



## Tribute to Chris Bowler

Chris Bowler was one of the founder members of Monstrous Regiment, and along with Gillian Hanna and Mary McCusker, remained with the company until her death in 2014.

'The enduring relationship of these three women was what kept the company going through difficult financial times and provided a pattern of continuity to the group's artistic programme, administration, and public profile.'

Elaine Aston, *Feminist Theatre Voices* 1997

At Chris's funeral in June 2014, Mary delivered a tribute to her, extracts from which are reproduced overleaf.

## CHRIS BOWLER



1946-2014

When I first met Chris Bowler we both had the energy to do a show, take the set down, pack the van, find some good music to dance to, but still get on the road for the next venue by 9.30 the following morning.

Chris was a person who got things done.

Chris was one of the founder members of The Monstrous Regiment Theatre Company. That short statement doesn't really cover the incredible amount of work she did to help get the company on its feet just 8 months after our first meeting, in August 1975.

Chris put all her skills and energy into the crucial first years of the company. She was creative, intelligent and incredibly practical. It was always Chris who found our premises. In those early no-income months she managed to acquire a house

(for free) in Camden Square, an important base for the new company. Later when we had annual funding she negotiated a cheap lease on a fantastic warehouse in Elder Street, big enough to store the sets and provide a rehearsal space.

And for our first play, *Scum*, she found the carpenters' aprons and protective gloves that enabled us to put the set up with professional ease and no splinters.

Of course our prime focus was the plays, the new work. Chris had no fear when it came to voicing an opinion on the first draft of a new play (and she brought that fearlessness on stage with her). She was articulate, constructive and honest. And she had the enviable ability to maintain an intelligent argument whilst crying.

Chris is stitched firmly into the history of the company: actor, writer, director, board member and Friend.

She was in twelve of the plays, and made valuable contributions to many more. She conceived, wrote and directed another two: *Enslaved by Dreams*, an imaginative visual feast based on the life of Florence Nightingale, and *Points of Convergence*, a bold physical piece.

She worked hard for the company. Even in her last year, despite other commitments and ill health, she helped get our web page up on the Unfinished Histories site. We met before Christmas 2013: me, Gillie Hanna and Chris, the three who had taken on the main tasks needed to set up the company back in 1975. There we were in a bar, after an event, all of us drinking water for health reasons. Still feminists, still with energy... still friends. Did I mention she was incredibly loyal and also a lot of fun?

In our book about the company Chris wrote:

*What do I remember? How do I want to be remembered? Scum: chalking "Vive La Commune" on an upturned table as I listened to Helen Glavin playing her most beautiful song of all, "Cherry Time". Dreaming of love and the Spring while facing death. And there we were with our dreams still intact.*

I can remember her doing that, with great beauty and wonderful focus. And I think that quote captures the spirit of Chris. Mindful of the past, not dwelling on her own achievements - and her achievements were considerable - and looking forward. She turned many dreams into reality, her own and others', and left an enduring legacy... and many friends. Thank you Chris.

Mary McCusker June 2014