

The Rattigan

The Newsletter of
The Terence Rattigan Society

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Version

Renovating a Rattigan home

The door was so warped that the agent could not open it when my partner Rob and I first viewed Sir Terence Rattigan's former Brighton home - Bedford House, 79 Marine Parade - in October 2015. In the end, while the agent turned the key, Rob and I put our shoulders to the door until it gave and we literally fell into the house. The house had been on the market, empty, for nearly two years. It was only when I decided in the summer of 2015 to move to Brighton permanently, in order to live with Rob who works at the County Hospital, that the house came to my attention. We had walked past the house umpteen times over previous months and we had read and reread the particulars online but had not made an appointment to view, as its guide price was at the top end of my budget.

Eventually we decided that although it was unlikely the house could be afforded, there would be no harm viewing if only to discount it from our list of potential homes. We were certainly impressed on the first viewing but what was immediately obvious was that the house was in need of some major renovation, particularly in the subterranean cinema room under the front patio, whose

ceiling had collapsed during heavy rain in December 2013. The agent advised that this was one of the main reasons why the house remained unsold.

Member Luke Jeffers describes the process of renovating Rattigan's house in Brighton.



This once fabulous space, which had originally been the laundry with a well in one corner and a passage under the road to the beach in the other, had only one tiny window, so was very dark. With no electricity we had to resort to the light from our smart phones. Not only was half the ceiling on the floor, the carpets were sodden, the toilet leaked and the stench was only just bearable.

That aside the possibility of structural damage was very real in this room.

Fast forward through a further six viewings, several with building professionals, and armed with numerous surveys and reports we made an offer. The agent was not hopeful but after two weeks the owner, Annie Hancock, sister-in-law to Tony Hancock and a former actress, accepted our offer and we got our keys at the end of March 2016.

Bedford House was built as a detached house with stables and gardens some time between 1810 and 1820. It is rumoured to have been built by the Duke of Bedford as his seaside **Continued on p 7...**

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The Terence Rattigan Society

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Email: committee@theterencerattigansociety.co.uk

Editor's note: Any views expressed in this newsletter are those of the individual author and do not necessarily represent the views of The Terence Rattigan Society or its Committee.

INTRODUCING Clive Montellier OBE

For a Society with as many artistically talented members as ours, the role of Secretary is to focus on the mundane, ensuring propriety in our administration and supporting the Chairman in the detailed planning behind our events. It was thus a wise move by our Chairman to enlist as a founding Committee member someone who not only brought 30 years experience of charity administration and event planning with military precision, but who also provided us with a link to the Royal Air Force, the Service that represented a turning point in Terence Rattigan's career.

Most of us know Monty well from his speedy despatch of the business of the AGM and his role at the heart of hosting many of our events but, beneath the efficient military exterior, there also beats the heart of a thespian.

Monty began his career in amateur theatre whilst still at school, carrying out running repairs to the Tin Man in a production of *The Wizard of Oz* with a pop-riveter. He was enticed front of curtain a few years later and stayed there for many more as entry into the RAF took him around the country, and membership of the local operatic or dramatic society gave him an immediate social life outside whatever station he was serving on.

In early appearances, culminating in an energetic production of *West Side Story*, youth and a wiry frame usually found him as chorus-cum-dancer, but experience and a "passable tenor voice" saw him graduate to leading roles. Highlights included Seymour in *Little Shop of Horrors*, a slimmer version of Nicely-Nicely Johnson in *Guys and Dolls* and Joe Cable in *South Pacific*.

Having settled in Gloucestershire, he took on the management of the resident RAF Station theatre group, producing, set building and designing posters, programmes and background music for three productions a year, many of which he appeared in. With material ranging from 'nice little comedies', to revivals



of 20th Century classics, to pantomime and occasional experimental new work, favourites included Hugh Whitemore's *Pack of Lies* and, because he found a grand piano in the storage shed and had a club member who reminded him of Judith Bliss, a faithful period production of *Hay Fever*. His admiration of The Master's

work led him to membership of the Noel Coward Society and his first encounter with our Chairman as they cooked up a plan for a Coward 'Weekender' on Burgh Island where Monty ticked off a number of ambitions in performing 'Won't You Please Oblige Us With a Bren Gun' in the Peacock cocktail bar. He can also be seen flitting across your screen on film in *The Ghost of Greville Lodge* and egging on Gary Oldman's Sid Vicious in *Sid and Nancy*.


