



The Rattigan

The Newsletter of
The Terence Rattigan Society

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Version

Having a Ball at Oxford!

Roger Mills reports on our second Harold & Pegs French Award production

Welcoming us to the Oxford School of Drama founder and Principal George Peck, I think, astonished many-probably all-by revealing that the school was the first to revive *After the Dance* preceding the 2002 Cockpit Theatre revival and leading Michael Billington to take the trip to North Oxford to see the show.

Billington, George told us, had this to say: *“As with No 11 buses, so with this early 1939 play by Terence Rattigan: you wait ages for a revival and then two come along at once. Dominic Dromgoole is to direct the play in the autumn. But he has been pipped at the post by the enterprising Oxford School of Drama who prove it to be a fascinating exploration of Rattigan's abiding theme: the inequality of passion and the fatal danger of repressing feeling.”*

“So if that isn't a good reason for doing the play,” George continued, “I don't know what it. I mean he is a great craftsman. We love doing his plays as they are good vehicles to teach the students because they have strong characters strong narratives and wonderfully observed human nature.”

Outlining the history of the school George said: “I started this school thirty three years ago. I had been an actor and one of my very first performances in the profession was playing Mr Gilbert in *The Browning Version*. A small but important part as you will know.”

“And I was very taken by what I think was a love of the living language of theatre and Coward Pinter and Rattigan. They epitomised the living language of theatre, a language that somehow lives in you after you have seen the play. It is the responsibility of actors and actors have to make that work.”

“So it became a life-long passion of mine to work with young people and try and give them that love of language and I think we have, here, managed to do something to bring that back to the young actors of today.”

“We are a very small but select school we only take



Chairman Barbara Longford presents our cheque to George Peck

three percent of the people that apply to us. Unlike some the famous drama schools now with hundreds and hundreds of students we have only 38 graduates a year. We work very hard with them.”

“We came here after starting in Oxford. You can't really find premises in the city. So I sold my house and I bought this derelict farm not because I needed a large house but because I thought that eventually we could convert those buildings, as we have done.”

“We bus the students here in the morning from around Oxford and they are here all day with no distractions so they can only concentrate on their work, but they are delightful and we are very lucky that people gravitate to us and become our supporters.”

“And the school has been a tremendous success. But it is the playwrights who have given the students that real sense of what it's like to touch people with fundamental human truths.”

Replying, our chairman Barbara Longford said: “George and Kate, on behalf of us all, thank you for welcoming us into your home for what is only the second occasion in the history of The Terence Rattigan Society, when we have been able to sponsor the production of a Terence Rattigan play by drama students.”

“As most of you know our Vice President, the American academic, Dr. Holly Hill, decided to give the Society a grant of £1,000 per year, to use as we saw fit. We decided to use these funds to encourage drama schools to put on a Rattigan play.”

“Holly wanted to call her award The French Fund, in honour of Harold French, who directed the first production of *French Without Tears* and his wife, Pegs, who became Terence Rattigan’s personal assistant and who was with him when he died. Also, Harold and Pegs had helped Holly when she was writing her dissertation on Terence Rattigan, by giving her access to his papers at his set in Albany.”

“The first £1,000 from The French Fund was given last year to The Royal Central School of Speech & Drama and, for the second, Professor Michael Gaunt suggested approaching the Oxford School because of its outstanding reputation and because George was known to him personally. Michael is very sad not to be able to be with us this evening, but he is recovering from a recent knee operation. It only remains for me to present the Society’s cheque for one thousand pounds.”

And so we went off to a sparkling production in maybe the smallest theatre I’d ever visited produced as a sort of relay race! Explanation below.

First the Theatre. A little studio space. But very flexible and very intimate (run out of chairs and you sit on the floor). I know I’m always on about ‘nought feet’ and you don’t get ‘noughtier’ than this. But what a joy. Simple set, basic white lighting, no frills, no distractions.

Relay race? School founder George Peck warned us that to give as many students as possible a chance parts would be doubled and some trebled! I admit I paled at the thought, but it was cleverly seamless and in its own way exhilarating.

