

## Centre for Social Gerontology

Since 1987 the Centre for Social Gerontology at Keele University has been at the forefront of research, teaching and policy development in the field of ageing. The Centre's work on the social analysis of ageing reflects the importance of diversity through all phases of the life course. Adopting interdisciplinary perspectives, our research focuses on areas such as family and kinship, women and ageing, social inclusion and exclusion, inter-generational relationships, and the social policy of later life. For more information, see: <http://www.keele.ac.uk/csg/>

## New Vic Education

New Vic Education exists to provide accessible opportunities for the whole community to learn through theatre. For this reason, we begin working with pre-school children, families and carers in our early-years literacy project, Tale Trail, which culminates in an annual interactive storytelling event each Christmas in our Stephen Joseph Studio. The programme continues through professional development and networking events for teachers and developing creative work for students across the curriculum.

Our work for adults provides opportunities to learn more about theatre making and the New Vic's own productions through our Revolve workshops. Revolve not only gives the chance for older adults to meet members of our professional teams but also enjoy sessions with visiting lecturers. For adults of any age wishing to take part in practical drama themselves we have our Evolve project, where group members can get on their feet and have a go.

Throughout our work, our most valuable resource remains the theatre itself and the knowledge and commitment of its staff. We continue to make the theatre as open as possible to reflect and build on the legacy of its foundations: 'A theatre at the heart of its community.'

## New Vic Youth Theatre

New Vic Youth Theatre forms a vital part of the work of New Vic Education. Each week over 130 young people aged 5–18 participate in Youth Theatre and Saturday morning Drama Clubs. Youth Theatre not only gives young people the chance to develop performance skills and experience in our special theatre-in-the-round auditorium, we also look for a variety of ways in which the groups can engage with the community. This has included 'Street' and 'Shop Front' theatre, performing for MPs at the House of Commons and involvement in the Ages and Stages project. Ages and Stages has given young people an important and rare chance to explore the role of theatre in promoting intergenerational relations and co-operation and we hope this may long continue.

**NEW VIC**  
education



new dynamics of ageing  
a cross-council research programme

RES-356-25-0005



Keele University  
Centre for Social Gerontology



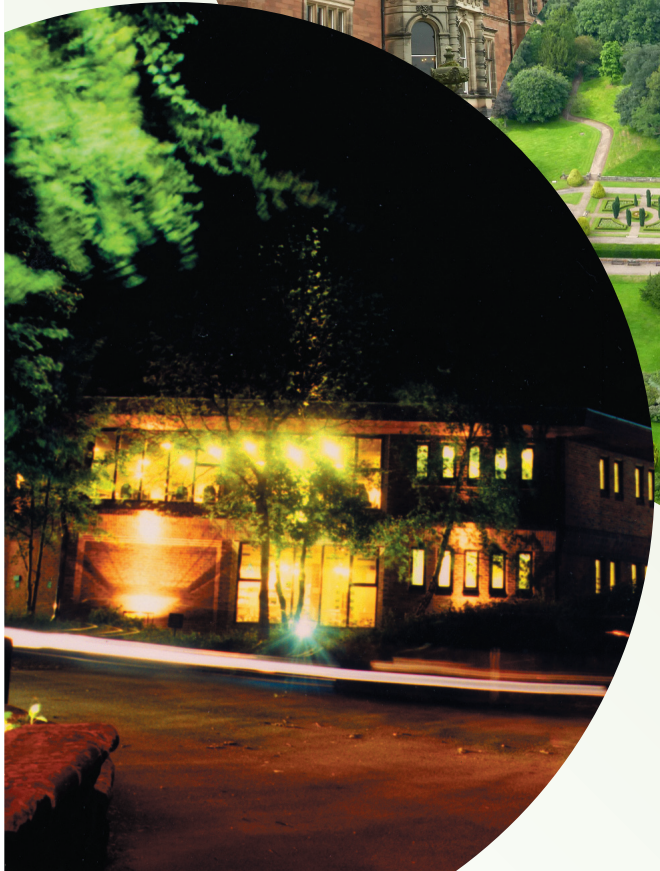
Keele University  
1962 | 2012

Website: [www.keele.ac.uk/agesandstages](http://www.keele.ac.uk/agesandstages)





# Ages and Stages



'There comes a time when you have to step aside.'  
(Audience member)

'I wouldn't step aside for anyone, this is my time. Your best years are when you're doing something that you're passionate about.'  
(Audience member)

'As a newcomer to Stoke, that sort of helped root you into the local community in a way, as you'd learnt about it...they (the documentaries) kind of earthed you in Stoke in a way, so you understood something about the culture and the background of Stoke.'  
(Audience member)

'But it's just, it was so nice that they were older people, like we are now, who were sort of giving their reminiscences, like we are now, and to have involved them, and think 'yeah, the job I did was important, people are interested in what I did'... This is kind of full circle, us as older people being interviewed, you know, about our experiences... it's lots of circles in history.'  
(Former Designer)

'You know, it was right from the very beginning, we are part of this community, let us get out there, let's find out what it's all about. And it's a two way thing isn't it? Let them see that we are human beings who want to contribute something.'  
(Former Actor)

The original Victoria Theatre, Hartshill, Stoke-On-Trent

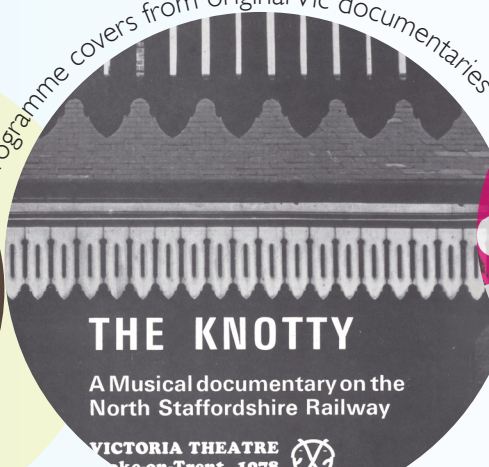


# THE DIRTY HILL

The Vic's 10th Musical Documentary  
Opening Wednesday 30 May 1990



Programme covers from original Vic documentaries



# An Introduction to the Project



## Ages and Stages:

The place of theatre in representations and recollections of ageing.