Military commitments have forced him to step away from acting in recent years; however, as well as scratching the theatrical 'itch' with his work for the Society, he spends much time performing as a battlefield tour guide in his adopted home of Tewkesbury.

First love for him and his wife Jane, though, is the lower end of popular mid-20th Century culture where, apart from regularly DJ'ing from a vast collection of un-Rattiganesque 1950s records, he is a regular writer for various magazines and websites, as well as maintaining his own blog www.midcenturychap.com.

A departure from London to take up a new role for the Armed Forces will see him less often in attendance at Society events but, as Secretary, he will remain the steadying hand on our administrative tiller (or should that be joystick...). May his thespian heart keep beating as strongly as ever, and let's hope the DJ'ing and the blogging don't swallow him up in deepest Gloucestershire. His understated RAFish charm is a huge asset to the Society. ✂

New appointments


Our US Representative, the distinguished scholar and world authority on the Rattigan *oeuvre*, Dr. Holly Hill, has been appointed a Vice-President of the Society following David Suchet's elevation to President. Holly says she is "surprised, thrilled and honored by the Committee's invitation" and has accepted "with delight". The Committee is equally delighted at her decision (and this newsletter respects her US spelling!).

We are also extremely pleased with ourselves to have found another distinguished theatre scholar, researcher, teacher and director to take on the role of Drama School Liaison. We extend a very warm welcome to Professor Michael Gaunt. The Society is clearly adding some serious academic muscle to its already illustrious top brass. And it so happens that both these appointees will feature in a new venture described below... 

The Frenches remembered

A new initiative to embellish the Society

As many of our readers will know, Harold French directed TR's first big hit, *French Without Tears*, and remained a lifelong friend—as did his wife, Peggy—or Pegs—French. It was she who nursed TR through his final days as he was succumbing to leukemia, and it is in their memory that Holly Hill has come up with the idea of the Harold and Pegs French Fund, by which she, Holly, wishes to offer a sum of money each year to help sponsor a drama school production, an activity or an individual, which will encourage new generations to understand and appreciate TR's plays. The Frenches gave Holly complete access to TR's papers and belongings at his set in Albany when she was writing her famous dissertation in the 1970s and this gift is a way of honouring their contribution to the Rattigan legacy. The initial task of organizing the application of this fund is being undertaken by Professor Michael Gaunt in his role as Drama School Liaison officer of the Society.

Holly is to be mightily applauded for this initiative, which has been wholeheartedly endorsed by the TRS Committee. 

Hugo and Greta at the Garrick

Our intrepid reporter Martin Amherst Lock conjures up the atmosphere at the Annual Birthday Dinner

The timing of this year's Annual Birthday Dinner for me at least was perfect; falling on the last day of the Summer Term it meant that with all the relief of a Taplow escaping the last of Crocker-Harris's extra Greek lessons

I was able to flee academia and exchange the dinginess of the school cafeteria for the elegance of the Garrick Club. Rattigan, Geoffrey Wansell reminded us in his welcome, was a proud and loyal member of the Garrick, making it the perfect venue for the Birthday Dinner. Geoffrey began by bringing to mind the Society's indebtedness to Princess George Galitzine and noting how fortunate we were that tonight her family was represented by both her daughter Princess Katya and her husband Nick. In her toast to Sir Terence, Barbara Longford reminded us that we were all here because of Rattigan's inestimable contribution to the theatre, extending a particular welcome to Professor Michael Gaunt, the Society's newly appointed Drama School Representative, whose birthday it was today.



