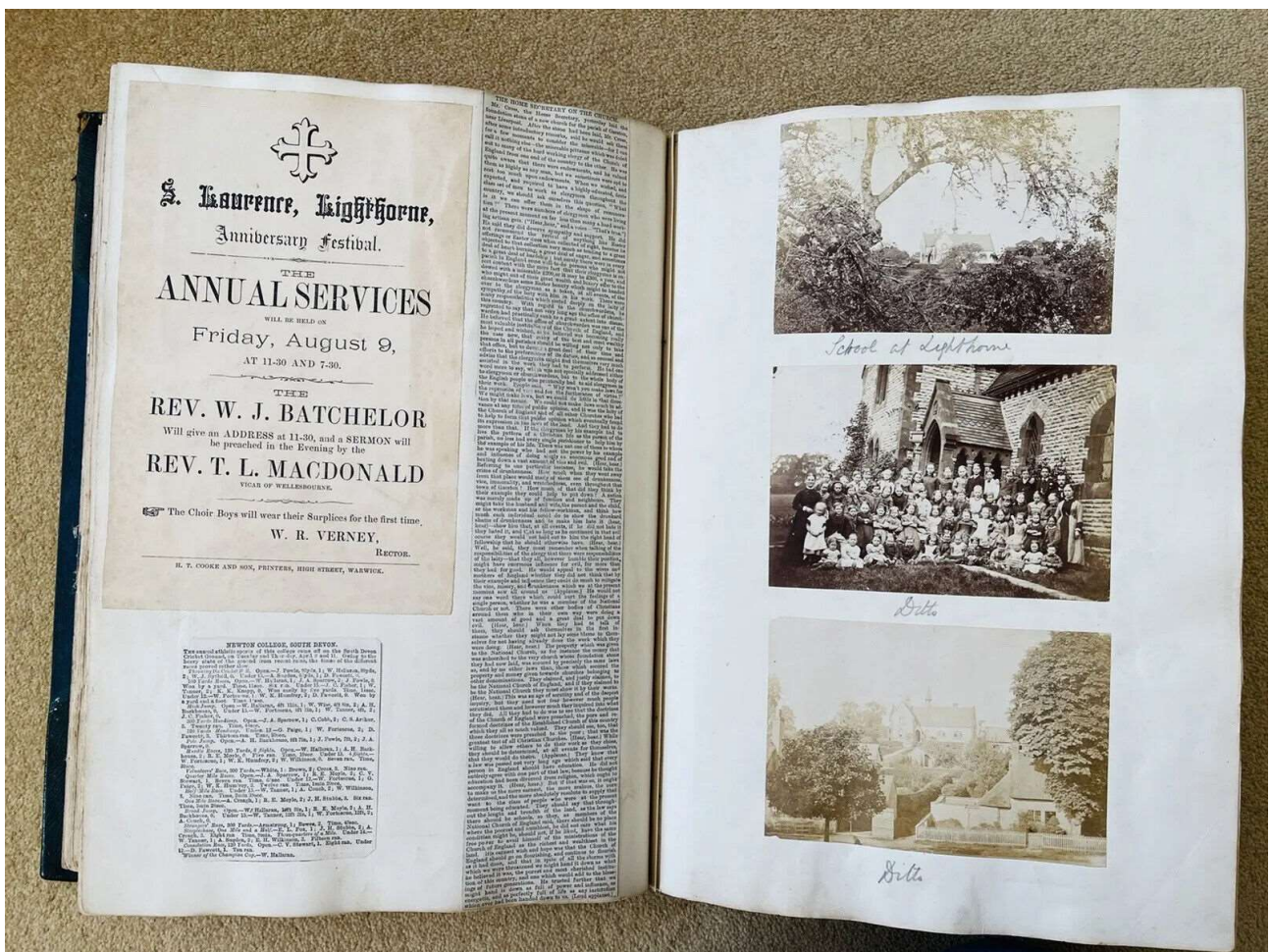


Entertainment in Lighthorne from the 1870s to the 1940s

by Colin Such (2023)

In February and March 2023 a number of lots were offered in an on-line auction, which contained details of public entertainments in Lighthorne from the 1870s to the 1920s. My main interest was the series of 5 scrapbooks assembled by Rev the Hon Walter Robert Verney, rector of Lighthorne and brother of Henry Verney, the 18th Baron Willoughby de Broke. He pasted into ledgers newspaper clippings, photos and paper ephemera concerning Lighthorne and the surrounding area and the Warwickshire Hunt, from 1873 until he died in 1912. One of the scrapbooks was continued after his death.



One of the earliest items is a programme of a concert held on 9 February 1874, in the Lighthorne School, newly constructed on The Bank in 1871-72, as a result of the passing of the Elementary Education Act of 1870. The proceeds of the concert were in aid of the restoration of St Laurence's Church, which happened in 1876. The Rev Verney gave a reading in the first part of the concert, which cost 2 shillings (2s) to attend if you required a chair, or 1 shilling (1s) for the first row of the benches, 6 pence (6d) for the second row and 1 penny (1d) for the back seats. Lady Willoughby de Broke sang 2 solos and Lord Willoughby offered the reading "The Vulgar Boy".

A CONCERT

WILL BE HELD IN THE
LIGHTHORNE SCHOOL
ON
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 9.

The Proceeds will be devoted to the
RESTORATION
OF THE
PARISH CHURCH.

PROGRAMME.

PART I.

- 1.—GLEE "See our Oars." THE CHOIR.
- 2.—DUETT "Piano and Violin." MR. AND MRS. HUNTER.
- 3.—SONG "Wait for the turn of the Tide" MR. GARRETT.
- 4.—SOLO PIANOFORTE "The Battle of Sedan." MISS HOBBO.
- 5.—READING REV. THE HON. W. R. VERNEY.
- 6.—SONG "When I was Young." LADY WILLOUGHBY-DE-BROKE.
- 7.—SONG "The Veil of Gray" REV. F. C. WILLIAMSON.
- 8.—SONG "Home, Sweet Home." MRS. WILLIAMSON. *etc.*
- 9.—SONG "The Red Iron Knight" Rev. H. Rev. Mrs. Gounstead & London

PART II.

