

A HISTORY OF DRAMA AT KGS

1952 - 1960

PART 2

PAGE

3	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS by the Author	
46	HAMLET	December 1956 / April 1957
54	Programme (December 1956)	
57	Photographs	
83	Press cuttings	
88	Programme (April 1957)	
91	Press cuttings	
93	THE GERMAN TOUR	
94	Press cutting and correspondence	
95	Press photographs	
98	Press cuttings	
99	Programme (Germany and Belgium)	
106	Letter	

INDEX TO PART 1

4	INTRODUCTION	
4	Photographs of Creighton Hall in July 1989	
6	MR WRIGHT'S FIRST PRODUCTIONS (pre 1952)	
7	AS YOU LIKE IT	December 1952
8	Programme	
11	Photograph of the cast	
12	THE TAMING OF THE SHREW	December 1953
13	Programme	
17	Photographs	

19	HENRY THE FOURTH, PART 2	February 1955
20	Programme	
24	Photographs	
26	Press cuttings	

28	CORIO LANUS	December 1955
30	Programme	
33	Photographs	

40	VISITS TO STRATFORD–UPON–AVON	
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40	ARMS AND THE MAN	July 1956
43	Programme	

INDEX TO PART 3

111	LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST	December 1957
112	Tickets for all plays	
115	Letter	
119	Programme	
122	Photographs	
131	Press cuttings	

133	VISITS TO PLAYS	
-----	------------------------	--

127	TWELFTH NIGHT	March 1959
136	Programme	
139	Photographs	

145	HENRY THE FOURTH, PART 1	December 1959
145	Programme	
148	Photographs	

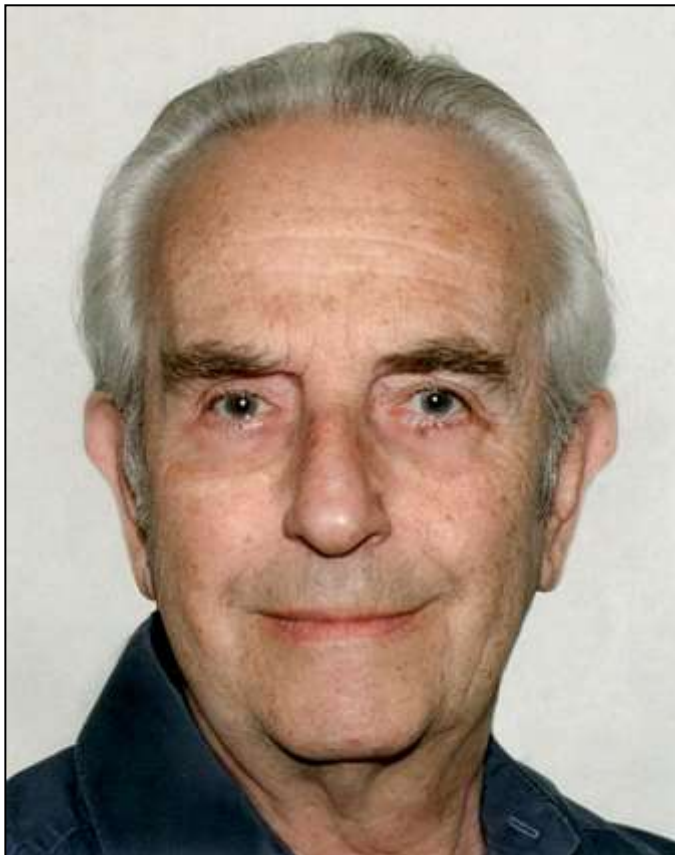
150	GABRIEL CHANAN'S PLAYS	1959 and 1960
151	Programme	
153	Photographs	
156	Programme	

160	POSTSCRIPT	
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I must start by thanking Alan Parish for the tremendous amount of work he put into preparing my History of Drama for the Old Boys' website. It was not easy piecing together all my pages of script – some typed on an old-fashioned typewriter, some digital, some hand-written. Then there have been all the photographs, programmes, and other pieces from my archives that have had to be scanned in. It has taken then best part of a year.

I would like to acknowledge my debt to the Editors of *The Kilburnian* over the period in question and those who wrote reviews of the plays and other articles. As for the photos, at this remove in time it is not possible to credit everyone. Mostly they are by the physics teacher, the late Mr E (Ben) Leavey. He also made the many close-ups of the Hamlet cast especially for me. Those photos of *Hamlet* taken from above, ie. from the lighting box, were by B Riley. The photos of full casts and staged scenes were taken by local Willesden professional photographer J Debenham, whom the school used throughout the fifties. If you took a photo not credited, please let me know.



I have tried to name at least once everyone in the photos. If your name has been left out, it is not because you were playing a lesser part. Everyone was important in creating the plays. Please let me know if you were not credited and maybe we can have an update in the future. The photos of the school hall are mine, from my visit in 1989 a few days before the school was closed.

And lastly, albeit long after the final curtain, a huge thank you to all the actors, technicians, and producers who made all the productions possible over these years.

ALAN SCHNEIDER

2014

HAMLET

Hamlet approached. The last production had been in 1923. Mr Wright had first hoped to produce it with Terry Wale, but Terry left earlier than expected. Now with Graham Bell he had the perfect Hamlet, a host of fine players for the other roles, and Vic Callaghan to coach and produce with him. Preparation began soon after *Coriolanus* was finished, as *Hamlet* was an enormous undertaking. Other plays can be well done or very good, but *Hamlet* can be nothing less than superb or it is a disaster. It would take every moment available.

It was then a great surprise when a staff production was announced for the summer. This was an entirely new venture for KGS. Mr Wright had a great passion for Shaw, and the play was to be *Arms and the Man*. So as not to digress from the main story of this article, I will relate the details of the staff play in a further issue.

Rehearsals for *Hamlet* started as soon as the autumn term began. There was a definite excitement in the air. We knew from Graham Bell's performance of *Coriolanus* that we had a super Hamlet in the making, and a host of actors who could play every part as required. Also it must not be forgotten that whilst today there seems to be a new production of *Hamlet* every month, in the fifties the only playing of *Hamlet* we had seen was not on stage but Olivier's film. When early in the year some of us went on a school visit to a production by Peter Brooke with a cast of leading actors, we thought it was absolutely awful, even with Paul Scofield acting, speaking, sets, production, everything. We could not wait to see our own production of the play.

Mr Callaghan assisted Mr Wright in the production and I recently asked him for some of his memories. The following is almost verbatim:

"The idea was to aim at a quasi-Elizabethan production: bare stage, actions downstage as conducted at the Globe, and emphasis on speaking lines as though they meant what they said. Especially the Ghost – no head in bucket effect, just a bit of green light, the illusion to be created by the language. The action was to be continuous, occupying about two and three quarter hours. Entrances, as at the Globe, were arranged logically so as to create an imaginary interior, eg nobody comes from opposite to where they went off. Sword fights, meant to be displays of skill for Shakespeare's audience, were to be better by far than current form in theatre. Sheila Williams, a student from the Royal Academy of Music, did some coaching, especially the female parts. Broadly speaking Peter (Wright) produced, I directed through him, plus some coaching and gluing on of innumerable beards –

full sets, trimmed when in place so they looked convincing, unlike those seen in the professional theatre, which were pathetic usually.”

The design as always was by Mr Whitmore, just one set – a backcloth of an interior castle wall with an archway and window, and a low platform running in front of it, at the centre of which a step led down onto the stage. This was all, except that the alcoves either side of the stage were perfect for a Globe type production. Changes of scene were effected by drawing a curtain across all or part of the backcloth and by lighting. The usual brown velvet curtains were replaced with black drapes.

Dominating the set were two thrones on the platform. These were of a medieval design. They were made by Mr Callaghan’s then brother-in-law at the London / Old Times Furniture Co. They were immensely strong but also collapsible so that they could be easily toured and stored. Mr Callaghan later told me that, having designed the raised platform for the set, he was helped in the construction by Dr Anderson, a name that might not be familiar to many. He was at KGS for only two years, to set up the biology lab (superb it was too) and introduce A-level Zoology and Botany.

The costumes for Hamlet and the ghost came from the Old Vic, and the others from the London Federation of Boys’ Clubs.

There were an unprecedented seven performances of *Hamlet*, the first being a school matinee on December 7th 1956. The first evening performance was on December 10th, followed by two more matinees and three evening performances on six consecutive days.

For Graham Bell this was an absolutely extraordinary feat. His performance, acting or voice, did not tire or falter once, which shows what a magnificent technique he already had.

The first scene of the play always provides pace and excitement. The second scene, when we meet virtually everyone else, must exceed the first in winning the attention of the audience otherwise you know you are in for a very long evening.

Graham, in his fine black velvet costume once worn by Olivier dominated and held the stage from the moment he appeared. As the scene began he sat downstage by the stage right alcove. His first speech set the speed of his playing – a fast crystal clear clarity of delivery of the words, often with that magnificent baritone ring that he had.

His “To be”, starting on the step upstage, was quietly contemplative. His “Bloody bawdy villain” was one of the most powerful sounds I have heard from an actor and it never became a shout. He practised it day after day for months so that in performance his voice never failed. It was this dedication to detail that made his Hamlet unforgettable.

The following is my appreciation of Graham after his death in 1998:

Graham Bell died suddenly in September 1987. He was at KGS from 1951 to 1958, after which he went to drama school and then started his professional acting career as a member of the Old Vic Company. In the sixties he turned to television work on the presentation side, and joined Anglia TV, where for many years he presented his own early evening programme of East Anglian local news. This programme was extremely popular and Graham became a very well known TV personality.

For those at KGS at the time, Graham will be remembered for his performances in the school plays. He started by taking the role of Warwick in *Henry IV part II* which was produced in February 1955, followed in December of that year with *Coriolanus* (sharing the role with Michael Elster). Leading roles in the plays were usually taken by sixth formers but Graham was still in the fifth year, yet he had already developed a very individual bite and power to his acting.

There was no doubt that with Graham's acting strength, stamina and memory, 1956 would at last bring us Hamlet.

We looked forward eagerly, but no-one was prepared for what burst upon us. This was no promising schoolboy performance. Graham's Hamlet was tremendous. His was a classic romantic Hamlet. Intense, powerful, spoken beautifully, he delivered the words with superb speed and clarity, at times with a volume that was stunning, and he looked superb in Olivier's old costume.

Speed was also the essence of the fight. Arranged by a professional actor, Graham and Philip Southwood (Laertes) practised every day for a term in the gym. The result was a stage duel of such ferocity that I still have not seen it surpassed.

His success as Hamlet was not achieved without real hard work. He would spend many a lunch time in a room developing the vocal power he needed, going

through lines such as 'bloody bawdy villain' over and over again until he knew he could make the effect he wanted. We would talk about acting and vocal techniques, many similar to those for opera singing, which was my interest. He had no illusions about easy success or stardom as a professional actor. I once suggested to him that he would surely not want to be in a musical or cabaret. His immediate reply "Acting will be my living. I'll do anything" is something I have never forgotten.

Overnight he achieved pop-idol status with the girls opposite. They chased him in their dozens, along the streets, on the station, even to his home. He took all this in calm good humour. Within school he evoked a new enthusiasm for drama and the stage, and he was awarded the Hicks-Bolton Shakespeare Prize from 1956 to 1958. This trophy was given jointly to a number of people each year, but only Graham received it three years running.

Hamlet was such a success that the production was invited by the British Council to tour north Germany and Belgium in the Spring of 1957.

Before it left there was a special performance at school in April. The end of 1957 saw Graham in *Love's Labour's Lost*. Dressed in a multi-coloured costume, he proved he had the skills required for romance and comedy as well as tragedy. A scene from the production was filmed by the BBC and televised as part of an educational programme.

In all these productions there was a great rapport with Graham from all the cast, and the masterful direction of Mr Wright and Mr Callaghan, and I will write about this in a later edition. (Mr Callaghan came to our centenary dinner.)

