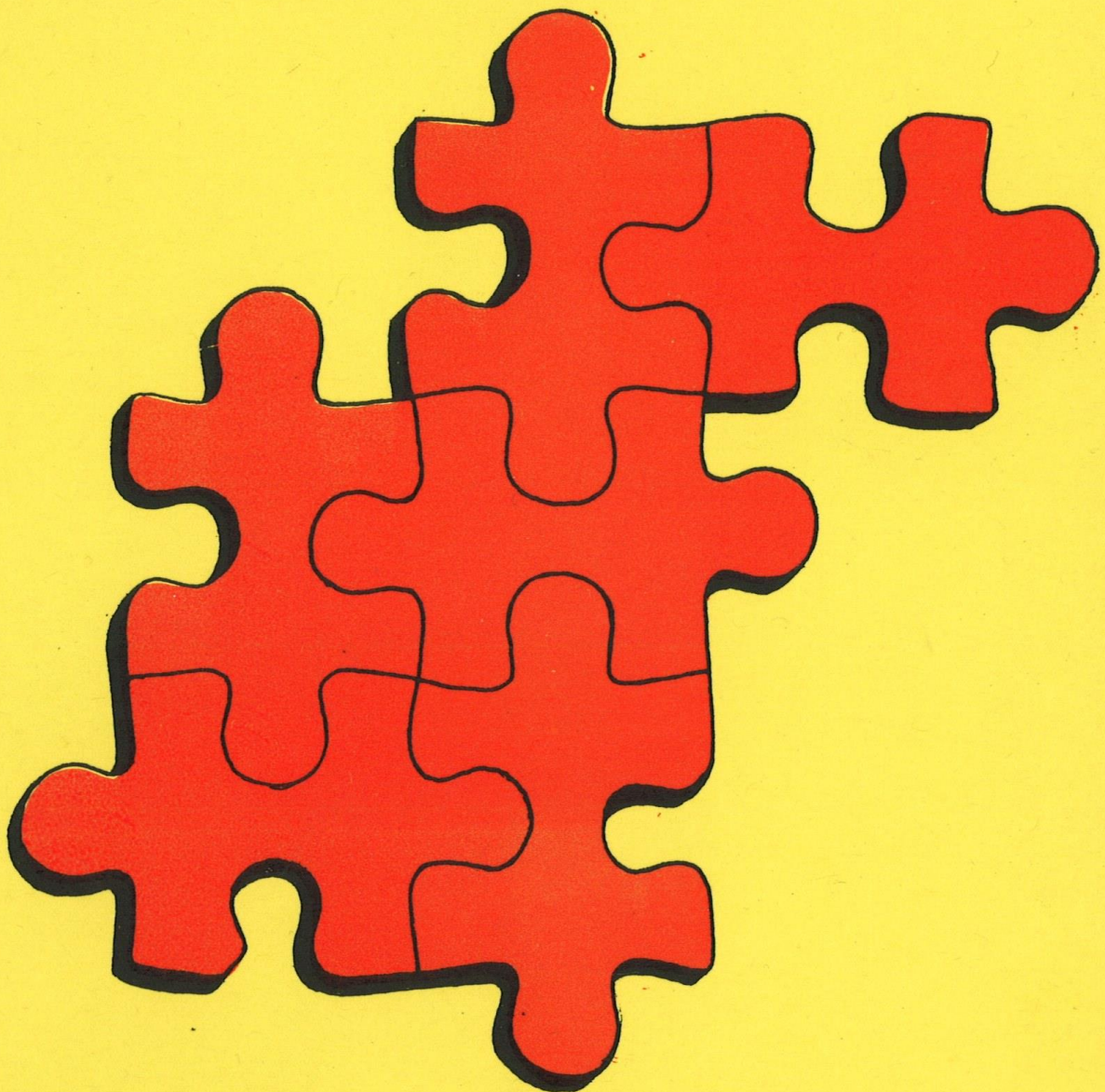
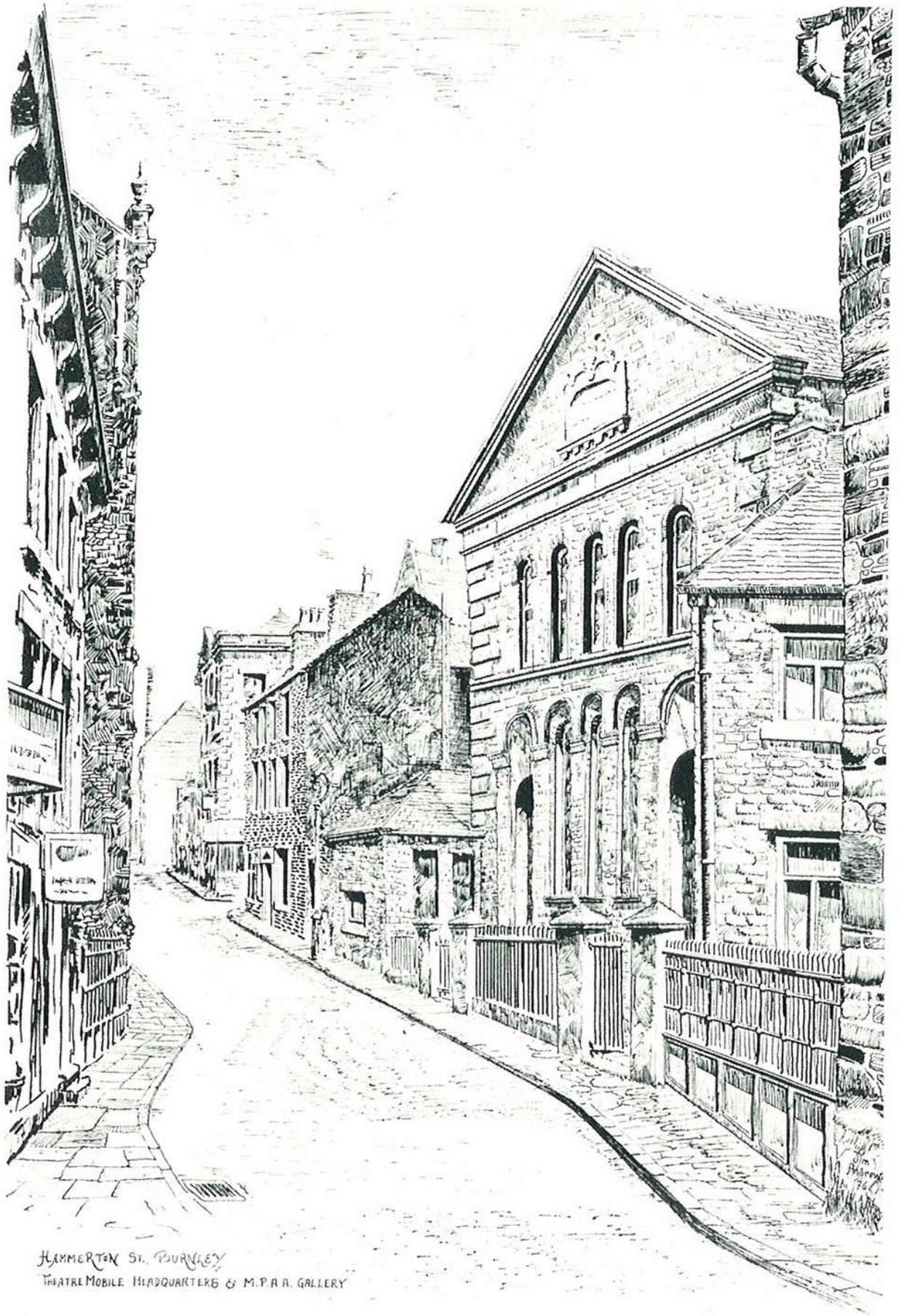


A VENTURE IN THE ARTS

The Mid-Pennine Association for the Arts
1966 - 1978



DORIS NIELD CHEW



Hammerton St. Bournemouth
Theatre Mobile Headquarters & M.P.A.R. Gallery

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The Mid-Pennine Arts Association

1966 – 1978

Doris Nield Chew

This booklet was written by one of the founders and tells how an *Association for the Arts of the Mid-Pennine* region came about, and what happened during its first 12 years.

To mark the organisation's 50th anniversary in 2016, Janet Clunie, a long-time member of the MPA team, who knew and worked with Miss Chew, offered to re-type the booklet so that it could be distributed digitally. The text remains unchanged, but we have replaced some of the photographs where the originals could not be found. More information about Mid Pennine Arts can be found online at: www.midpenninearts.org.uk

A VENTURE IN THE ARTS

The days of private and commercial patronage of the arts are gone, and nowadays they are largely supported by the Arts Council of Great Britain, which is a Government agency, the regional arts associations through which it disburses part of its fund, and the local authorities, either directly or indirectly through membership of the regional bodies. North West Arts represents the shire counties of Lancashire and Cheshire and the metropolitan county of Greater Manchester, together with their constituent district councils; it also includes representatives of various independent bodies interested in the arts. But within North West Arts we have two professional run area associations, Bury and Mid-Pennine. Fylde made a brave attempt to follow the same path but found it impossible to win enough financial support from its local councils. Bury is limited to the area of one district council, but Mid-Pennine is both the oldest – pre-dating NWA itself – and the most extensive it is in no sense an offshoot of the regional body, and its autonomous existence has had to be recognised by the relevant authorities. It has received favourable mention in a debate on the arts in the House of Lords, in Lord Redcliffe Maud's report on "Support for the Arts in England and Wales", and by the Scottish Arts Council.