- 1.—GLEE "Blue Bells." THE CHOIR.
 - 2.—SONG "What ails thee my son Robin" MR. AND MRS. HUNTER.
 - 3.—SOLO PIANOFORTE HON. ALICE VERNEY.
 - 4.—SONG "Savourneen Deelish." LADY WILLOUGHBY-DE-BROKE. *etc.*
 - 5.—READING "The Vagabond Boy" (by Mrs. Gounstead) Ed. W. de Broke
 - 6.—DUETT "Piano and Violin." MR. AND MRS. HUNTER.
 - 7.—SONG "Heart's of oak" Rev. H. Rev. Mrs. Gounstead
 - 8.—SONG "The Blue and seven" Mrs. GARRETT. *etc.*
 - 9.—GLEE "When Evening's Twilight." THE CHOIR.
- "GOD SAVE THE QUEEN!"

Doors open at 6-30 p.m.; to commence at 7.

CHAIRS, 2s.; BENCHES, 1st Rows, 1s.; 2nd Rows, 6d.;
BACK SEATS, 1d.

There will be another CONCERT on MONDAY, FEB. 16.

H. T. COOKE AND SON, PRINTERS, HIGH STREET, WARWICK.

It was always a great treat to hear the late Mrs. Verney's voice, she always sang with great taste & feeling.

A second copy of the programme for this concert is contained in the 1874 diary of Alice Jane Tritton¹ (née Verney) (1849 - 1882), sister of the Rev Walter Verney, who lived at Bascote, near Banbury and was buried at Lighthorne. She described the concert as "a great success". A second concert followed on 17 February 1874, again in the school.

¹ WCRO CR4694/25

CONCERT

IN
LIGHTHORNE SCHOOL,
FEBRUARY 17, 1874.

PROGRAMME.

PART I.

- 1.—DUETT, Pianoforte and Violin } MR. AND MISS LATTIMER.
Overture to "Lucia de Lammermoor." }
- 2.—GLEE - "Lilly Dale." - CHILDREN.
- 3.—SONG - "Men of Merry, Merry England." - MR. ANDOW.
- 4.—SONG - "Dream, Baby Dream." - LADY WILLOUGHBY DE BROKE.
- 5.—DUETT, Pianoforte "Diabelli" MISS TIBBITS AND MISS LATTIMER.
- 6.—READING "Rosabelle" (Sig W Scott) Rev. W R Verney
- 7.—SONG "The Maid of Llanweller" MR. HORTIN.
- 8.—SONG - "Robin Grey." - MRS. WILLIAMSON.
- 9.—SOLO Flute, with Accompaniment. MR. OVERBURY.
- 10.—Recitation - "The Soldier's Pardon" - Mr J. Hall
- 11.—SONG "When there's a will" MR. THOMAS HERBERT.
- 12.—GLEE - "See our Oars." - CHOIR.

PART II.

- 1.—DUETT, Pianoforte "March of the Men of Harlech."
LADY WILLOUGHBY DE BROKE AND HON. A. VERNEY.
- 2.—SONG Duett, Piano & Violin - Mr & Mrs
- 3.—SONG "Kathleen - Macconnell" MRS. WILLIAMSON.
- 4.—SONG "Ben Bolt" - MR. G. WALTON.
- 5.—READING LORD WILLOUGHBY DE BROKE.
- 6.—SONG "Near Woodstock town" LADY WILLOUGHBY DE BROKE.
- 7.—DUETT, Pianoforte and Violin } MR. AND MISS OVERBURY AND
MISS KIBLER.
- 8.—SONG "Far away" - Rev F. C. Williamson
- 9.—SONG "Pulling against the Tide." - MR. LATTIMER.
- 10.—SONG "The Vacant Chair" - G. Smith
- 11.—SONG "The Bells go a-ringing for Sara." - MR. HORTIN.
- 12.—GLEE "When evening's twilight gathers round." - CHOIR.
"GOD SAVE THE QUEEN."

The proceeds will be devoted to the Restoration of the Parish Church.

Doors open at 6-30, to commence at 7.

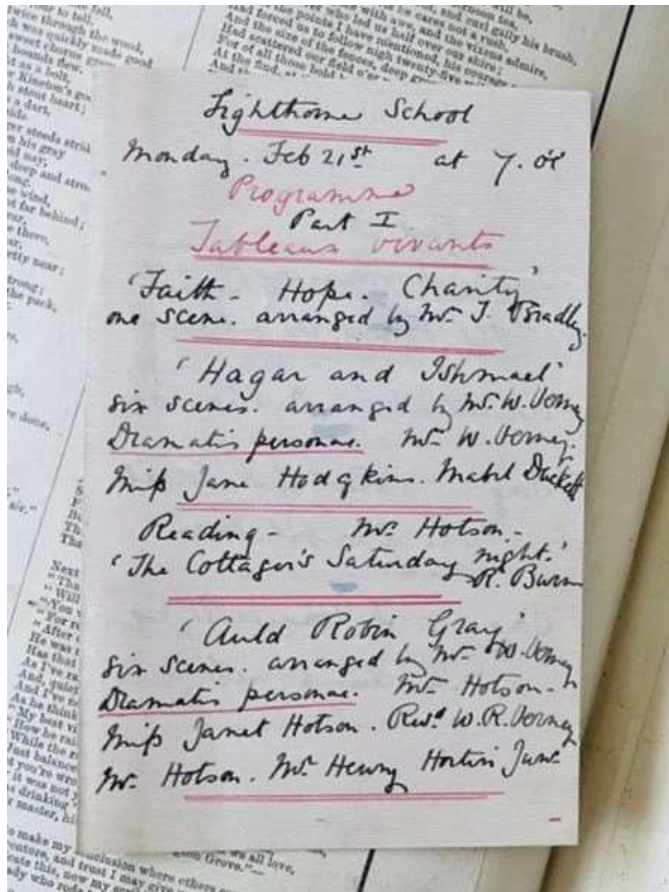
H. T. COOKE AND SON, PRINTERS, HIGH STREET, WARWICK.