Photo: Roger Mills

After an excellent dinner Giles Cole presented Greta Scacchi with her Vice-Presidential scroll; the Society, he observed is very fortunate in the balance and symmetry of the make-up of its Senior Officers, two of them being distinguished biographers of Rattigan and two of them actors who have given definitive performances of major Rattigan roles. Of Greta's portrayal of Hester Collyer in *The Deep Blue Sea* one critic commented: 'Her performance was a revelation in a role demanding acting of the highest order.' Greta was 'thrilled' and 'very proud' to receive her scroll, only regretting that the exigencies of the acting profession had prevented her from being able to accept it sooner. Giles also introduced our guest of honour Hugo Vickers DL who, whilst primarily a celebrated biographer, historian and lecturer, is also, Giles insisted, very much a man of the theatre, having devised various staged entertainments, including one at the Jermyn Street Theatre. Although most famous for his books on the Royal Family, he is also an expert on that subspecies of royalty of which Rattigan was a pre-eminent member – the stars of stage and screen. Not only an ardent fan of Rattigan plays Mr Vickers was also a great friend of Jean Galitzine and hugely admired her 'completely positive' attitude to life. His golden rule is never to talk about Rattigan when addressing 'experts';

Cont. on p 6...

The Case for Terence Rattigan

Dr. Holly Hill reviews a new study of the master craftsman

Rattigan supporters have long craved a recognition of his artistry from the academic world. It has come, and it was worth the wait. **The Case for Terence Rattigan: Playwright** is an early volume in a new series, *Bernard Shaw and His Contemporaries*, published by Palgrave Macmillan for a largely academic and global readership.

The author, John A. Bertolini, is Ellis Professor of Liberal Arts at Vermont's Middlebury College, which annually makes the top five-to-ten best listings of academic liberal arts institutions in America. With an Ivy League education (Masters and PhD from Columbia University), and long experience teaching English, drama and film, Professor Bertolini writes eloquently about Rattigan as a literary artist and the "best playwright of the twentieth century."

Bertolini pays tribute to the biographies of Michael Darlow and Geoffrey Wansell and to Dan Rebellato's contributions to the "superb" editions of the plays from Nick Hern and in his own study seeks to build on the critical studies of Susan Rusinko and my dissertation. He writes extensively, in the chronological order of the plays, about themes crucial to an appreciation of Rattigan; his mastery of the implicit, his exceptional craftsmanship, his wounded characters, his recurring themes.

Because TRS members are likely to be familiar with these subjects, let us take the opportunity here to explore some of Professor Bertolini's original insights and the felicities of his writing.



Diana and Actaeon c.1518 by Lucas Cranach the Elder and below *Echo and Narcissus*, 1903, by JW Waterhouse



It is a delight to discover how Bertolini's knowledge of classical and Western literature contribute to an appreciation of Rattigan's artistry. He comments on how Rattigan often drew "on his classical education to underpin the structure and meaning in his plays with specific myths." He cites *Diana and Actaeon* in *French Without Tears*, *The Deep Blue Sea's* drawing on both Venus and Adonis and *Echo and Narcissus*, and *Who is Sylvia?* adapting Apollo and Daphne (as did, he casually mentions, Ovid and Petrarch).

Bertolini's learned references may be brief, as in Millie's "artful little beast" and the new master's "Himmeler of the lower fifth", about which Bertolini comments: "In Aeschylus, the net and the axe finish Agamemnon, but in Rattigan's world, the words of a brief phrase lacerate the heart...." or his observation on how Lord Nelson's recitation of the letter from his wife parallels Cyrano de Bergerac's recitation of the letter that, as Christian, he wrote Roxanne years before, or Bertolini's analysis of how Rattigan partially modeled the character of Sir Robert Morton on Oscar Wilde and such Wilde creations as Algernon and Lord Goring and made the four-act construction of *The Winslow Boy* resemble Edwardian plays and particularly Wilde's four-act social comedies.