The original impulse behind the formation of MPAA was one of self-help, combined with a belief, firmly held by those of us who inhabit this corner of Lancashire and the adjacent bits of Yorkshire, that we live in a deprived area, off the beaten track (though for the sake of our beautiful countryside this is not entirely a drawback), suffering from a gradual exodus of population, and neglected and ignored by the rest of the country, not only those who live in the favoured south but also by our compatriots in the North West.

The old cotton towns suffer from enough disadvantages as a result of their industrial past, in an age when people were "hands" and nobody cared in what sort of surroundings they passed their lives or how they occupied their scanty leisure. They are trying very hard to get rid of their material disadvantages, but in one field all too little has been done. The theatres have gone, except for a few which are kept going by devoted amateurs, the picture houses have followed suit, and it seems that only bingo and dance halls remain. Apart from an excellent library service, one or two art galleries and multi-purpose halls, and the work of a number of amateur dramatic and musical societies, there is comparatively little to enhance the quality of life for those of us who live here.

This was realised as long ago as the fifties by a few farsighted people in Burnley who first advanced the notion that one way to make the district more worth living in would be to provide a civic theatre and arts centre, in the first instance in and for Burnley. Yet even now, in 1978, we have not yet achieved this aim, though I dare to hope that we are nearer now to its realisation than ever before. I have been compelled to notice, both through the reading of history and from personal experience, that there is invariably a depressing time lag between the inception of an idea and its eventual coming into being.

It all began with the formation in 1949, with the active encouragement of the Libraries and Arts Committee of Burnley Town Council, of the Burnley and District Association for the Arts, a smaller and more local organisation than the Mid-Pennine, and supported entirely by voluntary work and subscriptions. Its history can be divided into two stages before it succeeded in bringing about the formation of MPAA itself.

The first was from 1949 to 1956. Those of us who were members during those years have vivid memories of the apotheosis of the Victoria Theatre in Burnley during the Second World War. This theatre was situated on St. James's Street, next to the Empire cinema, and during the war the Old Vic and Sadlers Wells ballet took refuge here from the bombing of London, with the result that some of us can say that we saw the young Margot Fonteyn dance here when she was a rising star. These two great companies stayed with us no longer than they had to – and who shall blame them? – but after the war a repertory company carried on for a few years as best it could, after which the "Vic" disappeared to make room for an extension of Woolworths (now moved to another site), thus lending added point to a remark I heard one woman make to another on Todmorden Station, "Do come and see me 'i Burnley; we can always go to Woolworths and the cemetery."

Not many people cared by this time, that the town, indeed the whole area, had no live professional theatre, but the Burnley Association for the Arts cared; it was at its inaugural meeting that the need for a civic theatre was first referred to, though it was thought that such a theatre would be mainly used by amateurs.

A Working Party on the civic theatre was set up almost at once, but the Association, anxious to organise professional artistic events as soon as possible, arranged Civic Arts Weeks, under a financial guarantee from Burnley Corporation, in 1950 and 1951. The first of these was considered a *succes d'estime*, but both were financial disasters. Pat Mitchell, the Vice-Chairman, reminded us then that our first objective must still be a theatre and arts centre.

The sub-committee on the theatre, of which I had been appointed chairman, then set out to discover whether there was enough support, especially among local amateurs, to justify the setting up of such a centre. We were sufficiently encouraged by the result of our enquiries to start an appeal for funds and a search for possible premises, but alas, we could find none, and the fund never exceeded £37.17.0d. in pre-decimal currency – an amount not then eroded by inflation, but even so somewhat inadequate for our purposes.

Thus in 1952 and 1953 the Association sponsored only individual events, except for its share in the national celebrations of the Coronation, and from 1954 to 1956 we did indeed fall on evil times. Television had arrived, and even the "pictures" were feeling the cold. The arts were regarded as the prerogative of a small group of highbrows, not as any concern of the population as a whole.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the Burnley Association for the Arts went into cold storage in 1956. I was now vice chairman, and had become so disillusioned that I wanted to wind it up completely. But the chairman, Horace Brierley, a local businessman, well known for his interest in many causes, including amateur light opera, would not agree. It was owing to his faith in a future he was never to see that the Association survived.

The second period in its history began in 1962 and lasted until its dissolution in 1976. The Borough Librarian, Richard Caul, and I had a conversation one day about the future of the Association. Mr. Caul, as always was brimming over with ideas for the good of Burnley, and anxious to do even more for the arts than even the concerts, exhibitions and lectures which he was already arranging in the Library. I had retired from work in 1958, since when I had travelled a good deal and occupied myself in various ways; now I wanted something active to do.

We had come independently to the belief that the time was ripe for new developments in the arts in Burnley, and that the climate of public opinion towards them was slowly changing. We therefore got in touch with the secretary and in February 1962 the first meeting for six years was held. The chairman had died in 1957, so I was elected in his place and we passed a resolution: "That this meeting is of the opinion that a multi-purpose Hall for the Arts would be a desirable addition to the amenities of Burnley."

Our ideas at this time were somewhat grandiose; we had visions of a hall cum theatre which could be adapted for an audience of anything from 500 to 2000, with a stage able to take national touring companies, grand opera, and orchestras! One of our members remarked abruptly: "Well, if that's what you have in mind, I'm having nothing to do with it." Whereupon he departed, never to return.

The Town Council was not impressed either. On receiving our proposals, the Town Clerk replied that a) the Council wished to await the plans of the development companies which were to rebuild the Market Hall area; b) it was not convinced that there was enough public support for such a project; c) it did not wish to make definite plans while the future of the Mechanics' Institute, adjoining the Town Hall, was still uncertain. (Eventually the "Mechanics" was leased by the Corporation to a commercial concern).

On receiving this reply, the Association resolved to consult a local architect who had become one of our members, and he undertook to provide outline plans and a model of our hoped-for theatre, at his own expense.

Meanwhile, we continued to press our ideas on a reluctant Council but to no avail. At our Annual General Meeting in 1963 it was reported that, after much correspondence and no fewer than three deputations to the Libraries and Arts Committee, there had been no offer of a site and/or

financial support for our project. On one occasion Jo Hodgkinson, the Arts Council's regional representative, had put the wind up the Committee by assuring it that the arts centre would cost a quarter of a million pounds, and could not be built and supported by Burnley alone. However, when the Central Area Development Scheme got under way, the Corporation suggested that a theatre might be included, for which the Association would be required to pay an annual rent of £2,300, plus an additional lump sum of £80,000 for capital equipment. Apart from any other consideration, this was well beyond our reach; our available funds did not exceed £100.

We became hardened to marked references to white elephants, airy fairy ideas, and people with their heads in the clouds. I remember being told that one of the amateur dramatic societies included a skit on myself in one of its topical productions. However, we went doggedly on, putting on display the plans and model produced by our architect and distributing leaflets advertising the kind of performances we visualised as taking place in our arts centre, once our castle in the air had come to ground.

We ran theatre trips for our members to Stratford, Nottingham and Sunderland, and in June 1964 we arranged a meeting between Reginald Birks, the Director of the Sunderland Civic Theatre, and his chairman, Councillor Harper, and our Libraries Committee; Mr. Birks also addressed a public meeting in the Library.

Fortunately we were a very united group. One or two people resigned for personal reasons, and so did the architect, giving up hope of a commission. I was not inclined to blame him; after all, he was the only one who had actually invested money in the enterprise. The most remarkable thing about the other members was their patience and determination. We were a very united and harmonious group of people – more so than any other I have worked with.

At last, in October of 1964, two things happened. It was reported at the A.G.M., held in that month, that the Burnley Town Council, presumably weary of our importunity, had at last promised to give us a site for the arts centre, but had not stated where it would be. And secondly, the new Labour Government had created the post of Minister for the Arts, appointing Jennie Lee M.P. to fill it. I wrote at once to Miss Lee inviting her to visit Burnley and address a meeting on any date and at any time convenient to her.

For a long time nothing came of either of these developments, but in March 1966 the Vice Chairman of the Association, John Grey, and I met some of the officials of the Corporation to discuss the proposed new theatre in the Municipal College (on the declared understanding that this would not in any way preclude the building of a Civic Theatre.)

After the business in hand we fell into a general discussion, in the course of which Mr. Grey and I asked the Corporation representatives why Burnley should not approach the neighbouring local authorities, with a view to asking their co-operation in the building of a joint arts centre.

Absurd, they declared: the local authorities in this part of the world were much too parochially minded for that, and the smaller ones – the municipal boroughs and the urban and district councils – certainly would not welcome any approach by Burnley; it would prejudice the issue at once.

Afterwards we talked about this, and decided that while we could accept their reasoning, there was as yet no proof that there would be an equally negative response to an approach from an outside body. Nothing venture nothing win. So at our next committee meeting I suggested that the Association should take the initiative in approaching other bodies, both statutory and voluntary, with a view to their joining us in a larger Arts Association, as the first step towards our ultimate objective.

