The Artful Dodger – June 2026

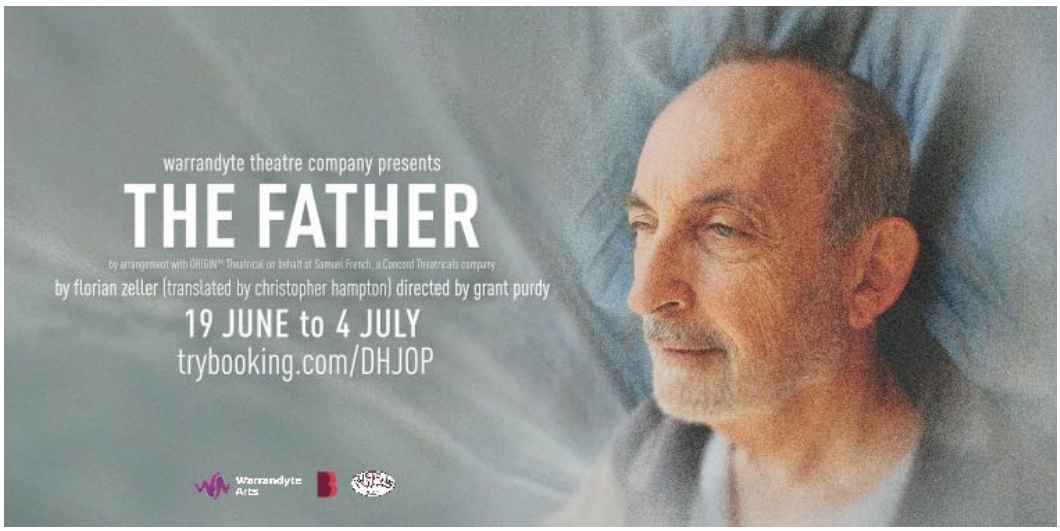
From the Chair

Well – this is awkward, isn't it? For any newbies, I may have been the WMIAA Chair once before and am quite delighted to keep the seat warm until the next great chairperson leaps forward. Until then, it'll be little old me again sorry. Can I say that since I last had this role, much has been done to improve the governance and professionalism required to manage an association such as ours. Bruce did a mighty job overseeing all of this and we are all very grateful for his calm, wise and pro-active leadership approach. Our secretary Grant continues to make the job of the chair, vice-chair, and the committee, much easier than it has previously been and I am grateful that he is happy to continue in that role. As vice-chair, Marion continues to manage the many caretaking responsibilities, tasks that are often unheralded, sometimes thankless, and always unremunerated! So onwards we strive, we merry, feisty band of volunteers, doing our bit to keep the Warrandyte Arts alive and the hall standing.

David Tynan

Theatre

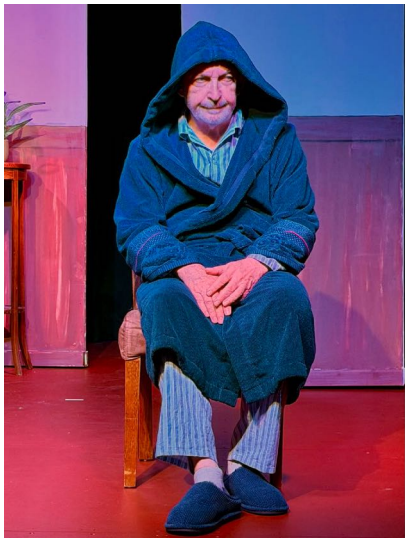
The Father – "One of the best plays of the decade"
Warrandyte Theatre Company's latest show opens on Friday, June 19. *The Father* is an extraordinary play that captivated Paris, London and New York when it was first performed.



The play offers a fascinating look inside the mind of Andrew, a retired dancer living with his adult daughter Anne, and her husband. Or is he a retired engineer receiving a visit from Anne who has moved away with her boyfriend? Why do strangers keep turning up in his room? And where has he left his watch? It's a funny yet heartfelt story. *The Guardian* gave the London production a rare, five-star review, calling it "*the best play of the year*", in 2015. *The UK Times* described *The Father* as "*one of the best plays of the decade*".

Many will recall the 2020 film, starring Anthony Hopkins and Olivia Colman, which closely follows the play. It won Academy Awards for Best Adapted Screenplay and Best Actor, for Anthony Hopkins. Grant Purdy, the director, says it is one of the most beautifully written plays he's ever directed and he hopes WMIAA members will join our audiences to share what, he assures will be a most memorable experience.

