterson, Hull and Kern, 2000: 66). In the



reminiscence workshops, twenty-eight participants reminisced about theatregoing in relation to a partner.

The importance of attending with the right person was stressed by June, who carefully selected a husband who would be the perfect theatregoing companion:

I used to have an acid test when I was younger. Before I got married. You probably will laugh at this. But I use to take... somebody said “would I go out with them”, I would say, ‘yes, provided you will go out with me to see...” and I took these unsuspecting fellas to all sorts of things, but it was a good test! Whether they’d have got stamina or not. [laughter] and my husband, I took to see *The Quaker Girl*, at Oxford. Do you know *The Quaker Girl*?... anyhow, Toby stuck it very well, indeed, and afterwards he took me to the Randolph and bought me a lovely dinner! [laughter] (Corn Exchange, 19 March 2007).

Behind this humorous story lies the issue of compatibility. Does the theatregoer attend the theatre in order to be sociable with someone else/other people? June, was married to her Toby for fifty-one years, and reminisced about their theatregoing together:

My theatregoing was always a shared experience with him and I never always went to what I wanted to see. We went to see what we wanted to see. You see where I’m coming from? Now I’m on my own I come to all sorts of extraordinary things that I would never have dreamt of before... (Corn Exchange, 29 March 2007)

It seems from June that theatregoing was a matter of consensus, where both parties would miss something if the other did not like the show. Similarly, Diana reminisces that theatregoing was something “I did with my husband” (Corn Exchange, 29 March 2007).

Five participants showed a pattern of lapsed theatre attendance because they married a person who was not a theatregoer. All five got divorced and promptly started theatregoing again. Sheila, who was in this position young in life, initially placed the interests of her first husband and family over her own:

I then met my first husband when I was about sixteen. And he wasn't at all interested in um books, literature, theatre so I tended I suppose to drop out then myself and we did um... the things we had in common was sport and I did quite a lot of sport, um and went to work. And then um I married early. I married at twenty-one and then had my first baby at twenty-three (Oxford Playhouse, 15 June 2006).

These same factors affected Gwilym, who noted:

My first wife wasn't very interested in theatre... my marriage was a bit on the rocks then so er um I went through years of not wanting to do very much except, sort of, exist, hang on to life really... but second time around there was "a mutual love of theatre and [we] started to go to the theatre more (Oxford Playhouse, 15 June 2006).

Having lapsed, Gwilym, as with the other four divorced participants, recalls the feeling of returning to regular theatregoing as liberating:

After the divorce I did actually find on my own, going back to the theatre was wonderful, and no constraints (*ibid*).

Participants who had lapsed because of the negative impact of a non-theatregoing partner often reminisced about the new opportunities that were open to them on their return, as with Rachel:

... I got divorced when he was five and um I started going to the theatre with a girlfriend who was a really avid theatregoer, when my son was away with his dad, and we used to go up to London and then she introduced me to the Donmar Warehouse (Corn Exchange, 19 March 2007).

Only one participant, the youngest, gave the impression from the reminiscence workshops that she relied on a partner for theatregoing: Sandra reflects that:

... things opened up a bit when I was um probably thirty-four, thirty-five. The boyfriend I was with at the time was very into opera so I got to experience opera... and whilst I was with that boyfriend, I also went to some Shakespeare in Stratford, again it was not so much my thing, it was pretty much what I expected. I didn't expect it to make me go "wow" and it didn't really, and it was good to experience it and it was good to be in Stratford to experience it (Corn Exchange, 19 March 2007).

Sandra was able to discover her own tastes by initially accepting the tastes of her partner where "things opened up for me".

## 9.2 Children

Every participant who had a child or children reminisced about taking their offspring to a theatrical production when they were young. Having a family changes the behaviour of theatregoers because in a typical, 'stage three', 'symmetrical' family, family unity is based on consumption, and leisure time that takes place mostly in the home (Young and Willmott, 1973: 69). Stage one families are where the family is a productive unit, such as contemporary farming families, whilst many stage two families find they have to work away from home in a disruption to family life; working class family life may be patterned this way, in evidence gained from oral histories (*ibid*: 91). Stage three is typical of managerial and professional people. The literature suggests that at key times,

theatre-goers will drop out of regular attendance when children are aged 0 - 4, and then they start attending again (Bunting *et al*, 2008: 56 – 57).

Mann indicated that there was a “missing generation” of those aged between 25 and 44, younger people with families (Mann, 1967: 79). His missing generation was also noticed by Cheeseman (1971) whose experience of managing a theatre in Stoke led him to state that “all theatres experience the gap between young married couples and middle-aged members of the audience and we [*at Stoke*] are no exception”. Cheeseman’s view is that people with young families have no need for theatre because their lives are very full. Mann (*op cit*) points out the same generation is also missing from other activities such as the church and voluntary organisations. Wilkie and Bradley (1970), however, could find no evidence of Mann’s “missing generation” at the Glasgow Citizens but provide a reason for the older age group’s lower figures:

The over-45s were at ‘higher education’ age at a time when the educational opportunities were far narrower than they are today. For the theatre at least, the younger an audience generally, the better educated will it be – at least in formal terms (Wilkie and Bradley, 1970: 39).

The theatre-goer therefore tends to become a “lapsed attender”, taking part in more home-based activities, because of childrearing (Constantoura, 2000a: 233). The data indicate a confirmation, although not a full one, of Constantoura’s findings. Twenty-one participants mentioned that they had a child, or children. Seventeen of these lapsed to some extent after starting a family. It was not having the children *per se* that caused a lapsing of attendance - it was the attendant costs of the additional members of the family as described by Margaret:

... one thing I have learnt from looking at my diaries, the change in the level of freedom to go about and to go anywhere and also actually change in income too. Much less, you know, it had to be spread over more people. I mean as a student and as a postgraduate student, what money I had was mine

to play with really... when I married I immediately acquired two stepsons and then we had our first child and then we did manage to get to the cinema sometimes but I don't think I went to the theatre at all in the first two years of being married. Just much, much too busy. Just life, you know (Oxford Playhouse, 2 November 2006)

Margaret still shows a desire for a shared experience within a cultural context; she swings from theatre to the more affordable cinema. Expenditure on theatre is re-allocated to family needs, because as Diana (Corn Exchange, 10 March 2007) says: "I was married and then in my thirties had four children so there was no money, basically for theatregoing exactly." Family responsibilities are a limitation on theatregoing, especially if there are other barriers to attendance such as easily accessible venues, as in the case of Kate:

Got married in 1961 and we lived in Nottingham then. Um I had two children and then we moved to Lincolnshire. Interspersed we were traipsing backwards and forwards to Nottingham visiting parents and things. But there was not a very great deal in Lincolnshire in any case. We were being a bit tied down and short of money by that time and so we were not frightfully productive on the theatre line (Oxford Playhouse, 9 November 2006).

Only one participant stopped theatregoing because of a child. The other twenty indicated a scaling down of their theatregoing as with June:

After that I got married and didn't do very much theatregoing at all except for occasional visits with my husband's firm to London to see various things... It was rather curtailed but the children did go to various things. We went to pantomimes and we used to go on the bus to Oxford to see things which they thought was a great excitement. I remember taking them all to see the ballet, the boys moaning like anything, but they did enjoy it and they still do... And as we gradually became more affluent... As the children grew older and there was a little bit more money, we gradually went back to our theatregoing (Corn Exchange, 19 March 2006).

June's reminiscence illustrates how theatregoers can maintain their theatregoing when finances are lower. She relies on complimentary tickets from her husband's work, along with cheap bus travel to the theatre. June's experiences support Quine (1999: 17 – 18) whose findings indicate that: "it appears that many people discover or re-discover theatre as they enter middle age. This thesis is eminently reasonable given that theatregoing becomes more feasible for people with children when the mortgage is paid off and the need for childcare has waned".

The participant who stopped attending because of a child indicated that the desire to go to the theatre remains constant. However, having a child creates an emotional dilemma where attendance causes guilt, as articulated by Rachel:

I came back down here and got married around 1985 and then moved to Newbury and that's when I first started going to the Watermill. And we used to go before I had my son; I didn't have my son until some eight years later. Um we go regularly to the theatre to quite a number of productions - as many as we could during the year and I was also a volunteer there selling programmes and doing the front of house. So you used to get to see them more than once. So I used to go there really quite regularly. And then after my son was born I stopped because I was working full time and I felt guilty about going out in the evening. I didn't go out for quite some time. So we stopped going to the theatre altogether for quite a long period (Corn Exchange, 19 March 2007).

A minority of participants with children – Robin, Audrey, Geraldine and Barbara, did not lapse for financial reasons, as Geraldine indicates:

But there wasn't really a period, thinking about having a, having a child, um that didn't really stop us, no. We just went ahead. We just introduced him and took it from there... so it's always been a very important part of both our lives... I always made time to go to the theatre (Oxford Playhouse, 15 June 2006).

If the participant had sufficient income, theatregoing activities still occurred, even if their range were curtailed by the needs of arranging babysitters, for example, as with Barbara:

I got married, had children, had the problems of babysitters and the rest of it and so for two or three years while they were babies I only went to things that I could get to once they were in bed and you know, happy with the babysitter so I think I only went to Battersea Arts Centre then which was about two miles from where I lived. So I just saw anything that was on at the right time (Corn Exchange, 19 March 2007).

The data suggest that having children alters the nature of the theatregoing. With the exception of Robin, Audrey, Geraldine and Barbara, the participants indicate that they attended fewer professional productions but went to amateur shows involving the children. Every participant with children spoke of attending school plays or nativity plays, as with Anne:

... had three kids... nativity plays were quite fun and I suppose during, children get to get that experience, playing a shepherd or whatever (Oxford Playhouse, 9 November 2006).

It was noted in chapters six and eight how many of the participants were active in theatre-making, as actors, writers, directors, and set-builders. The participants remain involved in theatre-making as they age, in this case, by being creative with their own children, as illustrated by Diana:

... we moved to Wales, and again lived right in the middle of the country, in the Wye Valley, so again, most of my theatre involvement at that point would have been children's things, things that they were putting on and getting involved with doing the make-up and costumes, and that sort of thing. I used to do a lot of that. Quite a lot of really freaky costumes and hair, you know, hair standing at one end and gelled, and coloured, and the girls used to love all that (Corn Exchange, 19 March 2007).

### 9.3 Employment

The evidence is inconclusive from the reminiscences over the effect of a theatregoer's employment on theatregoing attendance. Of the twenty-one participants who had a child/children, only Geraldine spoke about the effects of her job on her attendance. Heavy marking of exam scripts caused her to lose several weeks a year which does not indicate any lapsing of attendance. However, after lack of funds, and having children, the third most commented on reason for lapsed attendance is the lack of time caused by pressures of work. This supports Colmar Brunton (2006: 12) whose research indicates that lack of time is the main reason for attending the arts less often. Of the remaining ten participants who began the workshops, Laura, Henry and Ophelia stopped attending them before discussions started on post-school life. The seven remaining participants all indicated that their jobs affected their attendance.

The main barrier to attendance caused by work was living in an inaccessible location, such as with Catherine, in hotel management in Portugal. However, when she was in Japan and China she did attend a range of live, indigenous theatre performances. Phil, working in Lusaka, the capital of Zambia was restricted to amateur productions; Irene, coincidentally also in Zambia, but in the Copper Belt, had no access to any theatre. Cora, when she was working in Europe for the American universities, found theatre in another language a barrier, but did attend classical music concerts. Jane, working like Catherine in east Asia, and Greece, found living abroad no barrier to attendance, attending a range of performance genres.

Only one participant, Priscilla, found that she reduced her theatregoing because of the demands of work:



I was back in Oxford but I was working as a probation officer and then as a social worker, lecturer, teacher, incredibly long hours, and I was thinking, that there was a period when actually I couldn't do much at all because I would get home sometimes at nine, ten in the evening, from work, so this was less easy... (Oxford Playhouse, 9 November 2006).

Priscilla never lost her motivation towards theatre, and she “did have the odd kind of splurges, when one took a few days of holiday or something” and “read plays... I never lost my interest” (*ibid*).

However, work also provides opportunities for theatregoing. Kate, when young, working in a library in Nottingham, Irene, also young, whilst at St James', Leeds' central hospital, and Catherine, as a young teacher, socialised with colleagues at productions. Pat, a traffic warden reminisced about watching street theatre in Summertown, and Danielle, who works in arts management, and is a trustee of the Oxfordshire Touring Theatre Company, attends professionally. Additionally, as teachers, Robin, Audrey, Geraldine, Gwilym, Kate, Kay, Helen, Catherine and June took pupils to attend productions, or were involved in drama teaching and school productions.

The workplace provided Sandra with the opportunity for theatregoing when she arranged a staff visit to *Chicago* in the West End and started a staff theatregoing club. Work colleagues inspired the revival for Richard's theatregoing:

Between the age of eighteen and thirty I didn't have much contact with theatre. I went occasionally to it but when I was thirty I got a new job and I was staying in a management training centre all alone and one of the secretaries took pity on me and said “Richard, why don't you come and join our theatre group?” and so I went along and um they put on plays and I got a small part in it, and then I got a bit of a larger part, um in the next play and that got me going to the theatre again. We had trips to the theatre and so on, and that's how I began at aged thirty, taking an interest in plays (Corn Exchange, 10 March 2007).

#### 9.4 Becoming a familiar

One of the effects of having children, and later grandchildren is that those theatregoers become “familiar” themselves. Just as Wendy when young is touched by the magic of Peter Pan, but knows she must grow up, unlike her fairy friend, so participants, affected by the magic with children, seek to ensure that other young people feel the magic. By this time the theatregoers have accrued a measure of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) and so this process could also be conceptualised as passing on their own cultural capital. Frequent theatregoers rely more on their cultural capital than outside influences such as reviews on making their theatregoing decisions (Gardiner, 1991: 82). The familiar is a kind of tastemaker, but not one who is conniving (Bourdieu, 1986a: 89) with the public to create a value for the art. Passing-on one’s taste is one of eight motivations for going to the arts (Walker, Scott-Melnyk and Sherwood, 2002: 38) but that taste according to this study is just as likely to be for amateur theatre as professional. By this stage, long-term theatregoers are becoming connoisseurs, they have more artistic competence and are therefore able to decode more codes (Bourdieu, 1968: 216) inherent in the production. Their children, or grandchildren, on the other hand, will view the drama with a “fresh eye” (*ibid*: 217), decoding less than the participant.

This study indicates that there are different stages to this familiarisation process. The first stage is that theatregoers take their children to the theatre, usually to children’s shows and pantomimes. Maureen, in attending these shows explains how taking her children is akin to the cycle of life; a rebirth of her own first experiences of theatre:

... around four or five you begin going to the theatre in a different sort of way with your children and there’s that nice period of introducing them um to the things um either to the things either that you saw or that I hadn’t seen so it was my choice to go [*laughter*]. *Copélia* and pantomime in a way, do you know what I mean and so for me it’s a rebirth of that, and it is always

good to introduce people to whom it's new, isn't it? (Oxford Playhouse, 9 November 2006).

For Sheila, the children proved to be her theatrical renaissance; by taking her children to theatres in the park in South London, she rekindled her taste for theatre:

In the summer time they had amazing things happening in these parks. Crystal Palace Park, and which you could take the children to. So, I actually, er we saw a lot of children's type of theatre. I mean my children did, and it sort of, I got the sort of taste for it, and I used to go on my own to, sort of, fringe theatre. Um and, they were, sort of, I think a bit more than local amateur groups but they, they performed in all kinds of pubs, and, sort of, in small squares and things. I mean, strange, I mean, I hadn't any idea who the playwrights were (Oxford Playhouse, 15 June 2006).

Taking children to the theatre also enables a theatregoer to appreciate a theatrical form anew. Rachel only appreciated pantomimes with a child of her own, as she explains:

I come to see the pantomime here every year. I enjoy them here much more than I did as a child. I don't know why, but my son loves the pantomime here. But I didn't used to enjoy them very much as a child. It was more the occasion I liked rather than the actual pantomime. But it would have been the traditional one with the, as you say, the er "it's behind you", that sort of thing. "No it isn't, yes it is", that sort of thing (Corn Exchange, 14 February 2007).

The second stage is as the children grow older, theatregoers start to introduce their children to more adult theatre, as in this example from Geraldine:

We started to go to Stratford. One of the photos I've brought in showed that we started taking our son (Oxford Playhouse, 15 June 2006).

With Robin's closer involvement in professional theatre, and his job being a drama teacher and lecturer, it was completely natural for his son to accompany him to the theatre:

... of course, he'd always go to the theatre with us. He appeared in school plays when he was in primary school (Oxford Playhouse, 23 June 2006).

Robin's son has inherited Robin's interests and adds to his stock of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) because when he was fourteen, he was sent to the National Youth Theatre in London, a step eventually led to himself also becoming a lecturer in drama. A similar pattern was seen with Gwilym who said:

... then our daughter, um our mutually shared biological daughter, we've got three daughters, but the youngest one became really interested and she's actually now trained and became a professional (Oxford Playhouse, 15 June 2006)

However, if siblings do share a similar upbringing, the evidence suggests that becoming a theatregoer is more a matter of human agency than upbringing. Anne finds that her son, and her daughter, have had different leisure trajectories:

I mean, my daughter loves to go but my son hasn't got time. Although now he's got a child, he's beginning to see that um maybe pantomime's quite fun (Oxford Playhouse, 16 November 2006).

As the theatregoers' children get older, their children themselves start families of their own and a new cycle of theatregoing begins for the theatregoer. This pattern of behaviour is consistent with Peterson, Hull and Kern (2000: 28) whose findings indicate that people return to arts attendance in their later years once the demands of family and job are reduced. In this study, not all participants have grandchildren. However ten participants reminisced that they take their

grandchildren to productions. June, who is one of the two participants to lose a husband prior to the reminiscence workshops, maintains that:

I've got ten grandchildren and my whole ethos in life is to introduce these grandchildren to as many theatrical experiences as possible (Corn Exchange, 29 March 2007).

June still maintains her original motivation towards theatre when she was enchanted by the magic of *Cinderella* at the age of four. Her motivation now is outwards directed, although still intrinsic, located in the direction of her grandchildren. Some participants became involved in passing on their interest in theatre through teaching. Kate's journey indicates a two-stage process. Firstly, she engages with young people as a result of her husband's job as a teacher:

They also did like reviews for the sixth formers you know. They used to take part in it, the staff, and there were sort of great mixtures of people um for the end of term, the Christmas end of term things just for the children, and Robin was producing it and I used to do the make-up and so it was sort of, I used to have these sixth form boys appear you know, and reaching up to the, and of course there was nowhere to sit down, and you just did it wherever there was a chance to get it done, and that was a huge amount of fun. But it wasn't really serious drama (Oxford Playhouse, 9 November 2006).

The second stage is, a decade or so later, when Kate herself becomes a teacher, and, again actively participates in the creation of dramas:

I was teaching and I was teaching primary school children, and this is where I launched into my production life. So I was doing a very large number of school productions, various thoughts, you know, class assemblies, whole school productions, taking children out sort of to theatres, um and also getting touring companies coming into school. You know, very small educational companies that would come in. Um we would have a range of, I don't know, simple plays for the very young children, or a bit more complex ones for the older ones. Um I've never really thought about it as a plan of

action, but obviously everybody was saying ‘have you seen this, are you going to organise it?’ So I would say ‘yes, all right’ so I was always landed with the organisation of it all (Oxford Playhouse, 23 November 2006).

In the case of Robin, (Oxford Playhouse, 23 June 2006), who became a drama teacher in London’s East End after qualification, “life seemed to be full of drama at school” where “we promoted drama so much in the East End” through his drama society.

Theatre-goers in this study attend regularly as individuals, and as part of their regular attendance attend with their children, grandchildren, or schoolchildren, both in the professional sector and the amateur. Every participant with children or grandchildren spoke of attending school productions or nativity shows. If their children or grandchildren live in other parts of the country, the data from this study suggest that they will travel to see them in shows. As familiars they enthuse others with their own passions.

## 9.5 Ageing

All the Oxford Playhouse participants are senior citizens, whilst the majority of the Corn Exchange and Pegasus participants are either younger, or older, middle-aged people. At the time of the reminiscence workshops, eleven of the nineteen senior citizens were married, and usually went to the theatre with their spouse. Of the remaining eight, two participants had very recently lost husbands, both after fifty years of marriage, and their husbands were regular theatre-goers until their deaths. Of the single participants from the Oxford Playhouse, Cora and Genevieve expressed a preference for attending alone, whilst Priscilla, Margaret and Maureen preferred the company of friends. However, the literature suggests that single people, whether divorced, separated or widowed have a similar pattern of attendance to people who are married (Bunting, 2008: 57). The participants in

this study would tend to bear this out, with only Geraldine being a little deterred from attending as regularly as she would like after her husband's death.

Each of the groups had a small "moaning" element to the final reminiscence workshop which tended to focus on gripes they have with various theatres. These moans indicate that none of the participants have been deterred from attending the theatre because they getting older. Robin suffers from knee ailments that allow him to have disabled parking permits and reduced price seats in accessible locations. Geraldine's husband, before he died in his nineties, was in a wheelchair, and the two of them were regular attenders at Stratford, again making use of the disabled access provision. The Oxford Playhouse participants attend matinees primarily for accessibility reasons and for the reduced ticket prices of £7.50, although Kate prefers evenings because they are more of an occasion. As a pensioner, Anne does not buy programmes as she cannot afford them and the theatre ticket. Diane is a Friend of the Watermill Theatre, primarily because she can buy reduced price tickets in advance.

The older participants book stalls seats so they can see the stage better because of failing eyesight or hearing. Plays where the interval occurs after a long wait might not be a first choice because of problems with the bladder. Gwilym avoids theatres where he cannot sit comfortably. All the pensioners spoke of the expense of London's West End, which deters attendance; Cora makes about three visits to London a year where she will take in a matinee and an evening performance on a Saturday to make the most of the weekend. Sheila avoids the West End but enthused about the Travelex season at the National Theatre:

... we wouldn't have been able to, because the two of us, we wouldn't have been able to go up to London and pay the full price. It would just be beyond us so to have a ten pound ticket um is absolutely fantastic, isn't it? (Oxford Playhouse, 30 June 2006).

## 9.6 Conclusion

It appears from the reminiscences that the choice of a partner is important in remaining a theatregoer. A person having experienced their theatregoing epiphany and having the identity (Giddens, 1991a) of a theatregoer, will not maintain their theatregoing if their partner is not a theatregoer. The initially negative experiences where theatregoing was curtailed or abandoned, as related by five participants, indicates the fragility of the pastime. Theatregoing is not more important than non-leisure issues. The majority of participants married a like-minded partner, in another example of homophily (Mark, 2003), and in the case of the five who did not marry a theatregoer, remarried one, and thus regained their identity as a theatregoer.

Having children inhibits but does not curtail theatregoing. Only one participant completely stopped attending the theatre. The reminiscences instead in most cases indicate a changing of the genres of theatre attended. Parents are more likely to go the theatre with their children to a children's show, or to see their children performing in a show. A minority of participants took their young children to professional, adult drama. It appears that it is the financial cost of having children that creates a reduced professional theatre attendance because of the costs of babysitters, or having to buy more tickets. Theatregoing resumes once the children are older, or when they or their partner earns sufficiently more money to enable them to renew their attendance.

The choice of employment is a more important decision than that of a leisure pastime. Thus the reminiscences indicate that long-term theatregoers will forego their attendance if the requirements of the job take precedence. Long-hours, marking of scripts at weekends, or being relocated to parts of the world where theatre of any kind is inaccessible were all inhibiting factors. Relocations also provided opportunities for participants to experience a wider range of theatrical forms, especially if they were posted to another country. Whilst participants



indicated that there were interregnums in their theatregoing, whenever they could do so, they resumed their theatregoing at a later stage of their lives.

As long-term theatregoers age, they themselves become ‘familiar’, enthusing their children, grandchildren, schoolchildren and so on, in theatre or drama. The choice of teaching for so many participants perhaps indicates this desire to adopt the ‘familiar’ role. Ageing does not appear to curtail theatregoing, but it does lead to a change in their attendance patterns. Expensive West End productions inhibit attendance whilst subsidised companies or venues, especially for matinees, are locations for regular, frequent attendance. Ageing, long-term theatregoers do not buy tickets for promenade performances which they did in their youth; seats which are either far from the stage, or without sufficient legroom are also shunned. Poor health causes only lapses in attendance. Ageing audiences have gained sufficient cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) that they are both ‘collectors’ of productions and keen to engage in discourse about their theatregoing. Thus, long-term theatregoers were attracted to attend a series of reminiscence workshops aimed at helping the theatres they attend learn more about their most dedicated audiences. The many reminiscences of memorable theatre productions, recorded in the workshops, of plays recent and distant in memory, are an indication of the high value (Bourdieu, *ibid*) that long-term theatregoers place on their life-long passion. As familiars they are motivated to share with all those encountering this study their enthusiasm for theatre, and to pass it on to others.

## **CHAPTER TEN**

### **THE CURTAIN CALL: CONCLUSION**

#### **10 Introduction**

This concluding chapter of the thesis indicates how this study has contributed to knowledge in three areas – research methods, theory, and implications for theatre policy and practice.

The aim of this study was to explore the motivation of long-term, regular theatregoers to go to the theatre. The study has examined the lived past experiences of twenty-five regular theatregoers, with, additionally, glimpses into the lives of four former theatregoers who only attended one or two workshops, one person who was an occasional attender, and another who no longer attends regularly. By analysing their reminiscences it was possible by having a “backward glance” to learn about long-term, regular theatregoers’ “in order to” motivations (Schutz, 1967). Having examined their life histories using a four-part life course model developed by Giele and Elder (1998)’s this study suggests a three-stage series of motivations.

#### **10.1 Methodological implications: the reminiscence workshop**

The study has shown that there is room in the methodological kitbag for the reminiscence workshop. The movement towards qualitative research methodologies in theatre research has already been indicated by Arts Council England’s ‘The Arts Debate’ with its focus group and interview research (Bunting, 2008) and the Theatre Archive Project (British Library, nd); reminiscence workshops indicate that this research can go further and deeper into theatregoers’ motivations for attendance; other projects which are quantitative (Peterson, Kern

and Hull, 2000, Chan and Goldthorpe, 2005, Ostrower, 2005a, Warde, Wright and Gayo-Cal, 2007) have researched theatregoers and non-theatregoers on concepts relating to Bourdieu (1984) and his theories of distinction. Reminiscence workshops held over five to eight weeks, with ideally seven to ten participants, enable researchers to gain richer data on the effects of cultural and educational capital than a couple of questions in a questionnaire. Reminiscence workshops allow for participants to ask each other questions, for participants to 'do homework' between sessions by reading diaries or talking to family members about past experiences, and for them to bring in items for the reminiscence box which stimulate discussion and memories. Reminiscence stimulates long-forgotten but important memories, both by a reflective process and by listening to other people's stories which trigger their own memories. In relation to motivation research, reminiscence creates the opportunity for the "retrospective glance" at theatregoer's "past lived experiences", thus fulfilling the criteria for determining people's motivation (Schutz, 1967). Since it is impractical to live a whole life with theatregoers in a longitudinal study, reminiscence workshops offer a process for an analysis of a theatregoer from youth to the present day.

This study has indicated that reminiscence workshops if conducted by a credible researcher, in a convivial atmosphere such as a theatre café or bar, can deliver rich and meaningful data. There are therapeutic benefits for the participants whilst workshops also deepen their relationship with theatre, firming up their identity as theatregoers. Participants enjoyed the workshops, and believed they were contributing to a project that would help theatres understand them better. The workshops were also enjoyable for the researcher where the opportunity to meet interesting people and listen to their stories was a treat.

Reminiscence research in the field has its problems and limitations. Planning is a key factor allowing for sufficient time between invitation and workshops to attract sufficient participants. Workshops with older people are risky with illness, access issues, loss of memory, and perhaps a lack of connection between researcher and participants. That these problems did not occur during the four series of

workshops does not mean that they could not have happened. Four participants did not complete the workshops having started, and two were not regular, long-term theatregoers now. By handing over the sampling process to theatres, the researcher is in many respects in the lap of the gods. The Pegasus experience initially indicated an over-confidence in its chosen group, whilst the Corn Exchange was too successful in its promotion of the workshops. Given more research time, it would have been possible to run three Corn Exchange groups. This, and the second Oxford Playhouse group should suggest to future researchers with a positive promotional campaign, that long-term, regular theatregoers can be attracted to reminiscence workshops.

## 10.2 The motivation to attend

This study suggests a fresh perspective on theatre attendance. In order to become a long-term regular theatregoer, this study has suggested that there is a three-stage process.

### 10.2.1 The first stage

The first stage is a childhood spent playing at drama, formally or informally, at home, at school, at a religious establishment, or at an amateur dramatic club. Playing in this way creates makes people receptive to the magic, spirit, excitement, wonder, make-believe, fantasy, and unpredictability at a visual and aural spectacle. Of these motivating factors, magic appears to be the most potent.

### 10.2.2 The second stage

The second stage is a theatrical epiphany, where a person is introduced to the theatre by a “familiar”. A contribution to knowledge would be that Bourdieu’s (1984) theory of distinction can be widened to include the concept of the familiar. The familiar intervenes in a person’s life whose life trajectory thenceforward includes theatregoing. The familiar is already responsive to the magic of the theatre and helps in the initiation to this secret world with its special rituals and often, its religious content. The “familiar” is the person who passes on the cultural capital to, in most cases, a young person. S/he is sometimes a parent, an uncle or aunt, grandparent, godparent, teacher, or in a few cases, a close friend. The findings suggest that the influence of the father, as head of the household, as a passer-on of cultural capital, is a limited one. With secondary research indicating that more females than males go to the theatre (see chapter five), the data suggest that it is females who exert the most influence in developing children’s interest in theatre.

With twenty-five participants being taken to the theatre as a child, early socialisation is important, supporting Walker, Scott-Melnyk and Sherwood (2002: 24) and Bunting, Keaney and Gottlieb (2007: 65). Only two participants during their youth had a theatrical epiphany resulting from specific theatre marketing activities; both related to the serendipitous attainment of complimentary tickets where the theatre has “papered” workplaces to ensure fuller attendances. The production has to contain a mixture of elements that create the theatrical epiphany. The data suggest that the attender has to feel the magic, the sense of the unexpected, and the excitement in a production that should be relevant to him/her. It does not matter whether the production is traditional, classic, avant garde or a children’s show; it is not important where the venue is, what size the venue is, whether the production is professional or amateur, or a musical or straight play. The effects of a production where a theatrical epiphany has occurred last a lifetime.

