



# The Rattigan

The Newsletter of  
The Terence Rattigan Society

ISSUE No. 24 April 2018

# Version

## A Day in Broadstairs

*Hazel Kerr reports on the winning play's premiere*

The sun shone brightly as the High Speed train from St. Pancras (other trains & routes are available!) pulled into Broadstairs. This quaint seaside town, perhaps unsurprisingly, retains a Dickensian atmosphere. A quick jaunt down to the beach reveals hidden gems en route such as Wormwold's Magic Emporium, a quirky little shop displaying all kinds of fantastic wizardry.

The Dickens House Museum on the seafront promenade is closed during the winter months, but looming up on the nearby hill overlooking the sea, stands the forbidding Bleak House where Dickens spent summer holidays and wrote many of his great works including *David Copperfield*. The house was known as Fort House when Dickens holidayed there but was renamed in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as it was thought to have been the model for the Bleak House of Dickens' novel.

After this pleasant detour it was time to head up to the Sarah Thorne Theatre run by TRS member Michael Wheatley-Ward. The theatre is named after the legendary actress and theatre manager of the Theatre Royal Margate, who made her stage debut in 1848, opened one of the country's first Schools of Acting in 1885 and made her final stage performance in 1898. We were extremely fortunate in that both the Society's President, David Suchet and four of our Vice Presidents, Michael Darlow, Julian Fellowes (accompanied by Lady Fellowes), Greta Scacchi and Geoffrey Wansell were able to attend. Both David and Julian were members of the judging panel of the award as well as being Patrons of the Sarah Thorne Theatre. Its third Patron, Dame Judi Dench, was with us in spirit,

having sent a beautiful good wishes bouquet which was given pride of place on the Prosecco table!

After the welcome speeches, we took our seats for the premiere performance given by the Sarah Thorne Theatre Company of Roy Kendall's winning play *The Onion at the End*, sensitively directed by Michael Friend. The title comes from a device used in the days of variety to close an act with something which leaves



*At the after show party the cast meet our VPs. (l-r) Lainey Shaw, Alexander Hulme, Johanna Pearson-Farr, David Suchet, Clive Greenwood, Julian Fellowes, Stephen Martin-Bradley and Edward Broomfield. (Photo by Giles Cole)*

the audience with a tear in their eyes.

Set in the seaside town of Southport in the depression, it follows the fortunes of two amiable end-of-the-pier entertainers, Bob and Jimmy, trying to make a scant living from their somewhat scant talent. The very impressive naturalistic set, dressed with period props, by Caitlin Line, and with sound effects by David Gilbrook, evoked perfectly the drab 1930s seaside boarding house where our two hopeful

protagonists are lodging with determined landlady Rose Hoskins and her ailing son Teddy.

Their double act is called *First & Last* played, respectively, by Alexander Hulme and Stephen Martin-Bradley. Both ease themselves nicely into the roles, creating very assured performances as the play progresses.

With the duo experiencing limited success, mainly due to their poor timing, theatre owner Dan, played with gusto by Sarah Thorne regular Clive Greenwood,

insists they speak in rhyme when offstage to improve their timing. This is much to the delight of young Teddy, endearingly played by Edward Broomfield in his professional stage debut. Teddy is an electronics enthusiast with ambitions of becoming a stage manager but his deteriorating health doesn't allow this wish to be fulfilled.

Lainey Shaw as Rose beautifully conveys her warmer maternal feelings towards the end of the play in contrast to the comical and often stern demeanour displayed in the first act, and there is strong support from Johanna Pearson-Farr, another Sarah Thorne regular, as showgirl Dilly Williams who is having an affair with Dan.

Eventually the rhyming technique bears fruit to the point where Dan feels confident enough to let *First & Last* fill a slot on a BBC variety show. However this opportunity coincides with Teddy's condition becoming critical and while Bob reluctantly leaves to catch the train for the show, Jimmy forgoes his big chance and remains with Rose to comfort the dying Teddy. This touching final scene brought a tear to many an eye in the audience, so there was certainly an onion at the end!

Following the performance, we were treated to a buffet tea, laid on by the hardworking volunteer staff, which gave us an opportunity to meet the cast and other creatives. I had huge admiration for the actors. With only one week's rehearsal, it was some feat to get the piece up and on its feet and to bring Roy's characters to such life. A glimpse into what weekly rep must have been like!

