

# The Move to Riverlea



# **The Move to Riverlea**

**A brief history of the beginnings of the  
Riverlea Theatre and Arts Centre**

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*Cover picture: Top: The old Playbox theatre and Royce Barclay, President, early 1983  
Bottom: The old Musikmakers building in Clarence St, early 1984*

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## 1. Introduction

The Riverlea Theatre and Arts Centre was established in 1984 as a cooperative venture between a number of theatre groups and the Waikato Society of Potters..

These groups had previously existed independently (in the case of Playbox, for some 50 years), but the club premises of the theatre groups were a group of temporary buildings set up by the Air Force during World War II, and later used as a Post Office depot. The old Playbox and Musikmakers buildings are shown on the cover, and the Theatre Technique Trust and the Hamilton Operatic Society were based in adjacent buildings of similar vintage.

These buildings were fondly regarded by club members, but increasingly run down, and the electrical wiring, heating and toilet arrangements were primitive. Further, they occupied land between Clarence Street and Palmerston Street which fringed the expanding central business district of Hamilton, and the Hamilton City Council was coming under pressure to make more land available for commercial development and to remove developing road transport bottlenecks. As the landowner as well as the Local Authority, Council found itself caught between the needs of the resident performing arts community on one side and the needs for traffic and business growth on the other.

By the late 1970s, it was generally agreed that the old buildings had to go, but there was little agreement on anything else. Hamilton Operatic Society unilaterally went ahead with the first stage of their planned new theatre, but otherwise Al Williamson, Chairman of the newly formed Hamilton Community Arts Council was only able to report in April 1979 “During the past year the Arts Council has had meetings with Mr Eyeington [Director of Corporate Planning and Development] and others of the City Council Planning Department re possible development of land and buildings for cultural purposes. These discussions are continuing, particularly with regard to the Clarence Street area.”

This brief history covers the six years from this early City Council concept of an “Art Centre” in Clarence Street to the reality of the Riverlea centre established in a form which is fundamentally unchanged today, some twenty-five years later.

## 2. The Clarence Street Concept

By May 1980 there had been considerable planning behind the scenes by Hamilton City Council, but the Community Arts Council (CAC) heard “that the financial aspect of the Clarence St development was worrying many societies.” Maurice Boswell, the City Councillor appointed as Council representative as well as acting Chairman of the CAC responded that “the final plan has not been put to Council – finance will be discussed when the plan has been accepted by Council. To date the land has been bought and expertise from members of the community is now being sought. The Transportation survey is holding up the Council but it is hoped to have the answer this year.”

In July 1980 Royce Barclay, another City Councillor and CAC member as well as President of Playbox, reported that “he is the only arts representative on the newly elected

Recreation and Sports Committee” [of the City Council]. At the same meeting Cr. Boswell advised “the young qualified architect employed by the City Council for the Clarence St project is a planner of the overall concept but each group will employ its own architect to plan its own building.” Suggested names for the new concept included Hamilton Art Centre, Clarence Art Centre and Clarence Centre.

By September Cr. Boswell advised that “plans were about to be put to Council – hopefully in October”, and in November Cr. Boswell “produced a document with plans of the new Clarence St concept.” As well as assuming completion of the then partially constructed Hamilton Operatic Society theatre, this showed a separate smaller theatre and a musical performance building, taken to be replacements for the existing Playbox and Musikmakers buildings. Unfortunately the plans were not supported by any provision for funding these three buildings.

In May 1981, Cr. Boswell reported to the AGM of the CAC that Council was progressively purchasing 15 acres [6.6 ha] on Clarence Street and that over \$500,000 had been spent on planning etc. for the project to date. Council were looking for Government funding, and for a Trust setup to administer the proposed complex, which was now on the new District Scheme. Mayor Ross Jansen suggested that it was worth trying the Government for approval to run a special lottery to fund the planned centre.

Cr. Barclay advised in July 1981 that a Trust was being set up, but Theatre Technique felt they needed to develop their existing rooms. Cr. Boswell advised against renovation, but claimed he had the backing of Council (including the Mayor) in promising that under no circumstances would Council put out any group currently in Clarence St without ensuring other premises were available. Musikmakers wanted to improve their toilet facilities, and contacted the City Engineer to arrange this.

Slow progress continued in 1982, with Musikmakers appointing an architectural draughtsman to prepare drawings for a new building in March. The new committee also reappointed Alastair Barnett as liaison with the Community Arts Council, where he had been elected as a member in May 1981.

The 1982 AGM of the CAC was held in May, and received a report from Crs Barclay and Boswell “that the Trust for the Clarence Street Development had not been formed although the Trust [this word was corrected from “Trust” to “concept” in the minutes of the next meeting] plans are finalised”. The meeting resolved “That the new Community Arts Council write to the Hamilton City Council voicing concern at the delay of the Clarence Street development.” At the following meeting the Chairman, Al Williamson stepped down, to be succeeded by Royce Barclay.

Social links between Clarence Street groups were gradually improving – the June Musikmakers meeting discussed a social with a bar licence (a booth licence would cost \$10 per night) and an end of year ball combined with Playbox and Operatic social clubs.