A preview performance was held on June 17 in front of an invited audience. The whole team performed to a new, elevated level responding to the presence of a real audience. Feedback afterwards was effusive. Comments included – *"intensively moving"* and *"mesmerising"*. From an actor who has seen all our shows, for many years: *"I thought that the 39 Steps (in 2013) was the finest show I've seen here, but this was better".* Tickets are selling fast and, as with most of our recent shows, will sell out for most shows before we open on June 18.



So, book your seats soon! Performances will be held on June 19, 20, 26, 27 and July 3 & 4 at 8pm and June 21 & 28 at 2.30pm. [https://www.trybooking.com/DHJOP]

Costumes working bee

On 25 April we finally did the massive clear out/sort out of the costume shed. Many thanks to everyone who turned out to help - it was a mammoth task. All the tubs were emptied, sorted and re-labelled. The plan now is to be able to easily access a costume at the drop of a hat!

We have also been busy working out the 2027 season and have some amazing plays coming up. Watch out for audition notices or let me know if you are keen to be involved. So far we are sure of Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf, Flake and 'some sort of Pantomime'.

Louise Phelan & Grant Purdy

Pottery

The warm days of Autumn have ignited much creativity in the studio as the potters play with clay and experiment with the science of glaze applications.

A broad range of recent projects include beautiful garden bowls decorated with fantastic pooling glazes, native flower tiles, leaves with ladybugs, flowers, mermaids, herb signs for the garden, construction of a worm farm, creatures such as a chicken, echidna and a magnificent turtle.
But, the best project to mention would have to be Dave's clay replica of our dear Studio.

Alison Beanland

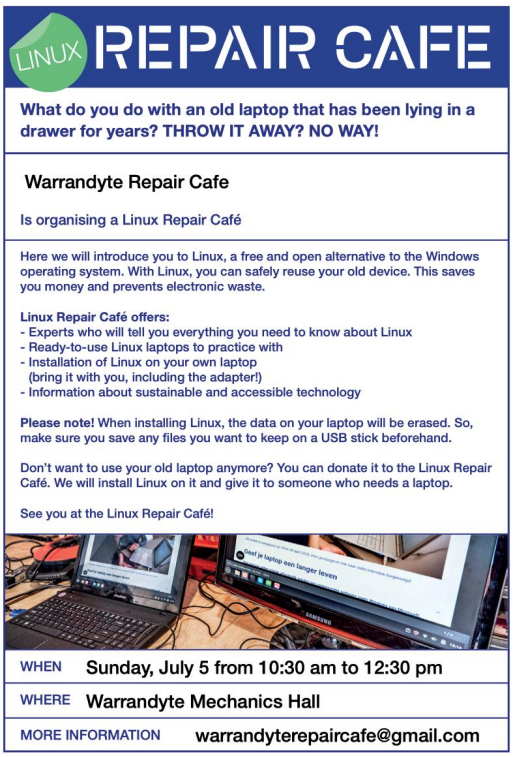
Repair Café

Monthly statistics

May and June sessions were busy as usual – in May, we dealt with 40 items of which 30 were completely fixed, while in June there were 38 items, of which 26 were completely fixed.

Linux Repair Café

After the June meeting, Chris, Jock, Ben, Dylan and David met to plan the starting session in which we invite people to bring in an older laptop, which we will help bring back to life rather than send it to landfill. We have a lot of expertise in the steering group, but we have decided to start small at the July RC and review our procedures. This will take a little promoting, mainly through our Facebook page (where we have over 1200 followers). Click here to book a spot on Sunday July 5. [https://www.trybooking.com/DNDPJ].



If you have an older laptop you would like to donate, send an email to **warrandyterepaircafe@gmail.com**. We can repurpose it for someone who needs one.

Other news (in brief)

Fixers are sometimes taking things home to work on - this is entirely voluntary, but some fixers enjoy an extended challenge, so we leave it to their discretion.
We have a new fixer Elise Moora, who we hope will soon join us focussing on fixing leather goods. Jim Anderson may be a guest fixer demonstrating a tool sharpening service - hopefully at the July session. If so, we will let the Facebook followers know. Stay tuned.

It was suggested we try to be more specific in our promotions about the categories of fixing - currently we do electrical and electronic goods, computers, mechanical, garment repair (machine and hand), as well as welding, glueing and leather goods. More areas will emerge no doubt.