There was enough about the performances that was unified to enable one to appreciate the nuances individual actors brought to each role. It just stymies the critic. You can’t hide behind ‘Miss A brought depth to the difficult part’ or ‘Mr Y showed us just how light comedy should be played’. Ensemble is often used as shorthand for a certain kind of production - here it was no more or less than the whole of the thing. What was astonishing was that the sharing did not obscure the play one iota, or prove at all jarring. Director Steve Woodward did a wonderful job.

One thing though must be mentioned - the ‘party’ going on as we returned from the interval was a master-

stroke. It was raucous, incredibly physical, superbly choreographed and looked far bigger than it actually was.

As for the play, Michael Billington reckoned the National’s 2010 revival confirmed Rattigan as one of the ‘supreme dramatists of the 20th century’. That production might have done but I don’t think the play itself does. I’d go further. If this was Rattigan’s only work, or say he had not survived the war, and his reputation was based on this and *French Without Tears* it would not be what it is today. Indeed he might be a footnote in the history of twentieth century drama.

But if it is not by any means a great work it is interesting, enjoyable and thought-provoking with a lot to admire. What we do have and what makes the odd

revival worthwhile is the creation of interesting superficially flippant characters whose apparent shallowness is engrossing. This is perhaps the script’s greatest achievement.

We stick with the irredeemably selfish, un-selfaware, pig-headed David Scott-Fowler or the determinedly parasitic if jovial and intermittently perceptive John Reid almost in spite of ourselves. The fact that we end up

caring about the fate of a pretty unlikeable crew shown in an unflattering light with precious little sympathy is a testament to the play’s many strengths. (So many strengths it seems impossible that *After the Dance* and *Follow My Leader* could have emerged from the same pen.)

If we enjoy the piece, and I did greatly, I think that enjoyment is coloured by hindsight knowledge of the *Browning*, *Winslow* and *Cause Célèbre* to come. We savour the seeds of greatness, the patent craftsmanship, the witty language, the hell for leather vigour; and ignore the expository longeurs of Act One Scene One, the feeble handling of Joan Scott-Fowler’s suicide and the unbelievable redemption of Reid. Billington argues that we see the inequality of passion and the fatal danger of repressing feeling. Frankly I don’t see that-well at least not in the same way the mature Rattigan handles things.

So what are the themes? After hours of thinking before writing this I still can’t decide what message Rattigan was trying to send his audience away with - if any. None of the motivations I’ve seen suggested seem, wholly, to ring true to me. It could be an Edward Gibbonish depiction of the lipstick-stained fag end of the Edwardian period, the last pre-war months when affluence was still just about enough. It could, as some argue, be a foreshadowing of the darkness to come in the Hitler War - when even the bright old things would have to face



reality. It could be simply an attempt to do something completely different from *French Without Tears*. It might even be a guilt-ridden apologia for his own semi-wastrel irregular lifestyle. (The £30,000 from *French Without Tears* that, Geoffrey Wansel tells us, Rattigan simply spent is £4.6m today-a sum one feels the Scott-Fowler crowd could make mincemeat of in very

short order.) If it is nothing more than a critique of a class of louche, rich hedonists at a certain period in history based on inside knowledge, and this is my suspicion, it is a little tour de force. It moves when well directed - as here - at a cracking pace.

Like our first French Award this was definitely money well spent.

Introducing Alison Du Cane

Many will have first encountered fellow member, and our new Treasurer, Alison Du Cane on a Society visit to a production of *The Browning Version* with *Harlequinade* at St Peters Church, Notting Hill astonishingly as long ago as 2013. It was mounted by the local amateur company Ladbroke Players where Alison and husband Leslie have been involved for 35 years now.

London's been home for years but Alison was born and raised in Glasgow, coming south to the University of London to study at Westfield College which is now part of Queen Mary College graduating with a BA (Hons) in History & History of Art.

But even then her interest in drama was strong and, given more confidence in her dramatic abilities, she would probably have preferred to study English Literature with Art History and been even keener to go to Drama School.