The Ages and Stages project is a collaboration between Keele University and the New Vic Theatre, Newcastle-under-Lyme. We have been exploring the Victoria Theatre's famous

social documentaries produced between the 1960s and the 1990s and talking to older people about what part the theatre has played in their lives.

## Ages and Stages Research Team

- Miriam Bernard:** Principal Investigator – Professor of Social Gerontology, Keele University
- Jill Rezzano:** Co-Investigator - Head of Education, New Vic Theatre
- Lucy Munro:** Co-Investigator – Senior Lecturer in English, Keele University
- David Amigoni:** Co-Investigator - Professor of Victorian Studies, Keele University
- Michael Murray:** Co-Investigator - Professor of Social/Health Psychology, Keele University
- Michelle Rickett:** Ages and Stages Research Associate, Keele University
- Ruth Basten:** Ages and Stages linked PhD student, Keele University
- Tracey Harrison:** Project Administrator, Keele University

Website: [www.keele.ac.uk/agesandstages](http://www.keele.ac.uk/agesandstages)



*“Since my retirement, the theatre’s given me a new lease of life. I’m doing more now than I was 40 or 50 years ago.”*

## Ages and Stages: A Project takes Shape

The genesis of Ages and Stages lies in earlier collaborative work Mim Bernard did with the New Vic Education Department back in 2004. With local funding, we mounted a small project – Stages – which brought older people together with members of the Youth Theatre to explore what life was like for both groups.

Ever since then, we had looked for a suitable opportunity to do further work together. During the course of 2007, David (Amigoni) and Mim began talking about what kind of project might span both Social Gerontology and the Humanities; we drew in other colleagues at Keele and the New Vic; and started to put together a project which would explore ageing and old age through the lens of people associated with our world-renowned ‘theatre-in-the-round’; which would underline the continuing potential for creativity in later life; and would draw younger people into the debates and discussions we hoped such a project would stimulate.

We held talks with Peter Cheeseman and made visits to the archive and to colleagues at Staffordshire University when – enter stage right – in April 2008, came the fourth and final call for proposals to be funded under the national, cross-council New Dynamics of Ageing research programme. Having been notable by their absence in the earlier rounds of funding, this call asked specifically for

‘biology’ projects and for ‘arts’ projects – clearly, it seemed tailor-made for us! The wheels of research proposal writing and submitting tend to grind slowly and we had to submit an outline bid by the end of June 2008 and then wait to see if we were to be invited to prepare a full proposal. In September, we were one of 40 bids (out of 191 received) to be asked to develop our ideas further; submitted a full bid by the end of October; responded to reviews of our proposal in January 2009; before receiving the long awaited letter on March 13th

informing us that we were one of 12 proposals to be ‘recommended for an award’. A little more to-ing and fro-ing ensued before things were finalised and we were given a start date of October 1st 2009. So, although the project is the culmination of over two years of discussions and proposal writing, the hard work leading up to what you see and hear today began in earnest late in 2009!

Mim Bernard

Programme covers from original Vic documentaries



## Ages and Stages: An Overview of the Project

Ages and Stages is a partnership between Keele University and the New Vic Theatre, running from October 2009 to the end of July 2012. It is funded by the national, cross-council New Dynamics of Ageing (NDA) programme, which aims to improve the quality of life of older people through research into all aspects of ageing. Our project is exploring:

*How age and ageing have been constructed, represented and understood in the Victoria/New Vic Theatre's pioneering social documentaries from the 1960s to the 1990s;*

*The relationship between older people's involvement in the theatre and continuing social engagement in later life;*

*The part the theatre has played in constructing individual and community identities and creating and preserving community memory;*

*The practical and policy implications of our research findings.*

We have employed a mixed method approach organised around three interrelated and complementary strands. Strand 1 explored historical representations of ageing through analyses of materials relating to the Victoria Theatre's social documentaries, held in the Victoria Theatre Archive. Strand 2 focused on recollections and contemporary experiences of ageing through 79 individual/couple qualitative interviews (95 people in total) and ten group interviews (51 people in total) with older people who were/are: (i) sources for the Vic's social documentaries; (ii) theatre volunteers; (iii) audience members throughout their lives; (iv) actors and theatre employees who continue to live in the area. In addition, participant observation was carried out at the theatre, with current volunteers.

In Strand 3, material has been drawn together from Strands 1 and 2 and used to create a new social documentary performance about ageing, creativity and intergenerational relationships, featuring members of the New Vic Youth Theatre (aged 16-19) and older people who were interviewed for Strand 2 of the project (aged 59-92). Regular workshops were held at the New Vic Theatre from September 2011 to May 2012, providing an introduction to 'showing' rather than 'telling' stories, as well as the process of creating devised theatre from research materials and personal memories. This was followed by an intensive two week rehearsal period in June, and a two week touring production in July. Alongside this, the 'Ages and Stages Exhibition' is on show to the public at the New Vic Theatre from 25th June to 21st July 2012.



# A Brief History

*'We knew what we wanted... He (Peter Cheeseman) was putting the artistic side to our story about what happened there really.'*  
(source for Nice Girls)

## Documentary Theatre at the Vic

'Everyone we have interviewed, or whose words we have been privileged to record, has treated us with great courtesy. We hope that we will have worked hard and painstakingly enough on our documentary to convince them that their patience with us was worthwhile.'



Peter Cheeseman

These words are taken from the programme to the tenth documentary performed at the Victoria and New Victoria Theatres, *The Dirty Hill* (1990). Similar statements are found in many of the documentaries' programmes – these are not just plays about a location, they tell us, but shows that sought to embed the theatre into its community: shows that depended on local people for the very words from which they are woven.

*The Dirty Hill* was part of a tradition which had begun in 1964, two years after the Victoria Theatre company was established in an old cinema building on the Hartshill Road. Peter Cheeseman had always wanted to weave the theatre into its locality – there's a famous story told by Alan Ayckbourn about the embryonic company's arrival in Stoke: 'Everyone except Peter booked digs for three weeks. We were all looking for our return tickets. Peter bought a house.' In 1964, the company was temporarily without a resident dramatist and instead of seeing this as a

problem, Cheeseman made it into an opportunity. Consulting historical sources such as ballads, memoirs and newspaper reports, the company put together *The Jolly Potters*, a historical play – no, a 'documentary' – focusing on nineteenth-century pot-workers and the 1842 Chartist riots. 'Our obligation', Cheeseman said a few years later, 'is to show people the past of their community in a way which will give them a sense of their past, in the knowledge that they stand not alone in the present but are part of a historical perspective'.