It all hinged, we felt, on our being successful in persuading Miss Lee to address a conference on the subject. Local authorities would almost certainly refuse to attend a purely local conference called by a small and unimportant voluntary organisation, but an invitation to hear the Minister for the Arts would be a very different matter. But at least we were sufficiently optimistic to discuss what name should be given to the new Association once we had managed to form it. It was Kenneth Nightingale, then Editor to the Burnley Express, who actually suggested "Mid-Pennine".

Still no word from Miss Lee, and we could move no further until it arrived. Meanwhile Stuart Jackson, General Secretary of the Community Council of Lancashire, was proceeding with plans for a conference in November to inaugurate a North West Regional Arts Association. He had always kept in touch with us and shown interest in our plans, and through him I was invited to join the sub-committee set up to organise the Manchester conference.

At long last, in August 1965, we were informed that Miss Lee had agreed to open an exhibition in Blackburn on October 29th, and would be willing to combine this engagement with a conference in Burnley on the same day.

We had been given the green light, the signal for much frenzied activity. "Sandy" Dunbar, then Director of the North Eastern (now Northern) Arts Association, had consented to be one of the speakers, and the Arts Council was represented by Jo Hodgkinson. We invited local M.P.s to appear on the platform and to move and second the vote of thanks, and the Mayor of Burnley was invited and in turn invited all the important guests to a civic luncheon.

Then we got down to brass tacks, and discussed what exactly the Conference should be asked to agree to; we knew that it was no use just meeting and talking – everything would dissipate in hot air, and we had had enough of that. So we drew up a resolution: This Conference supports in principle the formation of an Association for the Arts of the Mid-Pennine region.

Still we were not satisfied. The resolution, though exemplary, committed nobody to any specific action. So we decided to distribute the following

questionnaire, which delegates were to be asked to put to their respective organisation:

- (i) Is your Authority or organisation interested in the project of a regional theatre centrally situated in the Mid Pennine area?
- (ii) Does your Authority or organisation wish to be represented on the MPAA?
- (iii) If so, is your Authority or organisation prepared to support this project financially?

Since for various reasons we had no secretary at this time, I was now combining that office with my original one of chairman, so most of the general organisation, including sending out invitations to no less than eighty-four bodies, including twenty-three local authorities, fell on my shoulders. This is not to say that I worked single handed – far from it, for I had the generous help and support not only of Mr. Caul but also of all the members of the committee.

At last the great day arrived – what we felt sure was the day of make or break for our plans (the first but no means the last of such occasions). I reverted to being a chairman, and presided over what we felt later to have been a very successful gathering, attended by 130 to 140 delegates from many organisations and from local authorities from Blackburn to Settle, Keighley to Todmorden, all anxious to hear Miss Lee's encouraging remarks.

There was no overt opposition to our proposals, and the resolution was passed by a show of hands, but we were under no illusions as to the binding nature of such declarations. In my annual report to our A.G. M. in November, this paragraph was included: "Our main hope must now be that enough local authorities will agree to join the Association to make it possible to found it. If they do, this will be a solid achievement, but only the first step towards our main objective. It does seem increasingly certain, however, that in this area the arts centre and theatre we want can only be provided by a joint community effort throughout the area. We have taken the initiative and must see what response we get."

In the next two months the most important development was a proposal by Mr. Simon Towneley (now President of MPAA) that we should try to build up an audience for one form of music, namely chamber concerts, which were all we had accommodation for, by persuading the Burnley Libraries and Arts Committee and local industry to give a guarantee against loss for a series of three such concerts by famous quartets, in the Library. This guarantee we managed to obtain, so we ran the concerts for two years beginning with by the Borodin Quartet for which, for the first and only time, we had standing room only. After that, we handed over responsibility for succeeding series to MPAA.

This is going too fast, however. It was not until January 1966 that I was able to report that six local authorities, namely Burnley, Todmorden,

Padiham, Barnoldswick, Barrowford and Church had replied to our questionnaire in the affirmative. In spite of the fact that the rest had either declined or not yet replied, we decided to take the risk of calling a meeting in March or April to consider the actual formation of the Association. Eventually we settled on March. Jo Hodgkinson was invited to take the chair, and we passed a self-denying ordinance that the Burnley and District Association for the Arts should retire gracefully into the background.

By March eleven affirmative replies had been received from local authorities and we were greatly encouraged by this response.

THE SETTING UP OF MPAA

I think it can fairly be said that MPAA actually dates from March 1966. As arranged, Mr. Hodgkinson took the chair at the meeting, and representatives attended from the County Borough of Burnley, Colne, Clitheroe and Todmorden Municipal Boroughs, Barrowford, Brierfield and Padiham Urban District Councils, and Burnley Rural District Council. Barnoldswick and Oswaldtwistle sent apologies, and so did various voluntary bodies. Hebden Bridge WEA and, of course, Burnley and District Association were represented. Nelson, ever suspicious of its larger neighbour, sent only an observer, as did Manchester University Extra Mural Department, Lancashire County Council and the Community Council of Lancashire. I volunteered to take the minutes.

In his opening remarks the Chairman said: "The decision to be taken ... is whether the idea of an association for the whole area is a valuable one, and if so a small working party should be elected to make plans and report back, after which the constituent bodies should enter into definite membership." He then guaranteed that help would be forthcoming from the Arts Council. The "Aims and Objects" were then considered and agreed, and it was decided that the first specific object should read: "to increase the accessibility of the fine arts and dramatic art to the public throughout the Mid-Pennine area by providing a regional theatre and arts centre on a scale appropriate to the size of the region and to the nature of the activities envisaged hereafter."

After this the Working Party was set up to report on the constitution, finance, and planning and policy for the area. On the suggestion of Mr. Thornley, the Town Clerk of Burnley, the representatives were divided into two main groups, local authorities and other bodies; the local authority delegates should consist of both elected councillors and officials. We thus had Councillor James Meakin from Burnley, Alderman King of Todmorden on behalf of the municipal boroughs, and Councillor Dawes of Barrowford for the Urban districts. The Town Clerk and Borough Librarian of Burnley were included, as were representatives of six voluntary societies, Mr. Nightingale representing the Association for the Arts. Again there was nobody to act as secretary, so I volunteered to continue in that capacity. Later we invited Mr. Knight, Borough Treasurer of Nelson, to take on the vital responsibility of looking after our money- when we should have any, that is.

Under the chairmanship of Councillor Meakin of Burnley, who later became and still continues as Chairman of the MPAA, the Working Party met four times before the inaugural meeting of the Association, held in November 1966. Mr. Hodgkinson had suggested that one of the first things to be done was to draw up a questionnaire to be sent to all Local Authorities in the district, not merely to those which had already agreed to join the Association. So I had a draft ready for the first meeting – a very full one, which asked for details about such things as population, rateable value and the product of a penny rate, whether the Authority had a theatre or concert hall and how such a building, if any, was managed and financed, how much money the Corporation spent on public entertainment and how many amateur societies existed, and then wound up with a query as to how far people had to go to the nearest professional theatre or concert hall.

We had been rather apprehensive about this first meeting of the Working Party, but two things gave the three members of the Burnley Association great encouragement. The chairman of the Nelson Libraries Committee attended only as an observer, but soon afterwards Nelson joined as a full member. The other was the response of Alderman King of Todmorden to a remark from Nelson that the representative had been impressed by the questionnaire, since he had been under the impression that the only purpose of the Association was to “build a whacking great theatre in Burnley.” “Well,” remarked Alderman King, “that’s better than one in Manchester.”

We circulated a copy of the results of the questionnaire among our members, so that everyone had a clear idea of the accommodation and types of entertainment available. There were a few Victorian concert halls, one or two small civic theatres, not very adequately equipped and used mainly by amateurs, a few decaying and large Victorian music halls, used mainly by local light opera societies, but a great paucity of suitable facilities, and certainly of professional entertainment. In the vast majority of cases, the nearest professional theatre was in Manchester, or, for the Yorkshire borders, Harrogate or Leeds.

The next task was to draw up a full constitution, and this, which was based largely on that of the North Eastern Association and hence on that of the Arts Council itself, was put into legal language by the Assistant Solicitor of Burnley Corporation, and then sent to the Charity Commission for their approval. It was necessary to become a registered charity so that we would be exempt from income tax and – if and when we had our own offices and hoped for arts centre – subject to reduced rates.

Next we went into the replies to the questionnaire, and it was decided by the Working Party that, in order to win support for and excite interest in the arts centre, we should arrange as many professional activities as possible in the coming year in the accommodation we already had. This has been our policy ever since, but in the beginning it did arouse some criticism. One of the members of the Drama Panel, when we formed it, protested that we should have gone all out to get the arts centre itself

instead of beginning with promotions in all sorts of places. Looking back, I am not sure whether or not he was right, but at the time I supported the decision of the Working Party, even though it meant that the onus of organising all promotions fell on me, since there was no one else to shoulder the burden. "You're stuck with it for this year", said Mr. Caul, and so I was.

Fortunately for me we had set up four Advisory Panels, on the Spoken and Written Word, Drama and Dance, Music and the Visual Arts. I set about finding people who were qualified to give advice on all these matters and who must be drawn from the whole area, and it was these people, together with many more, who made my task possible.