After graduating she trained as a secretary and worked in several secretarial and administration posts, principally as a Parish Administrator, School Administrator plus and as administrator for two architectural conservation charities. As these posts involved book-keeping as well as secretarial tasks, it was perhaps inevitable that she should eventually be recruited as Treasurer.

She and husband Leslie met at college and settled in London first in Notting Hill, and more recently Hammersmith, which she finds handy for swimming in the river. They have three grown up children. Hobbies and interests include outdoor swimming, walking, cycling and singing in choirs and individually when not immersed in theatrical exploits mainly with the Ladbroke Players.

Interest in drama started at primary school where she took the role of a harridan Glaswegian mother and in her enthusiasm knocking over the boy playing her son.

"This was particularly embarrassing," she recalls, "as I had rather a crush on him. I also recall being taken to see a professional production of *My Fair Lady* and being enthralled. I loved the play *Pygmalion* too."

"Leslie and I have been lucky enough to play leading roles in many brilliant plays. When our last regular director moved from London, I decided to try directing myself. Amazingly I've now directed eleven plays. However, I love acting so much that I can never resist taking a part on stage."

Her favourite roles have been Hannah in *Arcadia*; Pat Cooper in *Separate Tables*; Mrs Erlynne in *Lady Windermere's Fan* and Liz in *Present Laughter*.



Amongst her directorial credits are *Separate Tables*, *Harlequinade* and *The Winslow Boy*.

Alison's interest in the playwright sprang from encountering Rattigan in teenage years; probably starting with the Robert Donat film of *The Winslow Boy*. But the play that most impressed her was a television dramatisation of *Separate Tables* which is possibly still her favourite Rattigan play.

"I was moved by the narrative, particularly the Major Pollock storyline and the themes of redemption and acceptance for those facing ostracization."

"Rattigan soon became my favourite playwright – although I also love Noel Coward and Oscar Wilde, so it is no surprise I have directed plays by all these writers. Our theatre group has performed many different plays including Shakespeare, Chekhov and Ibsen, which I've enjoyed performing in, but I've not been tempted to direct them. I prefer the realism, subtle humanity, gentle wit and heart-rending poignancy of Rattigan."

"It was when I was directing *Separate Tables* that Andrew [Kenyon] persuaded me to enrol. I enjoy the Newsletters and the various TRS events from theatre outings and play readings to dinners. Being keen on my food I am pleased that most TRS activities include excellent gastronomic refreshment as well as cultural stimulation. But most importantly it's enabled me to see fine versions of Rattigan plays."

It's also enables us to recruit a most enthusiastic and experienced treasurer!

CFT - the Rattigan Theatre?

Tibberton Bulleigh reckons it has as good a claim as any

2011 saw a Chichester Festival Theatre Season which went big on Rattigan but surprisingly I found on investigation that Chichester was a bit of a late starter as far as the playwright was concerned.

I'll leave aside why, in the late sixties and seventies, the Festival Theatre seemingly abandoned its ambitious use of the thrust stage and insisted on decorating it with sets that would easily fit onto a proscenium arch stage. I'll just say its programming makes it a surprise that it was not until 1983 that Rattigan was first presented with an outing for *The Sleeping Prince*.

Not a common choice and played with a most odd companion piece. One would like to ask Patrick Garland just why he put on Osborne's *A Patriot for Me* to open the Festival and *The Prince* to close it. I think I can see some kind of logic there but there's no doubt it is a strange pairing. Both transferred to The Haymarket as part of a repertory season they were mounting that year.

The Sleeping Prince, a play described by the late Milton Shulman as 'almost aggressively unimportant', saw the return to the stage of Omar Sharif playing opposite Debbie Arnold. Its fairy tale irrelevance maybe why it did so well on the coast playing to

96% houses - a more successful and almost certainly a cheaper effort than *A Patriot's* 67%.