On leaving school Graham went to the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art, during which time he made his first appearance in a TV play as a butler, and then began his professional career. It was not long before he was at the Old Vic, first in an Oxford Playhouse production of *The Oresteia* and then as a member of the Old Vic Company, playing the young Shakespeare roles.

It is easy to look upon school plays and the acting of one's friends with exaggerated enthusiasm. It was after all tremendous fun, and the critical faculties of school days are easily swayed. But no-one who saw Graham's early professional performances would have been left in any doubt that we

remembered correctly. His stage presence was immediate and his voice was rounder and even more powerful. His delivery of a line in *The Eumenides*, in which he played Apollo, when he turns on the Furies – “Get out of my sanctuary” – still rings in my ears.

In the acting profession there is a saying that everyone gets one break. Graham had his right at the beginning, but then ironically it was taken from him. When the National Theatre was formed, the Old Vic company disappeared and Graham did not join the new company. I am not sure how long it was before he turned to TV, which in those days was an exciting and creative medium. There he found a new career and eventually great success and popularity with his local news programme.

But I will continue to remember him as a superb classical actor, and I am sure that had he continued on the stage, he would have been amongst our finest actors today. Graham's family know that he has been well remembered by those who knew him at school. His sister tells me that he was thinking of returning to the stage. If only that had been so.

What follows is a letter (slightly abridged) from a friend of Mr Wright, a noted author. It was actually written after the special pre-tour performance a few months later, but it is in place here. Even allowing for some exaggeration amongst friends, I think it (and others I will quote later) will show that our memory of how tremendous Hamlet was is not false.

From Muriel St Clare Byrne 20th April 1957:

“Dear Mr Wright, I wouldn't have missed your *Hamlet* production for worlds. It is years since I have heard such a full and satisfying text – in fact, not since the good old days of the Vic's *Hamlet in its Eternity*, and your young man is magnificent. He seems to have everything – presence, carriage and movement, economy of gesture but no fear of it, good speech, real passion, good timing, variety and the power of husbanding his resources for the big moments, a really mobile countenance and expressive eyes, a first rate intelligence, the capacity to project a personality sympathetic to his audience; in fact it is ridiculous that one should be able to run on cataloguing all these excellences in a boy not yet 17 (am I right?) and one almost trembles for his future.

I long to know what is planned for him, or do I say by him? Of course, I can see the producing hand and discretion at work everywhere. What a joy it must have been to have such a 'natural' to produce. And the amazing thing is that it impressed my young Oxford man just as much as it did me. If a boy can get away with it with a young designer who has never seen a live Hamlet before, and with a venerable antique whose first Hamlet was Forbes Robertson's, he should do great things.

You had some excellent supporting performances – Laertes, Claudius, Ophelia. I have completely fallen for the latter. I was particularly impressed by your lucid handling of the play scene, and everyone concerned with the fight deserves the highest praise.”

Yes, dare it be said today, Ronald Steinberg's Ophelia was very easy to fall for. He was young – in the second year – and quite short, and a little quiet by nature. Any boylike step was hidden by the extremely long dresses. His small expressive face was set off by a blonde wig. Made-up with a rosy complexion, he really was a very young, very fragile, very pretty girl. In the mad scenes the rosy complexion became crazed with eyes sunken into deep shadows and with the garland in her hair, this Ophelia presented a poignant and unforgettable image. So much so that it came alive again over thirty years later.

Few people ever knew, apart from his close friends, and Mr Wright and Mr Callaghan, that Ronny Steinberg was going through a terrible trauma as his parents were getting divorced – in those days a far more serious and opprobrious circumstance than the common event of today. The crisis came just a few weeks before the first night. There was a very real possibility that he would drop out of the play. Despite the double casting this would have led to postponing the production. But Ronny had great courage and went on to play Ophelia without a hint of his own private grief, except perhaps there was something in his playing that touched the heart.

Without Graham there would have been no *Hamlet*. But with him there were some superb performances that made the production as a whole so successful. The other role that was not double cast was that of the King, played by Raymond Brody. He was a younger King than was normally presented, and this worked very well both in terms of the play and in that playing an older man in a straight part is immensely difficult for a young player with a young voice. Raymond's voice was higher than Graham's so contrasted well. He was very confident in his villainy without appearing evil. He spoke the speech after the play scene very well. Except for the night when Graham, waiting in the wings, saw Raymond getting up,

as he thought. Thinking he had missed his cue he rushed on. The King was in fact kneeling down about to say his speech, which was completely lost.

The Queen was played by Richard Gee and David Leigh. They both played the part quietly and calmly, letting the lines carry the drama. Laertes was played by Philip Southwood and Michael Schmeising and I have to confess that although I saw all the evening performances and a matinee I can only recall Phil. He was perfect in the part, the exact age, swaggering, a gentle brother to the live Ophelia and a frighteningly vengeful brother to the dead one.

The duel was stunning. It was arranged by the professional actor Mr Roger Gage. Mr Callaghan tells me he had recently been in a TV pirates story. He obviously knew about swordplay. This was no three strokes and a wrestling match job. He arranged about ten minutes of almost non-stop sword fighting, each actor using both foil and a dagger simultaneously.

Once worked out, Graham and the two Laertes practised the duel in the gym every day until every move was not only perfect but played at such a speed as to make this the most exciting duel I have ever seen on stage to this day.

One move in particular was breathtaking. After several strokes Hamlet had to bring his foil across his body, swing it round in an arc and cut across Laertes' neck. Laertes stopped it by bringing up his dagger in his left hand with the foil only inches away. Had he missed he would have lost his head. They were so well rehearsed that the move never went wrong. But Phil told me his heart sank every time the move came.

Ophelia was also played by D Barton. Larger than Ronny Steinberg, he did not convey the same childlike effect, but played the part well.

Polonius was played by Charles Sampson and Brian Conway. Both played the old man very successfully.

Horatio was played by Jeffrey Reed and Stephen Walzer, Rosencrantz was played by John Acklaw and Brian Winston, and Guildenstern by John Berger and Stuart Creggy. The Ghost was played by D Morgan and Frank Gladden. The two Osrics were totally different. Keith Brody was slim and quietly spoken, very much the courtier. Anthony Huckwell was solidly built, and played a far more menacing Osric, someone you did not meddle with.

Harvey Bernard and Howard Ripka played the Player King, and Keith Barber and W Chesnick the Player Queen. Other Players included John Hawley and Stuart Elgrode. The First Gravediggers were Graham E Bill and David Fitzwilliam and the two Seconds were David Brookman and Robert Burden. Fortinbras was played by Maurice Burlem. Peter Wayth was the Sailor and Christopher Bain the Priest. William Read, Michael Roseblade and Peter Packham were officers on watch.

There were nearly seventy names in the cast list and space precludes mentioning them all, but they all played their part in making *Hamlet* a success.

The schools audiences were always appreciative but *Hamlet* produced a totally unexpected reaction. Overnight Graham became the romantic idol of the girls of BKHS. Day after day they ran after him as he came to school and when he left. They followed him along the road, to the station, and some even to his home. He signed hundreds of autographs.

None of this affected him a jot. He took it all as good fun. What did satisfy him was knowing that the success of *Hamlet* did so much good for the school, giving KGS pride in the achievement, and creating a surge of interest in drama.

Make-up as always was by Rosemary and her husband, Mr Chirgwin, assisted by Mr Whitmore, and this year by Mr Callaghan. I think the student Ms Williams also helped with making up the ladies of the court. As Mr Callaghan recalled, the beards were not ready made ones – these were still very expensive – but were all made from the strips of crepe hair that had to be teased out and steamed, roughly cut and glued on, and then trimmed into shape. Every performance.

Amongst the technical people the stage manager was T McMahon assisted by Alan Maizels, B Riley, and Trevor Sutton. Sound effects were by A Lawrence assisted by Neville Wrench. Props were by P Hedgeland. The prompters were Daniel Sperber and W Hutchins.

The business manager was Mr Minchin; the tickets cost three shillings and two shillings, with reductions for pupils.

KILBURN GRAMMAR SCHOOL

Forty-Seventh Annual
Shakespearian Production
1956

THE TRAGEDY OF
H A M L E T
PRINCE OF DENMARK

DECEMBER 10th, 12th, 14th & 15th
at 7 p.m.

DECEMBER 7th, 11th & 13th at 2.15 p.m.

CHARACTERS

in order of speaking

BERNARDO	} Officers	{	C. F. Chipperfield, D. T. Fitzwilliam
FRANCISCO			W. C. T. Read, M. L. Roseblade
MARCELLUS			P. F. Packham, W. C. T. Read
HORATIO, friend to Hamlet			S. D. Walzer, J. P. Reed
CLAUDIUS, King of Denmark			R. Brody
POLONIUS, Lord Chamberlain			B. L. Conway, C. B. Sampson
LAERTES, son to Polonius			M. L. Schmeising, P. H. Southwood
HAMLET, son to the late, and nephew to the present King			G. S. Bell
GERTRUDE, Queen of Denmark and mother to Hamlet			R. Gee, D. Leigh
OPHELIA, daughter to Polonius			B. D. Barton, R. P. Steinberg
Ghost of the late King Hamlet			F. K. Gladden, D. J. Morgan
REYNALDO			E. G. Rooke
ROSENCRANTZ	} Courtiers	{	J. T. Acklaw, B. N. Winston
GUILDENSTERN			J. Berger, S. Creggy
1st Player (King)			H. G. Bernard, H. L. Ripka
4th Player (Prologue)			J. G. Hawley, T. H. Postlewaite
2nd Player (Queen)			K. S. Barber, W. Chesnick
3rd Player (Lucianus)			S. J. Elgrod, R. G. Wicksman
FORTINBRAS			M. J. Burlem
Captain to Fortinbras			A. J. Gunter
1st Gravedigger			G. E. M. Bill, D. T. Fitzwilliam
2nd Gravedigger			D. Brookman, R. Burden
A Priest			C. N. Bain, E. R. Golding
OSRIC, a courtier			K. Brody, A. R. Huckwell
Sailor			P. J. Wayth

Lords, Ladies, Players, Soldiers, Musicians, Messengers, Pages:

A. C. Bull, A. R. Maizels, J. F. Barnes, M. C. Barnes, D. Bray,
T. J. P. McMahon, A. R. Lawrence, G. I. E. Cole, J. C. Osborn,
J. C. M. Strachan, L. J. Keen, R. Hertsis, P. J. Spenceley, T.
Usher, J. D. Gladstone, E. A. Joyce, R. V. Wilson, T. O. Brown,
K. F. Temple, D. C. Austin, B. Gibbins, C. J. Hall, E. G. Nice,
J. S. Skelker.

(Where two actors are named against one character
the performances are shared.)

The action of the play takes place in and around
the Castle of Elsinore, Denmark.

There will be one interval of fifteen minutes.

THE PLAY produced by Mr. P. K. Wright,
assisted by Mr. V. Callaghan.

THE SET designed and executed by Mr. R. Whitmore.

Sword-fight arranged by Mr. Roger Gage.

STAGE MANAGER: T. J. P. McMahon, assisted by G. I. E. Cole
(under the direction of Mr. D. Robinson).

PRODUCTION MANAGER: M. A. Lock,
assisted by C. Baker.

LIGHTING by A. C. Bull, assisted by A. R. Maizels, B. S. Riley and
T. J. Sutton (under the direction of Mr. A. James).

PROPERTIES: P. W. Hedgeland, M. E. Green and C. D. Mayers
(under the direction of Mr. D. C. Measham).

(Thrones by Old Times Furnishing Company. Some properties
supplied by the Old Vic and by Stage Properties Ltd. Swords and
daggers supplied by Bapty's. Other properties have been made by
members of the school.)

MUSIC under the direction of Mr. D. Merlyn-Smith.

SOUND EFFECTS by A. R. Lawrence, assisted by N. S. Wrench.
Sound effects records kindly lent by Mr. J. Leigh.