### 10.2.3 The third stage

After the theatrical epiphany, the person enters the third stage. S/he has adopted the identity (Giddens, 1991a) of a theatregoer and henceforward attends productions seeking the motivational intentions discovered during the epiphany. S/he will experience secondary, or minor epiphanies as they attend other “wow” productions. As the theatregoer goes through the life cycle, there is the gradual adoption of a new role: that of being a “familiar” themselves - in school, amateur dramatics, professional theatre and especially within the family, with children and grandchildren. The theatregoer still attends for self-actualising reasons. Long-term theatregoers do not attend for reasons of status or esteem. They are more likely to go to small, intimate spaces for avant garde drama, to cutting-edge, provocative drama, to performances in site-specific locations such as gardens, parks, circus tents, amphitheatres, and prisons. For reasons of easy access and affordability, they go to one or two theatres constantly. Oxford Playhouse and Pegasus Theatre attenders go to Stratford, primarily, and travel to London for the subsidised sector. Newbury Corn Exchange attenders go to the Watermill, but also to London, although as much to the West End for musicals as to the subsidised sector. The theatregoers will seek out theatre when they are on holiday, or if they are working abroad. They attend festivals such as Edinburgh, or York. They are cultural omnivores (Peterson and Kern, 1996) watching films, attending art exhibitions, go to popular and/or classical concerts, and reading literature.

The study of the life history of theatregoers indicates a number of motivators over their life course: Shakespeare is a key influence on attendance, where Shakespeare is a shared experience amongst audiences. Theatregoers enjoy discussion of their “collection” of different Shakespeare plays, comparing different productions of the same play, and contrasting actors in iconic roles. They see the great performers in great roles, and spot future talents. The shared experience with other theatregoers is a motivational factor in itself, where people can converse about past productions that they have seen. Additional pleasure is gained when

theatre-goers have seen the same production in the past which can lead to an intellectual debate which brings people together. With the high number of long-term theatre-goers in this sample having worked in education, there is additionally the reading and performance of Shakespeare with pupils or students. They are interested in the interpretation of the plays by the director, and the design of the sets.

As well as Shakespeare, the study suggests that long-term theatre-goers attend religious dramas, or plays with a religious theme. This ranges from nativity plays at school or Christmas plays with the children through to Mystery plays, contemporary religious dramas and classic plays with spiritual or ritualistic content. The analysis suggests that long-term theatre-goers' relationship with theatre is reverential, or worshipful at times, towards certain venues, companies, directors, performers and writers.

The concept of magic in the theatre never leaves the theatre-goer but as they become more experienced attenders they relish the magic of the real. Theatre that takes place in the open air, or in a site-specific location brings the drama into a harmonious relationship with nature where the unexpected, or the spectacularly natural appears magical. Whilst the open air induces the sense of magic, all but a few participants indicated that they seek out intimacy in a small venue. In these theatres they feel more engaged emotionally with the drama.

The profile of long-term, regular theatre-goer confirms quantitative data: a snapshot of the participants now indicates that they are middle class, white, professional or managerial people living in affluent locations with a high level of education. However, the data do not support Bourdieu on the structures of the family or class as influences on a taste for theatre. One third of the participants were either not influenced by their parents, or did not originally come from a middle class background for this to be the case. Rather the findings support Chan and Goldthorpe (2007b) that a family's high socio-economic status does not *a*

*priori* lead to an engagement with high culture. Bourdieu is supported in that the structure that really matters is that of education. It is within a school context that putative theatregoers learn to perform, learn texts, in particular Shakespeare, and attend performances on school trips, or teacher-encouraged visits. It is by attending grammar schools that participants from working class background where theatre was not “for them” were encouraged to appreciate a taste for theatre. Having a religious background is a key finding of the study where the inherent drama in religious ceremonies, the encouragement of religious establishments for drama to take place there, and religious content of theatrical drama are enhanced by the religious belief of the participant and the participant’s family. The religious background of theatregoers is an area for further research in the UK although questions are asked of US attenders of their religion and frequency of attendance at a place of worship (Ostrower, 2005b).

Participating in theatre, in amateur dramatics is a key finding of the reminiscence workshops. Long-term, regular theatregoers tend to be doers and participators. From their childhood participants in this study have acted, danced, built sets, made costumes, written or devised productions, directed and managed. They have carried on these activities during their lives, often acting as a familiar and helping their children’s productions. Participants have arranged theatre outings, run friends’ organisations, worked professionally as arts administrators, actors, and designers, written plays produced in professional venues, worked as ushers and in front of house, and mobilised communities over new facilities. Participants have taught drama or technical theatre in schools, colleges and venues.

Long-term, regular theatregoers prefer to attend with someone else. If the theatregoers marries s/he attends with a spouse who is likely to be a theatregoer as well; if a theatregoer marries someone who does not go to the theatre, attendance will lapse; if the marriage does not last, there is a return to theatregoing, accompanied by a sense of renewal and freedom. Having a family causes theatregoers to lapse for a while, until they adopt their new role as a “familiar”. Theatregoing may not stop completely but it is scaled down. There is more



attendance of amateur theatre rather than professional. They will also return to regular professional theatre attendance as there is greater affluence, to pay for babysitters. The lack of money when bringing up a family acts as a barrier to regular attendance, as do family responsibilities. Other barriers to regular attendance are living in locations where there is no theatre, and working long hours so the theatregoer cannot attend. However, work can also act as an incentive for attendance as the theatregoer might attend with groups of colleagues. The effects of ageing on a long-term, regular theatregoer are minimal; whilst ill-health will mean non-attendance for the duration of an illness or injury, ageing tends to suggest sitting closer to the stage, sitting in roomier, more comfortable seats, taking advantage of disabled parking, and attending matinees to reduce the cost of tickets.

### 10.3 Implications for theatre practice and policy

The third section indicates how this study has contributed firstly to theatre practice and secondly to policy. By using reminiscence workshops theatres can meet their customers' needs for a greater involvement with their theatre. They can learn more about their audiences than is provided by snapshot quantitative studies. Theatregoers can express their motivations in workshops led by trained workshop leaders with the aim of addressing theatres' marketing and publicity towards satisfying these motivations. They could attract similar, or new customers who share these motivations. Identifying long-term, regular theatregoers and inviting them to join reminiscence groups strengthens their bonds with the theatre. As the most loyal of customers, they can be encouraged to provide items from the reminiscence box for theatre celebrations. As a result of this study, the Pegasus Theatre discovered Helen's forty-year archive of notebooks, drawings of sets and costumes, and production workbooks from past Pegasus productions. As a social gathering, reminiscence workshops encourage theatregoers to make new friends; this in turn could encourage them to attend more frequently, especially if they have lost a spouse. Theatres could build upon these regular theatregoers' roles as "familiar" by encouraging family tickets, thereby ensuring a further generation of

theatre-going customers. These theatre-goers are also likely to donate to the theatre, as Geraldine and June did, in memory of their deceased husbands with whom they shared decades of theatre-going.

The implications for policy are complex. The discourse since the formation of the Arts Council has been to widen the audience base. However, as secondary data have indicated, apart from the age demographic, where the audience is ageing, audiences have not changed much in their profile – they remain middle class, well-educated, living in comfortable towns and suburbs, and more female than male. Regular theatre-going remains a minority interest at about 2% of the population (Skelton *et al*, 2002: 17, Fenn *et al*, 2004: 31). Whilst the most recent policy statement advocates a move away from the tick-box culture to one of supporting excellence, innovation and risk-taking, the audience development suggestions are to provide more opportunities for young people, removing price barriers for one week at funded venues, and a greater interaction with artists (McMaster, 2008). McMaster advocates that “the best person to communicate with audiences is the artist (*ibid*: 8). In fact, this study indicates that the best person to communicate is the “familiar”. The indications for future policy, based on the reminiscences of long-term theatre-goers are that little of note results from a directive; the developments of taste for the arts and theatre occur firstly when young, within the home, at amateur shows, at religious institutions; once a “familiar” enthuses a potential theatre-goer, the production needs to offer elements such as magic, make-believe, visual and aural spectacle, intimacy, and show a relevance to the attender. If it does this, there is the likelihood that a life-long theatre-goer will be created.

#### 10.4 Recommendations for further research

This thesis has offered a fresh perspective on the motivations for people to attend the theatre regularly over a lifetime and has shown an innovation in the use of

reminiscence workshops as a research method. There are a number of limitations within the study that offer up opportunities for further research.

#### 10.4.1 Profiling a different demographic

It is a limitation of this study that the sample of theatregoers was so heavily weighted in favour of female participants. Further research needs to take place where the gender ratio is not so skewed. The reminiscences of the five male participants in this study was valuable and a greater male representation might harmonise the findings more with Bourdieu (1984) where Bourdieu's research was predicated on the male being the head of the household. In similar vein, since all participants in this study are white, further research could be undertaken in a location with greater numbers of multicultural audiences. The Tricycle Theatre in Kilburn, and the Theatre Royal, Stratford East, both located in boroughs with a wider diversity of population, could be approached.

#### 10.4.2 Reminiscence workshops and younger participants

At the Research Methods Festival at St Catherine's College, Oxford in July 2008, some (unnamed) academics from Essex University, in response to a question from the floor, suggested that the success of reminiscence workshops as a research method was due to the study focussing on older people. Their view was that this demographic is more likely to be motivated to share stories with a researcher. However, this study contained, especially in the Corn Exchange, Newbury group, a majority of participants who were more middle-aged than elderly. However, further research using reminiscence workshops should be undertaken with younger people, both about theatregoing, and other leisure pastimes, to assess the effectiveness of the reminiscence workshops as a research method.

#### 10.4.3 Researching the role of the researcher within reminiscence workshops

The viability of this study rested on the position and credibility of the researcher within the theatre and arts milieu. Without the contacts at the three theatres which had been built up over many years, it is doubtful whether such a study would have been viable. In addition to this, the success of each workshop was partly due to the knowledge and understanding of theatre and plays, and disciplines such as arts marketing and arts policy, held by the researcher. Further research would be needed to gather whether another researcher, less familiar with the milieu, would have been able to conduct, and interact in, the reminiscence workshops. Although the researcher has attended theatre regularly from mid-teenage years, and could have contributed reminiscences to the workshop groups, with only an hour for each session it was decided to make best use of the time to hear the stories of the participants who volunteered for the study.

#### 10.5 Reflections on the study

The nature of the involvement of the researcher in the reminiscence workshop means that a study of this kind cannot be objective. An interpretive approach has been embraced that has taken me as the researcher from novice to some level of experience over the course of nearly a year of primary research. Each subsequent reminiscence workshop reinforced the impression that this was a workable research method, not least because of the desire of the participants to contribute their reminiscences. Their enthusiasm for the project and their wish that the workshops would not stop, gave me encouragement to overcome twelve hours of transcription for each session.

It was interesting having conducted the series of reminiscence workshops how pervasive the effect of the research process. As a regular theatregoer and reviewer, further conversations took place outside the workshops with participants

present at those productions who were keen to know what was learned from their stories. This later engagement with participants, alongside discussions with the theatres' key managements, underscored the impression that the workshops had integrated me within the theatre environment in both Oxford and Newbury. As the research instrument, collecting data within a reminiscence workshop process, I felt a tremendous sense of privilege and honour in being able first hand to listen to often touching or humorous life stories. There was also an intense pleasure at experiencing the reminiscence workshops unfold, where I anticipated the following week's session as much as the invited participants. Learning from other people has been a very important outcome of the research process.

The workshops enabled motivators relating to the attendance of long-term theatregoers to be explored in depth within the contexts of the life history. Although the interpretation of the data is that of the researcher, the loquacity and willingness of participants to explore certain factors enabled the interpretation to be a rich and fulfilling experience. The structure of the reminiscence workshop allows for participants to provide their "retrospective glance" (Schutz, 1967), described in their own words. This study has opened the debate on the use of reminiscence workshops for understanding the motivation of people in many leisure areas. It has suggested that there is a key role for the "familiar" in the experience of a person's theatrical epiphany. The study has suggested that factors such as magic, religion and Shakespeare, unmentioned in all previous arts marketing studies, are relevant as motivators for attendance. The study has also suggested, in section 10.3 benefits for arts marketers and theatre managements by developing their relationships with long-term, regular theatregoers. The study indicates that for the participants of this study by attending reminiscence workshops, they do feel more positively engaged with the theatres that they attend regularly. It is therefore concluded that the study has introduced a fresh perspective on the motivations of long-term regular theatregoers in attending theatrical productions throughout their lives.

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## APPENDIX 1

|   |  |  |   |
|---|--|--|---|
|  | <b>Buckinghamshire Chilterns</b><br>UNIVERSITY COLLEGE | Buckinghamshire Chilterns<br>University College<br>Wellesbourne Campus<br>Kingshill Road<br>High Wycombe<br>Buckinghamshire HP13 5BB<br>Telephone: 01494 522141<br>Facsimile: 01494 465432 | <b>Faculty of Leisure and Tourism</b><br>Dean: Professor Chris Kemp<br>Direct Tel: 01494 605162<br>Direct Fax: 01494 448601 |
|---|--|--|---|

  
**OXFORD  
PLAYHOUSE**

Dear Playhouse Theatregoers

AN INVITATION TO OUR REGULAR THEATREGOERS

**FREE COFFEE, CAKES AND REMINISCENCES!**

We would like to offer **you**, our regular theatregoers, an opportunity to become part of theatre history and make new friends at the same time!

Researcher Jon Lewis is inviting **you** to join him over a five to eight week period in the **Playhouse Circle Bar** to enjoy a cup of coffee and some cake whilst reminiscing about your lives as theatregoers.

Whilst the history of theatre productions, actors, directors and designers is reasonably well known, we know little about the lives of **you**, our regular audiences. We invite you to talk about your lives in groups of 5 – 10 as you share memories of theatregoing, in Oxford and elsewhere. Why not bring along souvenirs such as programmes, posters and other memorabilia that the group could enjoy browsing through?

The Oxford Playhouse, and Jon (who is Senior Lecturer in Arts Management at Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College) hope that our reminiscences will give us a different picture of the lives of regular theatregoers in a way that no other survey on British theatre audiences has ever achieved.

We would meet on Thursdays from 11.30 am to 12.30 pm in the Circle Bar. A first reminiscence group will meet on Thursday 12 October 2006 for eight weeks.

If you would like to participate in this unique, innovative and enjoyable initiative to help Jon and the Oxford Playhouse learn more about the Playhouse's regular audiences, there are three ways to be in touch:

1) You could write to Jon at the following address:

Jon Lewis  
Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College  
Wellesbourne Campus  
Kingshill Road  
High Wycombe  
HP13 5BB

2) Or email Jon at:

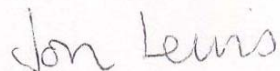
[jlewis01@bcuc.ac.uk](mailto:jlewis01@bcuc.ac.uk)

If you let Jon have your name and phone number, or email address, Jon will contact you to see which of the reminiscence groups you would like to join.

3) You could complete the attached slip and hand it in to the ushers by the sweet counter in the foyer.

All information and reminiscences will be treated as completely confidential and participants will be shown all reminiscence transcripts to make sure you are happy with them. Jon will record the meetings, which we hope could form part of a valuable archive for the theatre's use in the future. This reminiscence research will help all theatres in Britain put theatregoers at the heart of their history.


Yours faithfully



Jon Lewis



## APPENDIX 2



Buckinghamshire Chilterns  
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

**pegasus**  
theatre

home of oxford youth theatre

25<sup>th</sup> September 2006

Magdalen Road, Oxford OX4 1RE  
box office: (+44) (0)1865 722851  
admin: (+44) (0)1865 792209  
fax: (+44) (0)1865 204976  
<http://www.pegasustheatre.org.uk>

Dear Pegasus Theatregoers

**AN INVITATION**

Pegasus is about to enter a phase of major development. Much of the existing buildings on site, being post-war prefabs, will be demolished leaving only the existing auditorium. Work is due to start during 2008 after which the organisation will undergo fundamental changes to its environment and especially the physical evidences of our history. It is important to us as an organisation that our history, ethos and practices are carried through into the new Pegasus.

We would therefore like you to join us in helping to retain that history. **Researcher Jon Lewis** is hosting a group on a once-a-week basis for 6 weeks to enjoy some light refreshments whilst reminiscing about your lives as theatregoers.

Whilst the history of theatre productions, the venues, actors, directors and designers is reasonably well known and documented for the larger-scale venues, very little is recorded about smaller ones like Pegasus or of the lives of those who attend them – you, our regular audiences. We want to hear your stories and memories of theatregoing in general and of Pegasus specifically.

Jon (a Senior Lecturer in Arts Management at Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College), is also carrying out research at the Oxford Playhouse and we hope that the experiences of Pegasus audiences will give us a more complete picture of the lives of theatregoers in a way that no other survey on British Theatre audiences has ever achieved.

**We will meet on Fridays, beginning 27 October 6.30-7.30pm**

Why not bring along souvenirs such as programmes, posters and other memorabilia of your visits to Pegasus or other theatres as a stimulus? In return, as a token of our appreciation, you will have two tickets for the performances at Pegasus immediately following each session. The first will be *Tiiwa Tiiwa*, the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary production from Sakaboa Dance Theatre

This is the third in a series of projects that we have embarked on to capture our history – the other two being photography and video. We do hope you will be able to contribute and enable us to capture this element of our history as we embark on rebuilding the Pegasus theatre. The meetings will be recorded and transcribed but all information will be treated as completely confidential. You will have access to this transcript and be able to give further permission before it is used beyond the group meetings.

Please return the enclosed form in the SAE to us by **Mon 16 Oct** and we look forward to working with you over the course of the coming weeks.

Yours sincerely

Euton Daley  
Artistic Director

Gill Jagers  
Marketing Manager

## APPENDIX 3

Monday 4 December 2006



Dear ,

### Theatre Reminiscence Project

We would like to offer you, one of our regular theatregoers, the opportunity to become part of theatre history and to make new friends at the same time!

Researcher Jon Lewis (Senior Lecturer in Arts Management at Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College) is inviting you to join him over a five week period in **Bar 1861** to enjoy a cup of coffee and some cake whilst reminiscing about your life as a theatregoer.

Whilst the history of theatre productions, actors, directors and designers is reasonably well known, we know little about the lives of our regular audiences. We invite you to talk about your life in a group of 5 – 10 people, sharing memories of theatregoing, in Newbury and elsewhere.

The Corn Exchange and Jon hope that your reminiscences will give us a different picture of the lives of regular theatregoers in a way that no other survey on British audiences has ever achieved.

The group will meet in **Bar 1861** on the following dates:

Wednesday 14 February, 6.30pm – 7.30pm  
Wednesday 28 February, 6.30pm – 7.30pm  
Saturday 10 March, 11am – 12pm  
Monday 19 March, 6.30pm – 7.30pm  
Thursday 29 March, 6.30pm – 7.30pm

It is important that you attend all the sessions. As a thank you for your dedication and contribution to the project The Corn Exchange will also offer you a free ticket to five of our outstanding drama and physical theatre events next season: *Elsewhere/Real Deal*, *Spymonkey Bless*, *The Alchemist*, *Touching Zulu/Angels of Incidence*, *Hang Lenny Pope*.

If you would like to participate in this unique, innovative and enjoyable initiative to help Jon and The Corn Exchange learn more about regular audiences, there are three ways to be in contact:

1) Return the slip below to:

Christina Pepper  
The Corn Exchange  
Market Place  
Newbury

Berkshire RG14 5BD

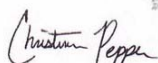
2) Or e-mail me at [christinap@cornexchangenew.co.uk](mailto:christinap@cornexchangenew.co.uk)

3) Or complete the slip below and hand it in at The Corn Exchange box office.

All information and reminiscences will be treated as completely confidential and you will be shown your reminiscence transcripts to make sure you are happy with them. Jon will record the meetings, which we hope will form part of a valuable archive for the theatre's use in the future. This reminiscence research will help all theatres in Britain to put theatregoers at the heart of their history.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me on 01635 582666 x239.

Warm regards,



Christina Pepper  
Community Arts Co-ordinator

---

Please return to Christina Pepper at  
The Corn Exchange  
Market Place  
Newbury  
Berkshire RG14 5BD



\_\_\_\_ Yes, I would like to take part in the reminiscence project.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address:

\_\_\_\_\_



## APPENDIX 4



I would like to take part in the reminiscence project.

Name:

---

Address:

---

---

---

Phone number or email address:

---



## APPENDIX 5

May 11 2006

**OP**  
OXFORD  
PLAYHOUSE

I would like to take part in the reminiscence project.

Name: Mrs. Geraldine [redacted]

Address: [redacted] Rd.,  
[redacted]  
[redacted]

Phone number or email address: [redacted]

I would prefer to join in on (please tick)

Thursday 1 June ☒ Thursday 12 October ☒ <sup>but could do</sup> Either date ☒

Dear Jo Lewis,

I should very much like to take part!

I am 57 years old + have been a theatre goer since the age of 16.

lots of theatres visited:

Stratford; National; several other London theatres + provincial ones in Manchester, Birmingham, Bristol, Windsor, etc. plus amateurs in Abingdon, Cornwall etc.

Any use??

Also as an English teacher (now early retired) took lots of parties to the theatre.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely yours, Geraldine [redacted]

I would like to take part in the reminiscence project

Name: MARGARET

Address:

Phone number or email address:

I would prefer to join in on (please tick)

Thursday 1 June \_\_\_\_\_ Thursday 12 October ☒ Either date \_\_\_\_\_

If you already have more than enough people then leave me out.

I was at one time involved in running an Oxford Playhouse <sup>Leaves</sup> Club which invited speakers & arranged pre production suppers for members and lived in Oxford and was a theatre goer from 1950's onwards & have a collection of old programmes. So I'm certainly interested in the success & scope of your project. November 16<sup>th</sup> is one day when I probably ~~or~~ wouldn't come as I'll be giving a talk on Measure for Measure that lunch time. Best wishes for your plans.



## APPENDIX 6

### Ethics and Reminiscence Workshops



#### What the Research is About

The research is the central part of Jon Lewis' Phd into the life histories of theatregoers. Theatres know much about their productions, actors, directors and other artists. Theatre marketing staff know much about their own audiences by looking at the computerised ticketing records. What theatres and researchers lack is knowledge about their audiences as theatregoers who visit other theatres, or see theatre in other spaces. We do not know how theatre has affected people throughout their lives and when they have attended productions, and when they haven't.

These reminiscence groups will provide us with rich, deep and meaningful stories of some regular theatregoers. The aim of reminiscence is not to direct participants but for all to share their stories. No one will be forced to reminisce about something they feel uncomfortable with. We share what we wish to share.

Memories can be triggered by souvenirs such as programmes, brochures, leaflets, reviews and so on. Please feel free to bring them along.

No one's name will be used in the research. Like actors with a stage name, all the participants can choose their own "stage name" which can then be used in the research.

This reminiscence group will meet at the The Corn Exchange's *Bar 1861* over five sessions to enjoy coffee and cakes, and each other's company. All the workshops will be recorded and then transcribed. You will all be sent transcripts and if there are any errors, or if you do not wish for any content to be recorded, it can be erased.

No one knows what may emerge from the reminiscences but the hope is that various themes will become noticed which can be used to further our understanding of theatregoers and theatregoing. The results of the research will be written up in 2007 for the submission of the Phd in 2008.

---

#### CONSENT FORM

As a participant in the reminiscence workshops I agree to let Jon Lewis record and transcribe my reminiscences recorded during the workshops. After I have read the transcripts, and either agreed or amended the transcripts, I will allow Jon to use the transcripts, adopting a "stage name" for confidentiality, for his research.

☒ I also agree to allow The Corn Exchange to use photographs and/or video of me taken during the reminiscence sessions for documentary or publicity purposes. (Please tick if you agree)

NAME: PHILIP

## APPENDIX 7

Dear Jon,

I am so sorry not to have made contact sooner.  
Perhaps apologies and gratitude are better late than never — I hope so...

No good excuses or explanations, except that sending you back <sup>my</sup> texts was never quite a particular day's priority — I'm afraid they fell off the back burner\*.

Gratitude: yes, the theatre reminiscence group you ran was highly valued by all of us. I am really fascinated to have the transcripts which bring a treasured area of my experience (& shared with others) — very much alive. Thank you.

I'm assuming, rather cravenly, that others did send back corrections + comments so that mine are less needed. The one thing I remember as important was getting Nevill Coghill's name right — it was lost in mishearing the first time it occurred. I am sure, Preszily, for one, will have put that right.

Genevieve and I have been in touch quite a lot & been to the theatre together. Her partner of many years died recently.

\* This means I can't find all of them or your address and until I've dealt with <sup>the</sup> tax complications of selling a house, I'm not ready to have a real file hunt.



17<sup>th</sup> January

Dear Jon,

Many thanks for the final transcript, which made fascinating reading. I have the feeling that we could have gone on for hours and still have found new aspects to discuss.

There is just one thing I would have added if there had been time and as you said we could add something here goes. I was thinking about what it is that keeps me going to the theatre after all these years. Partly it is because I enjoy going out and seeing people. I really like watching people find their seats, which you may think is a bit odd, but they do the most incredible things and it is almost guaranteed that the people in the centre seats come late. Allied to this is the added thrill at the opera of being in the theatre when the orchestra is tuning up. The sense of anticipation is intense.

However, what really keeps me going is that even though as age progresses and it is possible to think that everything has been seen there is always something new to experience. As I said in the transcript, *The Quare Fellow* was an eye-opener for me. Another new experience was seeing *Uncle Vanya* in Russian and seeing Russian actors who were working in what I presume was an authentic Russian setting. Also there is the possibility of being able to see a new talent emerging which is always satisfying.

I'm very happy for you to use my own name if you choose to quote anything! I could write a great deal about theatre and drama in the education of young children, but I will restrain myself, except to say that the love of entertaining others and of being entertained seems to be innate.

Now I will stop. Good luck with your research and I hope we have been of use to you,

Best wishes

Kate.

Jon -  
with thanks for the  
tremendous fun these  
meetings have been -  
and best wishes for a

Happy Christmas

2007

for Genevieve

June 29<sup>th</sup> 2006

Dear John, We would like to thank you for making us such a welcome part of your research. Sheila and I have thoroughly enjoyed the company, the chats and the refreshment. We don't feel we have helped much to date, but we will certainly do

anything to fill up that you later think of as necessary.

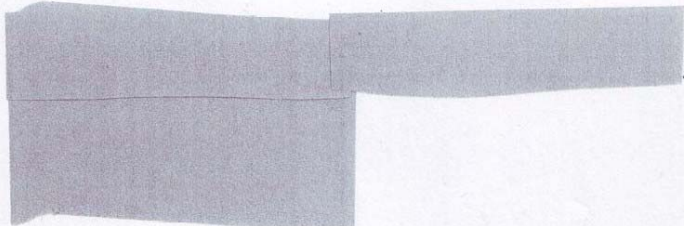
Good Luck with the work - we will be most intrigued to read it!

Please accept our small gift as a token of our gratitude. We hope it will help, too.

With Very Warmest Wishes,

Sheila & John.





19 July 2006

Jon Lewis  
Buckingham Chilterns University College  
Wellesbourne Campus  
Kingshill Road  
High Wycombe  
Bucks.. HP13 5BB

Dear Jon,

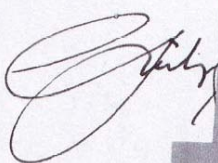
**Re: Research into Theatre Audiences**

Whilst researching the qualities of theatre audiences over the past three months you made us anonymous in the transcripts by deleting our real names and substituting – 'Judy Dench' and 'Paul Schofield' (JD and PS). We agreed that should you wish to use our real names we wouldn't have the slightest objection.

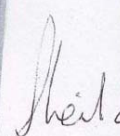
I hope our letter makes that sufficiently clear. (Giving up our only claim to theatrical fame wasn't that difficult after all!)

Good luck with your further work on the research.

With Very Best Wishes,  
Yours sincerely,



**Gwilym**



**Sheila**





Tue 27/11/07

Hello Jon

I hope this is not too late!  
I'm so sorry it's taken me  
6 months to return this  
- I'm suitably ashamed!

As I haven't seen a finished  
transcript, I'm hoping that  
you're still waiting to send  
it out to everyone with  
all amendments.

I've also enclosed my consent  
form as I didn't give it to  
you at the sessions.

Hope you're well, and  
Best wishes for Christmas.

Sandra

2

Newbury)

29/5/07

Dear Fon,

Thank you very much for  
sending me the draft of the  
reminiscence workshops

I'm sorry it has taken me so  
long to get it back to you but I  
found it quite a disconcerting  
experience to see how much  
rubbish I say! Also how many  
times I say "er" & "um".  
However I have now been through  
it & I hope it makes a bit more  
sense!

Best wishes

Rachel



## APPENDIX 8

Ted I didn't realise it was specified

J It does, and you can see the Thames supposedly from the view into the audience, as they stand by the windows

Helen Wow, well, I'll have to go!

J It has the most marvellous set, so it could be this house

Helen And it's at the Playhouse now?

J Yes

\*  
Kenneth Grahame lived -  
Helen I'll have to go because there ~~are~~ <sup>were</sup> a lot of ~~big~~ <sup>big</sup> houses there ~~to which~~ <sup>we</sup> went. My first school was where it was called Grahame's and it was Kenneth Grahame's house. You know, who wrote *Wind in the Willows*.

Dani What was the name of the school?

\*\*  
Helen It was called ~~Henry's~~ <sup>HERRIES</sup> but on the gatepost it said 'Grahame's' and there's a whole lot of stuff, and I then moved into the suburban area into a bigger house, it wasn't the cottage, but I knew these children and so I got invited to be a continuity girl. Um but then of course, I lived near Stanley Spencer.

Ted Yes, I was going to say, was he still living in Cookham at the time?

Helen Yes, I used to go as a little girl to his house because I was a painting child and he'd say, "come up and see what I've been doing" and <sup>he</sup> go up to his bedroom, and he'd unroll the canvases from under the bed!

Ted God!

Helen And we'd look and it was absolutely extraordinary, ~~so~~ <sup>at</sup> the whole place was, we're talking about <sup>being</sup> in the fifties, early forties and fifties. There were a lot of people who had kind of fled from wartime London and were there in that place and I'm sure it was Posy Simmonds <sup>the cartoonist</sup>.

Ted You're not sure that it was?

Helen The people who would have been, <sup>sure</sup> because I think she was called Rosemary Simmonds, ~~and um~~ but the people who really know <sup>sw</sup> my aunts and people <sup>are</sup> dead, you see, but I'm almost certain, I think my aunt BAY ROBINSON had taught her.

Ted She didn't show any aptitude for drawing?

Helen She wasn't drawing then. No, I was the drawing person. She was being murdered actually, in the chalk pit.

\*\*  
Ted Is this the manor house at Cookham or the nearest thing to it?  
Actually the HERRIES school I went to was in a different large house but it moved to 'GRAHAME'S' and one of my Abbey School friends, GILLIAN ARMISTRO lived there. Her mother was the headmistress. So in the holidays and at weekends we often played there.