Directed by Peter Coe, it was Sharif's return to the stage after more than 25 years. The American critic Gregory Jensen reckoned it: "seemed a needless risk for an actor who can earn \$750,000 for three weeks before the camera. Sharif certainly isn't doing it for the money, his salary doesn't even cover the rent of his temporary Chichester house."

He continued: "At 51 he's more bulky than he seems on screen, his hair silvered though his moustache is still black. His timing is understandably rusty. After so many years of playing to a camera he is hesitant in dealing with audience reaction."

"But Sharif makes his one-dimensional character believable and even sympathetic. He finds the laughs Rattigan built into the part and contrasts beautifully with

the not-so-dumb blonde."

"In that Marilyn Monroe part, startlingly-built TV actress Debbie Arnold appealingly echoes Monroe and almost steals the show from Sharif."

If *The Sleeping Prince* was a surprising choice it's maybe even more startling that it was another eighteen years before Rattigan was again presented, this time via *The Winslow Boy* described by the always bracing Sheridan Morley as 'a sturdy (if sometimes lethargic) revival' with Edward Hardwicke as Arthur Winslow. All the reviews I can find reverberate with the critics' surprise that what they obviously preconceive as an Edwardian period piece had contemporary relevance. We are, one

feels, still in the grip of sixties' attitudes...

Within a very short time the CFT was very nearly defunct. Mind you that was, I think, about the fourth time bankruptcy had stared them in the face in about a decade. But this time one was not surprised nor, I suspect, were many in the immediate area much concerned.

Jonathan Church took over in 2006 and turned the place round. In a later interview he was at pains not to place the blame on his

predecessors but on a lack of subsidy.

Perhaps he was right but some, to many eyes, pretty *recherché* work, a lot of it European repertoire, had failed to stem a huge fall in audience numbers over a period of years. Yes bits of the obscure stuff and new work pleased the critics. But, hey, critics don't pay to get in!

Looking back with a commercial hat on, frankly, some of the 2003, 2004 and 2005 offerings, especially in *The Minerva*, leave one wondering just who they were aimed at. On average in 2005 everything played to 51% - things were in the doldrums.

Maybe that's why I missed the 2006 production of *In Praise of Love*. Honestly, like many I fear, I'd stopped even picking up the brochures. What reviews I can find are diametrically opposed.

The Guardian gave it 2 stars and damned it with faint praise. On the other hand the Standard finished its review



postively: “Suzanne Burden, a wonderful performer who ought to be better known, negotiates with ease the Scylla and Charybdis of a mittel-European accent and playing drunk.”

“In the occasional girlish skip or inflection, she cleverly suggests that Lydia still can't believe she lives in a land of plenty after childhood years of deprivation. Michael Thomas provides fine support as the rumpled, surprising Sebastian. More Rattigan please, we're interested.”

Three years later, with the CFT's fortunes pretty well restored, by the joint management team of Jonathan Church and Alan Finch, came a stunning production of *Separate Tables* starring Gina McKee and Iain Glen (who also gave a brilliant performance in Schiller's *Wallenstein* in the same season).

This time I was there and I was impressed - perhaps more with *Table by the Window* than *Table Number Seven* where I wasn't entirely convinced by McKee's Sybil Railton-Bell. As Shankland and Malcolm, though, the pair were a revelation.

Table Number Seven used the 'bound over for soliciting men on the promenade' version not played in Rattigan's lifetime. Interesting; but for me it did nothing to increase the play's emotional impact which comes entirely from the character and not from the nature of the offence.

I hope you are ticking these off on your lists as we come to that annus mirabilis 2011, where in the main house we had *The Deep Blue Sea* with Amanda Root and John Hopkins as Hester and Freddy and Anthony Calf as Sir William. Philip Franks was the director, but perhaps the real miracle was the way designer Mike Britton came up with a set that convinced as a tiny rooming house flat in the cavernous space. Michael Billington wrote: “This is a play that cuts at the heart, and watching this production it is impossible to believe that it would be more moving if it concerned a homosexual relationship. Rattigan was writing about human love and despair, not sexual orientation.”

