

Free Church hall stage restored

TONY WILSON

In 2019, after 45 years of disuse, Suburb resident and Free Church congregation member, Tony Wilson, devised a plan to restore the church hall stage to full working order, so that it could once again become a community resource for the production of shows and performances of all kinds.

The plan which involved installing new sound and lighting systems, curtains and drapes was put before the church Elders and it was agreed to apply for a grant from the HGS Trust. The timing was bad as covid had just hit the

world, and the application was turned down. However, in spring this year the grant application was re-submitted and this time it was successful. The Trust grant covered 75% of the planned expenditure and the church Elders agreed to fund the remaining 25%, so in May the acquisition of items began.

Regular lettings in the hall meant that only two half days were available each week for the work to be done and what with summer holidays, pressures of work and covid attacks, it took Tony and his small team four months to complete the work. The plan required the provision of a full

theatre curtain set, with black fabric mid stage side legs and top border. Church member and theatrical costume maker Diana Darrer stepped forward to take on the job of choosing the materials and making the various parts.

The sound system was upgraded by replacing the ancient broken loudspeakers with a pair of 15 inch Wharfedale Pro Impact loudspeakers, a new Mixmaster 10 channel mixer and three radio microphones. The mixer has all the usual facilities including sound effects plus the ability to pair with Bluetooth devices for playing music or sound effects wirelessly.



Work in progress...

The lighting system has 10 new LED stage lights and incorporates the six original Strand model 833 stage lamps and a halogen flood-light powered by two new dimmer racks and all controlled by a 16 fixture Stairville DMX mixer. The system provides comprehensive lighting capabilities but has the capacity for the addition of more than double the number of lamps and other effects if required.

The restoration plan called for the building of a gantry to support the aluminium curtain track three metres above the stage and for the old lighting bar to be lowered by a metre to improve the angle of lighting provided by the six Strand lamps. New steel pipework and electrical circuits were required to support and power the new lamps and data wiring was installed everywhere to carry the DMX signals to control the lamps. Tony and his two helpers, friend Tim Mynett and church member Richard Orme carried out all this work on the stage while Diana and her trusty industrial

sized sewing machines purred away down below fashioning curtains, pelmets, drapes and borders out of long rolls of fabric.

The final part of the upgrade involved running cabling to the rear of the hall to allow the sound and lights to be optionally controlled from there rather than at the side of the stage.

With the work now complete the stage is restored and ready to host all manner of performances, pantos, plays, recitals, nativity and other children's activities. Bookings can be discussed by contacting Eddie Hayden at lettings@hgsfreechurch.org.uk.

Commenting on the project Tony Wilson said, "I grew up on the Suburb and have many happy memories of shows in the hall in the 1940s & 50s. I thought it was a shame that it had been sitting unused for so long, so I developed a plan to restore it in the hope that when it is completed individuals and theatrical groups will come forward to breathe life into it once more."



The end result



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