Having chatted to various Society members



(L-r) Michael Darlow, Barbara Longford, Julian Fellowes, David Suchet, Geoffrey Wansell and Greta Scacchi. (Photo by Giles Cole)

throughout the course of the day, it was clear that all had thoroughly enjoyed the trip. For those of us who come from London, utterly spoilt for choice when it comes to theatres of all sizes, it was truly uplifting to see that Broadstairs sustains an excellent functioning theatre, lovingly run by a group of loyal volunteers and supported by an engaged local community.

So, many congratulations, not only to Roy Kendall, but also to all involved at the Sarah Thorne Theatre - and to Barbara Longford, for yet again arranging for the sun to shine at a TRS outing!

The winner Roy Kendall sent this note after the performance.

*I just wanted to thank you and the TRS for that wonderful gala afternoon on Saturday and for giving me a most enjoyable and satisfying experience from first reading on the previous Wednesday to the last night on Sunday. Michael Wheatley-Ward, Michael Friend and that fine group of actors - not to mention the crew and the volunteers at the Sarah Thorne - were nothing but helpful and welcoming. It was indeed a most memorable experience.*

*I'd also like to say a large thank you to David Suchet and Julian Fellowes for making the effort to come down and see the production. It was very much appreciated by actors and writer alike!*

*Finally I'd like to thank you all for getting Onion up in front of an audience (well, up in front of five audiences actually) when it otherwise may not have found one. I would very much like to see it published one day and certainly hope we might see a future production at some point.*

# The Sarah Thorne Theatre - Some Reflections

It took a nine hour round trip travelling to get to the world premiere of *The Onion At The End*, writes Roger Mills, but it was so worthwhile. Not just for the play, which being one of the few that I did not read for the award came as a pleasant surprise, but for the venue.

I can imagine some being a tad sniffy about the Sarah Thorne Theatre in Broadstairs. Yes it is small, yes it is equipped in a way that made this aging refugee from the sound desk feel right at home, yes it is run largely by volunteers, yes it was clearly built to a price in a mediocre architectural period, yes it is miles from the West End.

But when I looked at the lack-lustre 2018 programme just announced for the massively subsidised Chichester Festival Theatre I found the Sarah Thorne model increasingly attractive. (And not just because the jovial face of that everlasting South Lancashire jazz trombonist Derek 'Hitchcock' Galloway was staring at me out of a *Temperance Seven* poster.) More proof that you don't need to be metropolitan, flashy, or employ big names to build an audience if your heart is in the right place.

Coincidentally, research for a client took me back to 1972's power cuts when evening entertainment went on courtesy of every showman's generator in the country. I thought for the first time in all those years of a Cheltenham Everyman revival of *A Streetcar* with the late Rosemary Leach as Blanche. We enjoyed that by the light of two floods when the mains went off. The carefully archived programme

was a reminder of how Malcolm Farquhar built a tremendous audience for things like the rarely done Peter Luke *Hadrian the Seventh* and such bizarre casting as Peter Goodwright in Shakespeare. It was a community theatre back then and in his programme note general manager Rae Hammond listed the many volunteers needed to keep things going. But it was also a powerful producing house whereas these days it seems to only receive touring shows. (Admittedly I think Malcolm took one of Cyril Fletcher's pantos each year.)

The Sarah Thorne reminded me powerfully of that time and proved that there is another way. We need more low cost, simple, locally grounded venues especially when, like the Sarah Thorne, they are willing to provide local work for local professionals in a rep season and an outlet for new work not specially commissioned. Without the Sarah Thorne there would have been no performance of the winning play, a prize separating us from most other new play awards.

Throughout the award process both David Suchet and Julian Fellowes stressed just how much theatre people depend on luck. It strikes me that with a few more Sarah Thornes about there would be a bit more luck going. The young actors I spoke to certainly thought so. They probably know only too well that without venues like these, and the unpaid folk who run them, most professionals across the whole gamut of live entertainment, not just theatre, would struggle to make a living.

## COMING EVENTS

**Saturday 12 May 2018** *The Winslow Boy* at the Richmond Theatre. Michael Darlow recently reckoned that after the early part of its tour this production 'had grown into one of the best and most moving I have ever seen'. This will be followed by an early optional supper at The Duke, which is a five-minute walk from the theatre.

**Tuesday 10 July 2018** *The Annual Birthday Dinner* at the Oxford and Cambridge Club. The guest of honour and speaker will be John Bertolini, Ellis Professor of Liberal Arts at Vermont's Middlebury College. A booking form is enclosed with this newsletter.