However reports reached the July meeting of the CAC that Hamilton City Council had granted \$20,000 to the Hamilton Operatic Society as a special case, bypassing the usual structures (including the CAC) set up to vet grants to non-profit community organisations. The minutes also recorded that “A Committee of future occupants of the [Clarence Street] area [is] to be established.”

Meanwhile the Musikmakers committee were relieved to hear that the drainlayer was going in, and that their toilet extension would be ready by the weekend.

In August 1982, the CAC heard that Les Gilchrist (recently appointed by the Minister of the Arts as a member of the Northern Regional Arts Council) had stopped the demolition of the Musikmakers building just before leaving the Hamilton City Council. The City Council Recreation and Welfare Department were looking for alternative buildings, such as the Oasis (Coca Cola factory) building. However much of that space appeared to be already allocated for the spinners and weavers, leaving little for theatre groups.

The September meeting of the Musikmakers committee heard from Cr. Barclay that he was going ahead with a “troubleshooting group” on the Clarence Street complex. The meeting agreed to send a letter to Council, setting out needs as seen by Musikmakers, including a theatre with a fly tower, two rehearsal rooms, a set construction space at least 16 feet [5m] high, supper facilities, storage space for wardrobe and props, and a sewing room.

In November 1982 the CAC meeting noted under the heading “Trust – Clarence Street” that “Dr Barnett suggested setting up a scheme whereby groups would undertake to save so much money each year – to be put into a Trust Fund towards their own building in Clarence Street – in the future. Dr Barnett was invited to put this in writing as it was of much interest to everyone.” A report headed “Trust Fund Scheme – Clarence Street” was duly tabled at the December 1982 CAC meeting.

This report commented “In the present economic climate the total funding requested far exceeds the funds available with the result that only the highest priority projects have been supported. Unfortunately in allocating priorities funding organisations can easily be persuaded that a group in financial crisis must take higher priority than a group facing longer term financial commitments.”. The CAC accepted in principle a motion that the CAC negotiate a schedule of priorities with the funding agencies which gave higher priority to groups with a strong savings record, and low priority to groups applying for emergency funding, except on a once only basis.

Meanwhile the Musikmakers committee meeting heard that the rewiring of the lighting system in the existing building had been completed by Pat Holloway for the sum of \$280.

### **3. The “Interim” Solution**

In January 1983 a Musikmakers subcommittee of Alastair Barnett (chair), Alan Wilson, Ron Jamieson and Michael Butcher met Royce Barclay, representing Playbox and the City Council. Various options were being considered for purchase by Council, including the Baptist Church and the Rogers [an ex-Mayor] property. Unfortunately the Playbox building fund was almost wiped out because of the costs of bringing the wiring and electrical fittings up to public safety standards in the old building. A suggestion was made to set up a joint delegation of three each from Musikmakers and Playbox to meet a Council group, preferably including Mayor Jansen.

At the site meeting on 16 February, Playbox (Royce Barclay), Musikmakers (Alastair Barnett) and TTT (Al Williamson) were all represented, and Mayor Jansen noted that Council had suddenly become interested in the issue in the last month. He agreed that it was nonsense to have three separate building funds, and stated that the Properties Manager would be instructed to look for suitable premises, based around one auditorium seating 250-350 people, with plenty of parking and good public access. He advised that each organisation should have a formal meeting to resolve that they would come together if certain criteria were met.

The Musikmakers AGM in March agreed that a joint committee would administer the new building, and set aside \$10,000 for the building fund – to be spent only on expenses relating to the new building.

Cr. Barclay reported to the March CAC meeting that the Mayor was impressed with the cooperation between the three theatre groups he had met, and was pushing Council for a solution. Six days later Lana Glogowski [Recreation and Welfare Officer, Hamilton City Council] advised that the properties committee meeting had resolved to evaluate the Orange Gardens Cabaret on Riverlea Road.

On 6 April 1983 the Management Committee of Council at a meeting of the Property Sub-Committee recommended “That the Properties Manager conclude a conditional Agreement for the Sale and Purchase of the property [the previous “Orange Garden Cabaret” complex, Riverlea Road] subject to the necessary town planning consents being available within 6 months, the 4 user groups indicating their agreement to the proposal within 3 months and forming themselves into an incorporated society, and any necessary loan authorities being obtained within 6 months.”

The April CAC meeting resolved “A letter of commendation is to be sent to the Hamilton City Council, acknowledging their foresight in purchasing the building on Riverlea Road for use as a Community Art Centre.”

On 28 April Alastair Barnett met [City Councillor] Elsie Neil and Chris Cooke from Playbox to discuss the mechanics of setting up an incorporated society and of applying to the various government schemes for building funds. Sue Knowles and Val Noonan from the Society of Potters also attended, at the suggestion of Hamilton City Council, because the Riverlea complex was believed to offer a solution for their building needs as well. Council were willing to supply a letter of support, and Lana Glogowski was to arrange a PEP [government funded employment scheme] worker to act as secretary to the group.

On 1 May the Musikmakers committee heard a presentation from Royce Barclay, and approved the Riverlea Arts Centre concept.

