Preface to 2020 edition

The opening of the Defence and National Rehabilitation Centre (DNRC) at Stanford Hall, Nottinghamshire, in June 2018 brought attention to a hitherto somewhat over-looked aspect of Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire history.

This PDF 'booklet' is based on an undated A5 booklet published 1991–2 in which the East Leake-based historian David Lazell recalls some aspects of the Hall's history.

Spectacular at Stanford Hall was a precursor to *Sir Julien Kahn and a View from the Co-operative College,* published 1993, which contains additional information – although not all the 'tales' from this publication.

A brief biography of David is included in the PDF version of his 1993 booklet.

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Spectacular at Stanford Hall

By

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SPECTACULAR AT STANFORD HALL

When in December 1938 Sir Julien Cahn presented some of his 'illusions' to an appreciative audience at Stanford Hall, he remarked that some eighty percent of them were created in the estate workshops, to his own specification. He could not have known that his Christian entertainment was to be the last given in peacetime, though he was obviously aware of the likely conflict with Germany. Air raid shelters constructed beneath the theatre are a little like the interior of a submarine, with doors closed via a wheel lock device. They were gas proof!

By Christmas 1939, Stanford Hall was in the process of adaptation to military purposes, as a well guarded vehicle dispersal unit linked to 12 Battalion RAOC at Old Dolby. Sir Julien died on September 26th 1944, just a month after the death of 'Bert' Firth, joiner extraordinary and member of the millionaire's staff. 'Bert', genial and gifted resident of Goulds Barn, will be mentioned further. For the moment, we may reflect on Sir Julien's interest in show business, for it was that impulse that left to the citizens of south Notts and Loughborough, a fine theatre, still in frequent use more than forty years after his death.

Sir Julien purchased Stanford Hall (and environs) in 1928, from the Radcliffe family. As Stanford Hall was for many years a 'dry' establishment, in the earlier times of the Cooperative College, it is interesting to note that the Radcliffe business interests included those of brewing. Today, there is a pleasant small bar in the basement of the College, close by a former laundry room and site of social psychology experiments.

In earlier times, the Stanford Hall estate belonged to the Dashwood family. Charles Vere Dashwood, at one time Sheriff of Nottingham, acquired the estate in 1770, though the existing Hall outline did not appear until 1774. An original Stanford Hall had been sited almost opposite the parish church in the village, of Stanford on Soar. A few traces of this original may be seen in the footings of Village Farm.

Then, a somewhat unattractive stone house was built about a mile from the village, on a barren hillside. This was destroyed by fire, and seeing that the present site was thereafter developed, the accident had at least some happy outcome.

Certainly, Sir Julien looked to the potential of the estate, rather than the existing facilities when he considered purchase. He was to spend around one hundred thousand pounds on his development programme (multiply that by twenty if you want to get some idea of an equivalent 1980s expenditure).

Transformation of the Hall interior included the dramatic altering of rooms in shape and size, then their furnishing in period style, down to the last detail. The Spanish Room, The Italian Room, The Charles II Room, and the Louis XV Room were among those that delighted, and no doubt astonished, guests. It is interesting to note that, in the following adaptation to Cooperative College use, rooms were sometimes called after the names of retail societies, helping the College, as well as of Cooperative pioneers. Symbolic, perhaps, of changing times.

Lady Cahn's boudoir enjoyed mirrored walls, and a door padded on its interior, with a silken fabric. A large circular mirror, surrounded by decorative metalwork, occupied most of the ceiling. The Nursery, on the top floor of the Hall (used today as a tutors' common room) was expensively panelled in wood, the door being a virtual secret panel. A glass and wooden simulated bookcase, complete with apparent spines of various books, was fitted to the door, which, when closed became to the eye part of the bookcase that ran the entire length of the wall. A small wooden plunger acted as a door handle: a puzzle for visitors.

The magnificent bathrooms were, and probably are, legendary. In Sir Julien's residence, almost every

bedroom in the Hall has its own bathroom. Probably the most luxurious in the entire house was that reached via the bedroom (left) at the top of the staircase. In this, a sunken bath is reached by a few marble steps, water coming via a bronze statue. Using brown marble, this six sided room was fitted with a dome of frosted glass, the tessellated 'pavement floor' giving an almost Roman atmosphere. One side of the bathroom had a low platform which was in fact a weighing machine. Accurate weight of anyone standing on the platform was given by an elegant pointer on the wall. A full length mirror was fitted in one recess, a shower in another. Although this was the most luxurious bathroom in the Hall, there were others that amazed the eye, like that made in black and marble, and illuminated via concealed lighting. Some of the bathrooms 'cost thousands' though, as the best business ideas are said to hit you in the bath, they must have seemed a good investment.

