Galileo: a Lincoln School Production in December 1963

Item of Interest 101

From the Garton Archive

Compiled by Peter Harrod

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The Cast of Galileo sent in by Derek Johnson
Centre Stage is Jim Hiley as Galileo

This article is written as a tribute to Mr John ‘Jack’ Granger who joined the staff of Lincoln School as a French teacher in September 1956 and directed several plays during his eight years at the School.

Rick Burt (burtsdrama.com) has written that, by the early years of the twentieth century, putting on school plays has been an important part of the curriculum, and is now recognised as a staple part of a school’s cultural life. In fact, it would be pretty hard to find a school that has never put on plays and performances. Burt reports that, until the 1950s, dramatic activity was largely Theatre, and the emphasis was on performing on stage. Such activity was also used in teaching English, and I still remember the mini playlets we put on in our classrooms at Lincoln School as part of our study of Shakespeare and other literary giants. We were allocated roles to read in turn, giving us the opportunity to develop our confidence, and our communication and social skills.

However, as the subject developed, and Drama was introduced as a subject into the curriculum, Theatre *per se* became less significant and teachers began to focus on Drama as a medium for developing students' understanding of themselves and the world. Role play and improvisation were used in that process and key pioneers in the field were Dorothy Heathcote, Peter Slade and Brian Way who built on to the approach championed by John Dewey in the United States.

Lincoln School was slow off the mark to begin performing plays although the School Concert, which included mini playlets, was revived in1914 and became a regular annual event. The concerts were held in the original hall and gymnasium which later became the woodwork room. The room was described as 'gaily decorated for the occasion' and the event was thought to be 'a notable fillip for the School's music'. There were several reasons for the delay in putting on plays. Perhaps the most significant one was the lack of a purpose-built hall and stage. Therefore, I was surprised to find that it was almost twenty years following the construction of the new hall and gymnasium in the late 1930s that the first play was performed. In 1954, a Dramatic Society was formed and in the same year a performance of Beaumont and Fletcher's eighteenth-century comedy *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* was staged. Such productions are also extra-curricular activities and require the voluntary enthusiasm of suitably qualified and experienced members of staff to provide the impetus and momentum. Lincoln School was fortunate during the 1950s and early '60s to have two masters who responded to the challenge. The first was the popular and somewhat mercurial history master Mr Charles Hannam, who produced the play listed above, and organised visits to other venues including the original theatre at Holton cum Beckering before leaving the School for pastures new. Fortunately, his departure coincided with the arrival of Mr John Granger, who took over the mantle and directed several challenging plays during his eight years at the School.

The tradition established by those two pioneering masters continued until the School closed as a selective grammar school in 1974. Bertolt Brecht's *Galileo* was one of the most challenging projects during that period. In summary, the play is a tribute to one of history's most celebrated astronomers and philosophers. It chronicles Galileo Galilei's illustrious but tragic life and focuses on his persecution, and subsequent trial and punishment by the Catholic Church for broadcasting his controversial scientific research. As such, its central theme is the conflict between religious dogma and scientific evidence. The original play was titled *The Life of Galileo*, so it is likely that the Lincoln School production was abridged or 'massaged' to suit a younger cast.

The play, staged by the School Dramatic Society in December 1963, was described in *The Lincolnian* magazine as the biggest and most ambitious ever attempted at the School. It was produced by French master John 'Jack' Granger, and it turned out to be his swansong as he was about to leave Lincoln School to be Head of Modern Languages at Norwich Grammar School. The performance was an outstanding success both artistically and financially as the record costs of the production were recovered from the sales receipts. The play was presented on the hall stage from Wednesday 11th to Saturday 14th December. An anonymous report

later in the magazine revealed that about seventy members of the School were directly involved with the production including fifty as actors.

The report then goes on to describe some of the reactions of those involved. One focused on the teamwork of those participating, stating that they were a really good crowd to work with, and that there were astonishingly few absentees from rehearsals. Another mentioned the way in which so many people worked together amicably in such a confined space. That included not only the small stage itself, but also the two rooms on either side (the prefects' room and the PE master 'Sarge' Perry's room) where the cast awaited their next entrance. In fact, those members of the cast who were off-stage were congratulated for remaining seated and being 'reasonably quiet'!