The infant MPAA was being run entirely from my dining room, which had the advantage of being rent free, but the Burnley Association was becoming burdened by the necessary expenses of postage, paper etc. So, on the advice of the Treasurer, the Working Party agreed to recommend the Local Authorities to make a contribution of one hundredth of an old penny rate towards the year's expenses, and also empowered me to employ a typist for two hours a week if I found it necessary. The sum of contributions amounted to £239, less than half of which has been used by the end of the financial year.

The Advisory Panels made various recommendations for activities in the coming year, but the Working Party required both more detailed proposals and an estimate of probable costs and receipts before laying them before the Local Authorities. This was very difficult for me, for my professional life had never required it of me, and figures were not my strong point, anyway. Again it was Mr. Caul who came to the rescue.

However at last all was in order, and the Treasurer then proposed that we should ask the constituent authorities for a contribution of a sum equivalent to one-quarter of an old penny rate, in other words one tenth of a new penny (when these came in). I have often wished since that we had asked for more in the beginning, for we have found from experience that it is easier to start high than to climb high, when it is a matter of money.

On November 8th, 1966, we placed the results of our work and our artistic and financial proposals before a general meeting of representatives. By this time the following authorities had definitely agreed to join the Association:-

Barnoldswick, Barrowford, Brierfield, Burnley, Colne, Nelson, Oswaldtwistle, Padiham, Todmorden and Trawden. Clitheroe and Bacup were also represented at the meetings, but Clitheroe Council changed its mind and Bacup did not join until later. After two years Colne left us, reverting to its normal parochialism and also piqued that it was not chosen as the site of the proposed arts centre, and so later did Trawden, but they were replaced by Accrington and Whitworth. All these various bodies have been absorbed into four new district councils, along with Earby which was also a member for some time.

At the November meeting two points were raised which were to exercise us a good deal during the ensuing year. In the Autumn of 1966 I had an interview with Nigel Abercrombie, then Secretary General of the Arts Council. On this occasion I asked him if the Arts Council were prepared to make us a grant. This was something to which we thought we were fully entitled. At our original conference both the Minister and Jo Hodgkinson had told us in so many words that if we succeeded in raising money locally we should be entitled to support from the Arts Council itself. In March 1966 Jo Hodgkinson had helped us to form what he and everybody else referred to as a "regional" association.

I came back from that interview, however, not only without any promise of financial help, but with considerably more than a mere impression that they were stalling for time until the North West Association should be formed. Far from being a 'region', as we had thought of ourselves and as we had been told, we were now regarded as merely a "sub-region", with no independent existence of our own. It was not the Arts Council, we were told, to recognise "sub-regional arts association" (of which, incidentally, there were none as yet but ourselves) except as part of regional ones.

All this hurt both our pockets and our pride, and still seems to me a piece of chicanery on the part of the Arts Council. We had got on with the job we were told to do, and even at a farthing rate our authorities were giving considerably more than most others throughout the country. There was a good deal of discussion as a result of all this, but at last we decided to shelve the question of our relationship with the NWAA until that body should be a going concern.

By this time I had moved the Association's headquarters from my dining room to a small alcove in the staff common room of the Central Library, where Mr. Caul and his staff put up with my presence with exemplary patience, and had also secured the services of a part time typist. The first time we met, we looked at each other rather dubiously.

"I don't know anything about the arts." said she. "Neither do I," I confessed, "and I've never dictated a letter in my life." But we got down to it between us and started a filing system too.

THE MPAA'S FIRST YEAR 1967

In February 1967 my typist, Joyce Mitchell, and I moved from our alcove into a tiny office which Mr. Caul had made available at the very top of the Library. It was at one end of a long corridor, with the Library's secretarial service at the other, and it contained a table and two chairs lent to us by the Library, and a desk, typewriter, typing chair and filing cabinet bought by the Association. At first we had to share the Library telephone, but after some months we succeeded in getting our own installed. This was a great convenience to us all, for up to then the Library staff had to come to fetch me to the phone and to take messages for me when I was not there. They still had to do the latter, for not only had I to be out looking at what arts associations and other bodies call "venues" and interviewing people,

but, as I once remarked rather crossly to Mr. Caul, I had to fit in my housework sometime: and I had magisterial duties too.

Looking back, I wonder how the Association managed to stagger along for that first year, much less prosper until it reached the stage of appointing a professional administrator. The number and range of events was small indeed compared with the scope of activities now, but even so it would have been impossible to run them without all the help we received from outside. First and foremost and all the time came Mr. Caul, of course. From advice on where to write to book films photographs, pictures and so on, to assistance with publicity and pianos, and advice on every conceivable subject there was no problem with which he did not help. The Library staff, too, were invariably kind and helpful, and they, together with the staffs of all the other libraries, undertook the sale of tickets and the making of necessary returns. The Town Hall staffs too, and those of our few concert halls, were ever ready to offer assistance.

I was constantly being faced with problems which I had never encountered or even considered. Most worrying of all was the necessity of keeping financial accounts, though the Treasurer not only gave me simple instructions but showed great patience with my failings in this direction. As far as the rest was concerned, the sheer interest and challenge of tackling so alien a field made things easier.

Luckily I had a car, for I found myself running all over the area delivering posters and programmes, and taking professional artists, or more likely their managers, to inspect halls.

We had only one programme that first year, but we were very proud of the fact that we had succeeded in arranging three one man shows (though one was misnamed, since it was a lecture on astronomy by Sir Bernard Lovell) as well as four exhibitions of pictures and six of coloured Kodak photographs, six film shows, three performances by the Arts Council's "Opera for All", and five by the Harlequin Ballet company, as well as a four-week session by the mobile Century Theatre.

All this involved a great deal of correspondence and many telephone calls; it also entailed investigation of and negotiation for possible venues for the performances. Luckily for us, our season began with a series of five very successful one man shows by Emyln Williams, on "Dylan Thomas Growing Up", and these were a revelation to me of the preparatory work required before anything like this could be staged. I had to run Emyln Williams' manager to all five halls, to borrow a full time electrician from the North Western Electricity Board for a week, and also a dresser from Ruari McNeill, then General Manager of the Century Theatre. Carpets had to be borrowed for the stage, and if they failed to arrive it was I who was expected to put the matter right.

I shall always be grateful to Emyln Williams for being one of the very few professional artists (another being Dame Edith Evans in 1969) to take pity on our struggling beginnings in what, to most of them, is a benighted area. His first performance was in Nelson; the Nelson people were in

charge, and I was afraid to go there, so anxious was I about the result. Then Councillor Mansfield from Nelson rang me up and said, "I wanted to tell you what a success it's been. The hall was crowded and everybody was enthusiastic." I went to bed happy that night.

This success was repeated in the other four halls, and the fact that the first artist engaged by us was so well known and so popular gave us a great send-off. True, there was still a long row to hoe before we became a household name, but at least we had started off with a big bang.

I discovered that pianos had to be inspected – though mercifully by "Opera for All" and not by me – and if necessary hired and transported, at enormous expense. And, of course, tuned. Fortunately Mr. Caul, coming as usual to the rescue, knew a "tame" piano tuner, a most helpful man; it was a blow to us as well as to those more intimately concerned when he died suddenly.

I found I had to look for accommodation for artists, and spent a lot of time in discovering and inspecting small and inexpensive hotels in side streets; when the flautist of the ballet company complained about his room, it was I who had to negotiate with the landlord. When this same company arrived in Barnoldswick, to find nobody to meet them in the school where they were to perform on Saturday evening (although I had made arrangements with a helpful local amateur) and the school caretaker up in arms for some reason (probably because he objected to coping singlehanded with a company of dancers), I was rung up on Saturday morning and expected to find the missing helper. And all my efforts were only met by a tart letter from the principal of the evening institute complaining of my inefficient organisation. Schools were not my favourite venues, anyway. More often than not people were kind and helpful, but heads and staff had natural reservations about their premises being made use of by outside bodies, and as an ex-teacher I could appreciate their feelings.

Burnley was the most difficult place in which to stage anything, that is outside the Library with its willing staff, and it was here that I sometimes felt as if I were carrying Atlas on my shoulders. When "Opera for All" gave a performance in the High School, it involved a good deal of preparation for which I alone was responsible, with no helpful members of the Craven Concerts or Todmorden Light Opera Societies at hand. An electrician had to be found, costumes ironed, tickets and programmes sold, and the School Meals Service roped in to provide refreshments for the company. The headmistress kindly found girls to assist in some of these activities, and boys from other schools helped with scene shifting, but I was uneasily aware that the ultimate responsibility was mine alone.

It was on this occasion that one of our schoolgirl helpers remarked in positive tones, "I don't like opera." "Have you seen any?" I asked. "No," said she, thus bearing out our contention that in the arts as in education, supply must precede demand.

Then there was publicity. Posters had to be printed and put up. Neither Mr. Caul nor I knew anything about graphic art, but we did know that it is very difficult to get people, both young and old, to read anything if they can avoid it, so we went in for plain letters in bold colours, and I arranged for enormous posters, advertising our programme, to be stuck up, even outside our own area. When our first Administrator took over, my plain inartistic posters were discarded for others by professional designers. I humbly admitted the intrinsic superiority of these – after all, said the Administrator with justification, we are an Arts Association, so our publicity should be artistic.