Downstairs, close to the Italian Piazza or Garden, the Turnbull Room offers a fine area for lectures, dances, seminars and many other purposes, including the Christmas Carol Service. In Sir Julien's day, this was the Badminton Court, with painted foliage on the walls, full length glass windows opening onto the Italian Piazza. This latter wonder was described an an 'architecural gem' by a local reporter, having been 'erected under the supervision of Italian masters' who laid the mosaic and made the fountain. Watching the fountain play, by artificial light during nightfall, is quite an experience. But then, Sir Julien was very interested in lighting effects.

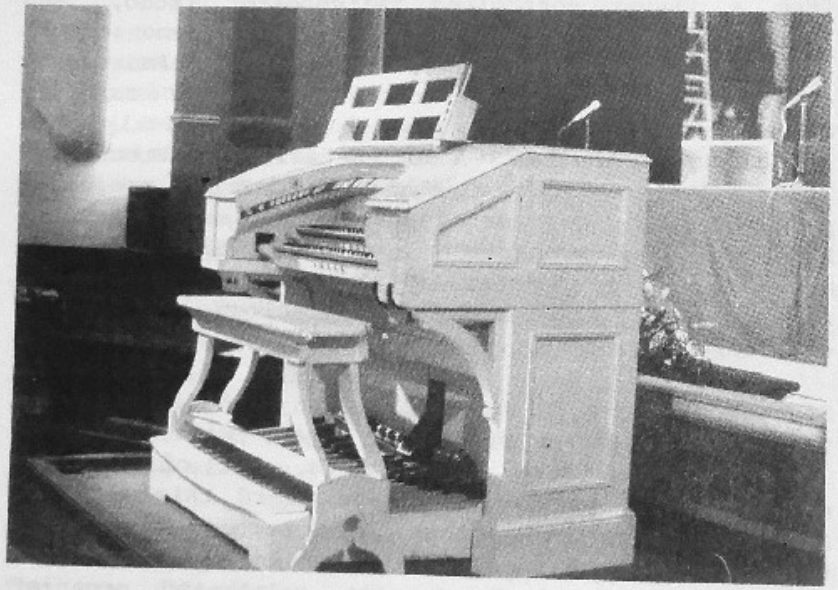
The Badminston Court offered opportunity for entertainment, Sir Julien using a portable stage for his illusions. Legend has it that, as Lady Cahn had her own plans for the Court's use from time to time, Sir Julien decided to build his own theatre.

Upstairs, and in the area now occupied by the Library, a Squash Court was built, complete with small balcony from which guests could watch the games below. At least a few College students will remember the Court balcony's later use as a small seminar area for social economics. Geoffrey Rhodes was one of the tutors who considered the possibilities of the welfare state, with students, therein. He was a fine tutor, and his early death robbed Parliament of one of its most diligent MPs. Incidentally, the balcony had some unofficial uses: a future general manager in the Cooperative Retail Services organisation used to practice his trumpet there. The Squash Court had marvellous echo chamber properties!!

But, that must bring us to entertainment, and to the theatre. In 1938, it was certainly one of the most advanced of its type anywhere in Britain. A somewhat open mouthed reporter from the Loughborough Echo noted that it was equipped with 'some 28,000 watts of spot lighting, operated by electro magnets, from a finger controlled switchboard' (Echo, 19th August 1938). Here again, Sir Julien demonstrated his interest in lighting effects, as almost any colour scheme could be thrown onto the curtains or stage at will, and move slowly or quickly from one colour to another. A device called the Brenograph (the only one of its kind in Britain) projected patterns onto the theatre curtains. Gaumont British Duosonic film projection apparatus was installed, and the estate engineer, Mr J.A. Chesham, delighted in showing off the sliding cinema screen, push button controlled, naturally.

Seating 366 people, the theatre enjoyed (and enjoys) the facility of a Wurlitzer organ, with hydraulic lift, imported from Paris at a cost of £20,000. Although many people will have heard this cheerful instrument over the years, few perhaps appreciate that it was extended to use music rolls, like a pianola. Reginald Foort, the celebrated organist from the Tower Ballroom, Blackpool, was engaged to inaugurate the Wurlitzer, others being invited to perform in later months, Ena Baga, for example.

THE THEATRE, STANFORD HALL



WURLITZER ORGAN, STANFORD HALL THEATRE

Fifteen instrumentalists can normally be accommodated in the orchestra pit, but this can be expanded to hold a full classical orchestra of some seventy five players. We may have a Glyndebourne type festival at Stanford Hall yet!!!