I didn't see *The Browning Version* with Nicholas Farrell as I had no desire to see David Hare's newly written companion piece *South Downs*. Of course the problem with *Browning* is that it's too short to stand on its own as a night out. Alone, I suspect, in this view I've always considered the Redgrave screenplay version should get a stage outing. Nonetheless the reviews were warm and the rest of the clan who went along came home delighted.

What I didn't miss was the series of rehearsed readings mounted on Sunday afternoons throughout the season, the casts including members of the current companies and visiting actors. They were in order *First Episode*, *Adventure Story*, *Variation On A Theme*, *Heart To Heart* and *Harlequinade*. All were successful within the limitations of rehearsal time but at least two were in one way or another outstanding. *Adventure Story* was a tour de force and one can see why Rattigan thought so much of it.

We've written of *Variation on a Theme* with Rachel Stirling in The Rattigan Version before - the later production at the Finborough was a revelation.

But it was *Heart to Heart* which had me saying, perhaps not entirely sotto voce, on leaving why does no-one put this on. This was a wonderful afternoon and one which I won't easily forget. One only wishes that television drama had this quality these days. But managements and potential directors please note this could work excellently as a piece of live theatre.

Finally in 2016 we had *Ross* in a superb production well written up in these pages and in 2018 the tour of *The Winslow Boy*. On *Ross* it is a mere coincidence but on the very day the fundraising committee agreed to go ahead with building the Festival Theatre, November 23rd 1960, founder Leslie Evershed-Martin went off to see Alec Guinness in the role

So there you have it. Eleven different works presented at Chichester for at least one performance. Twelve if you include *Rattigan's Nijinsky* also mounted in 2011. I wonder if any other theatre can match this number of different plays?

Chichester is to mount *The Deep Blue Sea* this summer to the surprise of some, having been part of the festival eight years ago.

So we asked Artistic Director Daniel Evans about the choice. He explained: “*The Deep Blue Sea* is one of the great plays of the 20th century. In 2011 it was done in the 1300-seat Festival Theatre with Amanda Root as Hester Collyer (and the more recent National Theatre production was in the 900-seat Lyttelton); but it's set in a small flat in Ladbroke Grove.”

“I thought it would be interesting for us to see how the play lives in the much more intimate setting of the Minerva Theatre – and for those audiences who saw the earlier production to compare the experience of seeing it in a more claustrophobic space.”

“Equally, our Hester is the wonderful Nancy Carroll, who won the Oliver and Evening Standard Awards for Rattigan's *After the Dance* at the National. She's wanted to play this role for a while but has waited until she's the right age for it and to do it with her chosen director, Paul Foster. I think she's one of the greatest actresses of her generation and I can't wait to see it.”

And I can't either, but even so I fell to wondering which of the un-performed plays they might have chosen instead?

Well no-one in their right mind would do either *Follow my Leader* or *Joi de Vivre*. Equally unlikely are *Who is Sylvia*, *Love in Idleness* and, I suppose, *Bequest to the Nation* despite the fact that Emma Hamilton is supposed to have danced naked on the table at nearby Uppark House.

This leaves *Flare Path*, *Man and Boy*, *While the Sun Shines*, *After the Dance* and *Cause Célèbre*.

For the main house at Chichester I'd certainly plump for the last. This is a much better play than it's often given credit for, and with the right cast could I think do well down in Sussex.

Farewell Andrew and Clive

Barbara Longford bids farewell to two stalwarts

The formation of The Terence Rattigan Society began on 15th July, 2011 when a small group of people met around my kitchen table, for an inaugural meeting. Those present that day were Diana Scotney, Giles Cole, Andrew Kenyon and Clive Montellier. (Michael Wheatley-Ward had also agreed to join the team, but was unable to attend.)

So I am very sad to report that both Andrew and Clive have reluctantly decided to retire from the Committee. Andrew is now living in Devon and Clive will shortly be starting a new job based in Gloucester, which will no longer involve regular visits to London.

