

In 1706 he sold his commission just before the very successful first night of *The Recruiting Officer*. In spite of the success Farquhar was soon in debt again and gravely ill with tuberculosis. He died, aged only thirty, just after the opening of his final play, *The Beaux' Stratagem*.



THE SETTING

Leigh Hunt described *The Recruiting Officer* as *having a charm of gaiety and good humour throughout. We seem to breathe the clear, fresh, ruddy-making air of a remote country town, neighboured by hospitable elegance.* Farquhar's great predecessors Congreve and Wycherley set their plays firmly in London – the centre of fashionable society, the Court, politics and pleasure, where the wits deride the country and its inhabitants as dull and boorish. It is Farquhar's great achievement to combine the mode of Restoration Comedy with a sympathetic and relatively realistic treatment of a country town society, where we can experience the vitality of the busy Market Square and enjoy the peaceful scene of the walk beside the River Severn.

So what was Shrewsbury like in the early eighteenth century? It was a town of some 7,000 inhabitants, increasing prosperity and fine red-brick houses. Daniel Defoe described it as *a beautiful, large, pleasant, populous, and rich town; full of gentry, and yet trade too really a town of mirth and gallantry. They all speak English in the town, but on a market-day you would think you were in Wales.*

It was places like Shrewsbury which were to foster those steadfast burghers and plain-dealing gentry with a strong sense of the importance of the family who were to form the backbone of English society in the next centuries.

RECRUITING

Although the recruiting action in the play is presented as a comic reflection on the Impressment Acts, the War of the Spanish Succession is a serious background to the play. In 1702 England had a mere 18,000 men under arms but the demands of domestic garrison duties and the escalating war in Europe required a large increase in numbers. By 1708-9 the army numbered nearly 70,000 and this increase could not have been achieved by relying on volunteers, particularly at a time of comparative economic prosperity.

So the activities of such soldiers as Plume and Kite were vital to the war effort. The first type of recruiting instituted in this era was beating up for volunteers, Kite's task in the opening scene. The volunteers would receive 40s enlistment money, but the process would be more likely to succeed after the potential recruits had been taken to the ale-house.

In 1704, when even more men were required, the Act for Raising Recruits was passed, known as the Pressing Act. This empowered Justices of the Peace

to raise and levy such able-bodied men as have not any lawful calling or employment, or visible means for their maintenance and livelihood, to serve as soldiers. This left to the Justices great liberty in interpretation, and moderate Tory and Whig Justices, like those in Shrewsbury, could be very helpful, even to the extent of bending the law. Pressed recruits received only 20s and the parish constable was to be paid *any sum not exceeding ten shillings* for every man pressed. Enlistment was accomplished by the payment of money, recording the men's names on the regimental muster roll, and the reading of the crucial sections of the Articles of War which specify the punishments for mutiny and desertion.

Arthur Bedford in *The Evil and Danger of Stage Plays* (Bristol 1706) ferociously assailed The Recruiting Officer as *destructive of patriotism and slanderous about the average character of the nation's military officers*.

MONEY

John Loftis in 'Comedy and Society from Congreve to Fielding' (1959) notes that *Wealth is only slightly less important than love as a motivating force in Restoration comedies, and the amount of wealth, which is often in the form of a landed estate, is described as precisely as is the condition of the heroine's affections*.

The nature and extent of the sums mentioned in the play, £1,500, £1,200 a year, £20,000, can be judged by comparison with this account of monetary value: *In the Georgian age, rock-bottom wages for males were about a shilling a day, but a man fully employed all the weeks of the year – and most were not – would not have been able to support a family on such a sum. For that, earnings in the region of £30-£40 a year would be required. A careful artisan family could hope to keep itself from hunger and out of debt on a pound a week, and members of the petty bourgeoisie would commonly have incomes of between £50 and £100 a year. About £300 was the least that would keep a gentleman in any style. As to outgoings, for much of the century a full loaf of bread cost about 4d and a pot of ale 1d. A new two-up and two-down brick cottage would cost about £150.*

Roy Porter: English Society in the Eighteenth Century.

THE PLAYWRIGHT

The chances of birth firmly linked George Farquhar's life with soldiering. He was born, the son of an Anglican clergyman, in Londonderry, Northern Ireland, in 1677, and he endured the 105 days' siege of that city in 1688-89. During this time his father was *plundered and burnt out of all he had, and not long after dy'd with grief, leaving his son without means* – a situation which afflicted him for most of his life. George is said to have played some part as a young volunteer in the Battle of the Boyne in 1690.

He went from Londonderry Grammar School to Trinity College, Dublin in 1694, under the patronage of Dr Wiseman, Bishop of Dromore, probably intending to follow his father's profession. However, he left two years later: one account suggests he was expelled for a profane joke, but it was more likely caused by the death of his patron. A growing friendship with the actor Robert Wilkes led to his joining the Smock Alley Theatre. He had a year's experience as an actor but his career was cut short by a distressing accident. In a fencing scene in Dryden's *Indian Emperor* he forgot to exchange his sword for a foil and his opponent narrowly escaped death. Farquhar immediately gave up acting and on Wilke's advice travelled to London in 1697 to try his fortune as a playwright.

His first comedy *Love and a Bottle*, in 1698 was a modest success and his next, *The Constant Couple*, was enormously popular but not profitable for the playwright. This was followed by three undistinguished plays and adaptations, during which time he married, in 1703, a penniless widow with two children, seemingly in the belief that she was a wealthy heiress. It is said that he never reproached his wife, although the marriage increased his liabilities and the rest of his life was a constant struggle against poverty.

