

# *The* Rattigan

The Newsletter of  
The Terence Rattigan Society

ISSUE NO. 10 FEB/MAR 2014

# *Version*

## In the footsteps of Rattigan

In June next year, it will be almost four years since the Society began and the Committee has concluded that the time will be ripe to hold a conference for members to celebrate Rattigan's work in a thoughtful and incisive way, helping to ensure that it is available to future generations.

Michael Darlow says this about Rattigan's time at Trinity:

"He entered Trinity College, Oxford on 10<sup>th</sup> October, 1930. He had won a minor scholarship to read history, thus relieving his father of some of the strain of supporting him through university.

"Rattigan was not the sort of person to push himself forward, yet he was one of those in his generation who, his contemporaries agree, made an impression while still at Oxford. This was not through any particular achievement as an undergraduate, but through a combination of immaculate good looks, perfect manners, sophistication, elegant wit and the declared and unswerving determination to become a playwright.

"The university was divided, as it had been through much of the 1920s into two, often mutually hostile, camps – Aesthetes and Hearties. Rattigan

was unusual in that he managed to keep a foot in each. He shared the enthusiasm of the Aesthetes for writing, the arts, acting, the theatre; he went to their parties and enjoyed their company; yet he was quieter, more reserved.

"He did not show off, talk too much or too loud. He stayed in the background at their gatherings, a quietly amused observer who made witty asides and did not push himself to



**Our Chairman Barbara Longford outlines a major initiative for next year at Trinity College, Oxford, and seeks members' responses**

the centre of the stage.

"The other group, the Hearties, were the sporting, beer-drinking upholders of unchanging undergraduate convention: the players of team games and their supporters. They were also raggers and practical jokers, although their idea of a joke often seemed perilously close to vandalism or bullying.

"One of their favourite diversions was to corner

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## The Terence Rattigan Society

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## INTRODUCING James Cellan Jones

TRS member James Cellan Jones (*pictured, right, at the Society's inaugural event in 2011*) saw the original production of *Flare Path* as an 11-year-old schoolboy in Swansea. He much regrets that he didn't manage to see Trevor Nunn's revival almost seventy years later, for that play marked the beginning of a fascination with theatre and with the plays of Rattigan in particular.

Having studied science (which he hated) at Cambridge, and done National Service, he managed to get a job as a call-boy at the BBC. He jokes that it was the only job he could get with 'a bad degree' (a Third). He used to annoy people by answering the phone with "Call Boy's Department" rather than using the more acceptable term of 'Floor Manager's Assistant'. But, in truth, what he did was knock on dressing room doors and give the artistes their calls.

As is the way of things with talented people, he progressed eventually to production manager and thence to directing plays at the BBC, two of his favourites being adaptations of Henry James's *The Ambassadors* and Stendhal's *The Scarlet and the Black*, which, he says, with gentle irony, "was wonderful in black and white".

He is still probably best known for *The Forsyte Saga*, which was a huge—and somewhat unexpected—hit in 1967. Many of us will recall being glued to the box in the corner of the room as



Eric Porter, Kenneth More, Nyree Dawn Porter and others held us in thrall week by week.

Pressed on the *least* favourite actors with whom he has worked (always more interesting than the favourites) he mentions the great Eric Porter, even

going so far as to say that he could be "malicious". But that's nothing compared to the language that the suave and urbane Rex Harrison used on the set of the TV movie *The Kingfisher* when given a directorial note. Best to draw a veil over that. Subsequently, however, Cellan Jones was invited to stay with the Harrisons at their house in Barbados, so good humour had clearly returned by the end of shooting.

One more star name makes his top three *artistes difficiles*. Let us draw a veil over that too (as she is still living) but suffice it to say that she starred in the 1973 film of Rattigan's *Bequest to the Nation* (called *The Nelson Affair* in the US). Apparently she was not enamoured of the finished product and said so, unstintingly. Rattigan, who also wrote the screenplay, was heard to quip that she may have hated the film she was in, but never offered to return her fee (which was substantial).

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# Marrying history with merriment

The TRS New Year reception

by Roger Barker

Some forty-eight TRS members including our President, Princess George Galitzine, Vice-President Geoffrey Wansell and 'Queen of Soho', Elena Salvoni, congregated in The Brydon Room at Chelsea Old Town Hall (where actors and Royalty have married) to kickstart 2014 with our New Year Reception.