By the time of *The Knotty* (1966), there had been a further development. Peter Terson, the lead researcher on the project, realised that the retired railway workers, the 'old Knotty men', were a valuable source of information, telling Cheeseman in a memo, 'much as I loathe to admit it, the kid with the tape recorder is going to win this bout'. First-hand testimony had a vividness which made it the ideal foundation for dramatic dialogue, and the words of the interviewees began to be

incorporated into the scripts of the documentaries. Transcripts of the interviews, running through from *The Knotty* to 1994's *Nice Girls*, can still be seen in the Victoria Theatre archive at Staffordshire University. On them are notes by Peter Terson and others – 'nice rhythm'; 'GREAT bit'; 'clock ticking + dog but dog never on good bits'. In the archive we can see the process through which peoples' voices and their stories reached the stage, moving from transcript to draft, to prompt-book. We can also see the stories that didn't make it into the scripts. The 'final' play, we are realising, is only one possible version of this material, only one of the stories that the community told about itself.

Lucy Munro



## The Musical Documentaries

**The Jolly Potters** – 1964 (revised in 1992) – about industrial conditions in the Potteries in the 1840s leading to the 1842 Chartists 'Riots and Potters' Emigration Scheme.

**The Staffordshire Rebels** – 1965 – about the English Civil War as it affected Staffordshire people in the county and nationally.

**The Knotty** – 1966 (also in 1967, 1969, 1978, 2008) - the origins of the railway in North Staffordshire and the rise and fall of The North Staffordshire Railway 'The Knotty' (operational 1835 – 1923).

**Six Into One** – 1968 - the Federation of the Six Towns into the City of Stoke on Trent (1900 – 1910) and modern attitudes to the Six Towns.

**The Burning Mountain** – 1970 - the story of Hugh Bourne (who lived his life in Stoke-on-Trent) and Primitive Methodism, with a reflection of modern attitudes to religion and superstition.

**Hands Up! For You the War Is Ended** – 1971 (also in 1995) - the wartime adventures of several local men in the Second World War who were captured by the enemy, and the tale of their escape and rescue or recapture.

**Fight For Shelton Bar!** – 1974 - the struggle by Shelton steelworkers and their families to stop the closure of the plant.

**Plain Jos** – 1980 - the life and achievements of Josiah Wedgwood (1730 – 1795).

**Miner Dig the Coal** – 1981 - a portrait of the North Staffordshire mining community, focussing on Hem Heath Colliery.

**The Dirty Hill** – 1990 - an account of the campaign to prevent the opencast mining of Berry Hill in Stoke-on-Trent.

**Nice Girls** – 1993 (also in 1995) - the story of the three women who occupied Trentham Colliery in May 1993.

## Docudramas

**Awkward Cuss** – 1976. Written by Kenneth Eastaugh about the composer, Havergal Brian (who was from Stoke).

**Good Golly Miss Molly** – 1989 (and in 1991/1993). Written by Bob Eaton. About the planned demolition of housing in Tunstall, Stoke-on-Trent, opposed by a Tunstall housing action group.

**I Don't Want to Set the World on Fire!** – 1990 (and in 1994). Written by Bob Eaton. About the experiences of women working at Swynnerton Munitions Factory in the Second World War.

**Eric the Epic** – 1993. Written by Rony Robinson. The story of local jazz musician and marathon runner, Eric Newton.

**Come on Stan!** – 1994. Written by Rony Robinson. 'The Remarkable True Life Story of Stanley Matthews'.

## The Victoria Theatre Collection

The Ages and Stages project couldn't have happened without the extensive resources offered by the Victoria Theatre Collection at Staffordshire University. This archive documents the theatre productions, community work and research conducted by the Victoria Theatre between 1962 and 1998, under the Directorship of Peter Cheeseman. The collection includes not only performance materials (scripts, programmes, photographs,

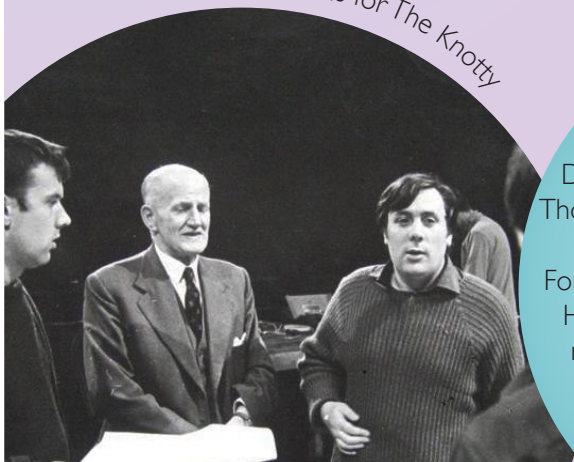
audio recordings, correspondence, etc.), and an extensive array of reviews and press cuttings, but also the research materials on which the documentaries were based, including newspaper reports, local archive documents and a remarkable collection of audio recorded interviews with members of the community. This has enabled us to place our current project within its historical context, and to explore

how research was transformed into theatre in the original documentaries. We have also been able to look at historical representations of older people, intergenerational relationships, place and community, both within the documentaries and in the original research interviews, tracing the stories that were and weren't told in the final productions.

Under the guidance of the Honorary Archivist, a team of stalwart volunteers have been responsible for organising and cataloguing this unique archive, which is available by appointment to students and teachers, theatre practitioners, and other researchers.

The collection is currently undergoing a digitisation programme, which will make its valuable resources more easily available to the whole community.

Rehearsals for *The Knotty*



To make a research appointment, please contact: David Parkes, Associate Director of Information Services at the Thompson Library, Staffordshire University: [d.j.parkes@staffs.ac.uk](mailto:d.j.parkes@staffs.ac.uk)  
For more general information, contact the Honorary Archivist, Romy Cheeseman: [r.cheeseman@staffs.a.uk](mailto:r.cheeseman@staffs.a.uk) or telephone 01782 622278.



