Memories of:

"Romanoff and Juliet."

50 years ago this month, the annual school play staged in our school was "Romanoff and Juliet" by Peter Ustinov. It turned out to be the most controversial play ever staged at our school and what follows are some of my recollections of the play itself, newspaper cuttings relating to the subsequent controversy and photographs from the time. I am indebted to Mr Islwyn Griffiths for allowing me to scan the 35mm slides he took in 1960, and to Terry Richards, who took the part of Romanoff in the play, and allowed me to scan the newspaper cuttings he had kept.



In the post-war period in Pembroke Dock and Pembroke Grammar Schools, the annual drama productions had most often been 'heavyweight' – plays such as Murder in the Cathedral, Branwen, Coriolanus, The Merry Wives of Windsor etc. Post-war School Plays had been produced by Miss A.R. Lewis-Davies and Raymond Garlick, but this task had been taken over by Mr GS Shaw in the early 1950s, one of the first plays he produced being the contemporary play 'Our Town' in 1954. He was a true maestro at the art of play production with the ability to take raw teenagers, get the best out of any acting ability they had and put on a series of plays that were a credit to him, the school and the education system in Pembroke-shire.



G S Shaw studiously watches a rehearsal in progress.

In 1960, Mr Shaw decided that the school should put on another contemporary play. He had seen a production of Romanoff and Juliet by the Arts Council the year before. The auditions were held near the end of the summer term so that those chosen to take part could familiarise themselves with the play over the summer holidays. Mr Shaw was confronted at the audition with a complete mix of people – stalwarts like John Lewis, Charles James, Roger Horgan and Jane Evans from previous plays and new aspiring hopefuls like Peter Lewis, Gwyn Jones, Pat Thomas, Janice Brady and myself. Looking back, I find it hard to believe that in the summer of 1960 I was only 14 and in fact wasn't 15 until the week the play was staged. The nearest I'd been to a stage was a chapel pulpit, reading the lesson, and I had played the part of the 'Mad Hatter' in one of Miss AR Lewis-Davies English lessons, no doubt to her great displeasure! Much to my surprise Mr Shaw gave me the play to get familiar with it. It really was a funny play but I remember thinking that the language was perhaps not 'school play' material – particularly a soldier suggesting that another soldier was born out of wedlock....

Rehearsals started in earnest in the Autumn Term. GS Shaw had taken it upon himself to take the part of the General as well as produce the play. I don't think he did this because he didn't believe he had the pupil talent to do it but rather because it was a huge part and would have taken any pupil a lot of time both to learn and rehearse. After all, there was rugby to be played, International Club to go to, Monti's, Brown's, the '22', and something else, oh yes, studying! Mr Shaw went through the play with us giving stage directions and cutting a few pieces out – including, to great disappointment, the line where Soldier Peter Lewis was to call Soldier Alan Bowen a bastard. But I distinctly remember when it came to Peter Lewis questioning the whereabouts of his "bloody rifle" Mr Shaw somewhat wistfully commenting that we'd leave that in – "I think we'll get away with that" he said. Subsequent events were to show that we didn't get away with it with everyone!

My memories of rehearsals were that they were such fun! On numerous occasions we would get the giggles, a terrible thing, and rehearsal would come to a stop – "come along, settle down" Mr Shaw would say. But it really was a funny play and we couldn't help it. Gwyn Jones was a terrible boy for setting people off giggling – well, it was alright for him, playing the part of a guy in hot pursuit of the American Ambassador's lovely daughter – played by Jane Evans, Gwyn didn't have to act, just be his normal self but with an American accent.



Rehearsal in progress whilst the set takes shape in the background.