On 2 May, a meeting of Elsie Neil (chair), Chris Cooke, Alastair Barnett, Alan Wilson, Nellie Shaw, Mac Campin, Al Williamson and Potters representatives reported their savings, given as Musikmakers \$13,800, TTT \$10,000, Potters \$5,600 and Playbox \$18,000. This was matched against a preliminary budget for equipment needs, such as lighting and fittings, seats (200 estimated at \$25 each), pottery wheels and drapes.

The AGM in May of the CAC minuted: “It was also decided that the Community Arts Council Committee write to the Hamilton City Council voicing concern at the delay of the Clarence Street development.

Councillor Boswell indicated that a committee had been set up to research and report on the Clarence Street development. To date this group had met three times and were responsible to the City Council property Sub-Committee.

In the interim, however, a property has been purchased in Riverlea Road, Hillcrest. Four main user groups are interested in this property at this stage ; Hamilton Playbox Repertory Society, Musikmakers Incorporated, Theatre Technique Trust and the Waikato Society of Potters.

At a later stage in the development of the facility, a public meeting will be held inviting other community groups to become members of the users Society and further utilise the building.”

So the “interim” solution was launched which is still holding together over 25 years later. Meanwhile, the only remnant of the Clarence Street Art Centre concept is the Clarence Street Theatre operated by Hamilton City Council. The remainder of the area has been converted to the Pack and Save supermarket and carpark.

## 4. The Move

The informal joint working committee met again in July and in September (chair Elsie Neil), when draft Rules were agreed and interim officers were elected as follows: Chairman Royce Barclay, Deputy Chairman Elsie Neil, Secretary Alan Wilson and Treasurer Nellie Shaw.

The following meeting in October (chair Cr. Royce Barclay) heard that the NZ Lottery Board had granted \$17,500 towards the project, to be spent by 1 March 1985. Hamilton City Council were to approve the purchase of the Riverlea premises for \$160,000, on condition that the four groups confirmed they would all participate in the joint formation of a separate incorporated society to manage the complex. The intention of this was to give all the groups some confidence that access to the facilities would not be taken over by any one group at the expense of the others.

This possibility concerned the Potters in particular, as they wanted assurances that they could control how much money of their contribution would be spent on building requirements. Alan Wilson, Royce Barclay and Al Williamson were delegated to meet the Potters committee to discuss safeguards.

A Christmas show was proposed by Michael Butcher of Musikmakers as a familiarisation occasion, and difficulties with public assembly were noted until compliance with building codes and licencing laws had been certified. Finally it was minuted “The Musikmakers were approved in principle to plan towards using a Christmas Show for club members only.”



At the October Musikmakers meeting, Alan Wilson reported that application had been made for a name for incorporation, and that the rules were almost ready. Provision was being made for Musikmakers to nominate their delegates at any time. Officers of the Society would not be permitted to continue in the same office for more than three years.

Meanwhile on 7 October 1983 Hamilton City Council granted planning consent to its own application “to establish an arts, recreation and community centre with a licence to sell liquor”.

The November meeting of the Centre heard that “The Potters have passed a unanimous resolution to join and become part of the Riverlea Theatre and Arts Centre.” They were also informed that “we could enter the premises as from 1 November, but it would be accepted with rental payments from 1 February 1984”, and that the rent would be set at \$6,000 per year. A problem was identified with a lack of storage at Riverlea Road compared with that currently in use at Clarence Street, and a building subcommittee of Al Williamson (coordinator), Chris Cooke, Michael Butcher, Alastair Barnett, Gavin Smith, John Tucker and Don MacArthur was set up. The present clearance of about 10 feet [3.3m] between floor level and ceiling beams left little room to raise the stage.

A flurry of activity then saw the December meeting of the Centre discussing rules for the calendar of productions. “Playbox usually produce five or six shows per year but would probably reduce this to three.” Musikmakers also wanted to produce three shows in 1984, but Theatre Technique had nothing planned.

The meeting was able to record that “[Sir] Michael Fowler [then Chairman of the Q.E. II Arts Council] had agreed to open the Centre on 12 May. [Mayor] Ross Jansen is liaising with the Queen Elizabeth II Trust. The City is to provide all expenses and costs for the opening.” On a more immediate note “The Building Sub-Committee is to meet at 10.30 Tuesday morning to discuss the restoration of power” – this with a Christmas production due to start on Thursday!

The first Riverlea production “Variety 83” (director, David Heberley) duly went ahead, with the Musikmakers President, Michael Butcher noting “Welcome to Riverlea, as you see there is a lot to be done, but you can also see the possibilities. To make our dream come true we will need a lot of help over the coming year. If you are available for a working bee please advise a committee member ... My thanks to Playbox, Theatre Technique Trust and the Potters for their participation in this production with Musikmakers.”

