**Press release**

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**The Crooked Spire medieval murder-mystery musical**

An exciting new show which has Chesterfield’s iconic ‘crooked spire’ at its heart is coming to Chesterfield’s Pomegranate Theatre from 19th – 21st May.

The musical has been created by Ashgate Heritage Arts, a not-for-profit theatre production company founded by Martin Coslett and Peter Gray, musicians and lyricists who live in Chesterfield and Mary Hennessy, an award-winning scriptwriter from Buxton.

A version of the show was well received when it was previewed at Buxton’s Fringe in 2020 and some of the songs from the show also delighted an audience at St Mary and All Saints Church, (the actual ‘crooked spire), in October 2021. Now, with funding from Arts Council England and Derbyshire County Council, Ashgate Heritage Arts is able to stage the full production.

Martin Coslett, the Producer and Co-writer, Ashgate Heritage Arts said: “We’re thrilled to finally be able to bring our ‘home-grown’ musical to the stage in Chesterfield – a captivating story which celebrates Chesterfield history and its most iconic landmark. It’s also about a community recovering from a pandemic (the plague), the importance of friendship and standing up for truth and justice, which everyone can relate to. And of course, there are lots of catchy songs along the way!”

The production will star Gerard Fletcher as Sir Henry, whose TV credits include roles in the BBC’s *Happy Valley*’; Netflix’s *The Crown*; the BBC’s *Get Even*, and the upcoming BBC drama, *Sherwood*, as well as the role of Hud in *Loaded*, with the Reform Theatre Company and Sir Toby Belch in *Twelfth Night*, at the Merlin International Theatre, Budapest.

Other cast members include John Conway, as Sir Richard, who has played the Wizard in the *Wizard of Oz* at Trinity Theatre, Tunbridge Wells and Starer in the film, *The World’s End.*

Stephanie Putson, who played Billy’s Mum in the London production of *Billy Elliot the Musical* (2005 – 2016) will play Martha, John’s landlady. Hayley Mitchell who recently starred in *Northern Girls* at the Pilot Theatre and *The Fiesta Fawns*, Middlesbrough Little Theatre, will play Katherine.

Philip Meeks, one of the country’s most respected pantomime dames has been cast as Robert the monk, Sir Richard’s scribe. For most of the year Phillip concentrates on his writing career, this includes several years writing for Emmerdale. He has also written plays including *Murder Margaret and Me*, *Harpy* starring Su Pollard and most recently Sleepy Hollow.  Philip last appeared at the Pomegranate Theatre in the leading role of Arnold in a national tour of *Not Now Darling*.

The show is also showcasing upcoming talent including Adam Stickler, who plays the lead role of John and who has already dazzled theatre-goers as Henry Jekyll in a run of *Jekyll and Hyde* at the Alexandra Theatre in Bognor Regis. Clara Coslett has been cast as the Master Carpenter’s wife, Beth and will come fresh from playing the beggar woman in *Sweeney Todd* at Buxton Opera House from 29th April-1st May.

11 year old Eddie Waller, from Brampton, Chesterfield, has been cast as Walter, John’s young friend. Eddie has played a variety of roles and performed in concerts as part of Inspirations Theatre Company since 2017.

Based on the novel, *The Crooked Spire*, by Chris Nickson, the musical is set in the mid -14th century and follows John, a carpenter, who has travelled from York to find work on the new spire which is being constructed on top of St Mary and All Saints Church.

Before long the Master Carpenter at the Church is murdered and John becomes the chief suspect. The only way he can clear his name is to find out who the real killer is. As he gets closer to the truth further murders are committed and John’s life is in great danger.

John makes new friends in Chesterfield who help him with his detective work, in particular a young boy called Walter whose parents have both died in the plague. Walter’s elder sister, a local seamstress, has caught John’s eye, but audiences will have to come and see for themselves whether John uncovers the truth and wins the heart of a good Chesterfield lass.

Despite the lead up to the show coinciding with Eddie Waller’s year 6 SATS exams, he can’t wait to start rehearsing.

