

Saving Hope

**A whole day Theatre-in-Education Programme for
Language Alive**

By Peter Wynne-Willson

Section One - Out of role [classroom] Both actor-teachers

Hello. We are from LA. A true story involving everybody. Another time and place. We will be in Hope in Derbyshire in 1665. We will be different characters. You will be the children of Hope [*They draw a simple map*] This is Hope, we will be going there shortly. Here you see the next village which is called Eyam, and this is the boundary between the villages – marked by stepping-stones. Exploring a story of something that really happened in that area 337 years ago.

The plague – do you know about it? Explain danger of plague. Incurable disease. Spread by the bites of fleas eg inside clothing Once infected spread it by coughing sneezing breathing neighbour. Over a distance of about the length of a classroom. Most people die.

In our story, the village of Eyam here has the plague. The boundary is closed, no-one can cross the stepping-stones. You are going to be children living in the village of Hope.

When we go to the hall, we'll be going to the village green in Hope, and you will be meeting a young man called Rowland.....

Any questions?

Come this way.

Section Two. – Hope [Hall]

Rowland is discovered in the Hall.

[Register]

Rowland: Is Mrs Butterworth here?... Oh good, she isn't. We're late. Is everybody here? All the lasses from the mill, ah, there you are, the farm boys, have we got all the girls from over the bridge? Who else have we got? Good. She wants to see us all. Have any of you ever done a well-dressing before? No? Thank goodness. She said that was very important. I don't quite know why. You know Mrs Butterworth though. I expect most of you have been to Sunday School with her, haven't you? She told me to gather all the children in the village that had never done a well-dressing. She is in charge of the children's well-dressing

Listen, if Mrs Butterworth isn't here yet, I think I'll just pop up to the stepping-stones. You know, at the edge of the village of Eyam, the next village from Hope. Eyam is my real home. I went away to get work, you see. I'm getting married next year. When I came back the village was closed - you know what happened. I go there every day. Emmott used to come to the other side. We were not allowed to touch; just seeing her was enough. But she has not been there for nearly eight weeks. But I still go, to the stepping-stones. At 11 o'clock. I need..... Don't tell her, will you. She doesn't know I go there. She believes that Eyam is....well. I'll be back before she gets here anyway.

He is about to leave when Mrs B arrives.

Mrs Butterworth: Rowland! Where do you think you are going?

Rowland: Oh. Just checking everyone was here for you Mrs Butterworth. I've brought all the children from the village, like you said.

Mrs Butterworth: They were not here when I asked. I have been all the way to your house. We are late.

I do beg your pardon, boys and girls. You all know me, Mrs Butterworth. As you are aware, next week is the well-dressing festival day, and I have once again been asked to arrange the children's well-dressing. Now if for once Rowland has done his job, none of you will have done a well-dressing before. Is that true? Excellent. Well done, Rowland. Do you know what a well-dressing is? At the end of the long hot summer, when we give thanks to the lord for all natural things, decorating the well with seeds, petals and leaves, all the bounty of nature. In fact the main one for this year is just here. I shouldn't really show you but.... *[She makes a big thing of revealing the dressing, and they discuss it – how it's made, inspiring image etc]*. Noah, you see, saved all of his people and all Nature, by building his ark, to protect them from the anger of God.

Now you are going to have the chance to make the dressing for the children's well. I am sure you must all be excited about this. It is always a great honour. I will remember my first well-dressing..... Rowland. Pass out the petals if you will.

He gives each child a rose-petal . As he does so, he mentions that he is going to go to the stones, and not to tell Mrs Butterworth. At some point he sneaks off.

Now here is this year's children's well dressing.

She produces a board with a title Saving Hope half made out on it. She lines them up to attach it to the board.

So what do we think is the kind of picture we could put on our dressing? Something that's happened in our village, to give us hope and confidence. An event that we can be thankful for.

Very good. Let me tell you what you will be doing. There are many heroic stories in the bible, of saints and heroes, slaying enemies, or performing miracles. I have an idea for this year which is...well... The title as you can see is 'Saving Hope'. What do you think that may mean?

