

Stantonbury Campus Drama Group: 'All Change', a local documentary play.

Starting now, we are giving ourselves a whole year in which to create an original musical documentary play about the life and history of our local community.

Preliminary discussions have been lively and fruitful. Our experience of making 'The Burston School Strike' this year has been thoroughly examined. We feel that 'Burston' was rushed and suffered from a lack of funds but it was a fine story and we had the advantage of Bert Edwards' book, which provided us with much of our material. For 'All Change', however, we shall have to do our own research and find a human story in the vast collection of heterogeneous factual material that exists in libraries, museums, archives, record offices, attics and memories.

We have chosen to impose on ourselves this challenge for several reasons. To begin with, our drama group is a community drama group, working in a community theatre. We want the people of Wolverton, New Bradwell, and the villages around to know that we are serious about our sense of belonging to the district we live in. We also want to do our part in developing an awareness of local roots in the newcomers who will soon outnumber former residents. Secondly, our drama group includes the children who are educated on Stantonbury Campus, and the theatre that we use in the evenings for our theatre workshops and rehearsals is their learning workshop during the school day. The educational application of a project which brings children, as well as adults, into exciting contact with historical and contemporary documentary material while engaged in the job of dramatising it, is easy to see. Thirdly, we have already experienced, with 'Burston', the pleasure and satisfaction that there is to be derived from assuming, collectively, the function of a writer, from shaping material drawn from documentary research and from producing a lively and popular show.

Having a deadline of one year from now imposes on us the pressure to spur us into action yet allows us enough time to do the job well. We welcome MKDC's interest in sponsoring our efforts above all for the discipline it imposes on us. We are used to the creative disciplines imposed by our art form, but to merit financial support, we must achieve new levels of organisational efficiency. Happily, while such high standards would be a prerequisite of our being in receipt of a generous grant, such a grant would also be the means to achieve them.

Our title, 'All Change', suggests both the railway connection in our local community and the impact of our new city on its original inhabitants. In the excitement of our early discussions, we were struck by the fact that, once before, this area was subjected to radical change by a decision to build a new town. The new railway age required the new town of Wolverton to be built and the pre-existing local communities had to adjust to that fact. In time, of course, the new town absorbed the people, and new social and community patterns developed. Here we are, now, in the mid 1970's, in the throes of a second community

explosion. Could our group, we wondered, by an honest and imaginative exploration of the facts of the first great change, help people to find meaning in their experience of the present day one? Much would depend on the quality of our research.

Whereas the popular and attractive local history by Sir Frank Markham does focus our attention on local incidents and personalities from the past, it does not try to see events from the perspective of those experiencing them. We learn little about the relationships between landowners and railway entrepreneurs: about where the Wolverton workers came from: about the injustices that led to the social unrest in the early 1900's: about why Bletchley was less militant than Wolverton: about the formation and character of the Working Men's Clubs. Many other issues remain as questions when we close the second volume of Sir Frank's eminently readable history. The two books provide excellent source material for a theatrical pageant, but they are inadequate for our purposes. We badly need a good researcher who has the means to spend days on end talking to local people, reading books, studying old photographs, documents, newspapers, delving into the archives which were transferred to York from the Wolverton Works, searching the County Records Offices in Aylesbury and Northampton, and generally bringing documentary grist to our theatrical mill. At the same time, within the limitations imposed by all our other responsibilities, our whole company will be collecting material and the Stantonbury children will be basing some of their curriculum studies on the same area of research, making their contributions too. This phase of preliminary research is planned to last the whole winter.

The second phase, the experimental stage, occupies next Spring. By then, the fruits of our researches will have been noted, catalogued, photographed, duplicated and, in the case of interviews, taped, summarised, or entirely transcribed, all ready to be subjected to our search for subject matter and shape. This is an interactive group function, which guarantees that we shall preserve the contradiction of viewpoint inherent in every historical event. Soon, we shall have evolved a running list which details the subject of each scene and song and the order in which it will appear in the show. To each section will be attached the relevant primary source material. At this stage, our researcher takes on the function of production secretary and is responsible for delivering the research material in forms suitable for us to work from. Through improvisation and experiment, a shape is forged, a line develops, speeches are apportioned, stage business is settled and the result is a draft script.

