

The Accrington

Pals

by
Peter
Whelan



Directed
by
Pam
Wilson

Leeds Arts Centre

at the Civic Theatre
30th Jan to 3rd Feb 1996

The Accrington Pals

Historical Background

Accrington in the summer of 1914 was an apparently thriving Lancashire mill town of some 45,000 people. The cotton industry was, however, on the brink of a decline and several of the mills closed for a number of weeks because of the lack of orders, putting five hundred men and women out of work. At the same time, industrial unrest among the textile machinery workers resulted in the closure of the town's largest firm and the 'lockout' of a further four thousand men and boys.

Even for the skilled workers, wages were too poor to provide any cushion against sickness or unemployment and the narrow margin between working class and poverty stricken was rapidly eroded. It was perhaps a practical desire to escape from this poverty and unemployment as much as youthful ideals of patriotism and service that led the men of Accrington to answer the mayor's call for a battalion of 'Pals' to form part of the East Lancashire Regiment of Kitchener's New Army.

They trained locally in their spare time until February 1915 when they marched away to their first real military camp at Caernarvon. Brigade training followed at Rugeley in Staffordshire and Ripon. The Pals went finally and fatally into action on 1st July 1915 at the Battle of the Somme after a week of continuous heavy artillery barrage which was supposed to have destroyed the German opposition. 'Not even a rat would be left alive,' and the 'Big Push' would be a walkover.

But of the 700 men who went 'over the top' that July morning, 585 were killed or wounded - most of them in the space of a few minutes.

The Play

Peter Whelan wrote *The Accrington Pals* for the RSC in 1981. His interest in the subject was first aroused by his amazed discovery of an old photograph of his mother as a female lumberjack during the first world war. It made him realise that *'doors had once been opened, and then slammed shut.....for millions of young women in that war, and through these doors they had glimpsed tantalising freedoms as well as unimaginable horrors.'*

His interest was fuelled by reading about the Battle of the Somme and its aftermath, in particular how the people of Accrington, *'driven desperate by rumours of disaster and angered by ludicrously optimistic reports in the press, surrounded the mayor's house to demand the truth.'*

Against this factual backdrop, Peter Whelan has set the relationship between a strong minded individualist woman and a dreamy idealistic young man. Their story and that of those around them portrays the humour, strength and courage with which ordinary people met the tragic events of the 'war to end all wars'.

by Peter Whelan

CAST

MAY HASSAL <i>a stallholder</i>	Shirley Burgess
TOM HACKFORD <i>an apprentice</i>	Stuart Watson
RALPH <i>a clerk at the mill</i>	Jonathan Coope
EVA MASON <i>a millgirl</i>	Alison Rees
SARAH HARDING <i>a millworker</i>	Christine Wilson
BERTHA TREECOTT <i>a millgirl</i>	Danielle Coleman
ANNIE BOGGIS <i>a housewife</i>	Mary Nelson
ARTHUR BOGGIS <i>her husband</i>	Trever Hodgson
REGGIE BOGGIS <i>her son</i>	Simon Raw
CSM Rivers <i>a regular soldier</i>	Tony Nelson

PRODUCTION TEAM

Stage Manager	Martyn Drake
Assistant Stage Managers	Dave Mallinson and Richard Francis
Set design and construction	George Westmoreland
Wardrobe	Margaret Rhodes, Betty Triggs, Margaret Savage, George Judd
Properties	Andre Kilner, Doreen Parker and Kathryn Heanachon
Sound	Jim Marshall and Margaret Savage
Lighting	Laurie Ball

DIRECTED BY PAM WILSON

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Leeds Arts Centre would like to thank the following for their help with this production:

The Accrington Local Studies Librarian for her help in researching the background to the play.

Mr William Turner of Accrington, author of 'PALS: the 11th (Service) Battalion (Accrington) of the East Lancashire Regiment' and 'The Accrington Pals' who kindly loaned the slides used in this production.