\* \*

Let's use one of yours. And she did this wonderful production ~~um~~ and it was a dance, and the book I had done <sup>was</sup> called *The Wolfman and the Clown*, and Caroline did the music and there's a tape about it, and all the costumes, and I made the costumes, and I made these ~~umb~~ <sup>head</sup> dresses

Dani Oh, OK

Helen And made costumes

Dani Pre-cursors to the Dark Materials

Helen I haven't seen them

J And that is mid-nineties, is it?

Helen Ninety-two. So I made these structures for *The Wolfman and the Clown* and they looked so beautiful. When I started I thought I would ~~um~~ make them solid but they were such beautiful structures, without anything on them and that was all what was required. That they should be, as you see, ~~um~~ these ghostly figures and the children, and I just made the props in the background, the children made their own headdresses. There was a chorus of wolves and a chorus of clowns and they made all their headdresses out of ~~um~~ they did a workshop; out of cornflakes boxes

\* \*

Dani And did you have helpers for these workshops? Volunteers or something, to kind of help you

Helen Older youth theatre members and occasionally I would have sort of, an art student or somebody. And there's a tape. I've got the music. It was absolutely wonderful. I loved it.

J Were they videotaped as well?

Helen I don't know. There was always a big problem with taping these ~~um~~, look

Dani They're lovely

Helen Magical sets. I think they might have been <sup>video'd</sup> I'll have to have a look. Somebody might have a tape. I know that Cecilia's dance ones were. And then I worked with Emma Webb. Do you know Emma Webb? Emma Webb was very active here. She was a dancer and a wonderful actress. And very funny. She has a natural gift. She does a lot of teaching now. And she wanted to do some ~~um~~ incredible stories from a South American writer. You do know him.

J Gabriel Garcia Marquez?

\* This book was dedicated to my Czech dissident artist friends.  
& was written before the fall of Communism.

\* \* I designed the costumes & the wonderful parents  
made the children's costumes from my ~~A4 paper~~ <sup>46</sup>  
It was performed at Pegasus Feb 1995 <sup>designs on A4 paper.</sup>



Danielle

Pegasus Reminiscence Workshop 27 October

J Well, we'll start with you.

Dani It's difficult to think about one "wow" moment. I suppose ~~"wow" moments~~, I suppose my theatregoing history, as it were, has been in different phases at different places. And there are probably "wow" moments at each of those different times of life. And those different phases are probably as I was growing up – I grew up in Zimbabwe and ~~didn't go~~ <sup>we've</sup> to a lot of theatre there. And the theatre there was amateur with only the director who was professional, mostly. The rest was amateur ~~so but~~, but a really good standard. Um so there were "wow" moments there, and then the next phase was probably when I was at university and I used to usher at a theatre and watch quite a lot through ushering, and then here in England after that.

J I think that probably um next week with the new group, or the other participants, we'll come back to "wows" again. But also talk about childhood and theatregoing. Growing up in Zimbabwe might be a really useful discussion there. Probably the week after we'll probably get to university time.

Dani OK. My university time was in Cape Town

J Perfect

Dani And then after that the theatre experience would be here in England. So anyway, which direction do you want to go in today?

J A show, a theatre experience that you found amazing, that turned you on to theatre

Dani It doesn't matter from which phase?

J It doesn't matter. No I will go right back to the beginning but um

Dani Well some of the more recent "wow" moments connected to Pegasus, I suppose <sup>we've</sup> with children, with the youth theatre work here, where the stage is just full of children who are, have obviously had a fantastic time, and is usually involved with a bit of song and dance, bringing them all together at the end and there's a real buzz at the end of a project. With the stage crowded with children, I suppose that's a real "wow" moment. They've come through a process,

J Do you get involved?

Dani Well, I suppose my children have been involved so those are more recent "wow" moments. Um

J Hello [knocking on door by administrator]

Jon Lewis,

21st January, 2007.

Dear Jon,

Theatre and Reminiscence Workshops:  
The Playhouse

It seems quite a long time since we all met together in Margaret's house in St. John's Street for the last session just before Christmas and once again thank you for all that you gave us during those eight highly enjoyable and enlightening meetings and discussion. You were a marvel of dedication to give us all the transcripts bar the ~~the~~ final one and ensure that we each had a list of each other's names and addresses. I also much appreciated your sending me the transcript of the last session and Anne Durham's address to add to the list.

I am afraid it has been several weeks before I could do the considerable reading of the recordings. I have been preoccupied with much business but these last few days I have greatly enjoyed reading the recordings and being taken back into such delightful company. I attach a list of corrections, which I hope can be clearly identified on your copy. It was a huge undertaking to transcribe so many hours of tape so I did not want you to send me fresh corrected copies. I will correct mine here.

I also enclose the consent Form and have added a note to say that I would prefer the transcripts to contain my own name rather than a 'stage name'.

I do hope that we shall all keep in touch in whatever way we can. An amazing further connection with the past - not to do with the theatre - was revealed when Genevieve rang me on New Years Day. She had returned from spending Christmas with her mother in Sussex and had apparently told her about your Group and our meetings, mentioning that I was one of those present. Her mother, now in her nineties said that she remembered me as a very little girl when she was teaching at Rye St. Antony School. It was my first school and I was there between 1936 and 1939. She told me her mother's maiden name was Sowerby. I instantly recalled a tall, distinguished young woman with dark hair and spectacles called Elizabeth Sowerby who taught French. This was indeed her mother and I sent her greetings

May your next groups be as fruitful as you ensured that ours was and may all your work of teaching and research continue to give great satisfaction. Another extraordinary link with my past that your College under a different name should be the College where I worked between 1966 and 1971!

With kindest regards and again my thanks,

Priscilla

Enc.

Priscilla



Corrections to the recorded texts of the Theatre Reminiscence Workshops:  
October-December 2006.

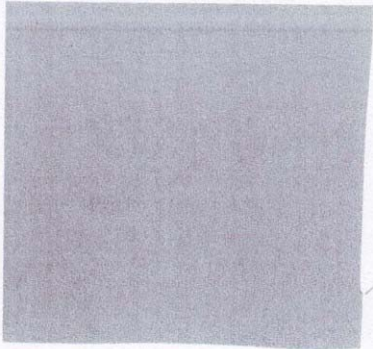
- One 12.10.06. Mau ...the Danish film producer: Pris Bergman. This is my error: Berman is/was in fact Swedish, I believe. But perhaps 'The Magic Flute' referred to was the work of another ? Danish director.
- Two 19.10.06. p.19. penultimate line: Mar Phil'n Gym? should be Phil and Jim. This was affectionate nickname for the former St. Philip and James Church.  
p.28. Pris long speech, l.13. Nova Pillarbean. Should be Nova Pillbeam.  
p.30. Pris long speech, l.11. Tintum Viscum should be Tintum Biscum.
- Three 26.10.06. p.38. Pris last line. I don't know what I was wanting to say there.  
p.40. Pris middle of page (indistinct one word) ? Perthshire or Highland.  
p.40. Pris 5 lines from bottom (indistinct 3 words) was 'a young adult'.  
p.47. Mar overlapping with Coghlan. Should be Coghill.  
p.47. Pris play called Gamaga was an Eagle. Should be Gamma Cirton's Needle'.  
p.53. Pris The BBC Drama... Stanley and Vera Hogen. Should be Stanley and Thea Holme.  
p.56. Mau Henry Lott School should be Henry Box School.
- Four 2.11.06. p.63. Pris bottom line: (indistinct 1 word) perhaps 'the Reportary (Theatre) in Birmingham'.  
p.66. Pris second speech: Bond Street should be Corn Street.  
p.67. Pris third line Rosemary Critchley should be Crutchley.  
p. 67. Pris end of next speech: billowing, circular skirts.  
p.74. Pris last speech on page: Probationers' conference should be Probation Officers' Conference.  
p.76. Mau second speech: John Clemence should be John Clements.  
p.78. Pris first speech: And my first case was an attempted suicide and I think the death penalty was still the law for murder and treason.
- Five 9.11.06. p.86. Pris first speech: I was in Ireland with my parents in the summer of 1951.  
p.86. Pris Last speech (indistinct one word) I think the word is 'icons'. Next line: an enormous amount of anarchic iconoclasm  
p.87. Pris 2nd speech: the death of Hector in 'Troilus'.  
p.92. Pris Final speech: (indistinct one word) accessibility.  
p.93. Pris 4th Speech: line 2, by Czechoslovakia should be about Czech.  
p.97. Pris 3rd speech: the two Ians (indistinct 2 words) Holm and Richardson.
- Six 16.11.06. ~~XXI25~~  
p.125. Pris 3rd speech: the whole kind of tribal I think should be triangle.  
p. 125. Pris 4th speech: recovered from some of its administrative chaos.
- Seven 23.11.06. ~~P.124~~  
144. Pris First speech: because I go to things in London very little
- Eight 21.12.06 p.159 Pris Long speech: two nightmares.  
p.159. Pris Long speech: Margaret Lains' biography should be Margaret Lane's.  
p.167 Pris 3rd speech: Ales Fidelis should be 'Adeste Fideles'.

# Reminiscence Workshops - Suggested Amendments

- Page 6 Nellie Wallace and Lupino Lane  
when the young man (Konstantyn, played by John Moffat) goes out and  
shoots himself
- Page 13 *(Not Anne speaking here!)*
- Page 24 my father lost his business, lost his home *(etc)*  
In Sunday school there was a gentleman, Sid Hedges  
who ran a harmonica band which was very famous,  
a rainbow fan
- Page 25 a hand came out round a door, and it was a mystery  
coming up to the nineteen-forties  
Wake Walks. He remembers that in his church all the men had gone  
off to the war, and when they came back  
you didn't care
- Page 71 And there were very strong amateur dramatic festivals,  
out into the villages. I don't know if  
adjudicated  
Listening through these three hour Shakespeare plays - my parents  
didn't like it.  
We were quite a hard up family
- Page 72 In the war time  
forty/fifty
- Page 80 Tristram Shandy
- Page 96 production of The Tempest  
Ariel ran across what looked like lily pads  
And we had three kids
- Page 106 and saw La Traviata in Samarkhand  
we 12 tourists
- Page 110 capsule of fantasy
- Page 158 he designed a set for amateur production of Lady Audley's Secret here  
at Playhouse

Anne 





21 May 2007

Jon Lewis  
Buckinghamshire Chilterns  
University College  
High Wycombe Campus  
Queen Alexandra Road  
High Wycombe  
Buckinghamshire  
HP11 2JZ

Dear Jon

I enclose the amended version of my transcripts. I chiefly removed the many 'ums' and 'ers' from my contributions.

I wish you every success with your research and look forward to receiving the clean version in due course.

Best wishes

*Richard*

Richard 

Rich Lots of dancing, I remember that [laughs] Very good and then much later on I saw *Sweeney Todd* which became famous and went on to transfer to the West End, in fact and that was a very good ~~um~~ production. I think I went to *Hedda Gabler*, I think they did that once, ~~um~~ and I went to see *Macbeth*, but that wasn't at the Watermill, that was at Stratford ~~um I saw Macbeth~~ and I remember the woods moving at Dunsinane, that kind of thing [laughs]. ~~Um~~ At one stage ~~um~~ I used to go to the Watermill, go and see the first play of the season, go there, and as I arrived in the theatre, I bought tickets for the next production within the season, and when I arrived for that, I bought tickets for the next production. So I went to every single production one season. ~~Um~~ and That was thoroughly enjoyable but the quality did vary I found, it did, from production to production though they were all of a high standard, it was just marginal.

J Do you tend to go by yourself when you go to the theatre or in groups or family?

Rich I like to go in groups and so on and family, and that sort of thing. I have gone by myself and enjoyed it, but it is not nearly as enjoyable without someone to discuss it with, during the interval or afterwards.

J Is that what you would normally do then, you would talk about the show and that's part of the experience?

Rich Yes

J Lovely. Well, we probably will come back to you. There's lots of themes there. Um Jane, we left you last in a village in Abingdon and then you did A-Levels. What happened to you next?

Jane What did I do next? I went to university down in Cardiff and there as far as I remember I went to see singers, Rod Stewart, Elkie Brooks, Leo Sayer, people like that um. Then I got married and moved to London and we saw *Hair* the day we got back from our honeymoon. And then, I've been picking my husband's brains because everything is a blur, it was a very long time ago, now he reckons we went to see another musical which was maybe *Jesus Christ Superstar*. He also says we went to *Othello*, *Coriolanus*, an Ibsen, *Waiting For Godot*, *A Day in the Life of Joe Egg*, and all this, I believe him but

Sand You can't remember

Jane Vaguely, vaguely I remember now, so all those things. Um er we started in London for about two years and then we moved down to Wales so I think *Othello* and *Coriolanus* were definitely in London. And the musicals were after that because we were in Cardiff. So I believe him but they obviously didn't make a huge impression. And I did English at my first year at uni so I must have something other than Anglo-Saxon Chronicles but I really don't



Irene No, not really ~~um~~ we never went to the miners' club because ~~um~~ we didn't actually live near the mine. My father had to travel there and ~~um~~ when he couldn't afford to go on the bus he walked so, you know, that was the situation. The ~~um~~, ~~the~~ pantomimes that my mother used to do, ~~um~~ they were in church halls ~~um~~ and they were normally for charity as well. And ~~um~~ she got involved in that because somebody <sup>else</sup> in the street was already one of the dancers in the group so ~~um~~ with them being friends ~~and~~ she knew my mother could dance, <sup>AS SHE IS THE ONLY ONE</sup> ~~would you~~ like to come along, and that's how it all started.

J Was is it in a specific church hall?

Irene It was various ones, ~~different ones~~. And ~~um~~ I think they did appear in one of two theatres but not very often. ~~Um~~ it was more or less ~~um~~ getting money for charity really, <sup>SO IT WAS MAINLY CHURCH HALLS</sup>.

J That's interesting. Um if the rest of you ~~um~~ have tales which might relate similarly, maybe drama in church halls or church-related, that is a theme that each of my three other groups have touched upon. And I think that is going to be one of my main, one of the findings, is the importance of the church to a lot of people's backgrounds to drama and so what you are talking about is very consistent with the other groups.

Irene Yeah. ~~Um~~ and I believe some of them were ~~um~~ Sunday School halls as well, ~~you know~~, because you know, that's a different area isn't it, Sunday School to church, ~~and um~~ the first pantomimes that we went to were actually in church halls because ~~um~~ they were much cheaper for us to go to and ~~um~~ experience but ~~um~~ I'm sure the quality was just ~~um~~ you know, it was good like it is in the theatre so I suppose that's how my "wow" factor arrived, going to a real theatre and all the opulence and all that I spoke about last time. So I think that's where the "wow" factor came from. Because generally ~~um~~ we went to these ~~um~~ church halls and Sunday School halls etc and so I think that's how that "wow" factor really came into being with the theatre itself. ~~You know, the theatre is sheer theatre.~~

J And at school. What memories do you have of theatre or drama at school? Was there much?

Irene ~~Er~~ we didn't have ~~um~~ actual drama happening at school. ~~I didn't~~ but we did go to theatre. ~~Um~~ we used to go and see ~~um~~ because of the ~~um~~ books that we were learning for our coursework, we went to see <sup>various productions in connection with those</sup> ~~various productions in connection with those~~. And again ~~um~~ I really, really enjoyed the theatre. So those occasions were very special to me as well.

J Do you have any memories of any particular teachers? Do any teachers stand out in developing your taste for theatre?

Irene No, not really. No, I think that probably came, as I say, from my mother and ~~um~~ just the actual productions I had been to and experienced. I don't think ~~um~~ ~~that~~ was a teacher who brought that alive for me.

J As Gerda

Rach That's right. About the age of twelve or thirteen. I only ever did that once. I don't know why. I did that once. But at home, my parents lived, we lived in an old house, and I remember my parents had a sort of a large alcove with a curtain that went round it and we – I had <sup>two</sup> sisters and a brother – and every Christmas when my cousins came over, at Christmas, we used to put together a little play. ~~Seven of us, and we used to do it in my parents' bedroom and the adults would come in and watch us. And use the curtains as part of the set. I remember that was really, really good fun. And I don't quite know, I can't remember what we did, it was probably around some religious story as it was Christmas and we just made it up, rehearsed it and then performed it to the adults. We did that for quite a number of Christmases. And then my mother was involved in the Soroptimists, and ~~ex~~ because there were four of us, I remember she and my father used to write plays that the four of us used to act in at the town hall in Devizes for charity, so to get people to come along and pay to go to good causes and things, and my grandmother used to make all our costumes with crepe paper which I can always remember being worried about, this crepe paper, because you always expect it's going to break and you're going to be left on stage with no clothes on [laughter] but we never did. I remember that, and that's the sort of thing I did.~~

J Did you have a dressing up box there in the house?

Rach My mother had these lovely, old, well, they weren't that old because she would have stored them, she had some lovely evening gowns which we used to dress up in but when we were old enough to be able to wear them, she'd given them all away. I thought that was really sad because they were always too big for us and I was always hoping she would have kept them so we could try them on when we were older but they had all gone by then.

J And you went to the local school?

Rach Um well I went to a private junior school and I went to the local comprehensive which is where they had the after-school drama club, that one of our English teachers, Mr Ball ran, he was very good and he took the drama club after school.

J Did you stay on until A-Levels too?

Rach Yes and I did English

J You did English as well

Rach And I do remember going to see some productions. Just Shakespeare. But one that sticks in my mind was *Romeo and Juliet* because it was done as a comedy and I've no idea how they did that but I always thought that was really clever. And I think that was the best Shakespeare that I have ever seen, ~~Because of the way it was done. It wasn't done as a tragedy at all and I don't~~

## APPENDIX 9

... Um, I don't want to, sort of, um, led you too much into, you know, what we can talk about but there are one or two things, um, which we could theme our meetings on. Erm, and, um, two things that really appeal to me are, um, the "wow" factor. Um, what, was there, what were, what could have been, the moment when you fell in love with theatre? Was there, was there a show, was there an event that you that you went to, the first time that you realised actually I am a theatregoer, this is for me. Erm and maybe that'd be, that'd be enough for one, one meeting to talk about, what that first moment was... (Oxford Playhouse, 1 June 2006)

I'm Jon and I'll be running these workshops for five weeks. This is the fourth in the series. I am researching the life history of theatregoers and I've been fascinated trying to find out how is it that someone becomes a theatregoer and stays a theatregoer, and what sort of things do they think about in terms of their theatregoing. So each week, um this is a reminiscence session so it's not an interview. Neither is it a focus group so I'm not trying to get out anything specific. It's more fluid and it's um much more conversational. So um you tell me the stories you wish to tell and you can also talk to each other and ask each other questions. And things will just emerge. Um but today, I think I'll start us off with one theme um and then you will all um speak about that particular subject. And it is what I would call the "wow" factor. There must have been a moment perhaps when you discovered that you were a theatregoer. Prior to that moment you weren't. Maybe you saw a show or a production when you were young, or when you were older; a light bulb went off in the sky... (Corn Exchange, 14 February 2007)



## APPENDIX 10

Oh, I did plays at school [**early participation in drama**]. I was always, from the time I was tiny, I mean charades [**play**] at Christmas, and when I was about six, my mother [**parental agency**] suddenly produced [**excitement of the unexpected**] a large suitcase and it was full of dressing-up costumes [**transformational items**] that she had made for herself, sort of amateur stuff at her church [**part of religious scene**]. And it was all beautifully hand-sewn [**attraction of the authentic; fascination with beauty**] costumes. And from then on I was always making up plays [**regular invention; regular imaginative escape into play world**], and um pretending [**putting on mask; being another**] to be a Russian Cossack or lavender girl, or a jester [*laughs*]. All these costumes she got and I was directing my friends [**proactive in leadership; conjuring up**] in made-up plays in which I played the wicked witch and the beautiful princess [**fairy tales**]. [*laughs*] And my friend came on at the end as the prince who awoke me. And the parents would sit there having to watch [**parental obligation/encouragement**] and my father would be saying “it’s bed-time, bed-time.” [**breaking the spell**] And I said “no, no, we haven’t finished! We haven’t finished.” And he would say: “right, five minutes” as they sat through probably half an hour of gruelling histrionics. [**parental obligation**] [*laughs*] Quite embarrassing for them. But um, um then was when I really enjoyed [**hedonism**] drama a lot. It was, sort of, part of me really [**organic presence**].

## Appendix 11

Memo: Wonder(ful) marvel(lous) fabulous

Wonder = not believing that something is; extra-ordinary; staring at agog

Marvel = incredible magic trick; spectacle; eye-opener; mind-boggling; surpassing belief; hard to believe; not of this world

Fable = amazing fictional tale.

Hard to believe; in a story; unreal. The first concept is that of being spellbound, under a spell, cast when young during epiphany. The spell cannot be broken and lasts lifelong. The word epiphany itself means an apparition or revelation; insight, perception, awareness; ironic that *Twelfth Night* is the date of epiphany and also a Shakespearean play. Magic is about the willingness to believe in the unbelievable ie the fictional world on Stage; the Church is about organised religion, which relies on faith, on belief in a supernatural being and fabulous stories.

## Appendix 12

Audrey's mother has had a hard life "she was brought up in an orphanage. So she he had a terrible life" (*Cinderella, Oliver*) and it was only when she left the orphanage and went to stay with an uncle and aunt, and met her husband-to-be through the church, who "worked for a bank in the city" (*Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty*), that she was able to change her life. Audrey's mother liked pretending and dressing up, showing a talent for acting, the arts and comedy before Audrey and her sister are born. When Audrey and her sister are old enough, they inherit their mother's treasures, her own home-made costumes which are "suddenly produced" from a dressing-up box in a dramatic gesture, like a magician's trick. They are so well-crafted, "all beautifully hand-sewn costumes"; a spectacle, from fantastic, far-away places – "Russian Cossack or lavender girl", "a beautiful Hungarian folk dancer" and "a jester", a comic teller of tales. Now the girls can enter their own world of make-believe as they have the magic items and clothes: "crowns, and cloaks, and you know, so you could be a witch, or you could be a king or a queen". Having gained these clothes "from then on I was always making up plays and pretending". The special nature of the clothes is reinforced with the bridal outfit "...she chucked in her wedding dress for good measure", worn for a day of show, with its own rituals, special magic and performance; it is the culmination of the fairy tale (*Cinderella, Snow White, Rapunzel*) to wear a white dress when marrying the prince. Audrey knows their otherworldly properties: "It was just magic I mean, every summer we would be out in the garden, with these costumes". Audrey also discovers she likes to play the magician: "I was directing my friends" where "I played the wicked witch and the beautiful princess and my friend came on at the end as the prince who awoke me". Audrey is in a world of inventing, make-believe, and playing, creating stories out of nothing - "charades at Christmas", a time of magic with Santa, fairies on trees, Rudolph and the reindeer, magical stars over Bethlehem, belief in the Virgin Birth and so on. Also Audrey plays in front of the parents in the evening until the spell is broken by her father "it's bed-time, bed-time" who with her mother was not inhabiting the same invented world (*Peter Pan*) "as they sat through probably half an hour of gruelling histrionics." Audrey is now strongly immersed in the world of belief: "most of my life at that time was bound up with church and school". Having been cast with the spell of drama, it infused her like a spirit or a dybbuk: "... then was when I really enjoyed drama a lot. It was, sort of, part of me really".

However, this magic time was not to last. Audrey's father is taken away (*Martin Guerre*) from her, her sister and her mother to fight in the Navy. Worse was to come as Audrey, her sister and her mother leave the family home "we'd been evacuated for the first year of the war" which "was such a miserable experience... and that following winter was so awful and I was ill all the time and I was so miserable at the school I went to that um they decided it was better to stick it through the raids that. Stay there. So we came back to London, well, out of London.



## APPENDIX 13

### 1. Gwilym

Gwilym's family moved from S Wales to Letchworth, a Garden City, pre war, living in a poor, close-knit working class community. His father was completely uneducated but learned Shakespeare by rote at school. Gwilym's first theatre experiences at the age of five or six was hearing his father quote *The Merchant of Venice* to him, and Gwilym was shocked by the passion in his father's voice. His father never went to the theatre unless it was to watch Gwilym perform at school or in am-dram and never saw a professional production. The family were outsiders, going to the Welsh Club.

At school Gwilym was a bit of a show-off and when aged eight, a new male music teacher wrote Gwilym a part in *Cinderella* as an ugly sister. When his parents liked his performance, Gwilym felt great esteem at the success, which was repeated the following year in *Sir Merry Blade and the Dragon*. The teacher wrote long speeches for Gwilym, and he kept the script as a souvenir. This teacher changed his whole life.

Gwilym was a member of the Methodist Church and got over his shyness by being showing off on stage. Gwilym likes acting because he never wanted 'to be me', escaping into other characters with a mask or make-up. He was never good at improvising and always worked from a script. He used to perform in Agatha Christie and farces with St Paul's Church Amateur Dramatic Society, SPADS. He remembers being terrified at an amateur production of *The Ghost Train* there when he was thirteen. His amateur group used to perform at a private school, St Francis College For Girls, plays for four days, so Gwilym got experience of theatre by doing it, until he was about sixteen. He thought the quality of the amateurs was brilliant but now realises it wasn't, but your tastes get educated by your experience.

Life changed for Gwilym when he was about fifteen in 1957 when his drama teacher at his grammar school took him to the Old Vic to see *Hamlet* with John Neville, his first experience of professional theatre. Prior to this, people of his class stuck to amateur theatre. He thought he would not be able to understand it because it was Shakespeare but his teacher reassured him that if he didn't understand it, it was because they weren't doing it right. Gwilym knew the play from reading it at school and waited for the one speech he did know, but was so absorbed in the play it had almost passed him by. Gwilym identified with Hamlet, because, he too was young. Judi Dench played a young Ophelia. Gwilym read Plays and Players at school so knew about the Old Vic. At the Old Vic he was gobsmacked by Hamlet. He now loves the play, a wonderful play, seeing it again and again, because there is always something he hasn't noticed before and so many bits to rediscover.

Gwilym studied teacher training at Bristol from 1960 to 1963 and went every couple of weeks to the Bristol Old Vic which had wonderful young actors performing from the theatre school. The Old Vic was cheap and for threepence he could sit in the gallery. It was a lovely theatre that smelled like a theatre was meant to smell, staging wonderful productions. At college he joined the drama society who used to perform in competitions, one of which they won.

Gwilym got married early to a woman who liked ballet but not theatre. They were poor and used to save up and go once a year because ballet was so expensive. She also liked musicals which Gwilym did not like much, and ice shows which he detested. He started teaching, and directed some school productions. They emigrated to Toronto in Canada in 1967 due to poverty but apart from one visit to Stratford, Ontario did not go to the theatre because it was so expensive. Toronto staged lots of musicals so it was a dead time theatrically for him. They returned to England but the marriage faltered and Gwilym did not go to the theatre. He got divorced, returned to Hertfordshire, and started going to amateur theatre, his real homecoming, which was wonderful. He then moved to Croydon to get away from his estranged wife and joined an amateur group there. He also met his second wife, Sheila, who came to see him perform. They moved a few times; to High Wycombe where he acted with Fourways, Thame where he acted with the Thame Players, which he found a wonderful learning experience, and where he was introduced to Pinter, and panto versions of *Hamlet* and *Lear*.

Gwilym likes to talk to others you know who are having the same experience. Theatre unlike cinema punches you between the eyes because you get a lump in the throat watching other people's relationships on stage, although he does watch films, especially those of Shakespeare. Theatre really works well when the audience reciprocates to the performers. The experience of working with amateurs is like belonging to a church, cliquey, but he likes their society. He likes it when you know twenty percent of the audience, which is something lacking in professional theatre. It is the sense of community he likes. They then moved to Bicester which is culturally the end of the earth. The amateur scene is so bad that they come to Oxford a lot, and particularly to the Playhouse. They go to see their grandchildren perform in school plays.

When Gwilym was young, actors used to declaim on stage and was especially fond of the wonderful voice of Richard Burton. He is a fan of Clare Higgins and sees her in many productions. Gwilym's daughter trained as an actress and has actor friends who have appeared at Stratford, so Gwilym has gone to those productions. He is also a fan of Judi Dench and Maggie Smith and has seen them in the West End, when the audience didn't breathe because people might miss something. He visited the Minack Theatre in Cornwall where he saw a rehearsal which he thought was magical.

Gwilym allows the willing suspension of disbelief to take over in plays because you allow the thing to follow through and you kind of find yourself hoping it won't happen. You don't anticipate the end of the plays, like in *King Lear* and like in *Romeo and Juliet*, you hope that they will make it. Gwilym likes to be comfortable in a theatre, having suffered on benches in a four and a half hour *War and Peace* at Bristol Old Vic, no matter how electric it was. He goes to children's drama and disabled drama. He observes theatre conventions by referring to The Scottish Play. He likes to go to the theatre to see people, or companies, that he knows. Gwilym has joined a playwriting group which meets at the Playhouse. Because of poorer eyesight he needs to sit closer to the stage, and ageing means having to sit in more comfortable seats with proper backs and good legroom. He can still be inhibited by productions he deems too erudite for the likes of him.

## 2. Sheila

Sheila's parents did not go as a couple to the theatre much, but her mother used to go, because her mother used to go. They went to musicals like *Annie Get Your Gun* about twice a year, because her father was musical. The family was not well-off so they were deterred by the price of tickets. They did not take the children because of the high cost. Instead they went to the pictures, especially on Saturday mornings. Sheila was brought up in Mitcham, in South London; her father was working class, her mother not, and her mother had won a scholarship to the Brompton Oratory. Sheila likes language and gained this love of reading from her educated grandmother and mother.

Sheila's first experiences of theatre were aged four or five when a maiden aunt who did not really like her, but liked her older brother, took them both to plays in London at Christmastime, wonderful things like *Where the Rainbow Ends*, *Peter Pan* and *St George and The Dragon*, the last of which she found magic, amazing, even she was sat behind a pillar. She was absolutely engrossed in these plays, once a year.

Sheila attended a strict Catholic school but after getting into trouble for talking too much, her father objected to the disciplinary measures, and Sheila moved to an ordinary primary school. She was a regular churchgoer. It was only at this school that they discovered Sheila couldn't read, a fact that shocked her mother. Her grandmother then took her to the Carnegie Library in Putney where they sat in wonderful chairs and read books. As a teenager Sheila attended several amateur productions, but as times got tougher, no theatre at all. After failing the eleven plus, Sheila went to secondary school which did no drama despite having a wonderful English teacher. She was good at sports.

At fifteen, Sheila's school organised a trip to see *The Mousetrap* in London, her first semi-adult experience of professional theatre. She had read most of Agatha Christie beforehand. Sheila used to visit the free museums in London, travelling on the tube. At sixteen, she met the man she would marry. He wasn't interested in the arts, but they had sport in common. Sheila left school at seventeen for secretarial college. They were married at twenty-one with the first baby two years later. They moved to a new estate in Croydon, had another baby, and Sheila stopped working. She used to take the children to free theatre in the parks and went on her own to fringe theatre in venues like pubs. Occasionally she would see a professional company at the Fairfield Halls, remembering Leonard Rossiter there. Sheila was divorced at twenty-six and was a single mother for a while. Although there was less money, Sheila felt free to go out more, and went to fringe theatre where ticket prices were as low as £3.