Sir Julien's marvellous theatre was created through his regard for hospital charities, and his great interest in 'illusion' sometimes called 'magic' though 'illusion' is a better description. According to an interview he gave during the 1930s, this interest had been generated during his boyhood. He was born, on 21st October 1882, and it's worth noting that popular boys magazines were filled with popular science and conjuring tricks during the 1890s (even the respectable 'Boys Own Paper' had a keen sense of humour in this direction). At any rate, the seed of interest was sown, though, involved in family business interests, Sir Julien was unable to develop his flair until he was in middle age. Whilst travelling overseas, he took opportunity to watch other illusionists, and no doubt acquired some ideas he developed for himself. But Sir Julien was not short on his own ideas, and, a member of the Leicester Magic Circle, had a library well stocked with works by experts on the subject.

Hospital Charities certainly benefited from the shows at Stanford Hall, and in Loughborough itself. He was in any case knowledgeable about hospital affairs, and many aspects of medicine. His trip to the USSR in the early 1930s was presumably to look at state medical provision. Perhaps he anticipated the era of the National Health Service, here in Britain.

Characteristically, Sir Julien would engage well known variety or radio stars to share the stage at Stanford Hall. Naturally, his 'Modernized Magic' routines would take up a genial slice of the evening, but he was happy to let guest artistes give an extended programme of their work, too. He met all expenses, by the way. Although, from this distance, Sir Julien sometimes gives the impression of a man preoccupied with business, or estate development,

he did not 'penny pinch' when it came to raising money for charity. On February 26th 1934, the Charity Show in the Badminton Room included films (unspecified) plus a personal appearance of the operatic singer, Laelia Finneberg. Sir Julien's 'Magic' included 'The Mysterious Green Ray' with lighting effects again. Other charity shows were given at The Theatre Royal in Loughborough, but the need for his own theatre must have become evident. Some suggest that the idea came from his estate engineer, Mr Chesham, or 'Chesh', as he would as often called. Certainly, the engineer's transatlantic tours must have given him several good ideas. 'Chesh' had returned from life in Canada and the USA in 1929, as depression hit the western world. Fortunately for both men, 'Chesh' heard about the vacancy for estate engineer at Stanford Hall. As he had been assistant manager of a dance hall and ice rink in Dallas (yes, the one in Texas) his curriculum vitae must have interest St Julien at once. 'Chesh' had started his working life as an engineer on the Great Northern Railway, but after completing five years' part time study at Nottingham University College, 'Chesh' and his wife went to Canada, where he worked Canadian Pacific. Later, he took up jobs in the automobile industry, and in selling farming equipment, travelling in many parts of Canada. Nancy Goodier, a Cooperative College student, reporting her interview with 'Chesh' in the College magazine for 1956, wrote that 'being drawn by dog sleigh and shooting the rapids in a canoe were all part of a day's work, selling and maintaining farming equipment'. At the time of Miss Goodier's interview, 'Chesh' had worked on the estate for twenty eight years, having been taken on with other staff of Sir Julien's day. He was marvellously patient with the students as they put on their annual Christmas Students shown, an institution which might have mixed 'That Was The Week That Was' with 'Opportunity Knocks'.

Mr Chesham acted as Sir Julien's chief assistant on stage, though other members of the staff sometimes 'got in on the act'. Anticipating the planned spectacular to be held on 28th December 1938, 'Chesh' told the Echo reporter that the programme would last well over two hours. Guest artistes included Ena Baga, the organist; The Grace Core Ballet; Phil Meny and his Hungarian Orchestra, and Sutherland Felce, a well known compere for commercial radio programmes. A full rehearsal took place before Christmas (on 17th December); William Goldstone, an author of books on illusion and similar subjects, travelled to Stanford Hall to see it.

Several new illusions had been prepared by Sir Julien and his staff, including a Houdini like trick using a safe. A girl, placed in the 'genuine steel safe' made her escape within 23 minutes. From this distance in time it is not always easy to see how the illusions were achieved, but that described as mental telepathy might be explained. It involved the use of a handsome gramophone carried onto the stage by Sir Julien Cahn, who showed that no wires or connections were fixed to it. A single 78rpm record was on the turntable, but unplayed.

After examination of the gramophone was concluded, Sir Julien walked among the theatre audience, inviting guests to tell him, in a whisper, the name of any favourite opera. Hardly had they done so, than the gramophone appeared to reproduce an aria from the same opera, though no one, apart from the person involved and Sir Julien, had heard the request. Incidentally, the first request was something from Bizet's Carmen. Other popular works followed.