# The Ages and Stages Theatre Company Presents...

## Our Age, Our Stage

Our new social documentary performance - Our Age, Our Stage - brings older participants from the project together with members of the New Vic Youth Theatre. It explores ageing, intergenerational relations and the role the theatre has played – and continues to play - in the creative life of the people of Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire.

Performers and participants are people who were interviewed for Strand 2 of the Ages & Stages project (aged between 59 - 92) and senior members of the New Vic Youth Theatre (aged between 16 -19).

### Participants

David Bailey  
Pam Beech  
Philip Birtles  
Jacky Carter  
Teague Davis  
Peter Dutton  
Rachel Eldershaw  
Frances Evans  
Jean James  
Becky Salt  
John Shapcott  
Jack Spencer  
Kathleen Webb  
Norman Webb  
Barbara Williams

### Performers

David Bowen  
Chris Evans  
Steven Granville  
Brenda Hennessey  
Jess Hughes  
Michael Lewis  
Olympia Pattison-Corney  
Colin Ramsell  
Arthur Roberts  
Judy Tindall

The words you will hear in this documentary were spoken in interviews or workshops conducted for the Ages and Stages project between 2009 and 2012. As well as live speech, Our Age, Our Stage also includes extracts from audio-recordings of the interviews (used with the permission of the interviewees) and quotations from Peter Cheeseman.

Jill Rezzano – Director  
Miriam Bernard – Ages and Stages Project Leader  
Michelle Rickett – Ages and Stages Researcher  
Lis Evans – Designer  
Vicky Laker – Stage Manager  
James Earls-Davis – Sound Designer  
Pat Blenkarn – Costume Supervisor  
Daniella Beattie – Lighting Designer  
Chris Martin – Consultant  
Bryn Passant – Filmmaker  
Set, costume and props by New Vic workshops

The performance of Our Age, Our Stage will be followed by a Q&A session. No interval.

## Our Age, Our Stage: The Tour

Our Age, Our Stage is being performed in a number of local venues between Monday 2nd July and Friday 13th July, including schools, colleges, retirement communities and local councils. Q&A sessions with the cast, crew and research team follow each performance. The main performance takes place on 11th July 2012 at the New Vic Theatre, in association with the 2012 British Society of Gerontology (BSG) conference. The audience includes conference attendees, people who were interviewed for Ages and Stages, and invited guests.

I didn't understand that age would stop you being creative. How would age stop you being creative?  
(Audio describer and Audience member)

## The Creation and Construction of an Intergenerational Documentary

The numbers tell their own story: interviews with 95 people; 36 hours of workshop time; and the challenge of honing these riches into one hour of theatre documentary. We were looking for the sparkles that would shed the most light and meaning - reflecting the strands of memory, opinion and conversation that we had collected. Locked inside the pages of interview transcripts and film of devising workshops are at least a dozen other plays. What you are seeing today, is the one that managed to escape.

Our project followed the intersection of many lives with a particular place over 50 years, and multiple stories were told. We used the history of the Vic itself to create a narrative structure. The problem was how to translate this story of a single organisation into a metaphor for so many lives. In the end, it was commonality of experience that seemed more important than time. So dialogue was created to allow voices to reach other across

generations and time, reflecting similar or conflicting stories and opinions. We have also produced composite characters, speaking words expressed by several different people, but which felt authentic to one voice. And we have included extracts

from audio recorded interviews, to increase the voices we can share with the audience. It is not only memory that we are interested in, it is the here and now.

In workshops, we sought to explore how we see our creative selves today and to take apart the notion that youth and creativity are inextricably linked and therefore assume a diminishing aspect as we age. Interestingly, it was the professional actors in the group who injected a note of realism about the demands of creative work on the body, the desire to put down roots and family life, whilst for others, age had brought a period of unrivalled freedom to pursue interests that a youth filled with domestic and professional

responsibility had not. We realised that, throughout life, there were no absolute endings, only transitions, sometimes chosen, sometimes enforced, but always leading to another stage and the potential for many kinds of creative paths. It is these contradictions and complexities that we hope to reflect.

Theatre, whether it be documentary or otherwise, is written to be performed. So we wanted to bear in mind the make-up of our group. The Ages and Stages Company brings together professionals, non-professionals, older and younger people. As we choose our content to reflect our experiences, we also choose our style. The honesty and dialogue that we want to establish with the audience is seen in our liberated approach to having access to the script and scene order on stage. This is an exercise in the enjoyment of sharing stories, not in the prowess of memory. In coming clean with an audience, anything becomes possible on stage. And, in many ways, this has been our overarching theme when we come together; when we can establish an honest dialogue that has meaning for our lives, anything is possible.

Jill Rezzano

*Our project followed the intersection of many lives with a particular place over 50 years, and multiple stories were told. We used the history of the Vic itself to create a narrative structure.*

Our Age, Our Stage rehearsals



Jill Rezzano, Director of Our Age, Our Stage.

# The Ages and Stages Exhibition: 25th June to 21st July 2012

## Staging Memories: The Exhibition

I could see immediately why Frances Evans would struggle to bring it to the 'Bringing in Day'. A large, original, rectangular acrylic painting of Alec D'Urberville, charging along in his fast moving pony trap, while the terrified Tess Durbeyfield prepares to jump. A dramatic scene from Hardy's novel: painted, presumably, as a hoarding to advertise Bill Morrison's dramatic adaptation of Tess of the D'Urbervilles, when he was resident playwright for the Vic in 1971. Inevitably, there was a story, a personal memory, behind the object: Frances and her husband Tom had purchased the picture at a New Vic fund-raising event in the 1990s. Now, Frances had recovered it from her garage and presented it to me: would we like it for the forthcoming Ages and Stages exhibition? Hastily handwriting a makeshift 'loan agreement', I thanked Frances and gratefully drove the painting away. Will you see it at the exhibition? As I write this, I still can't say because of the way in which we've conceived the exhibition. Back in January 2012, a sub-group of us (Lis Evans, Romy Cheeseman, Jo Blagg, Jill Rezzano, Ray Johnson,