PROMPTERS: D. Sperber and W. J. Hutchins.

CALL-BOYS: A. E. E. Judge, J. Aston and G. W. Phillippo.

MAKE-UP by Mrs. Chirgwin and Mr. R. Whitmore.

Business Manager: Mr. A. E. Minchin.

COSTUMES for Hamlet and the Ghost supplied by the Old Vic.
Other costumes supplied by the London Federation of Boys' Clubs.
Wigs by "Bert."

Smoking is not permitted in the Auditorium.



Graham Bell



Jeffrey Reed as Horatio



Raymond Brody as Claudius



David Leigh as Gertrude



Ronald Steinberg as Ophelia



Philip Southwood as Laertes



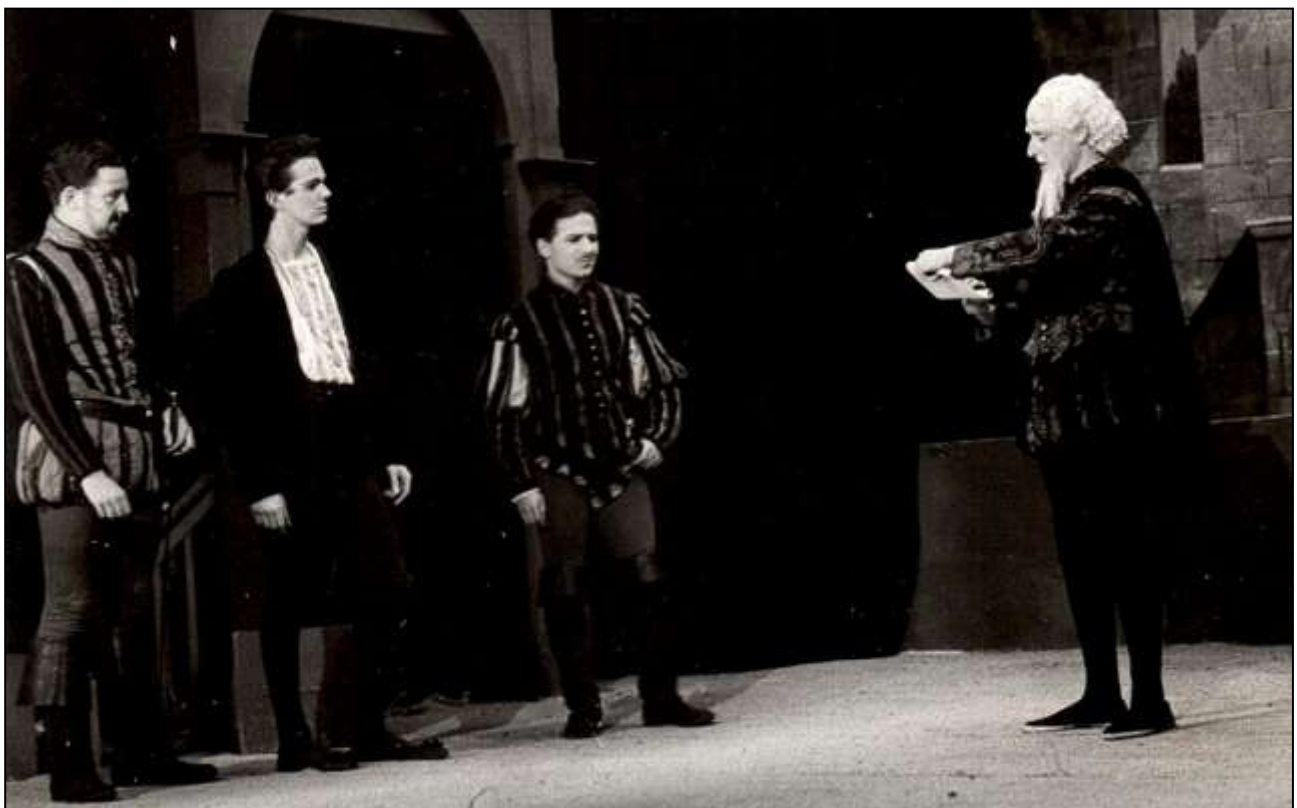
Brian Conway as Polonius



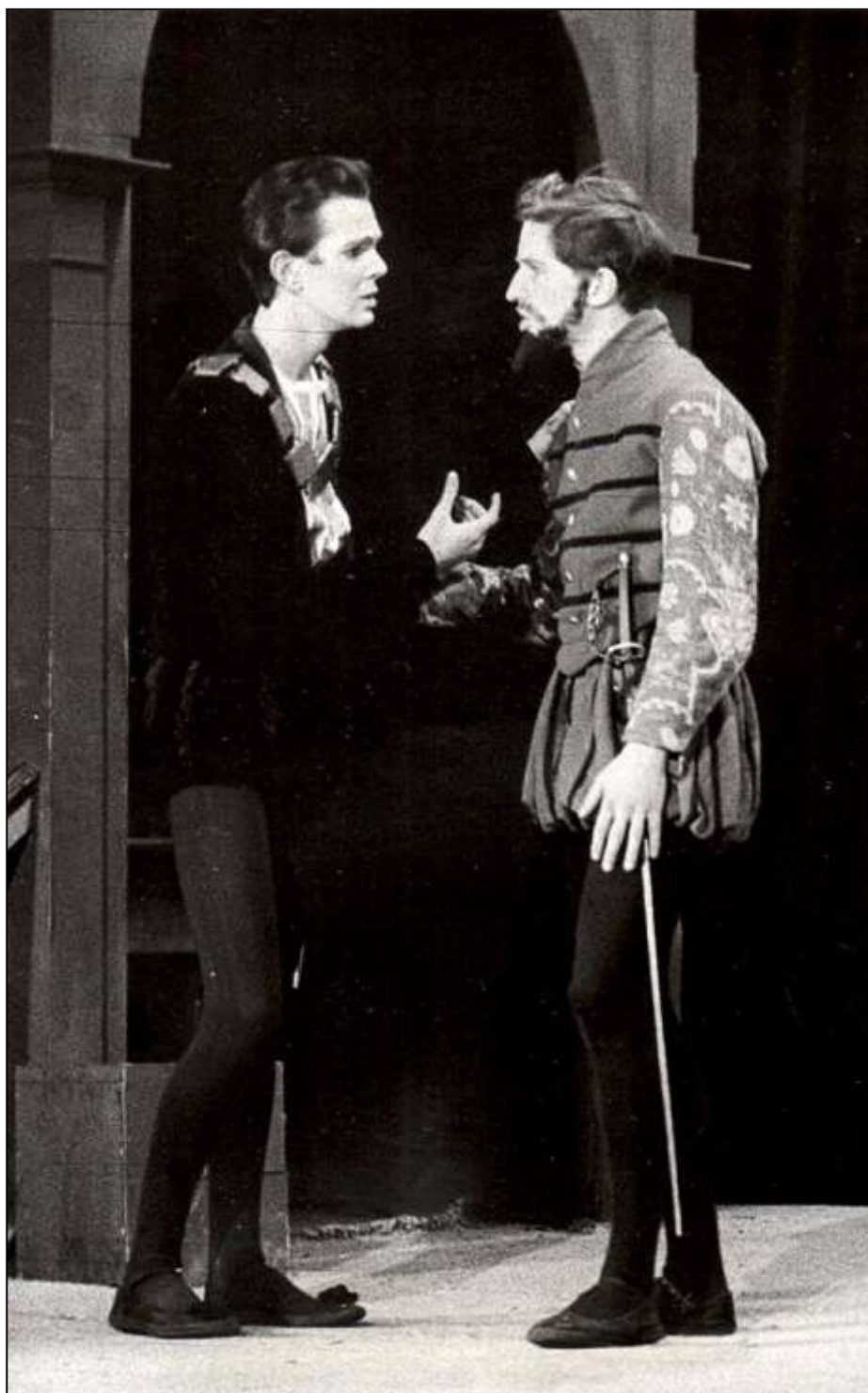
Second from right: Anthony Huckwell as Osric