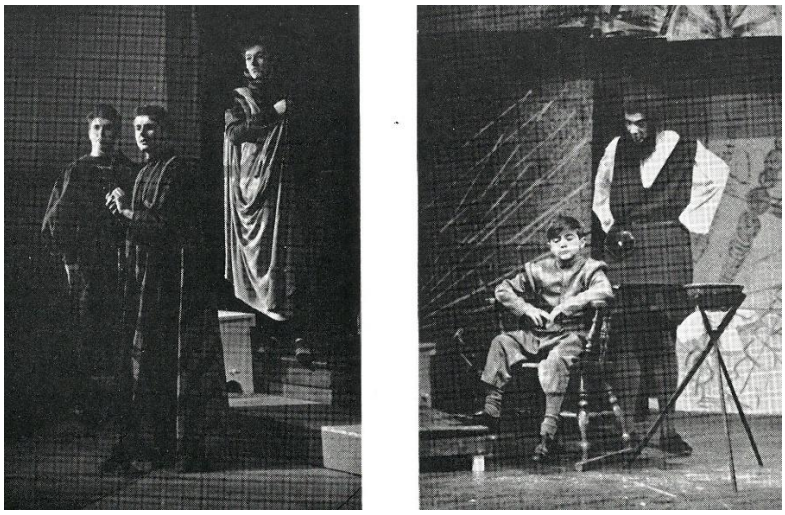
Several celebrated the performance of Jim Hiley, who showed his considerable potential as an actor, not only in *Galileo*, but also in a number of different roles during his school career before going on to read for a degree in Drama and Theatre Studies at Birmingham University. Other excellent performances were given by Robert Jones, Charles/George (?) Goodchild, and Charles Rawding (See Note).

One of the electricians reported that his part was more of a challenge in practical physics than a contribution to a work of art! He had a vivid memory of spending two and a half hours in the false roof of the hall in the pitch-dark fiddling with connections and standing on a vibrating ladder trying to direct red-hot spotlights onto their targets while getting increasingly roasted in the process! Those were clearly the days before health and safety were invented! On the nights of the performances there were such tribulations as manipulating four dimmers at once with a minimum of noise while changing plugs with little time to spare between scenes. Imagine the feelings of relief that he and his colleagues felt when everything worked without a hitch!

An amusing incident occurred during one rehearsal when Nick Berryman was so busy telling David (?) Bunn his lines that he forgot his own! However, a more critical moment occurred when Nick succumbed to whooping cough and Mr Granger was obliged to perform the role. Being a consummate actor himself, his performance would have been worth watching. Nick made fun of his affliction by stating, "Me? I was a 'whooping' success! One night and I'd had enough. Those rehearsals were just nails in my 'coughin'!" Those familiar with the play will understand the allusions!

Other anecdotes also depend on a knowledge of the play. Suffice it to say that there were occasions when the robes the actors wore and the props on the stage became inadvertently entangled. One suffering actor described putting a dummy on the stage and found to his horror that he was unable to move as his cassock was pinned down by the dummy! Another incident occurred during a scene when the crowd was following key members of the cast when a member of the crowd trod on an actor's cloak! That scene must have occurred off-stage in the centre aisle between two sides of the audience because the ensuing loss of balance caused a lady in the audience some concern! Mercifully, no incident occurred and the procession wobbled along its course. Following the last night, and in the best

theatrical traditions, a party was arranged for all those involved and I understand from a member of the cast that the music alternated between the Beatles and Christmas carols!