Lynn Parry) met to begin to discuss how we would stage an exhibition arising out of the Ages and Stages/New Vic partnership. This year, happily and coincidentally, also marked the 50th anniversary of the birth of the Victoria Theatre. This was an evocative moment in which to hold an exhibition about recollections of the theatre's place in all the lives and histories that comprise 'the community'. Romy Cheeseman had produced a 'timeline' of the key productions, across the decades; but she stressed that the Vic was all about the 'participation' of members of the community. So how then to capture this spirit? We would start with the fabulous archive of the theatre's history, but we'd also try to go beyond this remarkable resource. It was Lis Evans, set and costume designer at the Vic, and on this occasion exhibition curator, who coined the idea of the exhibition as a great 'exploding scrap book'. Certainly, we'd organise the exhibition around the theatre's creative output since 1962. But we'd be especially keen to see what memorabilia people had saved over the years, and we'd want this to 'explode' out

of the timeline. This chimed with the experience of our research team who conducted numerous interviews during the course of the research. As they answered questions, interviewees would bring physical memorabilia to the conversation. It is also in keeping with the Vic's practice of documentary theatre: what you show is based on the words and memories that the community entrusts to you. So, the exhibition will be made substantially from what we have received on our 'Bringing in Day' of May 26 – from which we'll have had to edit, and select. That's why I can't say, yet, whether the 'Tess' painting, fantastic and vibrant though it is, and with a great story attached, will feature. That makes our preparation suspenseful: perhaps not as heart-stopping as Tess's leap, but dramatic in its own way!

David Amigoni

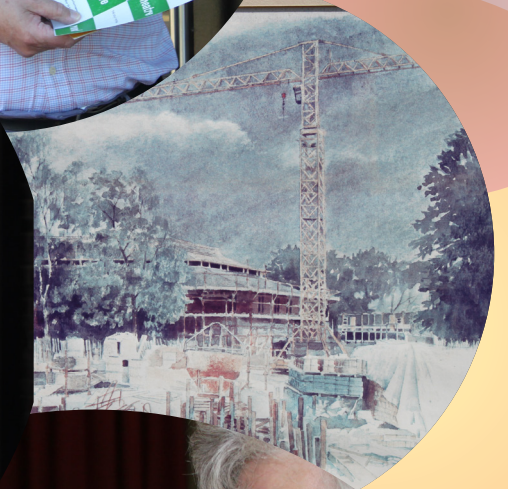
Volunteers, contributors & contributions on the bringing in day



# Bringing In Day

A special Open Day was held at the New Vic Theatre on Saturday 26th May. Local people were invited to bring in their New Vic or Victoria Theatre memorabilia and tell us the stories behind them. Many of these items feature in the Ages and Stages exhibition, including photographs, original scripts, paintings and props.

Ages and Stages Exhibition curated by Lis Evans, Head of Design for the New Vic Theatre.



# Reflections From Participants

*'The Vic was (pause), it's kind of made me into a Stokey now.'*  
(Former Actor)

## Being the PI

What, I hear you ask, is a PI when it's at home? It's the shorthand we in academia use for 'Principal Investigator' - and by that we mean the person who instigates and who leads the whole project and is, ultimately, responsible for the success or otherwise of what we do. So, no pressure there then... For me, Ages and Stages has been the highlight of a long career in research with older people which began in the 1980s when I ended up working quite by chance in the voluntary sector - for the Beth Johnson Foundation in Stoke-on-Trent. With a joint honours degree in English and Geography; a long attachment to the Potteries (I came from London to Keele as an undergraduate student in the 1970s); and theatrical links extending through the generations - this project has brought together many strands of my professional and personal life and interests. But I'm definitely no actor: I've always been more at home behind the scenes. Ages and Stages though has been a rather different undertaking: the buck stops with me - and this has meant co-ordinating, managing, encouraging and guiding both the programme

of work and our talented team. It's meant being hands-on too: learning from colleagues a little of what's involved in archival research and analysis; undertaking some of the interviews; and being closely involved in the workshops we have been running. Trying to keep the two roles - leading as well as participating - in some kind of creative equilibrium has been demanding to say the least. Elsewhere in this brochure you will read - or already have read - about different aspects of the project, written from the perspectives of those who have given us, and continue to give us, unstintingly of their time, experience and expertise. From conception through to the initial months of the project, Peter Cheeseman himself was a strong supporter of what we were attempting to do. Since then, we have completed

nearly everything we set out to do; mostly on schedule; and with our research team intact throughout. As the PI - as the person ultimately responsible for this whole enterprise - I can truly say that it has been the best and most rewarding project of my professional life and, despite the inevitable challenges and occasional disappointments, it has been more fun than serious academic work is perhaps meant to be!

Mim Bernard



Field research for Fight for Shelton Bar (1972)





## The Circle of Life

When I saw the Ages and Stages PhD advertised I couldn't believe my luck. It seemed to have been written with me in mind! My first academic qualifications were in English Lit and Theatre Studies and I worked with Peter Cheeseman, as a lowly assistant stage manager, at the New Vic in my early 20s. I have since trained and qualified in Counselling Psychology and begun to develop an interest in ageing and working with older clients. This research has enabled me to draw together all of my interests, across my own life course, both academic and practical and given me the opportunity to

explore the theatre, its history, its documentaries and Peter Cheeseman's vision. My research looks in detail at *Fight for Shelton Bar* (1972) and *Nice Girls* (1993) and has a specific focus on the way that these documentaries dealt with ageing and intergenerational relations within a very specific social context. I am working with the archive, engaging with it as a dynamic part of the musical documentaries rather than merely context. I am researching not only what was presented in the finished dramas, but also acknowledging what was left out or removed

during the process, recognising that this archival material is a record of a community's past feelings endowed with various implicit senses of the life course. My work is enriched with contemporary narrative interview material and this storied data is presented in the form of a documentary drama script, enabling the reader to experience, in written form, this genre of theatre first hand whilst making their own connections with the research material and finding what resonates for them.

