

AYR FORT PLAYERS

HISTORY OF AYR FORT PLAYERS

Ayr Fort Players was born in Room 12 of Ayr Academy. A group of drama enthusiasts had been meeting under the guidance of the late Marie Barton of the Scottish Community Drama Association and studying One Act Plays. They enjoyed the shared enthusiasm so much that they decided to form a Club - calling themselves Ayr Fort Players because of the proximity to the old Fort. In the early years programmes of One Act Plays were produced in the Memorial Hall Ayr Academy and at S.C.D.A. Festivals. Then in January, 1948 their first ever full length play was staged in the Ayr Town Hall. The difficulties of presenting plays on that barren platform were colossal and early members will remember with a certain amount of pride the pioneer spirit, that kept the determination to beat the difficulties, alive. With dexion frame fit-ups and hired lighting equipment the flag was kept flying till at length the efforts of Andrew Milroy and the late Tommy Dalling and a committee called the Arts Theatre Society paid off when they persuaded the Burgh Council of the day that a small Civic Theatre was a must for the town of Ayr and that the former Robertson Memorial Church was the ideal venue. Thus Scotland's first ever Civic Theatre was opened in 1951 and the Fort Players went from strength to strength playing in a delightful little theatre just the right size for comfort and financially viable playing a variety of popular plays, ranging from comedy, romance, thrillers, drama, over 100 in total to date. Of course in keeping with any other like groups they have had their share of difficulties, suitable club-rooms the largest of these, the loss of hard working members, the difficulty of finding suitable plays etc. During one of these low periods around 1962 the Fort Players were to receive an injection of new purpose which was to bring a fresh initiative and determination to be successful. This was the support of the Cancer Research Campaign. In the early days it was known as the Robert Murphy Research Section - British Empire Cancer Campaign and the first donations sent bought a machine. Now our donations go to the Ayr Branch of the Cancer Research Campaign where we are their largest single donor. Over the years we have to date donated £15,000 to this worthy cause. There is no doubt whatsoever that our link with this particular campaign does increase our patronage and support from the public.

Apart from the satisfaction of helping a good cause, members look back on memories of a shared comradeship in a recreation that bears excitement and humour like no other. No-one will forget the touring shows they have taken part in, the butterflies on an opening night in the theatre, the applause, the laughter, the breathless hushes, yes and the odd remark cast up from the audience. No-one denies its hard work - dedication and often disappointment, but oh, the rewards are legion in terms of achievement and satisfaction and purpose. On this, our **40th Anniversary**, may the Fort flag continue flying with determination and hope till the next milestone on the way.

Anne Milroy, President 1986.