When Sheila was in her thirties, in 1978, she met Gwilym, he asked her if she liked theatre. She said she loved it but could not afford to go. He invited her to Stratford. Sheila felt she would not understand it, but found *As You Like It* amazing, wow! Unlike when she was a child, Gwilym got good seats. She was a receptive audience because she remembered her childhood theatre experiences and as soon as the curtain lifted, it was another world. Sheila can still see this fantastic play with Derek Jacobi hiding behind the chairs. After this fabulous production, and after they got married, they both decided to make theatregoing a priority in their lives together.

The most brilliant set Sheila saw was in a dress rehearsal at Glyndebourne for *Albert Herring*, an tree next to a marquee that must have cost thousands. They saw their children in school plays, and Sheila went to see Gwilym acting in his amateur dramatic shows.

Cost is still a deterrent but the £10 Travelex season at the National Theatre has been marvellous. They take their grandchildren to see children's shows, and take them to the theatre. They go to the Playhouse, the Pegasus, Oxfordshire Touring Theatre Company and Creation Theatre Company in Oxford. They travel to Stratford to see wonderful plays, matinees, by which are you are spellbound. She was excited by the style of Northern Broadsides, with its performers who were amazingly virulent as they threatened audience members in *King Lear*, or beautiful, and is drawn into a play in any kind of venue. They have gone to theatre in London, to the National to wonderful stuff like the *Mysteries*.

Sheila feels you grow, if you keep watching plays. You often come out of the play thinking I haven't thought of it that way before. Sheila is politically aware, and picks up on issues of social injustice, also knows her artistic history, revealing knowledge of the effect of censorship on the Royal Court and the Arts Council's policies in supporting theatre.

Comfort is an issue, a reason she won't go to the Globe in London, with hard seats or standing. She and Gwilym only go to matinees where the audiences are full of grey-haired people. Tickets are only £7.50 at the Playhouse for a matinee.

### 3. Audrey

Audrey's mother was brought up in an orphanage and had a terrible life until she was fourteen when she went to live with an uncle and aunt, went to work and attended a lively Methodist church with a strong social element. It was there that she met her Audrey's father, and was able to develop her artistic talents, which included being an actress where she was very funny. Her father worked for a bank in the city.

Audrey was brought up in a London suburb in countryside near Epping Forest. Most of her early life was bound up with church and school. She acted in plays at school from a young age, sang in choirs and played hockey. At home she played charades and one Christmas when Audrey was six, her mother suddenly produced a dressing-up box full of home-made clothes. After this, Audrey was always making up plays and pretending to be different characters inspired by the costumes, such as a Russian Cossack, a lavender girl, or a jester. Audrey started to direct her friends in fairy tales in which she was the wicked witch and the beautiful princess which would be watched by her parents. The clothes included crowns and cloaks, Hungarian, Russian peasant clothes, as well as her mother's wedding dress.

During the war, Audrey's father was away in the Navy, and her mother had to cope with two daughters. They were evacuated to Guildford in a private scheme organised by the bank for the first year of the war but were so miserable there they returned. Audrey went to a grotty private school, and later to Loughton Grammar School where she acted in plays, always playing the funny men.

At school, from 1943 - 1948 Audrey had a brilliant, wonderful English teacher and she found that she loved Shakespeare. Her teacher took the class to see *Macbeth* at the Aldwych with Michael Redgrave, sitting with all her friends around her, knowing the play having studied it, with the magic on the stage once the curtain went up. She did not know how the visual effects were created for the ghosts and was very interested in the scenery apart from the acting. Theatre was always a treat because she could not afford to go.

In 1950 Audrey went to teacher training college in Coventry, studying a combined course in music, movement and drama. She didn't do much drama there, concentrating on music, but did go to Stratford twice. She only had ten bob to live on as a student. Audrey was spellbound by an absolutely fantastic production of Anouilh's *Antigone* in Birmingham. Audrey then went to teach in East London where she enjoyed doing drama with the children where every year there would be a class play.

After Audrey met Robin in 1955 she found she could afford to go to theatre a lot and he taught her to perceive theatre as a way of life. Now theatre is the pivot of their lives. It did not have to cost a lot as they sat in the back row or in the gods. They had a son who became involved with the National Youth Theatre, and then a drama lecturer. They rented out a room to a drama student.

Audrey likes intimate spaces such as the Swan in Stratford and prefers intimate theatres to proscenium arch theatres. A recent *Hamlet* there upset her. She goes to every production every year at Stratford, and with her husband Robin goes a lot to London. She saw Stoppard's recent trilogy all in one day at the National Theatre. Audrey observes theatre superstition and talks about The Scottish Play. She is knowledgeable about theatre and performance theory and history.

Issues of comfort are important as they have got older. She needs good legroom and space to sit on. Audrey always hopes that tragedies will turn out differently, but it never does.

#### 4. Robin

Robin's father was unschooled, and was in hospital a lot when young. His mother was a Unionist and went to church meetings at Emmanuel regularly. They had a Monday night club, and a Women's Union meeting. Robin's brother studied at the Old Vic in Bristol, along with Timothy West and Prunella Scales; he was best man at their wedding. He became theatre critic for the New York Herald Tribune, and his wife is a major Shakespearean scholar in America.

Robin was born in 1928. He lived in Sutton Coldfield, the dormitory for the middle classes, in Birmingham. His parents used to take him to the pantomime to the Theatre Royal in Birmingham to see stars like Noelle Gordon as the Principal Boy, or Tessie O'Shea doing a belly dance in a wonderful pantomime. After the war they became loyal members of the Birmingham Rep seeing every production.

Robin's wow moment came in 1938 when his parents took him to Stratford on the stopping train to see Komisarjevsky's famous production of *A Comedy of Errors* which is often quoted as a turning point in Shakespearean production, although he didn't know it at the time. The whole magic of the lovely costumes and back cloth appealed. Robin fell in love with Stratford before the war, and has been to everything, absolutely everything, there ever since. A highlight was Richard Burton in the Henrys, using just boxes as scenery. He is a Friend of the RSC and the only play he doesn't book for is the Scottish Play which has always brought him bad luck, since he acted in it at the Birmingham Rep under Barry Jackson and fled into the orchestra pit. When Robin was young he would not have liked minimalist scenery as he liked the colour, the music and the costumes. He fears he might have been put off theatre at ten if the production had been a minimalist one.

Robin's first school was part private, part orphanage, Sir Josiah Mason's, the founder of Birmingham University. Robin got a County Major Scholarship at Bishop Lees grammar school in 1939 where, having had the worst kind of English teacher who went through Shakespeare line by line, a new, liberal English teacher gave him tickets to see *Six Characters in Search of an Author* with Margaret Leighton at the Birmingham Rep. Robin said he wouldn't understand it. Merely being there, even while not understanding it gave Robin a tremendous feel for theatre. He liked the rituals observed. At the Birmingham Rep they used to do three knocks, bang, bang, bang before every performance before the lights went down. On afternoons off from grammar school Robin used to go to the Alexandra Theatre where they used to do weekly rep, and he went every afternoon, collecting all the programmes. As a star struck teenager, Robin wrote to the stars there, like Hugh Scully, from *Antiques Roadshow*. Even today, Judi Dench is his icon, and he has a photograph of her on his computer.

Robin also loves music. His music teacher at school conducted for the Birmingham Symphony Orchestra throughout the war and Robin went to Thursday and Sunday concerts with friends from his church. His interest in drama was developed through the Highbury Little Theatre which was built very near to his house. As a boy of eleven, he laid the bricks for the theatre. During the war this amateur theatre flourished and staged wonderful plays – Greek tragedy, Goldoni, Pinero, Shaw, Wilder, modern Russian plays etc. Robin acted in some of them, or stage managed or helped with props in others. He loved everything about them and had a mentor in the director, John English who taught him to make props. Robin's prime motivation for his love of drama comes from his experience of the Highbury Little Theatre where some of the amateurs became professional. One of his friends then is still president and chairman of the theatre. With this friend, whose father was a baker, they used to move the scenery on his horse and cart. When the Prince of Wales theatre was bombed in the war, they got 110 seats for the Highbury Little Theatre from Emile Littler, the producer who owned the bombed venue. They didn't go into Birmingham City Centre much during the war because of the bombing, so the drama at the Little Theatre became essential as relaxation. Well-known speakers came to the theatres for the Sunday Club.

Robin also used to act in his mother's church hall which had a very small stage and as a teenager staged plays there with Christian themes such as *Good Friday* by John Mayo Steele, and *The Way of the Cross* by Henri Guyon.

After school Robin got a place at Oxford but ran away and escaped to the Birmingham Rep. The first play that Robin acted in at the Rep was Shaw's *Man and Supeman*, with Paul Scofield. Paul Scofield also played the Bastard in Peter Brook's *King John*. Brook introduced an orgy scene at the beginning, instead of a tableau, so there was Robin, aged 16 or 17 taking part in an orgy on stage. Peter Brook actually had the idea that King John was poisoned by a monk, who doesn't appear in Shakespeare at all. Peter Brook

decided Robin was going to be the monk so he was in every scene in the background and one of them he had to kneel for half an hour without moving, almost. That's probably why he got a bad knee. At the end of the play Robin had to climb to the top of the theatre to toll a bell. Robin shared a changing room with Dennis Quilley and the two of them went for fish n chips after every performance. Robin also helped make costumes, stencilling in gold leaf to King John's cloak. Scofield also acted in Ibsen's *The Lady from the Sea* where Brook introduced a two minute silence, almost unknown in the theatre then, as Alida the main character, had to choose between her husband, played by Scofield and the stranger, Dennis Quilley. Robin ASMed for the Ibsen. Robin took Scofield on a bus to see a play at the Little Theatre. Peter Brook sent Robin on his first visit to London to find music and wigs. However, Robin worshipped the ground Barry Jackson trod on; he was his idol.

In 1946 Barry Jackson became artistic director at Stratford and asked six of them including Robin, along with Paul Scofield and the director, John Harrison to join him. Robin was one of only two actors in every production for the season. He laughed up his sleeve having a lovely season at Stratford as his friends were toiling away at Oxford. They rehearsed in Dean St in Soho. He lived in a settlement in the East End of London. First was *Cymbeline*, directed by Nugent Monck from Norwich's Maddermarket. Monck introduced the idea that Shakespeare should be continuous, without the curtains going up and down. Next was Eric Crozier's direction of *The Tempest*. Crozier produced most of Britten's operas. They built a massive ship, which rolled marvellously, for the first scene, and Robin was a mariner. They did not know how to get it off the stage, and abandoned it after a week. Crozier left, not to return and the production was a disaster. They also got into trouble with the Musicians Union because the music was recorded and not played live. Next was Peter Brook's *Love's Labours Lost*. Having been to the Louvre, Brook based the production on a painting by Watteau. Robin played a courtier strumming, captured in a photograph of actors on the set which copied the painting, by Angus McBean.

At the end of the season Robin was conscripted into National Service into the Fleet Air Arm at Royal Arthur near Bath. He was placed on an aircraft carrier based in Malta and because he intended to be a teacher, Robin was put in the psychology unit a week after joining the Navy. He was in a play on board, at Malta, with the stage being the lift that lowered the planes from the deck. After three months of psychology, Robin got bored and heard they needed twenty photographers, so he slipped his name onto the list, and became a photographer for the next two years, serving an extra six months because of the Korean War. Robin flew in fireflies, and served in Palestine, when he was present on the carrier for the signing of the treaty that created the State of Israel. Robin saw many plays in Malta, but did not like their declamatory style.

Although Robin could have rejoined Stratford after National Service, he felt there was more to life than being a celebrity, and returned to Birmingham for teacher training at St John's College, Saltley, taking drama and performing arts, and rejoined the Highbury Little Theatre.

Robin moved back to the East End settlement and started teaching in the East End in Stepney where he met Audrey, who was teaching in the next classroom. When Robin lived and taught in the East End of London he went to the first production Joan Littlewood staged at the Theatre Royal Stratford East, and subsequently to everything she did there. She gave all the seats in the balcony for the kids Robin taught. He was there for the debut of Brendan Behan's *The Hostage* when Behan drunkenly performed an Irish jig at the curtain call, and stumbled around the bar kissing all the women. For Robin teachers are essential beings who prepare children for a play. Robin attended performances like *The Hostage* which were daring for their day, this play with the theme of homosexuality. Robin likes to ponder the decisions of the artists. For *The Hostage*, Littlewood toned down the homosexuality, Robin thinks, in order to get its transfer to the West End. One day, when Littlewood was involved in running a carnival, they walked back to the Aldgate East, she was going home down Mile End Road, and there was a hoarding saying "The Pope Comes Out Against Contraception". And she said: "Fuck the Pope" and that was the last time they met.

Robin attended the first night of *Oliver!* at Wimbledon as he provided the boys playing Dodger from his classes, and gained an inside view on the processes behind the staging, with Lionel Bart rewriting three songs over the next two days. He also taught Anita Dobson, from *Eastenders*. Robin used to run play schemes on bomb sites during the summer for children from different racial backgrounds. Robin produced many pieces of theatre with his pupils.

Robin went to the Berliner Ensemble at the Aldwych in 1956 in the Daubeny World Theatre Seasons. He also went to the Royal Court to an early production of *Look Back in Anger*, which he felt had been hyped up, and less well crafted than Rattigan's *The Winslow Boy* which he saw the previous week, and *Live Like Pigs*. Robin does not remember many young people going to the theatre at this time. He also went to the National Theatre at the Old Vic in the sixties seeing the first production of *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*.

In London Robin saw the first production by the National Youth Theatre by Michael Croft. Robin then moved to the tough Shoreditch School which came to a halt when a Kray funeral took place. They spent a lot of time taking knives of pupils. Seven years later, Robin got a job at Culham College, a Church of England training college, in Oxfordshire as Deputy Head of Education. In 1970 they had a son. They took him to the theatre, in fact, he had to come with them, firstly to Stratford for Alan Howard's *Henry V*, and then to *Coriolanus*. Robin later got a job at the European School where his son was a pupil. They sent their son to the National Youth Theatre in London when he was fourteen. After Manchester University, where he was working for the NYT, their son became a drama lecturer, firstly at Stratford College of FE and he is now at Surrey University. Robin is proud of his son's achievements. Although Robin has been involved with scripted plays and musicals at the European School, he feels he is more of a social engineer, and dislikes the concept of a school play which he thinks is for the benefit of governors and headmaster. He also feels they always choose the best actors for the parts which is to the detriment of others' self esteem.

When Robin didn't have much money, he would still go to the theatre, and get tickets in the gods, which he did for a four hour *Hamlet*, with no break, starring David Warner. Robin reads reviews and texts on famous productions, like this one, and relates his views with those of critics and writers. Apparently, this *Hamlet* was a very good one. Lack of money is a problem today. Robin could not afford to see Judi Dench at the Haymarket in Coward's *Hay Fever* as ticket prices are so dear. He hasn't been to the West End for three or four years but then the Oxford Playhouse is so marvellous. They have been to a street festival at Avignon.

Robin went to Berlin when the wall was still up to see productions at the Berliner Ensemble, and to Moscow, where he runs drama courses. He likes innovative productions such as a Berlin show where the audience sat in the middle on swivel chairs and the action went on around them. He finds them lovely. His son directed *Twelfth Night* in a similar style. What Robin likes in theatre is the live interaction where there is no hierarchy of position between the actor and the audience sharing the same experience.

Robin cares about comfort, but is not averse to seeing three plays in one day, as with the Stoppard trilogy, or the Henry VIs. Robin can endure. He has a disability with his legs, so gets free parking outside the theatre, and sits in the same aisle seats at Stratford which cost £12. Despite his many years of theatregoing, Robin can still be shocked by a play, as when a RSC *As You Like It* had a woman who had sat in the stalls throughout, get up on to the stage at the end, and did the Hymen speech. These surprises or sort of moments, are events you remember. Robin likes The Other Place because there are no barriers and because there is no proscenium, the thing's right there. He is absolutely against prosceniums in theatre. Everything he sees in The Swan works, and he loves the Young Vic where he saw Miller's *The Price* last year, and thinks the Cottesloe at the National is lovely. He wonders where theatre is going to go next, since he believes prosceniums have had their day, citing the Tobacco Factory in Bristol as a new venue.

Robin still has many contacts in theatre. They know an ASM at Stratford who told them that they had to have several cats for McDonagh's *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* because some would disappear. They needed to be well trained and some would not leave the stage after they had been shot. Robin is also an Oxford United supporter.



## 5. Geraldine

Geraldine was brought up in a family near Bolton in Lancashire that did not go to the theatre. She loved cinema and was taken to the cinema every Saturday morning, costing sixpence by her parents. Because both parents worked, Geraldine was brought up partly by her grandmother, a working class former Lancashire cotton mill girl. Her grandfather worked in a co-op grocery department. Neither of them thought theatre was for them. However, she did have a dressing up box with items like a Spanish shawl and Geraldine used to give little shows with her friends. Geraldine used to watch the Whit Walks through her town, religious parades, with all the banners like TUC parades, and girls dressed in white. Her grandmother took her to church and they formed an audience for these Whit Walks,

At primary school Geraldine did bits of acting, being a tea pot in one drama. She liked showing off and being the centre of attention. Geraldine studied at a grammar school. There was a lot of drama at the school but Geraldine wasn't in much, and what she was in was a character part as she didn't have the looks for the female leads; she worked back stage on make-up. Her English teacher was very into theatre and encouraged Geraldine to go to the theatre. When she was thirteen, she was terrified by an amateur performance of *The Ghost Train* at St Paul's Church and can still feel the fear, the goose bumps. Aged fifteen, Geraldine went with her school theatre club, taken by the teacher, to a production of Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey* at a little theatre in Salford, a few years after Delaney wrote it. She was bowled over by it. It was her first experience of theatre, not having gone to pantomimes when younger. They had read the text at school, and the play was relevant to her, being set in Salford, and it was part of the new trend of kitchen sink drama. The play was an eye-opener for Geraldine because it dealt with ordinary people, unlike the Shakespeares she read at school. The subject of a young, unmarried, pregnant girl, written by a teenage playwright who was still alive, also appeared relevant to her, at her age, making it more relevant. Geraldine did not always get on with her mother, and neither did the girl in the play. The play finishes unresolved, which adds to the intrigue and debate as people left the theatre. Geraldine found the whole experience marvellous and exciting, going in a coach with a group. After this, Geraldine carried on going to plays with her friends.

Geraldine was involved in amateur drama through the Anglican church, St Paul's, PADS. She did Christmas shows, fantasies like *The Island of the Winds*, where Geraldine played the South Wind in a Mediterranean costume and piles of plastic fruit, and *The Happiest Days of Your Life*, about life at school during the war.

Geraldine studied at Lampeter University but didn't join the Drama Society because she felt it was too highbrow where they performed *Arden in Faversham*, all speaking in posh accents which put her off. However, she met her husband at Lampeter. He was keen on Gilbert & Sullivan and Shakespeare. They started going to Stratford. Shortly after Lampeter they had a son, whom they took to Stratford when he was about three and into the theatre when he was six. There was never a period when having a child meant not going to the theatre as they took him with them. Their son enjoyed autograph collecting at the stage door. Her son got interested in acting at school and they used to go and see the performances. They also watched him perform for Abingdon Amateur Dramatics.

After Lampeter they moved to Litchfield, then Shrewsbury, then North Wales. They used to hire a holiday cottage in Stratford so they could continue to see plays there every night. They were associate members of the RSC and booked for everything in the season. In the seventies they went to Theatre Clwyd, and then they moved to Cheltenham, where they went to the Everyman and the Cheltenham Festival. From there they moved to Abingdon where they became Playhouse regulars, and continued going to Stratford.

Geraldine became a teacher. Although she has a degree, she didn't do teacher training so had to teach in private schools. At times she was snowed under with marking, as an examiner, or by preparation, but mostly they made time for theatre as it was always important. She organised drama sessions with her girls. She was bowled over by some girls performing *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the classroom, finding the performances of eleven year olds moving. Geraldine knows her history of theatre and performance. She likes it that children gain self-esteem from drama or musicals, something they can succeed at.

She likes to see different interpretations of a play such as *Hamlet*. Geraldine took school parties to see Shakespearean productions at Stratford. During *The Taming of the Shrew*, she thought a trick start

worked brilliantly when an actor pretended to be a drunken audience member made his way to the stage from the stalls; it was Christopher Sly. Gradually she cottoned on to the trick which she thought was very effective. She said during the Ian McKellen and Judi Dench *Macbeth*, you could hear a pin drop. She is not as rigorous in maintaining theatre superstitions. She took parties of schoolchildren to the theatre, wherever she worked, mostly in private schools. In North Wales she took an African girl to see *Mother Courage* and was fascinated by her willing suspension of disbelief, really believing the daughter to be dead at the end, screaming, “dead, dead”. Geraldine wished she could have that kind of reaction to a play, especially when it is a play you know.

In later years, with her husband in a wheelchair, they had good access at Stratford, and enjoyed going there. She also enjoys Creation Theatre Company’s outdoor performances, and those in the Mirror Tent at the BMW factory, Oxford. She has never been to the Pegasus. Geraldine lost her husband this year and has rejoined Abingdon Amateur Dramatics for things to fill her social life. She tends to go to Thursday matinees but feels at times it is filling up the void. She misses sharing the experience with someone, as it makes it a different experience, although her son does take her to Stratford.

For Geraldine, theatre has a magical property, a chemistry, when you hope that something will turn out differently, even though you know the ending. It has a cathartic effect, a release effect. Even if she has seen *King Lear* umpteen times, Geraldine will still be reduced to tears and be quite agonised by Cordelia’s death. She is always horrified at Gloucester’s eyes being gouged out. Geraldine can even willingly suspend her belief for Brecht’s plays. She has been frightened by a hanging scene in the Other Place in Stratford in a play about Hogarth, in such a small space. She finds theatres that are too big lack atmosphere. In outdoor performances, Geraldine loves the way extraneous noises come in because they are part of the whole experience. She finds the Minack Theatre in Cornwall wonderful with the sea as the backdrop. She finds small Edwardian theatres beautiful with their fairly intimate feel. She is depressed by all the elderly people who go to the matinees with school parties going to “something suitable”. Geraldine is worried about the social profile of the audiences with the lack of ethnic minorities, and small audiences for more interesting work. She is surprised that with all the students in Oxford there is not more avant garde work being created. Although she is not influenced by critics, she finds she tends to agree with Michael Billington in the Guardian, so reads his reviews.

## 6. Maureen

Maureen, an only child, was born around 1932 to parents who were political rather than theatrical. Maureen's father was very strict, puritanical and did not approve of dances or musicals, or dressing up boxes. His emphasis was on moral education. He was out of work until the Second World War began, and was only nineteen when Maureen was born. He had an unhappy marriage to Maureen's mother and grew into a bitter man. For him, theatre had to have a political point or nothing else. They lived in Eltham in South London.

When Maureen was about five, she went to Punch and Judy shows held in a cul-de-sac in Eltham where Communist political meetings took place. Her first professional theatre experiences were due to her father's political activities surrounding the Spanish Civil War. She was taken to hear Paul Robeson sing at St Pancras Town Hall, but it was the Communist Unity Theatre that she was taken to initially, a theatre that politically-oriented people used to attend. Maureen was an early Woodcrafter.

At seven, and until thirteen, Maureen was evacuated, staying away from her parents, going to different schools, in Ashford in Kent, and North Wales always with good teaching. Her parents moved to Cumbria. When Maureen was eight she saw *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist* which she found very relevant to contemporary politics.

At school Maureen developed an interest for opera due to good music teachers, and the presence of Jewish refugee girls such as Erica Baumgartner performing in Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. Maureen loved school because it was an escape from home which was too puritanical for her. Music and drama were another world and Maureen is very conscious of what her teachers gave her with all this access to the theatre and music, and something to carry for the rest of our lives. School was Maureen's salvation. In South Wales Maureen went to the *Student Prince*, aged eleven but, as an evacuee was excluded from singing in choirs because Londoners were perceived as having no voices. Quartets of female players toured the schools, and Maureen also went to see *Everyman* in 1943 or 1944 in either Abertillery or Tredegar in a performance for evacuee schoolgirls. The High Chapel Welsh were as puritanical as her father, so were very much against frivolity.

She was so influenced by her father that the first time she saw *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, she thought it so stupid and so silly and so fairy and it was only when she saw a Peter Hall production that it was absolutely transformed into what it is. Her school magazine indicates the range of art Maureen attended aged thirteen, including Donald Wolfit, *Twelfth Night*, exhibitions, concerts in Central Hall and Robert Meyer Concerts for Children.

After the war, Maureen went to the Lyric, Hammersmith, where tickets were only one and nine, the price of coffee and an éclair, so theatre was accessible. She went to the Lyric reviews, Ruth Draper, Joyce Grenfell, Alistair Sim. She also went with her school on an expedition to the film of *Henry V*, which was a beautiful film, like looking at a medieval painting, which coincided with the showing of reels from the concentration camps. In 1949 aged seventeen Maureen, met a man at the Promenade Concerts at the Royal Albert Hall, and two months later, ran away from home to this other world, and went to art school at Goldsmith's College. She moved in with this man whom she would marry later, a refugee, in a house in Hampstead which contained Strindberg's nephew, Nonni Wieghart, a broadcaster who knew Brecht, to Eastern Europe and other continentals. Maureen's husband had been interned on the Isle of Man and played with the Amadeus Quartet, aged eighteen, and was linked to the European Socialist Movement. The European movement was more cultural than the more puritanical British Communists. Because they did not have money, they wrote, produced and performed their own plays. Her husband became an engineer and worked in a secret place for war effort. In Hampstead she went to the *Everyman*, and hear people reading out poetry on Hyde Park Corner.

All theatre life was wonderful then, and it was also the time of the Festival of Britain, where students at Goldsmith's were involved. Maureen attended free concerts at the Festival Hall. She attended Christopher Fry's *A Sleep of Prisoners* in a little church off Regent Street, which she links to Leveller's Day at Burford. It was relevant because she knew someone who died on the Burma Road in the war. Maureen used to go and sit in the slips at Covent Garden for Peter Grimes, seeing one half one week, and the other half the following week, costing two and six. The early years of television also had wonderful plays such as Arnold Wesker's *Roots* which Maureen saw on someone else's television set. She went to the Lyric for John Clements' restoration comedy. Maureen did not like kitchen sink dramas such as *Look*

*Back in Anger* because they lacked passion and treated people with cruelty, and also the realism was real life to her, not nostalgia, with things such as dolly tubs.

Sixty years later, the ideas approach of *Complicite* at the Pegasus linked up with those early Unity experiences with theatre that can really move without being realistic dramas. Today Maureen paints, often theatrical scenes. She goes to Leveller's Day at Burford every year. Maureen has gone to the Oxford Playhouse for many years, a highlight of which was David Jason in Ayckbourn's *The Norman Conquests*, three times in a fortnight. She went to political plays at the Playhouse such as *Oh What A Lovely War!* and *Hang Down Your Head and Die* and one in Brompton about the hanging of Ruth Ellis.

In the 1960s Maureen stopped going to the theatre when she had children, and then when they were four or five, started going again in a different way, introducing them to pantomime or ballet in what was a nice period. She took her, and her neighbours' children, who did not go to the theatre a lot, to the New Theatre, sitting in rows. She also went to see *Hamlet* at the New Theatre with Jane Asher as Ophelia. She also went to touring opera that came to Witney. She went to summer evening drama in colleges such as *The Miracle Plays* in New College Gardens where tumblers rolled a globe across the lawns. She went to Bernard Miles' plays at the Mermaid, seeing one play written by a friend about a strike.

Thirty years ago, one son joined the Young Playhouse and she attended their theatre days. One was *Lysistrata* with Sheila Hancock with talks, mask works, costumes, tea with Hancock, and then a performance in the evening. Maureen has a fourteen year old granddaughter, at school in Witney, who is interested in theatre, and whom she takes on anti-war demonstrations.

What theatre does for Maureen: "theatre does this for people who led very isolated lives. It is a world that shows you how other people can live but that you're not excluded. The time you're in the theatre, however excluded you are by upbringing, when you are in the theatre, you're with it all and you're with the audience, aren't you, included in that world." Drama is human experience, speaking to us all. There is nothing better than that wonderful feeling coming out of a theatre where people have been overwhelmed by the performance. Music and theatre express the misery of human life but it somehow raises you out of it as well.

## 7. Genevieve

Genevieve was born in 1942. Genevieve was brought up by a Catholic English mother in France, with a younger sister, in a town outside Paris. There was no drama at her state school. Her mother is absolutely convinced of the superiority of the English in every respect, so in the summer holidays ensured Genevieve did a lot of Shakespeare, with her cousins. They acted out scenes, and read the plays, and her mother took them to see Shakespeare's plays. They also acted out *The Importance of Being Earnest* where Genevieve was Lady Bracknell which was great fun. Genevieve returned to England to a crammer school for Oxford, where she studied next. It was whilst at the crammer that she started going to plays in London, and then carried on doing so.

When Genevieve was seventeen she had a watershed moment when her mother took her sister and her to the Old Vic in the school holidays to see *As You Like It*. Noticing that *The Importance of Being Earnest* was on the following week when her mother and sister would have returned to France, with her staying on at the crammer school, Genevieve felt that going to matinees by herself was something that she could do, and since then it has been terribly important for her whole life to do things on her own, finding it liberating. She felt it imperative to see it, because she had acted excerpts of it; Judi Dench was Cecily. As a teenager in the late fifties and early sixties, Genevieve began to think she was part of her generation rather than her family, and listened to the music of Cliff Richard, Elvis and the Everly Brothers. The whole family watched television together, often in other people's homes, or they came to her home, for programmes like *That Was The Week That Was*.

Genevieve read French at St Anne's, Oxford but would have preferred English. At Oxford students were not allowed up to London without the Dean's permission, but flouting the rules is a part of growing up. Cheating the rules was the exciting bit. At Oxford Genevieve found it good fun going to lots of plays that her friends acted in. Many OUDS productions were tremendous, terrific and very innovative, such as *The Changeling*, directed by Nigel Frith; theatre was very dynamic in Oxford in the early sixties. Many College plays were quite rare and off-beat such as the world premiere of Byron's *Cain* in Mansfield Chapel and *Mandragola* which a friend of hers acted in. She saw outdoor student companies like ETC, Worcester Buskins, and the St John's Mummings. Genevieve did not live extravagantly drinking tea rather than alcohol at university.

Genevieve went to see rather iconic, amazingly good plays when she was a student from 1960 - 1963 – *A Taste of Honey*, *A Man For All Seasons*, *The Kitchen*, *Chips With Everything*. There were lots of these plays, many of which were turned into films, and she went to them as well. She felt superior having been to the play. She found *Look Back In Anger* poisonous.