Accompanying the minutes of the December meeting, a “List of Members of Riverlea Theatre and Art Centre Inc.” was circulated. This recorded the original Society members as (from Playbox) Royce Barclay, Christopher Cooke, Gavin Smith and Joan Bassett, (from Musikmakers) Alan Wilson, Nellie Shaw, Michael Butcher and Alastair Barnett, (from TTT) Tui Marshall, Allister Williamson, Bruce Sheridan and Kevin Tucker, (from the Potters) Lance Turley, Don MacArthur, Michael Irwin and Mercia Fuller. In addition two non-voting members were recorded ex officio: Dinky Nugent (wardrobe) and Ken Sandford (buildings), making a total of 18 names.

[Note: The actual name of the Society seemed to vary, as this list of members of the “Art Centre” were attached to a meeting agenda headed “Riverlea Theatre and Arts Centre

Inc.” signed by A.C. Wilson, Secretary. It appears that the name was formally registered using “Art Centre”, and this name headed the Society Rules, but that in all other references, including original letterheads, “Arts Centre” was used virtually universally from the beginning.]

At the January 1984 meeting, Playbox advised that they may still wish to perform four productions per year, but would accept the time slot proposed for “Oliver”, the second Musikmakers production. Progress on a telephone connection was reported. “The bar was to be run for the first six months for the benefit of the Trust.” No smoking was to be allowed at committee meetings. Al Williamson reported on the outside building, and advised that a new building based on a standard agricultural design appeared likely to be cheaper than attempting to purchase and move an existing building.

Meanwhile Council had demolished the old Playbox theatre and had issued notice to TTT to quit their building by April 24, but Royce Barclay undertook to have demolition deferred until there was alternative storage for the contents.

A proposal was received from Extraordinary Foods (partners David Gibson and Graeme Greedy) to be appointed as the sole caterer at the Riverlea complex. The concept included managing the bar, coordination of bookings for shows, and four standard menus based on three courses with two choices per course. Suggestions included “Egyptian Lemon Chicken”, “Pickled Pork with Ginger/Mandarin Sauce (Hot)”, “Chocolate Almond Torte”, and “Snow eggs with cinnamon sugar.” Impressed by this, the Committee entered a contract with Extraordinary Foods, subject to a review after 12 months.

The following month the Committee heard that there was a stay of execution on the TTT building, and it would not now be demolished “before 20 May or shortly after that date.” Telephones had been installed, and the outside “haybarn type of building” was quoted at “\$10,500 erected, without the floor.” Winstones had quoted approximately \$2,000 to supply the concrete if labour could be provided to lay it.

The March Committee meeting heard with some concern that the Potters area “Roof and internal guttering is also to be updated before the power will be connected or a licence for a “public assembly” building is given.” However “Temporary power will be available for the opening.” On pianos, it was decided “We need three – one “honky tonk”, one for productions and a decent back up piano.”

There was discussion of the procedure for replacing members of the Trust Committee, especially the Executive. The position of TTT was also reviewed, as they had previously advised they were not in a position to produce shows in the near future, and that therefore they questioned the need to match the funding contribution of the other three groups. It was proposed that “Executives were to be chosen for three years by the Trust Committee, not the component members.” “The Chairman suggests we do not have an A.G.M. this year.” “TTT have one member, the other three are working members and not voting members.” Resolution of these issues was postponed to another meeting.

The first public production in the new theatre was “The Heiress”, directed for Playbox by Betty Ward. This ran from 10-24 March 1984. Royce Barclay noted in his President’s message “as we approach the Official Opening of the Riverlea Theatre and Arts Centre

which takes place on the 12<sup>th</sup> May, we must thank the teams of people who are working so hard to have this, our new home, ready.”

Almost immediately afterwards from 7-14 April, Musikmakers mounted their first Riverlea public production – “The Pirates of Penzance” directed by Pam Puklowski. Jane Barnett had just been elected as president after Michael Butcher stepped down, and her message said “This is a very exciting year for Musikmakers. We have come a long way since we first started several years ago, in an old army hut in Clarence Street. We now share this splendid new complex, with superb facilities, which with still further improvements will provide a top grade theatre and arts complex for Hamilton.”

Interestingly, the 2009 Musikmakers production of “Cabaret” involved several identities from these first two Riverlea public shows: from The Heiress Jan Hedge (the Heiress), and from Pirates of Penzance Jane Barnett (Edith), Alastair Barnett (Sergeant of Police), and Brian Lintott (Stage Manager).

The April Committee meeting was advised that “Playbox have a new President [Tom Hawley] and Executive and may possibly change their Trust membership.” This reference to the Riverlea “Trust” was common practice at the time, and was even used in the official invitation to the opening ceremony on 12 May 1984 – see Figure 1.

