Fiona’s oral history describes what happened to the Players when Bev (Beverly Attwood) and Milly (Milly Montgomery) left and John and herself took charge and how the Players have progressed. This extract remembers what happened when Bev resigned.

“Okay, so I remember we’d just done Aladdin and we had our normal committee meeting, which we have, and we’d reviewed everything and then Bev just sat there with the panel of people who were part of Players, and been part of Players for a long, long time, and just said, ‘I’m packing it in, that’s it, I can’t do anymore. I don’t want to do it. I’m standing down’. I burst into tears, because, you know, I loved it, it was like my life. Every Tuesday, Thursday night, I used to turn up there, I was now part of it on some Sundays, and it was a massive part of my social life, and I just felt like that had been dragged away from me and many of the other people probably would feel the same.

And at the same time Bev stood down, Milly stood down, who played the piano and she ran costume, did all the costumes. Pam Gill, who was an integral part of Players, stood down, she did all the front of house. Rita was on the committee stood down. So, the whole committee stood down, and it was quite a difficult time, and we couldn’t really evaluate it then, but there’s two choices if Players decides to close. So, if people decide that they’re not doing it any more, the choices are that either somebody stands up and decides that’s what they want to do, or the money in the bank is given, in the constitution, to another amateur dramatic company, if somebody else wants to set it up. And then, if that closed down that would have been it. You know, it’s hard then to set something up when you’ve no money in the bank again, and all your costumes are given away. And you know, it’s unbelievable what Players has got.

So, we all went away and had a bit of reflection, and I spoke to John Welburn, who’d been in Players a lot longer than I had been in, and said, ‘listen, shall we put a summer show on? Shall we do something, because it’ll just give us all time to think instead of making a rash decision?’ And we all thought we were going to be doing a summer show, so let’s just continue in that vein. So, we had another committee meeting, and we decided to do a show called Bon Voyage, which was done for Bev, really, to say goodbye for all the hard work she’d done, and it was going to be going round all – it was a cruise ship, and it was a cruise ship that was going round, like, to France and we took things from loads of French musicals; and then we went through Austria, and we did Sound of Music; and we went through all the different musicals on this voyage. Actually, a cruise ship couldn’t go to many of those places, but we didn’t really care, it’s artistic license. And Bev helped us pull it together. And what was quite nice is she stood back and if we needed her she’d support us, and she went back on the stage, which was lovely, and it was nice to see her and Rita back in what they did at that particular time.

Yeah, it was nice. Rita, unfortunately, had to come out of the part just a couple of weeks before the show, because her husband, who was actively part of the committee and Hambleton Players, obviously, was seriously, seriously ill, and another lady stepped up with Bev. And it was nice seeing Bev – we were doing a show for her to say Bon Voyage to her, and we’d written it ourselves. And it was also to allow her to tread the boards for the last time in Hambleton before she moved to the Isle of Wight. So, it was a really significant show, and as we were doing it, John and I, we didn’t realise how much hard work it was, what we had to think about, how we had to do it. We had a couple of disagreements I suppose, because he had a way of wanting to do it and I had a way of wanting to do it. And, you know, that was how it used to be with Barry, in them days, and Bev, because there was two of them doing it together and there’s two heads and sometimes you don’t have the same vision.

And after Bev had gone the committee had a meeting and they’d brought forward somebody externally, and he came. He ran an amateur dramatics society in Castleford that had shut down and he came to see Players, loved what we did. We wanted to know what his vision was. He was interviewed to take over as a producer/director. All the committee voted and thought he was great. And at that time, John and I thought, ‘well, wait one minute, you know, we’re bringing somebody in from outside from something that started within this village, and even though it was growing we need to really think about why was it started’, and when you look back at the constitution and you look back at it was all about to have fun, the people in the village, and to do that we were – we were taking it away from that by probably bringing somebody in from outside. So, we asked if we could do the pantomime and we – the committee agreed and we fell back on one of the old scripts, Paul Reakes, because we knew that’s what Bev used and we’d never ever explored anything else. So, we pulled back on that script, and we did Georgie Porgy, the old Georgie Porgy Pudding and Pie, which no one really had seen anything like that; it was a fabulous script. And we had to get a whole new committee round us, a whole new committee of helpers. We had no one sewing still. We had no one playing the piano, which was difficult. So, we decided we’d work on backing tracks. Did – would that work? Would that take us where we are? You know, would we be able to sustain ourselves like that, because we couldn’t find anyone to play the piano, because we used to have, like, a small band?

Anyway, we pulled it off. We – Bev came to see it, thought it was fabulous and it went really, really well, and it went really well with the backing tracks. And then, we went to the committee, John and I, and said, ‘we want to do this. We want to take this on and we want backing from people within the society. We don’t want anybody external. It needs to be kept into the village’. And because we’ve been part of it for so long we also know the things that we thought we could strengthen. We also knew some of the challenges that Bev had previously had that we knew we could overcome better than a stranger outside of the village. And we also had a connection with the cast and we knew their abilities and what they could do and, you know, how we could strengthen Players.”