In the second half of the sixties Genevieve returned to Oxford. Genevieve became a French teacher in a school. She went to the Playhouse and the New Theatre to everything she possibly could that decade. She saw David Jason in Ayckbourn's absolutely brilliant *Norman Conquests* over three performances in which he was so perfect. Genevieve feels like a cheerleader for less famous actors, shabby little people, just who you want, preferring *Uncle Vanya* with a lesser cast in Oxford to a starry Chichester production with Laurence Olivier. A wow moment was Tom Stoppard's absolutely fantastic *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* at the New Theatre which stunned Genevieve with its lacework of cleverness when she came out feeling just absolutely high with excitement. It was just as exciting and stunning when she saw it again ten years later. She went to other Stoppards such as *The Invention of Love* at the National Theatre, and was very enchanted by *Arcadia*. Ayckbourn's *Taking Steps* she found just so devastating and so exciting. His plays have become cruel but are also fun with absolutely convincing dialogue, making boring people so riveting. Shaffer's *Black Comedy* was great fun and wonderful.

In the seventies and eighties Genevieve worked at Oxford University Press and saw more opera than theatre, primarily because the New Theatre stopped showing pre-London productions.

In more recent years Genevieve has seen a Hungarian *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Playhouse with all the lead women topless, which she found pointless, and found *Rose Rage*, from Propeller and the Watermill Theatre quite extraordinary, just amazing and absolutely stunning. She goes to Oxford Theatre Guild performances such as 2005's absolutely lovely *Merry Wives of Windsor*. Genevieve sees less summer productions in the gardens as the students do not advertise effectively enough for her to find out what is on. She has also been to the Barbican Centre in London for productions. Genevieve now works

part time as a French tutor, and enjoys the flexibility, and also the lessons and has no plans to give them up.

The point of theatre for Genevieve is that it is a circumscribed place and theatre makes that space dynamic which is why she likes the plays of Ayckbourn so much. Liveness of theatre is a factor for her. Genevieve thinks theatre or opera good at moments when something goes wrong, and the performers manage to surmount the problems. She considers herself to be a theatregoer. "Theatre is a fix where you come out feeling elated and happy and it's like a magic stone in your pocket that you can touch when you need to". Genevieve books at the last minute at the Playhouse using her senior citizen discount.

## 8. Cora

Cora was an only child and was brought up in the suburbs of Cincinnati, Ohio, in the American Midwest. Her father was an electrical engineer and was employed during the Depression, building a new union terminal. When Prohibition was repealed he worked getting all the old distilleries back into operation. Cincinnati is on the borders of Kentucky where there are a lot of distilleries.

The only way in to the city centre was by street car. Cora used to pass breadlines in deprived areas; other children at school were affected by the Depression. She went to the cinema all the time, for ten cents. Cora went to the first talking film there. Her first live experience of theatre was vaudeville in a new cinema, the Albie, where as well as a film there would be acrobats, variety or music. Cincinnati had a very good symphony orchestra. She found it a very unexciting place to live.

Except on rare occasions, Cora rarely went to the theatre in America, partly because she lived too far from the city centre. She saw Danny Kaye once in New York. In Washington she went to the musical *Pioretto*. She sometimes went to dinner theatre out in the suburbs, seeing Yul Brynner. This took place in a hall with a little stage, and then dinner was served. The style was more like cabaret. There was no drama at school, nor at home as she had no siblings. The same was true at High School where there was music but no drama, but Cora was not part of any cultural activities there.

Cora studied journalism at Ohio State University, was a journalist briefly, got married and finished her journalism career. She later became a librarian.

Cora moved to London in 1979 or 1980. Cora had a job with the American Universities in Europe in charge of the school libraries, travelling around the American universities in Britain and Europe. She was not at home most of the time. On the continent Cora went to classical concerts but no theatre.

One day she was walking around the West End and noticed a theatre open, and went in. The play was *Underneath The Arches* and was immediately affected by the enclosing atmosphere that was bringing back memories to the audience which she found magic. She couldn't comprehend but shared the feeling all around her. All the time that Cora lived in London she went to a Saturday matinee seeing something serious, and usually something lively in the evening. She has only been disappointed once, enough to walk out of the theatre, which was Elizabeth Taylor in *The Little Foxes*, who acted to the audience, ignoring the other actors. Cora went to the National Theatre for *The Cherry Orchard* and did a back stage tour, seeing all the sets and props, finding the cherry orchard with real cherry trees on set magic. She has seen *Les Misérables* five times, from the original at the Barbican, onwards into the West End, seeing the ticket prices go on up; Cora staples her ticket in her programme, which she then keeps as a record. She saw *Barnum* and *Guys and Dolls* several times.

Now Cora lives in Oxfordshire and comes to the Playhouse for Thursday matinees and cannot get enough of it. She thinks the Playhouse is special. It is accessible, she can get to the Playhouse easily, the prices are affordable, she likes the atmosphere and the seats are spotless. The theatre is well-managed and everything is well-organised and clean. She goes to London about three times a year and sees three plays each time. She is not interested in reviews until after she has seen the play. She cuts them out and files them away. Cora does not mind what genre of play it is that she sees.

She feels a part of the live people sitting there, unlike the experience of watching television. Cora goes to the theatre to enjoy herself. She prefers going to the theatre alone, getting lost in it herself, and not having to talk to someone about it. She does not enjoy it when someone is being too critical about a play but is happy to talk about the play afterwards. Theatre has opened up a new world, and if she went back home, it would be what she would miss. She finds that theatre is a part of British life and it has touched most people, because most actors have been exposed to theatre.

## 9. Kate

Kate was brought up in Leeds. She played with a cardboard theatre when little with little curtains her mother made. Her mother also had a dressing-up box with a gipsy costume. Kate was always dressing up and couldn't stop herself.

Kate's first experience of theatre was when she was five. It was the end of the war and her father took her to the Grand Theatre, a special occasion because it was just with him, whilst her mother had just had another baby, sitting up in the circle for an absolutely brilliant Peter Pan that she still gets shivers thinking about. Kate was scared, terrified of the hook, with the whole experience being out of this world. It was overwhelming, especially as there was no Tinkerbell there; after that Kate became devoted to the magic of the theatre. Kate's grandfather encouraged Kate to do charades and little plays or songs at family get-togethers where Kate got used to standing up in front of people and performing.

The family moved to Solihull, Birmingham in 1944 where her father was doing work they never found out about. Kate was taken to pantomimes in huge theatres in Birmingham starring Jimmy Jewell, and Morecambe and Wise. She also went to concerts at Birmingham Town Hall. Much of the city centre had been flattened in the war. Kate also went to the cinema a lot, falling in love with James Mason in *The Wicked Lady*. *Bambi*, and *Pinocchio* frightened Kate to death.

Kate was sent to many schools. She went to a boarding school in Sutton Coldfield in 1947 where the redeeming feature of the school was that two teachers staged absolutely marvellous productions. When Kate was nine or ten she acted Titania in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, revelled in it, including the costumes. Performances were during the summer term outside in the gardens where there was a natural amphitheatre where they also did verse readings. The French teacher also got the girls to perform French plays. The school did a visit to see a Greek play when Kate was ten or eleven where a woman performing collapsed, which itself was dramatic. Kate was then sent to another boarding school in Wales, which was brilliant, where they performed Christmas plays, and there Kate started organising others to perform shows, like *Robin Hood* where her green tights kept falling down. Her parents came to see her in plays even though it was a long trek, and the school organised visits to a local school to see marvellous Gilbert and Sullivan operettas like *Iolanthe* which Kate fell in love with, and to hear Emlyn Williams recite Dickens which she found absolutely magical, one man at a lectern reading, the signalman and the ghost.

In the 1950s Kate went to many films, educational such as *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet*, or musicals like *Oklahoma!* The family moved to Nottingham in 1956, which had three theatres, and where the one bright light on the horizon was the Nottingham Playhouse, a small space in a former cinema. Kate got a job in the Central Library which was just behind the Playhouse, whose staff Kate got to know because they used to come in and distribute publicity and place items in the archive. Kate attended an amazing collection of plays there, mostly with similarly aged eighteen and nineteen year olds from the library, and even bribed her younger, practical brother to see *Henry V*, which he slept through. Other plays included *Look Back in Anger*, *The Bald Prima Donna*, *Oedipus Rex*, *Charley's Aunt* and *The Beggar's Opera*. She also went to pantomimes at the Theatre Royal. Going with her work friends was a brilliant set-up and as well as seeing plays with them, they participated in a play reading group. Kate studied at the technical college as she was working, going to Manchester to finish off her studies and gain her library qualification. You gained an associateship and then a fellowship by taking exams.

At the end of the 1950s Kate met Robin, whose father was theatrical and ran an amateur theatre group at the back of his church, the High Street Methodist Church which had a tiny stage, and very little space. They staged amateur productions of Agatha Christie and comedies that were great fun but not brilliant. When Kate was twenty she played Miss Marple there. Then the Nottingham Playhouse was built with John Neville as artistic director, and Kate carried on seeing plays there including *The Country Wife* with Judi Dench. Kate gets the shivers remembering John Neville shrinking in his white shirt as Richard II took his crown off.

Kate got married in 1961 and lived in Nottingham. They had two children and then moved to Barton in Lincolnshire where there was not a lot of professional theatre. They were short of money with two children so did not attend professional theatre so much. Her husband Robin was a teacher and so used to get involved in school productions, and staff revues and Kate used to help with make-up. Robin's younger brother was an actor but they missed his shows in the National Youth Theatre because it was an awkward time to see things. They saw amateur productions in Barton like Shaw's *Man and Superman*,



Stoppard's *The Real Inspector Hound*, *Carousel* and *Oklahoma!* They used to take their children to the pantomime at the Civic Theatre in Scunthorpe, and made an occasional trip into Nottingham to the Theatre Royal to see opera. In the early sixties on a holiday in Lyon, they saw an amazing, staggering production of Lorca in a Roman amphitheatre.

In the 1970s Kate went to see *Hair*, being gripped by it because it was something different. Kate went to Stratford, seeing *The Merry Wives of Windsor* with Sheila Steafel. Kate became a primary school teacher and took children to productions outside of school. She also staged school plays and arranged for touring companies to visit her school with simple plays for young kids and more complex ones for older children. Kate always seems to be landed with organising. One company used to perform science experiments where things got blown up, which the children used to enjoy.

When the Humber bridge was built in the 1980s they were able to go to the theatre in Hull, to the New Theatre for opera and musicals like *The Rocky Horror Show*, which was an experience, and plays like *A Winter's Tale*, with John Woodvine. They also went to Hull Truck which was a small, experimental space run by John Godber. They go on holiday to the Lake District where they visit the Theatre on the Lake, another small space, in Keswick where they have seen Gogol's *The Government Inspector*. They have driven through horrifying weather from Grasmere to see productions there.

Having moved to Oxford, Kate and Robin are still going to the theatre, to the Playhouse and New Theatre. Kate has joined a writers' group at the Playhouse. For Kate, theatre can jolt you into understanding, giving her a sudden visualisation as to what life is like, in prison, as with Behan's *The Quare Fellow* at the Playhouse.

## 10. Margaret

Margaret's grandmother was a Communist and Pacifist, which was a strand in her family. The family would debate puritanically if it was all right to go to the theatre. Margaret was born in Oxford in 1935. Margaret's father was a teacher in a boy's school in Oxford. Margaret's parents led regular lives, and had standard reserved seats, paying for subscription tickets, at the New Theatre which meant a kind of inertia set in where they would always go to the next production unless they positively did not want to go to it.

When Margaret was four she went to a Punch and Judy show in Weymouth which she hated. Margaret went to the cinema as a novel outing, where she found tosh like *The Thief of Baghdad* out of this world. Margaret's Cockney aunt took her to the circus where she engaged in banter with the clowns. Margaret thought it wonderful, exciting and amazing that her aunt knew the clowns personally. Margaret had a dressing-up box containing beautiful dresses, used to hide behind the sofa and jump out, and also play charades. She has a tiny, little wooden theatre which she could unfold and fold up, and a proper blue velvet curtain you could pull up, and footlights. She used to make scenery. With her friend who was the daughter of the Times Music Critic, who boarded with them during the war, she used to produce plays and make ingenious use of scenery. They created a dark tower with a light in it that collapsed at the end of the play where good triumphs over evil. Margaret had a lucky childhood where her imagination was stimulated. Margaret's parents stayed in Oxford during the war. Margaret went to revues staged by boys and masters of her father's school when they went to cut down trees in forestry camp, in Winchcombe. Margaret was censored from seeing films like *Jane Eyre* projected in the woods there, and felt naughty standing within earshot.

Margaret went to Oxford High School and produced and acted in Shakespeare plays, rehearsing girls through their parts and gaining the sense you need people for live theatre. Two of the girls became actresses, Maggie Smith and Miriam Margolyes. Acting was not seen as a suitable career for girls from this school. There were school competitions where one piece had to be Shakespeare, and the other, her own play related to the term's work. She performed in a grammar play with characters like the relative pronoun and curly brackets. One group did the Jenkins Ear War with a dried apricot as Jenkins' Ear. Margaret learned more about Shakespeare by producing the deposition scene of *Richard II* teaching a girl with a lovely voice to say the words, in a wonderful performance that was very moving. There was a key teacher who is in her nineties now, who encouraged the girls and was absolutely crucial to her sense of what was possible. Girls were expected to speak in public, and to paint scenery. She had both creative encouragement and creative freedom. Margaret herself specialised in old men like Old Capulet in *Romeo and Juliet*, (she had glandular fever after being cast as Romeo) and Old Adam, in *As You Like It*. Margaret was gratified that Shakespeare himself played Old Adam. Margaret saw school plays in other schools in Oxford seeing the best ever Herod performed by a seven year old boy, and one of the best Jessicas from a Dragon School boy. Margaret won a school prize for drama. She spent her prize buying tickets for a play in London. From the age of thirteen, Margaret used to go up to London to go to the theatre and art galleries, but she did not have a lot of money then. She went to Stratford once at school, and often, later on, and to the Greek play at Bradfield with the school which she found very exciting because it was in a foreign language. Margaret feels that she belongs to a generation which hasn't been taken over by scientific rationalism and totally factually approaches to things and was taught to cultivate imaginations to some extent through poetry, music, drama and romanticism. Margaret saw Christopher Fry's *A Sleep of Prisoners* in St Mary's Church in Oxford thinking at the time that poetic drama was the way theatre was going. In 1954 she went to a lecture called "Will the Theatre Survive?"

Margaret studied English at Lady Margaret Hall at Oxford University in 1954 where she was involved in plays. She also went on to study for a postgraduate masters and has an MPhil. She was passionate about the arts. In a *Hamlet* at Queen Elizabeth House it was the physical closeness that made the difference, actors and audience standing close to the stage in a circle. Margaret helped make the statues, and paint scenery, for a Strindberg play at the Playhouse staged by OUDS, where she and a friend left college at 4pm and worked overnight, feeling very guilty, creeping about because it was something which was not allowed by the college authorities. They used blackout material for costumes and curtains. She made costumes for a Magdalen College production of *Measure For Measure*. Her best velvet skirt became the Duke's cloak because they had very little money. Dudley Moore played the Provost. He had a reputation for being great fun and for being a pianist. Margaret went to innovative student plays such as Nigel Frith's production of *The Changeling*. One play that will stay in the mind forever is a most wonderful production of *Samson Agonistes* in the quadrangle of All Souls where she had all the towers of Oxford around her and the tremendous noise of the amplified sound making her think everything was falling

down. Margaret went to the Footlights' Revue. This was a good time for Margaret because she was free to go up to London and see plays in the holidays, and Oxford student productions during term time, as compared to later when she had children.

Margaret saw modern plays like *Waiting For Godot*, a real world masterpiece, in December 1955, its first production, which she really took in, and enjoyed, but she and her friend were the only people in the audience to find it funny, with a discrepancy between their reaction and most of the audience's, and *Look Back in Anger* which she hated and found irritating and masculine, and is absolutely outclassed by Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, and *The Entertainer*, all with a friend who persuaded her to see them. Margaret has had multiple wows, some because being in a particular theatre like the Royal Court, or it could be a singular actor or actress where you remember that presence very powerfully, or it is a theatrical effect, or a theatre symbol as with Pizarro and Atahualpa on either end of a rope in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, "that stays in your mind for ever as the kind of 'who's the prisoner, who's imprisoned?' ambivalence at the two ends of the rope and yet they're linking them" or the unforgettable gut-wrenching rasping shriek of Vanessa Redgrave in Ibsen's *The Lady from the Sea* "which just shot through the chests of everybody there". The closeness of seeing *Macbeth* with Ian McKellen and Judi Dench with all the actors not acting sitting around the stage linked the actors and the audience into one body. She found the performance very powerful, relieved to be out of the evil atmosphere emerging into the sunlight after the matinee to see ordinary people going around not about to be murdered. She liked the fun gag in *Jeffrey Bernard is Unwell* with Peter O'Toole with the egg and the glass. She also liked *Close The Coal House Door*. Here the actors started abusing the audience for their lack of reaction to Wesker's play about the miners. Margaret thinks Pinter is wonderful.

Italian films in the 1950s like *The Bicycle Thieves* and *La Strada* had an important role in Margaret's cultural life, as well as *The Childhood of Maxim Gorky* in 1957. She also went to the Festival Hall for concerts. Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* is the play she has seen most often in her life, which she saw once with Margaret Rutherford and Michael Redgrave. Margaret was a snob about youth culture, with the exception of rock n roll which she found very infectious.

After university Margaret got married, having one child and acquiring two stepchildren. She was much too busy with life to go to the theatre. There was a change in the level both of freedom to go about and go anywhere, and money from before. Her son eventually worked for Medicins San Frontieres, in dangerous parts of the world.

Margaret has seen theatre abroad, once in America, where actors acted towards the audience rather than each other. She has seen a production in Greek at Epidaurus by a French company and finds a magic in productions performed outside. She went with Priscilla to Australia and saw some Shakespeare and some documentary theatre in Sydney where she felt close to the local experience.

She went to *Hair* which she thought absolutely wonderful, significant, and was theatrically a moment which disappeared again. The cast took their clothes off, was multiracial with something special and accepting about the audience, a feeling of happiness. She went to Peter Daubeny's World Theatre Seasons at the Aldwych to see Japanese Noh, which she was amazed at, finding it wonderful, and a bloody production of *Titus Andronicus* at Stratford. She has seen many productions at Stratford, including *the Plantagenets* in the 1960s, and a wonderful *All's Well That Ends Well*, with Peggy Ashcroft. She thought *The Taming of the Shrew* with Christopher Fry arriving through the audience drunk was fantastic and very exciting. She was wowed by *Everyman* at the Pit, and by the RSC's *Macbeth* with Ian McKellen and Judi Dench at the Roundhouse. She thought *The Rover*, fun. At the New Theatre Margaret enjoyed the really wonderful Ruth Draper's one-woman show where "afterwards you can see the other people on the stage who weren't really there" and Marcel Marceau's mimes where he would play David and Goliath, and she could see them both. At the National Theatre Margaret saw a wonderful, energetic *Guys and Dolls* at the National Theatre starring a terrific Bob Hoskins and an exciting, terribly moving, terrifying promenade *The Mysteries*.

Margaret used to be a Friend of the Playhouse which became the Oxford Theatre Club, organising suppers for the members, and guest speakers. In her job Margaret has arranged psychodramas where people act out dramas and get to learn others' points of view, linked to semi-involvement and semi-detachment.

Margaret is an occasional attender for dance and goes a lot to the cinema, such as to the Phoenix for amazing Spanish films, and Shakespeare films like Branagh's *Hamlet*, set in Blenheim Palace.

Margaret likes to empathise with the characters influenced by the physicality of their performances. She likes small scale experimental theatre such as *Ubu Roi* with a cast of vegetables, finding symbolic theatre powerful and amazing. She was impressed and amazed by the brilliant Caryl Churchill play *Top Girls* at the Royal Court, and has seen others such as *Fen* and *Serious Money*; and *Our Country's Good* by Timberlake Wertenbaker. Margaret also goes to local amateur productions in her village hall, seeing a funny production of Stoppard's *The Real Inspector Hound* and a superb pantomime of Aladdin, where "you believe and you don't believe" in the story; and productions by the Oxford Theatre Guild. Margaret is a Playhouse regular seeing plays such as *Stones in His Pockets* and JT Rogers' *The Overwhelming*. She found *Orestes* at the Playhouse all spectacle although other physical theatre is amazing. She saw Alan Bennett's *The History Boys* in London. She liked the cleverness of Shaffer's *Black Comedy* at the New Theatre. Margaret also goes to the Watermill in Newbury, also enjoying nice meals in the barn.

Margaret needs to let the emotional power of a play to sink in, to digest it, before talking to anybody about it. She does not believe in the willing suspension of disbelief, thinking something else is happening. Watching an actor play a part is incarnational, spiritual-emotional, to do with the way people empathise. Because Margaret lives close to the Playhouse, it is accessible, and she leaves decisions to attend late. Sometimes she is absolutely definite that she wants to see a play because of a combination of the quality of the place, the expectation of the actors, the nature of the drama and she books in advance. She takes moderate risks about whether to attend, and keeps a filing system at home from the mailings of theatres. Margaret would like to know what frame of mind she is going to leave a play with; she does not mind how harrowing a play is but there must be some redemptive quality at the end, some flame of hope or recognition about the goodness of human nature. Lack of money, and being harder of hearing has affected theatregoing today. She used to sit in the back of the theatre but cannot do that now as she needs to hear and see the play. She will not attend if there is not a reasonable price a middling reasonable seat. She uses her senior citizen's card for cheaper tickets. She is influenced by other people recommending a play.

## 11. Ophelia

Ophelia's mother was a music prodigy, playing the violin at the age of six. Music was sacred to her. Her mother went with Gwen ffrancon-Davies and Marjorie ffrancon-Davies to Egypt in the First World War with a concert party as part of a tour around the East and in 1918 married a soldier there. This was two husbands before Ophelia's father.

Ophelia was born in Argentina in the middle of nowhere and she did not go to school there. She lived on a ranch, which was very Victorian and very disciplined where children were "seen and not heard, and preferably not seen" with one annual visit to the nearest village, and her parents visited Buenos Aires once a year. She read the Encyclopaedia Britannica and had the odd drunken tutor sent out from England, or a governess who "made eyes" at her father. They did not last long. They did not play family games like charades, and at Christmas time it was hot. Ophelia's mother was not keen for Ophelia to act saying "one bitch in the family is really quite enough". Ophelia's mother did not teach her the violin because "we never asked". If they were extra good or ill, they were allowed to watch her practice. Ophelia was not allowed to touch the violin or the piano. Her mother was very unhappy there and they only saw friends once a year. Nevertheless she knew of the theatre because her aunt back in London was a famous character actress called Martita Hunt. During the war, Martita sent her a song: *Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary*. "Mary, Mary, quite Contrary, How does your garden grow? Onions and beans, potatoes and greens, we're digging for victory, you know".

Ophelia could not wait to get away from her mother and go to school where there were humans like her, of her age, with whom she could communicate. Another aunt was a headmistress of a boarding school where Ophelia went when she came to England aged thirteen. She was taught by Fay Compton's sister Viola, who hooked her on drama, and half the girls at the school wanted to go onto the stage because she inspired them so much. The Compton sisters were caught in the Depression in America where they had a theatre company, and Viola's two sons, John and Nicholas Crocker were involved in stage management afterwards. Viola had a knack of making everything interesting, making everyone feel they were playing the lead. At school Ophelia used to enter drama competitions and festivals such as the Kent Festival, where, still in school uniform, they had to get into character and perform a soliloquy. Her drama teacher taught them that you did not need costumes or scenery to get into a play; you just needed a good actor. Ophelia's debut was as a rather plump Touchstone in *As You Like It*.

When Ophelia left school she became a member of the Royal Court Theatre Club and although she did not go onto stage, she hankered after it. In the early 1950s she went to the theatre a lot in London, to Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, and Rattigan's *The Deep Blue Sea*, the latter of which kept her at the edge of her seat due to its relevance because the person who invited her had just had her son make a suicide attempt, which was the subject of the play. She also went to TS Eliot's *The Cocktail Party*, with Irene Worth, and *A Winter's Tale* with Hermione Gingold. Ophelia also joined the London Symphony Orchestra Club, and started a drama club within it.

As an adult Ophelia made her swansong in an amateur production of *The Importance of Being Earnest* as Lady Bracknell. Ophelia goes to the Playhouse regularly, seeing plays like *Charley's Aunt*.

## 12. Priscilla

Priscilla was born and brought up in Oxford to Catholic parents. Her father was an academic and novelist. He always told her about the hardness of fairy stories, knowing their hardness as well as their beauty. She was originally given shortened versions with pretty pictures, and then when older read her brothers' original which were very, very different and unsentimental. Her parents took her to pantomimes at both the New Theatre and the Playhouse. She went with her parents to the old Playhouse on the Woodstock Road to see *Dick Whittington* where Priscilla loved the cat dancing. The magic scenes of the pantomimes coincided with the fairy tales with which Priscilla was brought up at home. The size and spectacle of *Aladdin* at the New Theatre created wonderful, so beautiful scenes of transformation and magic. Priscilla's mother liked musicals like *Desert Song* and *No No Nanette*, and took Priscilla to them; her father had the music. It was a perfectly normal thing to be taken to the pantomime or to go to the Playhouse.

At Priscilla's first school when she was quite a little girl they were doing a dramatic version of *The King's Breakfast* by AA Milne and there were four parts: The King, the Queen, the Dairymaid and the Cow. As the Dairymaid's costumes were hung up on a line she thought that she was going to play the Dairymaid and then found it was given to somebody else which was very discouraging at the time. However, being taken to the theatre was quite wonderful seeing *Peter Pan* at the New Theatre with Nova Pilbeam as Peter Pan. Priscilla identified terribly easily with the two boys who had the same names as two of her three older brothers, and the bath in the bathroom was the same as their bath. The only difference was she didn't have a nanna. She fell in love with the idea of flying and with the brother who was nearest in age to her in the next bedroom, who was much larger, they did the most awful damage to the beds by jumping off them. They were discouraged from doing that. But Priscilla loved the excitement and the feeling of being involved.

Before the war, Neville Coghill, a friend of Priscilla's father, and John Masefield, who had just become Poet Laureate, put on the mostly amateur Oxford Summer Diversions at the old Playhouse. Masefield lived with his daughter, Judith, who was involved with theatre, in Boars Hill. Priscilla went to years running to this excitement. She was thrilled to see her father dressed up as the Ellesmere figure, and impersonating Chaucer, where one year he did the *Reeve's Tale* and the next year he did *The Nun's Priest's Tale* all by heart. The show included poetry, ballet and recitation and a bawdy, farcical play, *Gamma Girton's Needle*. Also performing was the mother of school friends, whose husband was a professor, Frances Frazer, who was a great lady of the theatre, and Priscilla found it fascinating seeing the mother of her friends.

With a friend of Priscilla's who went to the same church, who when she was unwell at home, Priscilla went over to entertain her and they played church. They went to a lot of trouble and had their own liturgy, some proper church toys from a church shop, and others they made from plasticine, "and one of the big moments in the old Latin mass is *Dominus Vobiscum*. And the congregation replied *Et cum spiritum tuo*. And so we had our own version and we'd go around the house singing *Tantum Biscum*". She thought it was tremendous, and her parents did not think her naughty but thought it was wonderful. Priscilla also performed dramas with her brother, with koala bears which were also religious. One of the bears was turned into the Pope and in June 1940 at the height of the fall of France and Dunkirk, beautiful weather, had a very elaborate wedding of one of the bears in the garden with handkerchiefs and things. Her brother was manipulating the Pope and she was manipulating the bride and this little bear got bored with being the Pope and marrying people - it was like a sort of nightmare - his daughter. Suddenly he decided to dive bomb the stage which they had made, behind which was tremendous darkness as it was Dunkirk, a little while before the Battle of Britain where the bombing, air raids and aerodromes, and the German destruction of Rotterdam and of Warsaw by their air forces was the daily diet of news. Priscilla found it psychologically quite interesting how they were dealing with this "in forms of play which were acceptable and very enjoyable for us".

In the 1940s, during the war, Priscilla came every Monday night with her parents to the Playhouse which was then a weekly repertory theatre, and so she saw an enormous number and the sheer range of plays for which she is so grateful. The actors almost became friends through their familiarity. One day, her father was having tea in a café and saw a man and said "I know him" and started chatting to him only to find the other man was absolutely bewildered and obviously didn't know who he was. He was Peter Ashmore, the leading man here at the time who we saw every week so he was like a friend of the family.

Priscilla has gone on to love the theatre since her young to middle teenage years, and has always lived or worked in cities with a theatre or with access to a theatre. One time, Priscilla's mother took her to see *Emma* with Anna Neagle at the New Theatre. Priscilla had tears of rage as hundreds of people got up from their noisy seats in order to catch the last bus home which always left before the play finished. OUDS did not carry on during the war, but Priscilla went to productions staged by Neville Coghill, with some professional actors in the lead parts, such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the Grove at Magdalen College, where Hippolita and Theseus rode into the Grove on horseback.

Priscilla's mother took her by bus, changing at Long Compton, to a matinee at Stratford of *Cymbeline*. It was very unusual and very emotional, and a great treat, to go on an outing with her mother, having a day out. They took a picnic. She did not go again until she was an adult, and her family did not leave Oxford because of wartime restrictions. Priscilla deeply loves Stratford and the whole experience of it. She finds a wonderful sense, almost of magic going there, strolling through the gardens.

Priscilla went to Oxford High School. At school Priscilla had a devoted, kind English teacher. They did play readings and Shakespeare plays. A girl, still wearing her long, navy blue tunic, reading the abdication scene in *Richard II*, moved her to tears. A girl she knew at school, Judith Stott, who became an actress, acted Ophelia, at about the age she imagined Ophelia to be, in an OUDS production of *Hamlet*. The production overwhelmed Priscilla, because it was her first *Hamlet*, and because of the youth of the cast. Priscilla discovered she had a romantic nature at the Playhouse for John van Drouuten's play *Young Woodley*, which was about a sixth form boy and the headmaster's wife. Priscilla wept buckets when the headmaster's wife behaved very properly and told the boy that although she loved him, this couldn't go on. The school was similar to that her brother went to. Priscilla owes an enormous debt of gratitude to her parents and to the Playhouse to have seen a huge number of plays then. The school took Priscilla to see *Viceroy Sarah* being performed by High School girls at the Taylorian which had tremendous scenes of drama, and Priscilla felt sorry for the treatment of the Prince Consort. When in the Sixth Form, Priscilla went on a fun school trip to Cambridge with a select little group studying advanced Latin to see *The Frogs* in Greek at the Arts Theatre, which was a lovely theatre like the Playhouse. Everyone in the group fell in love with the lead man in the chorus, and regressed on the journey home making the "rkkkkk" sound of the frogs.