L-R: Peter Lewis (Soldier) Terry Richards (Romanoff) Jane Evans (Juliet) G S Shaw (The General) Alan Bowen (Soldier)



Serious stuff: Instructions from the maestro Producer G S Shaw.(Extreme Right) L—R: Alan Bowen (Soldier) Terry Richards (Romanoff) Janice Brady (Marfa) Roger MacCallum (Spy) John Lewis (Vadim)

The play was set in "the smallest country in Europe" and the action centred around the Town Square with its Church and ancient clock, with, on either side of the square, the Russian and American Embassies. The plot was based on a love affair between the daughter of



Some members of the cast watch others rehearse. L—R: Janice Brady (Marfa) Marilyn Sanders (Beulah) Roger Horgan (Hooper) Roger MacCallum (Spy) Gwyn Jones (Freddie)

John Lewis (Vadim)

the American Ambassador and the son of the Russian Ambassador, to the consternation of both sets of parents. The plot thickened on the arrival of an American fridge salesman and the female captain of a Russian warship to whom the daughter and son of the ambassadors were respectively betrothed. Mayhem ensues with the General playing the part of matchmaker, diplomat and narrator.



K A Cooper works on the set.



Willing helpers paint the scenery.

The set, designed by Ken Cooper, the school's Art Teacher, was a masterpiece of innovation. In the centre, the town clock with revolving figures who struck the time, which was usually wrong. The Embassies on either side had both upstairs and downstairs. The upstairs bedrooms were at table height and had front walls. These 'walls' were in fact sheets of muslin with paintings of Khrushchev and Lincoln on their respective sides. When the action was downstairs the muslin was lit from the front and the walls looked solid. When the action was upstairs the muslin was backlit and you could see straight through it. It was an amazingly effective piece of set design and obviated the need for massive set changing between acts. Unfortunately, photographs fail to illustrate how effective this was.



The General (G S Shaw) with his soldiers (Alan Bowen and Peter Lewis and their infamous "Bloody Rifles".



G S Shaw as the General.

The costumes were a complete mixture – from beautiful long dresses for the American girls, to the dark, austere clothes of the Russians. Then there was the military glitz of the General, the resplendent Archbishop and the 2 soldiers in their 'day clothes' like a pair of ragamuffins. When that lot was ordered Fox and Partners, who always supplied the costumes for school plays, they must have wondered what on earth we were doing.



Some of the American contingent. Hooper, American Ambassador (Roger Horgan) Igor the Ambassador's son (Terry Richards) Juliet the Ambassador's daughter (Jane Evans) Beulah, Juliet's Mam (Marilyn Saunders)



Some of the Russian contingent. Spy (Roger MacCallum) Vadim, Russian Ambassador (John Lewis) Evdokia, Igor's Mam (Patricia Thomas)



The Archbishop (Charles James) being transformed by the dextrous fingers of Julian Jones.



Juliet (Jane Evans) described in the local 'Telegraph' as **"an extremely at***tractive damsel reclining on a bed"* to the subsequent outrage of the Free Church Council.

It's a good job we had a dress rehearsal. If we had been confronted with Charlie James in full Archbishop's Regalia complete with long grey beard on the first night, the rest of us would have got the giggles for sure. The dress rehearsal went well and this was one of the occasions when Mr Islwyn Griffiths took a set of colour slides of the play. The dress rehearsal made me realise as well that to put on a play successfully required an army of helpers backstage. The set, the makeup, costumes, lighting and prompting, The people who did this were as important as the people on stage . A lot of people – both staff and pupils gave up a lot of their own free time to make these plays a success.