Handwritten note at the bottom of the page: "Rosabelle" by Harpuna's song was performed of a p. The Maid of Llanweller -

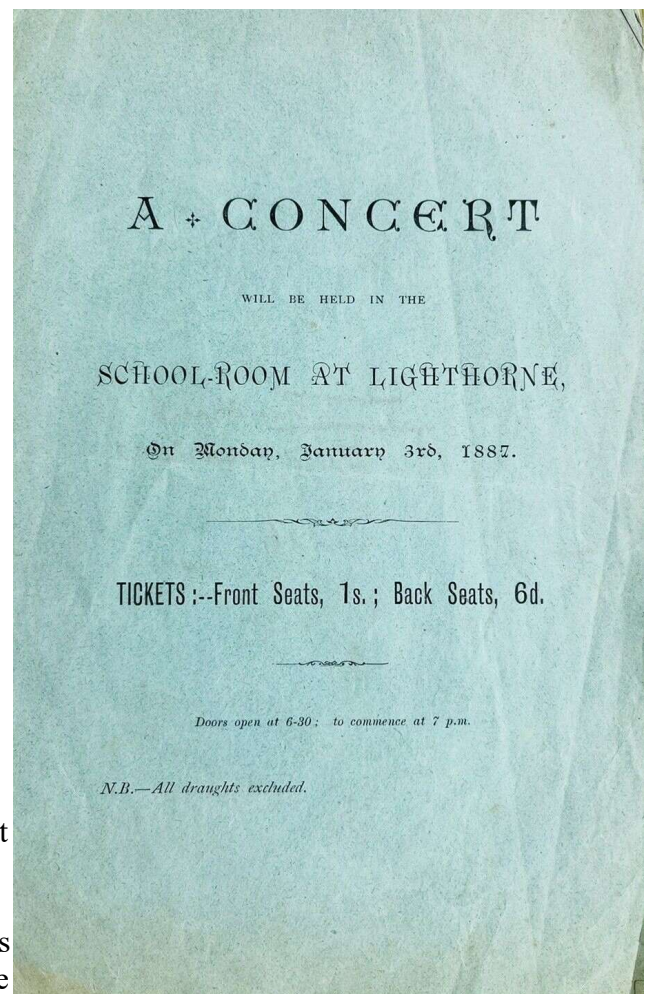
The Verneys were again significant contributors, as were Mr Lattimer, licensee of the Antelope and his daughter. The Rev Verney has written below the 2 programmes:

It was always a great treat to hear the late Lady Willoughby de Broke sing - though not possessed of a strong voice, she always sang with great taste & feeling - my favourite song was "The Maid of Coleraine" - WRV.

Further concerts in the school were held throughout the 1870s: one dated 13 February 1878 bears the enigmatic title "Lighthorne Parish Clock". Kelly's Directory of 1896 states that a clock was added to the school building in 1881, at a cost of £40, borne by subscription. So it is likely that the concert receipts went to the clock fund.



A programme, apparently in the hand of the Rev Verney, dated 21 February 1876 details an evening of "Tableaux Vivants".



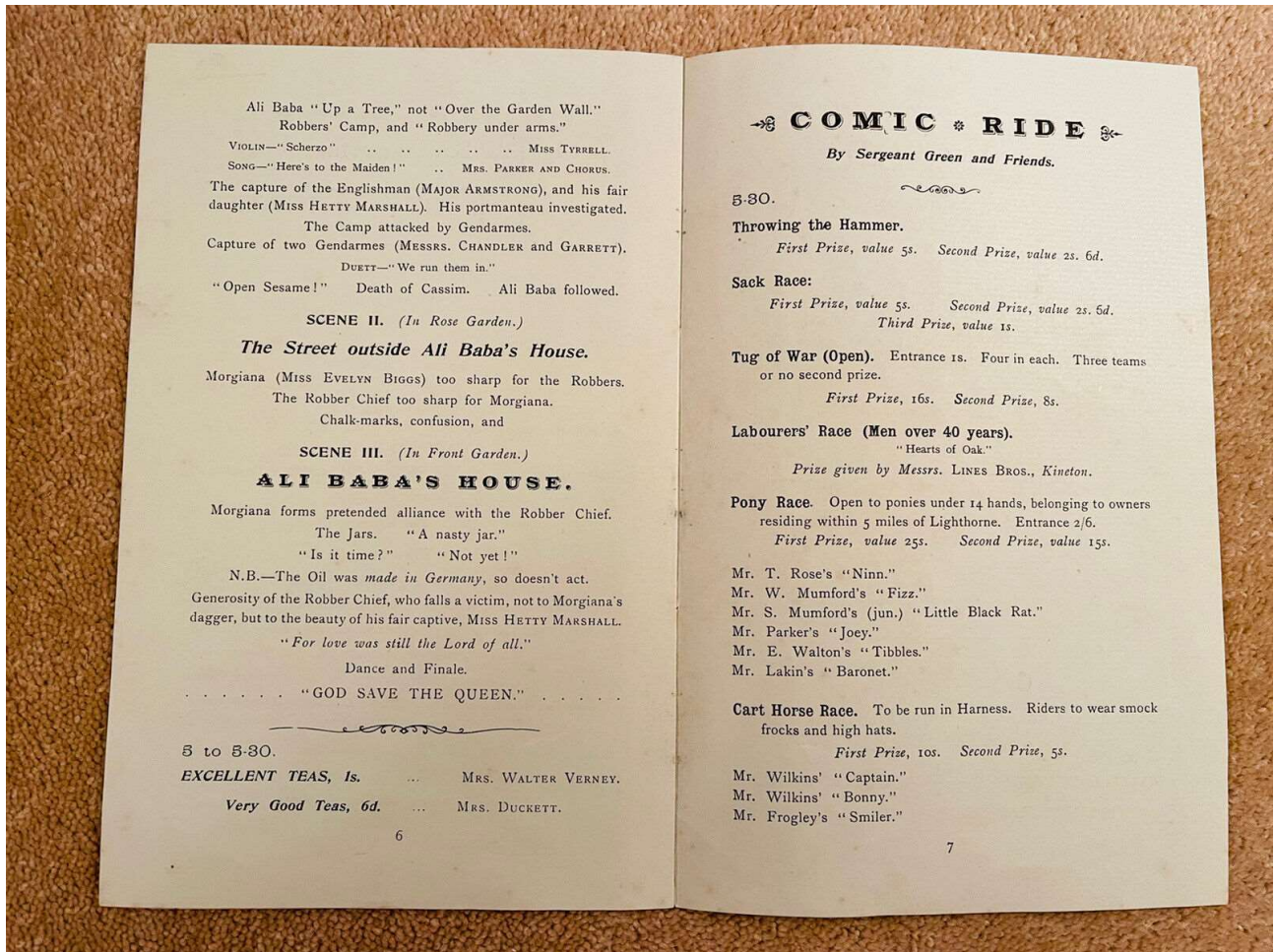
The Lighthorne History Society successfully bid for a programme from the Verney archive, which had not been stuck down in one of the scrapbooks. It was for a concert, again held in the school, on 3 January 1887, with front seats at 1 shilling (1s) and back seats at 6 pence (6d). There is a *nota bene* at the foot of the front cover *All draughts excluded!*²

A further item acquired from the Verney archive auction was the 8 page programme of the 1898 Lighthorne Flower Show and Village Festival, held on 4 August that year.³



The events started at 2 pm with a re-enactment of "John Gilpin's Ride", a comic ballad, written in 1782, by William Cowper, then at 2.30 pm the Flower Show was officially opened by *Mr Brayne's celebrated Leamington band*. This was followed by a cat show and a rabbit show, the latter with prizes of 5 shillings (5s) and 2 shillings and 6 pence (2s 6d). Athletic Sports from 3 pm consisted of 120 yards hurdles (with handicaps), 120 yards local boys and 100 yards flat race, with prizes totalling a generous £3 7s 6d.