Behind the King: Michael and Jeffrey Barnes



**Left to right: Stuart Creggy (Guildenstern), Graham,
Brian Winston (Rosencrantz) Brian Conway**





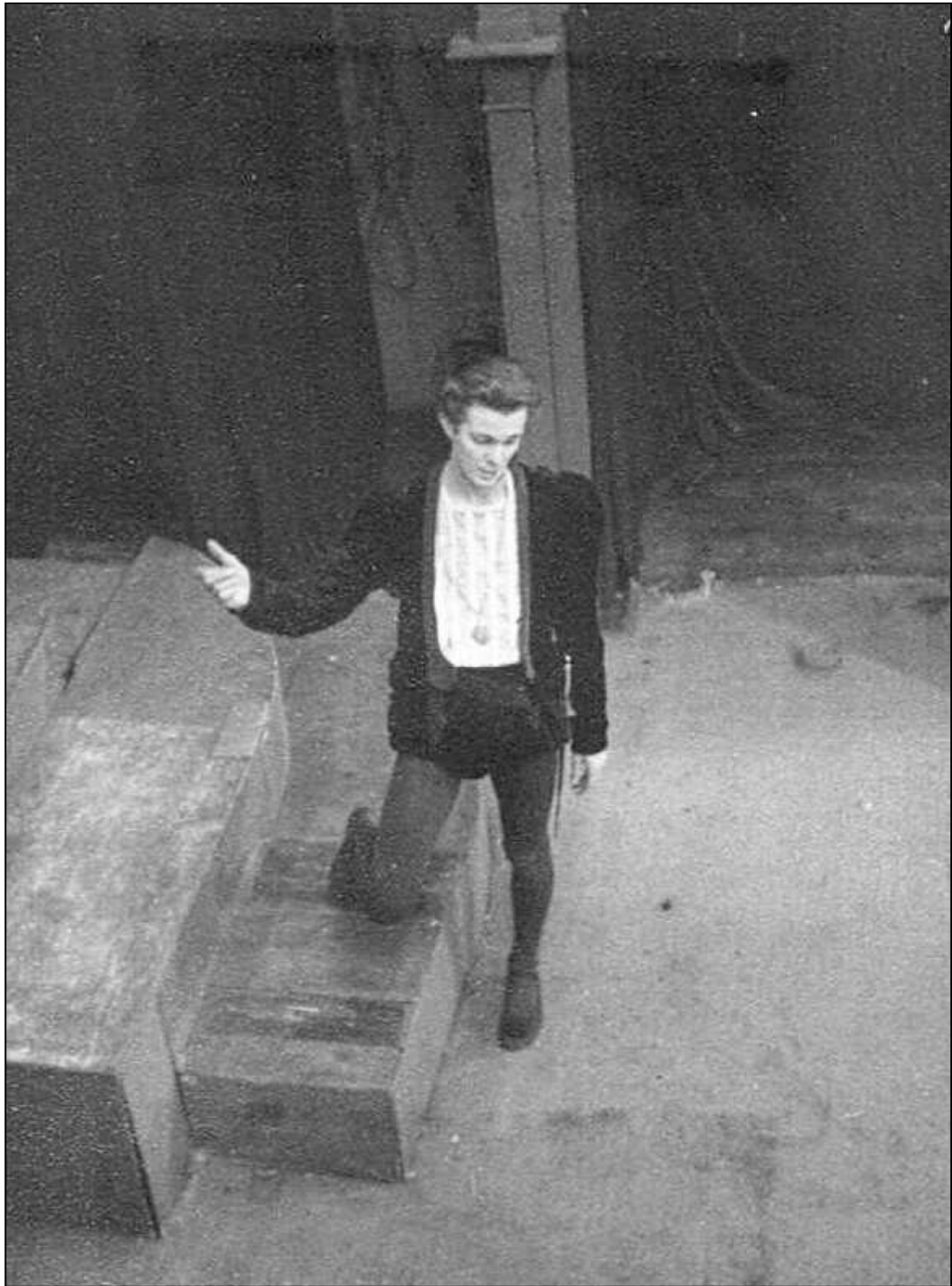


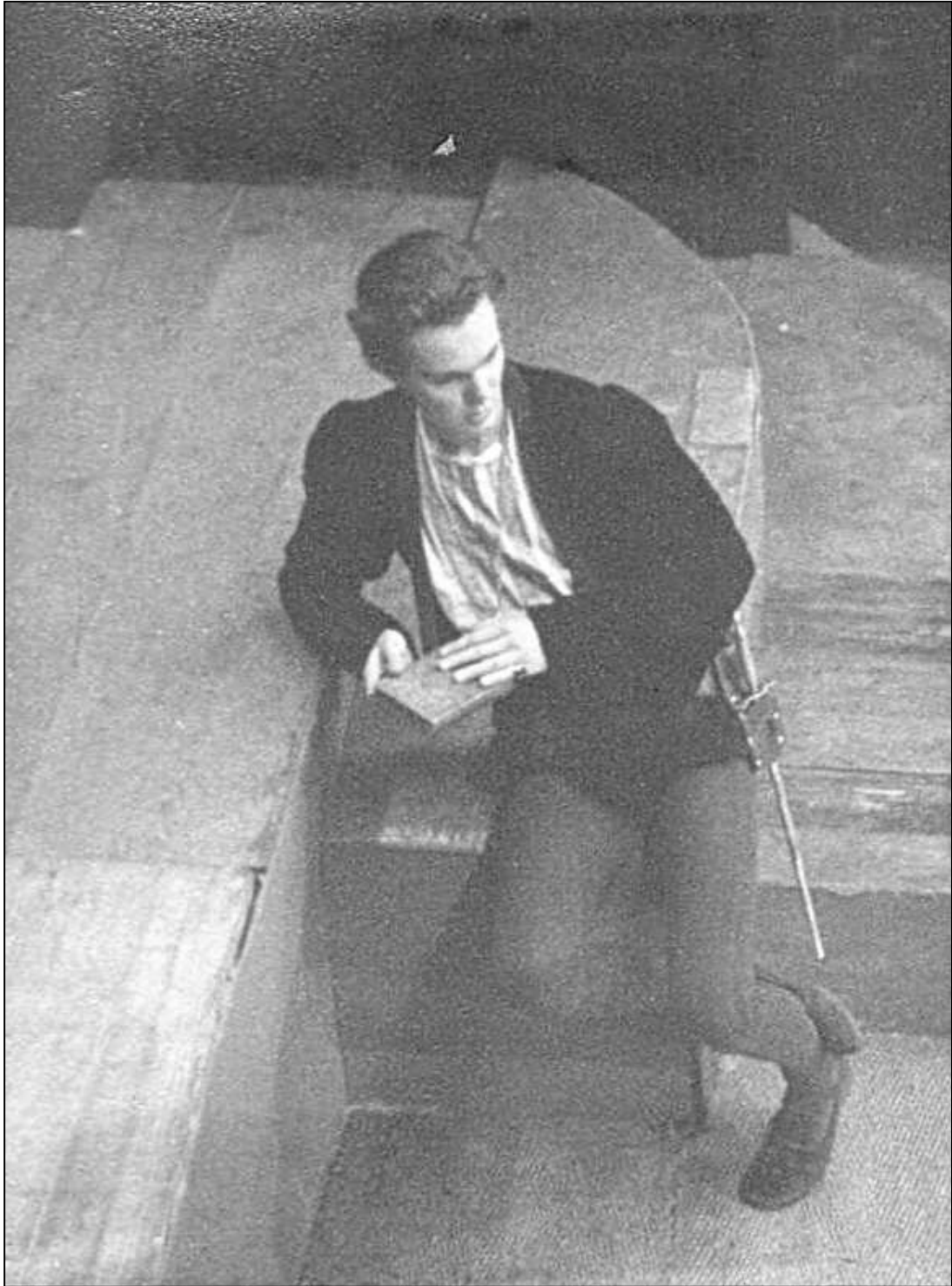




Keith Barber as the Player Queen











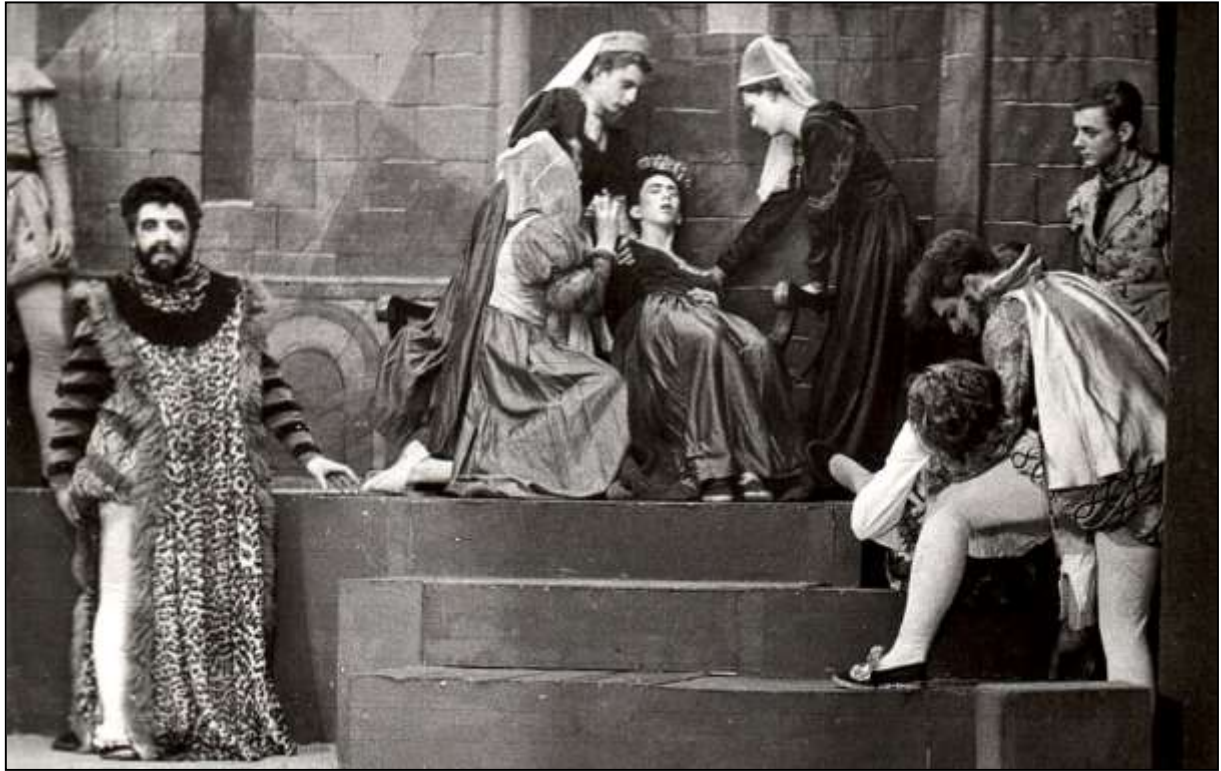














Hamlet Group Photograph

Standing back left:	K Brody – Osric
	M Schmeising – Laertes
	C Sampson – Polonius
Seated at back:	R Gee – Queen
To left of Claudius:	D Morgan or F Gladden as Ghost
	P Southwood also as Laertes
Second row standing:	J Acklaw – Rosencrantz
	J Berger – Guildenstern
First row seated:	H Bernard – Player King
	W Chesnick – Player Queen
First row far right:	G Bill and D Brookman – Gravediggers
Far right:	W C T Read as Marcellus



**Left to right: B Conway – Polonius, B Barton – Ophelia, Graham Bell – Hamlet,
P Southwood – Laertes, D Leigh – Queen, D Morgan or F Lgadden – Ghost,
R Brody – King, J Reed - Horatio**



Rosemary Chirgwin making up David Leigh

WILLESDEN CHRONICLE, FRIDAY, DECEMBER 21, 1956

GRAMMAR SCHOOL BOYS IN 'HAMLET'

Unforgettable performance

IT would be difficult to praise too highly the latest Shakespearian presentation by boys of Kilburn Grammar School. They gave seven performances, starting on December 7, of that lengthy and exacting production, "Hamlet," cutting it only by half an hour, and finishing on Saturday night.

It is a number of years since I last had the pleasure of witnessing a play by these talented young performers, and I found the standard even higher than I remembered it.

Quite unforgettable was G. S. Bell in the title role (I understand he has theatrical aspirations). His delivery was notable for its clarity and passionate sincerity, his stage presence was excellent—in short he is obviously a gifted lad with natural acting ability.

SHARED ROLES

Some of the performances were shared, so I can only speak of the boys who took the various roles on Friday night.

Great credit is due to the producer, Mr. P. K. Wright, who was assisted by Mr. V. Callaghan, for the way the young actors were taught to deport themselves, for the very real meaning they imparted to the difficult lines, and for their ease of movement and posture.

So closely did B. L. Conway emulate the movements and voice of an old man that it was hard to realise that Polonius, the meddling Lord Chamberlain, was a youth.

A forceful and colourful characterization of Claudius was given by R. Brody, and D. Leigh was his queen, Gertrude—perhaps a little stiff, but regal and impressive, with a touch of rich elegance.

MOVING

Remarkably unselfconscious was B. D. Barton, who gave a touching performance as Ophelia, the poor lady who became crazed after her

father's untimely demise and her lover's apparent betrayal.

P. S. Southwood, as Laertes, her brother, did not overact in a part which held many traps, but held the balance nicely, and J. P. Reed did well as Hamlet's devoted friend, Horatio.

A spine-chilling performance was given by D. J. Morgan, as the spectre on the battlements, ghost of Hamlet's father, and others who acquitted themselves well were C. F. Chipperfield (Bernardo), W. C. T. Read (Francisco), P. F. Packham (Marcellus), E. G. Rooke (Reynaldo), J. T. Acklaw (Rosenkrantz), S. Creggy (Guildenstern), the two gravediggers, D. T. Fitzwilliam and R. Burden, A. R. Huckwell (Osric), H. G. Bernard (a player), and M. J. Burlem (Fortinbras).

LARGE CAST

They were well supported by a large cast which included J. G. Hawley, T. H. Postlewaite, K. S. Barber, W. Chesnick, S. J. Elgro, R. G. Wicksman, A. J. Gunter, G. E. M. Bill, D. Brookman, C. N. Bain, E. R. Golding, K. Brody, P. J. Wayth (some of these took the roles at alternative performances), A. C. Bull, A. R. Maltzels, J. E. Barnes, M. C. Barnes, D. Bray, T. J. P. McMahon, A. R. Lawrence, G. I. E. Cole, J. C. Osborn, J. C. M. Strachan, L. J. Kenn, R. Hertsis, P. J. Spenceley, T. Usher, J. D. Gladstone, E. A.

Joyce, R. V. Wilson, T. O. Brown, K. F. Temple, D. C. Austin, B. Gibbins, C. H. Hall, E. G. Nice, J. S. Skelker.

Those sharing main roles were D. T. Fitzwilliam (Bernardo), M. L. Roseblade (Francisco), W. C. T. Read (Marcellus), S. D. Walzer (Horatio), C. B. Sampson (Polonius), M. L. Schmeising (Laertes), R. Gee (Gertrude), R. P. Atinberg (Ophelia), F. K. Gladden (Ghost of the late King Hamlet), B. N. Winston (Rosenkrantz), J. Berger (Guildenstern), H. L. Ripka (first player).

SWORD FIGHT

The highly impressive sword fight, climax of the play, was arranged by an expert, Mr. Roger Gage.

A fine job was done with make-up by Mrs. Chirgwin and Mr. R. Whitmore.