Our Treasurer, Andrew Kenyon, hosted this event and, as he is the Superintendent Registrar of The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, we were given special privilege to view the original birth register entry of one Master Terence Rattigan, born in Kensington South Sub-District on the 9<sup>th</sup> (or was it the 10<sup>th</sup>) of June 1911.

With prosecco flowing and members and friends assembled, at 12.45 all were welcomed by our Chairman, Barbara Longford, who began by thanking the Council of The Royal Borough for their generosity in allowing us the exclusive use of The Brydon Room. Barbara then introduced two new members at their first TRS event – the veteran actress, Sheila Bernette, and a young actor just

beginning his journey in the theatre, Esop Evard, before introducing two gentlemen (*who really needed no introduction!*) – our guest speaker and honorary member, Adrian Brown, who was being interviewed by our Editor, Giles Cole.

Adrian – a born raconteur – gave us a fascinating insight into Rattigan's private life, including his legendary weekend house parties, his glamorous circle of friends and theatrical first nights – together with tales of his own 'life in the theatre' interspersed with anecdotes a-plenty, all beautifully finished off with a reading of Adrian's own paean to Sir Terence, which he had composed for the occasion of the memorial tree-planting in 2012.

Although it had been scheduled for a twenty-five minute slot, nobody seemed to notice that nearly forty minutes had slipped by! Much socialising then ensued when, suddenly, it was time to leave the beautiful Brydon Room and head off into the January afternoon sunshine, carrying with us memories of another happy and successful Society event. 🍷

*TRS member Roger Barker was Secretary to the Mayor of The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea for 29 years, thus guiding 29 mayors through their year of office.*

## Adrian Brown in full flow at Chelsea Town Hall

Photo: Stephen Bradley





## In the footsteps of Rattigan *cont. from p 1*



some unsuspecting Aesthete who was out on his own and taunt him, finally attacking him and stealing some part of his clothing, usually his trousers, and running off whooping with joy. Rattigan, although identified with the Aesthetes, won acceptance among the Hearties because of his excellence at games, his conventional dress, good manners and modesty.”

By setting our conference at his old college, we hope to be able to bask “**In the footsteps of Rattigan**”, and this will be our opening tour on the Saturday morning, given by the college Archivist, **Clare Hopkins**.

The college was founded by Sir Thomas Pope in 1555. A devout Catholic with no surviving children, he saw the Foundation of an Oxford college as a means of ensuring that he and his family would always be remembered in the prayers and masses of its members. He came from a family of small landowners in Oxfordshire, trained as a lawyer, and rose rapidly to prominence under Henry VIII.

Trinity College is one of the smaller Oxford colleges in terms of student numbers, but it occupies an exceptionally spacious site with some of the most beautiful gardens and buildings in the city. The Bodleian Library and the other major University build-

ings are only a few yards from the front entrance on Broad Street.

## SPEAKERS

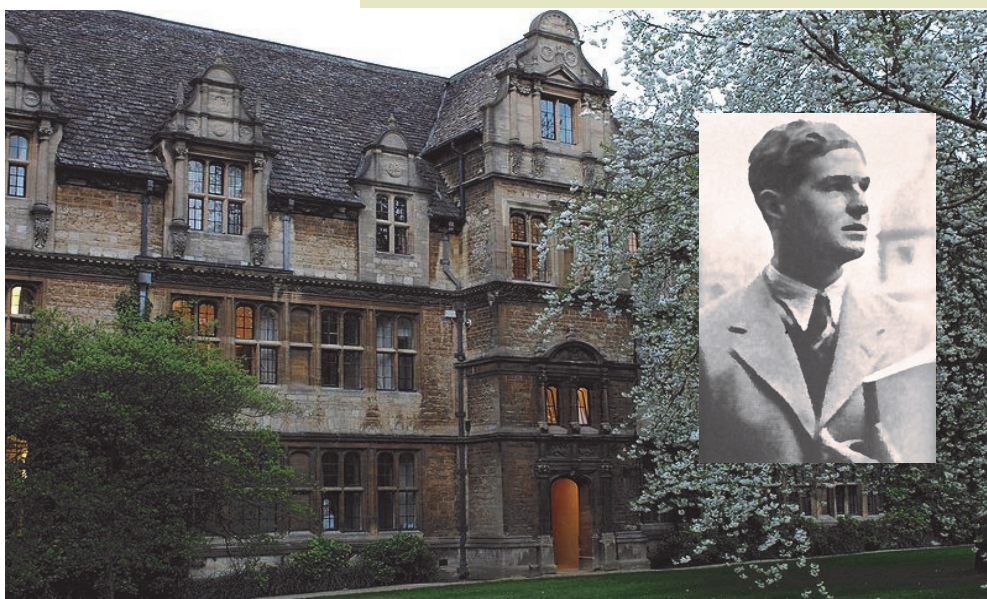
Speakers who have already confirmed are **Dr Holly Hill**, the distinguished theatre scholar and author who completed her postgraduate dissertation on the plays of Terence Rattigan in 1969. Dr Hill, who is the Society’s US representative, interviewed Rattigan at length and she will talk about the man and also the work. Dr Hill is coming to Oxford from her home in Dallas, Texas.