Two Photos from the 1964 edition of *The Lincolnian* (Lincolnshire Echo)

The 1950s and '60s were a vintage period for plays at Lincoln School largely because of the dedication and inspiration provided by John Granger. Mr Granger attended Dover Grammar School and went on to read Honours French at Jesus College, Oxford, graduating in 1951 and being awarded his Teaching Diploma a year later. He taught in a school in Marlow before joining the staff of Lincoln School in 1956 to teach French with some lower school English. Not only did he inject new life into teaching French in the School, but he also made an impact in his temporary role as housemaster and in extracurricular activities such as the Dramatic Society. In addition to his direction of *Galileo*, other memorable plays that he produced were Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of being Earnest* (notable for John Hurt's legendary role as Lady Bracknell), Sheridan's *The Critic*; *Noah,* by André Obey; *The Snob,* by Molière (an adaptation of *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*) and Herman Wouk's *The Caine Mutiny Court Martial.* John Granger left Lincoln School in 1964 for Norwich Grammar School where he was head of Modern Languages until his retirement.

Another member of staff who did so much to support the school productions and concerts, including the boarding house concerts, was Art teacher Mrs Dorothy 'Maggie' Ward, who was responsible for the costumes and props for most of the productions over many years. Charles Rawding, a key member of the cast, recalled how fantastic the costumes were in *Galileo*, and some idea of their finery can be gauged from the two photographs above.

On a personal note, one of the most memorable and satisfying moments in my career as archivist for the Garton Archive occurred some twelve years ago when I was able to organise a reunion between the distinguished actor and Old Lincolnian Sir John Hurt, and the man who effectively launched his professional acting career, John Granger. It took place at the Maddermarket Theatre in Norwich where John

Granger, who had been an active member of the theatre for many years, had organised ‘An Evening with John Hurt’. The two men had not seen each other since the year 1962 when John returned to Lincoln to assume the role of a troubled university student in the film, *The Wild and the Willing.* It’s not a great film but is worth seeing for the magnificent black and white photography of Lincoln in the 1960s and for the acting quality of John and three other young guns from RADA: Samantha Eggar, Ian McShane, and Johnny Briggs, who built his career as Mike Baldwin in *Coronation Street.* I was in the audience with my wife and friends, and we had the pleasure of meeting John and his wife, producer and former actress Anwen Rees-Myers, backstage following the show.

To place the performance of *Galileo* in the context of the cultural life of the School, the Academic Year 1963-4 was one filled with a variety of other activities and events as the following extracts from *The Lincolnian* magazines revealed. In October, the Mayor of Lincoln called a meeting of representatives of all walks of life at Lincoln School to consider the promotion of a university for Lincoln. This followed the disappointment when Lincoln was unsuccessful in applying for a university some ten years earlier when places such as York, Brighton, Essex, Warwick and others made successful bids.

There were several changes of personnel at the School which welcomed a number of new teaching staff: Mr M L Andrews (History and General Studies), Mr G L Causey (Mathematics and Physics), Mr J T Howie (PE, Games and Mathematics), Mr R Priest (Classics) and Mr A R Turner (French). Later in the year Mr J K Elenor was appointed to teach Music in place of Mr Rangeley who was moving to Gloucester. At that time the school orchestra, which had twenty members, consisted of a flute, an oboe, two clarinets, two trumpets, a trombone and assorted strings. According to a report, the orchestra apparently watched the conductor occasionally, played more or less in tune, kept reasonably together and learned how to play softly! Mr Notley and Mr Stone also joined the staff for one term. A E Panton was appointed School Captain with Charles Rawding as Vice-Captain. Supporting them were seven prefects and seventeen sub-prefects including several members of the cast of Galileo.

The magnificent school clock on its lofty turret became somewhat temperamental and appeared to ‘think up some unique times at intervals’ keeping everyone on their toes. How wonderful it would be to hear the ethereal tones of the bell again, but I am told it would be too expensive to repair and subject to too many adolescent pranks! On the same subject, there was a letter from a pupil in *The Lincolnian* magazine re-printed from the magazine in July 1901. The pupil, whose soubriquet was ‘Bracebridge’, complained that he was often late for school at 9am because there was no bell in the ‘sham tower’ He believed that if a bell were to be placed in the tower, and rung at five minutes to nine, it would hasten the lagging footsteps of those day boys living some distance from the school. I have to point out, however, that in 1901 Lincoln Grammar School was on Upper Lindum Street in the building which later became The Convent and is now part of The Cathedral School. The ‘sham tower’, crowns that imposing building to this very day!