### **Saturday 13th October, 2018**

Annual General Meeting and rehearsed reading of *The Rattigan Affair* by Lynda Strudwick. This play was one of the runners-up of The TRS Award. I am at Doggett's Coat & Badge, 1 Blackfriars Bridge, SE1. As in 2017, a buffet lunch will be included and a booking form will appear in a future newsletter.

**Saturday 24 November 2018** *Flare Path* at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama. This student production will be assisted by the first French Award, in honour of Harold and Pegs French and sponsored by Dr Holly Hill. A Society visit will be arranged, preceded by a buffet reception. Performance at 2.30 pm.



## The Terence Rattigan Society

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[committee@theterencerattigansociety.co.uk](mailto:committee@theterencerattigansociety.co.uk)

[www.theterencerattigansociety.co.uk](http://www.theterencerattigansociety.co.uk)

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# The Late Douglas Julien Strachan Gordon

## *Barbara Longford celebrates the life of one of our founder members*

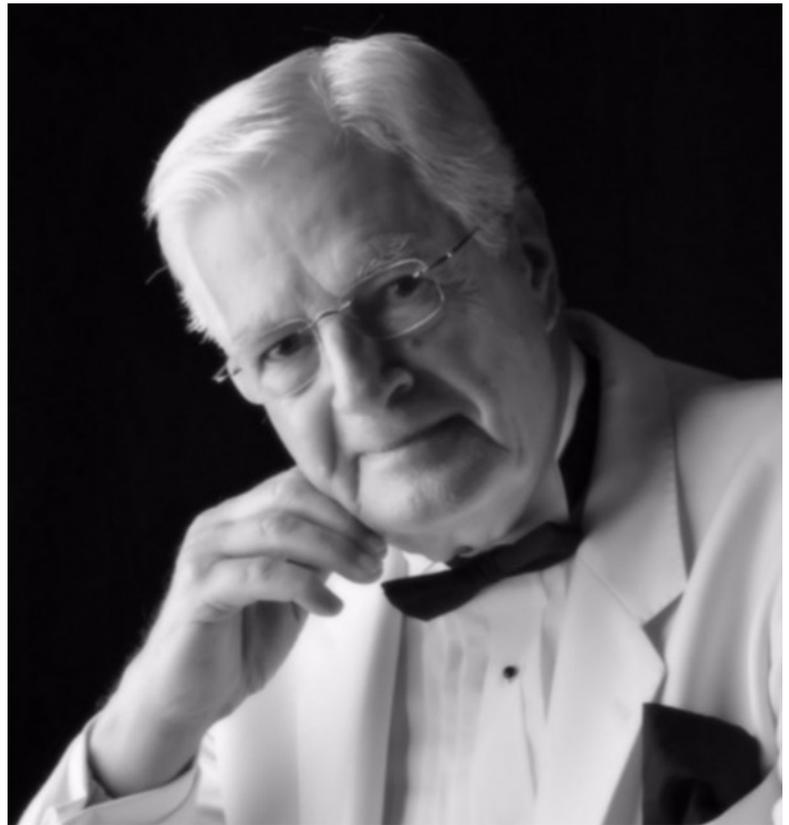
A magnificent memorial service to honour Douglas Gordon, our late Founder Member, took place at St. Nicholas Church, Shepperton on Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> January, 2018. This fine 17<sup>th</sup> century church, with gated pews, was packed with friends from all areas of Douglas's spectacular life.

Douglas was a popular and well-loved member of our Society and it is a tribute to his humility that we knew so little about his achievements. But his partner, Michael Chen told the congregation that: *"After leaving Westminster School in London, the young and adventurous Douglas sailed across the Atlantic and started his college life in the USA. After a year at Pomfret, Connecticut, he was awarded a scholarship from the Cornell University to study hotel management and graduated in 1952. In the summer of that year, he hitch-hiked from NYC to San Francisco, which took a week with two stops over at Omaha, Nebraska and Denver Colorado. He then moved south to Monterey California, where he worked at a B&B for three months. In October 1952, he returned to England and for the next ten years, he worked at the Mount Royal Hotel, Marble Arch, the Royal Hotel, Scarborough, a hotel in Nice and the Grosvenor House, Park Lane."*

Douglas's heart was always in the theatre, but his parents would not countenance the idea of his trying to make a career on stage. A talented dancer and singer, he was delighted when Ralph Reader, the British actor, theatrical producer and singer, invited him to join the cast of *The Gang Show* he was staging at the Golders Green Hippodrome. Begun by Reader before the war as a variety entertainment staged by the Scouting movement, the Gang Shows were then at the height of their popularity. Douglas met Ralph during his Grosvenor House days when Douglas had also become Assistant Scout Master to the 56<sup>th</sup> Westminster Sea Scout Troop, whose HQ was nearby.