The main attraction followed at 4 pm; "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves" with a cast in excess of 40, including singers and musicians. Tea was taken from 5 pm. One could indulge in an *excellent tea* provided by Mrs Walter Verney for 1 shilling, or a *very good tea* at 6 pence from Mrs Duckett!



A *Comic Ride* by Sergeant Green and friends was followed by throwing the hammer, a sack race, a tug-of-war, a labourers' race for men over 40, a pony race and a cart horse race, where riders were to wear smock frocks and high hats. Total prize money available was £4 15s, in addition to a prize for the labourers' race given by Messrs Lines Bros of Kineton. The only entrance fee payable was 2 shillings and 6 pence (2s 6d) for the pony race and 6 contestants are printed on the programme.

The evening concert programme was printed on the back cover, though a charge of 6 pence (6d) was made for attendance. Balloons and dancing brought a close to the proceedings at 10 pm, after a marathon event lasting 8 hours. *God save the Queen* (Queen Victoria).

In one of the Verney scrapbooks there is a clipping from an unidentified local newspaper, referring to the 1 August 1889 Flower Show and Village Festival. This was apparently the first arranged in Lighthorne, the previous local show having been held in Harbury five years earlier.

On Thursday a fête was organised at Lighthorne in aid of a fund which is being raised for the purchase of a new peal of bells for the Parish Church of St Lawrence (sic), and favoured with bright weather; arrangements complete in every detail, and the introduction of novelties of an unusually attractive character; the gathering was a thorough success and there was a large attendance of people from the surrounding villages, and from Warwick and Leamington. The fête took place upon Mill field, a charmingly elevated site in the rear of the church, from whence splendid views could be obtained of the country for miles around. At mid-day a procession, which created quite a sensation in the usually quiet village, started from Bishop's farm, and passed

through the village to the show ground. All the characters were in appropriate costumes, and the result was most effective and pleasing. The procession was led by a herald, after whom came the band of the 3rd and 4th Battalions Royal Warwickshire Militia; and then followed representatives of the Lighthorne Friendly Societies. Next was the "Trades' Waggon", and this conveyed a blacksmith, a bricklayer, a carpenter, and a shoemaker, all engaged at their employment. An allegorical picture of "Agriculture" was formed by a woodman, a hedger and a mower, with their implements; and following was a harvest waggon, laden with the golden grain, which was surmounted by the "Queen of Harvest Home", clad in white. "Diana and her nymphs" - the former represented by Mabel Duckett and the others by a number of children prettily dressed - were grouped on a decorated waggon, and were guarded by a knight (Sergeant Green) in armour. The progress of the procession was witnessed by a large number of people who lined the roadway. On the Mill field a flower, fruit and vegetable show was arranged in a large marquee.

On 17 July 1909 a village fête took place, to obtain funds towards a new church organ. The Warwick and Warwickshire Advertiser reported⁴ that there were stalls of new work, rummage and sweets and tea on the lawn. Clare Verney, daughter of the Rev Walter Verney, and her friends put on a pastoral play "Jack and the Beanstalk", with Jack played by Winnie Mordaunt and Clare playing Prince Paraquito de Popinjay. The Advertiser reported *A motor-car was lent by Mr Eccles*



Winnie Mordaunt as Jack

Lighthorne Pastoral Play,
JULY 17th, 1909,
"Jack and the Beanstalk."

Jack	MISS W. MORDAUNT.
The Ogre	MR. H. D. TEAGE.
Prince Paroquito de Popinjay ...	MISS C. VERNEY.
Barleycorn (a Countryman) ...	MR. R. B. VERNEY.
Lord Algy de Montmorency ...	MR. H. D. TEAGE.
Binks (a Chauffeur)	MR R B VERNEY
Sergeant Copwell	MR. J. CHANDLER.
P.C. Nailen	MR. J. T. GARRETT.

Grumps (The Ogre's Wife)	MISS C. MORDAUNT.
Barmaid	MISS E. TYRELL.
and	
Mrs. Brown (Jack's Mother) ...	MISS C. MORDAUNT.

Act I—Scene	Mrs. Brown's Garden.
Act II—Scene	The Ogre's Kitchen.
Act III—Scene	Mrs. Brown's Garden.



Winnie & Clara Mordaunt



Merry Wives of Windsor.

Seven hundred pounds and possibilities is good gifts.
Merry Wives of Windsor.

Sir Wilfred Lawson born, 1829.
French Republic proclaimed, 1870
Massacre at Cabal, 1873.

Nimble thought can jump both sea and land.

Sophaea.



Mr. Glenn & Miss Verney

Better three hours too soon than a minute too late.
Merry Wives of Windsor.

Bank Holiday
Battle of Hohenlinden, 1806
Marion Crawford born, 1854
William Watson born, 1858.

2. Henry VI.

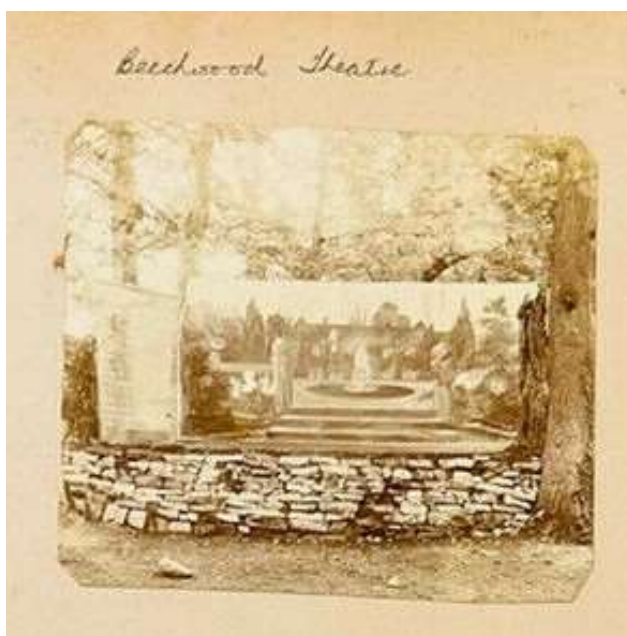
and a calf by Mr Glenn, while an aeroplane had been cleverly constructed by Mr R B Verney, who acted as stage manager. Coincidentally the following report in the newspaper was of the failed attempt of Herbert Latham to cross the English Channel by aeroplane. This fete took place on July 17th 1909 and Louis Blériot did not make his successful attempt until July 25th, 8 days later.