The set was designed and executed by Mr. R. Whitmore, stage manager was T. J. P. McMahon, assisted by G. I. E. Cole, under the direction of Mr. D. Robinson, and production manager was M. A. Lock, assisted by C. Baker. Lighting was by A. C. Bull, assisted by A. R. Maltzels, B. S. Riley and T. J. Sutton, under the direction of Mr. A. James, while properties were by P. W. Hedgeland, M. E. Green, and C. D. Mayers, under the direction of Mr. D. C. Measham.

Mr. D. Merlyn-Smith was musical director and sound effects were by A. R. Lawrence, N. S. Wrench and J. Leigh.

Among guests at Friday's performance were Mr. Hicks Bolton, a former mayor, who still gives the school's Shakespeare prizes every year, and who was for many years chairman of the school governors before the war; Mr. F. W. Wyeth, borough education officer; Mrs. S. Gillett, borough librarian and Mrs. Gillett, and Miss Dawney.

M. W.

The following is a review by Old Boy R Beaver who was the first KGS Hamlet in 1923:

“HAMLET” 1923 and 1956

“Full thirty times hath Phoëbus’ cart gone round
Neptune’s salt wash and Tellus’ orb’d ground,
And thirty dozen moons with borrowed sheen
About the world have times twelve thirties been”

Indeed, it is more, for thirty-three years have elapsed since Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* was last performed on the stage of the Creighton Hall, and there can have been but few amongst the audiences of December 1956 who saw the previous production in December 1923. Certainly only one member of the School Staff – who happened to be a pupil in 1923 – could claim to have seen both; and the producer of the first *Hamlet* Mr John Lodge, and his henchman, Mr John Ware, are both deceased. It gave me very peculiar pleasure to be invited to witness the final performance on the Saturday evening, and perhaps I may be forgiven for indulging in some reminiscences and comparisons. In order to do justice to the performers I should have seen both casts, and I can only express my apologies to the “second strings” whose performances I did not have the pleasure of witnessing.

My first impression was of a larger stage than we had in 1923, larger because of a wider “apron”. Looking back, it is difficult to realise how we ever managed to produce Shakespeare without an apron stage – yet such difficult and space-needing plays as *King Lear* and *The Tempest* were done before the “manual training” class constructed the first apron about 1921. I well remember the speaker of the epilogue in that year being pushed through the curtains and explaining in blank verse,

“Much virtue, truly, in a apron stage.”

which produced a long round of applause. Incidentally, I noticed that the custom of having an epilogue, written either by the producer or by one of the players, and spoken by a leading character, has been dropped. Perhaps it is just as well. The epilogue certainly provided a commentary on school activities, but it was a peculiarly inappropriate way of ending the performance of a tragedy such as

Hamlet, and I know I felt very uncomfortable about having to rise from a corpse-strewn stage and speak a somewhat frivolous epilogue which I had composed myself.

To return to the stage. We used to use the apron for small scenes, played in front of the curtain. This not only gave the impression of a change of scene, but enabled actual changes of scenery and furniture to be made behind the curtains whilst the apron act was in progress. I was much struck by the absence of a curtain in the present production. It certainly enabled the play to proceed with greater fluency, and the skilful variations of the fighting enabled one to forget that the same backcloth, steps and platform were there all the time. The placing of Ophelia's grave was also a stroke of genius. In the 1923 production we use the draped base of a vaulting horse, in the middle of the stage. It was most realistic – but was not easy to jump into convincingly!

It must often be the case, I suppose, that schoolboy productions of *Hamlet* tend to be one-man shows. I am sure this was not the case in 1923, when there was quite a strong supporting cast in which Claudius, Polonius and the Player-King gave outstanding performances. But if a boy is good enough to play Hamlet he is almost bound to overshadow the rest of the cast. I have nothing but praise for Graham Bell's Hamlet. He has a beautiful voice and an easy stage manner. His soliloquies were impressively spoken and his varied moods were portrayed with sympathy and intelligence; he was equally good in the lighter vein of the exchanges with the King after the death of Polonius and in the heavy ranting at Laertes by the grave-side. It was a most accomplished performance.

Of the other members of the cast whom I saw I was most impressed, I think, by R Brody as Claudius and R P Steinberg as Ophelia. Possessed of an appropriate figure and a good voice, Brody carried himself regally, even if he did not always look and sound quite old enough. Ophelia, after a somewhat halting start (what a pity her dress wasn't shorter!) was quite charming. This is surely one of the most difficult of all Shakespeare's female parts for a boy to play – other, perhaps, than those in which the poor girl – like Julia in the *Two Gentlemen* – has to dress up as a boy” – but Steinberg sustained it well and the mad scene was really most moving. I wished, however, that the little ditties had been sung to the traditional airs instead of being spoken.



Philip Southwood was a robust Laertes, and Brian Conway portrayed the “weak hams” of Polonius even if the make-up and the voice were a little too young. I was least happy, I think, with the Gravediggers. Is it really necessary to assume a coarse Cockney accent in order to be amusing? (The sailor did the same thing.) I suppose that the gravediggers in Kilburn might have such an accent, but no performance of *Hamlet* that I have ever witnessed, either amateur or professional, have I heard such speech, and it jarred, especially since on the whole the diction of the entire cast was good.

[Certainly post-war the Gravedigger was played coarse. However, what Mr Beaver and most of the audience could not have known was that Graham Bill was not putting on an accent. I thought he was an excellent gravedigger. Alan Schneider]

Finally, a word of congratulation to the Producer, Mr Wright. He had “cut” the play very skilfully to manageable length, and I was delighted to see Fortinbras in full – a feature which we also had in 1923 but one which is not always seen on the professional stage. I hope he felt that his out-of-school-hours had been adequately rewarded. I did: and it is quite clear that the very high standard of Shakespeare productions which the School has set for so many years is being well maintained. And now, what next? After our *Hamlet* of 1923 we went to the other extreme with the *Comedy of Errors*, and I turned comic in the part of Dromio of Syracuse. It was good fun – and I commend it to the Producer’s notice.

R Beaver

More photographs were taken of *Hamlet* than of any other production. Photos were taken from the wings by Brian Winston and from the lighting box by B Riley, and someone took a wonderful photo of the second scene from the prompt corner. But the most comprehensive coverage of the play was by Mr Leavey, the physics teacher, during one of the matinees. He caught some of the very best moments. I asked him to make enlargements of many of these photos to create close-ups of all the main characters, and he made a wonderful set of photos for me, which I treasure still.

In fact, I asked him for two sets, because Rosemary wanted a special photo album for the school as well. And this is how Ophelia came to life again.

Nigel Williams, the son of Mr David Williams, who was Head in the fifties (and until 1966) is a most successful novelist and playwright. He wrote a play in about 1990 that was produced on BBC TV. I forget the title but it was a drama about a family splitting up, with the crisis coming at Christmas time just when their son was playing a part in the school play. The play was *Hamlet*, the part Ophelia. The Head must have told Nigel what happened to our Ophelia at some time, and he must have held it in his memory for all those years.

When we saw the boy in the play, there was our Ophelia. Not something similar, but exactly our Ophelia in size, dress, and make-up right to the same eye shadows, and the same garland in the hair. This likeness could not have been achieved just by verbal description; someone must have seen the photos. So I wonder if the school's play photo album (with photos going back to the early fifties) has survived – perhaps Nigel Williams may even still have it.

Nigel is the splitting image of his father apart from a shock of curly hair and an upright stance. He has in various articles over the years referred to his father, and he might be able to tell some interesting tales on those years of the school when his father was Head. Perhaps he could be invited as a guest to a future Dinner?

KILBURN GRAMMAR SCHOOL

Benefit Performance

of

THE TRAGEDY OF
HAMLET
PRINCE OF DENMARK

in aid of the German Tour with the Play

THURSDAY, 18th APRIL, 1957,
at 7 p.m. prompt

Price 1/-

CHARACTERS
in order of speaking

BERNARDO	} Officers	{	M. J. Burlem
FRANCISCO			H. L. Ripka
MARCELLUS			W. C. T. Read
HORATIO, friend to Hamlet			J. P. Reed
CLAUDIUS, King of Denmark			R. Brody
POLONIUS, Lord Chamberlain			C. B. Sampson
LAERTES, son to Polonius			P. H. Southwood
HAMLET, son to the late, and nephew to the present King			G. S. Bell
GERTRUDE, Queen of Denmark and mother to Hamlet			R. Gee
OPHELIA, daughter to Polonius			R. P. Steinberg
Ghost of the late King Hamlet			D. J. Morgan
REYNALDO			D. T. Fitzwilliam
ROSENCRANTZ	} Courtiers	{	M. B. Elster
GUILDENSTERN			M. B. Treadwell
1st Player (King)			H. L. Ripka
4th Player (Prologue)			J. G. Hawley
2nd Player (Queen)			K. S. Barber
3rd Player (Lucianus)			P. H. Southwood
FORTINBRAS			M. J. Burlem
Captain to Fortinbras			H. L. Ripka
Gentleman			J. G. Hawley
1st Gravedigger			D. T. Fitzwilliam
2nd Gravedigger			G. E. M. Bill
A Priest			D. J. Morgan
OSRIC, a courtier			D. Brookman
Sailors			W. C. T. Read, G. E. M. Bill

Lords, Ladies, Players, Soldiers, Musicians, Messengers, Pages:
M. C. Barnes, D. Bray, A. R. Lawrence, R. Hertsis, R. V.
Wilson, K. F. Temple, C. J. Hall, H. E. Astill, J. Aves.

The action of the play takes place in and around
the Castle of Elsinore, Denmark.

There will be one interval of fifteen minutes.

THE PLAY produced by Mr. P. K. Wright,
assisted by Mr. V. Callaghan.

THE SET designed and executed by Mr. R. Whitmore.

Sword-fight arranged by Mr. Roger Gage.

STAGE MANAGER: A. R. Lawrence.

LIGHTING by A. R. Maizels and T. J. Sutton.

PROPERTIES supplied by the Old Vic and by Stage Properties Ltd.

Swords and daggers supplied by Bapty's.

SOUND EFFECTS by A. R. Lawrence.

Sound effects records kindly lent by Mr. J. Leigh.

PROMPTER: W. J. Hutchins.

MAKE-UP by Mrs. R. Chirgwin and Mr. V. Callaghan.

Business Manager: Mr. A. E. Minchin.

COSTUMES for Hamlet and the Ghost supplied by the Old Vic.

Costumes for Claudius, Gertrude and Ophelia, and cloaks, designed
and executed by Miss Eve Sheppard. Other costumes supplied by
the London Federation of Boys' Clubs. Wigs by "Bert."

Smoking is not permitted in the Auditorium.

School will produce 'Hamlet' in Germany

WHEN the talented Kilburn Grammar School Dramatic Society leave England on Easter Monday for a trip to Germany, they will become the first local school drama group to act on the continent.

The society will present their Christmas success of "Hamlet," in which 16-year-old Graham Bell is the outstanding star.

"Hamlet" was such a hit last year that the headmaster, Mr. D. F. Williams, was asked by the German Director of Education to send the cast on a tour of schools in the Schleswig-Holstein area.

Since that first request, all further correspondence has been conducted in German by the school's two German masters, Dr. W. Isaacs and Mr. E. Wowiheim.

Altogether 31 boys of the cast, masters Mr. Peter Wright, producer, and Mr. Victor Callaghan, assistant producer, and school secretary, Mrs. R. Chirgwin, make-up artist, will travel to Kell, the first stop.

The tour will last a week, during which the play will be presented at five different places. The party will be accommodated at the homes of German schoolchildren.

GREAT EXPERIENCE

Mrs. Chirgwin told the Citizen: "I think it is a wonderful thing for the school and a splendid experience for the boys. They will pay their own fares, about £10, to Germany, but then the hospitality of the Germans will take care of them."

Once again Graham Bell will take the role of Hamlet, and he will also wear Sir Laurence Olivier's Old Vic costume. "Graham is a wonderful actor and should go a long way," praised Mrs. Chirgwin.

