

URY PLAYERS – CHAIR'S REPORT 2026

As I look back over the past year, 2025 to 2026 has been another successful year for the Club.

Last year I compared my Chair's Report to "A Suitable Boy" by Vikram Seth due to it being longer than War and Peace. I jokingly said not to worry, as I still had a couple more years' worth of books to compare the length of my Chair's Report to! You'll be glad to hear that this year's Report won't be compared to books longer than "A Suitable Boy", but unfortunately, it is still longer than my comparison to War and Peace...

That being said, please stick with me while I report on the key events, in chronological order, from the last AGM in 2025...

JUN 2025: SUMMER PRODUCTION

The Summer Production this year saw the Club perform their first full length play since 2019. The play that was chosen to entertain the audience was, "FAIRWAY TO HEAVEN" by Diana Raffle, a comedy farce which included many innuendos, mistaken identities, and some rather interesting costume choices which led to the audience laughing throughout. This was also the Club's first production using the Stage at Stonehaven Town Hall with the new stage lighting and curtains installed. Thankfully our Summer Productions aren't as technical as our Pantomime, and use a box-set technique for the set on stage, but it provided valuable insight and testing for what was to come later in the year. As is custom with our Summer Production, the Town Hall was setup with Cabaret Style seating which provides a more relaxed feeling to the evening. The play received a glowing review from NODA and feedback from the audience was very positive. The Club also received an email from Scott Raffle, the husband of the playwright expressing his thanks for performing his late wife's play and wishing us all the best for the production.

JUL-AUG 2025: SUMMER SOCIAL EVENT, BURSARY SUCCESS & SEASON LAUNCH

In late-July the Club arranged a Social Event consisting of an Escape Room, followed by Dinner, and rounding off with Karaoke. A total of 14 members arrived at Breakout Games in Aberdeen and split into 3 Teams. Team 1 consisted of Myself, Heather AO, Heather Stewart, Meaghan, Tim and Murray, who took on the "V75" Room which has a difficulty rating of 4/5, and we managed to escape with 12 minutes and 52 seconds remaining. Team 2 consisted of Bill, Kirsty, Freda, Fiona, Jon and Kim, who took on the "Black & White" Room, which has a difficulty rating of 3/5,

and they managed to escape with 16 minutes and 35 seconds remaining. Now you may be doing the math and realising that Team 3 only consisted of 2 members... Well, your math is correct! Unfortunately, due to public transport issues, Andy and Oscar were late to arrive, and were thrown into the last remaining room, the “Frankenstein” Room, which is the most difficult room with a rating of 5/5 and is recommended to be attempted by a minimum of 4 players. The odds were stacked against the pair, and while their effort was valiant, they unfortunately were unable to escape their room and were “Locked In!”. After the Escape Rooms the group walked along to Union Square where we had some dinner at Cosmos, then some of the group departed, and the rest sang the night away at Bardot’s. A special thank you to Committee Member Heather Stewart for coordinating the Escape Rooms aspect of the Social Event.

Quick spoiler alert for the Treasurer’s Report that will follow this Report, the Club remains in a healthy financial position, mostly due to multiple successful pantomimes over the years. Due to this, the Club introduced a Bursary many moons ago which allows Members of the Club to apply for assistance for covering some costs relating to Drama related workshops, study materials, etc. One of the successful applicants, which you may be aware of if you keep UP to Date with the Ury Players Newsletter (U.P.Date), was Club Member Olivia Barrow. Olivia applied to the Bursary to cover some of the costs of attending a Summer School at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. The course that Olivia was attending was entitled “Acting for Camera” which lasted 5 days. If you would like more information regarding the Bursary, please come and speak to me after the AGM, or send an email to info@uryplayers.co.uk.