There are many allusions to Shakespeare and to Shaw. In the chapter titled "The Deep Blue Sea: Venus Loses Adonis", "Rattigan uses *Venus and Adonis*, both the original myth and its retelling in

Shakespeare's poem, as a way of organizing the difficult and confusing feelings associated with the entanglement of love and lust. The elements of the myth—a goddess, a hunt, a young man, sexual desire, and the death of the young man—are central to Rattigan's imagination. Professor Bertolini examines Rattigan's theme of the hunt as it weaves through the plays, for example in *Separate Tables* where "Rattigan provides a fine counterpoint to Anne's chasing down John when he has Sybil worry about people thinking she chases the Major: 'They think I chase him. Is that it? They think I run after him, they think I want—'"

Bertolini finds that both *Adventure Story* and *A Bequest to the Nation* "evinced a greater consciousness of the Shakespearean model for historical tragedy. The latter alludes to *Antony and Cleopatra*, and the former partly draws on *Richard II* in its protagonist's trajectory from a naive lack of self-awareness to an ironically clear sense of his failures as a ruler." Mostly, however, Alexander is modeled on two Shakespeare characters: "Prince Hal, the weary prince who overcame his ambivalence about taking his guilty father's throne and conquered France, and Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, who finally understood his own mortality by thinking of Alexander the Great in the graveyard scene... Indeed, Rattigan has made use of the likenesses between Henry V and Hamlet whom Shakespeare had linked by means of references to Alexander, to place his protagonist, Alexander, squarely in the tradition of the Shakespearean tragic hero who must kill his father to affirm his own fantasy of immortality and, in turn, be destroyed by that same fantasy."

Shaw figures strongly in Bertolini's chapter 'French Without Tears: Rattigan's Shavian Inheritance'. Bertolini suggests that Alan and Diana bear resemblance to John Tanner and Anne Whitefield from *Man and Superman*, but that Rattigan ends his play while the hunt is still on, whereas Shaw extended his for two more acts, so that the hunt could resolve. Shaw's influence also shows in *Ross*, which Bertolini contends

has similarities to *Saint Joan* in its construction—the scene of Lawrence's manipulating Auda into participating in the Arab revolt resembling the scene where Joan manipulates de Beaudricourt into arming her and sending her to the Dauphin, or when the Turkish General and Captain discuss what to do with Lawrence to get him to recant his 'heresy' of 'Arabia for the Arabs', as Warwick and Cauchon have discussed Joan's heresies and their consequences. "In the last scene of *Ross*, Rattigan follows Shaw's lead in the last scene of *Saint Joan* by highlighting the loneliness and suffering of his protagonist by juxtaposing the heroic figure's quietness and inner sadness with the friendly chatter of a demotic character who supports the hero against the authority figures... in Shaw the English soldier; in *Ross* the Flight Sergeant who consoles Lawrence similarly."

Bertolini deals with Rattigan's ambivalence towards Shaw: "Rattigan blamed Shaw for leading drama down the wrong path, the road of ideas instead of the road of character and situation." While Shaw wanted his actors never to pause for implication between lines, Rattigan developed his craft on what characters did not say and how they did not say it. Bertolini's English professor expertise brings new insights into Rattigan's use of language. Towards the end of *Table By the Window*, Anne Shankland says of remarriage to a doubtful John Malcolm, "I could still try." He replies, "So could I, Anne. So could I. And we'd both fail." Of this exchange Bertolini comments: "The prominent conditionals ('could' three times) reinforce the essential feeling that an unknown and frightening future defines the human condition." He then shows how Rattigan employs the monosyllabic "I" in Major Pollock's confession to Sybil to signal his accepting his real self and how



Sean Connery as Alexander the Great in the BBC Television version of *Adventure Story*, 1961

the monosyllabic "No" (to her mother) signals the same for Sybil.

There is a brilliant demonstration of how Hester's dialogue poignantly references the myth of Echo and Narcissus (as does her entire relationship with Freddie) *continued overleaf...*

The Case for Terence Rattigan *cont.*

in the way she repeats phrases in answer to questions from most of the other characters, as when Freddie says “I haven’t done anything, have I?” and she replies “No, Freddie. You haven’t done anything.” - or “This is me, Freddie Page. Remember?” and her response is “I remember.” - and numerous other exchanges. Bertolini writes that “The repetitions imply that she fears letting herself say more than the minimum... the echoes reveal her weakness, and hence her doom, for she sees that once she loses Freddie life will slowly drain itself out of her and she will waste away, like Echo pining for Narcissus, too enfeebled by the pain and prospect of loss to speak any words but those spoken to her.”

