

To commemorate the 95th Anniversary
Bedford Drama Company presents:

BEDFORD
DRAMA
COMPANY



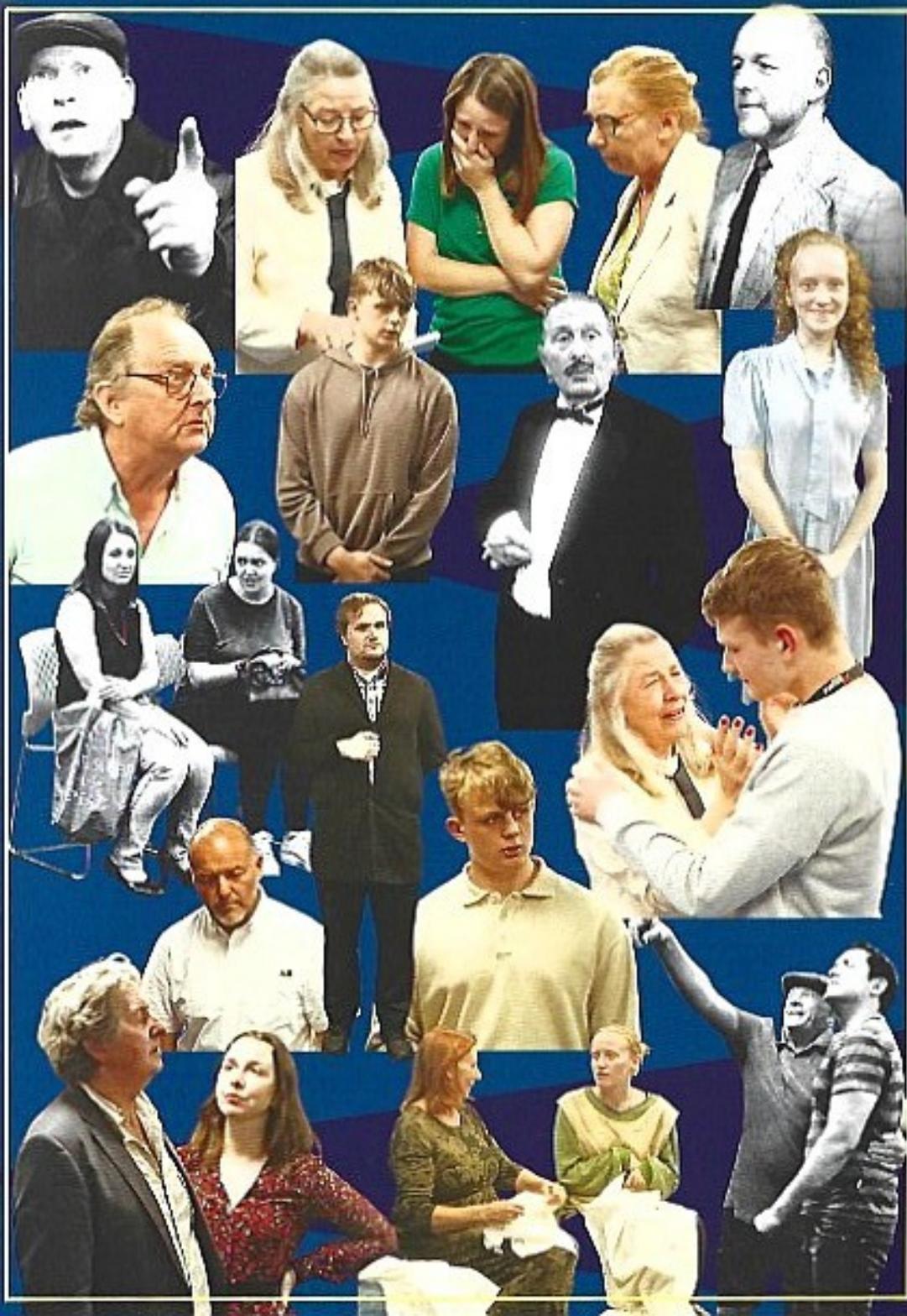
SEIZING THE SKIES

A drama based on real events. It tells the story of the airship R101, the people who flew in her, and the people left behind.