One of the most ambitious events was held to support the Cathedral's restoration fund. It was organised by Form 6 Classics who put on a dance in the school hall to the music of Mike Saladin and the Sultans. Apparently, the ancient building was 'held together by Death Watch Beetles holding hands' and a sum of £216 was raised by a joint effort with parents and the Old Lincolnians' Society.

It was also the second year of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme at Lincoln School. Some seventy boys had participated in the scheme justifying its inclusion in the life of the School. Several boys had already gained the Bronze Certificate, and a few had proceeded to attempt the Silver Award. Other activities included several traditional school clubs covering a wide variety of pursuits. The one that struck my eye was the Readers' Club, designed to simulate interest in reading which suggested that a lack of interest in books for adolescent boys is not a contemporary phenomenon. Activities during 1964 included challenging weekends in Derbyshire and equally tough conditions in the Lincolnshire Wolds. One party even suffered an attack of food poisoning.

Another event that took place in March 1964 was the visit of Sir John Hunt to open the celebrated 'Activities Hut', the brainchild of Headmaster Mr John Faull. The Hut, which was an integral part of the Duke of Edinburch's Scheme, had taken two years to erect. School Captain A E Panton welcomed the distinguished visitor and gave a short speech in which he emphasised the need for a serious and adult attitude towards the hut and its use. The implication was that not all members of the School had taken it seriously!

However, the most significant event in 1964 was the retirement of the legendary English teacher Mr John 'Johnny' Phillips who had been on the staff of Lincoln School for more than four decades. A tribute in the July 1964 *Lincolnian* recorded that he left an indelible mark on the life of the School as an inspirational teacher, a guide and mentor to decades of pupils, a dedicated housemaster of Greyfriars House, and a wise coach of successive football and cricket teams. He joined the staff in 1921, taught my father in the 1920s, and taught me in the 1950s. We remembered him with affection and respect, and who can forget his use of 'gobbets' in his teaching style during those memorable Shakespeare lessons? "Who said it to whom?", cloaked in his rich West Country burr.

The introduction of Drama and the Performing Arts into the formal secondary curriculum in schools was a gradual process. Initially, Drama was part of the English syllabus but became a subject in its own right when the National Curriculum was introduced in 2001 as an attempt to broaden and enhance the place of the Arts in schools. In September 2016, Secretary of State for Education Michael Gove announced that Art and Design, Music, Drama and Dance were to be taught at GCSE and 'A' levels and were to be to be reformed as rigorous and demanding subjects.

At Lincoln Christ's Hospital School, the tradition of putting on plays has continued as an extra-curricular activity since its formation in 1974. Today, however, there are not only opportunities for students to take part in productions such as *Galileo*, but there is also a thriving Performing Arts Department which includes Drama, Dance

and Music. The Drama and Theatre section offers opportunities to study at GCSE and BTEC levels. Its syllabus includes a knowledge and understanding of drama and theatre, the process of creating devised and improvised drama, and performance skills and techniques. The Department is housed in the former Lincoln School Hall, part of which has been partitioned off to provide an additional studio. The school productions at LCHS are staged in the new hall which was built on the site of the headmaster's garden at Lincoln School. Over the years, students at LCHS have performed in plays such as Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night,* and musicals such as *Oliver.* The School has built a richly deserved reputation for outstanding performances which are frequently collaborations between the Drama and Music departments who are currently working on a performance of *Grease*.

Note

I cannot find a programme or a complete record of the cast in the Garton Archive so some of the forenames may be incorrect. In those days at Lincoln School we were addressed by our surnames.

Acknowledgement

My appreciation to Derek Johnson for sending the photo of the cast.

Sources

The 1964 and several other editions of *The Lincolnian* magazine

https://burtsdrama.com/2020/04/15/why-we-teach-drama-and-not-theatre-part-1/

The Lincoln School staff admissions register

Personal memories from Mr Charles Rawding who was a prominent member of the cast of *Galileo*

Internet articles on the introduction of the Performing Arts into secondary the curriculum