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	The action takes place in the Main Square in the Capital City of the Smallest Country in Europe. On the left is the Russian Embassy and on the right the			CAST (in order of appearance)	
PEMBROKE GRAMMAR SCHOOL DRAMATIC SOCIETY presents Romanoff & Juliet	American Embassy. 1 Dav	Acr I vn to morning.	FIRST SOLDIEI SECOND SOLDI THE GENERAL HOOPER MOU VADIM ROMAN IGOR ROMANG JULIET	R PETER LEWIS IER ALAN BOWEN G. S. SHAW LSWORTH ROCER MOROAN VOFF JOIN H. LEWIS	
d		n to afternoon. Acr 111 ming to night,	THE SPT BEULAH MOUJ EVDOKIA ROM JUNIOR CAPTA ZLOTOCHIE	IANOFF PATRICIA THOMAS Patricia Inco	
PETER USTINOV	Stage Manager Set constructed by Assistant Producer Prompter Wardrobe Lighting	D. E. LLOYD. R. LEWIS, D. JONIS S. G. W. BOILE. GILLINS PHILLIPS. M. J. JORES. J. HOGE, BRIAN ANGLE, DAVID FEASTER, RAY RENOUES, PITTER	FREDDIE VAN THE ARCHBISH	DERSTUTT GWYN JONES	
NOVEMBER 1960	Effects Properties Make-up Publicity Business Managers	WILLIAMS. Properties JANET MUNT, ANGELA EVANS. Makeup FULEX THOMAS, M. J. JONES. Publicity TOM SIMPSON.		Setting designed and painted by K. A. Cooper. Assisted by Shirley Britten, Michael Edwards, Phillip Laine, John Lloyd.	
L G WARN (COMMENT) DR. AMERIK, TALY AN VALUER			Music for the l	allads composed by Antony Hopkins.	



An original ticket from the second night of the play.

Some of the 'Official' Play photos, taken at Dress Rehearsal.



Soldiers on their 'day job' - trying to sell 'exotic' postcards and magazines to Romanoff and Juliet.

L—R: Alan Bowen, Jane Evans, Terry Richards, Peter Lewis.



Russian Embassy Upstairs L- R: Janice Brady, Terry Richards. Downstairs L—R: Pat Thomas, John Lewis, Roger MacCallum On the pavement L– R: Alan Bowen Peter Lewis

American Embassy Jane Evans, Gwyn Jones Marilyn Saunders, Roger Horgan s



Liberation Day Celebration.

L– R: Pat Thomas, John Lewis, Alan Bowen, Terry Richards, Charlie James, Peter Lewis, Roger Horgan, Marilyn Saunders, G S Shaw.



The Spy is ordained as a kneeling Friar. L– R: Alan Bowen, Charlie James, Roger MacCallum, Peter Lewis, G S Shaw.

Anybody who says they were not nervous on stage on the first night of a play, must be devoid of a central nervous system. I was terrified that it would all go wrong and I'd forget my lines and go to pieces. Fortunately that didn't happen, no one forgot their lines and the play had been well rehearsed. One thing that surprised me, never having been on stage before, was that from on the stage, regardless of the lighting, you could see people in the audience – and hear what they were saying. The play seemed to go down well with the audience, lots of laughter and lots of applause.

The following day, there was a report in the local paper about the play. It was written by the late Vernon Scott –that finest of local reporters and authors of the day. I think he was writing for the "Guardian" at the time. Vernon obviously enjoyed the play, here are some extracts from his report:

EVERY MINUTE ENJOYABLE

"I attended the opening performance on Tuesday and like the rest of the large audience, enjoyed every minute of it."

"Superbly produced by Stuart Shaw - who also gives a memorable performance as the

General, a philosophical peacemaker and matchmaker - the play offers considerable acting scope and the talented and youthful cast respond with refreshing gusto."

"Romanoff and Juliet" reflects great credit on those who by thought and effort, endeavour to put the school on a high dramatic pedestal. It is a tremendous success and I advise all parents and friends to see the two remaining performances. They will find the visit well worthwhile."

This was music to our ears and ensured we had full audiences for the remaining nights. The only down side of Vernon's report from my point of view was that he reported some personal comments made about me by members of the audience. I was so embarrassed I told my mother "I'm not going back to school this afternoon Mam, I can't face it." And I didn't. (How I wish I had reminded Vernon of this later in life, when I got to know him well. The pair of us would have got the giggles all over again.)

Then, events took a different turn. The local "Telegraph" reporter, who remained anonymous, saw the play in an entirely different light. Here are some comments from his review of the play:

Strong Words, And Plenty Of Cuddling!