You may have heard that earlier this year a real heroic act was committed here, in our own village, by a brave group of villagers from Hope. It happened just over there by the stepping-stones, at the boundary of Eyam, when a poor unfortunate plague-ridden girl was turned away. This is going to be our well-dressing picture. Rowland I need you to – where is he? Never mind. You will have to help.

She asks for volunteers, and uses them to form a picture, of forcing a girl back. After the image is formed, they explore the words that might be spoken, or thoughts.

When the exercise is nearly finished, Rowland reappears, excited.

Rowland: Mrs Butterworth. Wonderful news

Mrs Butterworth: Where have you been?

Rowland: I have been to the stepping-stones, over by Eyam, and there is news. The village is free of plague. No-one has been taken for more than two months, they say.

Mrs Butterworth: How do you know?

Rowland: The rector has made an announcement. There were people by the stones. The church bell is ringing.

Mrs Butterworth: Well, if that is the case, then I am glad. Those poor people. Much as they may have brought it on themselves by their sins, I am glad the Lord has brought a close to their suffering. Now, we must continue our work...

Rowland: No. I must go there, now.

Mrs Butterworth: You must do no such thing, I pay you to help me with things
Rowland. You will do what I say.

Rowland: I must go. My Emmott is there.

Mrs Butterworth: Your what?

Rowland: It's her name, Emmott. The girl I'm going to marry. I will go to Eyam

Mrs Butterworth: You will not enter that terrible place, Rowland. Evil, disease and death are the villagers of Eyam, it is a place untouched by God, a place of darkness.

Rowland: The rector has said it is safe to go in. The plague is over.

Mrs Butterworth: But there is practising to be done. You have not been in Eyam for fifteen months. One more day will not hurt. We are doing God's work.

Rowland: But-

Mrs Butterworth: Enough of this. You will take these young well-dressers up into the woods. I want you to collect leaves, seeds and petals. Is that clear? God's work, Rowland.

Rowland: Yes, Mrs Butterworth.

Mrs Butterworth: I shall take this to show the rector.

[She goes. Rowland waits until she is out of sight]

Rowland: I am sorry, but I must go. You have friends in Eyam, don't you? Why don't you come with me. It is safe, I promise. It will not be long before I see Emmott again. [He gathers up the villagers and they go]

Section Four. - At the stepping-stones.

Rowland: This is the edge of Eyam. Over these stones. This is the last place I saw her. I can picture her there now. She is so beautiful. We used to play together by this stream, building dams, by moving stones around, and swimming in the pools we made. I have known Emmott since we were little. We grew up together, got into trouble together. I remember hiding behind that rock when Marshall Howe the miner came after us for taking apples from his tree.

Here we decided to be handfasted. Do you not know what I mean? Handfasting. It was such a day. [*he explains. Showing them the ribbon with which they were bound*] Summer. Sunshine, until the rain came, anyway. They sang songs, and Emmott and I were in the middle of the dancing circle.

Here that we separated when I went off to earn enough for our wedding.

Here that I last saw her, when I returned to find the village was closed. I could not cross the stones. She came to the other side. I could see her but could not touch.

I don't know why but I am frightened. I have waited all this time, and it has felt so long, but now I'm stuck to the spot. Will you come with me?

They go into Eyam

Section Five - Eyam

Music. They go in slowly.

Here we are. Doesn't seem to be anyone around.

It's quite like Hope isn't it? This is the village green. The well.

[they sit]

Listen, stay here, will you? I've got to go and get her. Her cottage is over there. You are going to love her. She is so.....I have nothing to take. Quick, those ribbons. [*he collects the ribbons into a garland to take*] There's no smoke from Emmott's chimney.

He goes in alone.

Rowland comes out. He looks different. She is dead. He wanders around. Finds a collection of piles of stones, each with a token. On one there is a book. He picks it up. He places the handfasting ribbon on the grave, and comes back to the well.