Playwright, teacher and academic, **Professor Dan Rebellato** is Professor of Contemporary Theatre at Royal Holloway, University of London. He is also the author of the introductions to the texts of Rattigan’s plays, which were published to mark the centenary by Nick Hern Books.

The Society’s Vice President, **Michael Darlow**, whose book *Terence Rattigan—The Man and His*



Some views at Trinity: the Lawns (top); a study-cum-sitting room and a residential building. Inset: TR in Oxford days.



*Work* (with Gillian Hodson) was first published in 1979 will also be able to talk about knowing Terence Rattigan, whom he met when he was commissioned by the BBC to write and direct a television programme about him.

Author and journalist and the Society's Vice President, **Geoffrey Wansell**, is the author of the 1995 biography *Terence Rattigan*, which was shortlisted for the Whitbread Prize as book of the year. Geoffrey is also the official historian of the Garrick Club.

**Alan Brodie** is Rattigan's literary agent. He was largely responsible for the highly successful centenary year events which included productions of *Less Than Kind*, *Cause Célèbre* and *Flare Path*, a season of films at the British Film Institute, an exhibition at the British Library, and lectures and play readings at the Chichester Festival Theatre.



### THE TRINITY PLAYERS

We've chosen to hold the conference during term time because the College's dramatic society will be staging a play at the same time. It is intended that a Rattigan play will be performed in the gardens and a moonlit Saturday evening performance could be a rather magical part of the conference. Bubbly will be served during the interval.

### THE BIRTHDAY DINNER

We shall have the special privilege of dining in Hall during the conference in Trinity's 17<sup>th</sup> century Dining Hall, lit by chandelier and candelabra, the tables decorated with college silver.

### DRAMA STUDENT PARTICIPATION

The Society hopes to be able to sponsor a small group of drama students from around the country to be delegates at the conference and to perform a play-reading.

### MEMORABILIA

In addition to the main conference room, we have reserved the Sutro Room (named after the celebrated film producer, John Sutro, a college benefactor) for the college's memorabilia of Rattigan to be displayed. Also, delegates will be encouraged



**The College library (above) and one of the conference rooms (left).**

to bring their own items for display such as theatre programmes, books or photographs and items with Rattigan's signature.

### OVERSEAS MEMBERS

The Society would particularly welcome delegates from overseas. Dr Hill is hoping to bring over some of our American colleagues. They will be warmly welcomed by the UK members.

### MEMBERS' INVOLVEMENT

We should like to have a panel discussion at some point, where members could talk about knowing or meeting Rattigan or simply about their admiration for his work. Planning for this conference is at a very early stage and we should greatly welcome suggestions from members. Would you like to be involved in some way? Have you any suggestions for sessions to include?

### TIMINGS AND OVERNIGHT ACCOMMODATION

We plan to begin on Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> June, 2015 at around 11am to allow delegates to travel to Oxford that morning. At present we plan to have an early Birthday Dinner, from 5.30 p.m. so that we can attend an evening performance of Trinity Players' Rattigan production in the gardens that evening. The play will end at around 9.30 p.m. So Saturday will be a very full day.

There will be morning sessions only on Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> June and the conference will end before lunch on the Sunday. Because this is term time, there is limited accommodation in the college, but delegates will be provided with a large list of hotels and bed and breakfast accommodation in the city.

