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Molly recalls her 40 years as a songbird!

Heather Long

Molly Greaves has saved every programme for the East Surrey Operatic Society's performances since she joined in 1949. "I'm so pleased that I kept them. They are something for my grandchildren," she said as she spread out her scrapbooks in the home she and her husband had built early in their marriage on the edge of the then completely rural Wray Common. "We were surrounded by fields, and cows ate our rose trees as they passed on their way to be milked," she recalled.



Batts Hill House stood only yards away where a group of friends formed the Operatic Society in 1907. By the time Molly joined, she had sung acted her way through school and been a member of both the Redhill and Reigate Choral Society and the Redhill Madrigal Singers, having lived in this borough all her life. When she auditioned for the society's 1949 production of *Bitter Sweet* she hoped to get into the chorus and wound up with the lead. The role of Sara, plus that of Anna in *The King and I*. remain her special favourites. Of principal parts, she says "They can involve you in twice weekly two hour rehearsals with additional rehearsals nearer the show."

Since 1949, Molly has made many friends through the society, which now has 200 members, many of them non-performers. Anyone can be a member, but those who wish to perform must audition, which this year led to a "fantastic" occasion at the Harlequin when 70 youngsters turned up to try for the parts of the children in *The Sound of Music*, to be performed in the open air this Summer at Polesden Lacey. It is only the second time for the society at that venue. Normally they perform once a year from their home base – which, until it was demolished in 1981, was the Redhill Market Hall. "We did not want to disband when we had no 'home' in Redhill - and we feared that performing in a lesser environment would lose us membership and support so we moved to the Dorking Halls, said Molly.

Five years there was longer than we anticipated but then we moved back to Redhill for *Oklahoma!* in 1987 at the Harlequin. "A modern theatre and lighting make performances much more real. Sometimes when the curtain went up at the dear old Market Hall it was so dusty that it was minutes before the audience could see the company clearly. The audiences there must have been very devoted because the seats were so uncomfortable."

Today, Molly is secretary of the self-supporting society which is so highly professional that it costs in excess of £20,000 to put on a show - it is always looking for sponsors. Nevertheless, it has raised many thousands for charities, as did some of its members who, for ten years performed as an old time music hall group. Molly was part of that group until it disbanded.

She leads a very busy life and the operatic society plays a major role. "It has been an important part of my life. Performing is in me." she said.