"Comment from one schoolboy programme seller at the entrance to Bush Grammar School last week: "If you like the Lady Chatterley story you'll really lap this up." Possible explanation for this view was the abundance of kissing and cuddling and the protracted appearance of an extremely attractive young damsel reclining on a bed even when she had no part in the act."

".....one schoolboy soldier posed the question: "Where's my bloody rifle?" Subsequently the "damns" and "hells" became an accepted figure of speech by almost everyone."

"The play may not have been everyone's idea of good choice. It was certainly not flawless by any yardstick. But the cast generally deserve praise for wholehearted effort."

We weren't too pleased with this report on the play but had no idea what was to follow, as reported in the local "Telegraph":

Churches Condemn that 'Naughty' School Play

NEARLY forty representatives attending Friday's meeting of the Pembroke Borough Free Church Council at Wesley Chapel Pembroke Dock unanimously condemned the recent Pembroke Grammar School play "Romanoff and Juliet" as an unsuitable presentation. Members were so appalled and perturbed that a letter of protest has been sent to the Grammar School Headmaster (Mr. T. C. Roberts) and the Board of Governors.

.....[it]reads as follows:

"It was with feelings of great regret that we read a report in last week's 'Western Telegraph' of the impression made by the latest production staged by the pupils of Bush Grammar School, and we would like to put on record how perturbed and appalled we were, as members of the Free Church Council to understand that such an unsuitable play could be produced and staged in your school, and presented by children to children, in Pembroke.

"In these days, when so much is said and written about immorality among teen-agers, we feel compelled to register our protest against the production of this play, and ask you to bear in mind the concern of the Council when choosing plays for the future." The Headmaster declined to make any comment on the matter.

This was followed by further moralising in the local "Telegraph" editorial:

Fit for Children?

THE pupils of the Pembroke Dock Grammar School present a play for the entertainment of pupils, parents and the general public. Anyone who cares to pay the price of admission is welcome to attend. The play selected by these young and enthusiastic amateur actors is "Romanoff and Juliet," and when the news gets out and about the town that the school children are swearing like troopers, that some of the situations are "suggestive and doubtful," a great many people start to wear frowns and long faces.......anyone who realises, that even "Lady Chatterley" is legally approved reading for school girls, must appreciate that, judging by the standards of today, the school play is really nothing amiss. But if anyone really believes that the standards accepted today are better than they were before the war, that's a different matter.

Then the National press got hold of the story and we were treated to headlines like this in the Sunday tabloids:

USTINOV UPROAR Saucy school play brings protests from

two towns

By Sunday Dispatch Reporter

In this article the Reporter included lines like:

A girl stretched precociously on a divan. Two school friends kissed. And a couple of schoolboys were swearing like troopers. The grammar school was staging its annual play—produced by the Scripture master in the school hall before an audience of pupils, parents, and friends.

All except one of the cast in the three-act play were senior boys and girls, aged 16 to 18. The leading role of the general —the part Ustinov wrote for himself—was played by the producer, scripture teacher Mr. Stuart Shaw.

"I see nothing improper in the play being put on by teenagers," said 34-year-old Mr. Shaw. "I chose it after seeing an Arts Council production."

Mr. Trevor Roberts [Headmaster] has replied to the churches, telling them he thinks their attack is unjustified and ill-founded. He said "I believe it to be a perfectly suitable play for a school production and not improper or immoral in any way. The only swear words are at the beginning to help create the character of the common soldier." There are stories that programme sellers [boys] boosted the play by calling it a "Lady Chatterley-style entertainment."

Said Mr. Roberts: "All the programmes were sold by girls, and I am sure they wouldn't have said that. The play was chosen and cast in August, long before the Lady Chatterley case was brought to court."