Ruth Basten

## Researcher's Perspective

I joined Ages and Stages as a Research Associate in October 2009 – and the time has just flown by! I had recently finished a PhD in Social Anthropology and felt very lucky to find such an exciting first research job, and one that resonated with me so strongly. My PhD had involved research with older people in Cape Town and in a community museum that brought memories to life in creative ways. I also have a BA in English, and I really wanted to find something that would bring together my interests in the arts, memory and place, and the lives of older people. Ages and Stages has offered a wonderful experience to do just that.

I've been involved in all aspects of the project, have presented the results of our research at conferences in the UK, USA and Italy, and met researchers working on all facets of ageing through our participation in the 'New Dynamics of Ageing' programme. I particularly enjoyed the many interviews I conducted with Vic audience members, volunteers, employees and documentary sources. As a newcomer to North Staffordshire, this really brought the New Vic and former Victoria Theatre alive to me. It was fascinating to hear people talk about their lives and creativity and, through the intergenerational workshops, we demonstrated

clearly that creativity doesn't belong to a particular age group – in fact, it flourishes when generations are brought together rather than set apart. As an anthropologist, I explore the roles people perform in different social worlds, the stories they tell to themselves and others, and the ways they make sense of their lives and I have come to realise that this has much in common with documentary theatre. I feel privileged to have met such wonderful people over the three years of Ages and Stages: it has been an education and a delight.

Michelle Rickett

*'All my life, I've tried to be creative, I have to do it as part of my life force and I carry on till I die as far as I'm concerned.'*  
(Audio describer and Audience member)

## Peter Dutton (Ages and Stages Theatre Company)

My memories begin with the early days at the Municipal Hall in Newcastle; Stephen Joseph's cogently argued case for a permanent home in the area for the company and the selection of Hartshill. Appointments at Hanley High School and Stoke Sixth Form College meant that I was involved with the development of the Vic's central educational and community philosophies. I was also a trustee for nearly twenty great years. From the outset Vic actors contributed to school drama lessons, visited productions and supported the work of teachers. A and AS Theatre Studies students followed Vic productions from early rehearsals to performance and the experience of watching professionals working and the close relationship between director, cast and the technicians was invaluable. Those who applied for admission to theatre schools

had briefing sessions with Vic actors; two students later appeared at the Vic and others also enjoyed successful stage careers. The Vic's educational and community work was executed in practical and largely unpublished terms but it was effective, consistent and generated significant goodwill.

*Participants clearly had a strong feeling of loyalty to the Vic for widely differing reasons, but a common factor seemed to be that it represents something substantial...*

### The Ages and Stages project

The composition of our group recalled Dryden's description of Chaucer's Canterbury pilgrims – "Here is God's plenty". Although there was a conspicuous absence of rogues, clerics and gushing theatricals, there was an interesting mixture of personalities, age bands and experience. The experience of Chris Martin and Steven Granville added to the impact of the sessions and the latter's account of arriving in Stoke for an audition which was actually being held in London was a comic highlight, while the illustrated talks by Pat Blenkarn and James Earls- Davis provided a revealing insight into the vital contribution of the backstage teams to each production. Participants clearly had a strong feeling of loyalty to the Vic for widely differing reasons, but a common factor seemed to be that it represents something substantial and meaningful in individual lives regardless of age and external circumstances. It is more than a place where one goes to watch shows – the setting and welcoming atmosphere have their own appeal. Attitudes to ageing were positive, notably cliché-free, and the improvisations which were devised reflected this variety of outlook. The success of the venture owed much the decisive input of members of the Vic Youth Theatre, who were confident and optimistic, as well as being attentive listeners and making constructive contributions to group activities. My treasured moment came when we were discussing a council leader's declaration that provision for old age should start at fifty. I wondered how Peter Cheeseman would have reacted to the suggestion that the green grasses of retirement beckoned at that point. The adjectives "incredulous" and "volcanic" came to mind.



Peter Cheeseman

Barbara Williams and Frances Evans, Ages and Stages participants



## Frances Evans (Ages and Stages Theatre Company)

In the late 1960s, I was fully occupied in learning to live in Staffordshire, to fend for myself as a single person and to teach English to 11–18 year olds. Coriolanus was my first A Level Shakespeare, not the most appealing to the girls in my group. To the rescue came Alan David, actor from the Vic, part of Peter Cheeseman's plan to build the relationship between theatre and school. The academic advantages were bountiful and my status was enhanced by my introduction of a 'dishy' male.

The late 1970s and 80s were dominated by money raising for the new theatre: meetings, covenants, raffles, Open Days, Family Nature Days, collecting at the Potteries Marathons, a Grand Auction, a New Vic Recipe Book: you name it, we did it. For me, the most important event was in October 1989 - I married T F Evans. We had a celebratory lunch in the New Vic restaurant with champagne, courtesy of a startled marketing department. Tom joined me as a dedicated stuffer, vol and audience member.

Last year I went to visit a niece Jane, who lives in South West France. She took me to tea with an English couple who were trying to learn French later in life. Once upon a time (in fact in 1974) John, whose profession had been sound effects for films, had been at the Vic during the preparations for Fight For Shelton Bar. He was sent alone to the steelworks where he found the noise and the heat terrifying. Recently I tried to establish the date of the documentary. The garage, source of much theatre memorabilia, produced a 9 page booklet, Fight For Shelton Bar, but no date. I shook it impatiently and a Sentinel cutting fell out – Friday March 15th 1974. What the booklet did reveal was a page of Acknowledgements. Under 'Design and Technical Staff' appears the name John Pakenham (Design Assistant).

Vive the Vic/New Vic: Home and Away.

## Judy Tindall (Ages and Stages Theatre Company)

I suppose it was Jill who first told us about the workshops, towards the end of similar workshops we'd been doing with her already. When I say "us", I mean the three of us, all retired teachers who'd become friends working as Audio Describers for the New Vic. I'm not sure I would have been brave enough to join in without my friends. I wasn't sure about being filmed either, but you do

*For me it was a completely different way of thinking. I could see why this sort of activity works so well in developing empathy...*

get used to the camera being there and ignore it after a while. Maybe I became more confident.

It's been something I've looked forward to on Monday evenings. I've met lots of interesting people I didn't know before. Many of the others had been coming to the Vic for longer than I have. There were people who worked for the Vic as actors or behind the scenes as part of the creative team, besides volunteers and audience members. Team work and being creative is an enduring feature of the Vic and we experienced it too by improvising ways to show the results of our discussions dramatically. For me it was a completely different way of thinking. I could see why this sort of activity works so well in developing empathy – a sense of how other people feel.