The pantomime which, according to the newspaper *had been very cleverly added to and adapted by the actors themselves* was staged in a beautiful natural theatre - a small plantation at the back of the rectory garden. The fête ended with dancing from 6 o'clock to 9 o'clock to the Bishops Itchington Band. £34 was raised for the organ fund.

In 1909 Capt. Bruce Bairnsfather starts to appear in the Verney scrapbooks. It was Bairnsfather who gained fame as the artist behind the "Old Bill" cartoons of World War I, which did so much for the morale of the troops fighting in the trenches. He moved to Bishopton, near Stratford-upon-Avon, with his parents in 1904 and became a good friend of Clare Verney.

In the scrapbooks is a type-written concert programme for 15 January 1910, in which Bruce Bairnsfather sang 3 comic songs and Clare Verney danced "Moonshine". The concert was in an outbuilding of Bishop's farmhouse and a contemporary newspaper clipping informs us that *the room was lighted by electricity, supplied by the Bishop's Farm installation by means of temporary overhead cables*. When the Compton Verney estate was sold in 1929-30 Bishop's Farm was the only house in Lighthorne described as having a supply of electricity.⁵ Magic lantern slides of the 1909 production of "Jack and the Beanstalk" were projected. The proceeds of the concert went to the organ fund for the church.

According to the press clippings in the scrapbooks, Bruce Bairnsfather was a skilled actor, set designer, director and writer, as well as artist, female impersonator, singer and comedian and it appears that he masterminded the dramatic productions in Lighthorne from 1910 until he re-enlisted with the army and was called up to the front. It is obvious that Bruce and Clare worked closely together and from 1910 the open-air theatre in the grounds of the rectory became known as the Beechwood Theatre. Below are photos of it from the scrapbooks.



5 LH125 September 10th 1929 James Styles & Whitlock auction catalogue of the Compton Verney Estate sale.

On 23 July 1910 there was a further village fête. According to the Leamington Spa Courier⁶ there were swings and roundabouts on the village green and in the rectory grounds rummage stalls and confectionery stalls. Entrance was 4d, but only 2d after 5 pm. The *pastoral pantomime* "Robin Hood", an original production by Clare Verney, Robert Verney, Cicely Mordaunt and Winifred Mordaunt (of Walton Hall) was staged at the Beechwood Theatre, as part of the fête. There were 2 performances; afternoon with seats at 2s 6d, 1s and 6d, and evening at 1s, 6d and 3d. Bruce Bairnsfather's painting of Clare as the title character formed the front cover of a very modern looking programme. Bruce played the dame, Aunt Jemima. The orchestra included Miss Louisa Tyrrell, who was an assistant schoolmistress, living in the school house with her parents, William and Louisa, who were the schoolmaster and schoolmistress.⁷ The Leamington Spa Courier described the production as a *clever mix of 20th century and 12th century life*. Among the novel features of the play were the introduction of the motor-car, Robin Hood and the Sherriff entering the stage on horses and the feats of archery. £36 was made for the organ fund, leaving £45 still owing on the debt.



6 Leamington Spa Courier 29 July 1910

7 1911 Lighthorne census

BEECHWOOD THEATRE, LIGHTHORNE,
SATURDAY, JULY 23rd, 1910.

The Original Pantomime

“ROBIN HOOD.”

Robin Hood	...	...	Miss Clare Verney
Lord Archibald Rottingham Footle...	...	...	Miss Winifred Mordaunt
Jemima (his Aunt)	...	...	Mr. Bruce Bairnsfather
Professor Aloysius Schwanderbosch	...	...	Mr. R. B. Verney
Allan-a-Dale	...	...	Mr. Barnard Hargreave
Friar Tuck	...	...	Mr. Fred Green
Little John	...	...	Mr. Joseph Chandler
Will Scarlet	...	...	Miss Helen Hargreave
Much the Miller	...	...	Mr. J. T. Garret
The Sheriff	...	...	Mr. M. Green
Maid Marian	...	...	Miss Cicely Mordaunt

I.—PROLOGUE.
Scene ... The Terrace, Footle Chase

II.—ROBIN HOOD.
Scene ... Sherwood Forest

III.—EPILOGUE.
Scene ... The Terrace, Footle Chase

Intervals:—Between I. and II., three minutes.
“ II. and III., “ “

Costumes by Mdles. Price, Hild and Freeman.
Wigs by Clarkson.
Stage constructed by Mr. R. H. Verney.
Scenery painted by Mr. B. Bairnsfather and Miss W. Mordaunt.

ORCHESTRA:—
Miss Tyrrell, Miss Thomson,
Mr. G. W. Webb, Mr. F. M. Green.

Bruce became a regular visitor to Lighthorne arriving by bicycle. The scrapbooks contain the score card of a cricket match played on 3 September 1910, between Lord Rottingham Footle and Robin Hood, characters from the pantomime.

"Jack and the Beanstalk" was reprised as the 1911 pantomime, which took place in the Beechwood Theatre on 9 September. There appear to have been many changes, no doubt influenced by Bruce. The cast included Bruce as Jack's mother and Clare reprised her part as Prince Paraquito de Popinjay. Major Bairnsfather, Bruce's father, played in the orchestra.

The pantomime was performed twice, after a fête in the grounds of the rectory, by permission of the rector, Rev A H Watson. The proceeds were for the newly installed organ and a contribution to the charity Birmingham Aid, a charity founded by Rev W R Verney to provide *boarding out for delicate children*.

