

# RATS IN LITTLE WOOD

Christopher Stephen.

Every June, with the onset of summer, the empty grass arena in the Suburb's Little Wood bursts into life for a week as the dramatic society holds its annual open air performance.

There can be few more enchanting ways of spending a warm summer's evening than by sitting out amongst the trees watching such an event, and a large audience gathered on the first night of this year's production, *The Pied Piper*. It was a performance alive with vitality, carried through with an ease that belied the hard work that had been put in beforehand.

This scene is Hamelin in the thirteenth century, a town plagued by rats. Their leader, played by Andrew Forney, is dressed as a gangster, Al Capone style, and is without mercy. With him are three henchmen; the pint sized but animated Daniel Berg, as Small Rat, Tim Solomons as the snazzily dressed Star Rat, and Tim Pointing as the thug-like Bar Rat. They are going to make sure that Hamelin gets no peace, and there is only the croaky old Pensioner Rat, played by Mortimer Bennitt, to raise a dissident, but ineffectual, voice.

The town council of Hamelin are little better though. Peter-John White and Colin Gregory as, respectively, the Mayor and Burger, played splendidly pompous roles, and the third member

of the town council was the sinister Duchess, Diana Bromley drawing hisses from the audience with her wicked schemes. Only the Town Crier, Frank Birnie, manages to inject any dignity into this corrupt council's affairs.



There was goodness too, in the form of the long suffering Aunty Hamps, played by Marion Greenwood. She had a challenging part, having to talk the audience through some of the scenes where children and rats cavorted around her, and was assisted in this task by two lead children, Polly and Pally, played with great self assurance by Emma Solomons and Natalie Berg.

Into this madhouse of characters strides the Pied Piper,

Anne Bracken as the aloof musician, lending an air of mystery and other-worldliness to the proceedings in the striking yellow and red garb. Arriving just as things in the town are getting out of hand, the Piper has to contend for the position of official rat catcher with Claude the Cat. Claude is a complete contrast, Joseph Russel playing the foolish clowning cat who is, in the event, terrified of rats. He has the audience in stitches, but after some dismal failures he hands over to the Piper, who has already proved her worth by bringing life to a scarecrow (Kate Atkinson) who dances to the flute.

As soon as the rats have been successfully led into the Weser the Mayor welches on the deal and offers the Piper a fraction of what he originally promised. No doubt, annoyed by this inconvenience, the Piper whisks all the town's children inside a mountain. All, that is, except the poor lame boy who couldn't keep up with his playmates, Geoffrey Falk giving a moving performance as the poor lad. But the Piper comes back for him, and the boy is obviously glad to be locked up inside a mountain in preference to a lonely life in Hamelin.

Together with its colourful array of characters, were a host of towns children and little rats who bounded about the stage



adding yet more energy and vitality to the performance, occasionally slipping into the audience demanding sweets.

There was music too, well played and arranged by Kate Atkinson, Chloe Falk and Liz Grant, and the audience too got in on the act, joining in a song for the Piper.

The enthusiasm of all concerned was only matched by the work put in previously, with some nice touches in props, such as the rats having their very own newspaper, the *Rat Times* and their wonderful heads made by Mollie Cattle. And congratulations to all those offstage who must have put in so much to get the show on the grass.

It was a super evening, and a tribute to the Suburbs community spirit.



Anne Bracken relaxes before the show.

## The Trust, Windows and Double Glazing.

In any building the windows are a most important feature of the appearance and give life to the elevations. We refer to a windowless wall as being 'blind' and the positions and shapes of windows and doors can make a building look austere, friendly, informal, haphazard or downright slovenly.

Unfortunately under general Planning Law (outside the Suburb) the alteration of windows is 'permitted development' (meaning that permission is not necessary) and we have all seen and been horrified by the way lovely gothic Victorian terraces have been destroyed by the introduction of only a few modern windows of completely different style. We would none of us wish to see the same kind of thing happen in the Suburb.

To restate what should be well known, any alteration to doors or windows, no matter whether they are at the front or the rear, requires an application to the Trust for approval. Almost all of them will require consent from the London Borough of Barnet also by virtue of the Article 4 Direction which is enforced throughout the Conservation Area.