Pat Anderson & David Tynan

Hall Housekeeping

There are always many jobs on the go to maintain our Association's environment.

Arborists tend to our canopy

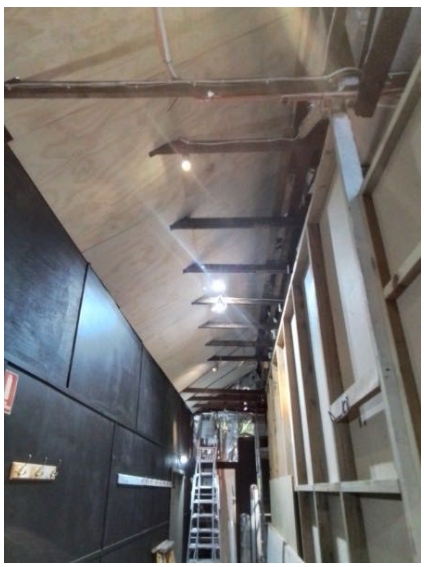
The reduction work completed on our majestic gum that greets us on entering the hall. The arborist started at the very top, removing diseased limbs and reducing the tree's load for general safety - you may be able to spot him in the photo. Great job by Valley Arbor.

Sealing the Ceiling

The second job was "sealing the ceiling" of the backstage area, the photos showing the improvement. A big thank you to Tony and John for tackling this fiddly job. No more debris or possum poo falling from above. A coat of black paint and, job done.

Before

After



Marion Cooper

Vale: John Anderson (1940 – 2026)

It is no accident that a large crowd gathered at the Warrandyte Mechanic's Institute Hall recently to celebrate the life of John Anderson. The hall has played a central part in John's Warrandyte life, spanning 54 years, and has been the nerve centre for many of the creative and community endeavours that John, together with his adored wife Pat, were involved in.

John was born in Eaglemont into a loving family, including two older sisters, Judy and Beth. His parents, Gilbert and Annie Constance both wanted a pleasant environment in which to raise a family and to give their children a good education. Music was also encouraged, and John took to the cello and violin while learning some carpentry skills encouraged by his mother since his father, although a scientist, lacked basic practical skills around the house.

The academic

John was a highly intelligent man and enjoyed an illustrious career as a plant physiologist and biochemist. The importance of his academic work was recognised by the University of Melbourne when in 1979 he was awarded the prestigious David Syme Research Prize. John also wrote three textbooks, the most recent being the "Molecular Activities of Plant Cells", coauthored by John Beardall.

As an example of his many skills, John once helped solve a major commercial headache for the Courage Brewery - then trying to get established at Broadmeadows in Melbourne. Courage were having problems with precipitation causing cloudiness in their brews and without too much trouble, John showed them how to rectify the problem. Not every plant biochemist can say they improved Australian beer. Not being a mercenary man, John sought no personal financial reward for this work. However, Courage instead decreed that a lifelong supply of beer should come John's way and thereafter, a big red "Courage" truck became a periodic visitor to 98 Bradleys Lane to deposit a wall of beer cartons under the verandah. In typical John style he established a "beer club" in his laboratory and shared his bounty generously with colleagues and neighbours until Courage folded in 1978.

The musician

One day in 1971, John came home from his job at La Trobe Uni and said that something called the *Warrandyte Arts Association* was staging *The Beggars' Opera* at La Trobe. Naturally, John and Pat went along to see this and met Noelle Burgess in the audience (Anthony Burgess was in the cast). Clearly this was something they had to find out about. So, on coming to live in Warrandyte later that year, they both joined the music group of the *Warrandyte Arts Association* (*WAA*). At that time, the group was run by Ann Arnold and consisted of informal music nights held in private homes. When Ann's family went overseas, the Anderson's offered to take on the organisation of events as their ambition was to stage a "Sing-Along" of *Handel's Messiah*, which they did in 1979. It was a wonderful night. They gathered an orchestra together from among their acquaintances, borrowed the orchestral scores from Camberwell Grammar and a pile of vocal scores from Melbourne Grammar, arranged soloists from among friends and contacts in the Astra Choir and invited the world to join in, knowing they would have a core of people from the choir who knew the choruses. And it worked! The hall was decorated for Christmas and Noelle Burgess and Marjorie Beecham organised a supper of mince tarts and Christmas cake.

