



The Rattigan Version

The Newsletter of
The Terence Rattigan Society

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A second TR tree is planted

On Saturday 27 April, our President made history by planting the second tree to commemorate Sir Terence Rattigan CBE. She had been invited during the centenary year by Martin Harris, headmaster of TR's prep school, Sandroyd, to plant a tree in his memory. At the time, the Society had already arranged a tree planting at the suggestion of the Sir Terence Rattigan Charitable Trust at the Actors' Church, Covent Garden, and it was felt that a second planting might lose impact. Mr Harris was happy to defer the Sandroyd tree planting and so it was that the Princess, accompanied by the Society's Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary, arrived at the School, just outside Salisbury, on a blustery late April morning.

A report by Clive Montellier

The school has already marked its association with Sir Terence by renaming one of the dormitories after him, and the tree planting marked a more formal commemoration of their celebrated 'old boy'.

The proceedings began with a full school assembly, scheduled to allow the school's cricket team to escape for an away match – a commitment of which TR would firmly have approved. Our Vice President, Michael Darlow, gave an animated address that quickly captured the pupils' attention and underlined the relevance of Rattigan's work to their own existence with an extract from the TV adaptation of *The Winslow Boy* featuring the tense scene where Ronnie is grilled by Sir Robert Morton.

He concluded by emphasising the importance of the central theme of access to justice for all in a world where it is often argued that detention without trial is a necessary weapon in the fight against terrorism.

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Suitably inspired, the headmaster's party were joined by the current members of 'Rattigan Dorm' for the tree planting itself where our President performed the ceremony at a plot carefully sited in a sunny spot in the School's beautifully tended walled garden.

Although a simple ceremony, it was immensely touching as our President, looking supremely elegant as always, and surrounded by the young boys and girls of the next generation, paid tribute to her old friend, and we remembered the boy who became one of Britain's foremost modern playwrights. We were then treated to lunch in the headmaster's study. The headmaster and his charming wife, Catherine, had gone to great lengths to provide a suitable occasion to mark the School's own 'Rattigan Connection'.

We were treated to extracts from the school records of Rattigan's era which, amongst other things, told us that, for cricket "*He has played many fine innings. His off-side strokes are masterful, especially those behind point. His bowling has lost a lot of the accuracy it had last year. His fielding at slip has been excellent.*"

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The Terence Rattigan Society

President: Princess George Galitzine MBE

Vice-Presidents: Michael Darlow, Greta Scacchi, David Suchet CBE, Geoffrey Wansell

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<i>Chairman</i>	Barbara Longford (barbara.longford@ntlworld.com)
<i>Membership Secretary</i>	Diana Scotney (dianascotney@virginmedia.com)
<i>Treasurer</i>	Andrew Kenyon (andrew.kenyon@rbkc.gov.uk)
<i>Editor</i>	Giles Cole (gc@gilescole.com)
<i>Webmaster</i>	Stephen Bradley (stevebradley1@me.com)
<i>Theatre Liaison</i>	Michael Wheatley-Ward (wheatleyward@btinternet.com)
<i>Drama School Liaison</i>	Elizabeth Donnelly (elizabeth.r.donnelly@googlemail.com)
<i>Secretary & RAF Liaison</i>	Gp. Capt. Clive Montellier FCIPD, FCMI, RAF (montellier@live.co.uk)
<i>US Representative:</i>	Dr Holly Hill (drhollyhill@gmail.com)

INTRODUCING

Elizabeth Donnelly & Stephen Bradley

It is vitally important to any Society that it has younger members, and we are most fortunate to have two young performers not only as members but who also serve on our committee. Elizabeth Donnelly is our Drama School Liaison officer and has masterminded both our masterclasses at Central School with Thea Sharrock and, more recently, at Rose Bruford with Adrian Brown (*see page 3*). She herself won a scholarship to Central, having discovered a love of acting at Oxford University.

Since graduating from Central in 2010 she has appeared in *Macbeth*, *Antigone* and *The Lady of Pleasure* and played the lead in a film set during the First World War, *Her Ways to Roam*, which will be screened at various film festivals this summer.

She was introduced to the work of TR with Thea Sharrock's production of *Cause Célèbre* at the Old Vic two years ago – a production she describes as 'sensational' - and was delighted to be able to persuade the acclaimed director to work with students at Central on scenes from *The Deep Blue Sea*. She offers this view of the process:

"The language of the 1940s and 50s can act as a barrier to some young actors, particularly those who consider themselves 'contemporary' rather than 'classical' actors.



I found working with current students of acting that it can be hard work tackling a Rattigan for the first time, but it pays off because it trains their ear to the delicate musicality of the language of the period, and teaches them to think about class and status and the mores and etiquette of the time. Once they have acknowledged the differences, be they accent, deportment or attitude, the key is to play the part for truth so that they become a real person and not a caricature."

Of her own ambition to play Rattigan, she has her eye on Diana Lake in *French Without Tears* and, further down the line, she would love to tackle Hester in *The Deep Blue Sea*.