Jump forward to mid-August and the Club held its annual Season Launch for the 2025/26 Season, once again in the Upper Hall of Stonehaven Town Hall. Due to the unexpected turn out the year before, we opted to use TicketSource to allow existing and interested new members to book a FREE pass to the Launch. This allowed us to be semi-prepared for the number of seats we would need, as well as capturing some pertinent details that would assist with streamlining membership onboarding and communication. The turn-out was once again excellent with familiar faces returning and a few new faces. As per usual, I kicked off the evening by covering the “boring” things like introducing the Committee, the Season Timeline, Membership Information (inc. our new Membership Charter), and Communication Information. I say “boring”, but it is important and necessary, but let’s face it, people are attending the Season Launch for one thing, and one thing only... the announcement of the 2025 Pantomime! So, in this current game of Writer-Director tennis match, it was Heather AO’s turn to receive the metaphorical tennis ball and produce a return after Tim’s absolute smash from last year. Since I have started using these tennis terms, I am going to continue... in for a penny as they say!

Heather AO's "racquet" of choice this year was her adaptation on the story of "ROBINSON CRUSOE". Once Heather AO ran through the characters, plot, settings, and song choices, auditions were held and within a week of the Season Launch, the Pantomime was cast. This year we decided to use the Town Hall for our sole rehearsal venue, using the Upper Town Hall for our Chorus Rehearsal's on a Sunday, then the Main Hall and Stage for the Principal Rehearsals on a Thursday.

NOV 2025: NEW STAGE LIGHTING PARTNERSHIP & MORE BURSARY SUCCESS

During the course of 2025, Neil Westland from our lighting Team (normally heard from above but not seen during productions) approached the Committee to propose a partnership with another local community group, Stonehaven Folk Festival. The partnership involved the two groups both contributing £2,5000 towards additional stage lighting for Stonehaven Town Hall to improve what was installed by Aberdeenshire Council during the work undertaken by them to replace the lighting bars, lights and curtains. The plan was to have them installed before the Pantomime and a letter sent to Aberdeenshire Council to request that they be left permanently rigged in the Town Hall. This upgrade would not only mutually benefit each group in both setup time and hiring costs but also benefit the community and other groups who use Stonehaven Town Hall. Neil worked with a representative from the Stonehaven Folk Festival and between them formulated a shopping list of equipment that covered their essential needs and requirements within the agreed budget. The equipment was ordered and were installed, ready for the upcoming Pantomime. I can also confirm that the letter was sent to Aberdeenshire Council, who replied in March of this year (2026) confirming that they were happy to have the lights left in-situ.

November also saw another successful application submitted to the Club for a Bursary, this time from Club and Committee Member Becky Williamson. Becky attended a series of workshops focused on aspects such as directing, acting and technical theatre, during the Scottish Community Drama Associations AGM Weekend in Stirling.

DEC 2025: ROBINSON CRUSOE PANTOMIME

After months of rehearsals the Club was ready to take to the stage and perform "ROBINSON CRUSOE" for the local Stonehaven Community. As part of the works conducted by Aberdeenshire Council, unfortunately, they were unable to replace the bars onstage that we used to hand backdrops on due to structural restrictions. This left the Club with a choice to

make, either construct another “freestanding” frame that a white cyclorama could be installed on to allow for projections/gobos and colour or hire a Video Wall for the very first time. Heather AO opted to take the leap into the unknown and hire a Video Wall. I am glad to report that the Video Wall was a huge success, as it allowed flexibility with the use of both still images, as well as some animated videos for use as backdrops to assist with setting the scene. After 5 public performances, along with an invitation-only Relaxed Performance during our final Dress Rehearsal, I am happy to report that we had 4 SELL OUT performances and only had 1 ticket unsold over the entire run! Congratulations to Heather AO and all those involved both onstage and behind the scenes. As always, everyone should be extremely proud of this fantastic achievement and outstanding production.

FEB 2026: PANTO VIEWING & SCDA ONE ACT PLAY FESTIVAL BREAK

Mid-February the Club arranged our annual Pantomime Viewing Party in the function room at the Stonehaven Recreational Grounds. As always, it was a very fun evening watching the final product of our hard work and dedication and enjoying one another's company with some refreshments. It also allows all attending to have a nice catch-up following the Festive break and New Year.

