

## **“A Legacy of Lions” by Howard Spring (1954)**

“a nonsense play”

This was never published and no copy survives in the RCPS archive. All we have is a photograph of an empty stage set as the frontispiece to the 1954 Annual Report and the following:-

“It is to be recorded that in November the Society received **“A Legacy of Lions”**

This unique gift came from the pen of our President in the form of a stage play. Described by the author as “a nonsense play” it truly filled the bill, though the audience had one disappointment in that the lions did not appear to take their bow, but only roared mightily in the wings.

The play concerns the multi-millionaire whose interest are divided between his ticker-tape machine recording stock-market variations and telephone conversations with his lady friends. His wife interrupts to ask for help with her crossword and the footman is much more helpful than her husband. Into the scene breaks Phyllida the lion-tamer who has been found intruding by the footman and is dragged on by her mop of hair. She has deserted the circus and her clown-husband as she “wants a change”. The faithful lion, Ranji, has followed her into the hall, but the footman does not favour introducing him into the drawing-room. Many entertaining situations and complications develop in the course of a few days. The lion, temporarily housed in a garage, has to be fed. The millionaire solves that problem by cornering the corned-beef market. Phyllida turns into an elegant and charming young woman, whom the millionaire would willingly “adopt”. She claims aristocratic parentage till her Cockney coster father turns up. The ‘dumb’ clown and his mother appear, he to claim both wife and lion as his personal property, she to talk incessantly of her late and quite perfect husband. The footman, “off duty”, appears in running shorts and is discovered to be an Oxford Blue seeking experience in a fresh social plane. The characters revolve in a world of fancy and phantasy [sic], but plain everyday commonsense is supplied by the millionaire’s wife who disentangles the company and the plot.

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The production was by Adelaide Russell and the company, selected from gifted amateurs, provided a first-class entertainment, received with much laughter and applause by the audience. The stage set, designed by Mr Spring, was greatly admired both for its elegance and originality. A photograph appears as a frontispiece to this Report.

The Society is grateful to Mr Spring for presenting this play, the fifth of an annual series, to be performed for the financial benefit of the Hall. Once again there was the excitement and interest of a "first-night", a special occasion, with red carpets, flowers and evening dress, followed by a buffet supper in the Gallery when the audience met the author and company. Thanks are offered to the very many who are involved in such a production. For building, painting and erecting the stage set, (this was a job for experts), for lighting, for costumes, for stage management, for box office, for flowers, for refreshments, for loans of stage properties, and not forgetting the Honorary Treasurer.

Unfortunately the following nights coincided with the worst gales of the winter, when even ticket-holders would not venture out, with the result that the cash benefits did not equal those of previous years, but the benefit to the Society is not to be measured in £.s.d but in the goodwill and interest which such events bring with them."

*Footnote 1: Following the Exhibition in the Steele Gallery at the Polytechnic Hall in 2015, a copy of "A Legacy of Lions" was donated to the archive by Clive Morris*

*Footnote 2: (From the Mary Gealer papers - "A Legacy of Lions" was performed again at the Polytechnic Hall from 25-29 November 1969. The programme recorded thanks to Mrs Howard Spring for the loan of furnishings and provision of flowers.)*