Lord Rottingham Footle v Robin Hood
Lighthorne Sept 3rd 1910
Rottingham-Footle won by 11 runs

Rottingham-Footle		2 nd Innings	
1 st Innings			
B. Bairnsfather, c. H. Hargreave	1	not out	28
C. Williams, c. B. Hargreave	0	c. H. Hargreave	2
W. Mordaunt, run out	2	c. B. Hargreave & R. H. V.	0
R. B. Verney (23 rd 22 nd) c. H. Hargreave	10	c. H. Hargreave	2
M. Dodd, c. R. H. Verney	16	c. R. H. Verney	18
N. Dawson, c. B. Hargreave	3	c. H. Hargreave	5
A. Parker, c. R. H. Verney	1	c. H. Hargreave	0
V. Bird, not out	0	hit wkt c. B. Hargreave	0
May Dodd, c. H. Hargreave	0	c. R. H. Verney & H. Hargreave	1
Wides	5	Wides	4
	38		60

*Lighthorne Sept. 3rd 1910
Bruce & Hargreave 1910*

*Miss Tyrrell
Miss Thomson
Mr. G. W. Webb
Mr. F. M. Green*

The newspaper clippings were not complimentary about the script of the pantomime, the Leamington Spa Courier of 9 September 1911 complaining

...was not the repeated introduction of political matter a mistake? Surely we have earned a rest from the subject. For once in a way it was quite harmless but when talk about the "last ditch" and the gallant "five hundred" is dragged up again and again, like old weapons from the arsenal, it begins to get irritating, not to say dull. In short, the political trumpet was blown too often.

Beechwood Theatre, Lighthorne,

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 9th, 1911.

"JACK AND THE BEANSTALK." 1.

Jack	Miss WINIFRED MORDAUNT.
Mrs. Brown (his Mother)	Mr. BRUCE BAIRNSFATHER.
The Ogre	Mr. BARNARD HARGREAVE.
Prince Paroquito de Popinjay	Miss CLARE VERNEY.
Lord Algy de Montmorency	Cadet HUMPHREY BRAND, R.N.
Barleycorn (landlord of the "Antelope")	Mr. ROBERT VERNEY.
Binks (a Chauffeur)	Mr. R. H. VERNEY.
Sergeant Copwell	Mr. JOSEPH CHANDLER.
P.C. Nailen	Mr. J. T. GARRETT.
Adomar le Vaillant (Popinjay's 'Squire)	Miss RUTH OLDMEADOW.
Grumps (the Ogre's servant)	Miss HELEN HARGREAVE.
Princess Rosabella (Popinjay's sister)	Miss PHOEBE BRAND.

ACT I.—SCENE—A VILLAGE GREEN.
ACT II.—SCENE—THE OGRE'S KITCHEN.
ACT III.—SCENE—A VILLAGE GREEN.


INTERVALS:—Between I and II, five minutes, and II and III five minutes.

Scenery by Mr. BRUCE BAIRNSFATHER and Mr. BARNARD HARGREAVE.

Orchestra:

Miss TYRELL. Major BAIRNSFATHER. Miss HELEN HARGREAVE.
Mr. FRED GREEN.



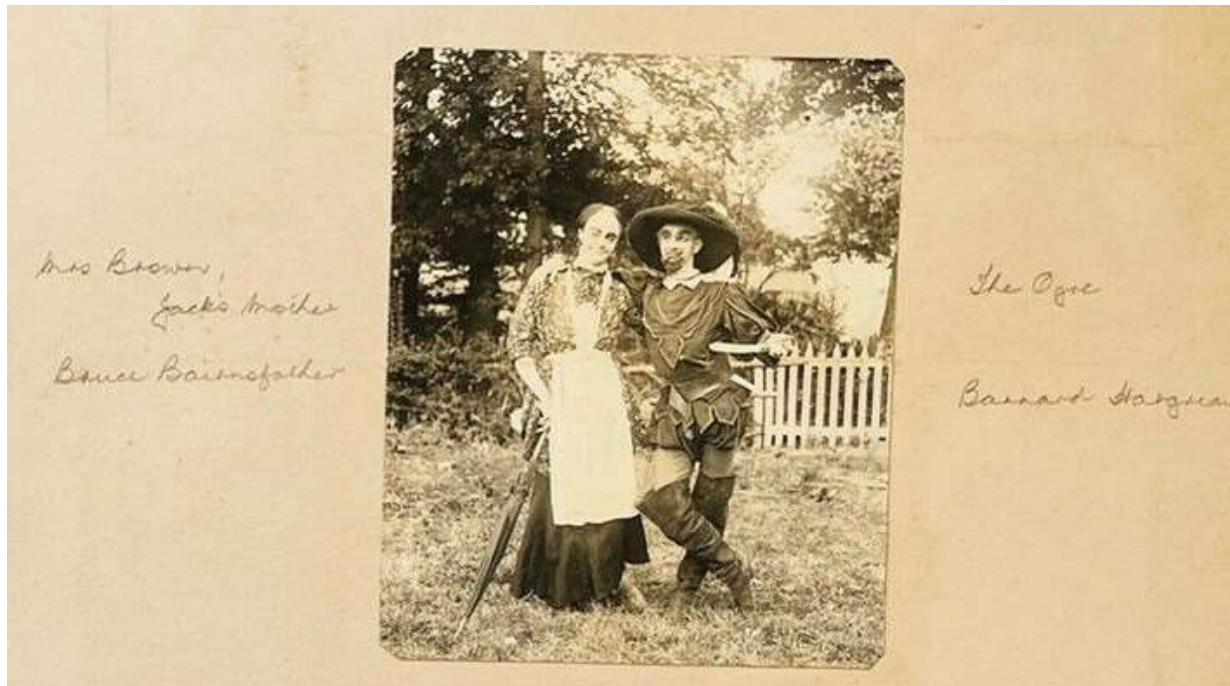


1. Prince Paroquito de Popinjay & Princess
2. Squire
3. The Princess de Popinjay

1. Clare Verney
Phoebe Brand
2. Ruth Oldmeadow
3. Phoebe Brand

However the critique was favourable for the performers *Mr Bairnsfather is undoubtedly a comedian of great ability, and he was as supremely humorous on this occasion as a year ago in "Robin Hood". Several new songs were assigned to him, and these he sang in his usual inimitable style.... Mr Barnard Hargreave's Ogre was another fine creation. Although his appearance was*

startling enough, the actor is possessed of a powerful baritone voice, which he used with most blood-curling effect.



Lighthorne Boy Scouts gave 2 concerts in the school, in May 1912 and May 1913, to raise funds for camping and swimming (1912) and the Birmingham Rally and summer camp (1913). Clare Verney was the ASM and her brother, Reynell H Verney was the ASC. The 1912 concert included 2 plays, comic songs, a magic lantern show and a ju-jitsu demonstration and the 1913 production included scenes from "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and "Cymbeline" and comic songs by Bruce Bairnsfather. Bobby Verney had erected a theatre in the school, equipped with electric light.⁸ This was despite the fact that he had lost his right hand in an accident in 1911. (See letter in LH271.)