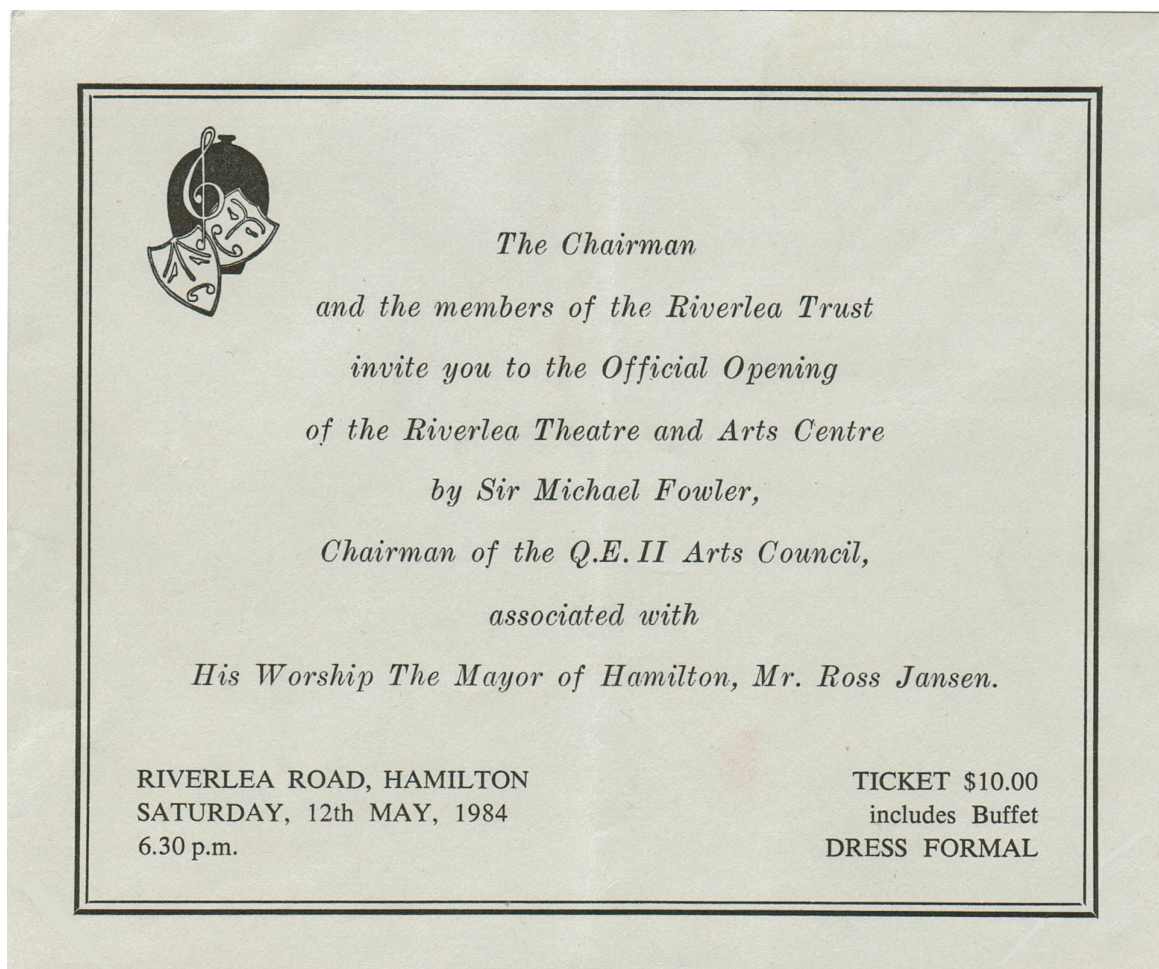


Figure 1. Invitation to the Official Opening Ceremony

## The Move to Riverlea

This was a hangover from the original proposals for a Clarence Street Trust. There never was a “Riverlea Trust” in any legal sense, because such a Trust would normally have had the unacceptable aspect of imposing direct personal financial liability on its members. Instead the Centre was set up from the beginning as an incorporated society “The Riverlea Theatre and Art [or Arts – see Note above] Centre Incorporated”.

However this was a mouthful, so many members developed the confusing habit of referring to the “Trust” for short, unintentionally implying a false basis for the legal dealings of the new Riverlea venture. The formal short name was the “Society” in the initial Rules, but when used this caused further confusion in the context that three other Societies and a Trust were each contributing some individual members.

This confusion was finally resolved the following year by amendments to the Society Rules, which introduced the term “Board” as the short form of reference to the membership group which managed the affairs of the Riverlea Society. The term “Riverlea Board” has been used ever since. [Up to the point that “The Board” was introduced, this history uses “The Committee” to be understood with essentially the same meaning.]

Meanwhile the legal status of the building was also in question, as City Council staff were increasingly unhappy that public functions were continuing without a licence for public assembly having been renewed from that approved for the building under the previous ownership. A stiff letter was received from Council per Mr Eyeington (contact A. Robertson) dated 18 April 1984, stating “I am now given to understand that repairs to the roof, gutters, downpipes and stormwater are required” and “It has been further indicated that other substantial costs will be required to satisfy the Building Codes for a Place of Public Assembly, particularly with regard to fire rating and egress brought about as a result of your building modifications.”

Considering that the Council themselves had purchased the building a year earlier specifically to provide a facility for public assembly, that the “building modifications” were minor and had been carried out under Council supervision, and that the remaining stormwater problems were understood to relate only to the Potters area, which was not accessible to the Theatre public, the Committee assumed that all that was required was to continue working on the building problems under Council supervision.