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## Introducing James Cellan Jones

*continued from p 2*

In fact, says Cellan Jones, Terry was rather hurt by the film being “slagged off” by one of its stars, especially as Terry himself had been very complimentary about it.

Cellan Jones has a delightful anecdote about the premiere of the film, which was graced with the presence of Princess Alexandra. He and Terry were a little late getting to their seats and were told by the ushers that they couldn’t be seated because it would mean scrambling along the row in front of HRH. Both of them too gentlemanly to argue, they settled for the next best thing—popcorn in the manager’s office washed down with large gins and tonics. “What does it matter?” said Terry. “We’ve both seen the film anyway.”


Cellan Jones is mostly known for classical TV drama, and that includes TV versions of Shakespeare too—such as *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *A Comedy of Errors*. However, he has also directed in the theatre and fondly recalls a production of Shaw’s *Saint Joan* at Birmingham Rep starring Anna Calder Marshall and the young Michael Gambon and future 007, Timothy Dalton.

As one might expect, Cellan Jones has worked with many of the greats: Paul Scofield, who was very cautious in rehearsal, but then “bloomed at the last moment”; Alec Guinness; Anthony Quayle; Lee Remick; Maggie Smith; Eileen Atkins; and the greatest? Probably Olivier. His Othello was “amazing, wickedly different” and Cellan Jones greatly admired Osborne’s *The Entertainer*, in which Olivier starred. (Rattigan saw this as an act of betrayal by Olivier.)

Cellan Jones became Head of Plays at the BBC in the late 1970s—“we won a lot of awards” - and was Chairman of BAFTA from 1983 to 1985. He has also been Chairman and Honorary President of the Directors’ Guild of Great Britain, so he has left hardly a stone unturned in a glittering career.

Any other treasured moments? *Oxbridge Blues* with the much-missed Ian Charleson, who entertained cast and crew with songs from the shows during breaks in filming (the traffic noise in Oxford was terrible); *The Fortunes of War* in 1987 with Kenneth Branagh and Emma Thompson; and Sartre’s *The Roads to Freedom* in 1970, for which

he also wrote the music. Oh, and on a slightly lighter note, there was the wonderful sitcom *A Fine Romance*, in which he cast Michael Williams as the husband, and asked Michael if his wife might consider playing opposite him—Michael’s wife, of course, being one Judi Dench.

A life, one might say, directed to the hilt. 

## In the footsteps of Rattigan *cont. from p 5*

### PARKING/TRAVEL

There is no parking at the college and parking in the centre of Oxford is impossible. However, there are park and ride options. The coach from Oxford to London (The Oxford Tube) is efficient and inexpensive and operates throughout the night.

### COST

The cost of attendance will include each member’s share of the hire of the conference rooms, a buffet lunch on the Saturday, a three course dinner with wine at the Birthday Dinner in the Dining Hall, morning coffee and biscuits on both days. Also included is a ticket to the evening performance by the Trinity Players and interval champagne in the gardens. We anticipate that we shall need to charge each delegate approximately £120 to include all of the above. The only additional cost will be for individual overnight accommodation in Oxford.

### EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

We are a self-funding Society totally reliant upon members’ subscription fees. This unique event can only take place with the support of our members. The minimum number required is 50.

Please be kind enough to complete the ‘Expression of Interest’ form included with this newsletter, to enable the Committee to gauge interest before committing any of our precious funds. Members do not have to make a firm commitment at this stage but deposits will be required later this year.

 **Barbara Longford**

If you would like to offer a year’s membership of the Society as a gift to someone, please contact the Membership Secretary about the special TRS gift card. And if you would like to offer views, letters, anecdotes to this publication please contact the Editor (contact details can be found on page 2). The deadline for the next issue is Wednesday 30 April.