We never really had any large posters, either, once I had handed over the reins. True, they were expensive both in making and placing. I think the first six months cost £300 in the days before rapid inflation. But to my untutored eye they looked grand, and I can never forget that when Bacup invited the Treasurer and myself to come and talk to them about the advantages of joining the MPAA (which they did soon afterwards) one of their Councillors said, "Yes, we know what you're doing; there's a whacking great poster just outside this hall!"

The lecture by Sir Bernard Lovell was a great success in all five places where it was given, but I had to admit to a disapproving Administrator that astronomy was not really one of the arts – and after that we left it severely alone. I wonder though, if we could show colour pictures of the earth taken from space, whether we should still maintain they had nothing to do with the arts! The Administrator and I differed on another point too. Public speaking could not be ranked as one of the arts either, he insisted, while I maintain that nobody who was privileged to hear such speakers as Maude Royden could ever completely exclude it.

By no means all our efforts were successful, either artistically or from the point of view of attendance. Indeed, very few except Emlyn Williams and Sir Bernard Lovell, "Opera for All" in Barnoldswick and Oswaldtwistle and the Manchester Mozart Orchestra, also in Oswaldtwistle, drew any size of audience at all. The photographic exhibitions and films were a complete flop. The Century Theatre did reasonably well, however, though just when people were beginning to come in bigger numbers, the theatre had to pack up and go elsewhere, and we had no more professional theatre for another twelve months.

The exhibitions, especially those in libraries in the smaller towns, were a success, but of course without monetary return. However, the pleasure of the Librarian and the Clerk of the Council at Barrowford, at having an Arts Council exhibition in the library there, was rewarding. They spent half the night putting up the pictures and Mr. Short said, "My Councillors know they haven't accommodation for much, but they would like something, and this exhibition will please them."

Meanwhile, busy as we were, we had not forgotten our theatre and arts centre. We had both Reginald Birks, and, later Alex Schouvaloff, Director of the newly formed North West Arts Association, to speak to us about it, and in February 1967 the Executive Committee passed the following

resolution: "This Committee feels that the Arts Centre should be located in or near Burnley, the natural centre of the area." It was decided that the local authorities should be asked if they agreed with this, or if they wished to put forward any alternative suggestions. When the replies came trickling in, all except Colne had expressed the opinion that the recommendation was a good one. We also asked the Arts Council for suggestions on the best size of site and the kind of buildings "suitable for our activities and population", but without eliciting any very helpful response.

We were also engaged in three sided negotiations of a different and more urgent nature, with both the Arts Council and NWAA (now know as North West Arts or NWA). In October 1966 our Working Party had had a meeting with representatives of the North West Working Party, at their request, but there was no meeting of minds on that occasion. We were already ready to resent the attitude of the Arts Council towards us, and were only too prepared to suspect that the members of NWA had no real appreciation of our aims or of the difficulties we had overcome in getting so far, but that they were indeed bent on swallowing us up, hook, line and sinker.

I have since seen a copy of a "Rough Note on Burnley", which does little to dispel that first impression. In it the writer states that the Arts Council had written to both the North West and the Yorkshire Working Parties, asking for their views on the proposed Mid Pennine Association and referring to a "possible proliferation of small area associations". (For the life of me, I cannot see why this would be a bad thing; in fact I have lately met a growing number of people who think it might be the best form of development for the arts in this country). The final paragraph of the "Rough Note" adds, "It may be that we shall decide to recommend that Burnley (or the Burnley area) should have a local arts council rather than a regional association for the arts."

No doubt all this was written with the best intentions, but even now it offends me, and it is lucky that none of us knew of it at the time, or our future relationship with NWA would have been prejudiced. I wonder where Jo Hodgkinson's promises came into the picture! Clearly the writer had no idea that it was the equivalent of a "local arts council" that had taken the initiative in forming MPAA or of our need for a wider and stronger body to fight for our projected arts centre. Nor did he – whoever he was – appreciate the fierce local patriotism of our Councillors. We had persuaded them to sink their differences for the first time in this particular connection, but now that same parochialism, combined with deep-seated suspicion, was the main factor in their opposition to the machinations of London and Manchester.

It was owing largely to the tact and discretion of some of the individuals concerned, notably Stuart Jackson, then Acting Secretary of the North West and General Secretary of the Community Council of Lancashire, which had promoted the regional Association, and Jack Goldberg, the Chairman of NWA, that our difficulties were finally ironed out.

Mr. Simon Towneley had been one of the NWA members who had visited Burnley, and he asked me for our reactions. I did not mince words in describing them, with the result that a frank and very helpful correspondence passed between Mr. Goldberg and myself. I outlined the two main obstacles in the way of our joining the North West: i) that we did not wish to be regarded as merely one of a large number of local arts associations supported mostly by voluntary contributions from individual members, rather like our own Burnley Associations, but possibly supported by one local authority; ii) on a more practical level our local authorities had no desire (to put it mildly) to contribute financially to both Arts Associations.

It did not take Mr. Goldberg long to find a solution to the second problem, one satisfactory to both parties, and the first was settled at the inaugural meeting of the North West by allowing a representative of MPAA to sit on both its Council and its Executive (now General Purposes) Committee.

Even with these questions solved, all was by no means plain sailing. The members of our Executive Committee still had to be convinced that not only could our local authorities become members of NWA without having to find any more money, while the connection would be of advantage in other ways – but, most important of all, the Arts Council had made it plain that if we wanted a grant from its funds we should have to agree to join the NWA. The Chairman and I thought that “going it alone” was not a practical policy, but some of the others took a terrible lot of persuading. Letters passed between Nigel Abercrombie and myself on the subject (I remember the Arts Council had to apologise for losing one of mine) and it was not until the Council not only promised us a grant of £1000 for the financial year, but also gave us a guarantee that, though payable through the NWA, it would, for that year at least, be earmarked for us, that they finally conceded the point.

The next thing I did was to embark on a long struggle to persuade the NWA Executive Committee that they should make us an additional grant from their own very inadequate funds. My reasons for this were twofold: first, I hoped that the fact that these two grants had been made would enable me to convince my own Executive that at last we really could afford to advertise for a professional administrator; and secondly, it would be proof positive to them that our relationship with, and our local authorities’ membership of, the NWA, was an advantage financially.

Again, it took a long time, largely through my own ineptitude. After all, what did most of NWA Executive know about the activities of the struggling MPAA? Once more Mr. Jackson came to the rescue by suggesting that I should send him enough copies of our programme for 1967-68 to distribute to his committee members, together with a breakdown of our anticipated total expenditure for that year. This was by no means an easy task for anyone as lacking in mathematical ability as myself but with Mr. Caul’s help I managed to do what was required.

Thanks almost entirely to Mr. Jackson’s help and advice, I was finally able to present a reasoned case for an extra grant, though I do not know

whether or not my despairing cry – “I cannot any longer carry this burden effectively” – tipped the scales in our favour. At any rate, I still remember my feeling of incredulous delight when the representative of Cheshire Community Council said abruptly, “I move we give them £400,” and nobody made any objection.

Now surely we could afford to advertise for a professional administrator, though Mr. Jackson was still murmuring privately that he thought it should be an organising secretary. But Arts Associations had directors and administrators, not organising secretaries, so in the upshot we appointed an administrator and upgraded his successor to Director, in line with all the regional bodies.

OUR FIRST ADMINISTRATOR, 1968-70

All three of our professional directors were acquainted with the Association before their appointment to its service. Ian Watson had been to us on a deputation from the Victoria Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, on the possibility of starting a theatre company in our area, so his acquaintance with us was more tenuous than that of his successors. His experience, like that of Jenny Wilson and Ruari McNeill, who followed him, was in theatre administration, and young as he was – in his middle twenties – he quite overawed me by his expertise in fields where I had been a fumbling and inexperienced amateur.

Ian was young, energetic and enthusiastic about both the Association and its projected arts centre, and once he joined us things began to happen. I continued as secretary until 1973, when I retired and was appointed Vice-President, and I also remained MPAA’s representative on NWA, but the ideas and initiative were Ian’s.

In some ways he was in a worse position than I had been before him. More was expected of him, and people seemed to think that he, as a trained and, above all, paid officer, should be able to run everything on his own. Town Hall staffs, who had been ready and willing to help me out, now said, “Of course, we’re handing everything over now you have paid staff.” We managed to get our typist, Joyce Mitchell, for five half days a week and tried to organise “Friends of the Mid-Pennine” to help with “Front of house” activities, tickets and programmes. Since we were a promoting body, this was an important part of our work, and without these volunteers we should have been sunk.

It became obvious that Ian could not manage without further full time trained assistance, so the committee agreed to appoint an assistant administrator, Hazel Cooper. We needed larger offices, rather than the little room in the Library, so we went hunting and found what seemed to us spacious premises over a shop in the centre of Burnley, but unfortunately with an entrance up a flight of back stairs in a dingy little back street which no stranger could ever find. However, we were thrilled with our first independent offices, which had one room large enough for committee meetings; these had been held in the Library hitherto. At this time we also acquired a full time typist.