Stephen Bradley has been a performer from an early age, his first passions being martial arts, which he studied from the age of 13, and dancing. He initially started the latter in hip-hop and tap, and now studies modern jazz, musical theatre, ballet, rock'n'roll & freestyle disco. This has broadened out in the last few years to include performing in plays, short films and musicals.

Alongside his performing career Stephen also runs his own IT company, which is very handy for the Society as he is our Webmaster and looks after the website. Do visit it if you have not already done so.

Among his ambitions to work in as many areas of performance as possible, he aspires to appear in Rattigan plays, and he singles out *Separate Tables* as a particular favourite. It's encouraging to know that Terence Rattigan can rub shoulders with hip-hop, tap and freestyle disco in a performer's wish list. ☺

Cause Célèbre at Central by Roger Mills

My, how things change. Back in the early seventies when I was a young drama student it would have been pretty well inconceivable that a Rattigan piece would have been selected for anything – except perhaps for derision. No, another dire revival of *Oh What a Lovely War!*, *Chips with Everything* or an improvised adaptation of *Spit Nolan* would have ticked the ‘right on’ boxes but bored the audience – and this member of the cast – to death. We MIGHT have tackled *The Winslow Boy*, but *Cause Célèbre*? Well, we couldn’t – it wasn’t written until 1975! Anyway the MA Acting students at the (now Royal) Central School of Speech and Drama took it on in April – and triumphed.

Whether the play itself merits the verdict ‘triumph’, even after a lot of thought I don’t know. It has all Rattigan’s strengths, including humour at the darkest moments – “I gave up a bungalow in Bournemouth for you” – a quality too often ignored it seems to me. Certainly the notorious Rattenbury case contains all the elements that interest and exercise the playwright. It’s cleverly constructed and, praise be, gives more than one woman the chance to shine.

I suppose for me the real problem is that while we can believe in Rattigan’s good time girl Alma Rattenbury, and perhaps to a lesser extent her alter ego the cool almost frigid Edith Davenport, his characterisation of Alma’s lover George Wood is rather more sketchy, and frankly implausible. If a George Wood did indeed wield the mallet it wasn’t Rattigan’s George Wood. This one wouldn’t have had the nerve! Willem Long did as good a job as the script and his one costume (coarse actors working class/farm labourer 1914-1958 for the use of) allowed. He’s just unlucky that Rattigan had more interest in the girls this time round.

That *Cause Célèbre* isn’t holed below the waterline by this central weakness is a testament to its other strengths. Dialogue is as usual sparkling, the scenes in the barristers robing rooms, the actual trial and spearing of various lawyerish attitudes, acute. Any ex-17-year-old boy will giggle at the speculation of what sexual services could be purchased in 1930s Lewisham for £1 7s 3d – but then throughout there is a post Lord Chamberlain frankness about sex that is striking.

Guy Retallack’s in-the-round production has real style and verve. His courtroom scenes are engrossing and involving – with an excellent use of montage and a real sense that the verdict was NOT a forgone conclusion. The highlight however was Alma’s arrival at court to face an angry crowd. Somehow this small cast managed to create a terrifying mob quite capable of lynch-

ing the accused, given half a chance. The shock of this scene was physical and very frightening indeed. Designer James Turner got the sense of period absolutely bang on.

This Rattigan is a good choice for a test piece; with plenty of doubling, virtually everybody has something to get their teeth into. In the end though it’s New Yorker Norma Butikofer as Alma who stays most clearly in the memory, and not just because she has most to do. This was a performance of great contrasts – hysterical drunken dancing in flimsy undies to a defeated winner at the end – underpinned by searing truth throughout. In the face of this, Edith Davenport’s jury room conversation, superbly played by Eleanor Rose, is both logical and inevitable. Kate Winslow would nod approvingly.

Overall, *Cause Célèbre* ends up, perhaps, as less than the sum of its parts but worth doing rather more often. This production deserves a wider showing too. A great play? Maybe not, but it is a very good one, certainly better than *Flare Path*, reminding us once more that if Rattigan has one over-arching concern it is ‘let right be done’. ☺

Masterclass at Rose Bruford by Denis Moriarty

‘Trained at Rose Bruford’ leaps out of many an actor’s biography in glossy West End programmes – and here we were, on a wet evening in early April, at the College in Sidcup.

Four students were there to work on two short scenes from *The Winslow Boy* and *The Sleeping Prince*, directed by our very own Adrian Brown, acclaimed director and writer, close friend of the playwright, and founder member of our Society, whose own career in theatre and television spans over 50 years.

The masterclass is a stimulating vehicle and came to prominence perhaps in the musical world – Tortelier with his cello, Geraint Evans on opera, Barenboim with the Beethoven sonatas. It works in three ways: for players, who can respond to an expert and build a performance; for an audience, to eavesdrop on this privileged process; and for a director, to provide insight, experience and anecdote and thereby inform, educate and entertain. In this Adrian excelled.