BY OSCAR ALEMAN & RICHARD MOON

14-18 October
The Place Theatre





DIRECTOR'S NOTE

What a challenge and opportunity Richard Moon presented to me when I was asked to direct "Seizing the Skies." I have directed a wide variety of theatrical productions for Community Theatre and this current experience has been second to none.

The cast have been highly adaptable, rising to the challenges set to them throughout, whilst stepping back into the era of the late 1920s into 1930.

Many questions and discussions took place on how to present the play's characters. Although a number depict real people, the play had to be a dramatisation and the writers' creation of fictional characters enhance this. The play has all the elements a strong story requires; love, loss, futility, tragedy and the enduring power of hope.

I would like to give thanks to a great creative team who have worked alongside me in bringing "Seizing the Skies" to you, the audience.

We hope that you enjoy the production!

Jenny Curzan - Director.



THE WRITERS

Seizing the Sides

A Drama Based on Real Events

It was early this year when Oscar Aleman suggested that BDC should commemorate the 95th Anniversary of the R101 Disaster. I knew a little of the story, I was born near Hawden where the R100 had been built, my dad worked in the aircraft industry, and I remember him telling me about the R101 crashing and that being the end of airships in Britain.

I began reading everything I could; the official report of the Enquiry; Sir Peter Masfield's definitive book about the disaster, "To Ride the Storm" and many others thanks to Bedford Libraries. I quickly understood that there were many stories to be told - the competition between R100 and R101 for example - the drama of the public enquiry for another - but realised that the stories we should tell were the story of the people who flew on her and the story of those left behind.

When it comes to writing a play, you need strong characters and the R101 story has some of the most interesting characters I've ever come across - Lord Thomson and Princess Bibesco, Colmore and Scott, Irvine and Atherstone. The challenge was to try and understand them, understand why they did what they did and get that across to an audience in the short time available. We didn't need to invent anything; these characters were real.

There were other characters in the story though, characters who don't appear much in the books. The people left behind. So, we introduced the wives and the women who built her. In the play these women have to represent the hundreds of people who were affected by the disaster.

And so we have "A drama based on real events". It's not a documentary, but we are confident that the story we are telling bears witness to the events that happened and is true to the people involved. Nothing else would honour the memories of those who died.

I'm immensely grateful to Jenny, the cast and crew for bringing Seizing the Sides to life so superbly. We are a community theatre - founded in 1929 the year that R101 first flew - and this project is an example of community theatre at its best - busy people giving up immense amounts of time to tell an important story which, for all its tragic ending, is a story of which Bedford can be proud.

Richard Moon - co-writer and producer and producer.

THE WRITERS

I was inspired to write a play about the R101 because I live locally to the airship hangars and often pass the Shorts Building which made me wonder about the rich history rooted here in Bedford.

The idea for a play had been manifesting for nearly as long as I've lived in Bedfordshire and, I had already been working on a draft when Richard Moon mentioned BDC was looking for new plays and was beyond pleased that this story could be considered.

In exploring the subject, I had gone down a few different rabbit holes searching for a story line. We ultimately decided to stick to a truthful account of events and include a balanced cast of characters, including the ladies in the fabric shop, selected and developed by Richard, as well as real-life figures such as Marthe Bibesco.

Having previously worked with Richard in the cast of his adaptation of 'Mary Shelley's Frankenstein', I was grateful to collaborate with him again, leveraging his greater writing experience to shape this storyline around true events and share this important piece of national history with the wider community. Beyond telling the story, I see the R101's tragic fate as not in vain, as it contributed to lessons in aviation safety that continue to resonate as today's engineers pursue new generations of safer airships.

I'm delighted that Jenny Curzon is directing, and it's been wonderful to see the creative teamwork across BDC in bringing this project to life for the 95th anniversary of the R101 disaster in honor of all involved.