# Dear Mr Spacey

## A letter to the Artistic Director of the Old Vic from Adrian Brown

Dear Mr Spacey,

As a former close friend of the playwright Sir Terence Rattigan, and consequently in the audience for many productions of his plays, both in his lifetime and after, I must assume that Sir Terence must be spinning in his grave at the flat ineptitude of the production of *The Winslow Boy*, currently playing at the Old Vic. I attended an early performance of this travesty, and was horrified by the flatness of it all. Flat scenery, with that great unbroken expanse of wall across the back, interrupted only by an exiguous peek into the dining room, and flooded by a flat unvaried lighting that served only to exaggerate a violent wallpaper, apparently chosen to add some animation on stage to an otherwise flat performance. Curtains were mentioned as having some significance to a lady journalist, but those provided were wretched skimpy things a house-proud Edwardian matron would only have permitted in the servant's bedroom, and even then with apologies. That sitting room, containing barely the furniture required for the action and nothing more, was never occupied by a large and active family.

I have seen beautiful productions of this play fairly recently, one starring Edward Fox I caught at Guildford, and there was another also very fine with Timothy West at Kingston, so I am astonished that reviewers of your production did not refer deferentially to these. Performers seemed also to have been encouraged to give us flatly what is written on the page but no more; the most notable of these being the unfortunate actor cast as Sir Robert Morton KC, a role Rattigan wrote to be flamboyantly played, as a personage whose rhetoric regularly held the House of Commons entranced. It all – even the great imponderable balance between ‘Justice’ and ‘Right’ – seems of no more weight and importance than an episode of *EastEnders*.

However, the grossest piece of miscasting is in the eponymous Winslow boy, little 13-year-old Ronnie, for whom a rabbit-faced beanpole has incomprehensibly been chosen, a gawky stick who seemed to tower over everyone else on stage. I was astonished, when his mother said “It’s time he was tucked up in his little bed”, that the audience did not explode into howls of derision.

It is so sad that this misrepresentation, giving an entirely false idea of what Sir Terence wrote, should be taking place on the stage of the Old Vic, where I have

seen so many shatteringly good performances, two of the greatest having been the good Lord himself in *The Dance of Death* and your own *Moon For The Misbegotten*, which I thought one of the finest productions, in its significance and economy, I have ever seen, anywhere.

Yours ruefully,

Adrian Brown

***This letter (somewhat abridged here) was written just before the Society outing to The Winslow Boy at the Old Vic in April 2013. We hope to publish Kevin Spacey’s robust response in the next edition...***

*Photo: Alastair Muir*



## Destructive zeal

***Kenneth Tynan’s review of the original production of *The Deep Blue Sea*, 1952***

Terence Rattigan’s new play is a searing study of the destructive zeal of love. It has already been acclaimed as “brilliant theatre”, but there is a patronising ring to the phrase which I must set about demolishing. It implies that for a play to suit the theatre is not quite enough; that it is somehow improper to write deliberately for the medium you have selected – not print, not pure sound, but for an upturned host of credulous faces in a darkened hall. *The Deep Blue Sea*, for its first two acts, is a masterly piece of work, and I went out exulting into the second interval, persuaded that I was seeing the most striking new play I could remember, and delighted at having divined a heart-pricking strength of purpose with which I had never before credited Mr Rattigan.


The play opens with the discovery of a gassed woman whose intended suicide has been foiled by the expiry of the shilling in the meter. And it invites us to piece a jigsaw together, to explore why she wanted to die, to rebuild her past; and by withholding this information until it tells most – by, in fact, beginning his

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## Destructive zeal *cont. from p 7*

action where most plays of the sort would end – Mr Rattigan keys us up almost to exploding point. Piece by piece, with seeming idleness, he presents the facts to us. She had left her husband and taken a lover, a clumsy, graceless, but boyishly desirable oaf, of whom she has made possessive demands that he is incapable of meeting. Apprised of her suicide attempt, and appalled by it, he walks out on her; and we leave her, at the second-act curtain, pleading riotously and without shame for him to stay.

I shall never forgive Mr Rattigan for his last act. It is intolerable: his brilliance lays an ambush for itself, and walks straight into it. If his heroine kills herself, he will merely be repeating the pattern, so he decides to let her live. But he has stated the case for her death so pungently that he cannot argue her out of the impasse without forfeiting our respect. He ekes out ingeniously, lecturing her about the necessity of sublimating her impulses in painting and going to a good Art School. Dishonestly, he makes her insist that she does not *deserve* to live, thus hauling in all kinds of moral implications which are totally irrelevant, since her point was purely that she could not *bear* to live. When, finally, she chooses survival, it is for all the wrong reasons.