He made a huge number of friends through the Gang Shows, including the late actor, Roger Rees, whose obituary Douglas wrote for the December 2015 edition of this magazine (Issue No. 16). When we gathered for supper after the service I spoke to many of the Gang Show boys who testified to Douglas's kindness, loyalty, warmth and great generosity.

Douglas's career as an employee in the hotel business culminated in his becoming Assistant Manager of the London Hilton, where he oversaw its opening in 1962. In 1965, he was able to start his own business and bought the Warren Lodge Hotel in Shepperton, just across the square from St. Nicholas Church. The previous owners



had left under a cloud and the hotel was derelict, with only four bedrooms and a bar. Douglas's many friends from the Gang Shows helped him to design and re-build the hotel.

His friend from Gang Show days, David Clay, told the congregation: *"In those early days he did virtually everything from making the early morning tea to acting as night porter and lived modestly in the loft space. He soon developed the hotel and then bought the boatyard next door for further expansion. He had tremendous energy and drive and went on to build a successful hotel business adding the Anchor and the Ship to the group in addition to the old shop in the square and staff accommodation in Shepperton and, of course, the hotels in his beloved Florida."*

All Douglas's hard work paid off and the Warren Lodge, conveniently situated for the Shepperton Studios, became a favourite hotel for many artists. Michael Chen told us that Douglas had hosted a number of movie stars over the years. Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor visited for lunch on many occasions and other guests included Julie Walters, Ronnie Corbett, Dora Bryan, John Cleese and Roger Daltrey of The Who, who later presented Douglas with his gold disk for *Tommy*. One of Douglas's fondest memories was when Laurence Olivier stayed for two weeks. Douglas used to take breakfast to his room and on a couple of occasions Olivier invited Douglas to have dinner with him at the hotel.

At the funeral, Karl Green, of the 1960s pop group Herman's Hermits, sang *There's a Kind of Hush All Over*

*the World*, for which the group had been awarded a gold disc. Karl told us that when the group first stayed at the Warren Lodge, they'd wanted to stay up late in the bar and Douglas (who had to be up at sparrow's fart to get the breakfasts) simply gave them the bar key and asked them to lock up afterwards, jot down what they had had to drink and just settle up the next day. I think everyone in the congregation would have recognised this act of kindness and generosity to a group of young people as typical of the warmth and generosity of Douglas's heart. Later on, the group gave their gold disc to Douglas - one of his prized possessions.

Before entertaining us with the song *A House is Not a Home* Peter Straker, a singer and actor who appeared in the original production of *Hair* in 1968, told us he was one of the assistant painters in the early days at the hotel. He too was a friend from the Gang Show days.

Latterly, Douglas and his partner Michael became members of the Weybridge Male Voice Choir, who performed two songs at the service.

I knew Douglas for only the last 12 years of his life but I was so proud to call him a friend. We met in 2006 at a weekend conference on Noel Coward, at St. Catherine's, Oxford and warmed to one another immediately. In 2008, Douglas was amongst the members of the Noel Coward Society who took over the Burgh Island Hotel for a Coward weekend. On the list of guests and their home cities were Bobi (Barbara) Sanderson and Dr. Jim Griffith from Sarasota, Florida. Douglas (a Florida hotel owner) had never met them but it turned out he had lived a few doors down from Bobi, for several years. Bobi and Jim, Douglas and Michael and Patrick and I subsequently spent an unforgettable week together in Sarasota and Michael and Douglas visited Florida quite often and became close to Bobi and Jim.

When Douglas first attended an AGM of the Noel Coward Society he presented us with a framed sketch, by Edward Molyneux, of the provocative backless gown he designed for Gertrude Lawrence to wear in the original 1930 production of *Private Lives*. Molyneux was a friend of one of Douglas's relatives, who had given it to him. The sketch was lent to various Coward-related exhibitions around the world and Douglas was delighted to learn that it now has pride of place in the Coward Room at Alan Brodie Representation. (Alan is both Coward's and Rattigan's agent.) Douglas was an active member of the NCS, TRS and Stephen Sondheim Society and himself founded the Michael Feinstein Appreciation Society, in the 1970s.

