



Manifest Theatre Group  
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## HISTORY

The Queen's Silver Jubilee Celebrations in 1977, on the Welcome Home Field in Mistley, was the location where the company was conceived. It was the heady excitement of the day that spurred Dennis Murfitt to discuss the possibility of forming a theatre group of local enthusiasts in Manningtree. Following eager conversations between Dennis, Val Taylor, Viv Wheatley and Bruce Emeny they decided to pursue this idea. There was a need for a drama group in the area as many local people used their theatrical talents in various surrounding towns and villages: not in Manningtree. There was a gap that needed to be filled.

Dennis was the inspiration and driving force during the early stages of the group's formation. So many people worked tirelessly to make the dream a reality. The Inaugural Meeting took place at the Waggon and Horses public house on the 10th July 1978. The first Management Committee was elected, the business of running a theatre group discussed and an implementation plan agreed. The Committee was made up as follows - Chairman: Ernie Norfolk. Secretary: Irene Hacon. Treasurer: Jack Hacon. Producer: Dennis Murfitt. Other Committee Members: Val Taylor, Viv Wheatley and Bruce Emeny. Others present were: Adrian Bolton, Kevin Brown, Brenda and Bill Chapman, Yvonne Cobbold, Jane Cousins, Sally Mann and Jean Murfitt. Special mention must also be made to Geoff Taylor and Terry Cousins for their skills in realising a vision and turning a hall into a working theatre.

Pauline Emeny thought up the name of the group.

Man - Manningtree: Manifest - as to show or appear. Thus we arrive at **The Manifest Theatre Group**.

The first venue we appeared at was the Old British Legion Hall, affectionately known as Robin's Shed, at the top corner of South Street, Manningtree. Due to the enthusiasm and dedication of the membership the hall was transformed into a theatre in time for our first production in May 1979. Genuine tip up theatre seats, sets and scaffolding for lighting positions were erected. The first production was the comedy "[Breath of Spring](#)" by Peter Coke. Nineteen productions were performed in our first venue.

In 1984 a former primary school in Oxford Road came up for sale. It was the only property that was ever likely to be on the market in the area that was suitable for conversion to a theatre. It was decided we should go for it and approach our bank for a loan to purchase it. After heroic fund raising efforts we purchased the building at a cost of £35,000, The group had already raised £14,000 towards the cost of a permanent home for the theatre. The members with the required specialist skills managed to completely refurbish the building without any outside help. In just a few months the group was ready to stage the first play in its new home. All this was achieved without any grants but through hard work, blood sweat and a few tears. The 10-year bank loan was paid of in just 5 years. An amazing effort by the loyal membership.

The sense of unity and working together was the reason for such a success for the group. To possess our own theatre is a remarkable achievement and is the envy of many amateur drama groups in North East Essex and beyond.

To show our appreciation to our loyal benefactors and owners of our previous home Hilary and Robin Wilshaw were made Honorary Presidents.

The first production in our own theatre was in October 1985. A comedy by Alan Ayckbourn called "[Bedroom Farce](#)".

Thanks to our active membership and fundraisers we are now what can be termed a fully self-sufficient and self-supporting theatre. From the humble beginnings in 1978 of just 16 members the group has grown and now has a [membership](#) of over 700.

In June 2013 it was decided to extend and improve our unique theatre. The new build included new ladies and gents toilets, plus new toilet facilities for the disabled. Improved backstage work added a kitchen, toilets and at the rear of the building a new stage management and scenery dock area, with access to stage right. We can now make an entrance stage left without having to go outside the building and face the elements. The building work team was headed by members of the group: The Architect was John Roberts and the Project Manager was Andy Terry who nursed the building work, so expertly, to its fruition. To keep the cost down a number of members volunteered the time and skills. The valiant efforts displayed are a testament to their commitment to the Manifest Theatre.

A topping out ceremony was held on Friday 25th October 2013. The Mayor of Manningtree Kerry King, another valued member of the group, officiated. The building project and fund raising efforts were overseen by our hard working Committee led by Chairman Alan Wheeler and was completed in November 2013. Owing to financial donations and the hard work put in by the volunteers the total cost of the extensions and

improvements was held at £40,600

A great big thank you to all involved is due for this lasting legacy.

We always strive to be extremely professional in all we do. With a varied mix of thought provoking plays, hilarious comedies and highly acclaimed musicals we endeavour to perform exciting drama for our membership.

*Bruce Emeny: Founder Member, Lighting Designer and Trustee.*