

***Four Families: Reloaded* innovative virtual exhibition brings a new dimension to lockdown community theatre and local history**

Elmbridge-based community theatre group, Quick Fix Theatre, is using immersive virtual reality technology to overcome some of the challenges created by social distancing, for a special project next month.

Taking place online from Saturday 12 December as part of the digital strand of the *Light Up Elmbridge Festival*, ***Four Families: Reloaded*** is a 3D multi-media exhibition based on untold stories from Weybridge, Surrey, during the First World War.

This web-based virtual reality project is a digital follow up to the group's 2018 project *Four Families of the Fallen*, which saw Quick Fix Theatre team up with the RC Sherriff Trust to devise four original one-act plays that were performed at five venues across Elmbridge to mark the centenary of the end of the First World War.

The original project was inspired by the names on a commemorative wooden roll of honour plaque at St James' Church in Weybridge, as well as a newspaper article about a memorial service held at the church in July 1918.

As part of his creative process, the project's lead and Chair of Quick Fix, Ben Wilson, gathered a vast amount of research, including newspaper clippings, photos and official records. The majority of this content was used to help the actors connect with the real-life characters and never featured in the final performances. Instead, much of it was left gathering virtual dust on Ben's hard drive.

But with Quick Fix Theatre unable to perform this year and the threat of another lockdown looming, Ben, who is also a specialist in immersive technologies, VR digital art and storytelling, re-discovered the forgotten project materials, including some of his early 360-degree digital art and photos.

Collaborating remotely with the members of Quick Fix Theatre, he has transformed the content into an online 3D virtual, multimedia, social-experience and exhibition, which includes an audio installation to commemorate those named on the Roll of Honour.

Alongside the virtual exhibition, visitors will also be able to come together in a grand virtual theatre where they can enjoy a screening of Quick Fix Theatre's original performance of *Four Families of the Fallen* and participate in a Q&A about the projects.

"Immersive technology has come a long way since 2018, with most popular internet browsers and devices now supporting virtual reality websites," explains Ben.

"During the first lockdown, after hearing about drama teachers struggling to keep students engaged in the topic remotely, I used this technology to create a 3D web-based interactive virtual reality theatre tour as a free teaching resource. This was extremely popular, so I thought it would be great to build on this for a Quick Fix Theatre project"

"Many amateur drama groups resorted to using videoconference tools to reach audiences during lockdown. However, but with so many people working remotely there's a risk of videoconferencing fatigue. Plus, there are also lots of limitations, especially sound quality, which can compromise the experience. Web-VR, with its 3D spatial sound and interactivity, delivers a much richer experience."

"Quick Fix Theatre prides itself on being unique, always innovating while having fun and performing. With *Four Families: Reloaded* we're re-visiting one of our most successful projects and using Web VR

technology to create something new during a time of social distancing that will bring people together for a unique shared experience -- which is ultimately what theatre is all about."

Four Families: Reloaded will be accessible via Mozilla Hubs, a free 3D virtual reality collaboration tool that works with most popular internet browsers (so there's nothing to install) and on a wide range of devices.

The festival is running from now until December 12 and the full programme can be accessed via <https://riverhousebarn.co.uk/light-up-elbridge-festival/>

Four Families: Reloaded will go live on Saturday 12 December with a screening of the plays throughout the afternoon. Ben and other members of Quick Fix Theatre will be in the exhibition throughout the event to chat with visitors.

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Notes to editors:

Quick Fix Theatre is a small not-for-profit group of volunteer actors who originally specialised in creating and performing short form, up-close, interactive theatre in compact public spaces across Elmbridge.

Supported by the RC Sherriff Trust, and now in its sixth year, the group grew out of the *Elmbridge Mummies*, a troupe of volunteer performers who delighted Elmbridge pub-goers with their modern take on ancient Christmas Mummies plays for charity.

Drawing on this experience, the cast and crew, have developed an innovative, original project-led approach to community theatre that is inspired by, and a celebration of, local history, while being accessible to all.

Ben Wilson is the Chair of Quick Fix Theatre. He is also the founder of and managing director of Bright Immersive Ltd, which specialises in enabling creative people and organisations to unleash the power of immersive technologies.

For more information, please email Ben via: QuickFixTheatre@gmail.com.

About RC Sherriff Trust

Working in partnership with Quick Fix Theatre, *The Four Families of the Fallen* was at the centre of The R C Sherriff Trust's WW1 Centenary Commemorations in 2018 and we are thrilled that people are able to experience this this remarkable project once again.

This virtual exhibition is part of The Light Up Elmbridge Festival, designed to showcase the arts in Elmbridge at the end of one of the most difficult years that artists, arts practitioners and organisations have ever had to face.

Full details of The Festival can be found here:

<https://riverhousebarn.co.uk/light-up-elbridge-festival/>