However just before the opening on 12 May, the Committee were disappointed to find good publicity relating to the opening was offset by the bad publicity of a motion of censure carried by the City Council three days earlier on 9 May. However an \$18,000 grant towards the costs of bringing the complex up to the required standard was approved by the same meeting, implying some acceptance of responsibility for this by Council.

Royce Barclay therefore accepted the censure, and moved to improve liaison with (and between) the various Council departments by inviting Alec Robertson (listed as contact on the Council letter) to join the Committee to fill the vacant Deputy Chairman role.

The official opening featured dinner music by Gavin Hawley on organ, Playbox sketches, Musikmakers cameo extracts from “Fiddler on the Roof” as performed in the 1983 Christmas show, and music from the Hamilton Big Band led by Charles Ingram. Also a large selection of pottery was displayed.

## 5. Settling In

After safely negotiating the official opening of the complex, the Committee meeting of 21 May 1984 took stock. The opening itself had attracted many compliments, and both this event and the Potters Open Day on the day after were felt to have been a success.

However the new groups were far from secure in their new home. The legal status of the Committee itself could no longer continue under the original Rules because Theatre Technique was unable to maintain their full contribution, so a new agreement was required on the membership. The motion of censure meant that the building complex urgently needed significant work if the Council were to permit any further public productions to go ahead. Poor sightlines were heavily criticised in the first two shows, requiring further structural work to replace obstructive deep beams in the auditorium. The main TTT storage building, still in the Clarence Street site, was under threat of demolition (or takeover from the Hamilton Operatic Society, whose own condemned Quonset Hut was crammed with reusable stage sets), and the bank account was overdrawn.

On the positive side, the new committees in Playbox, Musikmakers and the Potters were all enthusiastic about the new Centre, significant financial support was increasingly forthcoming from both the Government and the City Council, and the first two productions in the new out-of-town site had been well supported by the public, with "The Heiress" reporting a profit of \$1100 and "Pirates of Penzance" a profit of \$2500.

Also there was no going back, as the Clarence Street theatre buildings had already been demolished, so the Committee set about allocating a priority order to the most urgent tasks. The secondment of Alec Robertson from Council as Deputy Chairman was approved, and it was hoped this would give a much-needed improvement in communications between the Committee and Council.

Outside help with the Committee was also welcome, because members who had additional responsibilities in their constituent societies were heavily loaded. Playbox were organising an additional four productions for the year ("Theatre is Alive & Well, Will" directed (and written) by Diana Cooke, "The Nuns" directed by William Bulloch, "Mothers and Fathers" directed by David Gibson, and "Libel" directed by David Reid), while Musikmakers were hardly less active, working on an ambitious production of "Oliver" directed by David Heberley and a long Christmas season of "Music Hall" directed by Poppy Wheatley.

On the Committee membership, "It was eventually decided that T.T.T. withdraw and send an official letter in resigning, and suggested that 1 extra member be provided from each society. E. Bevege was ex officio without voting rights as a wardrobe mistress. Al Williamsons advice was valued and it was moved that he stay on as a voting member." Wardrobe was demanding considerable organisation, as there was no space for Musikmakers wardrobe, and Opera Waikato had also offered to donate their wardrobe to the Centre. Dinky Nugent and Ethne Bevege were asked to "go in and sort it out".

The pressure on the theatre calendar meant that external rehearsal space was required. Playbox booked space in the old TTT building, while Musikmakers arranged to use the Berkley Normal Intermediate school hall.

Meanwhile Alastair Barnett arranged for the original designer of the complex (Tom Flood of Angus Flood & Griffiths) to evaluate replacement of the deep truss style roof supports with low profile steel beams. A quote was received for \$2577 to replace the first (and most visually obstructive) beam, on condition that five volunteers would be available for two hours for manhandling the steel in and out of the Theatre. To facilitate payment, Musikmakers agreed to fund this job against future rentals, and they coordinated the project on behalf of the Board.

At the 20 June meeting, Dinky Nugent asked when some heating would go in [mid-winter!] but was told that the Committee could not yet afford this. The cost of theatre hireage to the groups was also discussed, and a rate of \$50 per performance and \$25 per rehearsal night was proposed. This was not popular.

A meeting was held with City Council staff about the final requirements for licensing and egress to meet Public Assembly codes. All seats had to be clipped together in sets of four, and at least 3'6" [1.07m] clear width allowed in all access ways. Replacement of the deep truss by a beam was acceptable as long as this was designed by a registered engineer.

Complaints were received from the audience of "The Nuns" that the theatre was very cold, and that the sightlines from Rows C and E were poor, particularly when the cast were lying on the floor.

The TTT building in Clarence Street continued to feature at meetings, being broken into by vandals for sleeping accommodation (18 July meeting) and then taken over by the Operatic Society (15 August meeting) which had "inserted a vast amount of scenery." "The wardrobe is now up at Riverlea but the props are still in the building. The rest of the scenery cannot be taken out at the present time." A broken window pane in the Potters area was reported – the main suspect was an opossum!

Finance was still a concern at the August meeting, and "accounts for payment were authorised subject to income being received to pay them." David Reid complained about the rents, as Playbox felt that \$25 for rehearsals was excessive, and "they may have to go outside for rehearsals". Alastair Barnett noted that Musikmakers "have been forced outside for some rehearsals because of excessive bookings." Both suggested that the Committee should run its own show once per year to help with fund-raising.

