

History of the Geneva English Drama Society

1922-1930

English language Theatre active at the International Labour Office (ILO) in Geneva.

30th March 1933

The Geneva English Drama Society is formally constituted at a public meeting of over 100 people. The first committee is formed.

9th May 1933

The Society presents its first playreading, Granville Barker's "The Voyage of Inheritance."

31st May 1933

GEDS produces its first ever production "See Naples and Die" by Elmer Rice.

Origins and pre history

1922-1930

The pioneering days of English language drama are described in the following article which appeared in the second issue (August 1930) of the periodical "UNION" ("Organe d'information des Fonctionnaires de la SDN, du BIT et de la CPJI").

"Amateur theatricals have always been among the consolations offered themselves by exiles, and the English colony in Geneva has proved no exception to the rule. During the past eight or nine years productions, ranging from Shakespeare and Shaw to the lower-browed but none the less welcome Pierrot show, have followed one another at more or less regular intervals.

"These productions were at the outset the result of collaboration between individual members of the Secretariat and the International Labour Office. Mr. John Palmer led off in 1922 with Shaw's Arms and the Man. Early in 1924 an Amateur Dramatic Society was founded at the International Labour Office, of which the first Chairman was the late Mr. H.A. Grimshaw. This society did much good work during the three years of its existence, its most interesting contribution being perhaps the spirited production of Sheridan's The Critic (1925) under the direction of Mr. Neil Little. Other productions of the Society were Shaw's Fanny's First Play (1925) and the Devil's Disciple (1924) and John Hastings Turner's The Liliés of the Field (1926).

THE FOUNDATION OF THE G.E.D.S. 1933

"For some time past there has been an increasing feeling among the English-speaking persons interested in amateur dramatic productions in Geneva that the time was ripe for the formation of a society, the main object of which should be to coordinate the isolated efforts hitherto made to present English drama on the Geneva stage."

"As a result, a representative meeting was held on 30 March 1933, which was attended by over a hundred persons. At this meeting it was decided to set up a society to be known as the Geneva English Drama Society.....

... the meeting elected a Committee consisting of the following members: Mr. Roger de Candolle, Mr. L.A. Cazalet, Mr. Colt de Wolf, Miss Mary Cooke, Mr. Niel Little, Mr. John Palmer, Mr. Herbert Stapleton, Miss F.O. Underhill, Mr. John Bieler (Hon. Treasurer), Mr. Chester Purves (Hon. Secretary)."

"The first play to be presented under the auspices of the Society will be Elmer Rice's comedy "See Naples and Die" which is being produced by Mr. Niel Little (I.L.O.) at the Comedy Theatre on Wednesday, 31 May. The cast will include members of the American and British colonies in Geneva, as well as of the Secretariat and the International Labour Office.....

'... another object of the Society is to promote the reading of plays. The first play-reading was held at the International Club on May 9 last, when the play chosen was Granville Barker's "The Voysey Inheritance." This reading was attended by about fifty members and was much appreciated.

Extract from the Union, the news bulletin of the League of Nations and ILO.

First Annual General Meeting, 1934. GENEVA ENGLISH DRAMA SOCIETY
YEAR 1933 - 34.

Held at the Intercontinental Club 4 rue de Monthoux, Friday June 1st 1934 at 8.45 pm

Report from the Committee to the Annual General Meeting Geneva, May 23rd 1934

1. Work- of the Committee. - The Geneva English Drama Society was founded at a meeting held on March 30th and attended by 85 persons. The same meeting drew up and approved the Society's Articles and elected the following Committee and officers for the Society's first year (1933 - 34) :Mr. John Palmer, President, Mr Roger de Candolle, Mr. L.A.Cazalet (since resigned upon departure for England), Mr. Colt de Wolf, Miss Mary Cooke, Mr. Neil Little, Mr. Herbert Stapleton, Miss Olive Underhill, Mr. John Bieler, Hon Treasurer, and Mr. Chester Purves, Hon. Secretary.

The membership of the Society on the date of this report was 269.

The Committee has held thirteen meetings at which, among other business transacted, it set up (a) a Financial Sub-Committee and (b) a Readings Sub-Committee and adopted certain financial regulations. It decided that for reasons of convenience in accountancy, the Society's year should run from June 15th to June 14th.

2. Play Production. - During the year the Society has produced "See Naples and Die " by Elmer Rice, " I Lived With You " by Ivor Novello, "The Royal Family" by George Kaufmann and Edna Ferber, " Alibi" by Michael Morton, "She stoops to Conquer " by Oliver Goldsmith and "When Crummies Played".

The Society was represented at the International Institutions Art Exhibition held on Nov18th and 19th 1933, by the production of "Christmas Presents" by Arthur Schnitzler.

A decision to produce "The Acharnians" of Aristophanes in a modern English translation had to be abandoned owing to the impossibility of finding a theatre.

The list of plays read [playreadings] follows :

"The Voyage Inheritance" (H. Granville Barker), "She Stoops to Conquer" (Oliver Goldsmith), "Measure for Measure" (William Shakespeare), "Once in a Lifetime" (Moss Hart and George Kaufman), "Theenci" (P.B. Shelley), "The Workhouse Ward" and "The Rising of the Moon" (Lady Gregory), "Riders to the Sea" (J.M. Synge), "The Distaff Side" (John van Druten), "Set to Partners" (E.H. Cope), "The Voice of Society" (Wilfred Benson), "The Apple Cart" (G.B. Shaw), "Hassan" (J.E. Flecker), "George Barnwell" (George Lillo), "The White-Headed Boy" (Lennox Robinson), "The Beaux' Stratagem" (George Farquhar), "The Devil in the Cheese" (Tom Cushing), "The Barretts of Winpole St" (Rudolf Besier), "Dear Brutus" (J.M. Barrie), "The Knight of the Buring Pestle" (Beaumont and Fletcher), "Volpone" (Ben Jonson).

The Readings Sub-Committee also organized readings at the request of (1) The Anglo-Genevese Society ("The Twelve Pound Look" by J.M. Barrie and "The Constant Lover" by St. John Hankin) and (2) the Anglican Church (a version of Charles Dickens' "The Christmas Carol" specially prepared by Wilfrid Benson).