**Holy Clappers: A Story of Folly and Stupidity**

**Synopsis**

**Act I**

Kalpah is a small country town in the northern plains of South Australia. The name Kalpah apparently derived from the aboriginal word “*kallapah*” meaning “*place of screaming parrots*”. Located 57 km from Adelaide, Kalpah has a population of around 1500 people and was settled in the early 19th century. In the distance, four large wheat silos can be seen, from where wheat is transported to the Port of Adelaide. It has a district population of approximately 4000. The Kalpah District Council dominates the main street with its cream brick 1960’s building and proudly flies the national, state and aboriginal flags. There are a number of other buildings: the Criterion Hotel, the Institute Hall and St Malachi’s Anglican Church, police station, St John Ambulance station and a doctor’s clinic, that all sit along the five way intersection of Kalpah. There is a small commercial precinct, including a post office, supermarket, hairdresser, take away food, butcher and a perennial empty shop but currently used as a thrift shop. The town is a typical mix of small minds, local intrigues and unresolved conflicts. As is common in small towns, many residents are volunteers on several community committees and are often employed by the local Council (or Shire). This ‘cross pollination’ can work well in an ideal, cooperative world, but Kalpah is not ideal, and nor is cooperation an attribute that would describe it’s community.

The local Reverend, and the parish committee of St Malachi’s Anglican Church, muddle along running the parish, raising a few dollars here and there trying to keep it all going, but an ever declining congregation means very little money coming in. Following an incident of falling masonry from the bell tower of the church, the local Council has issued a demolition order. As the Parish has no money to repair they opt to demolish it, with Council assistance. That is until a parish committee member reminds them that the bell in the tower is not actually owned by the Parish and is of historical significance to the town.

The community of Kalpah had commissioned the bell, with the congregation of St Malachi, in memory of the only Kalpah serviceman killed in action at the Somme, during WW1. His parents also directly donated a huge 50 pounds, via the church fund. The bell was hand cast in Sydney in 1920 from the casings of shells found on the battlefield of Somme, and it was said that there was not a bell in Australia that had a truer or more beautiful tone than that of the St Malachi bell.

The decision to sell the bell and demolish the tower enrages the Kalpah Historical Society and the Kalpah RSL, who remind the parish council that it also commemorates those who fell in the line of duty in WWII, and that the bell it not the property of the church.

The town matriarch, Gwen Hark, is a formidable women and president of the Kalpah Historical Society, claims ownership of the bell. The members of the RSL also claim ownership of the bell. Stepping into the fray, the splinter group, the Lower & Districts History Group, and Justine McNeil (Gwen’s arch enemy) and old wounds are opened.

Matters are made worse by the internal divisions in Council, particularly between the Mayor and the CEO. The bickering and badgering escalate and all the groups decide that they should get permission to keep the bell from the only known relative of the family, Dymphna Wilson, who resides in a nursing home in Adelaide. They all separately visit Dymphna but little do they realize she has dementia and doesn’t quite understand what’s going on.

It is the 11th November, and it is the Remembrance Day memorial service, 100th Birthday celebration for Dymphna and her book launch (courtesy of Gwen Hark the ghost writer), all happening in the Church grounds. Driven by the drunken cousin of the works manager, Mick Blought, the arrival of the front-end loader to demolish the tower causes mayhem, particularly as it is the wrong day.

A brawl breaks out between them as they fight about who owns the bell, and so enters the local policeman, Snr Constable Paddy Lange. He stops them with a gunshot and they are all stunned into silence. At this moment, the Reverend bursts into the mess, announcing with horror that the bell has been stolen.

**Act II**

Fury, distrust and accusations abound within the community, each group blaming each other for the theft. Several confrontations occur and the passions run high. Each group feels strongly that with their letter, they have the perfect right to take the bell.

All groups are sent an anonymous letter threatening the bell’s destruction if they don’t do as they are commanded: Produce, direct and participate in a Nativity play on Christmas Eve. They are told to meet at the Church yard one night, so they all arrive in the dark with torch lights, all eager to find out who it is that has stolen the bell and sent them a ridiculous ultimatum. The Reverend finds a pile of scripts and the assigned roles for them all. He is quite excited about the idea and with much arguing and discussion each group decide to join the production to ensure the safe return of the bell.