He began with a very informative *tour d’horizon*, setting Rattigan in the context of style, unashamedly middle-class values, French windows and panelled parlours. He emphasised that the repression and imprisonment of emotion can set the stage for dramatic tension, and that it still has a place in life to this day; it makes the Rattigan plays forever fresh and perhaps helps to explain the revived and continuing interest in them.

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Visits to the Bridewell and the Old Vic by Barbara Longford

On 27 March, thirty-two members attended the Tower Theatre Company's amateur production of *The Deep Blue Sea* at the Bridewell Theatre, near the journalists' church in Fleet Street. The star of the show was TRS member Jane Dodd, an Olivier Award-winning actress who trained at the E15 Acting School and the Meisner Centre, LA.

It was a bitterly cold evening, but fortunately our a pre-theatre supper at the nearby Punch Tavern consisted of good, solid comfort food, which went down a treat. A most successful and fairly inexpensive evening.

Then, on 6 April, fifty members and their guests attended a matinee of Lindsay Posner's superb production of *The Winslow Boy* at the Old Vic. Everyone enjoyed it enormously. Lloyd Evans in *The Spectator* began his review with "Thank God for *The Winslow Boy*. Terence Rattigan's masterpiece." and ended with "Let's not forget the script which, line by line and beat by beat, is an absolute miracle of dramatic craftsmanship. Not the least of Rattigan's achievements is to take the full span of a long-running and multi-layered court case and to condense the significant details into conversations conducted in a family sitting-room. Astonishing. With *The Judas Kiss* due to close, this show takes its place as the best play in London."

Thirty-one of us dined later at a nearby family-run Italian restaurant, La Barca. Elena Salvoni was the star and was feted by the waiters, who know her to be a legend in the catering business. Another happy evening in the Society's calendar. ☺

Sandroyd tree-planting, cont. from p1

When he left, the entry in the school magazine read as follows: "*T M Rattigan joined in January 1920. 7th scholar to Harrow. Leading member of two teams which in 26 matches have only twice known defeat. As a goalkeeper he has done splendid service for two football seasons. He has quick perceptions and a natural sense of style and is gaining rapidly to use them wisely and effectively. He has taken a leading part here in things grave and gay, and we look for a useful and successful career at Harrow*".

The day was capped by an unexpected coincidence: as we left the assembly hall, the school's Head of IT, Toby Carson, introduced himself as the great-grandson of Sir Edward Carson, counsel in the Archer-Shee case on which Rattigan based *The Winslow Boy*. Our thanks go to the headmaster and his wife, his teaching team and pupils for making us so welcome and for so warmly embracing the commemoration of the young Terence Rattigan's formative years. ☺

Dates for your diary

The British Film Institute is showing the 1958 American version of *Separate Tables* at the BFI on the Southbank on **Tuesday 25 June** at 20.40 in NFT2 and also on **Sunday 30 June** at 18.20 at NFT3. It stars Burt Lancaster, David Niven, Rita Hayworth and Deborah Kerr. The Box Office number is 020 7928 3232.

We have persuaded the V&A to hold a TRS event on **Monday 15 July** in their lecture theatre at 6.30pm. The programme is entitled **An Evening on Terence Rattigan with Princess Galitzine** and will involve committee members, acted excerpts from the plays, drinks afterwards, as well as some reminiscences from our President. You may book via the V&A, stating that you are a TRS member. Cost £15. Tel: 020 7942 2277/78.

TRS Treasurer Andrew Kenyon is directing The Ladbroke Players in an amateur production of *The Browning Version* on **Saturday 9 November 2013**. There will be a TRS outing to either the matinee or evening performance—to be advised. Please note that our **Annual General Meeting** will take place at an adjacent venue, prior to the performance, with an optional meal available.

Also in the autumn we are hoping to have a visit to the British Library (which houses some of Rattigan's papers and manuscripts). Professor Dan Rebellato will be giving a talk. Watch this space for details.

Contributions to the next edition should be sent to the editor via email (gc@gilescole.com) by Saturday 27 July.

Masterclass at Rose Bruford, cont. from p3

Our students, one suspects, were not naturally attuned to the Rattigan world in style and movement and they responded well – even gratefully – to Adrian's encouragement. It might have helped to get to the heart of the matter if a modest gesture away from the standard student garb of jeans and t-shirts had been made; nevertheless, the exchanges in both scenes were revealing and improved significantly as Adrian subtly shaped them. First was the scene where Kate Winslow reveals her former fiancé's engagement to a General's daughter, and then we had the famous seduction scene from *The Sleeping Prince*.

The evening was arranged by our drama school liaison committee member, Lizzie Donnelly, in conjunction with the College's Associate Director of Research, Dr Paul Fryer.

It concluded with a glass or two of wine and a chance for discourse with the director and performers. This was a highly enjoyable and informative occasion, and an insightful glimpse into the intimacy and working methods of a professional theatre rehearsal. Let us hope that more drama schools such as Rose Bruford and Central may be persuaded to essay full length Rattigans for our delight. ☺