Set construction was also a problem, as buildings elsewhere in Hamilton had to be found for working on anything which could not be fitted around the Potters. Until a substantially upgraded power supply was organised for several pottery wheels and kilns, they were unable to move in fully, but understandably they made it clear that use of their area for set construction must be regarded as extremely temporary. Capitalisation of a new switchboard was suggested as a way to solve the power bottleneck – effectively Council would pay for this and recover the cost via an increase in rent.

Meanwhile Ian Bolton had found a disused warehouse area for the set construction of "Oliver", and transport of the sets to Riverlea by truck was organised.

The roof beam alteration was completed and approved by the Council building inspector at a site meeting with Tom Flood on 12 September – 3 days before the opening of "Oliver"!

In the September meeting there were complaints about “rehearsing amidst sawdust”—much of this arising from the construction of seating rostra under contracts supervised by Chris Cooke and Colin Bennett. These platforms were ingeniously designed to be capable of assembly in a number of ways so as to allow flexibility for experimental seating layouts such as theatre “in the round”, but inevitably there was some trial and error in maintaining audience sightlines.

Alan Wilson was able to report that all risks insurance cover would be arranged for the building contents, and that Playbox and Musikmakers would require no separate cover.

The hole in the floor in the potters area remained as a last remnant of the “repairs to the roof, gutters, downpipes and stormwater” required by Council, and the “Potters expressed concern that the hole was still there.” They were advised to take it up with the Council Works Department.

Little progress had been made with the outside storage building since February, mainly through lack of finance, but now that funding was available a problem was reported with building permit delays. There was also a suggestion that there may be Union opposition to the proposed use of P.E.P. [government funded employment scheme] workers on the project. The October meeting noted “This is urgent” and asked Ken Sandford “to convene this project and push ahead with all speed.” He would arrange for Stiles and Hooker [consulting engineers] to check the structural drawings as soon as possible so that Council permits could be obtained.

Advice was received from Margaret Evans [City Councillor, later Mayor] that Council had funding for five community administrators, of which only four were taken up. An application for a Trainee Theatre Manager would fit Council criteria. An application was to be made. Committee membership was again raised: “Graham Greedy is to be on the Trust regarding bookings and David Gibson representing Extraordinary Foods.”

The November meeting adopted a policy that “no bookings should be made for the fortnight before the show, from the Sunday, two weeks before opening. However, it was pointed out that it was possible to have functions during the day while the show is on.” Also decided was “The A.G.M. is set down for April 17, which will include a Financial and a President’s Report and a possible recommendation regarding the formation of an executive with working committees.”

The December meeting resolved that the Deputy Chairman position was vacant through lack of attendance by Mr Robertson. However the previous misunderstandings through poor communications with Council had been largely sorted out during his brief tenure. Accordingly a Council complaint regarding ragwort control on the land behind the Centre lease was able to be passed back to the correct department inside Council with good humour on both sides. Under “Sealing of the Driveway” it was noted “the Hamilton City Council has agreed to do this when the road is widened.”

In early February 1985 a Stagecraft weekend was held in the Centre. This was well attended from all over the region, and featured presentations from Al Williamson (Lighting), Fiona Perry (Makeup), David Gibson (Stagecraft), Chris Cooke (Stage Management), and Di Cooke (Direction).

With the first AGM pending, a joint meeting of Musikmakers and Playbox committee members agreed that it was timely to update the rules, as the Committee was increasingly operating unconstitutionally:

- The number of voting members was now less than the prescribed minimum 15
- There was no procedure for review of membership
- The membership status of officers was undefined
- Qualification for office was also undefined

As well as compromising the rights to representation of the contributing societies, this raised questions about the validity of agreements entered into by the Committee.

The two theatre groups raised this at the February meeting, and a subcommittee was set up of Alastair Barnett (convenor), Lance Turley, David Reid, Al Williamson, plus the Secretary (Alan Wilson) and Chairman (Royce Barclay) ex officio.

In the redrafted rules, the term “Board” was introduced to mean the “Board of Management” [in place of the misnamed “Trust” – see note above]. The “contributing societies” were defined as Playbox, Musikmakers and the Potters, and the contribution of assets by TTT was acknowledged in the “objects” of the Society. Each contributing society was allowed to appoint five voting members. Also the Board itself could co-opt other people as required, subject to the number given voting rights by the Board being limited to four to protect the interests of the contributing societies.

The first Board of the Riverlea Theatre and Arts Centre was:

Royce Barclay (Chairman), Chris Cooke (Deputy Chairman), Michael Butcher, Alastair Barnett, Jane Tunley, Lance Turley, Gavin Smith, Don McArthur, David Reid, Brian Hoburn, Joan Hawkins, Maureen Alderton, Bill O’Neill, Ellaby Martin, Graeme Greedy, Al Williamson, Denis Fenwick (Treasurer), Dorrie Daly (Secretary), David Gibson, Ethne Bevege and Ken Sandford.