The examples here are only some highlights of Bertolini’s powerful examination of Rattigan’s plays and a few of the films that he has been able to see. His analyses are in such depth that the book’s only 217 page length feels brief. He confides that in his three decades of teaching Rattigan to Middlebury students, they “respond wonderfully to his literary power... a phenomenon that bodes well for the future growth in his stature as an artist of dramatic literature,” a view that complements Susan Rusinko’s comment that when she taught classes on Rattigan and Pinter, her students preferred Rattigan. There could hardly be a more timely and eloquent study of Rattigan as a literary (and dramatic) artist than John A. Bertolini’s *The Case for Terence Rattigan, Playwright* and we may hope that the Palgrave book is widely read by academics and taught to new generations of students. ✍



Tom Hiddleston as Freddie and Rachel Weisz as Hester in Terence Davies' 2011 film version of *The Deep Blue Sea*.

Editor's note: As a postscript to this article, Holly writes: ‘I didn’t feel it appropriate to include one of my favorite sentences in the body of this review, but Bertolini writes (after examining the opprobrium heaped on Rattigan in 1956): “Rattigan’s plays will still be read and revived while you will have to go to a theater archive to find out who Kenneth Tynan was.” Yes!’

Hugo and Greta at the Garrick *cont.*

instead he gave us fascinating behind-the-scenes glimpses of Rattigan through a series of footnotes on those such as Chips Channon, Jean Galitzine and the Oliviers who were intimately connected with him, deftly weaving a vivid picture of what it was like to be part of that extraordinary inner circle. Especially memorable and poignant were his reflections on Vivien Leigh who suffered not only from being married to a genius but also the commonly held view, shared and voiced at times even by Rattigan, that she had the most beautiful face, but that that simply ‘wasn’t enough’. Only after her surprisingly convincing portrayal of a Brooklyn chorus girl in *The Sleeping Prince* and her even more striking performance in *The Deep Blue Sea* was it acknowledged that she was a great artist, someone indeed who could act Olivier off the stage. She lived her whole life as art and, through the tragic heroines Blanche Dubois and Hester Collyer, women with whom she could all too easily identify, re-enacted in her art painful scenes from life. No wonder she died exhausted at the age of 53, admitting not long beforehand that for her ‘the light at the end of the tunnel is the light of an on-coming train’.

Princess Katya spoke for us all in thanking Hugo Vickers warmly: Jean would have loved to have heard his stories, particularly those about Vivien Leigh, whom she had been delighted to meet. She told us how her mother had greatly enjoyed being President of the Society, accepting the mantle at the age of 85 with an alacrity which was typical of her *joie de vivre* and finding that coming to its events revived ‘the gay pleasures of life’. It was thrilling, she averred, to witness the recent burgeoning of interest in Rattigan, thanks in no small part to Barbara Longford whose attention to detail and devotion to the cause was very much appreciated ‘up there’. Geoffrey Wansell began the evening by recalling how Rattigan, on meeting Olivier on the steps of the Garrick, asked: ‘Will anyone remember us?’ I think we all know the answer to that. ✍

Renovating a Rattigan home

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home which he quickly gave to his Aunt when he heard that the Prince Regent was building the Royal Pavilion. The Duke subsequently built himself a far grander home in Hove but apparently still sent his laundry to be cleaned at the house.

We know from censuses taken over the years that the house became a well respected guest house through the 19th century for visiting nobility and gentry. There are many references to this as in the "Fashionable Chronicle" section of the Brighton Gazette, dated 31 October 1861:

'We have the satisfaction of stating that the town is well filled with visitors, who are still continuing to arrive in considerable numbers, and we believe we may state that a great portion of them intend to winter in Brighton. Our cliffs are thronged during the whole of the day, and the weather still continues delightful. The Duke of Newcastle has arrived on a visit to Lord Robert Clinton, 79 Marine Parade.'

