

Tantivy Towers

– comments in various publications

from Operetta – A Theatrical History, Richard Trauber, Gollancz, 1984

Besides providing English versions of *La Belle Helene*, *La Vie Parisienne*, and *Die Fledermaus*, Alan P. Herbert will be remembered in operetta annals for his books for two 1930s works that are entirely forgotten: *Tantivy Towers* (Lyric, Hammersmith, 16 January 1931), transferred to the New Theatre) with music by Thomas F. Dunhill, and *Derby Day* (Lyric, Hammersmith, 24 February 1932) with a score by Alfred Reynolds. These did not pull the crowds out to Hammersmith for years, as *The Beggar's Opera* had done in the previous decade, but the public and critics *might* have imagined that Herbert and Dunhill or Herbert and Reynolds would possibly have developed into the new Gilbert and Sullivan. Again, Herbert's overwriting may have kept them too "special" for mass appeal – *Tantivy Towers* had no prose dialogue – though their typically English, modern themes were refreshing in an era of escapism to the spectacular past. Both had to do with "hosses." *Tantivy Towers* had the equine set visiting bohemian Chelsea and returning to the titular towers for a hunt ball. *Derby Day* was about just that – the derby. In the former, an unaccompanied quartet in Act I caused comment, while Rose's songs in *Derby Day* – "I'm Going to Be Rich!" and "Oh, Pretty, Pretty Horse" – attested to Reynolds's talent (especially on the recordings that survive from the operetta, sung by Gwen Catley)

from The Encyclopedia of The Musical Theatre, Kurt Ganzl, Blackwell, 1994

TANTIVY TOWERS Comic opera in 3 acts by A P Herbert. Music by Thomas F Dunhill. Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, 16 January 1931.

The best of the group of original light operas produced under Nigel Playfair's management at London's Lyric, Hammersmith, *Tantivy Towers* was an enjoyable attempt at a sung-through comic opera which aspired to lines of wit – and often achieved them – in a ridiculous little story of love not levelling all ranks. Chelsea's pretentiously artistic Hugh Heather (Trefor Jones) comes to grief when he moves out of his natural habitat and tried to outshine aristocratic Captain Bareback (Harvey Braban) for the hand of Lady Ann Gallop (Barbara Pett-Fraser) on her home ground at Tantivy Towers. He is damned for all time when he shoots the fox during a hunt and has to settle for joining the Savage Club whilst the aristocrat gets the girl.

The respected serious composer Thomas Dunhill provided a suitably and strongly English score to illustrate a piece which, in spite of some happy moments, lacked the crazy sparkle of the Gilbert and Sullivan genre, but still found sufficient audience to run through two and a half months at the Lyric before transferring to the West End's New Theatre for another two months.

It was revived at the Lyric by Claud Powell in 1935 with Maggie Teyte starred as Ann alongside Steuart Wilson (Hugh) and Frank Philips (Bareback).