Rowland: Dead. She must be dead. There are weeds growing on the pathway. She must be How? What happened?

He looks at the villagers

I need to know what happened. Will you help me?

He goes to the well, removes a stone, and finds her diary.

I gave this to Emmott. For writing to me while I was away. If she wrote in it we can find out what happened. Should we read it?

Section Six – Eyam – Emmott's Diary

He reads.

Rowland: The beginning. September 1665 – the first entry is more than a year ago. Just after I went away....

I am writing this, dear Rowland, as I said I would. It is hard here without you. I have no-one to tell my secrets, no-one to laugh with. So I will set down in this book everything that happens here in Eyam. There will be nothing compared to your great adventures. Where are you now, I wonder? Do you see the same stars in the sky that I can see now. In my head I still see you, from the stepping-stones, as you disappeared over the hill, getting smaller and smaller.....

His voice cross-fades with hers

....getting smaller and smaller. I cried in the night, but our Kate tells me I must smile or God will frown on my sadness. I have the memory of our handfasting though my love to sustain me, and today George Viccars arrived to brighten our day. You remember him, dear Rowland, the tailor's man from London, with his samples of fine cloth. He came to the green, and we all gathered.....

George Viccars arrives with his box of cloth

George: Come along, everybody, come and see, come and touch. Cloths from London Town. As worn by all the toffs and knobs. Don't she look just wonderful in that? Not that one darling, that's for the Earl of Devonshire. I'll be taking it over to Chatsworth next week. Have you been there? I have many times. By Royal Appointment. Ooh, this is a bit damp. Some of the rain got into the coach. Let's hang it up. Finest silks, Ladies and Gentlemen. Brought to you all the way from

London. Nice to see you again. Ah Emmott Sydall. What is it I hear about you. Handfasted and soon to be wed. I have the very thing for you. Nice bit of cloth

Emmott: Mr Viccars, it is beautiful. But I have not the money for such fine silk.

George: Don't go worrying about such a thing Emmott. Who would not want to marry her?

Emmott: How much?

George: Made up as a wedding gown. Finished off like a Duchess. Two shillings. You can pay me as you can.

Cloths back in the box please, ladies, this is just an early glimpse. Have you felt the fineness, the quality. I'll see you on Market Day, here on the green. I'll be staying at Mrs Cooper's for the next few days if you want me.

Emmott: I cannot pay you until my Rowland gets back.

George: Where has he gone?

Emmott: Sheffield

George: I will keep to my word – pay me when you can.

Diary Entry

[Emmott puts George down, and covers him with the cloth]

Emmott: September 7th George Viccars is dead....

In the evening he went to his bed happy enough, though Mister Cooper says he did not count his takings, which made him feel there must be something amiss. In the morning his face was reduced to the paleness of a cloud, blotched scarlet, with the patterns of rose petals in rings around. His tortured head was forced to its side by a great excrescence the size of a new-born piglet, which erupted from his twisted neck, his hair was dark and matted with sweat, which drenched his bed, and the air of the house was filled with the sickly stench of rotting apples. The fever of the devil's fire burned his body and throat. The cries for water changed to pitiful groans of pain, he called for us all to leave him, for he knew the dread signs and begged to save us from this pestilence, 'I have brought this terrible plague upon you, he said, with a knowing horror in his sunken eyes. It is in the cloth. Did you touch the cloth. The black death is in the cloth....' Then his words gave way to hideous screams for release and for forgiveness. At the end, the boil on his neck burst as he breathed his last desperate catches of life, and froze in contortion., and fell into death.

[The shroud is over George's body]

September 15th The village is quiet today. Since George's death it is as if everybody is waiting, checking their brows for fever. Nobody wants to say what we all know about what he died of.

September 16th Little Edward Cooper was buried today. From the markings and the signs it is known for sure that it is the plague. Any of us could die at any time.

September 22nd Thomas Thorpe was taken today, and there is more than I dare mention under the fever. I am glad Rowland that you are away. I could not bear to think of this terrible fate befalling you. I can only hope that wherever you are is free from the pestilence.