The following year, John and Pat organised another event -"Christmas the Medieval Way" - with modified exerts of Medieval Mystery Plays, children doing maypole dancing (slightly unseasonal!) choral stuff, a jester (Martin Walker) etc., and that too was fun. Together they organised several other themed musical evenings in the hall and over the following years helped produce another major production called *Peace and Harmony* and then the biggest of them all, a celebration of three hundred years of *Bach & Handel*, involving orchestral and choral exerts from all the major works, dramatised narratives about the composers' lives and a backdrop of slides of major art works from the times.

The poet

John had a great love of words and thrived on performance. His recitations of A.A. Milne around the family dinner table were legendary and he particularly loved playing "Bad Sir Brian Botany". He was often called upon to MC various events, naming ceremonies, scarecrow erection parties and even performed the role of celebrant at several unofficial weddings. He also wrote lyrics for songs performed at the Warrandyte Festival Follies. Over the decades, he developed a habit of writing what he referred to as "doggerel". According to AI, "Doggerel is a type of poetry that is irregularly rhymed, poorly constructed and generally silly or trivial in meaning," which well sums up most of John's writings. Only in the process of putting together this eulogy did the full extent of John's prolific writing career become known. He has left behind reams and reams of doggerel, some written for special family or work occasions.

The DIY man & recycler

For an academic, John was an uncommonly practical person. He was the penultimate DIY king and would turn his hand to anything. After an idea was born, he would thoroughly research the matter, rally requisite friends and confidently go about making things happen. He tackled plumbing, paving, construction and electrical projects and as a point of pride, avoided calling professional tradespeople unless absolutely necessary. Like Pat, (both war time babies who had experienced rationing and scarcity), John loathed waste in any form. He would repair, re-use and recycle wherever possible. As an example, as props for a Follies production one year, he built two lecterns out of older pieces of wood. They are still in regular use thirty years later.

The volunteer

John valued generosity and altruism above all. The highest form of praise that he could offer was to say that so and so was "a giver". He greatly admired Pat for her endless community contributions to WAA, to the hall committee, Information Warrandyte and various garden clubs. In his turn, John gave his time generously.

In 2022, at the age of 82, he joined Pat at the Warrandyte Repair Café, where he started repairing books for the community. As his mobility had deteriorated in recent years this was something he could do sitting down at home and it gave him a real purpose. From when he joined in 2022, he had completed 143 book repairs.

In the last few years, his mobility was gradually compromised with a balance problem, but he made the most of this from their new location, with the aid of his "Ferrari" – a rugged mobility scooter - with which he set out on adventures to visit people like Jock, David and Bernie, the latter up past the High School. He was still able to work on his book repairs, which he did most afternoons. He also played his cello and looked forward to long weekends when his cousin Margaret came to stay which he enjoyed immensely.

John was a complex, colourful, multifaceted man who had a great many interests and aspects to his character and at heart was a good, loyal and highly principled person. He had a long, full and richly textured life - those who knew him were lucky indeed.

The Old Fire Station – a progress report

The Old Fire Station at the back of the WMIAA site has housed the association's pottery since 1981. In 2022, areas of significant termite damage were detected in the timber section of the building during a professional Termite Survey. Subsequently, after wall coverings and ceilings were removed and the subfloor investigated, this damage was found to be very substantial indeed. In fact, much of the framing and supports for the north and eastern walls and some subfloor supports were almost completely destroyed. The Eastern wall was so badly damaged that once the wall coverings had been removed, that section of the roof was liable to collapse.

In 2025, funded by a grant from the Warrandyte Community Bank (Bendigo Bank) and donations from Rotary, the Lions Club, and through considerable fundraising activities, the Association was able to pay for essential activities to stabilise the building and replace all the termite-damaged timber. This involved almost completely replacing the northern and eastern walls with 'like for like' external timber weather- boarding.

Last year we were able to obtain a commitment from the Labor party that, if re-elected they would fund the complete refurbishment of the building to create a purpose-built pottery studio with a separate clay, slip etc., preparation room. A new ventilated room would also be built under the existing lean-to, to house the kiln away from the workspace.

The downstairs area would then become a multipurpose room for other artistic activities and meetings and would also allow its walls to display artworks from the Association and others.

We first heard from the Commonwealth Government in September last year. Although the money we required had been 'pledged' to us, nevertheless, we would still have to apply for the grant by December 1, 2024. Then, while we were preparing the application, the goal posts were moved again and we were told that we could not be paid the money directly, but that it would have to be paid to our local Council who would then 'sponsor' the work. At that stage no one really understood what that 'sponsorship' entailed.

