

## "TOAD OF TOAD HALL"—CHRISTMAS 1962

Although we have done 'Toad' before there was no doubt in anybody's mind that this was a happy choice and a happy company. The last production was over six years ago, beyond the memory of anyone present. There were over thirty speaking parts, a singing and dancing chorus, a choir, and plenty of opportunity for imaginative designing, dressing, painting and staging. Everybody took his chance with both hands and all are to be congratulated.

The story of Toad is familiar to all who have followed the adventures of the quartet and many other characters in "Wind in the Willows". "Toad", magnificently unpompous, pompous, hospitable and lovable, was played with all the stops out by Linda Heath. She left nothing to be desired in a performance of boundless energy and, in the words of the character "elian". Set against this youthful zest was the mature playing of Marilyn Latge, Dorothy Brown and Roger Walker—two long-suffering friends of "Toad". Marilyn gave us a beautifully natural characterisation of the sleepy, ever-hungry "Mole". Dorothy was all quick-silver and sparkle as the river-loving "Water Rat", and Roger portrayed the avuncular "Badger" with just the right amount of seriousness and humour.

Hard upon the heels of these principals came a dozen authentic animal studies. Donald Stone and Michael Cusack worked in perfect harmony as "Alfred", the talking and dancing horse; John Brown was a vigorous Cockney "Chief Weasel", ably served by Victor Trocki and Michael Zawila as his henchmen-in-crime; the "Field Mice" choir was spiritedly led by Martin Aylott and Martin Lovett, and Kathryn Mayer most convincingly mothered a mischievous pair of "Bunnies" played by Judith Adams and Joanna Brown. As the Fox, Edward Bell scored a big hit with one line, proving once again that there is no such thing as a small part—only small acts!

The Humans were very joyfully led by Anthony Lenthall as the "Judge". Helping in the pleasant task of putting "Toad" away for twenty years, Geoffrey Mall gave us a staunch "Policeman", Ronald James an asthmatic "Gadler" and Christopher Goring a well-observed study of a dour Yorkshire "Usher". Other humans who helped or hindered "Toad" in his bid for freedom were Crystal Suckling and Ann Kemp, as dainty "Phoebe" and a mercenary "Washerwoman", and Lynn Harrison who played the suspicious "Bargewoman" with great abandon.

None of the play would have been possible without "Marigold" and her nurse, as everything that happens is in Marigold's imagination, and our play was given a fine start by two experienced players, Elizabeth Hughes and Maureen Wadey.

Every year Miss Garrett conjures up a well-trained "corps de ballet", and this year the dancers surpassed themselves as villainous "Wesels", "Ferrets", and "Stoats", or delicate "Squirrels" and "Rabbits", the latter carefully drilled by Adrienne Hill. In addition we were treated to a delightful "pas de deux" by Irene Abel and Lesley Stone as two "Dragon flies".

The songs from "Toad" were on everybody's lips, thanks to careful plugging and brilliant execution by Mr. Stewart on the piano, while Miss Pounting skilfully worked up the junior choir into a sensitive instrument. Some of our costumes were hired—at the last minute—but the great majority were smilingly delivered on the dot by Mrs. Bonnett and her clever Wardrobe Department, and ingeniously designed, sometimes on the spot, by Miss Box and her helpers.

With its ten sets, the play presented a tremendous challenge to Messrs. Morrill, Luft and Walker, who had the assistance of a member of willing girls of the Upper School. That they were outstandingly successful was apparent from the first breathtaking moments when the curtains opened to reveal the painted gauze, right through every change of scenery, till the animals waved goodbye to Marigold at the end. For special features such as the splendid caravan and the barge we were indebted to a group

of parents who selflessly gave of their time and skill. Mr. Davies and the Props Department are to be congratulated for the high quality of their work, for when Toad and Co. went awalloping, many props needed amending and amending. Our thanks too to Mr. Andrews and his 4G helpers.

As usual, Mr. Findlay, the Stage Director, did ten people's work, supervising his loyal team of Upper School boys through all the perils of a production, until they mounted a really slick show with expert lighting and sound effects, swift scene changes and a high degree of order back stage.

Blackwell productions are noted for the harmonious co-operation of many people and the selfless service that all give who volunteer to make a play. Some have been named but there are many more. Two girls who deserve credit for their untiring service over a long period are Barbara Plumley and Janet Rowe who, with their apprentice, Raymond James, took understudy rehearsals, prompted, miraculously produced coffee at the right time and were, in fact, model Production Assistants. The Box Office was really efficiently run by Mr. Bowker, Mr. Kimber freely gave time and ideas organising the Publicity. Mrs. Lamont was there every night expertly supervising make-up, as well as being responsible for the riotous Walloping Song, and over all there was Mr. Thomas who ensured we did not spend too much, and who, as Editor of the Magazine, hastens to add that the Producer of this play was Mr. D. R. J. Mayhew who succeeded from the outset in instilling into the numerous and varied activities connected with such a complex production a sense of unity and purpose. An experienced actor and producer himself, he knew the difficulties a young cast would experience. By anticipating these difficulties and by inhibiting all concerned with his own enthusiasm, by his patient and tolerant understanding and his readiness to listen to all suggestions, and above all, by his own undoubted skill and know-how he created a production worthy of any professional stage and one which will long be remembered. We are all looking forward to his next production—"Peter Pan".

While on the subject of Peter Pan it looks as if it is going to be a spectacular show with special scenic and flying effects, hard-drinking pirates and Indians on the warpath, a man-eating crocodile and a boy-baiting nurse-dog, a dancing ostrich . . . and legendary characters with magical names like Tiger Lily, Great Big Little Panther, Wendy Moira Angela Darling, Captain Hook and Peter Pan. So when the time comes, don't forget to do your bit to make your play a success.