They rehearse, make costumes, sets, and the group dynamic gradually changes into one of reluctant and begrudging cooperation.

To a sell out performance the Nativity play is presented to the Kalpah community. During the last song, Silent Night, the bell is heard over the singing and the cast is overwhelmed with happiness, realizing that it has been returned.

They never learn who was the ‘phantom’ and they are left a little chastened and just a bit kinder to each other.

**CAST: 6 women (age range 40+) 10 men (50+, policeman 25-35)**

**Act One**: Takes place in the meeting rooms of the community and church groups, Kalpah Arms, Kalpah General Store, nursing home and the grounds of St Malachi Church.

**Act Two**: Takes place in the meeting rooms of the community and church groups, Kalpah Arms, CEO office of DC Kalpah, Kalpah General Store, grounds of St Malachi Church and St Malachi church hall

**Characters**:

GWEN HARK: A large bosomed matriarch, mid to late 60’s. Founding Member, President & Life Member of the Kalpah Historical Society. Retired primary school teacher and ex-councillor.

AMELIA MUSE: Middle aged, long suffering friend of Gwen Hark. Runs the Kalpah Deli.

JUSTINE MCNEIL: Middle aged gossip; feisty, outspoken, loves a battle. After a power struggle with Gwen Hark, formed the breakaway Lower & Southern Districts Kalpah History Group. She is the President.

MOLLY HESS: Diminutive, middle aged woman, just wanting to help out wherever she can.

JOAN SCHUSTER: Older woman, gossipy, blows with the wind. Happy to help, happy to gossip.

DYMPHNA WILSON: Old Kalpah resident, turning 100. Lives in a nursing home in Adelaide. Last living connection to the memorial bell. Suffers dementia.

HUGH BOYNTON: The town Mayor. Middle-aged, well-spoken, wealthy landowner whose family go back generations. Assertive and used to getting his own way. Private school - St Peters old boy.

REVEREND ARTHUR SWAILLE-BROWNE: Minister of St Malachi’s Anglican Church; middle-aged man with questionable sexuality. Well educated, gifted in music, of English background. Has speech impediment.

BILL (CRUSTY) MCQUEEN: Publican of The Kalpah Arms Hotel. Rheumy eyed, middle aged, afflicted with psoriasis and a sour nature.

KEVIN HOLLOWS: RSL President. Served in the army in Vietnam. One of only four serving men left in the Kalpah RSL. A good bloke.

SNR CONSTABLE PATRICK ‘PADDY ‘ LANGE: Young city born policeman on his first country posting, waiting desperately to get back to the big smoke

HENRI MAKIEWICZ: CEO of the District Council of Kalpah. Balding, sick of his job and waiting to retire; knows everyone in Kalpah,

ROBIN BLEAR: Council Building Inspector/planner/engineer. Middle aged man; started career as draughtsman, gradually absorbed other roles within council, only ever worked for this council.

MICK BLOUGHT: Works Manager/Grader Driver. Hugely overweight, blokey, florid, pie eating, beer swilling slacker.

LARRY SMITH: DC of Kalpah: Dog catcher/Refuse Manager/General Inspector; Middle aged, happy & helpful. Loves his job but suffers a stomach ulcer.

ROGER BLOUGHT: Mick Blought’s cousin, grader driver and alcoholic \* minor role

**Community Group Members:**

**St Malachi Parish Council**: Hugh Boynton, Molly Hess, Joan Schuster, Kevin Hollows, Reverend Arthur Swaille-Browne

**Kalpah Historical Society**: Gwen Hark, Amelia Muse, Joan Schuster, Larry Smith

**Lower and Southern Districts Kalpah History Group**: Justine McNeil, Molly Hess, Kevin Hollows, Robin Blear

**RSL**: Kevin Hollows (member served Vietnam). Mick Blought, Bill (Crusty) McQueen, Robin Blear, Henri Makiewicz all affiliate members