"But the only trouble now is hiring all the costumes, which is going to cost more than £40. We are hoping parents will help to defray the cost," she said.

The cast, who will meet audiences of all kinds, are made-up by Mrs. Chirgwin — who has the difficult task of making some boys look like women.

In preparing for this memorable visit the school authorities

have got to clear up insurance, bookings, re-hiring costumes and rehearsing during the Easter holidays — which start on April 10.

And then to Germany — complete with rapiers, daggers and wigs.



GRAHAM BELL — the Kilburn Grammar School-boy, who will play Hamlet with the school Dramatic Group, when they tour Germany at Easter, is seen dressed in Sir Laurence Olivier's Old Vic Hamlet costume.



EDUCATIONAL SUPPLEMENT

LONDON April 26 1957

VENGEANCE AT LENGTH

Yet another *Hamlet* awaited us at Kilburn on April 18 when the boys of the grammar school rehearsed a nearly integral version which they have been performing before audiences in six German towns this week.

Begun in confused darkness and later relieved by a single back-cloth, the production, though well-intentioned and eschewing fussiness, could boast but little dramatic enlivenment before Polonius's delivery of his homilies in Act II. These, however over-bleated, authentically prophesied that the comic relief was in safe hands.

To succeed in the title role, however, needed intelligence, presence, and genius, and this Hamlet possessed these first two qualities. In spite of a voice of which only a small part of the compass was actually pleasing, the actor, intoxicated with the sublime length of his part, enforced his deliberate *adagio* against a production that was surely intended to be matched in *presto* time. This treatment was highly effective in the soliloquies, where several rather Olivier-like echoes were achieved. For the rest it tended, for all its intelligence, to monotony of delivery.

Support was adequate: a Claudius of ripe looks and well-oiled vocal apparatus, an Horatio suitably lacking in authority, a surly and unlikeable Laertes, and a finely drawn First Gravedigger. The all-male cast sported a wooden and un-regal Gertrude but a memorably fragile, doll-like Ophelia.

16-year-old 'lead' will wear an Old Vic costume

Thirty boys of Kilburn Grammar School will be travelling to Kiel and other Danish-frontier towns of Germany next month to give performances of Hamlet. Mr. Peter Wright, 43-year-old English master and producer of the play, said today:

"This is the school's 47th Shakespearian production. The seven performances of Hamlet we gave last December were so successful that we were anxious to take it on tour.

"Fortunately the headmaster was able to arrange for us to present the play in a number of towns in Germany."

Excited

Most excited boy in the school is 16-year-old Graham Bell, of Kingsbury, who plays Hamlet.

When the tour opens in Kiel, on April 24—his birthday—he will be wearing one of Sir Laurence Olivier's costumes from the Old Vic.

The king is being played by 16-year-old Raymond Brody, of Canons Park.

The boys' parents are meeting some of the expenses, but the hire of some of the costumes will have to be paid for and to meet the cost the school are presenting a special benefit performance of the play on April 18.

Nothing but the best

Said Mr. Wright: "In presenting the play we have cut very little of the text.

"We have a fixed set with no front curtains. And this is how the play will be produced in Germany.

"The people in the towns on the Danish border have a very high regard for Hamlet, so nothing but the best will do."



SATURDAY APRIL 20 1957

GRAMMAR SCHOOL "HAMLET"

PRODUCTION TO TOUR GERMANY

Occasions when the full text of *Hamlet* is heard in the theatre are rare; some cuts are so firmly established that, when the lines are restored, the audience can momentarily recapture their first response to the play.

At Kilburn Grammar School, where a benefit performance of *Hamlet* was given on Thursday in aid of a German tour, the text was left almost intact. Voltimand and Cornelius had gone and a few couplets were missing, but even so the performance lasted almost four hours. It could easily have lasted much longer if Mr. P. K. Wright had not driven his production along at a cracking pace. A permanent setting was used, and a couple of pages doubled on and off to shift properties in full view of the audience, for there were no curtains. The cast, too, were given a free run; although in a few sections—the duel, and the mime between the Player King and Queen for instance—movement had been most carefully prepared, there was a minimum of stage business. Spare gestures and simple groupings allowed the text an uninterrupted flow.

Having saved time by these means Mr. Wright was able to free his cast from obsession with the clock; after a perfunctory scramble through the first scene there was no gabbling. Nor was there much growth of dramatic urgency; speeches in general were delivered intelligently at a pace that suited the formal and reflective passages well enough, but there was no welling up of excitement towards the peaks of the action. The play's scene was without a climax, and Claudius was slain indiscriminately, not with revengeful satisfaction.

The responsibility for the production's slackness largely rests on G. S. Bells, whose Hamlet though beautifully poised and spoken with great sensitivity corroded tragedy with self-conscious languor.

THE GERMAN TOUR

It had long been an ambition of Mr Wright to take a school play abroad, and none could have been better than *Hamlet*. The German tour was brought about by the Head's contacts in Schleswig-Holstein, and the performance in Brussels by a friend of Rosemary there. The German authorities paid for board and keep in the German towns and made an additional contribution to the costs of the tour. Nonetheless, everyone who went had to pay about ten pounds to cover fares, and that was no small sum.

There were thirty boys, twenty six cast and four technicians. Mr Wright and Mr Callaghan, Rosemary, and Mr Leslie Venn, who was an Old Boy and deputy head of Kensal Rise primary school. He went along at his own cost. (One does wonder why no other member of KGS staff could be found.)

Hamlet was given a special single performance on April 18th 1957 to raise money to pay the costs of costumes, transportation, insurance, etc. Top price tickets were five shillings.

There had of course been much rehearsing since December and what may have been weaknesses in the original performances were smoothed out. Also there were changes of cast, both changes of role and newcomers, and this would be their only pre-tour performance.

Graham had the same costume for Hamlet but there were superb new costumes for the King and Queen, and a new dress for Ophelia, all designed and made by Miss Eve Sheppard, another friend of Mr Wright.

After three months it was wonderful to see *Hamlet* again. There was no feeling of *deja-vu*. It was as thrilling as before. It would not be unfair to say that of all the marvellous performances of plays in the fifties, this performance must be the pinnacle of the school's dramatic achievement. It is therefore a good reason to list the cast in full. Interestingly, for the first and only time for a school play (or indeed any occasion), in the programme sheet printed for the tour names were given in full:

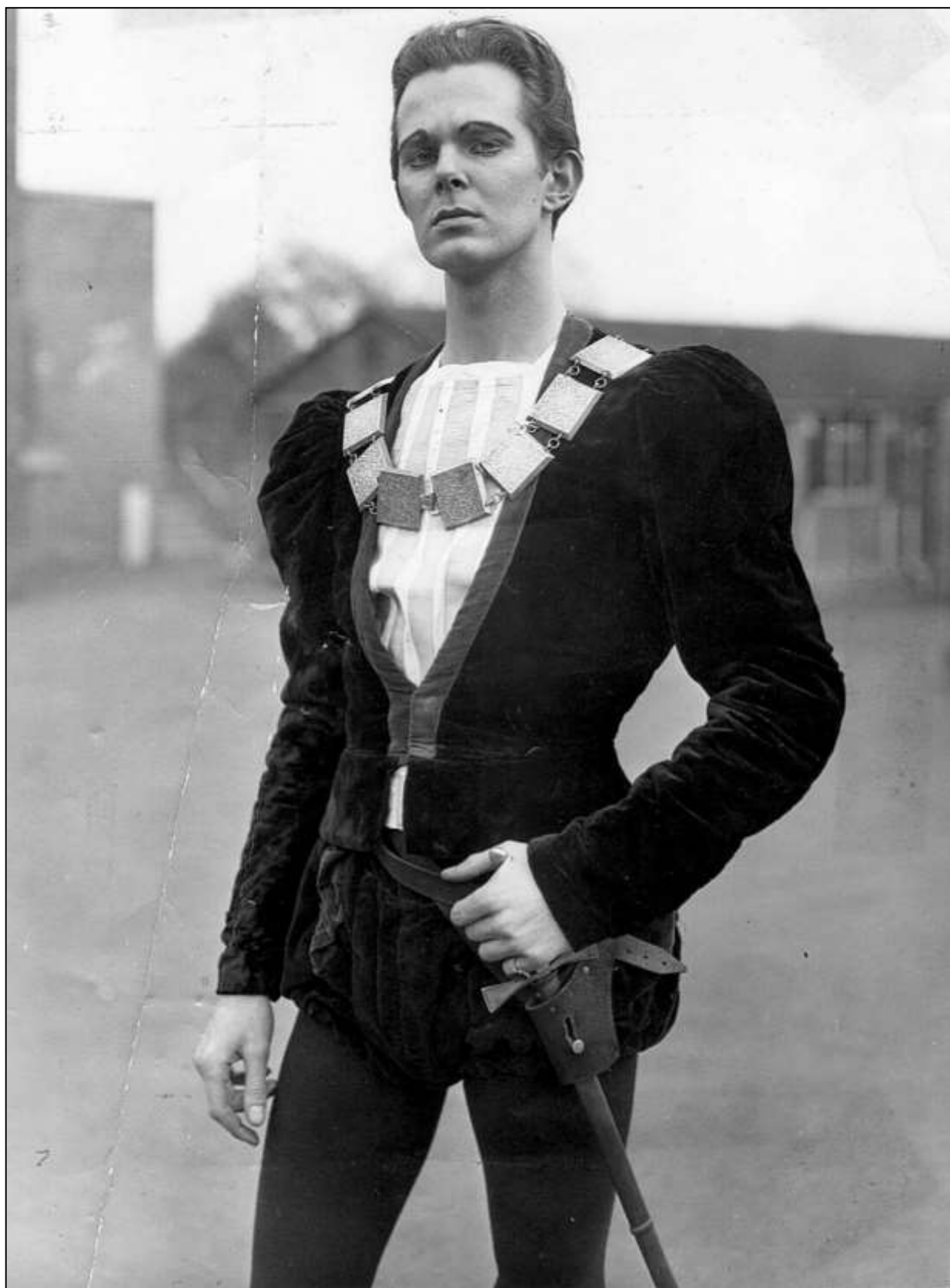
Bernardo and Fortinbras	Maurice Burlem
Francisco and Player King	Howard Ripka
Marcellus	William Read
Horatio	Jeffrey Reed

Ghost	David Morgan
Claudius	Raymond Brody
Polonius	Charles Sampson
Laertes	Philip Southwood
Hamlet	Graham Bell
Gertrude	Richard Gee
Ophelia	Ronald Steinberg
Rosencrantz	Michael Elster
Guildenstern	Michael Treadwell
Player Queen	Keith Barber
Player Prologue	John Hawley
First Gravedigger	David Fitzwilliam
Second Gravedigger	David Brookman