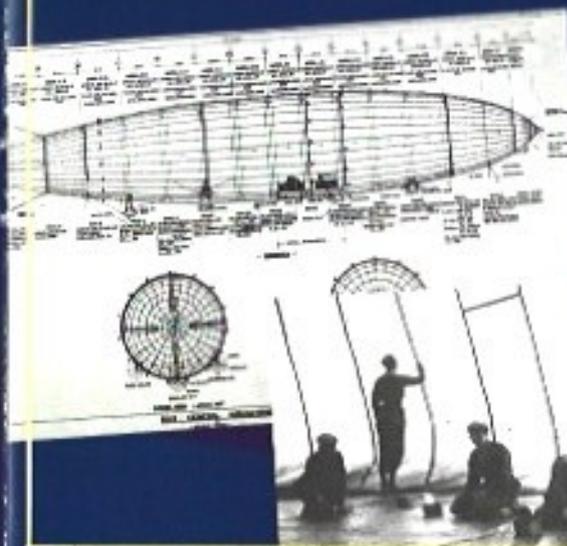
Oscar Aleman - co-writer and actor

CAST

LORD THOMPSON OF CARDINGTON	Barry Thompson
WING COMMANDER R COLMORE	Tim Wyatt
MAJOR G H SCOTT	Josh Heard
CAPTAIN H C "BIRD" IRWIN	Dominic Rankin
FIRST OFFICER MEL "GRABBY" ATHERSTONE	Richard Hart
2ND OFFICER M STEFF/HARRY	Oscar Aleman
CHIEF COXSWAIN G W HUNT/TOM	David Birke
EDDIE PARSONS	Charlie Butterworth
JOURNALIST	Richard Moon
PRINCESS MARTINE BIBESCO	Philly Martin-Moran
DOT PARSONS	Alyson Greenstone-Poll
PEGGY THOMAS	Annetta Moseley
ALICE O'MALLEY	Ellie Rowan
OLIVIA "LIVVY" IRWIN	Leah Perkins
SUSANNA ATHERSTONE	Kate Dillingham
RUBY ATHERSTONE	Nyah Wooding
ANN ATHERSTONE	Meredith Edoll
RADIO ANNOUNCERS	Richard Duncombe
	Berni Curzon
	Jean-Paul Dowding

PRODU

DIRECTOR	Jenny Curzon
PRODUCER	Richard Moon
STAGE MANAGER	Condoleezza Hankins
ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER	Utsharja Bhandari
SET BUILD	David Birke
LIGHTING DESIGN	James Doughty
LIGHTING OPERATION	Liz Burrigdo
SOUND	Mark Luckin
COSTUMES	Stephanie Smith Gail Shreeves Annette Moseley
PROPS	Pauline Corbyn Marian Barron
REHEARSAL PROMPT	Pauline Corbyn
VIDEOGRAPHY	Shannon Doughty
PUBLICITY, PROGRAMME AND PHOTOGRAPHY	Samuel Burrigdo



BEDFORD DRAMA COMPANY

Bedford Drama Company produce modern drama, classics, comedies and musicals to the highest standards. In addition to this, we also host a wide selection of performance based workshops throughout the year.

All of our cast, crew, directors, set builders, costume designers and front of house team are volunteers. However, we always say that our audiences are the paying professionals; when you buy a ticket for our shows we promise not to disappoint!

If you are interested in becoming a BDC member, there are several reasons to get involved. You will be part of a successful community theatre company. There are a variety of roles you can do. You might wish to to perform, but there are also ways to help backstage, designing and building sets, sourcing costumes and props, as well as stage managing. Members also get benefits such as discounted tickets for social and workshop events.

Join at: membermojo.co.uk/bedforddramaco



THE COMMITTEE

President	Jenny Curzon
Vice Presidents	Richard Duncombe & Andrew Sewell
Chair	Liz Mitchell
Vice-Chair	Dawn Allen
Honorary Treasurer	Richard Moon
Honorary Secretary	Holly Allen
Marketing & Publicity	Samuel Burridge
Membership Secretary	Annette Moseley
Education Co-Ordinator	Philly Martin-Moran-Bryant
Social Secretary	Monica Kulkarni
Technical Co-Ordinator	Sarah Dowding

We have a proud tradition of supporting charitable causes by donating tickets for the opening night of our productions. Those tickets are given to the charity for them to sell and raise money for their cause. This production has supported:

Bedford Hospital Charity and Friends Children's Cancer Services Appeal



Bedford Hospital Charity and Friends (BHC&F) are working with Bedfordshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust to raise funds to refurbish two dedicated cancer care side rooms on Riverbank Ward at South Wing, Bedford.

This will allow these patients to receive rapid specialist treatment to combat infections without needing to travel to London or Cambridge and any other care that might suddenly be required.

