

Jess Hutchinson 1920-2010

All members of the Guild who knew Jess Hutchinson will have been very sorry to learn of her death at the age of ninety.

Our Guild scrapbook records a first mention of Jess in a newspaper review from 1956. Styled as Mrs G Hutchinson, Jess had designed the set for a production of "The Housemaster" by William Hay in the Village Hall. The paper recalls "an impression of spaciousness and comfort", not an easy effect to achieve on that cramped stage, as remembered forty years later by George with other reminiscences of the early days of the Guild. Jess's first appearance in a Guild production was in J B Priestley's "When We Are Married", also in 1956. In the group picture below George and Jess are the couple on the right; our newspaper cutting mentions "a first-class quarreling scene". Jess had a leading rôle in the play that opened the Church Barn in 1958, Christopher Fry's "The Lady's Not For Burning". She directed her first Guild play, "Dinner With The Family" by Jean Anouilh, in 1966.

For nearly fifty years Jess was one of the Guild's most creative and hard-working members. As set designer, director or performer she took a leading part in so many of our productions. Her sets made the most of the Barn stage; her upholstery skills could transform a familiar piece of furniture into something new; as director she favoured historical or period plays and enjoyed working with her cast to make them convincing and entertaining; her acting abilities were wide-ranging and always tempered with that sympathetic directness that she herself possessed.

The picture of Jess with the teacup is from "Day Of Reckoning" by Pam Valentine, Jess's last acting rôle in 2001. She continued to design sets until George's death in 2004 when she moved north to be near their two daughters and their families.