In 1704 Charles Boyle, the 4th Duke of Orrery, granted Farquhar a commission as Lieutenant of Grenadiers in his newly formed regiment of foot with a salary of £54 – 15s a year and assigned him to recruiting in the Midlands. In 1705 he was in Shrewsbury, where his Commanding Officer commended his achievements in being *very serviceable both in Raising and Recruiting the said regiment to the great prejudice of his family*. The slow pace at which officer's out-of-pocket expenses were reimbursed probably left him worse off than ever. However, he enjoyed his stay in Shrewsbury, wrote most of *The Recruiting Officer* while there and dedicated it to all his friends in the area, who by their hospitality *made recruiting, which is the greatest fatigue on earth to others, to be the greatest pleasure in the world to me*.

THE RECRUITING OFFICER

BY GEORGE FARQUHAR

Captain Plume, A Recruiting Officer	Mark Sutherland
Sergeant Kite.....	Duncan Sykes
Justice Balance.....	Colin Hickman
Mr. Worthy, A Gentleman of Shropshire.....	Charles Anthony
Captain Brazen, A Recruiting Officer	Michael Williams
Bullock, Brother to Rose.....	Rob Hurcum
Costar Pearmain	Vincent Eavis
Thomas Appletree	Paul Davis
Constable Bridewell.....	Mark Fuller
Justice Scale.....	Keith Bayross
Justice Scruple	Paul Davis
Silvia, Daughter to Balance	Lynette Shanbury
Melinda, A Lady of Fortune.....	Clare Wooster
Lucy, Her Maid	Linda Hampson
Rose, A Country Wench	Christina Baker
Drummer Boy	Sam Williams
Servants, Townspeople and.....	Susi Thornton, Keith Bayross,
Prisoners.....	Crystal Anthony, Lloyd Davis,
.....	Vincent Eavis, Paul Davis
Local Children	Clare Sutherland, Nicola Sutherland,
.....	Edward Sykes, Adrian Sykes.
Director	Kathleen Jones
Stage Manager	Crystal Anthony
Set Design and Construction.....	Colin Tufnell
Assisted by.....	Glenn Cahill, David Iggulden,
.....	Rob Fone, Chris Roberts
Music.....	Duncan Sykes
Costumes.....	Evelyn Moutrie
Properties	Margaret Rudolph
Lighting/Sound	Arts Culture Harrow

The play is set in the town of Shrewsbury, Shropshire, during Queen Anne's reign. Coincidentally, it had its First Night almost 300 years ago – on April 8th 1706.

There will be one interval of fifteen minutes between Parts One and Two.

THE CRITICS

Farquhar, both as a man and a dramatist, has had a very good press. The Cambridge History of English Drama enthuses: *A man in whom there was no disguise, he unpacked his heart upon paper. Whatever he knew and saw, all the manifold experiments of his life, he put unrestrainedly into his comedies. Ireland, the recruiting officer, the disbanded soldier, love, the bottle and the road – these he handled with the freedom and joyousness of one who knew them well.* And so does William Archer: *In 'The Recruiting Officer' Farquhar has created a masterpiece of theatre in which human resourcefulness triumphs over chance and social restriction, and good-natured satire is mixed with humour.*



Farquhar himself, in the Discourse upon Comedy, acknowledges the importance of comedy as a moral and satirical medium. He defines comedy *as a well-framed tale handsomely told, as an agreeable vehicle for counsel or reproof.* He has a somewhat ambivalent attitude towards his audience. On the one hand he see audiences as holding back experiments in technique because they take all innovations for grievances. *A play without a beau, cully, cuckold or coquette is as poor an entertainment for some palates as their Sunday dinners would be without beef and pudding.* On the other hand they are the final arbiters: *the rules of English comedy don't lie in the compass Aristotle or his followers, but in the Pit, Box, and Galleries.*

And, no doubt, in the auditorium of the Travellers' Studio.

OUR NEXT PRODUCTION

MACBETH

By William Shakespeare

Dark and violent, Macbeth is the shortest and most theatrically spectacular of Shakespeare's tragedies.

Returning from battle with his friend Banquo, Macbeth encounters three witches who tell him that he will become King. This prophecy so obsesses the ambitious Macbeth that it sets him on a path of treachery, murder and over-burdening guilt that will lead eventually to his moral and spiritual disintegration, "A poor player That struts and frets his hour upon the stage And then is heard no more".

Directed by Anton Jungreuthmayer
Wednesday 14th June to Saturday 17th June 2006
7.45pm Travellers Studio, Harrow Arts Centre
Box Office : 020 8866 7075

ABOUT PROSCENIUM

George Woollands and Margaret Rendle founded Proscenium in 1924.

The company's first production was the now little-known "The Tide" by Basil McDonald Hastings. Since then, the company has performed nearly 250 plays, using Harrow as a base since 1945.

In this time Proscenium has built up a strong reputation for performing challenging plays (both classic and contemporary) to a high standard.

For more information on Proscenium, please visit our web site :

<http://www.proscenium.org.uk>



PROSCENIUM

The Recruiting Officer

By George Farquhar

Wednesday 29th March to Saturday 1st April 2006
Travellers Studio, Hatch End

The Recruiting Officer