We bought more furniture, and gradually began to make a bigger claim to being a real going concern. Our promotions continued on a larger scale, and one of the people Ian persuaded to visit us was Tyrone Guthrie, who had last been in Burnley during these – to us – glamorous days of 1940-41. Unfortunately the generation gap showed itself in the sparse audiences for his lectures, and his impressions of the drabness both of our surroundings and the women's clothes were not likely to predispose either side in favour of the other.

It wasn't long before Ian took our discussions of the proposed arts centre a stage further. He arranged a visit to Birmingham for the Executive to see the young people's centre there, and engaged a firm of architects to make a feasibility study of the area, which came up with a favourable conclusion. Later they drew up plans and made a model of the kind of building they envisaged.

We had continued to arrange visits from the Century Theatre, but found as before that they were not long enough with us to generate a theatre going habit in our public, apart from those groups which remained attached to the various amateur dramatic societies. In the last quarter of 1969, therefore, Ian started a long dialogue with the Arts Council for funds to run a theatre company of our own.

I was out of the country from October 1969 to January 1970, and on my return found these negotiations in full swing, but, like most negotiations with the Arts Council, they were long and tortuous, and we achieved no success until the end of 1970, when Ian had left us.

Two more innovations were the use of our large front room as a picture gallery for exhibitions as well as a meeting room, and the introduction of Drama Workshops for the young, the first of which was run by Ian's wife, Linda.

PHASE II: JENNY WILSON, 1970-77

Young men have their way to make in the world, and I felt uneasily that Ian needed more scope, so I was sorry but not surprised when he was appointed Director of South West Arts. However, it left us with the problem of a successor, and, most unusually, the choice lay between two young women. The one first appointed was an actress with the most beautiful eyes I have ever seen in a human face. I had my doubts, but those eyes made a very definite impression on some at least of my male colleagues.

However, the terms offered were not acceptable, and we then appointed Jennifer Wilson, whom we had known as assistant manager of Century Theatre. Like Ian, Jenny was trained in arts administration and full of creative ideas. I remember her saying dreamily, "I think I'll have an Irish Week."

She never achieved the Irish Week, nor did I ever quite grasp why she was so keen on it, but a great many other interesting ideas took its place. For a time we were in the unusual position of having two women in control, but with Hazel's resignation in January 1971, the way was open for applications for the post of Deputy Director, one of which came from Ruari McNeill, Jenny's newly married husband. He was clearly the best of the applicants, but many of the committee were dubious about this wife/husband combination. Eventually, however, after various safeguards had been agreed, he was offered the job, and stayed with us for six years. I later met Mr. Caul, who said, "Well, I hope this works; it's your doing, you know." I am sure this was an exaggeration, but if my influence had anything to do with it, I am glad, for the arrangement *did* work well.

We had always had a very harmonious committee, but there were two periods when politics of one sort or another intruded, contrary to the general principle that politics and the arts should have nothing to do with one another. The first of these was mainly during Ian's term of office, and was only on a small scale, in 1969-70. Two women councillors from one of the member authorities adopted an attitude of suspicion and distrust of our every action, even objecting to the co-option of a fellow councillor known to be interested in education and the arts, because he belonged to "the opposition."

On hearing this, Councillor Mansfield of Nelson could restrain himself no long. "This is the first time I've heard politics mentioned here!" he burst out. "I don't know what Alderman King's politics are. He knows mine!"

Alderman King of Todmorden smiled across at him and said nothing: to this day I do not know what party he belonged to. Fortunately the two ladies in question ceased to be councillors, and for the next few years Jenny had no such disruptive elements to deal with.

YEARS OF EXPANSION: 1970-75

One important development in Jenny's term of office was a move away from the policy of only bringing in artists from outside; instead she tried to generate interest in the arts from within by providing fellowships for individual artists. The first of these was a Theatre Fellowship set up in conjunction with Nelson and Colne College of Further Education, which was always very ready to help in our activities.

Another was the *Welfare State*, described as Town Magicians or the Fine Arts Circus, which first came to the area for three weeks in 1972, and in the following year, with a grant from MPAA, support from the Arts Council and acceptance by Burnley Corporation, established its headquarters on a deserted site in the town, performing in the area for about one third of its time. Into our streets and on our open spaces came processions and fairs, Old and New Year celebrations, mummers' plays, bonfires, the adventures of Lancelot Quail and street theatre generally.



Welfare State can, I suppose, be called MPAA's first venture into the field of community arts, which seems to be becoming more and more popular, but of all our activities it has roused the most controversy, both in the columns of the local press and even in our Executive Committee. Its aim, as I understand it, is praiseworthy; to re-introduce the element of fantasy into our technological society, but it is difficult for the middle-aged and elderly to accustom themselves to or learn to appreciate the grotesque side of this. Sometimes it seems as if critics look around for something to attack, but it is difficult to think of anything more grotesque in its way than one accusation which has actually been made of the practice of black magic in connection with the words "Gloria in profundis" on a Christmas crib.

Welfare State has had much success in other places and other countries; perhaps it can retaliate by calling us backward and conventional. After all, we don't like avant-garde sculpture either.

Theatre Mobile

The introduction of a professional theatre company has undoubtedly been Mid-Pennine's main contribution to the arts in North East Lancashire. Like the Association itself, but more dramatically, perhaps as befits a theatre company, it has gone through various phases and has had its ups and downs.

At the beginning of 1971 the Arts Council, at last, gave us enough money to start our company, but in so doing it killed two birds with one stone and, to vary the metaphor, married two unlike partners. A small fringe company under the direction of John and Shell Abulafia had been pressing the Council for help in moving to the provinces, and MPAA had also been pressing for a theatre company, what more suitable than a marriage between them? The fact that they were mismatched partners, and our area one of the last to welcome a fringe company, was neither here nor there; so the round peg was more or less fitted into the square hole.

The Abulafias were two enthusiastic, earnest and likeable young people, but their policy did not satisfy the Theatre Committee, which was a mixture of MPAA Executive members and professionals from outside the area. We had some trouble with Equity, the actors' union, in the early

days, because not all our actors were members, which meant, in effect, that they were not recognised as having had professional training and/or experience.

One difficulty which has arisen with all our artistic directors has been that MPAA's object in setting up the theatre company was to build up audiences for our projected arts centre, which meant that we had our eyes on the middle class, middle aged, middle brow people whom we had to rely on to provide the money for the centre. We agreed with our directors that it was extremely important to build up an audience among young people, who, unlike the middle-aged, had no memories of theatre, and who were not sufficiently catered for by the amateur societies. However, we also wanted what I learned were called "scripted" plays, and these we have found difficult to get.

The trouble with Theatre Mobile first edition was that it did not appear to us to satisfy either the young or the adults with the type of play or the standard of acting we were getting. So in the end we agreed to part, with no ill feeling on either side.

In the autumn of 1972 the new artistic director, Gloria Parkinson, well known to both Jenny and Ruari, was appointed and stayed with us until 1977. Gloria was – and is – an able, enthusiastic and thoroughly professional director, who built up a popular programme of plays in schools and for young adults, often with up to date musical accompaniment. Again under some pressure from the Theatre Committee, which still had its middle aged, middle brow audience in mind, she produced, and produced very well, a number of more conventional plays, like "Arms and the Man", "Private Lives" and the Importance of Being Earnest".

However, it was no blinking the fact that anybody directing a company like Theatre Mobile was faced by certain difficulties that most producers did not encounter. To start with, there was the obvious fact that we had no arts centre and no theatre to perform in, only a number of schools and mostly inadequate halls, and to these had to be taken all the necessary scenery, lighting equipment etc. Then directors today are not keen on the proscenium stage, whereas the middle-aged have to accustom themselves to newfangled devices like "theatre in the round". This latter makes things easier when you have to perform on a school floor, but it is sometimes difficult to arrange adequate or comfortable seating.

Another problem is that only young and often idealistic actors will come to our backwoods, and in any case we can afford only young and unknown actors, whereas most scripted plays for the not so young demand middle-aged or even elderly actors, as well as young ones.



However, in spite of all these difficulties, Gloria succeeded in drawing an audience from the young, and in gaining the respect of all who worked with her or saw her productions, while her Christmas pantomime was a popular success. As far as the parent body is concerned, the chief problem has been the growing cost of running Theatre Mobile in addition of all MPAA's other activities, and when the financial crisis struck us in 1974-75 the funding of both sides of our work became a matter of anxiety.

Meanwhile, Gloria was taking Theatre Mobile into other places, both at home and abroad, thus gaining both prestige and added finances. Thanks initially to the efforts of our Chairman, while on holiday in Bulgaria, an exchange was arranged with the Bourgas Puppet Theatre, which came to perform in the Bacup Empire. It was a hectic visit, culminating in a reception at the Bulgarian Embassy and – alas – the destruction by fire of most of the Puppet Company's souvenirs on the way home.

Another foreign venture was a performance at a Youth Festival in Frankfurt, as well as one in an international children's festival in Braunschweig in 1977. I have found myself wondering ruefully whether Theatre Mobile, like Welfare State, is more appreciated outside than inside its home ground.