Different areas of the Suburb have houses with different types of window, each characteristic of the period and of the area and each having their virtues and disadvantages. Each is capable of improvement in a way which does not affect the appearance.

Many of the earlier houses have traditional double-hung sliding sash windows, always on the Suburb divided into small panes of glass. This window is an English invention and a very good one too. Nothing projects to interfere with the hang of the curtains of for you to bump your head into. The sash slides in a groove so there are two checks against draughts. The beads are removable and replaceable so that the window can be tightened up after it wears. This is one of the great virtues of timber windows; they can be repaired so readily by a good tradesman. Using modern glues it is even possible to splice in replacement sections of wood and make badly decayed frames as good as new. The timber used in these old windows is often of very high quality and unlikely to decay unless neglected.

The performance of these windows can be improved by weatherstripping and the GLC has worked out a system using replacement beads incorporating pile weatherstrip. This system is being examined at present to see how well it works.

Another early window is the wooden casement window, sometimes divided into small panes and sometimes with larger glass sizes. In the Suburb these windows were very subtly designed to keep constant glass sizes or glass proportions, a subtlety which is missing from the standard modern catalogue product. For this reason standard windows are not acceptable substitutes in the Suburb for the original designs.



View of Coleridge Walk, where the original timber windows have been retained or copied.

Many of the earlier houses also used heavy timber frames with leaded lights set in and with iron casements for the opening lights. Where these have been well maintained the effect is very beautiful indeed. The individual pieces of glass in leaded lights are all set at slightly different angles and give a sparkle to the window which 'stuck-on' lead strips can never produce. By now some of the old wrought casement frames are in a bad way. New ones can be made and fitted in the original style but in some circumstances the Trust may agree to the substitution of a slightly different frame. These were always painted black in the original instance and should not be painted white.

At a later period in the Suburb, the 'Crittall' standard steel window was used, particularly by the architects of the Modern Movement. These windows have horizontal glazing bars and often curved bay windows. Standard steel windows with small panes were also used ('cottage casements'). Unfortunately these windows were generally not galvanised and by now are often rusty, ill fitting because of rust and layers of paint and generally

not of an acceptable modern standard. The householder in this situation is often told that these windows are no longer made and that his only course is to change to a different type of window. This is quite untrue. Steel windows made to 'imperial' sizes have always been available and are now even more widely available. The windows made now are always hot dip galvanised which overcomes the rust problem. They can also be factory painted with long life paint which overcomes the problem of paint build up. The windows can also be weatherstripped at the factory. In fact the modern steel window is a first class and very economical product. We are at present investigating the possibilities of double-glazing within the standard steel frame.

What is the attitude of the Trust towards double glazing? The views have been set out very clearly in an information leaflet which is available from the Trust Office. From the foregoing discussion it is obvious that anything which involves the replacement of the window frame by something different will not be approved by the Trust. However, if one is having to replace timber windows it may be possible, though not necessarily economical, to use a slightly deeper rebate to accept double glass units. It may be that acceptable double glazing can be done in steel windows and we are studying the matter. Apart from these possibilities the Trust indicates that, in general, it will only accept a secondary double glazing system.

However, on a more positive side the Trust, through its leaflet, points out that in the typical house the main heat loss is through the ceiling and roof. Therefore the first step in conserving heat must be to insulate the roof. Secondly, where a house have cavity wall walls, the next step to take is to insulate the cavity. Taking action on windows comes next but the greater heat loss occurs because of draughts. These are stopped by good secondary double glazing, but can also be stopped by a good weatherstripping system of which there are numerous types available.

The fashion for replacement windows with double glazing is based upon high-pressure salesmanship in a very competitive industry. As a result exaggerated claims are made and scorn is poured upon other materials and this gives a very distorted view of the true situation. It is almost always cheaper and simpler to repair than to replace and following the Budget, both attract the same VAT. Timber, when impregnated with preservative does not rot. Steel when galvanised does not rust. Both can be weatherstripped. The message from the Trust is to repair where possible. Where this is not possible, replace like with like. In this way the essential and characteristic appearance of the houses and of the Suburb are maintained.



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