

## Coping with the Slope

### **Making Props and Dance Safer for Ballarat**

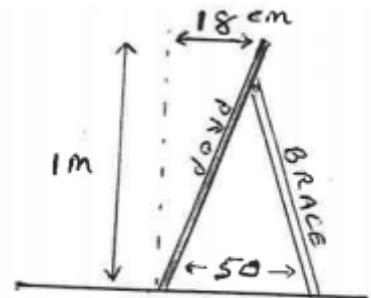
Generally, your props and your competition performances, work quite well on the normal level stage of most theatres that you attend. However the stage at Ballarat's Her Majesty's Theatre slopes downhill by **29mm per meter** of length. Despite advice in our general rules, most competition props arrive here with no modifications to cope with the slope. They are thus seen as unstable, and have been difficult to sandbag securely.

The following information is intended as a guide, and is not intended to bind HMT Theatre, who retains the power to make final decisions re the safety and use of your props. Any props you propose to use at HMT Theatre must be safe for use on the sloping stage and should be constructed with the following measures taken into account. Anything that may pose a risk requires a Risk Assessment Form to be completed and provided to the Theatre Tech for approval prior to performance.

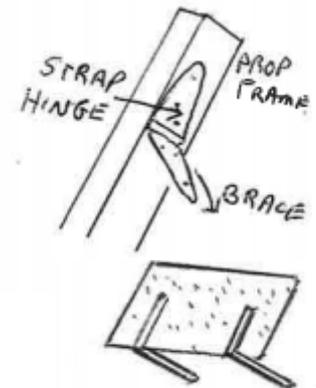
The following notes are suggestions for the construction of your props; however the Royal South Street Society does not accept liability for any props built according to those notes, which may subsequently not be approved by theatre Techs, or which may otherwise cause injury to those using or moving or storing the props. Always seek expert carpentry or mechanical advice in the construction of your props.

Seriously note the following suggestions for stabilizing your props. Act on it now, not when you get here. Theatre Techs can **ban your prop** or performance if they deem it unsafe. All this can happen just as you prepare to go on stage!

- 1. TILT BACK.** All **Flat** props, measured when sitting on a level floor, should tilt at **18cm (or more) back from vertical** measured at 1 metre up from the floor (or 9cm at ½ metre up etc). If a brace (stay) is used to hold the prop, the brace should contact the floor about 50cm (or more) back from the prop face, per metre of prop height (depending on other props and choreography). This will provide adequate tilt for use on the sloping stage.



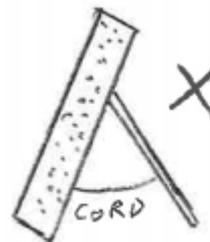
- 2. The BRACE** must be firmly attached to the prop panel / frame with a **strong strap or back-flap hinge** or similar (but not a standard butt hinge), such that the brace **cannot collapse sideways**. A Velcro strap should hold the brace flat and safe from twisting during transport. This brace must be sandbag able, as below. Here are just some options –



- 3. LITTLE FLAT props** up to 30cm high may only need 1 or 2 angle brackets (12 x12 cm?) bent to achieve the correct angle, or a solid wood base. Either arrangement must be accessible for a sandbag.

#### **4. NORMAL FLAT props**

- (a) Cord.** Props up to a metre or so high, usually have a brace at the back, held at the bottom by a cord.



Cord strung part way up the brace is **Unsuitable!**

(Unless modified as in b, c, or d)

**Cord** or a strong **tape** should run from (or very near to) the **bottom** of the brace to the bottom of the prop face. This allows a sandbag

to hold it down properly.

(b) A **Cross piece** about 20 - 30cm long, **very firmly attached** (Screwed, glued, braced) to the lower end of the brace as a "T", This can be held down by sandbags.

A basic modification for all simple braces!!\*\*

(c) For bigger props or any flat prop at all, it is much safer to use a **French Brace**. This is a rigid triangular timber brace, attached

to the back of the prop frame with top and bottom hinges. The brace can be folded flat for storage. Removable hinge pins ok for storage and transport. The horizontal member should extend 10cm beyond the brace to take a sandbag.

**Highly recommended. Gives excellent stability!!\*\***

(d) For large / wide panel props, make the brace a suitably sized **rectangle**, cross-braced, with the bottom horizontal member clear to take sandbags. Or use 2 French Braces as above

(e) **Variable angle** stays. The brace is attached to the bottom of the prop back by a hinged rigid strut. The top of the brace can be moved up or down. Right up for transport, down to various positions to suit a level stage or a sloped stage. This is an excellent brace, but the top of the movable brace must be firmly **attached** to the prop eg with a quick action catch, pin, bolt etc, such that it cannot come apart if knocked.