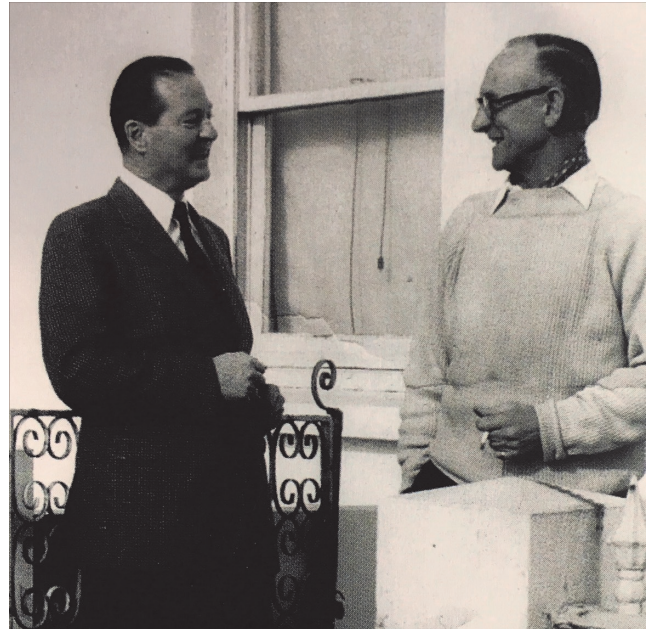
After the Second World War the house was divided into four flats and in 1959 was brought back into one house by the then owner Cecil Rochfort D'Oyly-John, a successful artist. D'Oyly-John was a colourful character who not only mixed regularly with the nurses living in the Nurses Home next door but with the rich and famous including Sir Terence Rattigan. It is highly likely that D'Oyly-John asked Rattigan if he was interested in buying the house, which he did—as a weekend/entertaining home—in 1961. He knew Brighton well and already owned a flat in Hove which was mainly used by his partner at the time, Michael Franklin.

It is understood that Rattigan gave Michael a sizeable budget and personal fee to design and redecorate the house whilst he went abroad to work on two plays. After an 18-month absence he returned and was none too impressed with what had been done. Two controversial changes Michael made were to remove the first floor balcony with iron railings in favour of a ground floor porch and remove a Regency staircase in favour of a second-hand pine staircase reclaimed from a Chelsea antique shop.

Another person not impressed was Vivien Leigh, who lived nearby at the time who was apparently "horrified to see what had been done to a perfect Regency facade and an impeccable interior." (*Michael Darlow, Terence Rattigan: The Man and His Work*, p 403.)

Rosie Brenan and her husband Patrick bought the house from Rattigan in 1967. It was a rushed sale as Rattigan needed to sell the house by a certain date to establish his expatriate status for tax reasons. I have had the pleasure of meeting Rosie several times. Rosie has told me so much about the house, which has been fasci-

nating both from a historical perspective and very useful with the current changes we are making. Michael Franklin, who was introduced to Rosie as Rattigan's "interior designer" took her around the house when she viewed. Michael was very passionate about the changes he had made to the house, pointing out many features he had introduced which included the creation of an ensuite bedroom for the sole use of the actress Margaret Leighton.



TR with the artist Cecil D'Oyly-John, a previous owner of Bedford House, circa 1960.

There are a number of rooms which are still just as they were when Rattigan lived here. Principal amongst them is his bay-windowed study with its red carpet and mock silk wall paper, heavy green swagged curtains and built-in mahogany bookshelves. The carpet is now threadbare and the walls and ceiling have damp stains but I cannot help but feel very fortunate, especially as a former student of Theatre Studies, to now call this room my study. I often think of Rattigan sitting at his desk, just where I am now, working on a screenplay or writing to friends. Rattigan had a four-poster bed in his bedroom with heavy curtains and a bath tub that faced the sea in the bathroom. Apparently there were many burn marks on the carpet around the toilet - a consequence of cigarette butts thrown from the bath tub but missing the toilet bowl!