Gabriel Ng MP and Catherine King MP with members of Warrandyte Arts and the Warrandyte Pottery Group

In February this year we received a letter from federal Minister Catherine King saying our application was successful but was contingent on Manningham council signing a funding agreement with the Commonwealth Government. Minister King visited us in February, toured the old fire station building and our hall, and said some nice things about the importance of what we do for the community.

Then, everything started to slow down! Jock Macneish and Grant Purdy almost constantly engaged with the City Projects part of the Council and the relevant Commonwealth department during autumn to urge progress. However, it was only at the beginning of June that

Manningham eventually agreed on a draft funding agreement with Government. At the time of writing, neither party has yet signed that agreement and so we cannot sign our agreement with Manningham. Only when we have that agreement in place can we be sure the monies will eventually flow to us, enabling us to pay our builder when he starts work.
Also, before any work can start, we have to obtain a building permit and commission further specialist reports on the soil under the building, the energy efficiency of the building and the integrity of the new ceiling that is to be installed downstairs, along with the new floor and stumps for the upstairs area, to keep the surveyor happy.

Then, in late May, despite indications otherwise, Manningham Planning Department decided we would have to apply for a planning permit, ostensibly for the construction of the new kiln room, even though it is under the roof of the existing lean-to.

The application has been made and after several requests for further information, largely a repeat of what had already been submitted, but in a different format, it seems the Council is now in the process of determining the issuing of the permit.

We had all hoped that the work would have largely been completed by now, so the Pottery Group would avoid another winter in the cold and draughty downstairs workroom. However, it seems that the best we can hope for now is that all the work will be completed by the spring.

Grant Purdy

Membership

To renew your membership for 2026, click **https://www.trybooking.com/DIJZB** and follow the prompts. If you have any queries, please contact our membership coordinator Noelene by email (noelenecooper@bigpond.com) or by mobile 0400 861 133.

Noelene Cooper

WMIAA Oral History Project (WOHP)

Pat, Denise, Jock, Michelle and David have progressed this project so that all pilot interviews are now complete. Now that we have the process about right, we can start on the interviews (about 70 interviews at last count). Noelene has joined the group to help share the workload. The interviews vary in duration – turns out some people remember more than others!

Here is an edited sample interview that we did recently with Heather Jamieson.

Interview with Heather Jamieson

I was first involved around 1965 maybe, when I did ballet. We used to rehearse in the Scout Hall and then we'd do a concert in the Mechanics Institute.

I think our ballet teacher was named Mila with Wendy Williams also teaching ballet. I loved it but was not good at it. Everybody got into toe shoes except Heather, but never mind, that's fine.

I can't remember first walking into the Hall, I can only remember being on stage and being very struck by having so many people looking at me, and I just went... still. Forgot everything. Froze. Yeah, froze up on stage.

The Hall hasn't changed much over all the years and I remember it being very like what it is now. It probably had curtains either side, old-fashioned velvet curtains. I can remember that musty sort of closed-up smell.

I've been a member of the Arts Association over the years. I was in the Follies maybe 15 years ago. I did the Follies for a couple of years, as well as ballet when I was young.

I've done a few concerts singing in the Mechanics Hall, raising money for the bushfire victims and in community concerts.

The Arts Association has impacted my life as a singer, being on stage gave me confidence. And I've met a lot of lovely people by doing that.

My favourite story about my involvement with the Hall and the Arts Association was when I was very young, doing ballet and... freezing on stage! We were dressed up in Japanese costumes. I think I might have been about seven or eight.

The other dancers I can remember were my neighbour, Sue May, along with Sue Williams and Kathy (Hook) Smith, who still lives in Warrandyte.

The Association contributes a lot as far as socializing. The theatre is wonderful and other events can be held there, even funerals. I remember going to Gail Macrae's wake.

When I was young, we used to go to the South Warrandyte Hall, mostly to dances, along with Mum and Dad. Dances were also held at the Mechanics Hall. They had barn dances and foxtrots and all sorts of things. It was a lot of fun. Mum and Dad loved to dance.

Mum sang at the Hall in a concert in 1933 when she was 17, and along with her friend Lily Beeston, helped raise money for the war effort. She was also involved with the Lilac Time Balls that were held there.

I hope the Hall and Arts Association keeps operating for the next 100 years and they get enough funding to keep it in good shape.

With many thanks to our generous sponsors for their ongoing support.