Bruce Bairnsfather, Clare Verney and several of the other actors from the cast of the Lighthorne pantomimes staged their January 1912 production in the Theatre Royal, Leamington Spa. The play was "The Forty Thieves" and, according to the scrapbook, it was written by Paul Pym who played a part in the production. Both Bruce and his brother, Duncan, took part, as did Clare Verney and Winifred Mordaunt, the youngest daughter of the late baronet Sir Charles Mordaunt of Walton Hall.

The 1913 pantomime produced by Clare Verney and Bruce Bairnsfather was "Robinson Crusoe" and it was staged in the hall at Compton Verney, the home of Clare's cousin, Greville Verney, the 19th Lord Willoughby de Broke, who was keen on the theatre. Lord Willoughby actually appeared in the production, dressed in his peer's robes, as a censor who vetos bad plays.⁹ The Rugby Advertiser of 18 January 1913 stated *The hall made a capital theatre and was capable of seating about 250 persons. It was filled at all performances.* The proceeds were divided between the Birmingham Aid Scheme and Kineton Nursing Home. Robinson Crusoe was played by Winnie Mordaunt and Bruce Bairnsfather played Mrs Crusoe, Robinson's mother. Bruce's brother, Duncan, took the part of Man Friday.



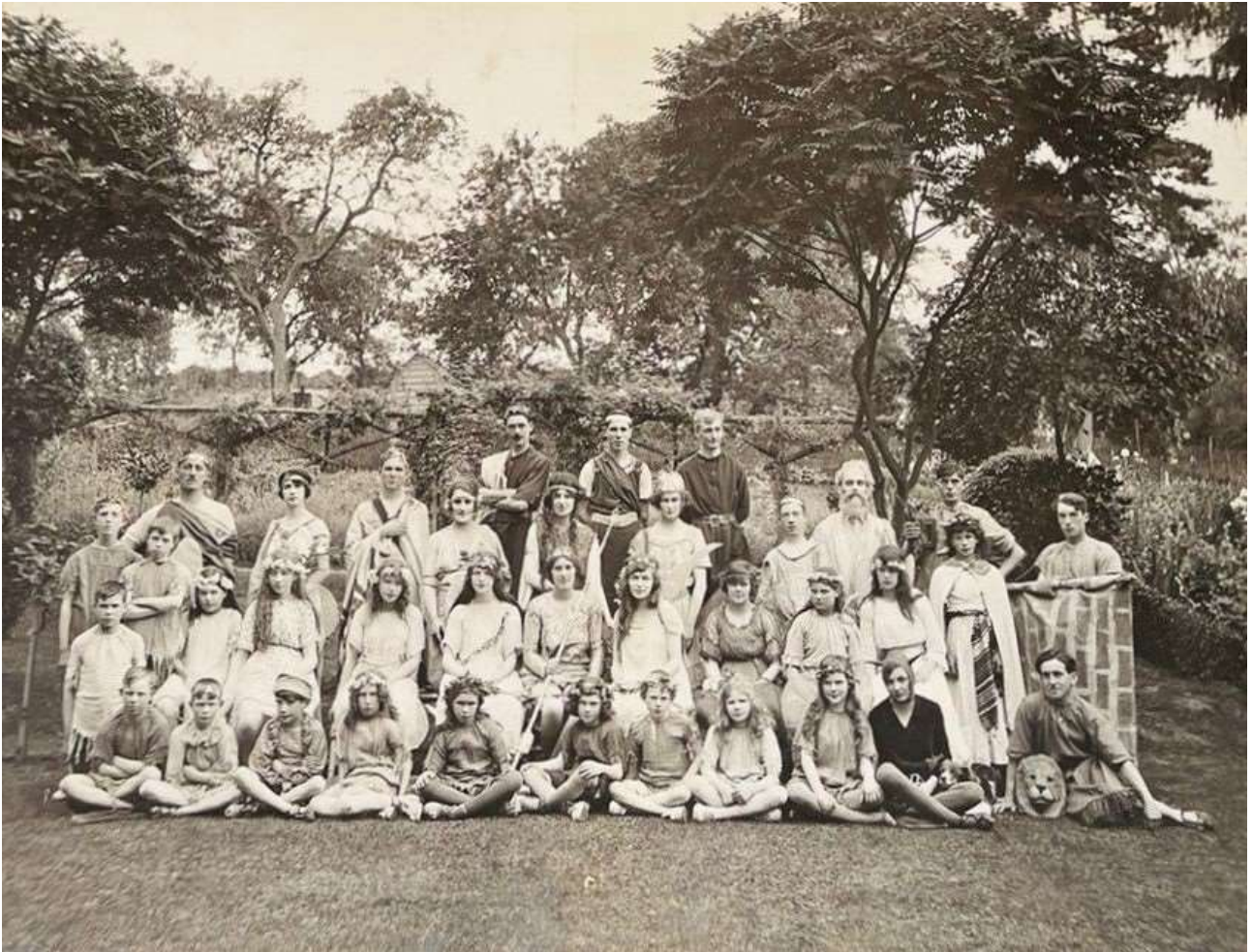
Unfortunately the outbreak of war with Germany signalled the end of Bruce Bairnsfather's involvement with drama and entertainment with his Lighthorne friends. On 12 September 1914 he was commissioned into the 3rd Battalion of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment and went to fight in the trenches of the Western Front. Clare Verney's scrapbook, auctioned in 2014, contained several letters from him, enclosing sketches, doodles and cartoons, from which the character "Old Bill" emerged. Clare encouraged him to submit his work for publication, which he did. Within a few years Bruce became an international celebrity. For further details about Bruce Bairnsfather, see this article [LH186\(E\)](#) Captain Bruce Bairnsfather and his association with the Lighthorne Drama Group.

Dramatic productions continued at the Beechwood Theatre in Lighthorne, despite the departure of Bruce Bairnsfather, with Clare Verney still the driving force. In July 1914 "A Midsummer Night's Dream" was staged, with an extensive cast clad in imaginative costumes. Clare's father had died in October 1912, but one of the scrapbooks continues with photographs of the production. Three performances were staged in aid of the Gaydon and Lighthorne Boy Scouts. The Leamington Spa Courier of 31 July 1914 gave a good description of the Beechwood Theatre.

Beechwood Theatre has been erected in a tiny wood at the rear of the rectory garden. Over the path the drop curtain was placed and when this is raised an exquisite background of trees and bushes is to be seen. These formed an appropriate setting for the woodland scenes in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and it was only in the garden scenes that artificial means had to be applied to any considerable degree.