David Clay told me that Ralph Reader wrote a song for the farewell London Gang Show in 1974 which included the lines: "...*We've been making memories and if you're very smart.. You'll take each little memory and lock it in the pocket of our heart*".

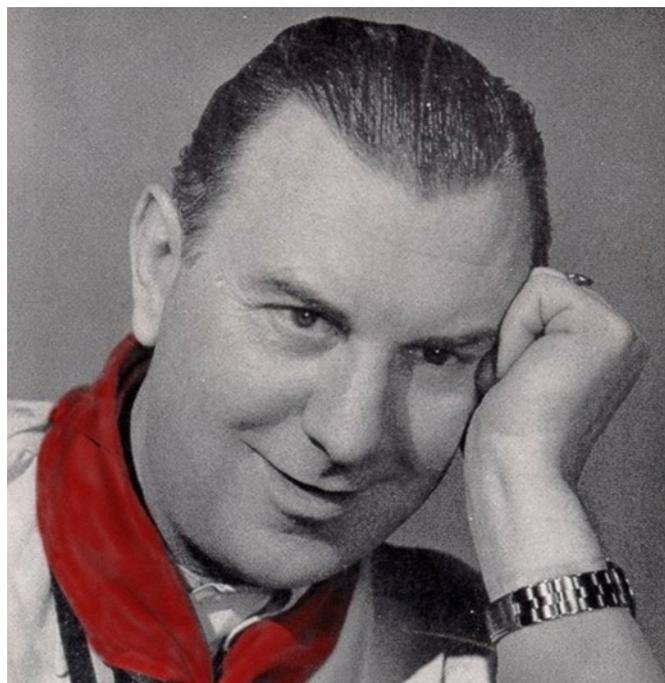
David concluded his tribute as follows: "*We will each have our own special memory of Douglas and I am sure we will lock it in the pocket of our heart*". I think Douglas would have loved this finale.

## Ralph Reader?

It occurred to me, *writes Barbara Longford*, that mentions of Ralph Reader will mean nothing to younger members and may even have faded from the memories of the rest of us. Ralph Reader, CBE, was born just eight years before Terence Rattigan and their backgrounds were very different. Ralph was the son of a Salvation Army bandmaster, but was orphaned by the age of eight. He joined the Scout movement aged 11 and put on scout shows. His early jobs were as a delivery boy, a telegram messenger and, at 15, an office boy at a cement works. Aged only 17 in 1920, Ralph moved to the USA working in various menial jobs, while acting and directing off-Broadway shows. Aged 21, he choreographed his first Broadway show and on returning to England he produced and choreographed West End productions, notably performances at Drury Lane and the Hippodrome. In 1932, Ralph anonymously staged his first all-scout variety show *The Gang's All Here*, featuring 150 boy scouts largely from London's East End, performing sketches, songs and dance numbers. In 1933 *The Gang Show Comes Back* played to capacity houses and the public and press began to refer to The Gang Show as a brand. In 1934 with Ralph acknowledged as their producer the shows went from strength to strength. In 1937 they became the first amateurs to appear at a Royal Variety Performance, sharing the billing with Gracie Fields, George Formby jnr and Max Miller.

As well as writing the material, Ralph Reader also sang and danced in the shows and was also a prolific songwriter. His best known songs being *On the Crest of a Wave* and *Strollin'*, made famous by Bud Flanagan in the Crazy Gang shows.

Ralph Reader can be seen (with one of the editor's personal heroes the late Billy Cotton snr) in a short clip at <https://youtu.be/hQAUNbikBRI>



# Introducing Michael Gaunt

Michael Gaunt, our Drama School Liaison committee member, was born in Harrow-on-the-Hill and his formative years were spent first in South Brent and then Totnes in South Devon. His father had been invalided out of WWII and for health reasons settled in the South West.