At the first Annual General Meeting (14 April 1985), the balance sheet recorded:

Equity Introduced – Playbox	33,060.00	
Equity Introduced – Musikmakers	23,492.00	
Equity Introduced – Potters	21,936.00	
Excess Income over Expenditure	<u>52,419.62</u>	
Accumulated Funds		130,907.62

The Excess Income over Expenditure included grants and donations totalling \$51,745.00 This support was most welcome, and it was particularly pleasing that the complex had still managed a marginal operating profit, allowing the grants and donations to be reserved for genuine improvements.

As Board Chairman, at the AGM Royce Barclay presented a report touching on the various milestones in the evolution of theatre buildings in Hamilton from 1946. He commented there was as yet no satisfactory lease for the building, but stated a goal of being finally settled in within 18 months.



## 6. Conclusion

By the time of the Annual General Meeting in April 1985, the organisation of regular productions by both Playbox and Musikmakers had become routine, and these were generally well supported, allowing the contributing societies to look forward with confidence. Thanks to improved familiarity with the various grant application processes, a fair funding success rate was being achieved, stabilising the financial position and allowing the Board to plan for the longer term needs of the Centre.

Within the following year, in addition to accommodating a full programme mounted by the resident societies, the Board had hired the venue to an outside group for a successful major production (Opera Waikato for “Plague Upon Eyam”), the outside building floor and mezzanine storage was completed, plans for the replacement of the obstructive roof support above the stage had been finalised, and David O’Brien had been appointed as the first full time Theatre Manager.

After some anxious moments, the three societies were finally able to conclude that their decision to move had been a success, at least in terms of a medium term solution intended to last fifteen to twenty years.

The Potters found new premises some fifteen years later, but with the evident demise of the Clarence Street concept, the two resident theatre groups are still facing an old problem. They need a secure long term base in Hamilton, so what comes after the obsolescence of the Hamilton City Council’s “interim” theatre solution?

## Appendix A: References

Author's Note: Narrative is based both on official minutes of meetings and on diary notes taken by the author during meetings. Where comments are written in quotes, they are direct extracts from official minutes. Where these quotes now require some context which would have been assumed at the time, explanatory notes have been inserted in square brackets, but these are not part of the direct quoted extracts.

### Hamilton Community Arts Council Minutes:

- a. Annual General Meeting 18 April 1979, Appendix I Chairman's Report
- b. Meeting 25 May 1980
- c. Meeting 7 July 1980
- d. Meeting 8 September 1980
- e. Meeting 3 October 1980
- f. Annual General Meeting 4 May 1982
- g. Meeting 31 May 1982
- h. Meeting 1 November 1982
- i. Meeting 6 December 1982
- j. Meeting 14 February 1983
- k. Meeting 26 April 1983
- l. Annual General Meeting 24 May 1983

### A.G. Barnett Business Diary Notes:

1. 5 May 1981
2. 6 July 1981
3. 16 July 1981
4. 14 March 1982
5. 23 June 1982
6. 5 July 1982
7. 21 July 1982
8. 2 August 1982
9. 17 September 1982
10. 21 December 1982
11. 18 January 1983
12. 27 January 1983
13. 16 February 1983
14. 7 March 1983
15. 22 March 1983
16. 28 March 1983
17. 28 April 1983
18. 4 October 1983
19. 13 October 1983
20. 1 November 1983
21. 12 December 1983
22. 31 January 1984
23. 27 February 1984
24. 9 May 1984
25. 21 May 1984

26. 22 May 1984
27. 20 June 1984
28. 9 July 1984
29. 18 July 1984
30. 19 July 1984
31. 1 August 1984
32. 13 August 1984
33. 15 August 1984
34. 21 August 1984
35. 9 September 1984
36. 12 September 1984
37. 19 September 1984
38. 17 October 1984
39. 21 November 1984
40. 2-3 February 1985
41. 11 February 1985
42. 12 February 1985
43. 20 February 1985
44. 14 April 1985

Riverlea Theatre & Arts Centre Minutes:

- A. Meeting 13 September 1983
- B. Meeting 4 October 1983
- C. Meeting 1 November 1983
- D. Meeting 12 December 1983
- E. Meeting 31 January 1984
- F. Meeting 22 February 1984
- G. Meeting 20 March 1984
- H. Meeting 17 April 1984
- I. Meeting 8 May 1984
- J. Meeting 21 May 1984
- K. Meeting 18 July 1984
- L. Meeting 15 August 1984
- M. Meeting 19 September 1984
- N. Meeting 17 October 1984
- O. Meeting 21 November 1984
- P. Meeting 19 December 1984
- Q. Meeting 20 February 1985

Programme: "Variety 83" Season 15-17 December 1983

Programme: "The Heiress" Season 10-24 March 1984

Programme: "The Pirates of Penzance" Season 7-14 April 1984

"Waikato Times" 21 January 1984

Hamilton City Council Management Committee Minutes dated 6 April 1983

Hamilton City Council Internal Memorandum dated 7 October 1983

Hamilton City Council letter dated 18 April 1984

Angus, Flood & Griffiths Letter dated 3 August 1984