

## **ARTHUR BAKER** by Martin Pym

Arthur Baker retired from the Indian Civil Service to Charing and lived in Burleigh House at the top of Burleigh Road with his wife and his unmarried sister. Quietly understated, he was very generous to the village.

Tall, friendly and wanting to join in the life of the village, he was particularly keen to join the Charing Guild of Players who regularly performed in the Church Barn. The Charing Guild of Players was formed by the Rev. Peter Burkett in 1946 and initially performed annually in the village hall.

Arthur Baker was a really keen actor and, with his moustache, wonderful at putting over the character of the English country gentleman in almost every role he played. He was meticulous at learning his lines, good at rehearsals, very good fun to act with, and always good company.

He loved the Church Barn and its stage, and once the Barn was finally built and opened, he took part in several of those early plays, the first being Christopher Fry's *The Lady's Not for Burning* in May 1958. This was produced by Donald Bain who was a friend of Christopher Fry, and the author visited The Barn during rehearsals. Everyone hoped for lots of plaudits from the author after he watched a short, carefully rehearsed scene, but instead he simply laconically muttered, "Oh yes, very good". Disappointingly noncommittal!

In *The Wind in the Willows*, Arthur took the part of Badger - I was Ratty. He was such a lovely man to act with and he enjoyed taking part so much.

He was a really lovely man to be with - I enjoyed regularly calling in on him just to chat with.

He was one of many people who played a vital part in the early days of Charing's own playing field. He gave me £1,000 (a lot of money in those days - it would now be worth around £33,000) to help pay for the first instalment on the newly purchased Playing Field beyond the Moat Estate, hence its name, The Arthur Baker Playing Field.

He died on 9 January 1970.

Charing Guild of Players (this includes notes taken from the Guild's website)

## **ARTHUR BAKER** *contd*

There must be a gap in the records as the first play known of, after the Guild's first performance in 1946, was in December 1952 when *Quiet Weekend* was performed in the village hall. Over the next five years there were another five productions, all in the village hall.

On April 28 1958 the national press reported that 'the parishioners of Charing had erected a new theatre under the North Downs'. In 1956 the vicar, the Rev. Patrick Lury, together with parishioners and Guild members, paid £100 for a C17th tithe barn located at High Halden, some nine miles distant. Its fine old timbers were lovingly dismantled and rebuilt over a period of two years on a site adjoining Charing church. Unusually for an amateur theatre, it included a fly tower to store the scenery. Liz Warrender funded the stage velvet curtains, in memory of her husband and my uncle, the actor Harold Warrender. Alongside his acting, television, radio presenting career, his credits in film included the 1948 *Scott of the Antarctic*, alongside John Mills, Christopher Lee and Kenneth More.

When that type of tithe barn was first designed, a joint's pieces of timber were numbered with the same Roman numeral to match, to help the builders construct the barn accurately. This also obviously helped with the barns being re-erected. Patrick Lury was helped in the dismantling and rebuilding by Frank Ruglys whose daughter, Margaret, became a brilliant, life-long teacher at Charing Primary School. The Ruglys lived in the house opposite Wakeley House in the High Street.

Another thespian in the village was Donald Bain who lived at the top of Charing on the Pilgrims Way (he had earlier lived in a cottage at Burnt House Barn owned by his sister, which my wife and I rented and lived in (the same cottage) when we first married in December 1960). He was well built, with a beard, larger than life and very jolly, a keen cricketer and married to Jessie Evans, a professional actress in the West End. He produced several plays for the Guild.

*Martin Pym*