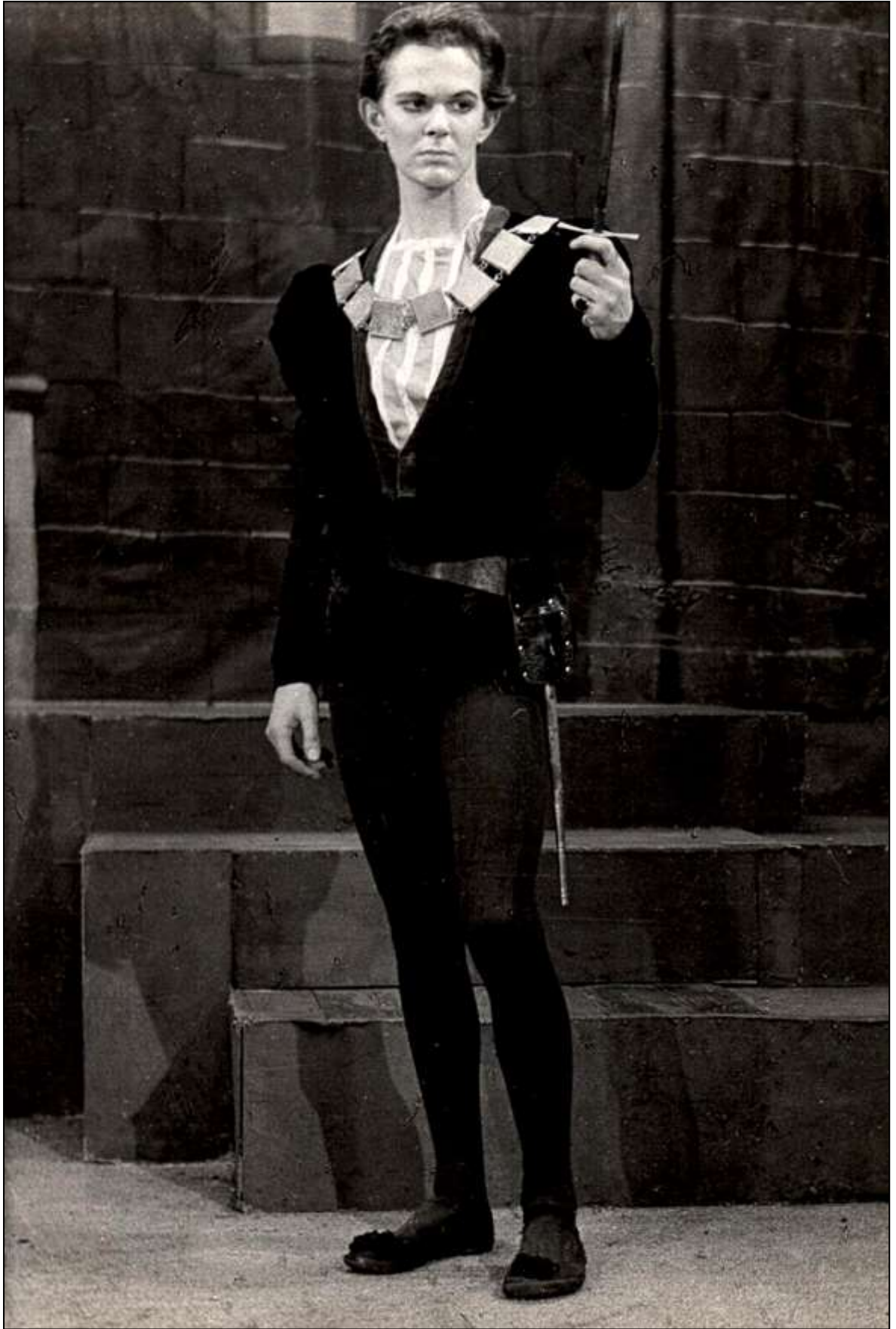
All other parts were doubled by the above. Courtiers, Soldiers, etc were Michael Barnes, Desmond Bray, Roger Hertsis, Roger Wilson, Keith Temple, Colin Hall, Harold Astill, and John Aves

The stage manager was Alan Lawrence, who also went on as a soldier, lighting was by Alan Maizels and Trevor Sutton, and the prompter was William Hutchins.









Michael Elster aus London . . .

Zu Gast aus England — „Those foolish teddy-girls!“ — Sehr angetan von Schleswig

SN. Wie wir gestern bereits berichteten, führten englische Schüler aus Kilburne (London) Shakespeares „Hamlet“ im NLTh auf. Ein junger Leser der SN beobachtete seinen englischen Hausgast sehr interessiert. Seine Eindrücke bringen wir im Auszug:

„Das Verhalten meines Gastes — er hieß Michael Elster — war beispielhaft für das seiner Kameraden. Er war sehr stolz darauf, in London, der größten Stadt der Welt, zu wohnen. Er hatte bereits mehrere Flugreisen nach Jerusalem, Belgien, Spanien und Frankreich unternommen, war aber bescheiden genug, um nie unaufgefordert ein Wort über seine uns immerhin ungewöhnlich erscheinenden Erlebnisse zu verlieren. Fremdartig erschien mir auch, daß er über unsere Familie die gleiche ausführliche Auskunft verlangte, wie er sie mir über die seinige gewährte. Geheimnisse irgendwelcher Art liebte er nicht. Wenn meine Eltern sich während der Mahlzeit über irgend etwas unterhielten, horchte er sofort auf und blickte mich auskunftserwartend an. Als wir ihn fragten, ob er gegen eine Ausrüstung Deutschlands mit atomaren Waffen sei, bejahte er eifrig. Vielleicht spricht daraus immer noch die Furcht vor einem zu starken Deutschland. Er legte Wert darauf, daß wir erkannten, daß er sehr viel von den Deutschen halte. Über die großen Deutschen wußte er sehr gut Bescheid, besonders über Wagner und Mozart. Immer wieder betonte er, was für eine große Ehre es ihnen bedeute, daß ihnen das Schleswiger Theater zur Verfügung gestellt worden sei — das beste, in dem sie bisher gespielt hätten. Sein Interesse für den Schleswiger Dom war so groß, daß wir seinen Wissensdurst kaum befriedigen konnten. . . Auch in London gebe es Halbstärke. Weil sie so gekleidet sind wie die Menschen z. Z. Eduard VII. — kurz Ted genannt —, heißen sie im Volksmund „Teddy boys“. Als sich nach der Vorstellung die Schleswiger Backfische um die Autogramme rissen, meinte mein Gast kopfschüttelnd: „those foolish teddy-girls!“ (diese närrischen Backfische!) Im übrigen fanden die jungen Damen, soweit unsere Gäste sie kennen-

lernten, lebhaften Anklang. Falls er einmal heiraten sollte, meinte mein Student, wolle er sich seine Frau aus Deutschland holen. . . . Bei normalem Bildungsgang ist der englische Schüler mit der Universität fertig, wenn wir das Abitur haben — mit 21 Jahren. Kennzeichnend für den englischen Charakter ist dabei auch, daß den Schülern weit mehr Rechte und Pflichten überlassen werden als uns. Ein „monitor“ — man könnte es mit „Vertrauensschüler“ übersetzen — darf auch bei entscheidenden Problemen mitbestimmen. Wenn bei Festlichkeiten Lehrer und Schüler auch gleichgestellt sind, so stellen die Lehrer bei Entscheidungen doch eine Autorität dar, der unwidersprochen gehorcht wird.

Günther B.

Kilburn Times May 10 '57

‘HAMLET’ BOYS BACK

The party of boys from Kilburn Grammar School who have been touring Schleswig-Holstein, Germany, performing „Hamlet“ in German schools, returned triumphant to Kilburn on Saturday.

„The tour went beyond all our expectations,” said producer Mr. Peter Wright, an English master at the school. He added: „The stages were not of the type we are used to, but we overcame all our difficulties by quick adaptation.”

On their way home from Germany, the boys stopped in Brussels where they performed part of the play for the Belgian Television. The next day, the Belgian viewers saw the play and a film of the boys touring Brussels.

Secretary of the school, Mrs. R. Chirgwin, who went on the trip as „mother and make-up artist,” told one of our reporters that the school has already had invitations to make similar tours in Germany and Belgium next year.

THE TRAGEDY OF

HAMLET

PRINCE OF DENMARK

PERFORMED BY THE BOYS OF KILBURN GRAMMAR SCHOOL,
LONDON,

in SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN, GERMANY,

in KIEL	on	Wednesday,	24th April,
in NEUMINSTER	on	Thursday,	25th April,
in EUTIN	on	Friday,	26th April,
in RENDSBURG	on	Saturday,	27th April,
in SCHLESWIG	on	Monday,	29th April,
in FLENSBURG	on	Tuesday,	30th April,

and in BRUSSELS, BELGIUM,
on

Friday, 3rd May, 1957.

CHARACTERS
in order of speaking

BERNARDO		.....	Maurice J. Burlem
FRANCISCO	Officers	.....	Howard L. Ripka
MARCELLUS		.....	William C. Read
HORATIO	friend to Hamlet	.....	Jeffrey Read
CLAUDIUS	King of Denmark	.....	Raymond Brody
POLONIUS	Lord Chamberlain	.....	Charles Sampson
LAERTES	son to Polonius	.....	Philip Southwood
HAMLET	son to the late, and nephew to the present King	.....	Graham Bell
GERTRUDE	Queen of Denmark and mother to Hamlet	.....	Richard Gee
GHOST	of the late King Hamlet	.....	David J. Morgan
OPHELIA	daughter to Polonius	.....	Ronald P. Steinberg
REYNALDO		.....	David Fitzwilliam
ROSENCRANTZ	COURTIERS	.....	Michael B. Elster
GUILDENSTERN		.....	Michael B. Treadwell
1st Player	(King)	.....	Howard L. Ripka
4th Player	(Prologue)	.....	John G. Hawley
2nd Player	(Queen)	.....	Keith S. Barber
3rd Player	(Lucianus)	.....	Philip Southwood
FORTINBRAS		.....	Maurice Burlem
Captain	to Fortinbras	.....	Howard L. Ripka
Gentleman		.....	John G. Hawley
1st Gravedigger		.....	David Fitzwilliam
2nd Gravedigger		.....	Graham E. M. Bill
A Priest		.....	David J. Morgan

This then was the tour company except for Roger Wilson who became ill on the eve of departure. But the tour almost never departed. Raymond Brody fell and broke his arm. Fortunately he was able to hold the plastered limb in a not too obtrusive way and the tour went on.

The tour performances lasted from 24th April to 30th April 1957 in Germany, with six performances in six different towns in one week., and a performance in Belgium on 3rd May – for which the school had to get special dispensation from the local council to allow the boys and staff to start the term late, can you imagine.

I am not going to write about the tour because I know John Hawley has written an article for the Newsletter and far better to read about it from someone who took part. The only other writing about this tour was a detailed report by Mr Wright in Kilburnian 138, which follows:

LITTLE EYASES ABROAD

The uncertainties attached to the trip nearly daunted us: to take a school *Hamlet* to a foreign country and to give six performances in six different towns in not many more days seemed at times a foolish notion. Should we be able to revive the December production in time and with enough polish to present it to our audiences without blushing for its defects? How should we be able to pay for the transport of ourselves and our costumes and props? And who would be responsible for our keep during the tour? These and some other important questions had to be resolved before we could take the decision to go.

The idea of a tour abroad had been in my mind for some years: this year the choice of play, the enthusiasm of the cast to travel, and the Headmaster's contacts in Schleswig-Holstein, all seemed propitious enough, and we decided to risk it. Negotiations with the Kultusministerium of Schleswig-Holstein were opened in the early days of the New Year, and a general agreement on the scheme was quickly reached. The details took much longer to work out. In fact, when we left Victoria on Easter Monday we were by no means certain that the final arrangements would be satisfactory from our point of view: the last letter we had received had proposed, for example, that the performances should take place at eleven o'clock in the morning: were the audiences to go without their lunch, or were we expected to give a sort of pantomime version of *Hamlet*? Still, we knew that we were expected, and that whilst we were to be responsible for

mounting the production and getting ourselves there, the Germans would feed and house us and transport us inside Germany; and this relieved us of our main anxieties.

So off we went, twenty-nine boys, Mrs Chirgwin, Mr Callaghan and myself (there should have been thirty boys, but unfortunately R Wilson, of 2B, was a casualty at the last minute, and was unable to travel. He that played the King was also careless enough to fall downstairs two days before our departure, and spent the entire trip with his arm in plaster (which I suppose added a touch of mystery to the character). An unofficial member of the group was Leslie Venn, an Old Creightonian who had sent us many of our leading actors from Kensal Rise School, where he is Deputy Head: he chose to spend part of his holidays in this unorthodox way, and we were very glad to have him. He took entire charge of the packing and unpacking of costumes and props at each staging-point (I use the word in two senses) until he was forced to leave us in order to keep the beginning of term (we ourselves had been granted two days' extension by the Middlesex authorities, which was later increased by a day to allow us to give a performance in Brussels on our way home). He also gave considerable assistance to Mrs Chirgwin and Mr Callaghan in the arduous and always urgent business of make-up.