Bedford House is a Grade II listed property so the first thing that Rob and I had to do was get Listed Building Consent to make a few minor changes such as installing a wood burner, a skylight for roof access, secondary glazing in bedrooms, new cornicing and ceiling roses. This application process took just under a year to complete so work only started on renovating the house in January. ***Continued overleaf...***

Renovating a Rattigan home

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We thought the best place to start was in the basement where there was a lot of damp. This former laundry room had been used as a wine/coal cellar by Rattigan. The plan for the laundry room is to turn it into a small art deco-styled basement theatre-cum-party room. I use the term “theatre” very loosely and as a nod to Rattigan’s previous ownership. A low level stage will be created at the back of the room along with a bar, seating areas and a bathroom. We intend to rent out this room and the whole of the basement for short term lets but would like to see the Theatre room used without charge for other activities, for example as a venue for small performances during the May festival. 🌀

Play competition update

Since I updated members on the progress of the award in the December edition, 40 scripts were selected out of a total of 191 eligible plays and these were read by our third stage readers. Then Roger Mills, Clive Montellier and I examined the reports and the marks and were able to arrive at a shortlist of 17 scripts. The titles of these chosen 17 were published on our website in April.

After further careful scrutiny, by the end of April we had identified a final shortlist of three plays to be sent to our judges, Julian Fellowes, Thea Sharrock, David Suchet and Professor Dan Rebellato. All four of them were asked to rank them in order from 1 – 3, and their reports are due at the end of July. At present two judges have reported back and it is clear from their comments that we shall have an award winner and a runner-up. This was helpful because our Rules had stated that “*The judges may at their discretion decline to award one or both of these prizes or combine the two sums to be shared proportionally between two or more winners.*”

On a visit to Terence Rattigan’s alma mater, Harrow School, in June to meet their new Director of Drama, Adam Cross, it occurred to me that their Ryan Theatre, where the Society has attended events in the past and which seats 400 on two levels and is equipped to industry standards, would be an excellent venue for our Awards Ceremony. Much to my delight, Mr Cross said that the school would be happy to welcome our distinguished judges, the writers and members of the TRS and we have arrived at a date for the event, 26 September. All the writers of the final 17 scripts have been invited to attend but the final winner and runner-up will be informed only on the day. I hope that as many members as possible will be able to attend. For full details, please see the enclosed booking form.

Barbara Longford 🌀

Date for your diary

Tuesday 26 September

This is the big day when the results of the TRS Award for a new play will be announced by Julian Fellowes, one of the final judges. Please see the Chairman’s update on this page and the flyer enclosed with this edition of the newsletter for full details. The date for the Society AGM will be announced in due course.

The Three R’s

Treasurer Andrew Kenyon
describes the Readers’ Thank-You Party

No, not Readin’, (w)Ritin’ and ‘Rithmetic but Readers Rewarding Relaxation! ‘*A labourer is worthy of his hire*’ as the saying goes, and with close to 200 scripts being submitted for entry into The Terence Rattigan Award needing to be read (and not just once!), it soon became evident that strong staying power was required from the dedicated team of volunteers who had offered to bury their heads in the aspiring playwrights’ submissions.

As a ‘thank you’ for their efforts, on Saturday 4 March a reception was held at Sir Terence’s birthplace – 100 Cornwall Gardens SW7 – courtesy of Junko Tarrant (*for whom a ‘hurrah’ or two is due as we’ve been here at least twice before!*) and, indeed, as in the past, a good time was had by all.

Our Chairman Barbara and Membership Secretary Diana were in charge of the canapés and your Treasurer and student member Esop Evard dispensed the drinks. Throughout the three hours or so at least 35 readers dropped in and, as one of them myself, it was interesting to hear first-hand from others, the diversity of the entries we had been privileged to receive.

Barbara said a few words of welcome and offered the Society’s thanks to Junko and she was also able to tease us by telling which plays had made the final shortlist. It all started to become very real. Readers swapped their stories and it was fascinating to share how we felt in offering up our comments and marks. Not an easy task – one man’s meat and all that. But what a rich and exciting experience this has been. Time-consuming, yes, but I would certainly do it again. And, who knows, one of the plays we read could turn out to be the embryonic work of a future Albee, or indeed Rattigan, so diverse were the entries.

The ‘thank you’ party was a chance for the Society to show its appreciation for the hard work by the team of readers in a relaxed and convivial atmosphere and to hope that we had succeeded in a job well done. We all now await the denouement at Harrow on 26 September.

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