Now for the explanation : beneath Sir Julien's immaculate jacket lapel, a microphone was connected to a small wireless transmitter in his pocket. Beneath the stage, out of sight, but picking up the whispered request via receiving apparatus, an assistant was surrounded by a large stack of records, covering almost every opera known to English audiences. As the whispered request came through, the assistant found a record appropriate to it, and then played it on a sound reproduction system which seemed to come from the gramophone, but didn't. Disc jockeys these days may be fast, but not as fast as the assistant under the Stanford Hall stage!

There is no similar explanation of the 'most popular trick' as the local press described it, that of producing a flow of cocktails and licquers from apparently, a conventional water jug. Refreshments so obtained were passed to appreciative members of the audience, to confirm that the output was genuine. Another popular illusion involved the use of an old fashioned farm yard pump, which produced jugs of fine, foaming ale on command. According to the Loughborough Echo, the pump was encouraged to put in a little overtime, so that the local police superintendent was rewarded with a glass of excellent wine. The then Mayor of Loughborough, Councillor G.H. Dean, was invited to help with this trick. Disappearing young ladies were included in the programme, two vanishing from a large box suspended in mid air. A girl was produced from a very large top hat, empty seconds earlier, another from a tea chest. Especially useful today might have been a box like Slimming Machine into which a substantial miss entered, and from which a slim young lady walked across seconds afterwards.

Sir Julien's keen interest in lighting effects was certainly evident. The show opened with the auditorium being plunged into darkness, the slow build up of light effects on the curtains then producing a beautful multi cololured scene of trees, birds and flowers. At the same time, a soprano sang the ballad, 'Trees'. You might say that in 1928, Stanford Hall had the Ultimate Video Experience. Ena Baga performed Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue, on the Wurlitzer, also showing off the many effects in her programme. It must have been a memorable evening, guests including supporters of the local hospital charities so close to Sir Julien's heart. Councillor S.J. Darlaston, Honorary Secretary of the Loughborough Hospital Carnival Committee, had worked with Sir Julien on planning the event.

During this period, Sir Julien seems to have been suffering from ill health, this being the reason for his resignation from Mastership of the Fernie Hunt, at the end of the year. So his work in planning the charity show was really noteworthy.

Many well known artistes came to Stanford Hall, these including Frances Day, Norman Long and Mario de Petro. The august arrivals did not cease with the advent of war, as the theatre was used by ENSA. Jesters have suggested the initials stand for Every Night Something Awful. They might have stood for Every Night Stanford's Active, for the estate certainly saw a lot of activity following the outbreak of war. The top floor of the Hall was utilized as a military medical unit, soldiers who had been wounded in France recuperating among the handsome surroundings.

Only commissioned officers were permitted to enter the Hall via the main entrance, but there were consolations for lesser mortals. Lady Cahn thoughtfully provided a canteen for other ranks, close to the side entrance.

Cricket matches were played on the estate grounds, even in wartime, though bearing little comparison to the great events of pre war days, when Sir Julien Cahn's XI played well known sides. It was said that Sir Julien spent a fortune on the game, and in addition to his considerable generosity to county sides, also owned the best collection of cricket bats in Christendom.

He took his team to several countries during the 1930s, including Argentina and Jamaica (1930) and Denmark and Jutland (1932) thence to Canada, the USA and Bermuda. As one might expect, only first class players were invited to join this team, recruited from English speaking, and thereby cricketing nations throughout the world. In wartime, soldier cricketers of rather less talent enjoyed the facilities, 12 Battalion RAOC playing their matches at Stanford Hall. Cliff Berry, writing in the 'Coop News' (26th May 1982) recalled that Sir Julien sometimes watched these matches, and on some occasions twelve a side games were arranged so that Sir Julien's son could play. When Cliff Berry returned as a Cooperative College student in 1949, there were still some evidences of the wartime use of the estate, some remnants of steel

wire being found under trees which had concealed military vehicles from any possible reconnaissance by enemy aircraft. As a College student, Mr Berry was able to use the front door!!

MUCH-TRAVELLED

Into this extraordinary menage a youthful all-rounder named T.B. Reddick found his way in 1930 on the demise of Aubrey Faulkner's School of Cricket, where he and Ian Peebles had been on the staff. Tommy Reddick played with much success for Sir Julien until the war and although his subsequent career involved county cricket with Notts, a spell as chief coach at Old Trafford, and then a long and happy employment in South Africa, where he was widely regarded as the outstanding cricket coach of his time, a much-travelled life brought him no experience quite so remarkable as his bizarre and demanding apprenticeship with the Cahn circus. In Cape Town over the years we often talked about those days. Now that Sir Julien Cahn's XI has become part of the mythology of the game Tom Reddick's reminiscences gave a striking picture of what might be described as sponsored country house cricket.