It was great when some of the Youth Theatre joined us. How inspiring to see their energy, enthusiasm, and confidence. Talking, let alone working, with teenagers is something I rarely experience now. They were always coming up with ideas and were so good at dramatising them.

## Colin Ramsell (Ages and Stages Theatre Company)

The Vic Theatre Hartshill, 1969. We went to see The Knotty. We've been coming ever since. There is something about the intimacy of that small area which produces an effect on the audience and the performers. Where else can two chairs, three actors and the background music produce such drama? The collaboration with other theatres, although probably encouraged by the current economic chaos, is welcome and reveals imagination and willingness to adapt. This is all in the spirit of innovation and experimentation that makes this theatre unique. The Ages and Stages project has brought a group of people together, spanning a very wide range of ages and with very diverse interests in theatre. I have been part of that group. It has been a great experience and I have gained an understanding of what is involved in bringing thoughts and ideas to the stage. It will be a documentary of the life of the theatre and the people who have made the Vic/New Vic so special.



## John Shapcott (Ages and Stages Theatre Company)

It is not only the wealthy who can afford second homes in magical places. I first discovered the Vic as a Keele student in the late 1960s and, apart from a few years working in and around London, it has been my second home ever since. London theatre is world-class but it doesn't have that unique combination of immediacy, intimacy, community and involvement found at the old Vic Theatre, and that is now also the magical hallmark of the New Vic. The Ages & Stages project seems a natural progression for the theatre's outreach into the local community. Who better to tell of its past glories than those of us who have been audience members for, in some cases, over forty years? Invited to share our memories as part of

a documentary, we have been meeting and getting to know each other since September 2011. The most daunting but ultimately most rewarding aspect of the workshops have been the improvisation sessions, challenging our ability to express our knowledge spontaneously without resorting to clichéd speech or gesture. Not easy. And not made any easier by the presence of a camera filming every moment – the surprise is that a relaxed and informal atmosphere makes possible a level of concentration that overcomes any concerns about appearing foolish and having blunders recorded. Before Christmas we older, (mature?) theatre fanatics were joined by members of the Youth Theatre. Their

arrival brought a new focus to the sessions, together with the promise of future magic. Their enthusiasm and openness was infectious, awakening memories of when I was young and unaware of the impending demands of adulthood. So perhaps it was just as well that some topics were avoided – fear of a painful death, sex, poverty – in our discussions and improvisations. Maybe an 'Extreme Ages & Stages' awaits exploration, the Theatre of Cruelty and the Absurd combined. For the moment, however, young and old approached the tasks of improvised performance with intelligence, sensitivity and wit such that we created a Theatre of Pleasure for an all too brief magical time in which Age was Play.

*"I think I've said it, it definitely saved my life, led me into things that are all positive that I never would have had the confidence,*

*in fact I can't imagine where I would have ended up without it really."*

*(Former Costume Designer)*



Joan Levitt (right) with Peter Chesebrough and Cathy Seabridge, at the first opening of the New Vic doors 1986



Becky Salt & Michael Lewis, Ages and Stages participants



## Becky Salt (Ages and Stages Theatre Company and the New Vic Youth Theatre)

Getting involved with Ages and Stages has given me an insight into the history of the New Vic Theatre and how it has positively influenced valued members of our community. Not only have I learnt about how the different departments within the theatre have developed over time but I have also met some inspirational people of the older generation. Through participating within the workshops, I have had the opportunity to contribute my ideas

and beliefs about 'Perceptions of Age', whilst also contributing to how the final documentary performance could be produced. By creatively re-enacting people's memories it has enabled me to understand how greatly the New Vic has impacted the public and how in time they have developed their style of productions. Having the chance to work with people from both generations, I have been able to build strong relationships and make valuable friendships that

I hope will last. There are different personalities and interests within the group; however, we all share one common passion, for theatre and the all-important connection with the New Vic. On a weekly basis, being involved with Ages and Stages is something I thoroughly enjoy and look forward to. I have encountered new knowledge and have learnt new skills and qualities about myself.

## Olympia Pattison-Corney (Ages and Stages Theatre Company and the New Vic Youth Theatre)

On my first day of Ages and Stages I had absolutely no idea of what to expect. We had been told about it in Youth Theatre and, thinking that it sounded interesting, I applied. In the first session, as an ice breaker, we told two truths and one lie. So out came the incredible truths and the unfeasible lies. Guessing which the lies were was hilarious, and with that the void of ages had been breached. When I first applied to be in Ages and Stages I wrote on my application that I thought I could learn from people with more life experience. I

have realised that in this I was naive. The older members of the group haven't just had more life experience they've had a completely different experience of life. What fascinates me is that I'm hearing about things that I have never seen with my own eyes. Getting to know the older members I feel like I am able to begin to bridge the gap between the times and start to understand. I realised quickly that age isn't representative of a person's ability or personality but that it simply records the years that they have lived through. We were told the story

of a 94 year old woman shopping in Hanley who when walking past a charity shop saw a piece of china that she had painted and saw her own signature on the back. Working with the group has taught me not to judge a person by their age or by what they're wearing. As someone surmised in a group session "An old man in a hoody looks like a youth until you really look." I have loved working with the group and think that they are all amazing people.

# Acknowledgements

*You're a family, you were part of a family that stretched decades, but you feel*

## A Big Thank you!

We are indebted to all the people who allowed us to interview them for the Ages and Stages project and use their words in the compilation of *Our Age, Our Stage*.