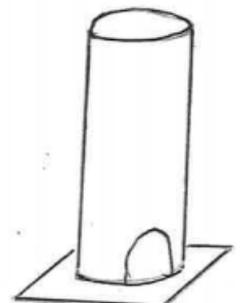
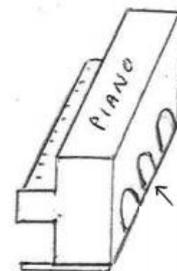
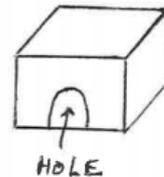
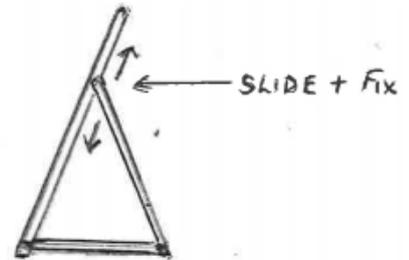
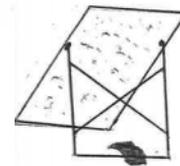
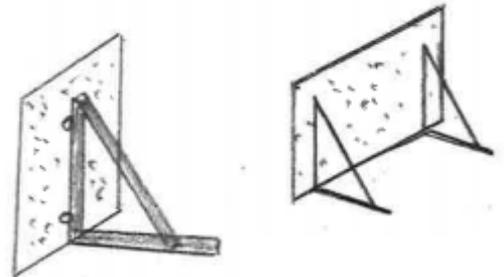
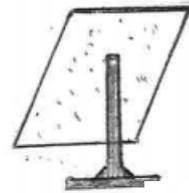
Simply jamming the brace in a notch is not allowed.

**5. 3-DIMENSIONAL Props** boxes, drums, stands, pianos, fireplaces, houses, tree trunks, furniture, etc. These may be impossible to tilt back, but if so, only 3cm per metre in height. Just make sure they are stable on stage.

(a) **Boxes.** Width should be **1.25 times the height** if they are to be danced upon. Preferably to have a floor in them, and an 18cm diameter access hole in the lower back, through which sandbags can be placed inside the box. Max height of box/platform 90cm.

(b) **Pianos** should have a floor in them and 2 or 3 access holes (18cm diam.) Along the bottom back of the prop, where sandbags can be inserted. If the piano is to be sat on, jumped from etc, consider attaching a length of timber to the bottom of the ends to give it more stability depth wise.

(c) **Columns, Tree trunks, Hat stands.** Fix firmly to a base that is at least 12cm wider than the column in every direction, so that sandbags can be placed all round. Or, it must have a floor and access hole in the back through which sandbags can be inserted.



If Tilt Back is possible, only 3cm per metre height.

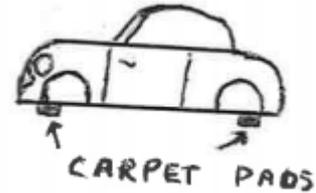
(d) **Houses, Igloos, Fireplaces** etc. Have a horizontal part of the frame at the back, available to take sandbags if necessary.

**6. LEGS** spindly table legs, narrow coffee tables, bassinet legs etc. If there is much activity with these props, consider attaching a horizontal piece of wood between the bottom of 2 legs, to take a sandbag.



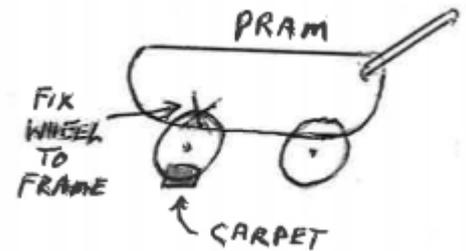
**7. MOVABLE props.** Prams, ships, cars, animals, etc.

(a) **Always Hand Held.** If the prop is constantly held/controlled by the performer, or taken side stage when not in use, then straight wheels are ok, but **not** swivel-in-all-directions furniture castors!



(b) **Only held while shifting.** If the prop is moved by the performer to various positions then left unattended, do **NOT use wheels**. Push it around on little carpet pads stuck to the prop. If you really need wheels, life gets complicated. You must have a brake system, or lockable castors, or a portable Sandbag, all of which have to be operated by the performer during performance!

Prams could operate with normal rear wheels, but have the front wheels locked to the chassis and fitted with carpet pads. Wheel-barrows are ok.



**\*8. LADDERS** Only Industrial step ladders can be used and you can only go 2 steps up the ladder, 3 steps up if someone holds the ladder! Anything more than that needs more Risk Assessment. RSSS will provide an Industrial A frame step ladder.

**\*9. BIKES,** scooters, skate boards, roller blades etc. Risk Assessment needed for use on sloping stage. OH&S.

**10. ROLLING things** Balls, sticks, canes, pencils, cylindrical props etc that might roll down stage when unattended. Consider a “blu tack” pad, a weight stuck on, or suitable placement on stage.

**\*11. THROWING things** Balls, arrows, spears, axes, books etc. (Nothing to do with slope, but) Risk Assessment needed. OH&S.

**\*12.** Performing **IN FRONT** of main **CURTAIN** basically is **BANNED** unless Special Permission obtained.

These are just some of the ways to improve the use of props. I am sure you can think of other ways. Bottom line is that the stage props must be safe and stable, and the whole performance is safe.

You should always seek professional advice.

- **Special permission:** Requires a **RISK ASSESSMENT** form handed in to RSSS a day or more beforehand, and a possible discussion/preview with the Theatre Tech. Risk Assessments forms available from the website. This requirement essential for 8.Ladders; 9. Bikes; 11. Throwing and 12. Front Curtain. Any queries, contact the RSSS Office.