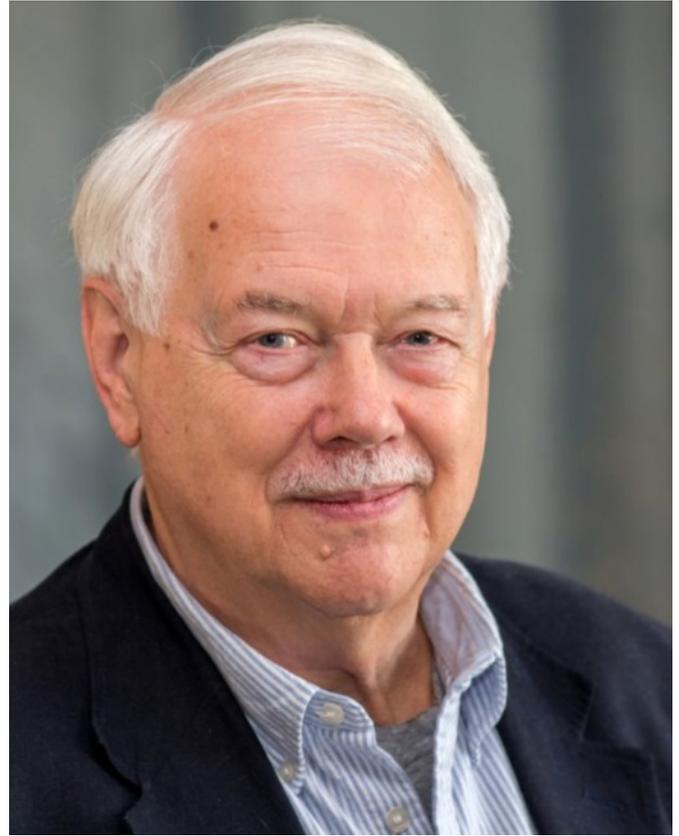
Michael's first acting experience was in the South Brent village hall where he played the boy in Dodie Smith's play *Dear Octopus* with the local dramatic society. He later acted regularly with the Buckfast Players in Ashburton, frequently cycling the eight miles from Totnes to rehearsals when a lift was not available!

His National Service was with the Royal Air Force towards the end of the 1950s. Square bashing commenced one November day in the land of mists and rains known as RAF Padgate close to Warrington. This was not a good time to be a National Serviceman as troops were being sent variously to Korea, Malaya, Aden, Cyprus, and Egypt; in addition to the Cold War, the Hungarian Uprising had just taken place. Michael trained to be a radar operator at RAF Worth Matravers in Dorset, but as his training ended the radar system involved became obsolete and rather than re-train in a new system he opted to switch to administrating a Reserve Flight. At 18 he was one of two airmen awaiting their posting. The other boy burst into tears when he learned he was being posted to Cyprus; Michael was posted to RAF Hope Cove near Kingsbridge in South Devon – 17 miles on his Velocette motor bike from the family home!

How to become an actor was the next challenge. First Michael applied to be a teacher and was accepted at King Alfred's College, now the University of Winchester, where he studied Education, English and Art. He knew that on completion of the training at Winchester he would be eligible to audition for one of 18 places available on a one year drama course at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama. The audition was successful and on completion of the course he began his career as a 'strolling player' starting with the rep company at the Castle Theatre in Farnham, Surrey.

Over the next 20 years he worked with numerous repertory companies and also began directing. Seasons at Eastbourne and Dundee especially enabled him to consolidate knowledge as both an actor and director. With Roy Plomley and Paul Elliott he set up a weekly rep season at Rhyl in North Wales for two seasons. Here he learned the basics of directing, Paul learned the fundamentals of theatre management and Roy wrote plays that were staged during the seasons. He and Roy were part of the management team with Cameron Mackintosh who began his producing career when they presented a summer season at Henley's Kenton Theatre in 1967 – Michael directed the season – company members included Simon Williams, Tom Baker, John Challis and Eric Lander.

On television Michael acted in *Armchair Theatre*



plays; *Screen 2* plays; played opposite John Thaw in *Redcap*; appeared in several episodes of *Softly, Softly: Task Force*; *Dixon of Dock Green*; *The Brothers*; *Blake's Seven*; *Hazell*; *Lillie* and *Van der Valk*. He was also a BBC TV *Jackanory* story teller and read a number of the Rupert Bear adventures.

In between he had the pleasure of directing UK touring productions including: *Ladies in Retirement* starring Renee Houston; *Private Lives* starring Conrad Phillips; *The Amorous Prawn* starring Evelyn Laye and Barry Sinclair. He was also asked to direct *A Matter of Choice* starring Sarah Churchill at the Mickery Theatre in Amsterdam.

Over a period of 19 years he trained actors, first as principal of the Guildford School of Acting (University of Surrey) (GSA) and then as principal at the Birmingham School of Speech & Drama (Birmingham City University). While in Guildford Michael established a very successful exchange programme with the Russian Institute of Theatre Arts (GITIS) in Moscow which ran for 5 years, where he also directed, and Santa Monica College in California.

