

MARCHAM PLAYERS

This was originally written for the Millennium edition but not published ... until now!

The view from the front of house

A good front of house man can gently prise every penny from his audience's pocket and still let it go home happy. Mark Twain once posed the question, "what is the difference between a taxidermist and a tax collector?" and answered "the taxidermist only takes your skin". So it is with the good front of house man.

Of course the people of Marcham understand that an evening at a Marcham Players production will always cost more than the price of the ticket. Thus a healthy game ensues between audience and host, where at various moments in time, the front of house man will dangle tempting lures before his guests. The audience in turn makes as if to resist, but with a little showmanship, can usually be persuaded to make another modest contribution to the organisation's coffers. Prime among these lures is *the raffle*.

Rule number one concerning the raffle is never display the prizes until you have sold the tickets. This is why raffle tickets are always sold at the door and never when the audience is comfortably ensconced in their seats and able to make rational decisions at their leisure. Prizes are always revealed to the audience just before the raffle is drawn. A good front of house man will undertake this at the very start of the interval whilst the audience are still blinking and fumbling in the sudden brightness of the house lights.

You will understand, of course, that members of the cast donate the prizes. Every effort is made to ensure that the prizes are of the most ostentatious and desirable nature. And, indeed when the prizes were first donated they possibly did bear some resemblance to this ideal. However, every one knows that the only purpose of winning a raffle prize is to be able to make a donation of it as yet another prize in some future raffle. (This is what, I believe, environmentalists now call re-cycling). Thus some of the items in The Marcham Players store of prizes are now into their second decade. Hence the golden rule – never display the prizes until the tickets have been sold.

Problems only arise when some one unfamiliar with the unwritten rules of raffles draws a winning ticket. There was the unfortunate incident in 1991 when a man from Kingston Bagpuize won a bottle of Blue Nun, which on closer inspection, and with a little scraping of some judiciously applied tipex, had a label revealing a vintage of 1974.

More recently, I vividly recall the look of anguish on a small boy's face as he approached the prize table to claim the one remaining prize. This was a faded and rather dog-eared box of Bassets Liquorice Allsorts, which I could see from where I was standing, still displayed a price sticker proclaiming one shilling. On asked to take his prize, the boy very politely enquired if he could have the tablecloth rather than the sweets.

Another lure that always prompts the clicking of purse catches is the interval drinks.

In this respect, I can reveal that that "takings" from interval drinks has fallen considerably since the new heating was installed at The Institute. The connection between the two may not be immediately obvious so let me explain further.

I suppose that to a certain extent we were our own worst enemies when it came to the heating. Regular attendees at our performances will recall the difficulties we all suffered with the old heating – a series of 1950s style bathroom fires that hung high up on the walls. These were operated by the insertion of coins in a meter. These heaters had two settings – on and off. On was hot. Off was cold. You either froze or baked.

One of our very first front of house men, a wily sort of chap, who went on to be a pawn broker I believe, quickly spotted the correlation between room temperature and refreshment consumption during the interval. Winter performances in a frozen hall resulted in voluminous partaking of tea and coffee after the June 2005



first Act. With a little experimenting it was discovered that the application of the heaters ten minutes before the interval during a summer's production could easily double takings on soft drinks and cold wine.

In order to explain the apparent unpredictability of the heating, various rumours were put about concerning its unreliability and how it seemed to have a mind of its own. I understand that such falsities are now perfectly acceptable in society and are generally known as spin doctoring. Thus we ease our guilty consciences.

However, rumour eventually came to be taken as fact, and The Institute Trustees replaced the heaters with something more up to date. Our funds have never recovered.

TIM OWEN

Should you still wish to join Marcham Players after reading this(!), please ring Joey Maclean, 391242.



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MARCHAM CRICKET CLUB

The Season has opened satisfactorily with the 1st XI winning two out of three Division 2 matches and the 2nd XI three out of three in Division 7.

Fixtures for June are as follows:

- 4th 1st XI at home to Chinnor
2nd XI away to Wantage
- 11th 1st XI away to Marsh Gibbon
2nd XI at home to Freeland 2nd XI
- 18th 1st XI at home to Charlbury
2nd XI away to East Oxford 2nd XI
- 25th 1st XI at home to Brill
2nd XI away to Chalgrove

Early July fixtures are:

- 2nd 1st XI away to Horley
2nd XI at home to Kennington 2nd XI
- 3rd (At Marcham) either Quarter Final Airey Cup or friendly match against Headington Quarry

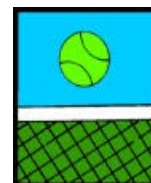
As usual, information concerning the Club may be obtained from Graham Hill (391415) or Terry Whittaker (391317).

Bill Pointer has kindly supplied a cricketing "snippet from the past". Thus, in the *North Berks Herald* of 28th June 1879 a report appears regarding a return match against Hagbourne which transpired to be an eight wicket victory for visitors Marcham (Marcham 133-Hagbourne 72). Our team congratulated Hagbourne for having "secured so good and excellent piece of ground". Further, it is reported that after the match "the two Clubs indulged in some athletic sport, that would have done credit to professionals". The nature of the "athletic sport" does not appear to have been recorded. Please remember, as always, spectators are very welcome at the Club's matches.

CSB

MARCHAM TENNIS ASSOCIATION

If couldn't come along to registration, call me on 01865 391725 to arrange a time to renew or join. Fees are Junior £11.50, Adult £20, Family £42 Please remember to put the nets down during term time so that the school can use their playground.



During holidays you can leave them up but on the last day before term, please put them away:

Half Term Break: 30 May – 3 June. **End of Term:** 22 July

MERIEL