ANDREW and I met when we were both working for The Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea and Andrew was the borough's Senior Registrar. He also has a great love for the theatre and vast experience as a director for amateur groups. A trained singer, Andrew has been involved with The Savoy Operas (singing tenor leads in most of them) and directing a full-scale production of Franz Lehar's *The Merry Widow* on the Isle of Wight.

Knowing of Andrew's stringency with financial affairs, I asked him to be our Treasurer. Although he hadn't performed such a role in the past, he readily agreed.

Andrew has been an outstanding Treasurer. The Committee holds quarterly meetings and for each of these meetings Andrew has presented us with a Treasurer's Statement of Accounts, clearly presented and which has never, over all these years, contained any errors. Quite a feat. He has also prepared an *Annual Statement of Accounts* for our AGMs, involving a great deal of preparation and which have always been signed off by a professional Auditor (on a voluntary basis). He has regularly paid our bills and kept a stringent watch on expenses. But, over and above fulfilling his committee role, Andrew has made other contributions. Many of us recall the wonderful New Year Party which he threw for us at the Chelsea Old Town Hall, to which he gained exclusive access. Terence Rattigan was born and christened in The Royal Borough and Andrew arranged to have his original birth register, as signed by Rattigan's father, on display in a glass case during the party.

In 2013 Andrew directed a fine production of *The Browning Version* for the Ladbroke Players at St. Peter's Church in Notting Hill Gate and this became a members' event which coincided with our AGM at a nearby restaurant. He also read and reported on many of the scripts submitted for The Terence Rattigan Society Award for a new play and helped out with more mundane jobs, such as serving drinks, at many of our parties.

Andrew played a valuable role in escorting our late President, Princess George Galitzine, MBE, who was

registered blind, at many of our events. The two of them struck up a great friendship.

Andrew stepped down from the committee at our January meeting this year, having served the society for almost all of its first eight years. I should like to thank him, on behalf of us all, for his invaluable contribution. Happily, members have not yet said goodbye to Andrew and a TRS visit to his production of *The Browning Version* in Devon, is taking place in June. (See enclosed flyer).

CLIVE and I met in 2006 at a conference of The Noel Coward Society at St. Catherine's College, Oxford. We immediately hit it off and I particularly admired his wonderful way with words as well as his vast and infectious appreciation of theatre and showbiz.

When I heard that Clive was going to be based at the MOD in London for several years and living here during the week, I invited him to help with the Terence Rattigan Society. Clive quickly read some of the plays and researched Rattigan's contribution to the RAF during the second world war. I invited Clive to be our *RAF Liaison* and he also agreed to become our Secretary, for which he was vastly qualified professionally.

Clive has arranged several TRS events, a highlight being in 2012, when he was based at RAF High Wycombe. At *The RAF Connection* event members saw a special screening of Rattigan's rarely-seen wartime screenplay *Journey Together*. This venue was formerly RAF Bomber Command and we were given special access to the former office of Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur 'Bomber' Harris. Michael Darlow had directed a TV play about Harris, starring John Thaw and Robert Hardy and Clive managed to secure the presence of the late Robert Hardy at this unforgettable event.

Clive hosted and arranged our Annual Birthday Dinner in 2014, at the RAF Club, when the guest speaker was Julian Fellowes (Baron Fellowes of West Stafford, DL), who later became our Vice President. He also introduced us all to the Cinema Museum and arranged and hosted two *Rattigan on Screen* events there. The first was in 2015 and included a tour of the museum and the second was in 2016, when we saw *The Sound Barrier*. The guest of honour on that occasion was the late Liz Fraser, about whom Clive had intriguingly found several Rattigan connections.

Clive has written several reviews for this magazine, including a report on Giles Cole's play *The Art of Concealment*, an article about Rattigan and Spike Milligan, a report on the tree planting, by Princess Galitzine, at Rattigan's prep school, Sandroyd, and our visit to the V&A Archives in West Kensington. He made a great contribution to the success of The Terence

Rattigan Society Award, even hosting some of our meetings at his London flat.