Mr David Thirlwell of Houlgate Village Museum near York for lending the various items of first world war equipment used in the production.

Costume Hire

Costumes of various types and periods are available for hire from the Leeds Arts Centre costume collection at reasonable rates either by drama societies or by individuals for fancy dress occasions.

Please telephone Leeds 275 6796 and discuss your requirements with Mrs Margaret Rhodes, our wardrobe mistress.

Civic Theatre Staff

Theatre Manager - *Steven Cartwright*

Assistant Manager - *Vivien Simpson*

Chief Technician and Lighting - *Peter Waddicor*

Technicians - *Sandy Clark, Chas Elliott*

Catering for Crown Point Foods - *Shirley Tarran*

Box Office - *Helen Richmond, Shirley Shortall, Sylvia Gooding*

In accordance with the requirements of the Licensing Sub-Committee of Leeds City Council:

- a. The public may leave at the end of the performance by all exits and entrance doors and such doors must at that time be open.
- b. All gangways, passages and staircases must be kept entirely free from chairs or any other obstructions.
- c. Persons shall not be permitted to stand in any of the intersecting gangways, or stand in any other unseated space in the auditorium, unless standing in such a space has been specially allowed by the Licensing Committee. A notice is exhibited in that part of the auditorium in which standing has been sanctioned.
- d. The safety curtain must be lowered and raised once immediately before the commencement of each performance to make sure it is in proper working order.

Next Guild Production.....

Proscenium Players

I Am a Camera

by John Van Druton

Director: Richard Noakes

7th to 10th February 1996 at 7.30 pm

Leeds Arts Centre....

Leeds Arts Centre was formed in 1945 as an amateur Society to encourage and foster interest in the Arts. Members come from all walks of life and include some who have worked in and others who aspire to the professional theatre.

Our activities are now mainly centred around the theatre with the Drama Group mounting four or five plays each year at the Civic Theatre. These often include a musical or review type show.

The Green Room Group puts on plays and other forms of entertainment in the rehearsal rooms to give members valuable experience of acting and producing before they tackle major parts or productions in the Civic Theatre. Prospective members are welcome to attend these performances.

The Fine Arts Group meets twice each week throughout the year for drawing, painting and other creative work. Annual exhibitions are held of members' work.

In addition there is a variety of social activities for members, such as theatre visits, outings, parties etc.

Interested in Joining?

We are always glad to welcome new members and our lively Green Room Group provides a friendly atmosphere in which younger and less experienced members develop their potential - making friends in the process.

If you are interested in acting, producing, drawing, painting (pictures or scenery), set building, making costumes, helping back stage, front of house or even with publicity and think you might like to join the Centre, or would like more information please have a word with one of our members tonight or write to:

The Secretary, Leeds Arts Centre,
Stansfeld Chambers,
Great George Street, Leeds 1

Leeds Arts Centre

Forthcoming productions.....

Pygmalion

by George Bernard Shaw

Cockney flower girl to the toast of London Society - who would have thought Eliza Doolittle's chance encounter with Henry Higgins would prove to be such a challenge for both of them!

Don't miss this opportunity to see Shaw's brilliant comic masterpiece.

Directed by Joyce King
23 to 27 April 1996

Relatively Speaking

by Alan Ayckbourn

Greg and Ginny are living together but Greg suspects that he is not the only man in her life and follows her when she claims she is going to visit her parents. Misunderstanding follows misunderstanding to create a hilarious situation ideal for a summer evening's entertainment.

This is without doubt one of Ayckbourn's funniest plays - don't miss it!

Directed by Jonathan Coope
23 to 27 April 1996

FRIENDS OF LEEDS CIVIC THEATRE

Join the 'Friends' and support this delightful little theatre.

Application forms available from the foyer

**Book at Civic Theatre Box Office,
Cookridge Street, Leeds -**

Tel:(0113) 245 5005 or 247 6962