September 23rd Peter Hawksworth we pray for him.

September 25th Joan Howe beloved wife of Marshall the miner.

September 30th Mary Thorpe was taken today

Oct 1st Today there has been some good news within the village. Marshall Howe the miner, whose wife was taken away last week, and himself seven days in bed, has seen his fever lifting. They say the Lord did not want to take a rascal like him. Or his skin had been made thick by years in the mine. The plague could not get through. He has been to see me large as life and twice as ugly. He has brought me a surprise.

Marshall: Emmott Sydall. I have brought young Thomas. You will care for him, now his mother has been taken.

Emmott: Yes Mr Howe.

Marshall: You're not thinking to leave the village?

Emmott: No. Where should we go?

Marshall: Mr and Mrs Bradshaw in all their finery were scurrying off this morning. Unwin says they have a big house near Manchester. The rich shall be safe from this sickness.

Emmott: What about the mine? What will happen if Mr Bradshaw has gone?

Marshall: Tis already closed.

Emmott: What will you do, Mr Howe?

Marshall: Fate has smiled on me young Emmott, and delivered me from the hands of death. I shall pass on what I know of this disease to others. You need spare no concern for me. I shall give you whatever is needed for Thomas's care. He is all I have now.

Emmott: I understand Mr Howe. He shall be safe with me.

Marshall: Aye well, I'd best be off.

He goes

Emmott: So we are carrying on. There is a great shadow over the village, but everyone pretends it is not there. We talk to each other and joke, just as if we are not all in fear of death. Life goes on, but so does death.

Marshall is busy putting up notices

Emmott: October 2nd Elizabeth Thorpe and Matthew Banes

October 3rd Margaret Banes and Annie Thorpe

October 6th Sarah Torre, your sweet cousin, Rowland is dead today. You cannot even know to cry for her.

October 6th William Thorpe

What have you got there Mr Howe?

Marshall: Notice for the village. The rules by which we now must live.

Emmott: Rules

Marshall: From the meeting last night. Of course, you were with Thomas. Have you not heard. Three rules have been made. The Rector has decided that it is God's will. I am to post them around the village.

Emmott: What are they?

Marshall: I cannot read Miss Emmott. See for yourself.

Emmott: No more services in church. That can't be god's will – stopping worship.

Marshall: Does it not say there. The services shall be in the open. To stop the spread of the disease when we are all gathered together in church.

Emmott: That is a sensible rule I think. They say that the miasma in the air carries the disease. In the open air the wind can carry it off. [reading on] There shall be no funerals, and no burials in the churchyard. Victims of the pestilence shall be buried by their families.

Marshall: They fear the corpses. You have seen yourself, no-one will touch those that have died of plague. They are to be buried in gardens and fields. No headstones or graves. No-one gathered round the grave to mark their passing.

Emmott: They're sealing off the village?

Marshall: To save others from our fate.

Emmott: How are they going to do that?

Marshall: From sunset, boundary stones will mark the edges, and no-one shall leave the village or come within.

Emmott: No-one to come and go? But what about food?

Marshall: The Earl of Devonshire will give us food, it will be left by the stones, for us to collect, and if we have any other needs we are to leave messages there. Money we leave, soaked in vinegar to take away infection.

Emmott: Why has the plague come to Eyam, and not to Matlock, Stoney Middleton or Hope?

Marshall: It is the will of God, Emmott. The reverend has said that all good Christians will see it as such.

Emmott: Our sins are no worse than theirs.

Marshall: No other village shall suffer this plague on our account. It shall be contained here.

Emmott: But that will mean..... What will it mean for those of us left, Mr Howe?

Marshall: We trust in the Lord. The reverend says. Greater love hath no man, than he lay down his life for his friends.

Emmott: But my Rowland!

[She cries. He makes a pathetic effort to comfort her. She shrugs him off. Awkward silence]

Marshall: I went up to Bradshaw's and found this spade in the outhouses. He's no use of it where they've run off to, in their big house .