Scan the QR code for more information and to donate towards the appeal.



If you are a local charity who would like to be supported by a BDC production please email:

secretary@bedforddramacompany.org.uk



Alyson

Alyson first skipped on stage in a topless role at the age of 4. She has worked with numerous companies and looks back with great fondness on her time acting and directing with Ariel, the BBC's amateur dramatic society, in London fringe theatres. Alyson joined BDC to play Mrs Gardiner in *Pride and Prejudice* (2022), which marked her return to artdram after a long absence. This is her fifth production with BDC having appeared as the doctor in *Hobson's Choice* (2023) and Mrs De Lacey in *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (2023) also written by Richard Moon. She enjoyed directing *The 59 Steps* radio play for BDC at the start of the year.

Annette has played a variety of lead and support roles in a range of stage productions including musicals, Shakespearean drama, and classic literature adaptations. Returning to Bedford after many years abroad, Annette discovered BDC and has enjoyed performing radio plays and in *Jane Eyre*. She has appreciated bringing the character of Peggy to life in this production and hopes to honour the real women who worked at RAW.



Annette



Barry

Back in February, Barry appeared as the eccentric clairvoyant, Madam Arcati, in BDC's *Blithe Spirit*.

He has been involved in theatre across the region for several decades, and has recently been totally engrossed in creating the character of Lord Christopher Thomson, a pivotal figure in the R101 narrative. He is finding more elements of this quite complex character so very challenging, and a very different person to portray than *Madame Arcati*! A challenge he is relishing.



Charlie

Charlie plays Eddie, an energetic, determined and passionate young man when it comes to the R101. He took Drama at GCSE and really enjoyed it. *Seizing The Skies* has given him the opportunity to act alongside his college studies. Charlie has particularly enjoyed learning about the lives people lived in the 1930s and the tension and attention the R101 brought to Caddington where the community came together to witness such a masterpiece. He has enjoyed seeing the hard work and dedication all the crew put in, and seeing it all come together scene by scene. Charlie has liked seeing everyone helping everyone with advice which has helped him as a new actor.

Seizing the skies will be David's third outing with BDC, though his first acting production was *The Great Siege of Bedford Castle* where he played a guard. David gave his voice for the part of a newspaper seller in BDC's *Radio Play in a Day* before getting the role of the boatman in *Shakespeare In Love*. All of them were highly enjoyable with great people involved in the cast and crew.

This particular production excited David because of his interest in aviation, especially with a local connection.



David



Dominic

Dom joined BDC last year when he was cast as Sam in *Shakespeare in Love*, a role that gave him the chance to explore the lighter side of the play. He is now looking forward to playing *Captain Irwin*, having already got to know the wonderful cast involved in the production.





Ellie

This is Ellie's first role with BDC and she has loved every minute of it! Previously she has loved playing in shows like We Will Rock You and Peter Pan. Ellie has particularly enjoyed getting to know the cast and learning more about the real lives behind the story of what happened to the R101.



Josh has been on and off the stage since 2012 in his first Production with The Wootton Country Players in Cinderella. Josh came into the Bedford scene in 2015 with ShowCo's Witches of Eastwick and Blue Stockings in 2016 with BDC, since then he has been in a range of shows with various companies including Sister Act, Nell Gwynn, The Producers, Bonnie and Clyde and more. Josh is very excited to be back with BDC playing the highly arrogant Major Scott. Let's Press On!



Josh



Kate

This is Kate's second play with BDC following 'Vintage Hitchcock: A Radio Play' earlier this year. She graduated from the University of Northampton with a BA Hons Acting degree in 2024, during which she appeared in 'Nell Gwynn' at the Royal and Derngate in Northampton, 'The Tempest' at Aphorpe Palace, Fringe Festival in London and a Shakespeare schools tour. She has partaken in every musical and performance possible during school including as part of a choir and as a trained pianist and contemporary dancer. She's currently finding her feet after her degree and is immersing herself in the Bedford theatre scene as she returns back from university to the town she has lived in her whole life. It's an honour for her to play a role in a story about an important piece of Bedfordian history, and perform alongside such talented people.