Clive's final and quite triumphant contribution was when he was invited to speak to the students who took part in the production of *Flare Path*, at The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, which was the first recipient of The French Fund. With his vast knowledge of the RAF and its history and his love of the play, he proved to have had a significant influence on the students. Clive spent two hours with the cast and director, Lindsay Posner. He found the students extremely well prepared and they presented him with numerous questions about the mores of the period and asked about the motivation for many of the lines. Clive wasn't present at the Q & A session, chaired by Professor Michael Gaunt, after the performance. Every actor mentioned Clive Montellier and how his words has inspired them to do the very best they could in their roles, to pay tribute to all those fallen

men from Bomber Command. This was very moving.

Clive was instrumental in the preparation of the TRS booklet which accompanied this production – *Per Ardua Ad Astra – Rattigan, Flare Path and the Bomber War*.

Over and above these contributions Clive (or Monty has he is known to many of us) has produced our Constitution, our minutes and agendas. He has arranged the paperwork and chaired, with great aplomb, all our AGMs. He has also guided the committee on good governance.

For his services to the RAF, Clive was awarded an OBE in the New Year's honours list of 2017. He is retiring from the Committee at our meeting on 24th April, having served us for almost eight years. At that meeting we shall be discussing his possible replacement. I should like to thank Clive, on behalf of us all, for his unique and invaluable contribution over so many years.

Goodbye to a worthy 'Crock'

Roger Mills on the late Albert Finney

Despite the fact that some of us consider him to be perhaps the greatest actor of his generation, two words seem to dominate memories of Albert Finney - ordinary and nice. Well, that's the feeling down here in Emsworth where he settled just after Erin Brockovich if memory serves.

Seemingly he'd visited and fallen in love, as so many of us do, with this charming harbour town. Customers at the Blue Bell Inn, like Jesse Grant, told local media: 'Albert was an extremely well-liked man with the locals here. We are all working-class builders in this pub and he was one of the boys.'

Which just about backs up what the real Ed Masry - the lawyer on whom the Brockovich film was based - reckoned: 'He's just a super guy. I can't say enough about him. Albert Finney is the type of a guy you'd want to have a bottle of beer or a glass of wine with. He's laid back, very intelligent and a great conversationalist.'

My old friend Bob Smyth was delighted when, during his mother's 99th birthday party, the actor came across and gave her a big hug. Bob's right in saying Albert Finney became as much part of the local scene as, say, the war memorial bus shelter - and about as much noticed. I mean that as a compliment.

Sadly you may not be aware of what I think is his one Rattigan outing, the 1994 film of *The Browning Version*. Though it ran for months in France and elsewhere, turned \$7m production costs into \$487m box office, and got pretty positive reviews wherever it played; for some reason it was denied much of a release both here and in the states.

This despite the fact that our Vice-President Greta Scacchi told me it is one of the three or four films she was most proud to have been involved in.

She was also absolutely thrilled to be working with him: "Like many actors of my generation and many actors I'd met, Albert Finney was considered to be the greatest British actor. He kept to his own path, his work was so varied and always brilliant."

"Yet he simply didn't lead the actor's life. I remember being at Cannes when he was expected to win and they had begged him to show. He wouldn't budge from Ireland where he was with his horses. He preferred to just do the work and keep out of the limelight."

Naturally I wanted to know how Greta found working with him on *The Browning Version*. Her reply was interesting and a bit of a surprise. "On the set he was very withdrawn and kept very much to himself when not on set. I'd heard he was the life and soul of the party and very gregarious but I didn't see that at all. He was very serious and warm in rehearsals but he seemed to relate this only to the work. He was wonderful to work with, he was my non-expressive, reserved, boring, husband embodied. We worked well together and he was extremely gracious. But there was a reserve."

"Yet I met him a few years later at a party where he was full of life. I don't know if Albert would have called himself a method actor but I think the character of Crocker-Harris was so different from his own that he had to immerse himself in it. He had to discipline himself. But he was at the right age and stage in his career to do it justice and he was wonderful in the part."