Barbara Baker  
Martyn Barlow  
Susan Barlow  
Pam Beech  
Roy Beniston  
Brenda Beniston  
Mary Bennett  
Diane Birt  
Philip Birtles  
Jo Blagg  
Pat Blenkarn  
David Bowen  
Jean Bowers  
Jean Bowness  
David Briggs  
Angela Briggs  
Chris Budd  
Tricia Budd  
Jacky Carter  
Peter Cheeseman  
Romy Cheeseman  
Albert Cooper  
Pauline Conliffe  
Irene Connon  
John Connon  
Julie Connon  
Jean Crick  
Tony Crompton  
Carole Crompton  
Les Dallas  
Pauline Dallas  
Peter Dutton

James Earls-Davis  
Bob Eaton  
Frances Evans  
Mark Fisher  
John Fox  
Angela Glendenning  
Irene Goodwin  
Steven Granville  
John Guyan  
Betty Hancock  
Tony Handy  
Barbara Hargreaves  
Geoff Hargreaves  
Brenda Hennessey  
Sheila Howells  
Margaret Hulstone  
Rose Hunter  
Eunice Jackson  
Jean James  
Ray Johnson  
Pam Jones  
Paul Jones  
Philip Jones  
Mary Keogh  
Dave Kirk  
Joan Levitt  
Michael Lewis  
Pat Marshall  
Chris Martin  
Janet Mason  
Peggy Moreton

Valerie Morris  
Eunice Mortimer  
Colin Mortimer  
Eric Newton  
Michael Painter  
Reuben Parr  
Lynn Parry  
Jeff Parton  
Brenda Proctor  
Colin Ramsell  
Nina Ramsell  
Brian Rawlins  
Pat Rawson  
Roma Read  
Jackie Redgewell  
Jan Roberts  
Chris Salisbury  
Barbara Salt  
John Shapcott  
Ken Smith  
Roy Smith  
Shirley Southerland  
Julia Stanway  
Judy Tindall  
Chris Toombs  
Mary Toon  
Terry Turner  
Norman Webb  
Kathleen Webb  
Dickon Wilkinson  
Maureen Wilkinson  
Barbara Williams

## We would also like to thank...

The Ages and Stages Exhibition Steering Group (Jo Blagg, Romy Cheeseman, Lis Evans, Ray Johnson, Lynn Parry, Jill Rezzano)  
Ages and Stages Exhibition donors  
Romy Cheeseman (Honorary Archivist, Victoria Collection)  
James Dacre (former Artistic Associate at the New Vic)  
Dave Emley (website development and maintenance)  
Ray Johnson & Bryn Passant (film makers)  
New Dynamics of Ageing Programme - Alan Walker (Programme Director), Karen Tsui & Sarah Howson (Administrators/Secretaries)  
Lynn Parry (Education Project Manager)  
David Reynolds (New Vic Youth Theatre)  
Deborah Hall & Sarah Thorne (New Vic Costume Department)  
Steve O'Brien (New Vic Production Manager)  
Clare Wydell (Research Manager) and all the support staff in the Research Institutes for the Humanities & Social Sciences, Keele University  
New Vic Technical Department  
New Vic Marketing Department

And  
a special  
thanks to our Project  
Administrator,  
**Tracey Harrison,**  
for keeping us all in order  
over the past three years  
and for being unfailingly  
cheerful and upbeat!

Brochure  
Designed by  
Annie Jean  
Crooks

as though you're part of it. Anybody who says 'oh I worked at the Vic', 'ah, right', you've already got a bond!"  
(Former Actor)

## Ages and Stages Advisory Group

We have benefitted greatly from the support of an experienced and enthusiastic Advisory Group. Members have met with the research team on a regular basis throughout the project, and our overseas members have corresponded with us electronically.

Diane Andrewes (2009-2011) – Member, the NDA Older People's Reference Group (OPRG)

Anne Basting - Director of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's Center on Age & Community and Associate Professor of Theatre at the Peck School of the Arts, USA

Mary Brown – Member, the NDA Older People's Reference Group (OPRG)

Joanna Bornat – Emeritus Professor of Oral History, Open University

Tony Carter – Member, the NDA Older People's Reference Group (OPRG)

Peter Cheeseman (2009-2010) – Director of the Victoria/New Vic Theatre from 1962-1998; pioneer of the Vic's social documentaries

Romy Cheeseman – Honorary Archivist, Victoria Theatre Collection; former actor at the Victoria Theatre

Janet Fast – Professor of Human Ecology and Principal Investigator on the 'Health and Creative Aging' project, University of Alberta, Canada

Susan Feldman – Associate Professor and Director of The Healthy Ageing Research Unit, Monash University, Australia

Meli Hatzihrysidis – Senior Officer, Engagement and Participation, Arts Council England

Ray Johnson – Emeritus Professor of Film Heritage and Documentary, Staffordshire University

Nick Jones (2009-2011) – Former Managing Director, New Vic Theatre

James Knowles – Professor of Renaissance Literature and Culture, Brunel University

Teresa Lefort – Member, the NDA Older People's Reference Group (OPRG)

Louise Middleton – Manager, the Centre for Intergenerational Practice, Beth Johnson Foundation

Gordon Ramsay – Lecturer in Drama and Performance, University of Nottingham

Pam Schweitzer – Founder of the Age Exchange Theatre Trust; Co-ordinator of the European Reminiscence Network

Elizabeth Sclater - Member, the NDA Older People's Reference Group (OPRG)

Fiona Wallace – Executive Director, New Vic Theatre

## Canadian Collaborators

We have a partner project at the University of Alberta, Canada, led by Professor Janet Fast and including David Barnet (University of Alberta and GeriActors and Friends), Sally Chivers (Trent University) and Jacquie Eales (University of Alberta). The project, titled "Health and Creative Aging: Theatre as a Pathway to Healthy Aging", involves research with the 'GeriActors and Friends' intergenerational theatre company in Edmonton, and is exploring the participation of older adults in theatrical productions and how this may enhance health and well-being. The collaboration between our two projects is funded by the Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR) and the UK New Dynamics of Ageing (NDA) programme.

Health and Creative Aging website:

<http://www.rapp.ualberta.ca/en/Research/TheatreAndHealthyAging.aspx>

GeriActors and Friends website:

<http://www.seniorscouncil.net/geriactors-and-friends>

## AHRC Research Network

We also participate in the AHRC funded Late Life Creativity network, co-directed by David Amigoni at Keele University and Gordon McMullan at King's College London. Through a series of workshops and online networking, this project brings together researchers in the arts and humanities, gerontologists, older people, creative practitioners and performers, and policy makers in order to explore experiences and understandings of late life creativity from multiple perspectives.

Late Life Creativity network website -

<http://www.latelifecreativity.org/>