Leah

With a background in film & television, having spent the last few years dedicated to her personal growth, Leah has recently started to reconnect with a childhood dream and transition to more on-screen roles. Last year she trained with Limitless Academy of Performing Arts, overcoming stage fright, and has since performed as The Announcer in Hitchcock's 'The Lodger' and has done role play acting to assist with training police officers.

Leah was delighted when she was offered the role of 'Livvy' and is extremely grateful to BDC for this opportunity. As well as learning about the history of the R101 and the local lives that were impacted, she has really enjoyed getting to know her character and her quirks - particularly some of the uncanny similarities they share!



Oscar's stage credits include Charles Granillo in 'Rape' (Woodhouse Players), Paul in black comedy 'Wiked', and a soldier in 'The Tank - Fray Bentos Theatre Project' at Oxford House, a National Lottery Heritage Funded WWI play based on real events (Alfie James Productions).

Known for playing a wide range of ages, Oscar returns to BDC with 'Seizing the Skies', co-written with Richard Moon and inspired by his local area. His last BDC role was Percy Shelley in Moon's 'Mary Shelley's Frankenstein' in 2023. He's delighted to collaborate with Richard Moon again and take on unique roles with this fantastic cast.



Oscar



Philly

We last saw Philly in BDC's The Secret Garden in which she played Dr. Bres. An active member for over 10 years, Philly is thrilled to be part of the Seizing the Skies production, telling our local history as part of international history. Having the chance to play the historical character of Princess Marthe Bibesco is amazing as it is possible to research her life by reading her actual books and letters - she was an amazing person of that era.



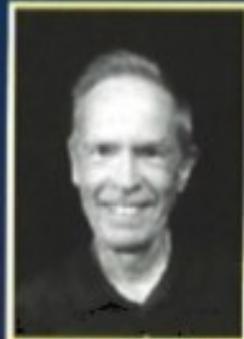


Playing Noel Atherstone, the first Officer on the R101, is a real honour. Richard has long been fascinated with Airships and had an interest in the tragedy that befell this iconic giant of the skies. He hopes that the play is a worthy retelling of its story and a tribute to those who died. Richard believes that the authors have done a great job. He wanted to be involved the first he heard about the project. This is only Richard's second play, his first being Shakespeare in Love back in May, so he is still learning the ropes but loving the process.



Richard H

Richard has been involved with the theatre for many years: performing, directing and writing. Recently he's appeared in 1984 (with Swan), The Secret Garden (BDC) and Shakespeare in Love (BDC). Plays he's directed for BDC include Kindertransport, Much Ado about Nothing and Mary Shelley's Frankenstein (which he also wrote). Other works that he's written include the Sherlock Holmes and Mrs Hudson Radio Plays for BDC, and The Song Thrush and Towels on the Bathroom Floor for MO&NA Theatre Company. His short plays BARF and The Playwright have won open competitions, and BARF has been performed across the country. He is a member of the Performable Plays collective.



Richard M



At university, Tim appeared in an adaptation of Virginia Woolf's Orlando and was directed by Edward Bond in his Saved. After a brief 40-year break from the stage, Tim has recently played parts in: Certain Age's Vote!, Albany Road, Motherless Brontes, Endgame and Wind in the Willows; BDC's Mary Shelley's Frankenstein; and Swan's Amy's View, The Comedy of Errors and Much Ado About Nothing.



Tim



Nyah is a young performer currently training at the Pauline Quirke Academy, where she is studying Film & TV, Comedy & Drama, and Musical Theatre. She is also a member of Brave Youth Theatre with whom she played Arabella-Rose in Platform earlier this year. Nyah has a passion for acting and dance and is always striving to improve her skills.

Nyah

Seizing the Skies is Meredith's first stage production, although as a member of the Place's youth theatre group Brave, she has participated in two group 'shows', playing a singing mermaid in an Under the Sea spectacular, and Juliet in a modern take on Shakespeare's classic - think playground friendships, dance-offs and talent show rivalry.

As the youngest cast member, Meredith has learned a lot from her fellow STS cast and production members. She hopes this will be the first of many on-stage performances, as she's definitely caught the acting bug!



Meredith

Meredith is 9 years old and attends a local primary school. She lives with her parents, brother, and their pet dog.



R101 cap badges

1915

The Short Brothers build No. 1 Shed to develop airships for the Admiralty.