Still in his teens, Reddick found himself a member of a distinguished and colourful band: 'playing in most of the games were F.C.W. ('Lofty') Newman, a tremendous batsman who often opened with the New Zealander Roger Blunt, and scored some 15,000 runs for Cahn; G.F. Summers, of Richmond, a prodigious hitter who scored over 13,000; C.S. Dempster (New Zealand); C.R. Maxwell, who came straight from school at Brighton; Denys Morkel (South Africa); H.R. Munt, a quickish bowler who looked after Julien's wines and entertainment; and the Australian trio, Harold Mudge, Jack Walsh and Vic Jackson. There were also R.W.V. Robins; George Heane, later captain of Notts, Ian Peebles, and, in the mid-1930's, the South African fast bowler Bob Crisp.

'John Gunn was the team's umpire, and another Notts player, Tich Richmond, took a tremendous number of wickets for us. In the winter most of us were assigned to jobs in Sir Julien's vast business empire. I was one of the very few with an agreement, and finished up by managing 12 furniture shops in the South of England'.

INQUEST

By the time Reddick joined the staff they had two first-class grounds to play their home matches on - Stanford Hall, Cahn's lavishly-laid out estate near Nottingham, and Loughborough Road ('the best wicket I ever saw'), closer to the city. 'Early in one game there', said Reddick 'a ball lifted while Sir Julien was batting - the only ball I ever saw behave unexpectedly in nine years. Immediately the groundsmen were summoned and a tremendous inquest was held on the spot'.

To a young and inexperienced boy desperately anxious to make his mark, the Nottinghamshire millionaire must have seemed a hard and unreasonable taskmaster. Reddick hardly played at all the start and in desperation he went secretly to Worcestershire for a trial. Cahn was furious but still gave him a few chances, although he forced him to attend every match.

'When I did get a game I found I did not have to compete only with the opposition, often of Test class; I had to compete with my own side. Twice I was blatantly run out by players anxious to remove any challenge from a newcomer. It was a cut-throat business, with no holds barred.'

When Reddick first joined this remarkable retinue Sir Julien Cahn was in his middle forties. A frail figure of medium height, he was something of a dandy who wore exquisitely tailored suits and monogrammed silk shirts. When batting he used metal leg-guards and he donned inflatable pads before facing fast bowling.

A teetotaller, he ate sparingly. Although he smoked innumerable cigars he invariably threw them away soon after lighting them. His lifestyle was impressive. A decidedly insecure horseman, this

did not deter him from hunting, and he was in turn Master of the Burton, the Woodland Pytchley, and the Fernie. It was estimated that hunting and cricket alone cost him at least £50,000 a year. He was capable of great generosity, lavishly supporting hospitals and charities, and on his home grounds he refused to take a gate. Collections went either to charity or to cricketers' benefit funds.

'I remember playing against the West Indians' Reddick recalled. 'We lost two wickets quickly and the light was fading. Maxwell and I were ordered to stay there for half an hour so that a collection could be taken for Bill Voce, but we were up against Constantine and Martindale and I could not time them at all. All I could hear was the zift...zift...zift as the ball passed me but Max hit these two out of our sight and our jobs were safe for another day!'

A highly successful businessman, Cahn had few close friends, but this was not altogether surprising. He was moody, abrupt and often downright rude. He could tell quite amusing stories, many drawn from an encyclopaedic knowledge of Wisden, but he had no innate sense of humour. His favourite hobby was conjuring and he gave frequent performances in his private theatre.

'These were invariably hilarious for if anything he was a worse conjuror than he was a cricketer. Assisted by the household electrician, he would attempt trick after trick and never get the sequence right. His favourite illusion, involving a bowl of disappearing goldfish, was a spectacular failure, but as the routine was conducted with the utmost solemnity it was irresitibly funny and was always cheered to the echo'.

Sir Julien sat as a magistrate at the Guildhall, Nottingham on Monday 25th September 1944, the day preceding his death. His passing was noted by the county and local press, as might be expected. After cremation at Wilford, the ashes were scattered on the cricket pitch at Stanford Hall. Sir Julien, we feel sure, would have been pleased to know that the new arrivals at the Hall, as the new Cooperative College, included a tutor whose regard for cricket was almost as impressive, Arnold Bonner.