Priscilla saw an Old Vic production of *The Merchant of Venice* at the New Theatre with an ageing Jean Forbes Robertson as Portia; but she identified more with Andre van Guysenham as Graziano, who was a totally gorgeous young man, who with the actress playing Nerissa showed Priscilla "what a lot of good a production can do by bringing out relationships, even if it's only sketched in, in the text".

Priscilla studied English at Oxford and tried to see as many Shakespearean productions as possible. Priscilla went on holiday in 1951 with her parents to Ireland and saw an embarrassing amateur production of a farce in Cork, having been told by their hostess it was the Abbey Theatre on tour. They walked out.

From 1952 to 1954 Priscilla worked in Bristol and saw the gorgeous John Neville at the enormously exciting Bristol Old Vic in *She Stoops to Conquer*. She also saw joyful the musical *Salad Days*, recovering, after the austerity of the post-war years. In Bristol Priscilla saw *A Sleep of Prisoners* in a bombed church in Corn Street. It was absolutely terrifying because she could see the results of all the bombing. In 1954 she moved to Birmingham where she became devoted to the Birmingham Rep, and went to Stratford from there. She saw Paul Scofield in *Waiting For Godot* there. She then moved to Watford and went to the Palace Theatre. She lived in London for two years and went to theatre a bit but found it impersonal.

Priscilla became a Probation Officer in 1959. In the fifties Priscilla saw John Gielgud and Peggy Ashcroft in *Hamlet* at the New Theatre and found seeing the great names very exciting. The New Theatre took touring productions prior to London so this was exciting. She found kitchen sink drama boring because it lacked the poetry of Christopher Fry.

In the 1960s Priscilla was back in Oxford working as a probation officer and was home too late weekdays and often too tired to go out at weekends to go to the theatre much. Priscilla read more plays than she saw. In the summer of 1964 she stayed overnight at Stratford for the absolutely wonderful *The Plantagenets* which was unbelievably moving when Hotspur was killed. Priscilla did not like the hostility and lack of subtlety shown to audiences with theatre's anarchic desire to smash icons, to get at the world which had let them down. She found many new plays boring and predictable, preferring the horror of

darker Shakespeare plays like *Titus Andronicus*, or the death of Hector in *Troilus and Cressida*, which when stylised, makes the horror greater, and can be fantastically moving. She saw Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* at the New Theatre which she found quite difficult. Many plays she found brutal, adolescent, clever, extreme, an intellectual assault challenging your comprehension. She prefers Stoppard's more passionate plays about Eastern Europe. Priscilla's mother took her to see Ruth Draper's one woman show at the New Theatre which was an absolutely amazing experience. Priscilla felt the stage was full of young people in a sketch about the French Resistance, and fishermen's wives waiting for them in the port. She felt she could see the lights out at sea, and knew the fishermen who had gone out. Draper was narrating as the matriarch character. It was truly great, unbelievable theatre. Draper produced a kind of magic out of a realistic story.

Priscilla saw the incredibly physical *Macbeth* with Ian McKellen and Judi Dench where the relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth was so interesting and so complex with a huge feeling of electricity, terrific sexual dynamism between them. The nearness of the action was a factor but Priscilla has been bowled over by productions at the New Theatre where the play is powerful enough and the actors are good enough. In 1981 she went with Margaret, Margaret's daughter, and an American friend to Stratford, rushing through bad weather, driven by a friend as her car had broken down, to see Peggy Ashcroft in the absolutely amazing, riveting *All's Well That Ends Well* at Stratford. It was the first time the driver had been to see a Shakespeare play. She also saw *A Winter's Tale* with John Woodvine which absolutely hit her. In 1985 she and Margaret went to Australia and saw a piece of documentary theatre about survivors of an earthquake in Newcastle, staged in a very small space in Sydney, written by the son-in-law of a friend there, and *Titus Andronicus* in another small theatre.

Priscilla was involved with the Friends of the Playhouse, then Oxford Theatre Club, arranging dinners and guest speakers. Priscilla goes regularly to the Playhouse seeing plays like the Watermill's production of *Rose Rage*, Behan's *The Quare Fellow*, and JT Rogers' *The Overwhelming* which she had heard about when it was on at the National Theatre, seeing it twice to take it all in, having been deeply interested in Rwanda. She saw *The Mysteries* in Stratford in the nineties, appreciating the intimacy of the small theatre. She occasionally goes to the Watermill in Newbury. Priscilla is addicted to the German Lieder Festival. She goes to the cinema, more often on her own, and sees films like *The History Boys*, *Joyeux Noel*, which she thinks is like a fairy story, but fairy stories are not divorced from reality, and *La Vita e Bella*.

Priscilla likes the communion with audiences to a performance and therefore attending with someone she knows. Priscilla is always looking to see Shakespeare but is excited about seeing plays for the first time. For her, "the marvellous thing about theatre is the sense of magic, the sense that one is being enchanted, even when it is deeply realistic". Priscilla believes that theatregoing is almost like a relationship, "about continually adjusting oneself about commitment". There was a thrill about staying out late at the theatre. She is deeply anti-critic, believing them parasitic, writing nasty little pieces. Priscilla buys theatre programmes as a subsidy to the theatre.



### 13. Anne

Anne's father had been in the services and was against high drama. He had lost his job in the Depression and the family lost its house, having to move to another village outside Oxford. From there, when Anne was five, they moved to Oxford just as the war began.

Anne had a lot of entertainment when she was young. Anne's mother like cinema, which was cheap, about threepence for a child, and they had belonged to a cinema club in the village. Anne called this "The Crutching Hand" because a mysterious, scary hand came out, and you were always waiting what it would do. Anne's first experience of performance was going to see the film of *Snow White* where she was terrified of, and hated the witch. Being taken out by your mother or grandmother was exciting, wearing your best things, eating an orange, and the darkness coming down.

Anne was taken to the pantomime where the principal boy with the lovely long legs was a wow, and whilst her parents went to the Old Red Barn, the origins of the Playhouse. When she was about eight or nine, Anne's father took her to the wonderful music hall, and variety at the New Theatre where the clowning was fun but the singing boring. He, and Anne's godmother went to musicals like *No No Nanette* and *Desert Song*.

Anne's first experience of performing was at Sunday school in a Methodist chapel in Bicester, where personnel from the nearby RAF base attended, and Anne stood on a little chair and sang. Then at primary school she sang *Somewhere Over The Rainbow*, and after all the mums went aaah, Anne thought more about showing off. Anne's mother had a dressing-up box with 1920s clothes, and Anne used to dress up her younger sister in a turban as in *The Thief of Baghdad*.

At school Anne thought the older girls performing Jane Austen was a wow, in their tights. She enjoyed learning about Shakespeare at school and was allowed to read Brutus in *Julius Caesar* affected by the power of the words she could not understand. Anne thought her English teacher wonderful.

After school, because she was from a poor family, she went straight to work. She envied her younger sister who was cleverer, and went to the High School where she studied music and drama. Although she earned a little money, it was enough to go to London to the theatre, or to Stratford. She went with her amateur theatre group to Stratford, buying cheap standing tickets for plays like *Macbeth*.

In the 1940s and 1950s, Anne and a friend were sort of Playhouse groupies, and collected autographs whenever they could, seeing plays like *The Seagull*. They got seats near the front because a friend's sister was an usherette, and when the young man goes out and shoots himself, the full audience was absolutely suspended and Anne was hooked at how these people on the stage could create this emotion with the audience holding its breath. Anne and her friend then went to Stratford and became Stratford groupies and went to everything. Anne saw Donald Wolfit in *Macbeth* at the New Theatre, which had a fantastic revolving stage, performing this, and restoration comedies, in an old-fashioned style. It was good to see Laurence Olivier perform at the New Theatre, and saw him in *She Stoops To Conquer* at the Wyndham's in London. Instead of going out for dinner, Anne went to the theatre and was extremely lucky that Oxford had three theatres. She saw Vivien Leigh in *Titus Andronicus* where the effect of the daughter's tongue being cut out was done with red ribbons, which was quite good, but later people were scared when splashed with squirts of blood. The Rural Arts Council also promoted village theatre. It was great fun acting and adjudicating in festivals. Anne's husband, who is from the moth of England came back from the war with other man and put on plays about all their feelings about the war. There was a lot happening in Oxford from 1947 to the early fifties regarding the Festival of Britain. She queued up for tickets at the New Theatre for ballet and opera.

Anne was so hooked that she went into amateur dramatics, joining the Oxford Theatre Guild, and performed as Olivia in an outdoor production, in the round, of *Twelfth Night*, produced by Daphne Levens, at New College, a wonderful experience at night when the lights go down. Oliver Ford Wilkinson encouraged Anne, and others to hire a coach and perform rather awful one-act Welsh theatre of the absurd plays by NF Simpson. She acted in *Lady Audley's Secret*. Radio plays have also been important for Anne. Anne only went to conventional theatre in the fifties. Anne met her husband through amateur dramatics; he has acted at the Playhouse.

In the sixties, Anne and her husband went on holiday to Ireland went to the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, which was very traditional, and an amateur play in Killarney which started at 8.30pm but went on and on because the cast was pissed. Although the rest of the audience enjoyed it, they eventually walked out as it was a bad experience. She saw conventional theatre at the Playhouse such as *A Passage to India*, Michael MacLiammóir doing *The Importance of Being Oscar* and *Lawrence*. She carried on going to Stratford for plays like *Pericles* and *Romeo and Juliet*, and was confused by Genet's *The Maids*, which, because she is not bright, did not know which way it was going. She saw Brecht's *Mother Courage*.

However she dropped out of theatre having had children. She was housebound, although her husband did buy vouchers for her to go to the New Theatre. Anne went to Peter Sellers films at the cinema, took her children to pantomimes, went to the opera, read plays with her drama group like Beckett's *Waiting For Godot*, produced plays by Lorca and Pirandello, and acted in Miller's *The Crucible* and Shaw's *Arms and the Man*, for the Cherwell Players which was linked to the Oxford Theatre Guild. She rehearsed in awful little halls, but it was not intellectual, it was jolly good fun. She saw a lovely production of *The Tempest* at Worcester College by Oxford Theatre Guild down by the lake, a fantastic production, better than in any theatre, where Caliban emerged from a chamber where he was hidden in the lake, and people ran across what looked like lily pads. In 1969 she was on holiday in Cornwall and saw a lovely production of *Oh, What A Lovely War* at the Minnack Theatre above the blue water.

As the children grew older, in the seventies Anne participated in less drama, which dwindled away, but started supporting the children in their concerts, and nativity plays, and sending them to see Shakespeare, which they did not like so much. Anne's daughter likes to go to the theatre but not her son, who does not have the time, although he takes Anne's grandchild to the pantomime, finding it quite fun. Anne decided to educate herself and did her O-Levels, A-Levels and went to university, studying English. She went to Stratford, and was poor for a time, as she had to pay for it all herself.

In the eighties, Anne took her children to Stratford on a Boxing Day, very bravely, to see *The Taming of the Shrew*, where Christopher Sly arrives through the stalls drunk, arguing with the usherette, and goes onto the stage, pulling down the drapes and the set, and Anne thought, "it's terrible, what are the children going to do?" and then a motor bike came onto the stage, breaking all the conventions, but her children still remember this, better than a pantomime. Mostly in the eighties, Anne joined the Peace movement and participated in peace plays, poetry readings and organising concerts.

Anne sees performances on holiday, for example, *Tosca* in Tashkent, watched also by a troop of soldiers back from Afghanistan. She saw *The Tempest* in the thermal town of Rotorua, in New Zealand in a little theatre performed by academics where she could smell the sulphur. In the nineties, Anne saw *The Mysteries* at Stratford, one of the history plays where actors had come in from the rain, dripping and an intimate *Twelfth Night* which overwhelmed her. She takes her sister and brother-in-law to Stratford, for instance to *King Lear*.

Anne goes regularly to the Playhouse and Stratford, seeing plays like JT Rogers' *The Overwhelming* and the promenade style *Pericles* in the Swan. She found Caryl Churchill's *Blue Heart* difficult and nearly walked out. Anne and her husband run a small amateur theatre group. She goes to her granddaughter's plays in Malvern, enjoying the communal experience where parents, grandparents and grandchildren are united at a Nativity play. She could see her granddaughter enjoying being a pig, wearing a mask, as loud as anyone, in a two-way experience, "just like when you go to the theatre".

Anne likes a challenge in theatre but choice of play is dependent on her mood, or if she likes an actor. She buys senior citizens' tickets, reasonably priced at £15 and sits in the middle of the stalls. She grumbles about the air conditioning and the erratic sound system at the Playhouse. Programmes have become too expensive to buy. She likes the RSC free cast lists. Anne's sister lives in London and they go to the National Theatre there. She is no longer keen on musicals, preferring plays which are more interesting, or more intellectual, like Michael Frayn's *Copenhagen*. She does not want to sound snobby, but likes some issue behind the play. After a play the memory is there for Anne, who is left with "the picture you've got in your head".

#### 14. Henry

At school Henry was a spectator for plays, watching *Captain Brassband's Conversation*. He got involved with sideshows, school pageants like *1066 And All That*. He had two very good music teachers with dramatic capabilities, and a Latin teacher who produced plays.

Henry's acting career began when he left school and joined the Navy. He studied at the Royal Naval College Greenwich and they held an annual drama competition. The English master was an ex-West End actor and he produced the fifth act of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for the competition. It was done in full naval dress with the Count as an Admiral, the staff gathered around him and the daughters, the play within a play, was really manned by the ship's company. He won the competition. He also performed in *The Two Gentlemen of Soho*.

Henry spent thirty years in the Navy.

Henry goes to the Edinburgh Festival. Thirty years ago he went to the Stockholm Opera at the King's Theatre in Edinburgh performing *The Valkyrie* with Birgit Nilsson singing Brünhilde and Arne Anderssen singing Ziegländer. It was a wow moment when Henry realised that Nielsen's voice was too big for the theatre. A couple of years ago he was at the Festival for the Hamburg Opera's production of *Pelléas et Mélisandre* in a dreadful, modernised version, with all the magic taken out of it whereas the original play by Maeterlinck is full of magic.

Henry goes regularly to the Playhouse seeing plays like *Charley's Aunt*. He thought the actress playing the real aunt was gorgeous.

## 15. Kay

Kay was born in Nairobi, Kenya. Her family travelled constantly over ten years, never settling long in any one place. She has a much older brother, and an older sister. She spent a lot of time playing on the beach.

Kay was brought up in Eifel, a rural area near Köln in Germany, close to the Belgian border. Neither of her parents were theatregoers. Her father was a photographer, then became a teacher. Her mother died young. When she was a child of ten, her school took her for the first time to the theatre and she went onto the stage. Kay was transformed to a different world, a world she hadn't been to before, which was a big "wow" moment. The play was a fairy tale and the set was sparkly, white and beautiful. This enthused Kay more than the Heimat kind of amateur theatre in her home village with wobbly sets, Lederhosen and Oompahpah band. At school Kay was the one doing the sets and the painting. Her school was strong in art, and she was lucky to have had an artist as an art teacher there.

Kay studied interior architecture at Dusseldorf university.

Kay works in theatre as a designer and prop maker. It is the space element, the visuals, and how to use the space which interests her most about theatre, working backstage. Kay likes to transform a world so quickly and then see children's eyes sparkle when they are in the middle of that process. When Kay started out, a lot of her work was done for the love of it, without pay. Kay is interested in minimalist sets, thrilled by the challenge of how little you need to use. Kay does not really love theatre, unlike the people Kay has worked with in England; it is what comes with it that she loves.

## 16. Danielle

Danielle grew up in Salisbury, Rhodesia, now Harare, Zimbabwe, to a churchgoing Catholic family. Danielle's parents were always theatregoers and so theatre was always a normal part of her life. Her father was a photographer, and used to take production photographs. Danielle used to go with him and help by holding the flash, so she has always seen backstage. Her mother studied set design at art school but her work in the theatre was amateur, done for the love of it. Danielle also used to watch her make the sets. Theatre remained with Danielle and she continued to be interested in her own way.

When she was young, Danielle used to subject her parents to watching her, her sister and friends devising plays. Apart from pantomime, which she went to every Christmas, where she knew the people up on stage, because it was a small community, there was no specific children's theatre in Rhodesia, so Danielle watched more adult theatre.

She went to a lot of theatre in Rhodesia, taken initially by her parents, and then she went independently. They used mostly to go as a family. The theatre was amateur but with a professional director, and of a good standard. At secondary school, an all-girls school, Danielle went to some Athol Fugard plays, often minimalist, performed in an unusual setting. She saw *Othello* performed in an art gallery with no set at all. Danielle was involved in, and enjoyed school plays. In 1980/81, at sixteen or seventeen, in Lower Sixth, she directed a black, mystery thriller, herself, in an inter-house play competition. They came second but an actress won best actress. Mostly Danielle assisted the director, took notes, and did the lights rather than perform. Danielle got a thrill reading a play at school.

Danielle studied a degree with English at Cape Town University and used to usher at university as a way of seeing theatre.

Danielle came to Oxford in 1990 and lived near the Pegasus Theatre. She was attracted to the Pegasus by the eclectic and rather surprising, refreshing range of theatre there. She was delighted by this little treasure, an active hub of surprising new drama, within easy reach producing new work, and since having children, has become involved in taking them to the youth theatre. Danielle gets a buzz seeing children's and youth theatre at the Pegasus Theatre watching the children come through a process. She is reassured that the Pegasus is here for Oxford. Danielle took her children seven years ago to Korky Paul's wonderful, refreshing, joyous, natural production *Winnie The Witch*, where he wrote and illustrated the book and collaborated with the Pegasus by influencing the Saturday Drama Club for very young children design the sets and costumes. She met him in the street, and invited her to see it. After this her children got involved with the Pegasus. Her children then took part in another Korky Paul play from an illustrated book, *Captain Teachum*, where her young son enjoyed jumping off the gang plank so much he returned at the end of the play to have another go. It is the sheer joy that comes through the children at Pegasus. She also saw Philip Pullman's *I Was A Rat* adapted by a youth theatre teenager, Ben Coren, and *Multiplicity*, a festival of performances by multicultural audiences in Oxford. Danielle thinks it great of the Pegasus that groups who would never get anywhere near a stage, are given scope to perform. She was involved in the evaluation of the project, which brought black and Asian together. Danielle also likes that the size of the Pegasus allows it to do puppetry.

Danielle responds to the visuals in theatre. She has a dressing-up box which is a vital part of the house and which she uses all the time with her nine and eleven year old boys. They go round to friends, girls, who also have a dressing-up box and they always perform plays when they go to visit.

In the late eighties, Danielle went to the York Mystery Plays, held every four years, a tradition going on for centuries. She studied the play in South Africa and had a kind of yearning to see it for real. Seeing it in York was a pilgrimage. She found the production, set in the ruins of the old abbey in York, with one professional actor and the rest amateurs, the local community acting, a wow. It starts in daylight, and ends in darkness, so there is the drama of the real elements. There was a fantastic sunset against the ruins of the abbey. There is also the unexpected when you are outdoors, with birds, and other unexpected things, which is the joy of theatre.

Danielle is a trustee of the Oxfordshire Touring Theatre Company, which is done for the love of it. The first production she saw of OTTC was *Around the World in Eighty Days*, in a park. She was drawn in after watching a dog walker get caught up despite themselves. It is a wow for her taking theatre to village halls with their floral curtains and very little else and transforming the space, creating a set and a new

world. It is exciting for Danielle having a mixture of people from a village attend, giving them live, professional theatre. It is as thrilling being a member of the audience as watching the audience. Many of the company's productions are intimate, in the round, within spitting distance of the actors, where you can watch the audience's reactions. When the OTTC plays at the Pegasus rather than a village hall she notices that the production is more intense, and more frightening; a wolf will produce terror in children at the Pegasus whereas it won't at another venue. One of the most memorable OTTC productions was *The Little Prince* with its surreal set.

Danielle works in arts management, and is a trustee or a director of other arts organisations, including Five Arts Cities events in Oxford, and an organisation linked to the Oxford Literary Festival. She worked on the information desk during the Luminox festival in Broad Street. The firelight transformed the buildings, and the magic went as soon as the electric lights were on.

Danielle goes to the National Theatre seeing plays like the spectacular *His Dark Materials*, which was a wow, with its use of puppets. Whilst nothing matches the book when you have read the book, the play was done as well as it could be. Her children were too young for the play, but she didn't want to ruin the book for them, to preserve the original form, wanting them to read it fresh. She goes to cross-over theatre with art, performance art, such as a show by Oxford Brookes University students at Modern Art Oxford where a woman may or may not be sitting in a corner in her costume, making tea. She goes to Stratford very occasionally, because it is expensive, where she saw Kneehigh's fantastic, wonderful, fresh and alive production of *Cymbeline*. Danielle went to OOMF in South Park where the river of sellotape was outstanding.

Danielle goes to the Playhouse, often sitting at the back, seeing plays like Teatro Kismet's outstanding, surprising, wonderful *Beauty and the Beast* which was a wow, visually enormously powerful, and with their voices and singing, and their *Snow Queen*. She saw Theatre de Complicite's *Mnemonic*. She sees student work like a student production of Timberlake Wertenbaker's *Our Country's Good* which she found too stereotyped, with the performers too similar, just like Oxford students.

Danielle sees more theatre than film, preferring theatre where the directorial message is expected to come through. She is selective in choosing her plays, veering away from more old-fashioned fusty scripted ones like bedroom farces, that she doesn't think will have any magic. Theatre is a composite art form that brings in literature, which she loves, visual art, which she loves, dance and music. It is the excitement of the live performance, and the moment. Because of its humanness, theatre cannot be edited, so it reflects humanity, and every performance is slightly different. Theatre has mobile boundaries and so many variations; it can involve and be wonderful whether it is performed by children, amateurs or professionals. The variety is so attractive about theatre, and the risk-taking. "But with theatre it's not only the actors taking notice but also the audience. Because the audience have to go along with it. They have to buy into it. They have to kind of go with the ride otherwise there's nothing in it for the audience, so it's the audience's imagination as well as the actors' creativity...". Danielle likes how you never know how it is going to happen, how it is going to be portrayed, because you may know the words, but they are not always the same. She likes the creation of darkness, silence and solitude in theatre.

If Danielle has seen a particularly good production of Shakespeare, she will preserve it in her head by not seeing another production for a while.

## 17. Pat

Pat was brought up in Oxford at the bottom of the Cowley Road in a tall back-to-back house with a back yard rather than a garden. Pat was an only child, so tended to go to things on his own. When Pat was little at St Joseph's school in St Clements, Oxford, he had quite a deep voice so he was always the voice of God in the school play, and he would be thinking "da, da, da and this is decreed!" They performed Nativity plays with tea towels on their heads. He got used to reading in class. Pat's mother has been to Lourdes.

Pat's mother worked at the Isis Hotel in Oxford and aged about fourteen or fifteen, Pat used to help out. The hotel was given complimentary tickets for the theatre because people from the theatre used to stay there. Pat got into the habit of going to the theatre, either with his mother, or with people from the hotel. They went for nothing, so it was an evening out for free where Pat could be taken away and escape into another world. It was live entertainment in front of him where he is a fly on the wall and can see what is going on. The shows were mainly at the New Theatre. He went to a wonderful Passion Play, and some fantastic Russian Cossack dancing where they sliced potatoes on stage with sharp swords, before dancing over them, causing Pat to think if they put a foot on them, they would cut a lump out of them. The dancing was great because of the colour and the spectacle.

Pat originally came to the Pegasus Theatre when it was Oxford Youth Theatre, a drama club run by Roy Copeland, where he had fun. They did about three plays a year including a pantomime. They created their own sets using home-grown talent. They performed in a small hall in front of about fifty people in old tin sheds behind the Pegasus. He went with the Youth Theatre to Glasbury to perform a play after a theatre workshop.

About 1997 Pat took his children, aged 9 – 11 to the amazing *The Lion King* in London with tickets gained through work. They had good seats at the back of the rakes stalls and there's a bang through the double doors at the back of the stalls and Pat thought someone was late and did not realise that it is what is part of what is going on, and the gangway is filled with actors dressed as animals. It was a wow, with the orchestra, and kettle drums up in the balconies. His son enjoyed it, and his daughter wanted to come again. Pat could imagine all the animals on a stampede, on the stampede scene. The colours took his breath away, and the physicality of it. *The Lion King* rekindled the magic and the excitement for him. "You can get completely lost in something that would take you out of your normal humdrum life. ... pure escapism."

Pat is a parking attendant in Oxford, and he works twelve hour shifts. He was working recently in Summertown and watched some drama students perform a rap version of *Romeo and Juliet* in the street which was a nice bit of entertainment when he was up there. He saw the setting up of Luminox during the day, with music rehearsals which was very eerie.

Pat's children are currently at university, and he hardly sees his daughter now. Pat is not a regular theatregoer any more. West End theatre is too costly, with cokes £3 a can. For Pat, there are fewer venues in Oxford for putting on plays. The Playhouse is a lovely theatre with more room in the seats and fantastic acoustics.

Watching good actors Pat can get lost and believe what is going on in front of him but with bad actors, it loses all credibility. Unlike a film, with theatre "you are actually there, and smell it, feel it, taste it and you're part of it." But like cinemas with big screens when he was young theatre is "something big that you can get enveloped in, lost in, which is what it is all about". The memory of theatre gives Pat something to "think about whilst you are doing your normal, humdrum boring things" where "you can go off on a quiet tangent for five minutes, just to escape and enjoy it" re-running it.

## 18. Ted

Ted was brought up in the country in a hamlet, a mile from the nearest village, outside of Oxford. His parents were not interested in theatre.

At school Ted had been in one school play.

Ted joined the Oxford Youth Theatre in late 1965, in his late teens to get a social life. At twenty-one he graduated to the Gladiator Club next door where there would be joint productions with the Youth Theatre. It was good fun, and he made friends there. Ted remained in amateur dramatics for the next thirty years. Ted's sister also got involved in amateur dramatics. They rehearsed in old post-war sheds. Ted's mother did her duty and watched him in the productions.

In the mid-sixties Ted went to the Playhouse where Frank Hauser's Meadow Players produced theatre in repertory. This was the time Ted was a theatregoer, seeing famous Ben Jonson plays, and *The Lady's Not For Burning*, and *Romeo and Jeannette*. The leading actors were Judi Dench, Barbara Jefford and John Turner. He also saw Ayckbourn's *The Norman Conquests* there with David Jason as Norman. He also went to the New Theatre seeing Strindberg's *The Dance of Death* when Laurence Olivier was ill so Ted missed him. He went once or twice to Stratford. Ted has never been to the National Theatre and only been to the theatre in London a couple of times, for *Hair*, where he felt part of the scene for seeing it, and for Alan Bennett's *Forty Years On*. In the late sixties he saw Moliere's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* in Worcester Gardens by the Oxford Theatre Guild where they used the lake, coming across it in boats, and with Turkish dancing girls in diaphanous costumes.

After leaving school, Ted worked, and then returned to full-time education studying English and French A-Levels at the College of Further Education, and then a degree in Literature at Essex University.

In the early seventies Ted saw the *York Mystery Plays* at St Mary's Abbey as part of the York Festival, performing in the streets on carts. He missed the Last Judgement because he and his friend were still getting their last beer at the pub. In 1978 and 1979 Ted was recruited as an events organiser for the Oxford Festival, organised by David Norrington, mostly at the Holywell Rooms with artists like Donald Swann of Flanders and Swann, Juan Martin, the flamenco guitarist, and Stan Tracey.

Ted went to Luminox, noting the remarkable peaceful crowd. He would go to the Playhouse and wanted to see Pinter's *Old Times*, as he had acted as Deeley, but couldn't afford the £25 ticket price. He went to a film instead. Ted goes to the opera at the New Theatre such as the Welsh National Opera's Monteverdi's *The Return of Ulysses* which he hated for its self-indulgence approach which detracted from the music. Ted has been to the Watermill in Newbury.

Ted has a daughter who knows about music. He is a church-goer who regrets the loss of ritual and ceremony in an ordinary Anglican church.

Ted has been more involved as a performer than as an audience member. He feels with all the theatres in Oxford he ought to go more often, but suffers from great inertia about taking the initiative and does not go to the theatre until it is suggested to him to go with others. He tends to focus on the acting rather than the set or costumes. For Ted you are eavesdropping on families in front of you, on crises and dramas. It does not matter to Ted if he knows the play as the machinery catch "takes you along, every time". He finds Osborne's *Look Back In Anger* old-fashioned now, in today's "anything goes now" theatre. It was very much of its time. Ted is a purist, preferring period dress.



## 19. Janet

Janet was born around 1950 in Hull. They lived in a back-to-back house like *Coronation Street*, and her mother let her play theatre in the back yard, using everything, making up plays, playing different characters.

Janet's family had moved to Wallingford some years earlier when Janet was six. They also lived in Wolverhampton. Her mother took her to see Rex Harrison in *My Fair Lady* at the New Theatre. Her parents were not really theatrical; her mother used to sing a bit, and her uncles played the piano. At school Janet took small parts in school plays, once playing a fairy.

Janet's family moved to Oxford, in Campbell Road, up the road from the Pegasus. Janet worked in a bank, and first came to the Pegasus when she was twenty having been to several drama groups which did not go on for very long. A colleague at the bank suggested that the Pegasus was looking for girls in the Kit Kat Club for the musical *Cabaret*, and asked Janet to go along. Janet sang a couple of songs (not very well). Her family came to support her in the audience. Janet was then involved in a fundraising cabaret for the new black box, Pegasus Theatre that was being built. The first play there, which Janet took part in, was *Live Like Pigs*. The leading actor at the Gladiators had been Patrick Mower.

In the seventies, Janet saw a few things at the Playhouse but stopped going for a while.

After Janet got married she took theatre more seriously and started to produce plays in her local village from 1990 to 1995. Janet went to London where an opera singer friend was rehearsing *The Horse and His Boy*, playing a horse, and Janet loved going behind the scenes there, watching him rehearse for hours. This experience inspired Janet to study at the FE College for a BTEC in performing arts. Janet spent a year rehearsing a devised piece called *Fast-Forward* which Euton let the students perform at the Pegasus. Janet's husband made a huge box with clothes for dressing up in it, so that Janet could fall into the box and dress up as anybody. The play started in an old attic with an old record player and got its title because they then used more modern pieces of equipment. Janet became a technician at college, and studied further, in technical theatre at Westminster. Janet has also studied at Northampton where her tutor was into experimental theatre.