Eddie said: “Walter is a great character – he’s very brave and a bit cheeky, but he looks up to John, the new carpenter in town and wants to win his approval. It’s a great role to play.

“I feel very lucky and excited to have got the part in the show. I can learn so much from all the professional actors and it’s going to be amazing performing on the stage at The Pomegranate Theatre.”

Ashgate Heritage Arts has secured Jake Smith as the musical’s Director. Jake’s credentials include Resident Director roles at the Almeida Theatre and Chichester Festival Theatre and he has also worked on large scale productions, notably Sting’s *The Last Ship, The Hounds of Baskerville* for Northern Stage and the tour of *The Legend of* *Sleepy Hollow*.

“After reading the script, I jumped at the chance to be involved as I love staging amazing stories which have a strong sense of place and pride in local heritage. I’m also passionate about working with community theatre and creating excellent productions outside London,” said Jake.

“Together with set designer Lu Herbert, I will be creating a visually stunning show, which will transport audiences back to medieval Chesterfield,” he added.

The Musical Director for the show, Harry Style, is a composer-arranger in theatre and television, and singer with the *Ashatones*. His credentials include composer for *Liz* and *Forgive, Oh Father!* at the Edinburgh Fringe, and musical director on *Godspell* at the Bridewell Theatre.

Harry has taken the songs written by Martin and Peter of Ashgate Heritage Arts and created the orchestral score and choral arrangements for the cast.

Harry said: “The music for the show combines a mix of folk ballad, rock, as well as some references to medieval music. It’s an absolute pleasure to work with such talented performers to create something truly worthy of the West End stage for Chesterfield,” he said.

Novelist Chris Nickson said: “I’m flattered that Ashgate Heritage Arts are bringing my story to life. There are a number of theories about how the spire became crooked and my story explores one of those theories. Above all, it’s a murder mystery, but the importance of friendship (and a little romance!) underpins it all,” said Chris.

The matinee performance on Saturday 21st May includes a Q & A with Martin Coslett, Musical Director; Mary Hennessy, Scriptwriter and Chris Nickson, author of *The Crooked Spire* novel.

The cast and production team will be involved in a series of workshop with young people during the rehearsal period in May, hosted by Junction Arts, to provide local young people with an insight into musical theatre.

***The Crooked Spire* is at The Pomegranate Theatre, Chesterfield from 19th – 21st May. There is a BSL signed performance on the evening of 19th May. To book tickets visit chesterfieldtheatres.co.uk**

**To find out more about Ashgate Heritage Arts visit** [**www.ashgateheritagearts.co.uk**](http://www.ashgateheritagearts.co.uk)

**For updates on the cast and behind the scenes action, follow Ashgate Heritage Arts on Twitter @AHA-cic, Facebook: Ashgate Heritage Arts and Instagram @ashgateheritagearts**

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**Note to News Editors**

1. For further information or to arrange interviews please contact Kate Dawson, Well Read PR via kate.dawson@wellreadpr.com or mob: 07866 762401
2. Ashgate Heritage Arts is a social enterprise dedicated to making arts-heritage projects come alive. It puts essential community stories relevant to today’s world in front of people. The company opens up the importance of heritage to new and wider audiences through workshops and performances. The company researches, creates and promotes dramatic projects rooted in local and national heritage and history. By involving community members, people are brought together for a common purpose to educate and entertain.

[www.ashgateheritagearts.co.uk](http://www.ashgateheritagearts.co.uk)

1. Image captions:

Gerard Fletcher (Sir Henry) and John Conway (Sir Richard) ©Ashgate Heritage Arts, credit Tom Humphries

Eddie Waller (Walter) ©Ashgate Heritage Arts, credit Ste Waller

Clara Coslett (Beth) ©Ashgate Heritage Arts, credit Tom Humphries

Adam Stickler as John – © Ashgate Heritage Arts, credit Tom Humphries

Group photo of Ashgate Heritage Arts (l-r) Martin Coslett, Mary Hennessey and Peter Gray - ©Ashgate Heritage Arts, credit Tom Humphries (Two photo options, one in front of the ‘crooked spire’).