It seems certain that in this second phase on our work, we would benefit much from extra resources that would cost money. We shall be busy putting our material, our ideas and our interpretations to the test. We shall be giving the flesh and blood dimension to material that exists in flat print. We shall all the time be trying to see behind the scenes, to search out the truth of a situation. Our constant question will be: does this convincingly represent a recognisable

reality? We shall want to invite in people with particular first-hand knowledge of the railways, of Trades Unions, historians and people who remember the old crafts. Furthermore, while we feel strongly that the availability of money should never be permitted to pre-empt our own creative potential, we are, at the same time, anxious to improve our skills and our understandings. There are people like Ewan McColl, Peter Cheeseman, Charles Parker, Peter Terson, Jocelyn Herbert, who might, for a fee, inject some of their expertise in music, design, writing and direction for our long-term benefit as a Community Drama Group and for the immediate sake of a better play and performance. As a group, we have our own capacities and special skills to exploit but it would be an exciting prospect to have the financial means to add to them. Music, for example, can provide an emotional momentum to a theatrical situation which is composed of factual material. We may need help in finding folk songs of our period, songs with an appropriate narrative function, new songs set to folk tunes or composed in that same musical idiom. We can ourselves do much in this line; but Ewan McColl could teach us a thing or two.

In the early summer months, we shall begin on our first rehearsal schedule using our draft script. Our business at this time will be to perfect the theatrical means by which we shall communicate our story to an audience. Set, props, costume, acting, use of sound, use of light, and musical decisions will now be made and integrated within the production. Concurrent with our work on 'All Change' at this time will be our revival of 'The Burston School Strike' which will go on tour to Norfolk and to London in July. It would therefore be realistic to call August a month of complete rest for the whole company before the second and final rehearsal schedule begins in September. We see this as lasting ten weeks and culminating in performances in various auditoria in Milton Keynes, elsewhere in the East Midlands, and possibly somewhere in London.

Something needs to be said about advertising and publicity. There is little doubt that a project of the nature we are committed to will attract the attention of the press and we shall enjoy the consequent free publicity. Nonetheless, with money to spend, we could persuade still more people to come to the show.

We want to do for 'All Change' what we did for 'Burston', namely, design a programme which is, in itself, an interesting and informative document; create an exhibition, which, as an adjunct to the show, will excite interest and supply background to our work, which people can peruse at leisure; make a video record of the production as it develops; and record for television a complete performance. All these could be of very high quality if we had funds to support us. Finally, it may be that, as in the case of 'The Burston School Strike' our final script will attract the attention of major publishers. If not, then there is little doubt that the editors of our local People's Press would be interested in publishing it; they were in at the inception of 'All Change' and have pledged their support.

In summary, we believe that we could give popular and lively theatrical expression to aspects of the life of our home community. 'Burston' has given us that confidence. We could do it using our own resources. At the same time, we know our limitations. A production budget of £3,000 could be used to overcome them. The attached sheet, page 8, attempts to give a rough guide as to how we would use the money.

Researcher/Production Secretary (52 weeks at £20 - £30 per week depending in the number of days)	£1000 – 1500
Travelling expenses to enable research	£100
Fees to consultants (Music, design, choreography, writing etc)	£300
Costumes and props (We would seek a measure of authenticity)	£500
Set (It should be effective and portable)	£300
Programme	£100
Exhibition (including insurance and transport)	£200
Administrative costs (Telephone, postage, stationery, paper)	£150
Hire of theatres and halls	£100
Publicity (including posters, tickets and advertising)	£100
Video	£100

These figures are extremely rough guesses at this stage. Box Office would offset some of the expenses of the production.