

THE MALDEN FAMILY THEATRE

One of the major ways in which Windlesham House celebrated its 150th Anniversary in 1987 was to embark upon an appeal which would fund the building of a new space, especially for the performing arts. Though it had the potential to be used also as an indoor sports facility, the building was initially called the Malden Theatre, to mark the five generations of the Malden family who had been heads of Windlesham House since the reign of William IV.

The first dramatic production in it was an adaptation of the DH Lawrence short story, *The Rocking-Horse Winner*, written by the then Director of the Malden Theatre, Michael Benenson, and directed by Head of English, Peter Nixon. This was performed in June 1988 and was watched by Sir Michael Hordern, arguably the school's most illustrious theatrical Old Boy ever. He returned in December of the same year to perform the official opening ceremony of the Theatre, for which Benenson had written a special play, *Homo Sapiens*, again directed by Peter Nixon.

By 1990, in a blaze of glory, the Malden Theatre had begun to host the first of its special concerts, going on in its early days to attract such names as Benjamin Luxon, *Instant Sunshine*, Julian Lloyd Webber and Nigel Kennedy. These events were gradually to become what is now long established as the regular six-per-annum subscription concerts. Likewise, by 1993, with the intention being to attract acts that had clear 'across the family' appeal, the name of the theatre changed to that by which it is now known, *The Malden Family Theatre*.

Thus it is that this beautiful building, one that blends so successfully with the Queen Anne main school, is in 2008 celebrating its own 20th anniversary. In his speech at its grand opening, Sir Michael Hordern had spoken of it as "a small jewel in the crown of English Theatre" and so the Malden Family Theatre does and will remain.