In 1977 Gloria resigned her post – with some relief, I suspect – in order to take up an Arts Council Writing Bursary, and was succeeded by David Pammenter. Again we have had a change in policy. Theatre in Education, in which teachers and children are involved as well as actors, has taken the place of plays performed for children in schools, while adult plays so far have been closely related to the recent history of our neighbourhood. So far adult audiences have been small but very receptive, and many teachers are enthusiastic about the company's work in their schools.



The Arts Centre

Jenny and Ruari continued to work towards the setting up of our hoped for arts centre, and the Association tried hard to get promises of definite financial support from as many sources as possible. In 1971 drawings and a model were put on display in Burnley Library, and were taken to any local authority which expressed a desire to see them. We had a special meeting of representatives, addressed by members of the Design Syndicate, the firm of architects found for us by Ian Watson, and we discussed various ways of raising money e.g. by a penny a week scheme from local factory workers – Lucas showed some interest – Civic Trading Stamps and so on.

The following year we made a definite request to our local authorities for the sum of a two and a half pence rate over a period of five years. This

was agreed to by Burnley County Borough, Burnley Rural District (though not a member of the Association), Nelson Municipal Borough, and Barrowford and Barnoldswick Urban Districts, to an amount of about £100,000, towards a total cost estimated at over £300,000, in pre-inflation prices. We also started a public building fund, which amounted to nearly £1,200 by December 1975.

Another practical problem arose, this time about the site, which Burnley had proposed should be shifted to adjoining ground. This, like much of the town, was undercut by a maze of old mine workings, and required stabilisation, which again meant more expense.

What would finally have come of all our strenuous efforts I do not know, for few of the local authorities were prepared to put up the necessary funds. But the economic crisis settled the matter, at least for the time being, if not for good, and at the end of 1974 it was formally decided that no new work should be done on the design of the arts centre or on fund raising.

SCRAA

During all this time we were steadily establishing our position in the ranks of Regional Arts Associations. At first SCRAA, the official body which represented them, ignored us, and so, in their publications, did the Arts Council. But gradually, though our existence was still regarded as an anomaly, we became accepted. First, Jenny was admitted to meetings as an observer, later as a full member. By 1973 our name was to be found in the relevant booklet, and when there was a debate on the arts in the House of Lords, the then Minister for the Arts actually mentioned us – or rather our local authorities – with words of praise for their comparatively high contributions. When a party of Directors of Regional Arts Associations was invited to visit America, Jenny was included, and then Lord Redcliffe Maud drew up his report on support for the arts, MPAA received favourable mention.

BLACKBURN

In 1972 not only Great Harwood but also the County Borough of Blackburn joined the Association, the first being in the pattern of gradual expansion, the second a major development which had a fundamental effect in the four years before its abrupt notice of departure shook MPAA to its foundations.

From our point of view the main trouble with Blackburn is its comparative size, in relation to any other town in North East Lancashire. It naturally regards itself as the obvious leader in inter-communal activities, and the parochial jealousy which is endemic in the area is at its most acute, not only in the suspicion with which the other towns are inclined to regard Blackburn, but also in that town's dislike of an initiative taken by anybody else. Thus, the fact that MPAA was usually described in the not very friendly local press as "Burnley based", led inevitably to a feeling of antagonism.

It was, of course, Blackburn's own fault that it had not been involved in setting up MPAA. Its representatives had been invited to the conference in 1965, but although they had attended on that occasion, they had refused to join in the formation of the Association. (From hindsight, this may have been just as well, since, judging by later experience, Blackburn's greater weight might well have wrecked MPAA before it really got going; we had enough to cope with without the imbalance Blackburn would have meant to our original plan).

However, two things made Blackburn's Labour majority change the collective mind of the town. One was the fact that we had a theatre company which they envied; the other was gentle pressure from Jack Goldberg, Chairman of NWA. He and NWA's Director, Alex Schouvaloff, and his deputy, Peter Booth, had always been very kindly disposed to MPAA, and his idea was that it should eventually take in all the area from Preston to the Pennines.

Negotiations with Blackburn started in 1971, but took some time, for the constitution was gone over with a fine toothcomb, and a number of changes agreed. One was to substitute plural for singular in "the establishment of an arts centre", since Blackburn had its own plans, and would not wish to contribute to an arts centre anywhere else. It finally became a member of the Association in April 1972. As a result, the area and especially the population covered by MPAA were considerably enlarged, and both its income and its expenditure increased.

The Blackburn representatives were understandably anxious to have a visible MPAA "presence" in the town, and we were able to open an "Art Shop" in the centre, where arts and crafts could be on display and tickets sold for our events.

The two Directors found their work greatly increased, but they rose to the occasion and did their best to satisfy their large new customer without causing the others to feel neglected – not always an easy task – in spite of adverse criticism in both Council and press in Blackburn. One example of this latter was that in 1974 a room in the Art Shop was let almost inadvertently to a group of International Socialists, and it was at once assumed that MPAA was a Marxist organisation. After that every application for a letting was carefully vetted, and if there was any possibility of misinterpretation, the room was not let.

In an attempt to counter all this criticism, the Blackburn representatives on our Executive Committee strained every nerve to bring the constitution and committees of the Association into the straitjacket of local government. We had always been a friendly and in some ways an informal body, but we had never acted irregularly; now, however, every minute and every action was carefully scrutinised and judged according to the strict letter of the law.

In some ways this was a necessary development, but the way it was done and the apparent suspicion which accompanied it engendered an

atmosphere of mistrust, not only on the part of the individual members whose enthusiasm had helped to support the Association from the beginning, but also among other local authority representatives. Together with the suspension of plans for the arts centre, it led to the alienation and actual withdrawal of some of the "interested persons" who, by the constitution, were eligible for membership of the Executive Committee. It must be said on the other hand, however, that Blackburn's membership was responsible for the appearance of representatives of some of her amateur societies on the same committee.

After I retired from the secretary-ship in 1973, the Burnley Town Clerk's department took over the secretarial duties, and the Association was henceforth run entirely by professionals of one sort or another. (I recall a remark from one of the Blackburn councillors that it was satisfactory to have orthodox minutes at last!) For obvious reasons our Treasurers had always been local government officials, beginning with Mr. Knight of Nelson, and on his retirement, Mr. Carradice, his successor, acted for us too. When he too resigned owing to pressure of work, the Blackburn Treasurer took over, and on Blackburn's departure in 1977, Rossendale's Mr. Ormesher assumed the responsibility of our accounts.

In the midst of all this constitutional and administrative change, the Directors had to consider what the position of the Association would be when local government reorganisation should take place in 1975. The new District Councils would be larger than any of the old authorities, but their powers in comparison with those of the old County Boroughs, would be greatly reduced. One of the most important remaining to them would be the provision of leisure pursuits and entertainment. With more money and a larger area, would they wish to continue to support MPAA? In view of the two to one Arts Council grant it would be to their interest to do so, but would they see it that way? Meetings were held with recreation officers in order to ensure co-operation which, it was agreed, was essential in order to provide a comprehensive service.



One example of the kind of provision MPAA could make was the offering of a Music Fellowship to Atarah Ben Tovim in 1975. This colourful artist, full to the brim with enthusiasm, ideas and a capacity for hard work, plus a striking appeal to her audiences, especially the young, took to the area with zest. She settled in Haslingden, where she set up a music centre for children, in addition to music making, not only in our area but around the whole country. MPAA had gained in esteem and popularity through Atarah's work.

All this upheaval, one would have thought, was enough for the hard pressed Directors to cope with, but owing to the economic squeeze, especially in public spending, we dared not ask for an increase in our local government grant, already among the highest in the country. For two years we had no more income although staff and visiting artists had to be paid at higher rates, and inflation in the performing arts was higher than in any other sphere.

Then came the local government elections in May 1976 and Blackburn's consequent withdrawal from membership. To this day I cannot understand why Blackburn Conservatives included in their election manifesto a pledge to withdraw from MPAA. If they won, I would not have thought we were so important. After all, we only cost them £9,000 a year from the rates, and our presence brought into the town, at a proportion of two to one, an added sum of £18,000 from the Arts Council through North West Arts. But reason and even financial considerations beat on the closed door of prejudice in vain.

They gave us seven months notice, it is true, but in the following year we should be £27,000 poorer. It is always more difficult to contract than to expand, and Theatre Mobile in particular was in dire distress. There was some talk for a while of selling the company's services to Blackburn on a contractual basis, but it fell through when Blackburn realised how much it would cost them to have to meet the full cost of employing the company. MPAA, in consequence, was also in trouble, since it had its obligations to Theatre Mobile and the cost of all its other commitments to meet out of a reduced budget, in a time of rapid inflation.

In panic we appealed to both the Arts Council and North West Arts, but NWA too had changed. Instead of covering the counties of Lancashire and Cheshire (excluding Merseyside) in which there was one great conurbation, Manchester, with a ring of smaller county boroughs, the two shire counties were now diminished, and overtopped by an enlarged Greater Manchester Metropolitan County, which felt no particular responsibility for what was happening in the rest of the region. ("If North East Lancashire wants a theatre company, let them pay for it." Said one chairman of the GMC. Recreation and Leisure Committee"; and another GMC councillor remarked, "If Blackburn doesn't think Mid-Pennine worth supporting why should we?"). While Lancashire in its turn, having given a seat subsidy for performances for schoolchildren as its only direct contribution to MPAA, withdrew it in 1977 without prior notice.

