

Pembrokeshire Life

February 2018

£2.90

**When Jack
the Ripper
charmed
Porthgain**

- Wreck of the Alice Williams
- The golden age of cinema
- Has your name been 'pembroked'?

Playwright's battle to

A PRODUCTIVE partnership between the Torch Theatre and one of Wales's most exciting theatre writers will bring a new work to the stage this month.

Written by Owen Thomas and directed by Peter Doran, *The Wood* is a tale of friendship, love and sacrifice set against the background of some of the most horrific battle scenes of the First World War.

And it renews a creative partnership that has produced one of the most successful original plays in Wales – the highly acclaimed one-man show *Grav*, a dramatic biography of one of Wales's best-loved characters.

Owen, now head of performing arts at a Llantrisant school, traces the urge to write back to his early school days in mid-Wales. It began with poetry for eisteddfodau – but he took his first steps onto writing for the stage when a mystery he wrote was made into a school production.

As a playwright he has enjoyed a lot of success in the last few years. His plays include *The Dead of Night*, *Meat* and *Coldstone Station*, all of which have been performed in theatres around the country.

One of his most successful plays, the dark comedy *Richard Parker*, toured Wales twice and then the wider UK before going on to enjoy a successful run at the Edinburgh

Owen Thomas in conversation with Eifion Jenkins

Festival in 2011 where it received several four and five star reviews. The play was then invited to be performed at the Hollywood Fringe Festival in Los Angeles in 2012.

There it received several incredible reviews including Pick of the Week in the prestigious LA Weekly. The show went on to win 'Best International Show' before being listed by *The Huffington Post* at the end of the year in the top ten theatrical shows of 2012 in Los Angeles.

The sequel, another black comedy 'Robert Golding', was performed at the Edinburgh Festival in 2013.

"I was always fascinated by dark stories, I was a big fan of *The League of Gentlemen* and such like," said Owen. "I also loved reading autobiographies of comedians."

But *Grav*, a biography of the Wales and Llanelli rugby player and Welsh patriot Ray Gravell, gave him a chance to properly get under the skin of his subject.

"I was quite nervous working on a play about someone who was so well known. The launch was at Parc y Scarlets – I thought, Oh my God I hope I haven't got this wrong."

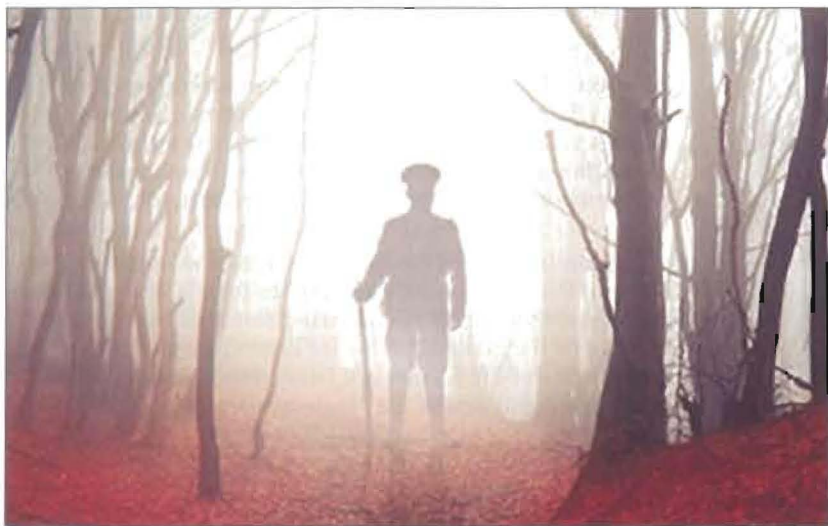
"I also remember it being performed in Mynydd y Garreg, where he was from and every single person there either knew him or was related to him."

Fortunately for Owen it was great hit and will even be going on to an off-off-Broadway production later this year.

"I had read everything I could about him and watched everything I could, and I was very lucky to have his wife and children on board with it," said Owen.

TACKLING a First World War drama in the 100th anniversary of the end of the conflict – and against the background of a battle in which so many Welsh soldiers lost their lives – has been no less daunting.

But having already worked with Torch artistic director Peter Doran, he felt confident enough to take it on.



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Village at war – no escape from

RUNNING alongside the new Torch production of 'The Wood' is a fascinating exhibition based on the lives and experiences of the small rural community of Llangwm, and the devastating effects of war on those who served and those who remained at home.

It charts events during the four years of the Great War locally, nationally and internationally.

There are several poignant stories particularly those of

the 17 soldiers and sailors who didn't return home. These include the story of two brothers who were killed on the same day during the Battle of the Somme. No-one who returned was unscathed by the traumatic events of being shelled at sea or the appalling conditions of trench warfare.

Other stories focus on the Home Front such as the Butter War reported in the local press when Llangwm women staged a boycott and succeeded in lowering the price of

put war into words



"Peter wanted to mark the anniversary of the end of the war in some way and how it linked in with poetry and writing such as Sassoon and Wilfred Owen," said Owen.

"Peter is great to work with, he's a very good adviser and collaborator – he calls a spade a spade."

The final script, performed by Gwidian Rees, is based on an idea by Ifan Huw Dafydd and has been developed into a two-hander by Owen and Peter.

"It's quite a poetic approach and is set in a clearing in Mametz Wood in 1966 when a soldier who lost his best

friend in the battle returns there to lay a ghost to rest.

"The Welsh involvement in the battles, of course, was very strong and when I visited the site I spent about an hour and a half just walking through the wood soaking up the atmosphere.

"There are still shells on the ground and Welsh flags on the trees. It's a very haunting place and I wanted to capture that in the play as well.

"I hope people are moved by it, I wanted it to be a very emotional experience."

the horrors

butter in Haverfordwest market. Llangwm Local History Society also commissioned an opera to commemorate the First World War which will be played during the opening hours of the gallery.

There is a final performance at the Follies Theatre, Folly Farm on November 10 to mark the end of war.

■ The WW1 – A Village at War exhibition at the Torch gallery runs from February 3 to March 3.