It would, I think, be tedious to give a day-by-day chronicle of the trip: indeed, at this stage many of the details have been forgotten; in any case a general perspective is probably of greater interest. We played in six towns, beginning at Kiel, which we reached after a twenty-four journey via Dover, Ostend and Cologne, and ending the German part of the tour at Flensburg, on the Danish border. We were taken from place to place by coach, and wherever we spent a night or more (it was never more than two in one town) we were given individual hospitality in the families of pupils or staff from the local schools. (In such conditions friendships are quickly made: I understand that some will be renewed during the summer holidays, either at home or away.)

The excellence of the arrangements for both repose and movement was conspicuous everywhere: indeed, it was the only constant factor in our conditions. Each new stage brought fresh problems, which had to be solved with the utmost rapidity, especially as the hour of performance had in most cases been advanced from eleven to ten o'clock in the morning! (Professionals shudder at the thought of playing "cold" like this, and with reason; but our actors

were apparently unaffected, and performed with surprising gusto.) In no case did the stage we were given resemble our own in the Creighton Hall in any important respect. Most of them were in school halls, but the absence of a “school play” tradition meant that they were not in themselves at all suited to a production of the character of our *Hamlet*. Two of them, for example, were appreciably smaller than ours at KGS, where already we felt seriously constricted in certain scenes; two others were rather larger than ours, but were designed as platforms for assembly, prize-givings and similar occasions, and not as stages for dramatic performances, and were consequently deficient in the normal stage exits and entrances, which had to be contrived by making detours through the audience and by similar devices. Then again, the lighting arrangements were invariably quite different from those on our own stage, and our electricians needed far more time to get acquainted with them than was ever available.

But everywhere the utmost efforts had been made by the schools – pupils and staff – to provide the nearest possible approach to the conditions we had been used to at home, details of which we had been sent in advance: platforms had been erected, thrones had been hired or borrowed (we had, in fact, taken our own, as we thought their provision might present problems), curtains had been rearranged, and in one case special lighting equipment had been made by the science department. In Kiel we were given a hall attached to a restaurant, which was almost like playing in a real theatre; and in Schleswig, whither a certain reputation had apparently preceded us, we actually *did* have the town theatre put at our disposal, a privilege of which we were very sensible. It was a joy to get the feel of a properly designed theatre, with none of the cramping and frustration caused by lack of space backstage and on stage, and inadequate dressing-rooms and make-up facilities, such as we experience every December at home! (Paradoxically, I think the actors gave their best performances in the less favourable conditions of some of the school stages, perhaps because these demanded more from them.) The lighting equipment made our new switchboard at KGS look like a child’s toy; unfortunately we had too little rehearsal time to make the best use of it, and even the limited effects we were able to produce had to be operated under the control of a professional technician, whose services the theatre kindly placed at our disposal. But the best feature of this stage, apart from its size, was, for us, the generous curved apron-stage, which carried the actors well forward into the auditorium, and gave them a sense of intimacy with the audience that a more conventional theatre would have denied them.

Not that it was otherwise in the school halls. All the technical problems of devising exits and entrances where there were none, of adapting movements to fit shape and size of stage (a real headache in the fencing scene: one set of curtains nearly got brought down on the heads of the duellers), of etherealising the Ghost without the aid of dimmers, seemed quite unimportant once the performances had been launched and contact with the audience established. This was unexpectedly easy to do, partly, I think, because the stages were *not* designed to erect a barrier between the people on them and the people in the body of the hall; this was specially true of the big open platforms at Eutin and Flensburg, whose freedom allowed continuous and uninhibited communication with all parts of the large audiences. But we also found the German audiences, about whose capacity to understand Elizabethan English we had had serious misgivings, astonishingly receptive: indeed, I think they were no more surprised by our performances than we were by theirs. True, many of them were either students or teachers of English, but even so three and a half hours in a foreign tongue is a great deal to listen to with attention and understanding; and they appeared to emerge with both unimpaired.

One almost permanent member of our audience – she missed only one performance – was Miss Davies, British Vice-Consul in Kiel, who had been our liaison with the German authorities in the first place. She came so often, she assured us, because she liked coming; but she also rendered us many a good service when we were too tired to cope with the many little problems that arose from time to time, and we are grateful to her for this and for the way in which her perfect German made the arrangement of important details so much easier than it would otherwise have been. I recall with particular gratitude her offer (gladly accepted) to drive back in her car from Flensburg to Schleswig, where the thrones had been carelessly left in the theatre; and her invaluable assistance in finding us accommodation on the train from Flensburg to Brussels.

We were of course sorry to leave Schleswig-Holstein, of which we had really no more than a swift and vivid glimpse between performances; here and there a rather longer look: at the huge canal locks at Kiel, or the remarkable railway viaduct at Rendaburg, and from Flensburg a hasty excursion into Denmark; but mostly it was the flat green lake-studded landscape familiar to our ancestors the Angles, who are supposed to have come from these parts, and whose ghostly echoes could be heard (however inaccurately) in the Plattdeutsch so reminiscent of Tyneside.

TO BRITISH CONSUL
in BELGIUM

13th June, 1957.

Dear Sir,

I should like to thank you very much for your efficient help in letting the Belgian schools and their students know about the performance of "Hamlet" by the Kilburn Grammar School boys on May 2nd last, in the Atrium Theatre, Brussels.

The cast of the play and the teachers accompanying the party were very impressed with the enthusiasm and appreciation of their Belgian audience, and we do hope that your students were helped in their studies by our performance.

Yours sincerely,

HEAD MASTER

Monsieur Van den Borre,
Directeur-General en
Ministere de l'Instruction publique,
Rue de la Loi, Bruxelles.

But we were eager to get to Brussels, where a performance in a small theatre had been arranged by a friend of Mrs Chirgwin's, Professor Jean de Herdt, a great Shakespeare enthusiast, who had taken immense trouble to collect for us an audience of students and senior school pupils, and to arrange hotel accommodation on terms that we could afford: he used his influence with the Belgian Ministry of Education for both purposes with excellent effect. He also gave us a most enjoyable trip round Brussels, himself enlightening us of points of interest in impeccable English – a “conducted tour” with a difference. An additional difference was that the tour was observed and recorded by a team from the headquarters of Brussels Television, who had also been present at the performance to film part of the nunnery scene: we enjoyed sitting in a local café in the evening and seeing ourselves on the screen during a sort of News Review in Flemish. We had been given to understand that the same film might find its way into a programme over here, but have heard nothing further.

And so home, and to the end of this skeleton account. I would like to take this opportunity of commending the little *eyases* for the admirable way in which they coped with all the difficulties that beset a touring company: they slid easily into every new situation, and no one, not even the youngest, appeared ruffled by the unexpected. Thanks, too, to Mrs Chirgwin and Mr Callaghan for their unremitting efforts throughout the tour: the appearance of the actors as regards both costume and make-up (yes, beards as well) owed a great debt to their deft touch.

The rest ought to be silence; but, as Hamlet said (and wisely was it said): “*Who maintains 'em?*” Unfortunately the answer to this is complicated. The position is briefly this: the parents of the boys who made up the company (in some cases the boys themselves, and not their parents) paid a sum which, it was estimated, would cover the cost of the return fare, hire of costumes, and insurance. Cost of hiring wigs and properties, and expenses involved in travelling, such as registration of luggage, would, we hoped, be covered by the money raised at the special benefit performance held at the school on 18th April. Unfortunately, there was more to be paid out than we had bargained for, although in Germany we had no worries about our keep. The hire of the costumes was increased because we stayed away an extra two days; and the break in Brussels involved extra cost in registering luggage. Again, we had had some costumes made by Miss Eve Sheppard, whose excellent work will, we hope, be of use to many generations of KGS actors. The *Hamlet* thrones that were specially made for us, too, will be of

inestimable value so long as there is a Shakespeare tradition at Kilburn. May I thank all those parents and others who responded so nobly to our initial appeal for funds and at the same time point out to others that this, our first venture if the kind, cost more than we had calculated? Even the five hundred marks so generously contributed by the German authorities, whose financial responsibility really ended at hospitality and transport, did not quite tide us over.

Finally, a word of thanks to the Headmaster, without whose contacts in Germany the trip would have been quite out of the question. He frequently, when negotiations seemed to be dragging or awkward, allowed me to talk him out of his doubts, and I hope he is as glad as I am that he did so. Perhaps, he will also consider favourably a similar undertaking next year.

Mr P K Wright

After the tour, Miss Edith Davies, the Cultural Attaché at the British Consulate in Kiel, wrote to Mr Wright:

“Thank you very much for coming. I do hope you think it was worthwhile. I KNOW it was. I was privileged to witness the enraptured faces of the young Germans who were your audience and for whom you have made this tremendous effort.

By your coming, you have infinitely helped – in the space of a week – the work I have been labouring at for many years. I am most grateful.”

There were articles in the local paper about the tour, and a very full review of the special performance. For the first time some of the national press was invited – The Times and Times Educational Supplement, in the hope that their coverage might give added publicity. But this was a mistake since despite some perceptive comments these critics were obviously not pleased having to review a school play, and one thought the tour already over.

I will end the story of *Hamlet* by quoting more letters written to Mr Wright and Rosemary after the performance on April 18th. I imagine very few people ever saw these letters. I have copies of them because when I was making the school play photo album Rosemary gave me the letters to put in it. But first I took them home and, these being the days before photocopying, my mother typed them all out for me.

They make a fine epilogue to *Hamlet* at KGS. One I have already quoted. Here, abridged, are the others.

From Miss G Blumenthal, English lecturer at Queen's College and Morley College:

"Dear Mrs Chirgwin, I can not tell you how excited and thrilled I was by your production of *Hamlet*. I cannot remember having ever been so moved by the character of Hamlet himself, or by the pathetic and lovely little Ophelia. I sincerely wish I could have brought my students to this beautifully spoken and intensely alive production. No praise is too high for the producer, and as for your young man who played Hamlet, suffice it to say here that I found his interpretation the most satisfying that I have ever witnessed on any stage in England."

From Don Woodman, Head of Portadown College, Northern Ireland:

"Dear Rosemary, Thank you for the magnificent show. I came away staggered by the brilliance of (a) the production itself and (b) of Hamlet himself. How delightful to see those easy movements lending life to soliloquy and dialogue. The duel scene was as good as anything done by professionals – it was superb. As to Hamlet – I can't find adjectives good enough for him. Starting at brilliant, I work up to speechlessness. And this is not flannel. Such poise, restraint and power, and such an apparently effortless mastery of the enormous part. It was a superb piece of craftsmanship. We return to the producer, because every boy understood his words and spoke with amazing accuracy and clarity."

(NB: Don Woodman was a KGS Old Boy.)

From Bram Bootman, Producer:

"Dear Peter, I had more real theatrical enjoyment that night than for many a moon because of the whole hearted spirit of achievement that came across. Your young man gave a most intelligent and brilliantly thought out presentation of this role. Next to him I would place the King and the pathos of your little Ophelia I found quite heart rending. I am still wondering at the speed and ease with which the players scene and the duel scene came across on that small stage. You have every reason to be proud of your achievement."

The Kilburn Times review was very good. It ended:

“The fight between Hamlet and Laertes was brilliantly performed. I have seen nothing better. When it was over, the atmosphere of tragedy and desolation swept down from the body-strewn stage and over the breathless audience.”



I hope that these pages have brought back some memories and helped to convey to Old Boys of other years just what an effect *Hamlet* had, for those who took part in it and for those like myself who just revelled in the beauty and power of the production and the acting of Graham Bell. At the Centenary Dinner Old Boys looked at the photos I put on display and said things like: "*Hamlet* was great". And so it was.

Next time I will write about the last of the annual Shakespearean productions, and two very special new ones.