Janet has been to the National Theatre, recommended by her tutor during her time on the BTEC, for Antony Sher in Brecht's incredible *The Incredible Rise of Arturo Ui* which was a wow. A wow at the Pegasus was Bobby Baker, a one-woman show, which Janet had worked on as an assistant technician. There was a video screen with clouds, and the theme was women in the kitchen, and shopping with a Tesco trolley; she was hoisted into the air on a chain which got stuck and no one knew if it was the end of the show. She had to be rescued. Janet has seen the Oxfordshire Touring Theatre Company enjoying *Wuthering Heights* where the actors changed all the time.

Janet has been to the Minack Theatre in Cornwall where a friend lives who used to work as an actor on BBC Deaf Programmes. Apart from wonderful plays, Janet finds it beautiful with the backdrop of the old ruin and stones, and as night falls, the birds swimming across the sea and the sun going down while the performance is playing. Janet has been to Lourdes where you become one of the players.

Janet's interest lies more on the visual side of theatre. She does not enjoy watching theatre so much after her studying; when she went to *Les Misérables* she was looking at the lights, and how they put the scenery together, watching the hugeness of it all and all the people needed to push the scenery. She prefers the intimacy of the Pegasus.

Janet loves theatre because everything is so different. A play that has been seen is always done differently. For Janet, "even though it's transient and it's gone when it's gone, it's actually real when it's there, when it's on". Theatre is intimate and you are a part of it. Watching improvised theatre is magical, taking Janet back to her childhood in Hull when she improvised plays in the back yard.

## 20. Helen

Helen was born in 1940 and was brought up in Cookham Dean in a cottage until she was nine. They were an educated but poor family in a village which had many rich families. Her father used to work for the publishers Rockliff, designing their logo. He commissioned the translations of foreign books including one by Barrault in 1951.

In the fifties Helen took part in the village pantomimes playing a fairy in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with her parents. She acted in charades at Christmas, and sang. Her first theatrical experience was watching her father and uncles join in the charades in the small living room, which was fun and something you shared. She performed improvised plays to the rest of the great aunts and families crowded into the sitting room, prepared in the hall and then went in, the lights would be down and the charades were so improvised that mistakes really didn't matter. It still brought surprise to people that was totally spontaneous, unplanned, unexpected, and never to be repeated. Helen had a dressing-up box with tea-cosies as hats, and cardigans worn as leggings. The real tragedy of Helen's early childhood was that she was not a boy. One day she dressed in trousers and a sweater, her long, blonde hair, stuffed into a little woollen hat, and she aggravated the coal man who said: "go home to your mum, sonny!" which meant, at a deep level, being able to be someone else. Because Helen was "a painting child" she was invited to Stanley Spencer's extraordinary house. Spencer would say: "come up and see what I've been doing", and take Helen into his bedroom where he would unroll canvases from under his bed.

After the war, Helen was taken to the Open Air Theatre in Regents Park. When she was seven her aunt took her to the Wigmore Hall to see a woman performer who sang. Helen went to the village church (of England) which was theatre with the smells of incense and the beautiful vestments. Helen's first school was Herries, at a house called Grahame's which is where Kenneth Grahame lived. At the age of ten, Helen won a scholarship to the Abbey School in Reading where she acted in school plays. She played Portia in *The Merchant of Venice* and was nervous about going on stage. Helen was good at reading. Helen preferred being an observer than an actor. As she got older Helen got involved in sets and costumes. Helen's first experience of theatre was going on school trips at the age of fourteen, to Stratford for *Twelfth Night*. She was visually training her memory because she was looking over the balcony and visually memorising all the costumes. When she got home she drew them from memory. Her teachers were so astonished they sent them to Stratford. Helen still has a programme signed by all the actors.

Helen had a friend in the village, the son of a wealthy family, who, when she was fifteen, had a film camera. The family had a ballroom in the house, with chairs with golden legs. Helen went with the group to go ballroom dancing in Maidenhead to the music of Victor Sylvester. The teenagers were then invited to the ballroom dance where in new frocks they would dance around the ballroom watched by parents sitting on the gold-legged chairs, which she found hell. Helen was asked to join the group making a film as a continuity girl.

Helen studied at the Slade School for Fine Art and when in London saw some amazing productions visually. She went to tiny little theatres in the back of pubs with room for only twenty-five people and the actors. She lived round the corner from Sadler's Wells and attended opera there, but found a barrier of looking at the singers, where a fat old lover would sing to a really ghastly looking person with a big nose, preferring to listen to the singing with her eyes closed. Helen saw Joan Littlewood's *Oh What A Lovely War!* at the Theatre Royal Stratford East. She saw films at the Everyman in Hampstead such as Bergman's *The Seventh Seal*. She went to happenings and similar theatre events in London. A fellow student was the daughter of Peggy Ashcroft, so they went to see Ashcroft's performances in the theatre, sitting in the cheapest seats at the top of the theatres.

Helen's two boys were born in 1963 and 1967. Helen moved to Oxford in 1964, teaching art in North Oxford. She had a dressing-up box in her classroom and the boys would dress up in silks and boas, having been deprived of tactile, sensual textiles elsewhere. Helen worked part time as an artist, but never made much money at it. She rented studio space from other artists until rent rises caused her to work at home. She creates large scale work for spaces such as ruined castles and churches, or in the open.

Helen loves the Pegasus. When one of her sons was ten or eleven she met Greta Verdin who had started a children's Saturday morning workshop at the Pegasus which she thought he would like, but as it happened he was not keen, but Helen was drawn in. She came to productions, and lived nearby in a flat, and then in her current home not far away. The possibility of painting with light was a magical world, so

as she is not technical, Helen worked with the lighting people at the Pegasus. Helen thinks that the Pegasus has a magical intimate atmosphere with its steep auditorium. This means audiences haven't got people's heads in front of you. They have unimpeded views where everyone can relate directly to the play without interference from other people. For Helen, magic is a "heightened awareness, but it's a very special place within which something is going to happen"; magic at the Pegasus because it is black, small, dark and intimate. Helen worked with the choreographer Cecilia MacFarlane and Carolyn Harrison-Ganberg, the composer, over a period of about eight years at the Pegasus. As an artist it's the process that matters, not the result.

The shows that Helen was involved with designing costumes and sets at the Pegasus for Oxford Youth Theatre included the very elaborate *How To Trap The Sun* in 1992, a massive project with Tony Davis, who secured European funding for it. The project was for The Tuesday Club of disabled children. She designed a river goddess that started as a tent, hung from a hook in the ceiling, and the river goddess came from underneath at the back and rose up inside it. Helen and the children made and painted papier maché babies. She and Cecilia adapted one of Helen's books, *The Wolfman and the Clown* for the stage, designing costume and magical sets, ghostly figures with a chorus of wolves and a chorus of clowns. She worked with actress and dancer Emma Webb on *The Handsomest Drowned Man In The World*, an adaptation of a Gabriel Garcia Marquez short story where Helen designed an eight foot model of a corpse. There was a subsequent magical occasion: "when the production was over, he was left in the workshops in the back and I was there with Emma and we were rehearsing something else, or she was doing something else, and suddenly she said "listen" and we heard children's voices outside the wall and they had come in from the vacant plot. Little children's voices. "Look, look, is it dead? Is it a dead man?" Emma and I, we were tired, sitting down out of sight, she crept along and she got behind the figure and she made him turn. And they screamed!" Helen designed a huge planet for the *Song of Aslia* which was constructed at the Pegasus and performed at the Playhouse where she had the wonderful experience of carrying the globes through the streets of Oxford after they would not fit into the hired van. She also worked on a production about Christopher Columbus.

One of her sons enjoyed dressing up from Helen's dressing-up box, one day wearing a gold lame dress and a wig out on the pavement. He got a scholarship to Christ's Hospital School in Horsham where he was really involved in theatre. By the late seventies and early eighties Helen spent about ten years helping the Oxford Youth Theatre and working with the children. The Youth Theatre's first backcloths came as curtains thrown out by the John Radcliffe Hospital which were sewn together in Helen's kitchen and painted with emulsion in the Pegasus workshops. Helen got involved in theatre in Eastern Europe and had the desire to bring their physical theatre companies back to Britain. Helen used to write and illustrate books and knows Philip Pullman from the primary school circuit; he used to give her lifts home afterwards.

In the early eighties, Helen went with her son to Rose English's absolutely extraordinary and unforgettable one-woman performance art show at the Pegasus, a wow. Helen was interested in the cross-over between the visual arts and theatre. Rose English's performance was "one of the most extraordinary experiments I have ever seen in my life". The theatre was in darkness, and a voice was heard speaking and a child's voice and they were talking about *The Wizard of Oz*. The lights went up and there was a huge, four-poster bed and a patchwork counterpane and the little voice went on, child talking, and Rose speaking also, and there was a tiny bed in the corner of the stage. Suddenly there was a movement in the bed and a dog got out, a Jack Russell terrier and jumped off the bed and ran round, and then a little girl of about five or perhaps younger, with curly red hair got out of the bed, quite comfortable and tottered around. This person got out of the bed, looking as if she was an illustration from a children's fairy book, with a patterned skirt and an extraordinary long black plait, and very theatrical and dramatic movements, and the thing unfolded and all the dialogue was about Yellow Brick Road and the characters from the film. This carried on in the most extraordinary way, and suddenly two people got up in the audience and said "this is absolutely outrageous, we've paid terribly good money for these seats, this isn't theatre". Rose English waited, and they started to come down and they were livid, they thought they had been hoodwinked, they couldn't handle it. Rose stood by the door, and included them in the performance. They became part of it and the child was pottering around. The child got into the little miniature bed and out. It was quite extraordinary. It was strangely disturbing, because there hadn't been any explanation about how it had evolved and you were watching a child. Rose English responded to what happened between the child and the dog and the memory of the story and was allowing you to enjoy a moment with a child and a dog, but on the stage, in this setting.

The effect on Helen was intellectual, making her wonder if she was watching child exploitation, whether children on stage are really frightened or are crying about something that is not emotional and what the rules were about having a dog on stage. The incident with the angry couple made her think about preconceptions before attending a production. The play led to a very serious discussion about performance art with dramaturg Petr Oslzly in the Czech Republic who said that performance art was not theatre. Helen was glad she is a visual artist who can cross boundaries without having any problem.

The performance was a one-off and has become a mystery because there are no records of the performance at the Pegasus. There were also to be one-off performances in London and New York with a different child each time. It was a child of friends each time, and she would spend a weekend looking at *The Wizard of Oz*, the film, and talking about it with the child, getting into their world. Helen had seen how her own children could reconstruct something that they had seen and become the characters. Helen could draw Rose English from memory. She related this kind of performance art to the happenings she went to in the sixties.

Helen loves it when the unexpected happens in the theatre, as with Rose English, or the Oxford Youth Theatre production with a socio-political context in South America when a drunk man who was asleep on the stage, and woke up mid-performance to the sound of the performers going to the back of the stage to get some bottles. He got up from his slump on a chair by the door and wobbled across the stage, and the company helped steer him around the table with bottles of water, and out of the theatre. Helen is very interested in mistakes, loves it when something goes wrong, and is interested in how to make the mistake or catastrophe into something else.

Helen went to some of Ayckbourn's quite funny *Norman Conquests* at the Oxford Playhouse, but she tends not to go to comedy. Helen saw amazing productions at the Pegasus because it was an experimental venue. Helen came to wonderful, fantastic early Theatre de Complicite performances at the Pegasus, and their visually extraordinary *Street of Crocodiles* which is the sort of stuff they do all the time in Eastern Europe. Helen saw Pam Gems' play *Stanley* at the National Theatre where the music was by Illona Sakacz, who composed music for a dance piece Helen worked on with Cecilia MacFarlane. Helen found the play absolutely brilliant, and beautiful, responding to it visually with its scaffolding and Spencer paintings all the way around the Cottesloe Theatre stage. The set was Cookham, all reconstructed.

Helen has been to some extraordinary, open-air productions in Oxford Colleges, magical because there are trees, grass and bushes, and it is out of the ordinary. She has been to the new Trestle Theatre in St Albans, which does not have the wonderful steep slope of the Pegasus. Helen finds Chekhov wonderful. She knows Stephen Mottram quite well and has been to all of his puppet shows at the Pegasus. She finds his puppetry "so beautiful, it is so wonderful and it's silent and it's visual and it's movement and it's magical" where he creates a "dreamlike imaginative space" but does not want to know how he constructs, as when he included an exhibition after a production. Helen loved Pinter's *Old Times* at the Playhouse having been given the ticket as a birthday present, aware of the beauty and the timing of the words, finding it terribly funny, about memory, and so relevant to the reminiscence process, about misremembering and half remembering, and "the awareness that people don't really tell you the truth". She also goes to the Old Fire Station, the Burton Taylor Theatre, The Oxfordshire Touring Theatre Company, and the Creation Theatre Company performances outside in the parks. She will never forget the extraordinary Luminor, with the most extraordinary transformation of a space, where Broad Street, a familiar place, was somewhere else with crowds of silent, excited people and atmospheric music. She was glad she was not there when the electric lights came on.

Helen is an obsessive archivist and has kept all her workbooks, stage and costume designs, diaries and correspondence from her years at the Pegasus. She commented in her diary recently on an interview with Harold Pinter on television. In 1998 Helen burned a lot of her artwork which was traumatic, because there was nowhere to store it. Helen's sister goes to the theatre, recommending productions such as the all-male Propeller Shakespeares. One of her sons lives in Hamburg, Germany.

Helen likes the physicality of theatre because you can smell, touch and feel it. She is interested that "audiences can have shared experiences of something even if they are not in the same place at the same time". Helen relates to theatre's "ephemeral quality that gives it a heightened poignancy and immediacy". Helen feels the ritual of coming into a foyer, looking around to see if she knows anyone, the anxiety about the lack of room at the Pegasus, getting the tickets, waiting for the usher to take the tickets, rushing in, knowing what it is like inside and hoping for a good seat where she is going to sit; or at the

Playhouse with the space being light, the programmes, the counter selling tickets, the waiting and the anticipation in the build-up, and then the call to go in. Theatre is more flexible than music because you can disengage and then go back gently in again. Helen is deterred from attending the Playhouse due to the cost of the tickets, finding twenty or twenty-five pounds too expensive. Helen does not have a car so the future is more where she can get to on her bicycle.

## 21. Catherine

Catherine's mother was brought up in rural Essex. During the war her parents worked in Malvern at TRE and they used to play hookey and go to concerts in Birmingham which were done for local people and the troops. Before the war, they would not have been exposed to that quality of concert. They got moved around the country during the war and had opportunities they would not have had at home. Catherine's father in particular enjoyed the theatre.

Catherine was brought up in a village in Kent. The family did not have a lot of money, and Catherine did not have a television until she got married. There was always something happening in the village. One grandmother who lived in Leeds, was a pianist who grew up playing organ in a Methodist chapel. Her father used to sing as a boy, and her younger brother played the guitar.

At eighteen months Catherine was taken to dance classes by her godmother where she started performing as a snowflake or a leaf. Her godmother took it in turns to take her to the theatre in London whilst the other babysat her brothers. When she was six or seven she was given a birthday surprise treat to watch a troupe of Spanish dancers, possibly at Sadler's Wells; there was a dish of water in the middle of the stage and somebody bumped into it and smashed it, with water all over the stage, a wow. She enjoyed going to the theatre with her family. She felt the magic, and was overpowered walking into the ballet in London.

Catherine had a dressing-up box with travel blankets and sheets, granny's corsets, cub uniforms and discarded clothing and she used to dress up and play. She could do all sorts of things with tea towels. Catherine used to listen to plays on the radio, being frightened, sitting on the stairs, not letting her parents know she was there; the radio highlight of the week was at Sunday lunchtime with *The Ban Show*, *Round The Horne*, *The Goons*, and *The Navy Lark*. It was the only time her father was around during the day and Sunday lunch was very much a dramatic activity.

Catherine went to the village school where she acted in a Nativity play and went through the village doing *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*. The family then moved to Newbury where there was a lot more to do, because of the theatres and the cinema and they started going out a lot more. Catherine's father got established and there was more money. In 1956/57 Catherine went to the local all-girls grammar school in Newbury, taking A-Levels in 1963. She acted out Shakespeare plays; Catherine was Jessica in *The Merchant of Venice* and acted out the balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet* standing on a classroom cupboard. There were school trips to the theatre. The family did not have money to go to shows in London but they made at least two trips a month to Oxford, if not two trips a week, going by bus to the theatre. Catherine saw the RSC, *St Joan*, and one other play, before they went to Moscow.

Catherine studied geology at Keele University. Keele had fantastic concerts, being spellbound by Paul Telelie and theatre groups she did not appreciate at the time. Catherine got cheapo tickets to the Victoria Theatre in Stoke, run by Peter Cheeseman, where a wow was seeing *King Lear* in the round. She would not go out of her way to see a Shakespeare play but she could not help but cry with him because she got pulled in. She saw Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, and a propaganda play about chemicals in foodstuffs. Her only problem was getting home. None of her friends had a car and it was later that she went to the Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester.

Catherine got married and moved to Newcastle upon Tyne which was absolutely fantastic because there were three theatres. She loved Newcastle; it was incredible. The University Theatre and the Studio were not open when she went there. There was an eclectic variety of theatre or performance art and The Peoples Theatre was magic because they had Indian dance groups as well as local groups performing. Catherine became an infants and primary school teacher in Newcastle where the football coach at the school was an opera buff, and he, and a colleague got Catherine interested in going to opera. They went to street theatre down at the Quay Sides, opera and theatre, and folk bands in pubs. She went to the RSC in Newcastle. After Catherine divorced, because she could not have children, she went to anything and everything – Scottish Opera, English opera, theatre groups, at the Royal Theatre. She especially went out at weekends, and if she went out in the evenings, had a sleep beforehand as she was exhausted after work. She prefers vibrant operas like *Der Fledermaus*, or musicals like *West Side Story*, and not operas where a character takes half an hour to die. Catherine became a Friend of the theatre, getting one free ticket if she bought two, and theatre was not more expensive than going to the pub; not an elitist activity.

Catherine retrained to teach English as a foreign language and moved to Japan for six years. One of the girls she worked with was married to a bunraku puppeteer. She went to his shows, and kabuki. She went to the Chinese Opera performing *Monkey*. She likes Chinese Opera because it is all flash and action, swords, dance and acrobatics. There was a festival every month with street dance. She went to Japanese-subtitled films in the cinema above her offices like the devastating *Das Boot* and *Napoleon* from 1911 or 1912, in the Kendo auditorium with a pianist playing for five hours. A friend took her to Noh productions, and she visited a company that made the costumes where she learned about the symbolism of the colours.

In 1982 Catherine returned to England, to Salisbury, working for the same company, and then returned to China to Tianjin and Beijing. She returned to England and then got headhunted back to Beijing working in hotel training schools, opening new hotels. She then moved with the company opening hotels in Portugal on the Algarve, which was Catherine's cultural desert because there was so very little happening there; no cinema within two hours of driving. From Portugal, she returned to Newbury, living in Speen.

Catherine worked for a while at the Watermill, loving Propeller's productions, especially *Henry V*. She finds the theatre claustrophobic, entering by the spiral staircase, and prefers The Corn Exchange, finding the plays from the London Mime Festival phenomenal – especially the mind-blowing *Stones in his Pockets*. She works as an usher for the Corn Exchange. She has seen bunraku at the National Theatre.

Catherine has been to the York Mystery Plays, going under duress because she is not a rampant Christian. Set in a field not far from the city centre, with morris dancers and people in medieval dress playing medieval instruments in the city; once it got going she was spellbound where it "pulled in all the things I could remember from childhood about Nativity plays" with the Crucifixion occurring at the same time as the setting of the sun. It was a very moving experience.

Catherine relates to the total emotional involvement, never knowing what to expect next, the element of surprise. She loves going to things and not knowing anything about them. She just wants to go and find out, just open herself to whatever's going to happen where "you win some, you lose some". Catherine has had some really boring evenings that she does not agree with, but it captures her. Sometimes she is not in there at all during a production, her mind thinking about getting things ready for kids at school. Theatre "in a way opened the world and at the same time made me realise how universal, how similar we all are". She does not go for escapism, but more as an exploratory situation. She is not running away from something but she wants to learn about something. Catherine can get really involved in theatre a Japanese musical etc without "having a clue half the time what was going on." But there's something there that strikes a chord and she feels involved and committed to it. She likes the experience to sink in, to float through her, and she thinks about it, before talking to someone else about it a few days' later. As an adult, either because of age, or familiarity, she does not feel the magic, or is overpowered, walking into a provincial theatre. She feels different emotions: anticipation over what she is going to see or hear, but not the sparkle of chandeliers, gold and velvet; she is just as involved in a field or watching somebody perform on the back of a lorry.

## 22. Barbara

Barbara grew up in a large family in Greater Manchester near Oldham where social life centred around the church, and music. They used to meet at her grandparents' every week where Barbara and the other children would write and act plays for the grown-ups.

When Barbara was at primary school she was taken with her brothers and sisters by her great uncle to a local amateur dramatic production of *Hobson's Choice* in a church hall, a different church to the one she regularly attended. She loved being part of the event, just being in the middle of it all, rather than the theatre itself. It was a wow for her, hot, packed and sweaty and everyone laughed all night; it was great. She loved all the little tricks like someone coming up through the trap door, and the shock of people turning up in places she hadn't expected to see. After that, Barbara just knew that she wanted to keep on going to the theatre.

As a child, Barbara attended Whit Walks, which were huge, girls wearing white, or new outfits, top to toe, bearing witness to her faith. She walked through the streets with her church carrying banners, with bands playing, and a Rose Queen and a Harvest Queen who are dressed up. There were Catholic walks one week and Protestant walks the next. The walks were very theatrical and everyone participated. As a teenager Barbara started going to local repertory theatres with her sister and cousin. By sixteen or seventeen, Barbara was a regular theatregoer.

At school Barbara did a drama, and got involved in painting a set, but drama was not big at school. She studied English A-Level and went on school trips to the Library Theatre, and the Palace Theatre, to see *Hamlet* and *Waiting For Godot*. After school Barbara studied for an HND in business, did a management traineeship and during those years mainly went to parties or music. At twenty-one or twenty-two she moved to London. She was nervous going to a West End theatre for the first time. She lived in central London, working as a buyer in retail, and for the next four or five years, she carried on going to parties rather than going to the theatre. In her late twenties she went to opera.

Barbara got married and had her children. For two or three years, Barbara could only go to things when she had a babysitter. She went to the Battersea Arts Centre which was two miles away from her home where she saw anything that was on at the right time, strange, very experimental stuff. Barbara discovered she liked mime there, and also went to the Jongleurs which was in a room over a pub in Battersea. After a couple of years as the children got older, she went back to normal. Barbara took her children to the Polka Theatre, which was nearby. The children went to drama clubs. The BBC went to the drama club because it was close, leading to her oldest son acting out clues for a programme where they had to fill out a crossword. Barbara saw a lot of plays in the West End, and at the National Theatre where she saw the fantastic Antony Hopkins fill the auditorium in David Hare and Howard Brenton's brilliant *Pravda*.

Barbara started going to the South Bank, seeing *Don Giovanni* there, and to opera in parks and castles, *Così Fan Tutti* in a garden in Ealing, *Don Giovanni* again in Canizaro Park in Wimbledon Common, a sort of sunken Italian garden, *Rigoletto* at Heaton Castle and Pimlico Opera doing *West Side Story* in the smelly gym of Wandsworth Prison. She was searched before entering the prison. Barbara lived in Wandsworth at the time, and prisoners played the gang members. There was a professional orchestra and the prisoners, in for fifteen years, were really good, very convincing at times. The audience is part of it for Barbara, with the different experiences of audiences outdoors, where on a really hot night, people are being bitten by midges, and on a cold night it looks as if everyone has been camping with people getting their food and drink out.

Barbara then moved to Newbury and went to the Watermill where Propeller's *Rose Rage* was outstanding, and *Henry V*, with the horse, was good; and the Corn Exchange. Her children were involved in drama at St Bart's School. Her oldest son has turned radical and is against theatre because of its audiences, but her youngest son is passionate about theatre and would quite like to act. Barbara does not go to see much in London any more because ticket prices are so staggeringly high.

Barbara likes to be surprised and challenged by theatre. She likes to see the same play two or three times by different companies because she can be surprised that it is the same play, and she can realise something else about it. She does not attend for escape but to feel absorbed by it, to feel that she becomes part of it; theatre makes her think and educates her.



### 23. Phil

Phil was born in Newbury and brought up in New Malden. His mother was a member of the Townswomen's Guild where Phil played Joseph in a Nativity play. They had a television and watched the Coronation.

Phil started in secondary school in Merton in 1955/56. Phil preferred sciences at school, failing English Literature, where he studied *Henry IV Part One*, and History O-Levels. He studied pure maths, applied maths and physics for A-Level. In the summer holidays when he was seventeen, he got a job at Fanum House in Leicester Square with the AA, and they would come around with free tickets for the theatre. His mother told him to get what he could, as she loved the theatre, so he got tickets for a CP Snow play. He thought it would be too heavy for him but thought the play, about Oxford or Cambridge was good, a wow, and started taking more tickets.

In the sixties and seventies, Phil was not particularly theatre-oriented. Phil studied at Liverpool University in the early sixties, where he went to the original Cavern Club, where the walls were dripping with water. He was the social secretary of the Maths Club and organised dances with local groups. He got married, had two children and graduated wanting to be a maths teacher. In the early seventies he applied for a postgraduate course in Zambia to study for a postgraduate certificate in education followed by a government contract for teaching in Zambia. There's an old adage in Africa: "are you married or do you belong to a theatre club?" His marriage broke up and Phil got involved in a theatre club, inveigled into Lusaka Theatre Company, which he found sociable. Although he acted once or twice, one was *Conduct Unbecoming*; he preferred being backstage, getting involved, which was a secondary wow for him. He appreciated all the effort in producing an event, the months of work in getting something right. Productions were ambitious including *Empire of the Sun* and *Oliver!* The magnificent sets got a round of applause. After four years Phil returned to Britain, only to go back to Zambia working for Glaxo for three years.

Phil got promoted within Glaxo and moved to Islington. From there it was easy to get a taxi to London theatres so he saw a lot of shows then, enjoying theatre, ballet and concerts at the Royal Festival Hall. He went to the King's Head once but preferred the West End. He then moved to Woking, Wokingham, Newbury, North Devon, Blackburn, and Newbury again. He met Maureen and went to productions in Manchester where he likes the absolutely fabulous Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester where he had his third wow, seeing *Conduct Unbecoming* in the round, close to the production..

Phil is not particularly a fan of the musical but his partner is. He went dutifully to musicals but thought *Evita* with Elaine Paige brilliant; and more recently, if it counts as a musical, the absolutely brilliant *We Will Rock You*. He could relate to Queen, who were right there. They got Telegraph tickets for £10 each in seats normally costing £40 or £50. *Chicago* was OK and didn't do much for him; he likes the spectacle of musicals. Phil went to Stratford particularly to see Judi Dench in the musical version of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, which he was not sure worked but which he found interesting. What he wants to see is something a bit different; he would see something different every time. He went to the National Theatre to see a modern dress *The Alchemist*, which they nearly left at the interval. The rest of the audience thought it was absolutely wonderful but he found it boring. He does have disappointments going to the theatre.

So, although Phil is extremely badly read, he does like to go to the theatre, although he is not a strong theatregoer. He also likes ballet. He goes to be entertained and does not get involved in the play. He will know if the play is good, that he is enjoying it, but he is an observer, not part of things. He thinks he is hard-hearted and detached. He likes smaller theatres like the smashing little Watermill Theatre, which makes a good evening, having a meal there as well; he liked *Hobson's Choice*, and *Mack and Mabel*, with David Soul. Mostly he goes to the Watermill and the Corn Exchange but occasionally goes up to London, but it is more of an expedition. Fortunately he has a cousin who lives in Kensington, and he house sits there, choosing plays to see when there. At Christmas he saw three shows in a week which is a lot for him. He is quite selective about what he goes to.

## 24. Rachel

Rachel was brought up in an old house in Devizes. Her parents had an alcove in their bedroom with a curtain that went round it. With her two sisters and a brother, every Christmas when her cousins came over, they used to put together a little play. The adults would come in and watch them, which was really, really good fun. They made up, rehearsed and performed, probably a religious play for a number of Christmases. Rachel's parents took her to the pantomime at the Theatre Royal Bath when she was a child, which she loved. They used to have a box, everyone would dress up and it used to be lovely. She didn't enjoy the traditional pantomime that much, however.

Rachel's mother was involved in the Soroptimists. Her father used to write plays that the four children would perform at the town hall in Devizes for charity. Her grandmother made costumes out of crepe paper and they were worried that the paper would break and they would be on stage with no clothes on but it never did. They used to dress up in her mother's old evening gowns which were given away before they were old enough to fit them.

Rachel went to a private primary school where she was involved in doing the Nativity plays.

Rachel then went to the local comprehensive school. When Rachel was about twelve she played Gerda in a school play of *The Snow Queen*. Rachel was involved in the school drama club after school which her English teacher was involved in. This got Rachel involved in amateur dramatics which she really enjoyed and got a lot out of. As a result of this, Rachel has always been a theatregoer. The motivation is escapism: on stage Rachel could escape from who she is into somebody else, and in the audience escape by just taking over what is going on. Rachel studied English for A-Level. She went to see Shakespeare productions with school, especially a really good *Romeo and Juliet* when she was about sixteen, which was the best Shakespeare she had ever seen because it was done as a comedy, but she did not know how they did it.

After A-Levels Rachel worked for her mother in her garden centre and because it was fairly boring, she had a lot of time on her hands, so she got involved in amateur dramatics at the Wharf Theatre in Devizes. In 1977 she saw *The Rocky Horror Show* in London, and *Stevie* with Glenda Jackson, at the Theatre Royal Bath. She also saw *Ipitombi* at Bath, but these were always special occasions, she did every three months or so. She saw Miller's absolutely excellent, fascinating *Death of a Salesman* at the National Theatre but was went by accident and was meant to see another play, something she had a part in as an amateur.

Rachel then worked in Swindon in Debenham's, again in a fairly boring job, and got involved in amateur dramatics in Swindon and went to the Wyvern Theatre. Rachel liked straight theatre and pop concerts, seeing Leo Sayer at the Colston Hall in Bristol, Elton John at the Hammersmith Odeon, and Rod Stewart a couple of times.

When Rachel lived in Guildford she had a boring secretarial job so she worked evenings in the bar of the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre. She also went to the Redgrave Theatre in Farnham.

From 1980 – 1983 Rachel studied psychology at Newcastle Polytechnic as a mature student. She found Newcastle a wonderful place where she went to the Rolling Stones at St James' Newcastle and Dire Straits at the City Hall. Rachel worked in pubs in the evenings as she did not have a lot of money so she did not go to the theatre much.

