

## Venture Theatre News - The Wardrobe Department

Costumes are so important for the success of any play and there's a lot more to it than you might think. Although not in charge of wardrobe, Mary Barker has been involved in costumes at the Venture Theatre since 1973 and has spent her whole working life in the textile industry so she knows a thing or two about fashion and clothes!

At the start of a new production, the costume team's first job is to read the play several times and work out what costumes each actor will need and how many changes they will have. After a meeting with the director to get their views, and the first production team meeting, the work begins to research and source possible costumes. Another important stage is to measure the cast. "I never ask them their measurements," Mary told us, "as they often say they are a lot smaller than they actually are!" The theatre has its own wardrobe department, complete with a set of rolling storage stacks and a big range of costumes but it is still necessary sometimes to hire from elsewhere. This is particularly so if it is a period play. The theatre did have some vintage costumes of its own at one time but they are often far too small for modern actors. Victorian clothes are particularly minuscule!

As well as hiring, car boot sales and charity shops can be a good source of possible costumes. It is often possible to adapt items to make them suitable. For our last production, an old wedding dress was worn by the ghost. This came from a car boot sale and was originally in good condition but in order to transform it Mary had to hang it on her rotary clothes line, slash it to ribbons and throw a mixture of beetroot, cocoa and brown sauce at it!

The costume person will be present at technical and dress rehearsals to make sure all the cast are happy with their costumes. "You can't expect them to go on stage with a costume they don't like or don't feel comfortable in," Mary said. After those final rehearsals, the costume team usually leave the cast to it but sometimes, if a costume is particularly complicated, an actor will need a dresser and a member of wardrobe will usually do that.

After the production, costumes have to be returned. If they have been hired and altered, these alterations will need to be undone. It is not necessary to clean hired costumes as the hiring organisation do this but for theatre costumes Mary will wash any washable ones before putting them away.

Working in wardrobe can be fun as well as satisfying and help is always welcome. You don't necessarily need to be a good needle person. You might prefer to help with research and finding costumes or just keeping the wardrobe area in good order. If this sounds like something you would like to be involved with, don't hesitate to come down to the theatre on a Monday night to meet us all.