It is interesting in the context of the time that putting the Headmaster to the sword ('Murder in the Cathedral'), carrying a severed head around on a spike ('Branwen') apparently brought no complaint. Even in Romanoff, teenagers carrying real rifles (they were not stage props but rifles borrowed from the Army at Llanion) was not questioned. What caused the furore was "bad language and cuddling." The following week, the local "Guardian" – ever a friend of the school - carried a long article included in which were the following:

FREE CHURCH COUNCIL PROTEST OVER SCHOOL PLAY

Yet Members Never Saw "Romanoff and Juliet"!

WIDE LOCAL SUPPORT FOR PRODUCTION

Chairman of the Free Church Council admitted that the criticisms were based solely on a press report (not the "Guardian").

A "Guardian" representative who saw the production, described it as a tremendous success" the audience loved every minute of it and after the Thursday and Friday performances the cast took several curtain calls."

The "Guardian" also canvassed local opinion:

A member of the Free Church Council... absent from Friday's meeting but he did see the play which has caused his colleagues so much upset.... told the "Guardian" on Monday:

"I saw nothing offensive in 'Romanoff and Juliet' at all."

Rev. J. B. Lewis, Vicar of Carew, whose two sons. John and Peter, were in the play, said:—

"I hope the Grammar School goes on producing plays like this without taking notice of the criticisms. ...At this rate we'll be crossing Shakespeare off the list—not to mention text books supplied for the Welsh Joint Education Committee examination!

A prominent Pembroke Dock businessman, who has a 13-year-old daughter at the

Grammar School, dismissed the criticisms as "utterly ridiculous, the entire production was a credit to the school and the Borough,"

A Pembroke businessman thought that the Free Church Council criticism was childish. "Anyone with the most elementary knowledge of the theatre would not bat an eyelid at 'Romanoff and Juliet.'

Mr. E. Lloyd Williams, Headmaster of the Coronation School, observed: "In the present day it is important that drama like other arts has an important part to play in the life of senior pupils of any secondary school. 'Romanoff and Juliet' is a play dealing with contemporary problems. It has a moral and in my opinion it was a fine effort on the part of the pupils."

Letters to the Press included the following:

This, from Rene O'Bear, Licentiate of the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London:

"ROMANOFF AND JULIET"

"Sir.—It is heartening to know that Roman Catholics and the Free Churches are united in a matter of such grave concern as the appalling and constant lowering of the standards of purity, modesty and integrity before the onslaughts of progressive materialism......"

But from Mr Drysdale in Pembroke:

"Do It Again"

To the Editor

Sir,—May I say that I enjoyed the performance of Romanoff and Juliet, so severely criticised recently.....In view of the controversy aroused by this play it might be profitable to produce it again and this would give its most vehement critics a chance to see it and judge from a more knowledgeable viewpoint."

All of us who had been connected with the play regarded all this stuff with glee – and would willingly have done repeat performances. Mr Shaw and TC Roberts handled it well in a quiet professional manner but I suspect both of them were seething underneath, and I doubt that either of them thought for a moment that the morals of the pupils had been corrupted by the play, they were probably well aware that some of the language that flew round the boys playground and that various other, er...'extra-curricular activities' would make Romanoff and Juliet look distinctly 'Enid Blyton.' There were to be two further broadsides:

In the local "Guardian", the columnist who went by the name of 'Factotum', writing a column called "You Might Agree", had no time at all for the attitude of the Free Church Council. Here are some extracts from his column:

The Pure in Mind

....but how nimbly these Pembroke Puritans succeeded in achieving a dis-service to their local Grammar School, its pupils and teachers! All because they are ever ready to clutch to their over-righteous bosoms any bit of cheap dirt slinging and tittle tattle of perverse innuendo, or the slightest suggestion that their Victorian tenets of rigid moral conduct have been overlooked ...

....what is the matter with these people? Have they nothing better to do than fasten on to idle or ill-informed gossip and turn it into a religious crusade? Merely to gainthe adulation of their kind? And this at the expense of local youth and schoolmasters, who because of the Puritans' astonishingly fiery indignation made the headlines for the Sunday newspapers which, surely members of the Pembroke Free Church Council NEVER read.

