



**Flashback** Murder Deferred from the Ayr Fort Players in 1987



**Top cast** Committee members celebrate the 70th anniversary

**Stuart Wilson**

**From humble beginnings in a school classroom to the bright lights of the stage, they have become a theatrical staple.**

And this year, more than most, the Ayr Fort Players are preparing for a well-deserved spotlight to shine on their stars.

It was 70 years ago in Room 12 of Ayr Academy that a group of drama enthusiasts were studying one-play acts.

Since then, via the Town Hall, Civic and Gaiety Theatres, the Players have wowed audiences throughout the decades.

And now they are returning home on this, their 70th anniversary year.

And as they prepare to stage their latest production, the cast are ready to put on one of their biggest and best shows yet.

President Stuart McKinlay said: "Back in those early days, the group were met with all manner of challenges.

"That ranged from the bare platform with no lighting or proscenium, to the lack of changing facilities that meant casts had to change in the big room at the back with hampers and sheets as a divide."

The Players soon found a new home at Scotland's first Civic Theatre, after the Burgh Council had been convinced to buy and convert the Robertson Memorial Church.

# Still holding the Fort **70** years on

## Theatre group returns "home" to celebrate milestone

But the destruction of that venue in later years would lead the Players to produce their shows in Belmont Academy, both old and new.

And in recent years, they have called the Gaiety Theatre home. But with the old lady undergoing a refit this year, it is now time for the Fort Players to return to their spiritual home.

Stuart admitted: "It is quite fitting that in our 70th anniversary year we are returning to our original venue of Ayr Town Hall and all of the challenges that it presents to any dramatic company.

"We have achieved many

notable successes, including the first amateur production of Tony Roper's 'The Steamie', which played to packed houses during the 1997 Ayr Festival.

"To celebrate the Homecoming year in 2009, we staged Rikki Fulton's Scots adaptation of a Moliere comedy, 'A Wee Touch O' Class'.

"Most recently, we have performed 'Calendar Girls', 'Noises Off', 'No Sex Please, We're British!' and, in October 2015, 'The 39 Steps'.

"Over the years the style of play has changed and the size of cast has fluctuated, but we remain a club that stages plays for

sheer enjoyment with the aim of entertaining the audiences of Ayr and beyond, and over the years we have been able to donate over £50,000 to Cancer Research UK."

To mark their big birthday, the Players held an anniversary bash at Ayr's Savoy Hotel, with members past and present in attendance.

●The Fort Players are on stage next Wednesday and Thursday, April 20 and 21, at the Town Hall with their production of "Stepping Out".

Tickets are priced £14 (£12 concessions) and can be bought from the Gaiety Box office on 01292 288235.



**Memories** The Last of the Red Hot Lovers, featuring late Fort Players President Dennis Johnston

**“ It's quite fitting that we're going back to Town Hall**