

Memories of the WI Panto Oh Yes We Did!

The first pantomime, *Jack and the Beanstalk*, was written and produced by Daphne Waugh as the entertainment for the December 1988 WI meeting. Rosemary Salter persuaded the cast to perform it again in January for the whole village as a fundraiser for the old Beaconsfield Hall. It was also 'taken on tour' and performed for Leaffield WI.



cave, complete with precious jewels and twinkling lights. Who can forget the 'commuters', brought in to whisk Aladdin away on the local train as Daphne

just could not get a magic carpet to fly? She rounded up a group of local 'dignitaries' and taught them to move to the chosen music. The harder they tried the more hilarious they became as they counted out their steps, turned the wrong way and twirled rolled umbrellas.

Young Robin of Wychwood

The following year I was given the leading role in *Robin of Wychwood*, as I represented the younger element of the WI (I had turned 40 by then). Year after year Daphne wrote the most wonderful scripts with a local slant and references to events and personalities within the village. But the abiding memory is the fun that we all had. We would start in September with rehearsals in Hartley's Barn. No auditions, if you turned up you were given a part. Each Saturday we rehearsed, with the stage area paced out on the barn floor. It was not until late November that we finally got on to the real stage at the Hall for a dress rehearsal.

Costumes were made by WI members; Joan Howard-Drake and Evelyn Dixon stitched the most convincing penguin outfits. Barbara Wilson and Pat Bannister fashioned costumes for dwarves, soldiers, pirate crew, princesses, sultans - they were never fazed by Daphne's requests. Scenery was all made from scratch and one of the most memorable was Aladdin's

And All Because of Daphne

Another of Daphne's 'master strokes' was the rats scurrying up and down the stage and scenery in *Dick Whittington*; she and her husband Duncan stuffed socks with newspaper and attached them to fishing line to make those rats. In the old hall the only way to get off the stage to the changing room at the back was to run round the outside in full view of any passing motorists and often through snow. Gordon Halliday provided the music on his electronic keyboard. The first notes of *There's No Business like Show Business* let us know that the curtain was about to rise and we were off. Fitting us all on the tiny stage of the old hall was a nightmare. It is thanks to Daphne that the new hall was built with such a magnificent stage and curtains, decent lighting and changing facilities. And don't forget that from the humble beginnings of the WI pantomimes grew the Wychwood Players, whose performances we enjoy today.

Christine Halliday