"Shame"

Thedirty little storm created in the local teacup last week-end was turned into a noxious mental drink for half the nation!

Obviously the Free Church Council had it in mind to let the world know that those vicious words "damn" and "bloody" were actually SPOKEN by schoolboys on a school platform in PEMBROKE. Are we now to fear that the morals of these young people have been irrevocably perverted? Can they never, never become nice, clean-minded, sweet-mouthed adults like the Fathers of the Free Church Council? Also, it is to be feared that they are doomed to perpetual damnation; I have heard normally polite schoolboys who would do nothing mean by a friend, a girl, parents or indeed anyone, cuss like troopers in a rugby scrum. And it was not "stage language"! Several young pupils are "said" to have "confessed that they were embarrassed by certain scenes" Here is cause for wonder! As if these children had never seen the "love-mush" on the silver screen? Have they not yet seen anything other thanthe Flower Pot Men on the telly? Have they not yet listened to the tear- drenched death-gloom of a "pop" record called "Tell Laura I love her"?

..... I can't tell the F.C.C. that I love them. I cry "shame" that they seek to denigrate the local Grammar School and its masters. And "shame" again that they should doubt the morals of the young folk who performed a difficult play with considerable ability."

I think he should have told them straight and not beaten about the bush so! I can't remember if the Free Church Council responded to this, but Father Newman, head of the local Catholic Church did. He was not pleased with 'Factotum', and had this to say:

"Factotum" Taken to Task

To the Editor

Sir,—That criticism of the Grammar School play on the lines of the Free Church Council's protest or others who thought it "unsuitable" would cause genuine concern to the School Authorities and the producer few would doubt, and few who would not sympathise with them. Good choice or bad (I did not see the play myself) none of the critics has impugned their sincerity. Nor, has anyone gainsaid the Church Council's right and ...duty to speak its mind on what it thought a moral issue; and no one has doubted its sinceritywith one appalling exception.

Fair Comment is one thing, vulgar abuse of those with whom you disagree is another, and I feel obliged to protest against "Factotum's" unjust and insulting attack on the Free Churchmen.

....the public look to the Free Churchmen for moral leadership. Does he think that those leaders should remain silent on what they regard as a moral issue lest somebody's feelings are hurt? Must they abdicate their position and calling and relinquish their followers to the guidance of a "Factotum"? Must the most unworthy motives be ascribed to them when they do speak,because it strikes "Factotum" as just a desire for cheap sensationalism and publicity? "It was no more than that." But any stick will do—"merely to gain for themselves the adulation of their kind," or they "seek to denigrate the local Grammar School, etc., etc."

Is "Factotum" being honest himself in opening his attack or as a journalist is he so ignorant of the ways of his own profession that he really doesn't know that the national Press itself "lifts" items from the local Presses or works up sensationally the raw material supplied by this latter or to use his own phrase, "the dirty little storm created in the local tea-cup?"

He asks "What is the matter with these people," but what is the matter with him?..... So what makes him tick? It couldn't be a violent animus towards them could it? "You might agree."

....But what is surely of greatest importance Sir, is that responsible bodies and individuals should be free to express their views and to differ without being pilloried with the cheapest abuse.

Yours, etc., MAURICE J. NEWMAN, Catholic Rectory, Pembroke Dock.

After this things seemed to die down and the "storm in a teacup" was over. One wonders whether the members of the Free Church Council regretted their stance, but I suspect not. Neither do I think that Mr Shaw regretted choosing that particular play. The following year he chose a play by Nicolai Gogol which contained a scene of on-stage drunkenness! But that's another story - and the Free Church Council never said a word.

Finally, if there are any other former pupils, or staff, who have additional, or different memories of "Romanoff and Juliet", please send them in.

Roger MacCallum, 1956-1964.