This year saw Ury Players not participating in the Scottish Community Drama Association One Act Play Festival. This is due partly to no interest from our Youth Members, but also partly due to many of our regular cohort of Adult performers sharing the consensus that the SCDA has lost touch with the Community aspect of the Festival with smaller groups (particularly groups that perform two-handers) being the favourites in the competition. The Club communicated this to the Aberdeen District of the SCDA and while their response was as we expected, we hope that they take this comment on board. I hope that the Ury Players return to the Festival in the future.

MAR 2026 – SUMMER PRODUCTION LAUNCH

March saw the Club host an event in the Upper Hall of Stonehaven Town Hall to officially launch our Summer Production, which this year is another Summer Showcase – a double-bill evening of One Act Plays. The Committee felt that going forward, we will have both a Season and Pantomime Launch in August, but also a Summer Production Launch, and potentially a launch event for the SCDA One Act Play Festival entry (if required). The evening followed a similar format to our Season and Pantomime Launch, I kicked off by (once again) covering the “boring” things like introducing the Committee, the Season Timeline, Membership Information (inc. our

new Membership Charter), and Communication Information. I then handed over the reins to Club and Committee Member Elizabeth Levy, who is directing her latest script “BURIAL PLOT”. Once Elizabeth went through the characters and the plot of her play, she handed over to the directors of the other play, new-comers Bill and Kirsty Williamson, who discussed the characters and plot of the play “AFTER ESME” by Kathryn West. At this moment in time, rehearsals are in full swing, and I wish the best to the directors and hope that the cast break a leg in June.

IN SUMMARY AND A LOOK TO THE FUTURE...

To those who haven't sat through the torture of my Chair's Report over the years, this is the second to last section of my Report, so hang in there!

Overall, it has been another successful year for the Club with both the success of our Summer Production and our Pantomime entertaining the local Stonehaven Community. Membership to the Club is also another success, so much so that we are bursting at the seams with eager individuals looking to tread the boards, quite frankly we are running out of boards in Stonehaven Town Hall for our Members to tread on!

As for the future, the final production of the 2025/26 Season will once again be our Summer Production entitled “URY PLAYERS SUMMER SHOWCASE”. Tickets are currently on sale and available either online on TicketSource, or by reaching out to myself or anyone involved in the production. Once this concludes, the Committee will begin planning for the 2026/27 Season and Pantomime Launch in August. Keep your eyes peeled on our Social Media for date, time and location!

As always, if you would like to remain up to date with the latest news and announcement from the Club, please feel free to speak to anyone on the Committee about joining the mailing list for our Newsletter – U.P.date. Also, if you would like more information on our Bursary, again speak to anyone on the Committee or send an email to info@uryplayers.co.uk.

A VOTE OF THANKS

In the words of Frank Sinatra – “And now, the end is near...”

I would like to kick off with a special vote of thanks to Fiona Westland. Fiona has taken the decision to hang-up her proverbial Cans (Oi! Get your minds out of the gutter! Cans are a term

used in Theatre for the headsets used by the Stage Manager and other Crew to communicate with one another) and hand over the gauntlet that is Stage Managing this unruly Club to Club and Committee Member Victoria Barrow. Those are some pretty big Cans to fill Victoria... (Oi! Don't make me say it again!). So, from everyone on the Committee and the Club, thank you Fiona for all the hard work and dedication you have given over the years.

Another vote of thanks I would like to make is to Committee Member Gordon Smith who has taken the decision to step-down from the Committee. Thank you Gordon for the time that you have spent on the Committee over the years. You have been a valuable Member of the Committee, but I am glad that we will still be able to tap-into your DIY skills for our future productions.

To continue with my vote of thanks, I would like to thank the Members of the Club for once again getting involved this year, as without you the Club would cease to have a purpose.

I would like to round-off my vote of thanks, as always, thanking the rest of the Committee for their support, hard work and dedication during the year. As always, I hope that I did you and the Club proud.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew Dart". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of "Andrew" and "Dart" being capitalized and prominent.

Andrew Dart

Ury Players | Chair