His UK drama school productions travelled to Moscow, Brussels, Hong Kong and Santa Monica. In the USA he has given classes in a number of universities, including those at the University of California, Santa Barbara, Kutztown University, Pennsylvania, and Penn State University, and Regent University (Virginia Beach) in Virginia, visiting over five years and giving classical acting workshops - where he also directed a production

of Sheridan's *The Rivals*.

His last acting engagement in 2002 was for Thelma Holt, when he played Alonso in *The Tempest* which starred Richard Briers; the production opened at the Plymouth Theatre Royal and went on to the King's Theatre Edinburgh, Malvern Festival Theatre, Theatre Royal Nottingham, Yvonne Arnaud Guildford and the Theatre Royal Norwich. His last production was Rattigan's *The Deep Blue Sea* which was seen at the Yvonne Arnaud's Mill Studio Theatre in June 2017. Another Mill Studio production (as yet unnamed) is planned for autumn 2018

Michael is a Fellow of the Royal Scottish Academy

of Music & Drama: Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. He is a previous chair of the Society for Theatre Research (STR) and a former committee member of the Irving Society (IS). His spare time is spent researching acting styles for the period 1800-1850 and this interest has taken him to archives in New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Washington, in addition to British archives. He has given talks on David Garrick (Royal Society of Arts), George Frederick Cooke (STR Cambridge Conference), Edmund Kean (Richmond Local History Society), William Charles Macready & Edwin Forrest (STR) and Henry Irving (IS).

[www.michael-gaunt.co.uk](http://www.michael-gaunt.co.uk)

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## The Harold & Pegs French Fund Award

### *Holly Hill introduces her new Society Award*

Imagine full houses for Terence Rattigan's plays in fifty, one hundred, hundreds of years from now. Happy thoughts, and a goal that the TRS can further right now by engaging young theatre professionals' and playgoers' enthusiasm and support for Rattigan's work. With this end in mind, I have committed a yearly sum to the Society.

Our Committee brilliantly suggested that this could be used to support a production of a Rattigan play each year by a drama school. And to develop the new programme, the Committee found the superbly qualified Professor Michael Gaunt. A theatre director; acting teacher; drama school principal; theatre historian and also Chairman of The Society for Theatre Research and a Fellow of the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, Professor Gaunt generously accepted the Committee's invitation to join it as Drama Liaison Director. Michael has arranged for the Royal Central School of Drama (whose alumni include Olivier, Ashcroft, Dench, four Redgraves, Michael Grandage and relative youngsters Andrew Garfield and Kit Harrington) to stage *Flare Path*. TRS members are invited to the Saturday, 24 November performance.

When we were considering a name for this new venture, I thought of Harold and Pegs French. Harold French, as we all know, was the director of Rattigan's first great success *French Without Tears*, in 1936. Harold and his second wife Pegs were close friends and eventually caregiver-companions of Sir Terence, with him through his final illness and death. At the last, as Michael Darlow movingly wrote in his Rattigan biography: "...with Pegs French sitting beside him...he gave a slight smile and his head dropped on to her shoulder."

I well remember the great kindness shown to me by Pegs French while I was working on my Ph.D dissertation *A Critical Analysis of the Plays of Terence Rattigan*. In the summer of 1975, Pegs, acting as Sir Terence's personal assistant, welcomed me into his Albany chambers to work with his papers. I was allowed to take

away, study and copy everything, including his juvenilia, the three versions of *The Deep Blue Sea*, his scrapbooks of press cuttings and countless other treasures now in the British Library. I was nervous all the time that my bedsit might burn down, or I'd be hit by a car and the papers I was carrying would scatter. What a priceless privilege I was given (and what a clever and kind way to keep a graduate student from being underfoot in Sir Terence's home).

After Sir Terence's death, I saw Harold and Pegs frequently in London. We had silly fun. Harold won the snooker tournament at his club and wore the Snooker Champion shirt I had made for him; Pegs and I met for lunch and tea. Once we were at the Ritz tearoom when all the guests were asked to go out into the garden because of a fire alarm upstairs. Several glasses of champagne later, I asked for the bill and we were told that there was none; the Ritz apologized for our inconvenience! We celebrated when I was named New York Theatre Correspondent for *The Times* in 1984; I was very grateful that they knew that the student to whom they were so nice was having a success.