Emmott: You've broken into Bradshaw Hall? Marshall Howe, that is thieving.

Marshall: Well how am I supposed to bury them?

Emmott: Bury whom?

Marshall: I thought I might take on the job of burying folk. The young rector wants us all to serve God. I will serve the Lord, by digging holes. There's no-one else wants to touch those that have died. Me, I've had the disease and come out the other side.

Emmott: Will the reverend pay you?

Marshall: I will need no payment.

Emmott: You're a good man, Marshall Howe. When I think how Rowland and I used to hide from you when we were little, coming back from the mine, in your big coat and hat.

Marshall: Besides, I can find ample payments in the plague houses, where no-one else wishes to go.

Emmott: Now that is thieving, Mr Howe. Or are you teasing me?

[No reply]

Marshall: My Thomas seems to be holding up alright.

Emmott: He is a bonny child. He knows nothing of all this.

Marshall: I believe that God will take care of us.

[He goes]

Emmott is left alone. If they close the village, I'll not see my Rowland again. How can he come back to me? How can I even tell him about this? Should I go?

Should she escape, or should she stay? She draws them into hot-seating her. Possibly expands into group discussion. It is inconclusive. She leaves.

BREAK

Re-enrolling Reopening diary?

Ring of roses

Tears page from diary

Emmott: I have been so happy Rowland, seeing you across the stepping-stones, every day. Just to know that you are safe, and living so close. I know it is hard for you, not coming across, but you must not. This place is so wretched. There is hardly a family left untouched. My father is gone. Susan has a fever. The one thing that sustains me is the thought of you[writes] living in Hope.

Marshall comes on

Marshall: When's it going to end? You wouldn't believe how many graves. October twenty-three, November seven, December nine. Men, women and children.. Every one a fresh hole. I've dug them all. Nineteen in the Spring, then just when you might think the sun would clean the air nineteen more in June, fifty six in July. Marshall Howe, gravedigger. Who'd have thought it ? Some of the things I've seen.

[Hot-seating/story session. To include facts about the plague, plus the following]

Did you hear about Margaret Blackwell? On the point of death she was, and she felt the raging thirst that I know well. In her fever she picked up a mug of bacon fat, thinking it to be water. She was dreadful sick, but here's the thing. Soon after, the fever lifted. Her markings faded and within the day she was as right as a rabbit. They're all drinking that now. The potions and remedies they have are worse than the disease.

I nearly buried Unwin yesterday. They said he was close to death, so I went to find him in his house. I saw him unmoving in his bed, as I have seen so many in these days. I pulled him from it with a sheet under his arms like this. The fall from the bed knocked some wind into the poor old fellow, and he called out for ale. I don't know if he will ever know how close he was to being buried.

I used to work under ground, and now I put people there. There's houses silent, there's streets empty. Families gone with no-one to carry on the name.

I picked this up this morning from the Jackson cottage. I've washed it in vinegar. Should be fine for little Thomas.

He takes the trinket to Emmott

Emmott is sewing cloth

Emmott: I have left this greatest sadness until now, as if by not writing it, I can make it untrue, but I cannot. Last week in the garden we buried our Kate. The fourth of my sisters to have followed their father to the hands of God. Yes it is so. There is only me and my poor mother left in the house. It is so quiet, Rowland. And even the crying of the baby -

Marshall comes in

Marshall: I have this for Thomas.

Emmott: Oh tis beautiful. Have you fashioned this yourself?

Marshall: In a manner of speaking.

Emmott: Mr Howe, do you believe in God?

Marshall: I try to be a good man

Emmott: Why has He done this to us?

Marshall: I cannot tell you that. Where is Thomas?

Emmott: Can you not hear him crying?

Marshall: No I cannot? Where is he ?

Emmott: He did not go gently. He cried and wailed, and I could do nothing. His little face went quickly through those pains that I saw on my father and on my sisters, and then went soft and still.

The baby is dead. She gives him to Marshall, and they place him in a box. She returns to the diary.

