

# Theatre group hit by £450,000 costume drama

Historic clothes dating back to 1908 stolen in raid

**Katie Davies**

DISTRAUGHT actors in Hampstead Garden Suburb are facing an undressed rehearsal after thieves stole £450,000 worth of historic costumes.

Hundreds of handmade costumes, some nearly 100 years old, were taken in a dramatic raid on the Garden Suburb Theatre prop garage last Thursday morning.

The group, whose president is Sir Donald Sinden, is due to perform *The Wizard Of Oz* in a week's time. But the heartless theft has left the show's mayor of the munchkins without a ruby slipper to his name.

Chairman of the theatre Terry Rogers said: "This is not just a horrible thing – we have also lost the whole history of a society which dates back to 1908.

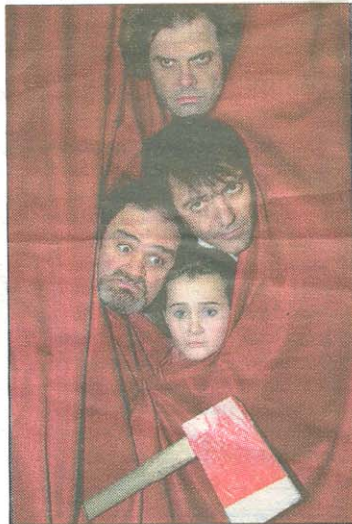
"Many of the costumes were going to be used in the pageant for the Suburb centenary which is taking place in June. I don't know what we will do for that."

He added: "People have put painstaking work into making these costumes and they are absolutely distraught. They are all made by hand and are really antiques – each is worth around £1,500 per costume, and there were 300 taken at least.

"The sad thing is the burglars will probably dump the whole lot because they won't be able to sell them. No one else would want them apart from other drama groups."

Many of the costumes were made by Suburb seamstresses: Diana Darrer, Jeanne Solomons and Frances Musker.

They have been sewing for the theatre group for more than 30 years, winning awards for their designs and making money for the group by renting cos-



**Distraught actors from Garden Suburb Theatre have been left without costumes after the garage theft.**

tumes to top productions at the National Theatre and for the Royal Shakespeare Company.

Ms Musker is an expert in historical dress and lectures in costume design at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Her grandson Gabriel, eight, is due to play a munchkin in *The Wizard of Oz* and her son Jon will be the cowardly lion.

She said: "It is an awful thing – a terrible loss. The things they left they shoved in piles at the back so there isn't much we can salvage. We will really have to start from scratch."

During the raid at the Finchley Lodge lock-ups in Woodside Park, thieves also broke in and stole from several other garages.

Emma Solomons is the director of the *Oz* show, her mother Jeanne is one of the seamstresses and her brother

Tim is playing the scarecrow. She said: "It is so sad. The costumes were such hard work and took such a lot of time. I have been a member of the society since I was eight and my mum has always worked here.

"Everyone is upset because it is a close family theatre group and we all have close connections."

But the de-robed munchkin mayor Alon Witztum, 18, believes there may be hope – somewhere over the rainbow.

"All that work has gone to waste but I have faith that we can find something. The group has so many members and everyone contributes," he said.

"I am sure that when it comes to it, it will all be sorted out. The show must go on."

The *Wizard of Oz* runs from February 1 to 4 at Henrietta Barnett School in Hampstead Garden Suburb.

There are matinées on Saturday and two on Sunday. Tickets are available from the box office on 020-7723 6609 and cost £7, £5.50 concessions.

katie.davies@hamhigh.co.uk