*The Deep Blue Sea* remains the most absorbing new English play for many seasons. And it contains something which no English playwright (save Shaw in *Saint Joan*) has provided since Pinero – a long, straight, emotional part for a young woman. Peggy Ashcroft plays it superbly, as she should, for it is analogous in shape to that of *The Heiress*: deserted by her lover at the end of Act II, she rejects love itself at the end of Act III. And in Kenneth More, who plays her fumbling barfly bed-fellow, we have acquired an actor who may become our best retort to Marlon Brando, with the same doubting proviso: can he do anything else? 

*This review is taken from 'Curtains' by Kenneth Tynan, published in 1961. In the light of the extraordinary duel of letters between TR and Tynan subsequently, it is fascinating to see here how Tynan starts with great admiration for the play but then can't quite forgive himself for sounding so positive. Later reviews were much more highly seasoned, which surely contributed to TR's emotional and physical ill health. (Ed.)*

IN THE NEXT EDITION: A REPORT ON THE VARIATION ON A THEME GALA EVENING AT THE FINBOROUGH THEATRE WITH AN OVERVIEW OF THE ORIGINAL PRODUCTION IN 1958; PLUS ANOTHER MEMBER PROFILE

## Dates for your diary

### Wednesday 21 May 2014:

**An Evening on Terence Rattigan, with Princess Galitzine** at the English-Speaking Union, Dartmouth House, 37 Charles Street, London W1J 5ED, 7.00 – 8.00pm in the Long Drawing Room, followed by refreshments in the Churchill Room. We were asked by the English-Speaking Union to reprise our event which took place last year at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Members who missed the event, or who wish to see a 'variation on a theme' of it, may attend at a cost of £12 per ticket, which includes drinks afterwards.

Bookings should be made direct to the ESU by ringing Liz Baxter on **020 7529 1594** (please remember to say that you are a member of the TRS) or via the ESU website. Go to Events / May 2014 / Wed 21 May / and click on the title. Select 'TRS members' and you can book at the reduced price.

The great 1950s Dior fashion model, **Jean Dawnay (Princess George Galitzine)** was the hostess at many of Rattigan's glittering parties—in particular the party for the opening of the film *The Prince and the Showgirl*, based on the Rattigan play *The Sleeping Prince*. Jean greeted all the guests, including Marilyn Monroe, who starred in the picture, her husband Arthur Miller, Sir Laurence Olivier and his wife Vivien Leigh, as well as Dame Sybil Thorndike, Margot Fonteyn, John Gielgud, Lady Diana Cooper and Peggy Ashcroft.

During the first part of the evening the Princess will be talking about being the friend, muse and hostess of Terence Rattigan with his biographer **Geoffrey Wansell**. And then Geoffrey will give a unique insight into the private face of one of the 20th century's greatest playwrights. Actors **Judy Buxton** and **Stephen Martin-Bradley** will join Geoffrey and playwright **Giles Cole** to perform extracts from four of the plays.

Writer and journalist Geoffrey Wansell's book *Terence Rattigan* was first published in 1995 and he is also the author of the recently published *Poirot and Me*, written with David Suchet. Giles Cole is the author of *The Art of Concealment*, a play about Rattigan himself, which was first performed in the centenary year, 2011, with two further productions in 2012.

### Friday 6 June:

**Annual Birthday Dinner, RAF Club, 7 for 7.30 pm.** The guest of honour will be Baron Fellowes of West Stafford, DL, more widely known, of course, as Julian Fellowes, the actor, novelist and screenwriter, and creator of *Downton Abbey*. Members may initially bring one guest each, if they wish, and any further guests will be placed on a waiting list as space is limited. The booking form is enclosed with this newsletter.

### Monday 8 September:

**The Rattigan Archives & Cause Célèbre.** The Society is being given special access to the V&A Archives Centre in Blythe Road, London W14. The day will be hosted by Kate Dorney, Curator of Modern & Contemporary Performance at the V&A, and our Vice President, Michael Darlow.

In the morning we will have a tour of the Theatre and Performance collection and the Terence Rattigan material will be on display. In the afternoon, after a pub lunch nearby, there will be a screening of the film of the Old Vic production of *Cause Célèbre* which took place during the centenary year. The film is in the collection of the National Video Archive of Performance. A booking form will appear in the next newsletter.

And don't forget to express your interest in the 2015 Oxford Conference. A special form is enclosed.