So, for all that Harold and Pegs French meant to me and, more importantly, for all that they meant to Rattigan and Rattigan meant to them, I am thrilled that the TRS will have a component known as The French Fund - short for The Harold and Pegs French Memorial Fund. I hope that Society members will come to the 24 November performance of *Flare Path* at the Royal Central School of Drama to support a new generation of theatre artists performing the work of Terence Rattigan.

### Harold French?

Harold French is one of those characters who worked pretty well continuously in the post-war home film and TV industry without ever really becoming a 'name'. Born in London in 1897 or 1900 (sources vary) he trained as an actor at Italia Conti but by 1930 had turned to directing. His biggest stage success was the premiere production of *French Without Tears*. From that point on he and Rattigan worked together on projects indeed

French's last film was *The Man Who Loved Redheads* and, as Holly Hill records above, the friendship lasted until the end. His first wife Phyllis died in the blitz in 1941 and he married Pegs in 1947. Profiled on *This is Your Life* in 1970, the guest list included Richard Briers, Basil Dean, Roland Culver, Richard Todd, Amanda Barrie, Kenneth More and Terence Rattigan. French died in 1997.

He worked for pretty well every UK studio, and Disney on the film *Rob Roy, The Highland Rogue*. His first film, though, is credited to someone else. From the opening frame Gabriel Pascal claims *Major Barbara* as his own but in French's own words. "I co-directed quite a lot of that with David Lean. Pascal knew nothing at all about directing and in the end he paid me quite a lot of money not to have my name on it as a director.

Gabby hadn't the slightest idea. I mean, sometimes he would look through a view-finder the wrong way around!"

Looking at French's oeuvre in 2018 I suppose you'd best describe it as the kind of fare that was popular with Channel 4 and the Beeb for afternoon and small hours output in the early days of daytime telly. Solid, workmanlike, divertingly entertaining but essentially of its time. His film collaborations with Rattigan are *The*



*Day Will Dawn* (1942), *English Without Tears* (1944) and *The Man Who Loved Redheads* (1955).

Although I really can't get on with *English Without Tears* I've just been re-watching his Claude Rains vehicle *The Man Who Watched The Trains Go By*, superbly photographed by Otto Heller, for which French also had a writing credit, and it stands up very well. There's a nostalgic glow around *Quiet Weekend*, again stunningly photographed this time by Eric Cross, which lets one forgive the essential twee-ness of the subject matter and for the rest I've seen all are at the very least watchable.

That's largely because French worked with every character actor you could find on a list which

might be called 'British Film Fixtures of the Forties and Fifties' and got top work out of them too.

If this new award encourages people to look into just who Harold French was and the artistic world he inhabited the Society will have scored yet another achievement. The post war UK film industry has a lot to offer those with eyes to see and they could do worse than find a way in with Harold. *Roger Mills*

## RATTIGAN'S RECIPES

Rex Bunnett of Overtures Trust was going through his late partner's collection of cook books (many!) and found one dated 1952 which he thought might interest us. It was a charity publication in which people of the theatre gave their favourite recipe. Amongst the about 250 people were all the theatre nobility of the time. It's rather interesting as it is post war and there were still shortages. Cheese was basically cheddar and wine came from France! Alone amongst the contributors, Terence Rattigan had two printed. If you try them let us know how good they are! You can visit Rex's website at [overtures.org.uk](http://overtures.org.uk)

### Cheese Short Paste

**R**UB a  $\frac{1}{4}$  of a pound of plain flour through a sieve, then mix with 2 ounces of butter until smooth. Add a pinch of salt and pepper, 2 ounces of grated cheese, 1 raw egg (whole) and mix all into a stiff paste with cold water.

Roll out and cut into strips two and a half inches long, and one inch wide. Twist into plaits and cook in hot oven until brown, or cut into fancy biscuit shapes.

This paste is also suitable for tartlets or flan cases for savoury mixtures.

TERENCE RATTIGAN

### Little Chickens stuffed with Cucumber in White Wine Sauce

**C**HOOSE four even-sized pousins, prepare for roasting. Rub breasts with lemon juice.

Peel a cucumber, remove centre and pips, cut into very small pieces. Chop finely one rasher of lean bacon, mix with cucumber, add a cupful of white breadcrumbs and season well with salt and pepper. Bind with an egg.

Stuff the birds carefully with the cucumber forcemeat and roast them (if possible in butter) basting frequently. Ten minutes before the birds are done, pour over them a glass of white wine. Baste once or twice again.

Serve the birds on fried bread with the juices from the roasting tin poured over them. The gravy can be thickened with a little sieved flour.

*Terence Rattigan.*