Rachel got married and moved to Newbury in 1985 and started going to the Watermill Theatre, going regularly, going to as many as she could until she had her son eight years later. Rachel worked front of house, and selling programmes at the Watermill so she saw the plays more than once. She stopped going to the theatre after her son was born because she was working full time and felt guilty about going out in the evenings. She was divorced when her son was five and started going to the theatre again, when her son was away with his father. She had a friend who was an avid theatregoer who introduced Rachel to the Donmar Warehouse in London; she went to the Albert Hall for the first time since she was five for the wonderful *Classical Spectacular*. They went to the National Theatre, to productions like *Mother Molly's Clap House* and again to the Watermill. As her son got older, about eight, she started to take him to the theatre; he enjoyed Sweeney Todd, and *Neville's Island* at the Watermill. Rachel takes her son to the

pantomime in Newbury which she enjoys more than when she went as a child in Bath; her son loves the pantomime at the Corn Exchange.

Rachel got remarried in 2005 and they took all their wedding guests to the Watermill for *Mack and Mabel*. She takes her now thirteen year old son regularly to the Watermill for the talkbacks on the first Friday of the first week of the play, most recently to *For Services Rendered*.

For Rachel theatre is educating and entertaining. When she has more time, she will go to the theatre more often. Her interest comes because she would really liked to have been an actress but she did not have the talent. She likes everything about the theatre and this is the nearest she can get. Rachel does not remember names of plays or actors, and does not keep programmes.

## 25. Diana

Diana's father was a pilot in the air force during the war and was stationed at an airbase in Cambridgeshire. Diana grew up in a seven miles from Cambridge in a cluster of houses that was not really a village. There was nothing there except the church, and the family stayed in the tight, claustrophobic, very inbred village. Diana was always an oddity there because the family was not from the village. Diana had to do readings in front of the congregation which she loved because she has always been able to learn a piece and say it. This gave her a lot of confidence in life because she was good at it.

When Diana was ten the family moved to Luton which was a culture shock because the children there were more confident and more brash, putting Diana in the shade, when she had been previously top of the tree. That year she auditioned for a part in the Christmas play, *Dick Whittington*, getting the main female part. It was the last part she ever got because it ruined her confidence. Diana went on to High School where she studied English Literature but where there was no drama. In about 1959/1960, she learned at least a third of *Twelfth Night* off by heart and went on a school trip to the Old Vic to see a fantastic, very funny *Twelfth Night*. Having studied it first, Diana knew all the nuances they were trying to put across. Unless you have done your homework on a Shakespeare play beforehand, you do not fully understand it or take it in.

Diana left school at sixteen, having met her future husband at fifteen, and decided not to go to university, disappointing her parents. She studied secretarial and languages for a year in Luton, and then worked in London. Luton was a manufacturing town, for Vauxhall cars, and hats. In the summer there was a Vauxhall Fortnight which the whole town attended. Diana was into pop music and loved Elvis who was frowned upon by her father, who would not let Diana put her records on his new super-duper especially-made record player with its huge speaker. She became a groupie of the local group, the Baron Knights. She and her future husband organised social events and booked the band for them. Her husband organised trips to Wembley where they saw Freddie and the Dreamers, Marty Wilde, Joe Brown, and even the Beatles, all on the same programme, performing two or three numbers of what they were famous for. Diana's local cinema hosted pop concerts; she saw Cilla Black in one of her first live performances; the electricity went off, and Cilla held the audience, laughing, with her personality.

When Diana was eighteen she went to see the original production of *Oliver!* in London which was a wow. Diana lived in Luton and worked in London and with her monthly season ticket could travel up to London as often as she liked. She and her future husband went up on Saturday nights, getting cheap tickets in Leicester Square and the night she saw *Oliver!* was the night they got engaged. Diana loves musicals and this was a good production that she really enjoyed. It made her hair stand up on end. It was quite frightening at times with the murder and the rest of it. At that time she saw nearly everything that was on in London, including *The Mousetrap*.

Diana was married at twenty, and had four children by her thirties, so she had no money or time in the evenings for theatregoing. She had a grandmother who lived in Bournemouth who they visited for holidays, going to end of the pier shows with a famous person heading the show, and entertainments like a comedian, a dancer, a singer in variety, or going to farces at the end of the pier.

The family moved quite a lot, to the Ashdown Forest in Sussex, and then to the Wye Valley in Wales, both in the countryside away from theatres. Her involvement in theatre was her children's plays, and getting involved with make-up, quite a lot of freaky costumes and hair. Then they moved to Newbury when Diana was forty. She started to go to the theatre again because she could get to London. She loves the Watermill where the seating is good and she can see from any angle, and has been to a lot there, particularly Alan Plater's absolutely fascinating *Only A Matter of Time* where she learned about how time had to be the same all over the country when trains were introduced. Another really, really good really interesting play, was Alan Bennett's *Talking Heads* with Lorraine Chase in one about flower arranging in a church, and all the cattiness and bitchiness of church life, and Diana does flower arranging too. *Shirley Valentine* was absolutely fantastic, unforgettable at the Watermill because the first act is entirely taken up with this actress coming in, and this is where Diana stood back from it, and watched the production itself. She came in with her shopping, she unpacked it, she peeled the potatoes, she put the cooker on with that, and she produced perfect egg and chips, to be put down in front of her husband right on the spot at the end of the monologue at the end of the act, better than Diana could have done if she were concentrating at

home. Diana could smell the cooking, and the actress had to be able to act, remember her lines and cook. She could empathise with Shirley Valentine and the way she was brow-beaten.

Diana went to see *Cats* the staging of which she found amazing swivelling on the chairs which shocked her for a start. It was the first play with high technology that Diana had seen with cats emerging from tunnels and round the back. Diana went a few times to *Phantom of the Opera*, and once took some Americans who found the technology neat.

Diana's son did *Oliver!* at school and Diana did all the make-up which brought it all back because it is part of her life. Theatre threads through her life.

Diana also goes to the Anvil in Basingstoke. All her children are married and she has brought her young grandchildren to the Corn Exchange to the pantomime. She goes to more local theatre than London, where it is difficult getting a late train home, although she went to *Mamma Mia* in the West End recently. She is a Friend of the Watermill, but does not do any of the "friendly" things, seeing plays there when they have been recommended by a friend. Diana was widowed in 2001.

Diana is a regular theatregoer, and loves local theatres, large theatres, everything about it, and feels she is participating as an audience. She is part of it. She likes the unexpectedness, she don't really know what's going to happen and "I just feel that you are with people on stage who are part of it and without you, they wouldn't be there and conversely you wouldn't be there without them. And that's what I really like about it." Diana will see anything just to see what it is like, and there is not much that she has not enjoyed. There is always something Diana can take away from a production. Theatre is all-enveloping. Diana finds it difficult to swap back into her normal life after a play and wants to stay a bit longer and let it sink in. Finance and location are considerations for Diana in her theatregoing.

## 26. Jane

Jane was brought up in a little village near Abingdon. Her parents did not go to the theatre or cinema, except for *The Sound of Music*. The family did not have a car. When Jane was a child she was taken by her aunt by bus to the normal, OK, no-big deal pantomimes, sitting in the balcony where her aunt would fall asleep, so she was sort of there alone. She went to see her older brother perform in gang shows.

Jane went to an awful all-girls secondary school where she studied English for A-Level which included Shakespeare. There were school trips to see *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at Regents Park Open Air Theatre but it did not make an impression on her. She loathed the Gilbert and Sullivan dramas at school. Jane has spent her life in Tamla Motown going to Otis Redding and Sam and Dave in Oxford when she was fifteen or sixteen. Jane studied English at Cardiff University and went to see singers like Rod Stewart, Elkie Brooks, and Leo Sayer. Most of her money was spent on clothes and gigs.

Jane got married and moved to London where she went to the spectacular *Hair* the day after the honeymoon. She found the spectacle impressive and special, and to *Phantom of the Opera* with Michael Crawford and Sarah Brightman, a wow, unbelievable, very clever with the river, chandelier and the fog, and tremendous music, heart-tugging special. She also saw *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Othello*, *Coriolanus*, an Ibsen, *Waiting For Godot*, and *A Day in the Life of Joe Egg*.

Two years later Jane and her husband moved to South Wales. She worked in personnel, and then for the Inland Revenue. They went to Sophia Gardens a lot going to all kinds of wonderful things. When she was thirty she had a daughter. They then moved to Ipswich, Dubai for six months, and on the way back went to son et lumière at Luxor in Egypt, Winchester, briefly, Hong Kong, for three years, where she saw Chinese Opera, acrobats, lantern festivals, and dragon dances. They went on holiday from there to Japan where they went to the really wonderful Noh Theatre, with masks, high-pitched chorus singing, and stories in a language she could not understand, and Kabuki Theatre and tea ceremonies. She really liked just sitting there and experiencing it. The sound was very like cats being strangled. In Mongolia her husband had to recite Edgar Allen Poe's *Famous Hand* otherwise they wouldn't feed us, which was fun. In Russia they went to the Moscow ballet and circus which the children enjoyed. They returned to Winchester, and went to family shows at the Tower and adult shows at the Royal. They moved to Newbury for a year, but the house was falling down so moved to Greece for three years, where there was not much theatre. A friend there staged Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls* and borrowed Jane's furniture for it, whilst her daughter designed the programme. They went to some Greek tragedies in translation, another son et lumière, *Stomp* in an amphitheatre, and to whatever was going.

They returned to Newbury and made up for the lack of theatre previously. She has been up to London to see plays with big names such as Woody Harrelson and Derek Jacobi, who lived up to his reputation. In the late nineties Jane saw Hoipolloi's *Dead on the Ground* at the Arts Workshop in Newbury which was a wow. It was modern, unusual, minimalist and quite different. She rounded up her friends taking them to see it at their next venue. She kept going with modern, wacky theatre after that. She saw a couple of others of theirs, including *Living With Victor*. She has her favourite companies, like Peepolykus and Hoodwink, whose work she will see wherever it is toured to.

Jane goes regularly to the Corn Exchange, the Pegasus in Oxford, The Tower in Winchester and South Street in Reading. The plays she goes to are usually on for one night only, so she travels around for her theatre. Jane also goes to opera, and ballet and modern dance and poetry. Jane went to the Cornbury Festival a couple of years ago where Joe Cocker was still amazing. Her daughter buys her tickets to rock concerts going to David Gray and Tracy Chapman at the Royal Albert Hall, and Blue, who were amazing. Jane goes to blues clubs, and went to WOMAD seven years in a row. She has been to the enjoyable Boxford Masques with her son and his Japanese girlfriend, which thrilled her; she liked that there were so many young people there in a relaxed and informal atmosphere. She went to the annual Aldermaston Mystery Play in a little church in the grounds of Aldermaston Manor, and enjoyed the singing and acting, but once was enough, took her son to the rap poet Lynton Quezi Johnson, *The Vagina Monologues*, Johnny Vegas, modern dance, *Pluck*, *Faust* twice, once with puppets at the Tower, and then at a warehouse in Wapping from Shunt, where there are got four floors and audiences enter in the dark, which was interesting. On holiday she has seen Aboriginal and Maori dancing. She did not like the wishy-washy *Stones in his Pockets*, or *The Alchemist*. Recently, Jane has like puppet shows seeing the wovey *Rust* and *Soiled* and *Low Life*. *Rust*, which Jane saw at The Tower, in Winchester, was about some djs and a pirate radio and the sea. There were actors as well as different sized puppets and a little wooden

boat, submarines, all part of it. Also at The Tower she went to People Can Run doing *Ushers*, and they had two chairs, one CB radio and a torch, two characters and it was absolutely riveting.

Jane likes cinema and in 2002 Jane started a petition in Newbury for the town to have a cinema. Jane started taking her nephews and nieces to the pantomime when they were about five.

It is bad going to a bigger place with not a very big audience. Intimate spaces are good. Jane won't just go to anything and is selective; she reads about it, thinks she will fancy it and then go. She tries to interest work colleagues about the theatre sticking up a "what's on" but no one is interested, so she goes with her husband. Although her husband studied science, he is art-inclined, so he suggests plays as well to go to. Jane goes to the theatre for a new experience and hardly ever sees anything twice. She will not go and see Shakespeare again and again, unless it was outside at Highclere Castle. Scenery and staging are really important for Jane and modern plays are so good because everything turns inside out and folds out and Jane just loves the inventiveness and the flexibility of scenery.

## 27. Sandra

Sandra's family was not theatre-minded and no one thought to go to the theatre. When she was four or five a friend of the family took Sandra and her family to see *Basil Brush* live at the Ashcroft Theatre in Croydon, her first time in a theatre. The family did not have a lot of money. Sandra moved to Basingstoke when she was ten. At junior school Sandra played music, going to after-school sessions with the music teacher, who was also the form tutor. She played Elizabethan duets on the recorder with her sister. They also played on xylophones, and a little glockenspiel. She was in Christmas-themed plays, once as a reindeer, but Sandra wanted to be something more interesting than a reindeer. She tried for a better role by making a five minute skit with friends, but still remained a reindeer. Sandra did drama when she was twelve or thirteen, but could not get into Shakespeare at all, finding it very difficult with obscure language, despite seeing little clips and reading it in class. Sandra did an A-Level but did not get it. Sandra did not want the academic life of university but regrets not having the large circle of friends that carries on through life, and get married together.

At eighteen Sandra went to her first pop concert, Tears For Fears, and then Status Quo and Paul Weller at the Rivermead, Reading. She thought this was good, and sat there with a friend thinking who they would like to see in the pop world. Two were Sting and Robbie Williams, and she did those, can tick them off her list. Others were Kylie Minogue and George Michael, happy with the experience of seeing him in December 2006, and still living off that.

Sandra did one year at Basingstoke Technical College doing a secretarial course, but did not have any career ambitions and stumbled into work. Sandra started working in an office, Monday to Friday, nine to five, at eighteen or nineteen and has remained in an office all her working life, working as a secretary for ten years, in the pharmaceutical industry, Glaxo, Bayer, for nine years, and then Vodafone, latterly in market research. She moved from Basingstoke to Newbury fifteen or sixteen years ago, with her then boyfriend who was with her in her twenties. They split up when she was thirty. She felt she had not done anything, or gone anywhere, three holidays in ten years.

Sandra went on five holidays that year. No one was going to do it for her so she suddenly found the life that she wanted. Having realised also that theatre had not come to her, and since she did not go to the theatre until she was thirty having always seen theatre as a big, expensive night out, and getting dressed up, she was just going to have to pick up the phone herself. Sandra was on the social committee at Bayer and she arranged a social night out getting second row seats with great, unobstructed views for *Chicago* in the West End, with Ruthie Henshaw as the leading lady. She did not know what to expect. She sat there with a big grin on her face looking up at the stage. The show was just loud, in your face, a wow, and the style of music was just up her street. Sandra's achievement was that: 'I'm going to the theatre. At last, I'm going to the theatre.' She noted that this was the performers' job, in the evenings and weekends, working hard, dancing around, giving it their all, the liveness of it, and very different to what she has seen every day. She made a wish list of things she wanted to see, that she had heard of and were really famous.

Chicago was not, however, the be-all and end-all of it for Sandra. A bigger wow than her first time was the brilliant *The Lion King* in the West End, which she feels she could see again and again. She had been told a bit about it, but wished she hadn't, but that did not spoil it for her. She was blown away, really enjoyed it. She went with some of her family, as part of a works do. Everything about the musical, the way they made humans into animals, the amazing creativity with costumes, she loves Africa, and the themes, the colours, the music, the lights, everything shone for her. Sandra wanted to go. It was a selfish thing and she chose the musicals that she wanted to go to, arranging them for herself. She organised the groups for other people to come along on, arranging a coach to get them all up there and back, and *The Lion King* was one she particularly wanted to see, so when an opportunity came to see that she jumped at it. She didn't care what anyone else wanted to do, she was just going to go. She was happy and excited having seen it. Other musicals on her wish list she saw were *Cats*, and *Les Misérables*.

Sandra has been to pantomime as an adult. When she was thirty-four or thirty-five, her then boyfriend was into opera which she experienced at Covent Garden, every two weeks, over a year or so, because it intrigued her. She wasn't over-enamoured by the style of music, or singing. It was fun the first few times but she got bored by it. It was lovely to soak up the style of the opera, the class, and observing everyone who goes. It was fascinating with the posh end of dressing up, people going bravo. The really well-known operas were lovely but the others were overkill. Sandra also cherishes her first ballet, *Swan Lake*,



getting the best of both worlds - the lovely style, the Opera House, the atmosphere, and then just a beautiful ballet. The same boyfriend took her three or four times to Stratford for Shakespeare, which was not her thing, pretty much what she expected, but good to experience.

Currently Sandra goes to the theatre in Newbury, and has not been to London for three years. She likes to try new experiences, but theatre does not touch her deeply and she does not have a passion for it. She is a film buff and has felt shocked, distressed and traumatised by films like *Babel*, which she saw at the Corn Exchange. She can associate with something in a film.

## 28. Richard

Richard was brought up in West London. When Richard was about thirteen, a kindly uncle was very keen to introduce him to theatre and music and took his sister and him to London to see a show, which happened every Boxing Day. It also gave his parents some relief. The one outstanding show was *West Side Story* which transfixed him. The sheer drama kept him in suspense the whole time, wanting to know what was going to happen next. He has subsequently seen the film, and bought the cassette and cd. It really turned him on to musicals in a big way and he prefers musicals to ordinary stage plays. Richard's sister is artistic and is a first rate painter, but neither parent went to the theatre much.

As a child Richard went to Baptist meetings and he was asked to read out and explain a passage in the Bible. The explaining freaked him out and he never did it again. However, he did join amateur dramatic groups. Richard went to prep school where the emphasis was on work and a private boarding school where there was drama but Richard concentrated on his exams instead. He did Shakespeare in his all-male school where casts were all-male as in Shakespeare's day and boys whose voices had not broken were given girls' parts. Richard enjoyed playing Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*.

Richard did not start his theatre career until he was about thirty because other things intervened. He was staying at Tadley Court, a management training centre and one of the secretaries took pity on him and asked him to join her amateur theatre group, the Newbury Dramatic Society. Smaller parts led to larger roles, in plays like *Dear Octopus*, and they went on theatre trips. That got Richard interested in theatre. He also directed a thriller, which he found nerve-wracking. A more experienced director helped him out so it was fantastic. Richard saw how everything worked back stage which he would not have found out about if he had just gone to the theatre. They performed one production a year, at the Watermill, which he found exciting.

Richard got married and when married and working he did not go to the theatre. When he retired, he also got divorced and it was a fresh start. Richard started to go to theatres like the Salisbury Playhouse to see *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, but that stopped when his friend died.

Richard has recently seen the excellent *Mamma Mia*. He trusts in the quality of the Watermill Theatre and is very seldom let down there. His first play at the Watermill was *Moll Flanders*. The famous *Sweeney Todd* was a good production, and *Hedda Gabler*. Richard would attend the first play of the season at the Watermill, and then book the next one on that day. One season he went to every single production, which was enjoyable although the quality was variable, although all of a high standard. He finds the surroundings at the Watermill are empathetic, which not a lot of other theatres have, so he knows he is going to something special when he arrives. He finds the Corn Exchange too antiseptic, but fine once the shows start. He gets carried away by the show, but it does not have the same impact as at the Watermill. He has been to Stratford for *Macbeth*. Richard prefers to attend with family or groups to discuss the play in the interval or afterwards. He normally goes after someone has recommended it to him. Richard does not have a car any more and finds it difficult coming back from the Watermill by taxi.

Richard likes the whole atmosphere in a theatre, which is special to itself. It is unlike anything he has experienced in the outside world at all. Theatre is completely new.

## 29. June

June was born and brought up in Newbury twelve years after her parents were married. June's parents were regular theatregoers and went to many musical shows in London before June was born. They were determined that June carried on that heritage.

In 1938 when June was four, she came to the Corn Exchange to see *Cinderella*, put on by the local dance school, which was a wow. The seats were awful, they sat in straight rows, and June could not see because she was little, so she sat on her father's lap. The moment for her was when Cinderella's rags fell off and she turned into a wonderful princess. Her hairs stood up on the back of her neck. The pantomime was more storytelling with music, than a show with lots of shouting. That started her off on her theatregoing. The Corn Exchange was still a corn exchange then with the desks used for exchanging corn pushed to the back of the hall and they sat in the rest.

All through the war June went to plays, musical shows and entertainments at the Corn Exchange and the little Plaza Theatre which was next door but one. June is proud of Newbury's great theatre tradition, as there used to be a theatre at the Chequers Pub which was a stopping place from London to Bath, and groups performed to people on the stage coaches. June always went to the cinema, twice a week. June went to Oxford for the ballet and to Reading, to the Palace Theatre, and also to Winchester. She listened to the radio and was scared to death by *Jane Eyre*, having nightmares, so her mother had to take her to bed every night.

June went to school until she was eighteen, where she studied English, and was influenced by one particular teacher who opened the world of poetry and Shakespeare to her. June does not believe that Shakespeare should be studied too deeply as he wrote plays for the ordinary people. There are several levels to Shakespeare. In 1948 she went on an enjoyable overnight trip to see *As You Like It* at Stratford with school, staying in a youth hostel. They also visited Shakespeare's house and the Arden house which was quite an experience.

June studied at Bristol University where she did not go to the theatre, but resumed when she did teacher training in Salisbury. There was a very close liaison with the Playhouse where she went every week. The college had cheap seats at the theatre and June was on a budget there. Younger actors used to come back to the college for supper which is where she met the vivacious Prunella Scales who was a similar age to her. There was still food rationing, and the food there was better than that at the rotten landladies where the actors stayed.

June had an acid test when she was younger; she would only go out with someone if they had stamina, so she took unsuspecting fellas out to the theatre. She took her eventual husband to *The Quaker Girl* in Oxford, a musical about a little Dutch girl, who sang *Little Pink Pettie for Peter*. Toby stuck it very well and bought her a lovely dinner at the Randolph Hotel afterwards. When June got married to Toby she did not do very much theatregoing except for occasional visits with her husband's firm to London. June became a teacher teaching children aged five to six, in Kintbury. She was involved in children's plays there where the knack of getting every single child on stage doing something was quite an art. Theatregoing was curtailed when June had children but she took them to pantomimes and to Oxford for the ballet which they found exciting. As the children got older, June gradually went back to theatregoing.

June was married for fifty-one years. Theatregoing was always a shared experience with Toby and June never always went what she wanted to see, but what "we" wanted to see. Since Toby died she has come to all sorts of extraordinary things she would never have dreamt of before, which is a good thing but theatregoing is a shared memory, and no there is no one at home to share the memory with. One memory was *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in Polish which they went to in Oxford. Toby got annoyed with people who left who did not understand the words; they were not listening "to the music of the words". Toby donated money to the Corn Exchange so that people could be entertained in Newbury, and his name is on a seat in the stalls.

June still regularly goes to the theatre and the feeling she felt at four is still with her, as when she went recently to *The Sound of Music*. June has ten grandchildren and feels it is her duty, her ethos in life, to take those grandchildren to the theatre to carry on the wow factor. She thinks you must go and taste and if you don't like you don't have to go again. Three grandchildren live in London and June took them to a John Rutter concert at the Royal Albert Hall; her oldest grandson is twenty-five, and June introduced him

to jazz, which he adores; she takes a twenty-three year old granddaughter to ballet and dance in Newbury; she takes a fifteen year old granddaughter, gifted in drama, to all sorts of plays, along with her thirteen year old grandson, most recently to the absolutely wonderful *The Alchemist*. She is giving her grandchildren experience of the theatre. She goes to the Watermill seeing plays like *Shirley Valentine* and to Stratford for the *Merry Wives of Windsor* with Judi Dench, who sang.

June finds audiences absolutely fascinating, because there are people who come to one sort of thing, and a lot of other people who come to another. But there is always a core who overlap. June does not come to the theatre to criticise, but to enjoy, to lose herself, to immerse herself in it. Some things are distasteful to her, not to her liking but it is not bad for her to come to something she does not like.

### 30. Irene

Irene's grandfather was a master baker. Irene's father was a miner, some distance away from home, and her mother worked in worsted and woollen mills. Irene's mother took dance lessons from the age of ten to fourteen and then later was in a dance group called the Ragamuffins, who performed in a church hall in Bramley. She appeared in *Ali Baba*, and other pantomimes for charity, playing in various church halls. Irene's great uncle wrote the script for *Ali Baba*. They had to make their own entertainment then.

Irene was born and brought up in Leeds. Because her mother thought it would be good for her, when she was three she learned to do ballet, tap and modern dance and was introduced to that side of theatre. She stopped at six when her mother could no longer afford for Irene to go because of the costs of another daughter. Money was tight but Irene was always well-fed and well-clothed.

Irene's first taste of theatre were pantomimes which her family took her to, initially to church halls, which were cheaper, and then with her school to the quite wonderful things that she had read where the characters came to life before her very eyes on the stage like *Wind in the Willows*, *The Tinder Box*, *Macbeth* and *Pride and Prejudice*. It was a wow the first time she went into a theatre; old buildings with beautiful architecture, heavy drapes, the buzz of the people in the theatre, waiting for it to come on, and the orchestra to play the music. She went to the Grand Theatre and the Civic Theatre, seeing ballets like *Swan Lake*, *Coppelia* and *Sleeping Beauty*. As Irene got older, she went with her friends to the theatre which she loved. She started to build up a rapport with the actors, being drawn in to the story that they are telling her, and her emotions that she was going through were rollercoaster emotions depending on what she had gone to see. She went through all different emotions, which was good. Sometimes she felt euphoric, other times a sense of well-being. Each visit to the theatre is a journey. It depends on what the play is, and the nature of the rapport between the actors and the audience, as an audience reaction can ripple through the audience to the actors.

Irene left school at sixteen to become a cake-decorator. She became a trainee cook at Leeds General Infirmary which is where Jimmy Saville did his charity work as a porter in his white uniform, with blond hair, sometimes chasing a nurse down the corridor, sometimes with his dj colleagues Alan Freeman, David Hamilton and Pete Murray. One of her patients who she made a green salad for, was Eric Morecambe, after his heart attack. She became a full-grade cook, and socialised with a group of young people at the hospital. She then studied cake-decorating for three years on her day off. Most of her leisure time was spent dancing or at concerts, some in theatres, some in small venues like the Mecca where she was in more connection with the performers, who included Joe Cocker, Rod Stewart, Mott The Hoople, The Real Thing, Gladys Knight and the Pips, The Hollies, The Righteous Brothers, The Walker Brothers, Lulu, The Temptations, The Drifters, Bryan Ferry, twice, at two different places and Third World. She travelled to Manchester, Harrogate, York, Huddersfield and Wakefield for the concerts. She went in groups by coach to the Wakefield Theatre Club and the Batley Variety Club where there would be a meal, an international artist, and then dancing.

Irene saw *Up a Gum Tree*, a farce with John Inman at the Civic Theatre, Leeds which was a wonderful, special evening because Inman returned to the stage for repartee with the audience for ages. She also went with a relatively new boyfriend to Bradford for *Richard III*, hungry after no dinner, where her stomach grumbled the whole play and she felt the whole audience and the actors could hear her, disgracing herself.

Irene met a Zambian boyfriend who was studying at Leeds University. In 1979 she visited her sister in Australia. She went to concerts, a drive-in movie and a fashion show in front of the Sydney Opera House. She then went to Zambia to see if she wanted to marry her boyfriend. She got married in Zambia where she worked for four and a half years in the Copperbelt in the hotel and catering industry. She worked long hours. She went to the Kitwe Little Theatre once, for an Afrikaans play. She returned to this theatre in 2004, shocked at its tattered curtains and broken seats, for a play in Bemba. They left Zambia for Milford Haven, for six months, and then Reading for six years. She went to the Hexagon there for concerts and plays like *The Hobbit* and *The Rocky Horror Show*, with Bobby Crush, great seeing the audience dressed up as transvestites, getting into the spirit of the show. When she undressed later that night, she was amazed how much rice fell out from her clothes onto the floor.

Irene went to *The Lion King* which was so realistic, sheer genius, and was in tears when all the animals came on because it was so emotional. It was a show she would see again if she lived in London. She

took her Zambian husband to a pantomime for his first time, seeing *Babes in the Wood* in Reading. They were in the front row of the circle, and the children were in the pit. There was a priceless moment when in a soliloquy the fairy godmother asked “where are the babes in the wood?” and a little girl of five or six in the audience answered “well, you see...” telling the whole story, which the fairy godmother allowed her to do, right up to the moment they were at in the pantomime, and the actress could not think of her own lines, and the whole audience was in uproar. Moments like that happen quite a lot in theatre, at different levels. She also went to the exhilarating and deeply moving *Jesus Christ Superstar* in London where the audience flinched with every lash on Jesus. The Crucifixion was realistic and harrowing. It was a magic moment being able to speak to the cast afterwards, complimenting them on their performances as they collected money for charity. She also went to *Miss Saigon* which was terrible because the leads were out of tune throughout. She has been to more concerts in London, the Haymarket in Basingstoke for the good fun *Toad of Toad Hall*, where she sat in the second row and got wet several times during the performance, and an excellent amateur *Amadeus* at Kennet School. She has been to the Theatre Royal Windsor for *The Play Wot I Wrote*, where the guest actor was Sian Phillips.

She goes to the Watermill where *Snoopy* was cleverly done, and the hilarious *Thieves Carnival* was enchanting because it began outside. *Hobson's Choice* and *The Rise and Fall of Little Voice* were both exceptionally good because of the actors' timing, attention to detail with remarkable sets, and enlightening and interesting talkback sessions afterwards. At the Corn Exchange the Tibetan monks emitted a special aura, a magic moment, and *Stones in his Pockets* was brilliant, sheer genius where she was taken on a rollercoaster of emotions.

For Irene, as soon as she has stepped into the theatre she has stepped into another world. In a serious play she can empathise with characters, tapping into emotions, feeling fear, anger and hope. She gets enclosed, and the rest of the world is excluded for that moment in time. Whereas, in the cinema it is pure escapism and it just washes over her. Irene is an emotional person, wearing her heart on her sleeve.

### 31. Laura

Laura's father was a postman and he used to take Laura to the Corn Exchange for the pantomime which the Post Office used to pay for. He could not afford to take her elsewhere. Every year she would enjoy it, but would wish that she would be picked out of the audience to go onto the stage. When she was eight, at *Cinderella*, they did pick her and she tried on the slipper, and it fitted. From there she was mesmerised.

Laura did not return to the theatre until she was eighteen when a friend took her to the utterly fantastic *Cats* which she loved, a wow. It was a birthday surprise because she did not know they were going to the theatre. She did not catch on until she was seated in the theatre. The production mesmerised her. She cried because one of the cats was homeless. From then on she was hooked. She went to see the absolutely fantastic *Phantom of the Opera*, a real wow. She sat in the third row, the way they moved the boat down and the Phantom would disappear and then appear in front of her. Now she goes at least twice a month, to Oxford, Basingstoke and Reading for musicals, comedians and concerts. Most recently she saw *Stomp* which was not what she expected but very good. She goes to Shakespeare and other drama.

Laura's husband is slightly blind so they sit close to the stage.