It is so quiet, Rowland. And even the crying of the baby is gone. I have a fever. I see from this book that it is a year now since our hand-fasting. When my thoughts are black at night, I think about that happy day. And I think about our wedding at the wakes next year. I wonder what

Rowland returns and the voices cross-fade again.

Section Seven

Rowland:next year. I wonder what we will be celebrating then?

That is all she has written. All I have to explain this.

Why did she stay here? Why did she not escape when she could?

Discuss as appropriate. Did she think about going? Why didn't she?

There must be more than this. I don't understand. It does not seem fair. The rector is still alive. Marshall Howe, but Emmott has gone.

He starts looking around. Rummaging desperately in his box. He throws all the cloth out - he finds a missing page of Emmott's diary and reads it out....

June – just before I came back to Hope, after the village was closed....

'I tried to come to you today. I know that it is God's will for me to stay within the village, but perhaps I do not have the strength. I came to the stepping –stones and stood. My mind was in a turmoil. The Rector and all the good people of the village have said we must not take our illness to others, but it is so hard. I started to cross the stones, but someone must have seen, because suddenly there was a group of villagers from Hope, circling the bank of the stream. They shouted such things at me, [*he uses phrases that they have made up in the earlier workshop*] they looked with hate in their hearts, and they picked up stones to hurl at me. It was as if I were a hunted animal, or worse, some dragon they were slaying. The noise and the fear and the hatred, they hurt me more than the scrapes and bruises which cover my body. Perhaps this too was God's will, a punishment for my weakness.'

Do you know about this ? What happened. Why?

Discussion section. He finds out what happened, and Mrs Butterworth's plans for the well-dressing image.

Mrs Butterworth arrives at the stepping-stones.

Mrs Butterworth: Rowland, are you there?

Rowland: Yes Mrs Butterworth

Mrs Butterworth: Have you got my well-dressing team with you?

Rowland: Yes Mrs Butterworth

Mrs Butterworth: Well come back here now. We have work to do

Rowland: No

Mrs Butterworth: I beg your pardon

Rowland: I said no.

Mrs Butterworth: Rowland!

Rowland: If you want to talk to me, you'll have to come here.

Mrs Butterworth: I certainly will not. I do not wish to set foot in that wretched place.

Rowland: It is safe. The plague has gone.

Mrs Butterworth: I am aware of that, Rowland. I simply do not wish

Rowland: You are frightened aren't you?

Mrs Butterworth: Absolutely not. I have nothing to fear [she reluctantly crosses over] Very well.

[She tiptoes warily into the village, and acknowledges the children of the village]

Mrs Butterworth: So it is true? It is a great relief to be able to pass safely into this sad place. Rowland, I shall deal with you later. Oh I say, look at all those petals, those will look simply splendid on the well-dressing. Well done –

Rowland: Don't touch those.

Mrs Butterworth: Why on earth not?

Rowland: They're important

Mrs Butterworth: What?

Rowland: Emmott said in her diary, they – [*he sits down, sadly*] Explain to her will you?

Mrs Butterworth: What can be so important about rose-petals?

[The children explain the petals, and through that she draws out the story of what has happened.]

Mrs Butterworth: I see. Well that is very touching I must say, and I see why Rowland is in such ill temper. However there is much to be done. We must press on with the well-dressing. We only have the title completed. We must do the picture of that poor girl

Rowland: That was my Emmott. Let me ask them something, Mrs Butterworth. Do you want to celebrate what happened to Emmott? Do you still want this to be your well-dressing picture? etc

They discuss this as well.

Mrs Butterworth: Well what do you suggest we do?

They trigger off [with Rowland suggesting things if the pupils do not], the creation of a new image, with small groups each doing them, with the title 'Saving Hope' The groups are prompted to think about representing ideas, not necessarily simply actions.

The groups share their images, and they are discussed, with care to expand their meanings beyond the specific context of these two villages.

Mrs Butterworth acknowledges their ideas, and in the end has been to some extent persuaded by them. She leaves to do the next stage. Rowland thanks them, takes the diary, and a petal, and leaves.

The End