I agree. I thought Finney turned in a Crocker-Harris who you could really believe might a) have had red hot passion for his subject, b) thought it was his duty to pass this on, and c) was someone who Laura (Millie in the original) could have seen as desirable once upon a time. I never ever saw that in Redgrave.

So what went wrong? As an ex-teacher for me it's simply explained. He chose the wrong job.

Talk to any experienced teacher and they'll tell you when you set out it's all about the survival of the fittest in that struggle between you and the enemy - the thirty odd faces staring up at you knowing they have superior numbers and an armoury of guerilla tactics.

Maybe this is why the most effective staff are often those who merely drifted into the job; the cynics, the pragmatists, the intellectually moderate. Yours truly fits this bill. By keeping things in perspective and knowing the limits of the possible eventually the 'secret', as Mr Chips put it, finds them.

Sadly though the highly qualified, committed idealist with a vocation like Andrew's, faced with this 'enemy' is often on the back foot from day one. Mystified, sometimes terrified, often appalled by the reluctance or downright rebellion of the students they expected to simply soak up the gold dust, they can resort to tyranny simply because they care too much.

Clearly the Crock doesn't fully match this stereotype; as a young teacher he could at least make the boys laugh, if not with him, at him. But something - we are not privy to what - made him into the Himmler of the Lower Fifth.

So in Finney's 'Crock' many teachers will recognise

the unhappy pedagogue who, from the highest of motives, in that uneven contest, has won the battle but lost the war. Respected by most, admired by few. For one so solid, attractive and virile an actor this is no ordinary achievement. There is truth here.

Happily most 'Crocks' don't have to confront the reality and retire unaware of their failure. Crocker-Harris' tragedy, as Rattigan so cleverly shows us, is to be shown himself as others see him at the same time as the rest of his life seems to be falling apart.

Finney gives us a hero, and that is what the Crock is, who confronts his nemesis with dignity and indeed humility. And, dare one hope, a new determination? Surely there are signs of life in that corpse.

It's a great performance but one's left wondering what Finney in Rattigan on stage might have given us in the straight *Browning* or say in *Separate Tables* or *Winslow* - where one imagine he could have been a tremendous Sir Robert Morton.

(Greta was also full of praise for Ronald Harwood's screenplay and particularly for the way her own role was rounded out. To judge for yourself the film is available for purchase on DVD, but not widely, and not at a bargain price. The most cost effective way is to purchase a streaming version from one of the usual online suppliers.)

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Monday 10th June 2019

Annual Birthday Dinner at The Garrick Club (booking form enclosed)

Saturday 15th June 2019

Visit to Devon to see Andrew Kenyon's production of *The Browning Version & Red Peppers* (booking form enclosed)

Saturday 13th July 2019 2.30 p.m.

Matinee of *While the Sun Shines* at the Orange Tree Theatre, Richmond. Optional supper at The Duke Public House. 31 tickets reserved so far. Late bookers, please contact Barbara Longford

NEW EVENT

Tuesday 17th September 2019 (save the date)

Professor Dan Rebellato is hosting two events at the British Library Rattigan Archive

Show and Tell (exclusively for TRS members)

5-6pm Foyle Suite, Conservation Centre, British Library

Craftsman at Work! Secrets from the Rattigan Archive

7.15pm - 8.30pm, Eliot Room, British Library

Full booking details will be sent to members nearer the time. Numbers are limited and bookings will be taken on a first come, first served basis.

NON TRS EVENTS

Talks associated with the Chichester Festival Theatre's production of THE DEEP BLUE SEA 21 June - 27 July

Pre-Show Talk with Paul Foster

25th June 2019 6pm Free but booking essential.

Post-Show Talk

23rd July 2019 Stay after the performance to ask questions, meet company members and discover more. Free.

A Slow Evolution

27th July 2019 10.30am Dan Rebellato explores the early inspiration and reception of *The Deep Blue Sea*, discussing its subsequent developments in conversation with Alan Brodie. Tickets £5



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Representative

committee@theterencerattigansociety.co.uk

www.theterencerattigansociety.co.uk

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