The report continues ... *the prompter had nothing to do and the actors took their cues always at the right time. This is a somewhat rare occurrence with amateur theatricals and it added greatly to the enjoyment of the audience.*

⁹ Compton Verney, A History of the House and its Owners, ed. Robert Bearman (2000), p. 167



The cast included Clare Verney as Theseus, Duke of Athens (seated in the centre, holding a spear), R B "Bobby" Verney (back row on the right) as Bottom (also the stage manager) and the Hon John Verney (standing near the right, with a large beard), as Flute. Anne Godfrey was Titania and Major T H Bairnsfather, the father of Bruce, directed the orchestra.



Bobby Verney, Clare Verney and John Verney

Bobby Verney as Bottom and Anne Godfrey as Titania



This photo is from the archive of the History Society (LH254). It is clearly the cast of "A Midsummer Night's Dream", probably photographed in the rectory garden. The caption states that Thomas Warren is playing Peasblossom. This indicates that it was a photo of the 1913 Boy Scouts' production. Mr H.G.Hanbury was playing Bottom. (Ref. Leamington Courier 2 May 1913)

Lighthorne residents clearly enjoyed the "Dream", as the classic Shakespeare play was repeated in the Beechwood Theatre, in July 1920, as this clip of an advert from the pages of the Leamington Spa Courier of 23 July 1920 clearly shows. The review in the same paper, dated 6 August states that the Friday performance was in the Malthouse and that Mr Hutton lent the portable dynamo and electric fittings. Major T H Bairnsfather was again the musical director.

in
6d.

LIGHTHORNE BEECHWOOD THEATRE.
FRIDAY, JULY 30th, at 8-30 p.m.
SATURDAY, JULY 31st, at 3 and 8-30 p.m.

"A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM."
FULL COMPANY OF 40 PERFORMERS.
ELECTRIC LIGHTING AND EFFECTS.

Admission: 3s., 2s., 1s. Children under 14 Half-price.
 Reserved Seats at 3s. and 2s. can be obtained from Miss C. Verney, Lighthorne.
 Proceeds in aid of Lighthorne Church Expenses.

Yc
IN

There is a report of a village fête in the Leamington Spa Courier of 3 July 1925, held in the garden of the Hon Mrs W R Verney, at Bishop's Farm house. By that time the fête had become an annual event. There were stalls, pig bowling, cake weight guessing, cockerel weight guessing, clock golf, a balloon race, a wireless concert on the lawn and, in the evening, an entertainment in the Malt House Theatre (now Malthouse Cottages). "Lighthorne Amateurs" presented two short plays, *Michael*, Tolstoy's story of a Russian peasant and *The Boatswain's Mate*, a short comedy. Clare Verney took the lead role in *Michael*, who, at the end of the mystery play, reveals himself to be an angel. (See photo, right.)



The Warwick Advertiser of 3 July 1926 reported that the Lighthorne Women's Institute organised the 1926 fête, in the grounds of the rectory, with a baby show, bowling for a leg of mutton, treasure hunt, weight of cake, best plain cake, best fruit cake, stalls and dancing on the lawn to a jazz band. The forest scene from *As You Like It* was performed by the Lighthorne Amateurs in the Beechwood Theatre, with Clare Verney playing Rosalind. The rector, the Rev A H Watson, appropriately took the role of Sir Oliver Mortext, a vicar. Bobby Verney was Touchstone and the paper stated *a bevy of pretty girls took the parts of peasants and attendants: Constance Carpenter, Marion Hall, May Hunt, Rose and Florence Jones, Hilda Cole, Mabel Duckett, Joyce Holtom, Grace Fennell and Brenda Cole.*

A village fête along similar lines also took place in July 1927 and the forest scene in *As You Like It* was re-peated. The report in the Leamington Courier of 8 July 1927 was quite poetical in its praise of the Beechwood Theatre. *Never have we seen Shakespeare's beautiful comedy presented in more ideal surroundings. A charming grove of beeches formed a natural theatre, and the effects obtained by the sunlight striking through the trees and the singing of the birds were most enchanting.*



1926 May Day maypole dancing on the village green, with Bishop's Farmhouse in the background. Photo: Helen Jones

Lighthorne Amateurs continued to stage theatrical performances in Lighthorne, thanks to the organisational skills of the Verney family. In July 1934 they staged 5 scenes from Shakespeare's *Henry V*, with the assistance of the Stratford-upon-Avon Amateur Dramatic Society and the Leamington Spa Dramatic Study Club. The venue was the garden of Mrs W R Verney, Bishop's Farmhouse and funds were raised for the benefit of the Lighthorne Church Electric Lighting Fund. The Warwick Advertiser of 7 July 1934 reported *As King Henry V, Ralph Barnard gave a magnificent performance; his bearing and expression were superb. His speech before Agincourt carried strength and conviction.* Some of the costumes were borrowed from the Shakespeare Theatre at Stratford. These photos, taken by the Leamington Spa Courier, from the History Society archive (LH254), are thought to be of the cast. They were taken in the garden of Bishop's Farmhouse.



By 1939 the Malt House was being used as an entertainment venue. On 20 January 1939 a fancy dress competition and dance was organised in the Malt House, with electric lighting in the capable hands of Bobby Verney again. The Warwick Advertiser of 28 January reported that over 100 adults and children attended and that the judging was conducted by Mr and Mrs Whittington Wicks, who awarded the children's first prize to Cyril Adams, dressed as a Dutch boy. Winner of the adult prize was Mr Gerald Draycott, dressed as a barrister-at-law.

During and after World War II produce shows took place in the Malt House and the Warwick Advertiser of 9 August 1946 reported on the Lighthorne and Chesterton Flower and Produce Show, opened in the Malt House by Mrs R B Verney, with Clare Verney acting as secretary. There were competitions at Bishop's Farmhouse and the day concluded with a dance. Part of the proceeds went to the Lighthorne Village Hall fund, which was finally built in 1960, replacing the Malt House as the venue of choice for further village functions.

Entertainment has continually been a feature of village life in Lighthorne, from the 1870s to modern times, with concerts, theatrical performances, pantomimes, produce shows and dances. These would not have materialised had it not been for the input of the Verney family and in particular, the input of Clare Verney. Although my study of the evidence has finished in the 1940s, I do know that Clare Verney continued for many years more to produce pageants and other entertainments for the village. She died in 1976 and she and her family are commemorated in a stained glass window, on the north wall of St Laurence's Church.