1924

No. 1 Shed extended to 812 feet and the roof raised by 35 feet.

1928

No. 2 Shed erected at Cardington having been relocated from RNAS Pulham, Norfolk.

1929

14 October - First flight over Bedford and London. Duration: 5hr 40min

1930

June - Huge rips caused by light wind when R101 was walked out to the mast. Cover replaced and reinforced, ready for the Hendon Air Show.

29 June - R101 enters the shed ready for its extension. Extended to 777 feet.

1 October - Final trial flight delayed from September. Duration: 6hr 51min

2 October - Certificate of Airworthiness issued.

4 October - 18.36 GMT R101 cast off its mast.

5 October - Just after 02.07 am R101 went into a series of dives and hit the ground near Ailonne southeast of Beauvais. It immediately caught fire.

1919

Airships site nationalised and renamed the Royal Airship Works.

1926

Cardington mooring mast constructed.

1929

11 July - Inflating the gas bags began. Completed on 21 September.

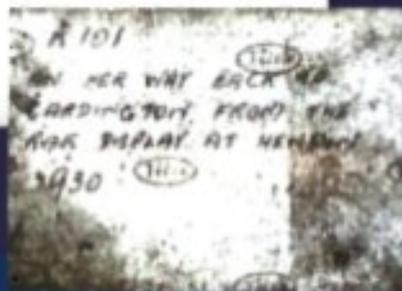


Photo supplied by Colin King

IN MEMORIAM

George K Atkins
Percy Bishop
Richard Blake
Sir William Safton Branccker
James Buck
Charles A Burton
Alexander Bushfield
Samuel Church
Reginald B B Colmore
John F Curran
Frank Elliott
Christopher J Fergusson
Hector E Ford
Percy A Foster
William R Gent
Maurice A Gilbert
Naal Grabowski Atherstone
Eric A Graham
Alfred C Hastings
George W Hunt
Herbert C Irwin
Ernest L Johnston
Spencer T Keeley
Thomas A A Key

William H King
Maurice F Littlekin
Christopher H Mason
Thomas W Megginson
Wilfred Moule
Arthur W Norcott
William H L O'Neill
Leonard F Oughton
William Palstra
Walter A Potter
Walter G Radcliffe
Martin G Rampton
Arthur J Richardson
Vincent C Richmond
Frederick M Rope
Ernest G Rudd
Albert H Savidge
George H Scott
Sidney E Scott
George W Short
Maurice H Stoff
Cecil E Taylor
The Right Hon Lord Thomson
Albert H Walters

SURVIVORS

A V Bell. T H Binks. A J Cook. A H Leach. A Disley. V Savory.



UP-COMING

January 2026

Radio Play Play In A Day



Sunday 18

Read-through auditions

Sunday 25

Performance

More details TBC

17 - 21 February

BDC presents: An Evening of Tom Stoppard



**An Evening of Tom Stoppard:
The Real Inspector Hound
& If You're Glad I'll Be Frank**

Two fantastic and bizarre
comedy farces from the mind
of Tom Stoppard.

**7.30pm The Place Theatre
Tickets available from
Place Theatre, Bedford.**

2 - 6 June



**The Lovely Bones
by Alice Seabold
adapted by Bryony Walker**

Read-through & Audition TBC

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Alastair Lawson, The Airship Heritage Trust - airshipsonline.com

Trevor Monk, St Mary's Church Airship Museum
St Mary the Virgin Church, Church Lane, Cardington MK44 3SR
We Love the Cardington Sheds (Hangars) Facebook page

David Jenkins for lending the naval uniform

Sound Effects:

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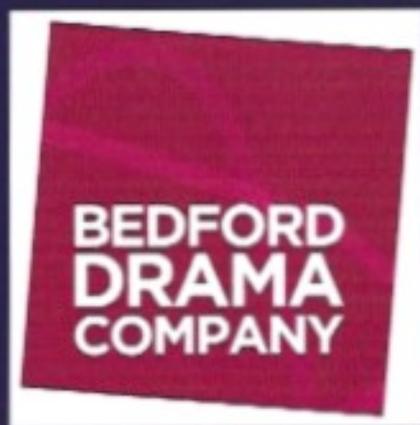
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