Fortunately, in spite of adverse criticism, NWA stood by us in the end, and the Arts Council too found a little more money, so we survived these immediate hazards – though with no security for the future – only to meet another head on.

The rest of our District Councils were muttering; if Blackburn was not prepared to continue its support for MPAA, why should they? New councillors had little knowledge of our history and purpose. Only Burnley, with Councillor Meakin, our stalwart Chairman, as Mayor elect. stood firm. Fortunately the other council representatives on our Executive Committee included loyal and understanding supporters of the Association, some of whom had stood by us for a long time. They criticised, yes, but constructively, with the aim of strengthening us against outright opposition. With their encouragement, the Directors attended meetings of Leisure and Entertainment committees to try to persuade them to continue to back us, and did their best, with no increase in grant, to provide attractive programmes. In one way, the economic crisis

contributed to their success in this, since the Job Creation Scheme enabled Jenny to set up the Arts Squad, which works in community arts in various ways, such as drama workshops, wall paintings for local community centres, a programme to encourage artistic expression in both adults and juvenile disabled, physical and mental, and a number of summer activities for children.

Proposals were made and have now been agreed, to alter the Constitution in a number of ways, including a period of a year's notice for a local authority wishing to leave the Association; this should help to give much needed stability.

1976-77 was a nightmare for all of us who cared about the fate of MPAA, but the two most directly involved like the rest of the staff, saw in addition, a direct threat to their livelihood. It was no real surprise when Ruari McNeill decided at the beginning of 1977 that he must leave us for a more secure job. Jenny stayed on without a deputy until October, and then she too left us.

They had given us six and seven good years. As long as the time permitted, they devoted themselves to the development and diversification of the Association, and when the bad times came it was largely owing to their earnest endeavours that MPAA survived.

During Jenny's term, the lease of our offices in Back St. James' Street ran out, and Burnley Corporation offered us the lease of a rambling but much larger building which had been in turn a Baptist and a Christian Science church, in Hammerton Street. In this building, which some at least of the public are beginning to know and to accept, a multitude of activities are carried out. In what was the body of the church, altered and whitewashed by Ruari and his helpers, with new lighting, Theatre Mobile rehearses, and when it is out performing, the room is used for exhibitions and meetings, and is sometimes let, on one occasion to the Silver Jubilee Committee for a Giant Tombola (free on that occasion). In the basement the theatre company has its workshop, after years of being bandied from pillar to post, the company at last has a permanent base.

The Arts Squad works in a small room downstairs, while upstairs, in what was the Christian Science Reading Room, the Director and his assistant have their offices. I believe that Charles Bowden, the new Director, who, like his predecessors, has a background of theatre, having been an actor, Drama Fellow of MPAA and more recently has been involved first in Yorkshire Arts and then in that side of local government concerned with the arts, has other plans for foyer and offices. When time and funds allow and he ceases to be faced with one crisis after another, he will be able to give full play to his creative faculty.

Somewhere at the back Meriel Samuels, the part time book-keeper, attends to the vital accounts, while in the general office Janet Clunie, the Administrative Assistant, and the secretary-typist, Sheenagh Mayo, attend to the multifarious jobs that fall to their lot in a body like the Mid Pennine Association. It is a cramped and very busy office, for beyond it lies the

ladies' loo, not to speak of the coffee machine and the sink, so at times there is a procession through it. The general public, too, are beginning to make use of it, especially at Christmastime, when pantomime tickets can be booked there, as can tickets for all our promotions and for Manchester Exchange Theatre, as well as for amateur productions if the societies wish to make use of our facilities. We also provide a range of general information - if we can - on answer to such queries as "Where can I buy tickets for the Burnley Festival?" and "Where do the Garrick perform?" Members of the theatre company, when rehearsing wander in and out, so do the Art Squad.

It is impossible to overrate the services of the secretarial staff, especially those of Janet Clunie, the only full time member. With the Director, they are the fundamental basis of the Association, without whom it could not function, and their enthusiasm and loyalty and - without exaggeration, their devotion, to MPAA and what it stands for, are an essential element in its survival.

What of the future? Like all bodies concerned with the arts, we live from year to year, trying to convince local authorities on the one hand and Arts Council and NWA on the other that our activities are expanding and need more generous funding. There are hopeful signs, however. With the help of the Manpower Services Commission, we hope to employ workers who will greatly improve our publicity, and so, we hope, our audiences. Our local authorities have agreed to increase their grant to us for 1978-79, and a fifth, Ribble Valley, has entered into a trial membership of one year. This both gives us a larger area to cover and provides our administrators with a challenge, especially since the area contains only small towns and villages, unlike the mainly industrial districts with which we have been dealing hitherto.

And the old rift between professionals and amateurs is gradually closing. Sometimes we are asked why we do not do more for amateurs. The answer is simple. Arts Council grants - that is, money from Central Government - are available only for the professional arts, and in any case we have no funds available to make grants. But we have made approaches to amateurs, in which we have suggested methods of co-operation. The theatre company has held one-day schools, we will sell any tickets for amateur performances if requested to do so, and above all, we have successfully approached the Arts Council for grants from its Housing the Arts Fund to improve buildings which are used both by professionals and by amateurs. Examples of this are Bacup Empire and Oswaldtwistle Town Hall.

In the last few years local Arts Council have been set up both in Burnley and Pendle on the initiative of the amateurs. Both make use of the secretarial services of MPAA, the Director and his assistant, John Wood, in Burnley, while Jenny Bowden, the Director's wife, performs the same service for Pendle. These Arts Councils include both performing and non-performing societies.

As far as Burnley is concerned, the chief motive behind this most promising development has been the growing need for the theatre and arts centre which the old Burnley and District Association for the Arts began to work for over twenty-five years ago. The much over subscribed theatre in the Municipal College, the premises used by many societies in the past have disappeared. Schools are cold, rents are high and the services of caretakers difficult to obtain. There is no public hall larger than those in the Library and the Sports Centre. People say to me, sometimes in accusatory tones, as if it were my fault, "Look at Colne Municipal Hall or Nelson's Silverman Hall, and we in Burnley have nothing". Yet neither of these has accommodation for an adequately built and equipped theatre. A local millionaire provided funds for Burnley's Sports Centre, but no other millionaire – if such exist – has shown any interest in the arts.

In the middle of Burnley, adjacent to and part of the structure of the Town Hall, stands the 19th century Mechanics' Institute, with one large hall where in the past many events took place, from school prize-giving to orchestral concerts; the building also comprises a number of smaller halls and meeting rooms. Pressure has been growing for it to be returned to something nearer its original purpose, and at last there are plans for a complex of buildings to include a civic centre, and we hope, the adaptation of the Mechanics for a theatre and arts centre. If, with the help of the Arts Council, which is interested in the project these plans are carried through, we shall have a theatre in the main hall, with a raked floor, seating for 400-500, adequate dressing room accommodation, and a stage large enough for performances of amateur light opera, medium professional opera and ballet, and of course plays. In the rest of the building there will, we hope, be a bar and snack bar, and concert, rehearsal, meeting and storage rooms – in fact, a fully equipped arts centre, open all day long.

All this, we are told, will take about five years to achieve. To some people – not least to those of us who have grown old in the struggle – this seems a long time, and so it is. But it is not so long as the twenty-five years in which some of the most enthusiastic protagonists of the idea have left the district or died. We have not achieved our planned and hoped for arts centre for the whole of North East Lancashire (always excluding Blackburn, of course) it is true, but we shall certainly have a centre for opera and ballet to which, we hope, many people outside Burnley will come, as they did in the days when the Royal Ballet made Burnley its headquarters. For the rest, the Mid Pennine Arts Association will continue to take the arts to the towns and villages throughout the area – or at least that part of it which subscribes to our activities.

The Association was not handed down to us by any outside authority. It was begun and has been maintained by the enthusiasm of individuals and the steady support of local councils. All of us involved in its activities hope most earnestly that it will continue to support and be supported by the community which it serves. In the words of Councillor Spence of Pendle, "*The Mid-Pennine is ours*".

POSTSCRIPT

Since I wrote the last page, MPAA has experienced two more crises, which, occurring simultaneously, have needed both persistence and determination to surmount.

The first was the proved necessity of ending the tenure of the latest Theatre Mobile company. On this I will only comment that, from its earliest days, the working of the Association has been on a basis of trust – a trust which has never hitherto been misplaced.

The second, which came upon us suddenly and unexpectedly, was the announcement by the Burnley Borough Surveyor's office, that the building in Hammerton Street, on which we had spent both money and energy, and for which our Director had interesting plans, had become too unstable for use any longer as our Headquarters.

At the time of writing, no definite arrangements for our future headquarters have been made, but we want to assure all our members and all those clients and friends who buy tickets from us, come to us for information, or simply to find out from our leaflet display what is going on in the whole of the North West, that somehow and somewhere we shall continue to be accessible to them in the middle of Burnley, near to our beginnings.

D.N.C.

