

SOUND SYSTEM UPGRADE

A report by Richard Pollard

Both the Players and Pantomime Group, with a gratitude payment from the hall committee clubbed together and financed a new sound system for the village hall. Basically, the old system was falling apart in more ways than one. This all came to a head with the performance of 'Out Of Order' when the system collapsed at one stage during the performance, with sound only coming from selected speakers and leads were literally dropping out of their sockets at the rear of the sound desk ... and to drive the final nail into the coffin the sound mixer blew up!

After the groups sanctioned the initial finance for the long awaited upgrade, this was now the point of no return. Richard, along with his trusted neighbour Trevor, set about pulling out every cable in the place connected with the sound system. Many surprises came to light, as taped joints were found in the ceiling all of which added to the poor sound quality we were experiencing. After the building had been rid of all the old cables and flexes, new high quality speaker cables were drawn in from one end of the hall to the other, all in all there were about 22 cables laid across the ceiling. All the main speakers were connected to the system properly now, jack plugs were now done away with and the cables were now connected under proper terminal nuts, making a more positive connection. At the stage end a new control box built specifically for the new system was installed along with a new power supply to control the boards, also a master panel was installed in the sound room (cloak room!). The panels now contained many special speaker sockets along with control sockets for ancillary equipment that could be used on a set during a performance but controlled from the master end either by the sound or lighting person. These all now lit up when switched on to indicate that that particular outlet was in use.

The main sound desk (Hernbolt) was completely stripped and apart from a new sound mixer all connections were made up of manufactured special leads, as now the mixer was only able to receive jack plugs! The amplifiers and CD, Mini Disc players were repositioned in the unit along with the mains distribution boards on the back. All the equipment within the unit has now been permanently connected to an all-purpose speaker outlet board fixed at the base. Two sets of new heavy duty leads were made up to connect the sound desk to the panels, either at the stage end (normally the pantomime works from here) or from the cloak room, which becomes the sound room at a players performance. The sound desk has now been equipped with a rotary switch so that any combination of speakers can be selected during a performance without having to swap speaker leads and become knotted as we did in the past. The leads have professional plugs fitted on either ends, making the insertion and removal easy, these plugs also guarantee a positive connection as well as they lock into position. All this upgrade took many Sundays to complete, and I sat soldering literally dozens of connections within the 2 panels as this was the only way to ensure a positive connection, whereby, screwed terminals were not the answer! When it came to test and commission the system, only one speaker lead was found to be connected the wrong way round, a simple task of turning the connection around and ... hey presto ... it all worked as planned. This system will last if not tampered with for a good number of years without having to be looked at in any way. The whole works took me something like 70 hours to complete, but when you love doing something like this what is time?

It was also requested at the same time that a sound and visual monitor link be installed between the auditorium and the main dressing room behind the stage and the Paul Matt room, this was a specific requirement when the Pantomime is under way, as most if not all the children have to use the rooms at the far end of the hall. Consequently they have no clue, other than a person standing on watch, as to when they should be at the stage end! So this

monitor link will now give them audio and visual connections as to what is going on, on stage. Oh look this is where I come in.....Whoops I should have been back stage and not here!!!

As this now expensive upgrade was now fully working, the Players and Pantomime groups decided that the system should now only be operated by trained authorised personnel only, and not available to any Tom, Dick or Harry. So, a new sound system working from our speakers was to be built for the general public and clubs use. Unfortunately, due to illness this was put back by several months, but I found time and the energy to build a wooden cabinet that housed an amplifier, CD player and radio microphone.

Incorporated in the build were several sockets of varying kinds to accept most equipment brought in from outside that we did not cater for in the build. The cabinet fits neatly on stage out of the way and when needed can be wheeled out within a short distance from the side of the stage to a convenient point to operate the unit from.

Although the two systems work from the same speakers (but the hall system have their own sockets away from the panels), a fail-safe device has been incorporated into the build to protect either system when in operation, as by when we need the system a simple turn of a special key switch locks out their system completely, therefore eliminating any possibility of a feed back or short circuit by connecting the two systems together.

This only now leaves me to thank both the Players and Pantomime groups for their prolonged patience in me submitting more bills where the costs started to spiral out of control during the build, as far more cable was needed than first thought. At the last count the hall gobbled up over a quarter of a mile of flexes and cables of one sort of another ... where did it all go?back and forth the main hall ceiling many many times.

Richard Pollard
Fairlight Players stage manager.