

# *The* Rattigan

The Newsletter of  
The Terence Rattigan Society

ISSUE NO. 4 JULY/AUG 2012

# *Version*

## A new tree is planted in Covent Garden



**Our President and Vice-Presidents in front of the new tree (obscured); for the tree and plaque see inside...**

On a blissfully sunny day in May the Society marked the centenary of Rattigan's birth with a service of celebration at the Actors' Church in Covent Garden, where Sir Terence Rattigan CBE has a plaque along with many other theatrical luminaries, including, as a close neighbour on the north wall, Sir Noel Coward.

And indeed this was a splendid theatrical occasion, with contributors to the service including Charlotte Page, who sang 'O Mio Babbino Caro' from *Gianni Schicchi* by Puccini, Nicholas Farrell (then starring in *The Browning Version* at the Harold Pinter—lately Comedy—Theatre) who read from Rattigan's essay *A Magnificent Pity For Camels*, Greta Scacchi and Simon Green, who gave an extract from *The Deep Blue Sea*,

Simon then also singing 'Avalon', the song that features strongly in *After the Dance*, and Adrian Brown, who read his own specially composed 'Elegy' (printed in full on p4).

The service was conducted by the Reverend Simon Grigg, with piano accompaniment and organ music by Simon Gutteridge. David Suchet gave the tribute, written by his fellow Vice-President Geoffrey Wansell, and Geoffrey himself stood in for Sir Ronald Harwood, who was to have spoken about one of Rattigan's great loves, the game of cricket, but who was unable for family reasons to be present on the day. The service was then followed by a tree planting in the garden.

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## The Terence Rattigan Society

*President:* Princess George Galitzine MBE

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



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### INTRODUCING

#### ...our Vice-President Michael Darlow (in his own words)

I have been wracking my brains and the more I think about it the more I conclude that there is not really anything worth the paper space that I want to add to the account of my meetings with TR that are already in my biography of him. The most salient points were first and foremost his courage in bearing such extreme pain, his charm, helpfulness and encouragement to us. This affected me all the more because I had initially rejected the idea of writing and directing his obituary programme for the BBC because I regarded myself as being 'on the other side' in the great divide that still existed at that time between broadly, the younger, more left-leaning people who identified with the Royal Court, Joan Littlewood and the work of Bertolt Brecht and, on the other side, those associated with the commercial West End theatre and managements like Binkie Beaumont's HM Tennent - of whom Rattigan seemed the epitome.

It is sometimes hard today to recall the strength of polarisation between the two camps which still existed in the mid-1970s. While doing my National Service I had been to the original Royal Court production of *Look Back...* and had stood up and cheered at the end.

Throughout the performance I had wanted to stand up and shout out encouragement to Jimmy Porter each time he launched into another of his tirades against the old order, the people who seemed to have been running things for ever and were too polite or uptight to express their feelings openly and honestly. At last here was someone who seemed to be speaking for all of us! Yes, it's true that I remembered from doing Rattigan's plays

in rep and earlier at school and drama school, how well they worked with audiences. But when Graham Benson, a young BBC drama producer I had never heard of rang me up out of the blue and asked me to write and direct Rattigan's obituary my first reaction was incredulity - I simply believed that he had got the wrong number.

Once he had convinced me it really was me he wanted to talk to I still turned his offer down, explaining that I was "with the other team". I only agreed to take on the assignment after Graham had assured me that I could say what I liked, including being critical of TR and his work. After re-reading the plays I changed my view of Rattigan, becoming angry with myself and others for so underrating and misunderstanding him. It was from this that the idea of writing his biography was born.

When, as a condition of talking to him and allowing us access to his papers, TR demanded that we show him his TV obit, the actual viewing was a potentially fraught occasion. That it passed off so well was entirely due to him, his patience, understanding and humility - even at those points when there was criticism of his work - as with our dismissal of his beloved *Adventure Story* as "an expensive, tasteless flop".

Of course, in the first edition of the book there were certain things that we could not say as there were still people alive who made no secret of the fact that they were prepared to take legal action to silence us. Later, after they had died, it became possible to include some of the things that they had wanted to remain hidden. Also, as happens to any biographer, people approach you with new and relevant information. On top of which, over the years various things were written about Rattigan which were simply untrue. In later editions of the book it was possible to include some important new material and to try to correct some of the misinformation that had been printed in the interim.

**Continued on p5...**



**David Suchet, the onerous task of tree-planting accomplished, in the garden of St Paul's. Photo by Roger Mills**

**Continued from page 1...** The tree was planted—or, rather, the last bit of topsoil was carefully put in place—by David Suchet, whose resonant speech was interrupted by the church bells at noon. We paused. Our Vice-President continued. We relished the sunshine and the convivial spirit of the occasion. Those present also included many Society members, a fair number of guests and other interested onlookers.

Another plaque (pictured) to mark the occasion was already in place on a nearby bench. How many Rattigan plaques can we now identify? One in the church, this one in the garden, another at his birthplace in Cornwall Gardens, and one on his house in Madeira Drive in Brighton. If there are others, this newsletter would like to know of them.

Afterwards, Society members, their guests and the performers repaired to the Irving Room at the Garrick Club for a champagne reception. David Suchet was presented with his commemorative scroll as Vice-President and was called upon to give his third speech of the day. In it he drew attention to the way in which Rattigan's plays have a quality reminiscent of musical composi-

tion. There are the top notes, the middle notes and the lower, darker notes, not all of which have always been played to the full in productions of the plays in the past. In Rattigan's lifetime, David suggested, the top notes may have been given slightly more emphasis, and the lower tones given less than their full value. Now we have the advantage, with some excellent recent productions, of seeing the plays in their full depth and breadth.

David then had to disappear to prepare for his evening performance at the Apollo Theatre, in which he is playing James Tyrone in Eugene O'Neill's *A Long Day's Journey Into Night*. The rest of us melted away into Covent Garden and its environs, heads and hearts buzzing with another sense of right being done, in Winslow Boy style, to the enduring reputation of Terence Rattigan.

As more than one person remarked, if Rattigan had been looking down on the day's proceedings he would surely have been touched, amused, and quite possibly very surprised. ☞



**The plaque on a nearby bench; much hilarity after the planting (in the foreground Charlotte Page, Sheila Suchet, Elena Salvoni and Simon Grigg); the President confiding a quiet word to the attentive Sir Donald Sinden at the reception — Captions please for the next issue! What might Jean be saying to our great thespian? A glass of bubbly for the winner.**



## Elegy for Sir Terence Rattigan

by Adrian Brown

We've gathered here today to plant a tree  
To honour one fine playwright's memory;  
A tree we hope will flourish down the years  
To keep his aura freshly without tears.  
For while the sun shines or if tempests teem  
They're simply variations on the theme  
Of this bequest to the nation that we've made  
For Terry's shade reclining in its shade.

Enough of that, tributary recitals  
Need more than half-baked reference to titles  
And play on words; let's rather be inspired  
By this persona we so much admired:  
His well-graced figure and his handsome face,  
His confidence he filled a destined place;  
The suits from Savile Row, the well-bred voice,  
The house at Sunningdale, the sleek Rolls Royce.  
A generous host, a true sophisticate  
With many friends among the good and great  
The Burton-Taylors, Harrisons and Co.;  
Or Arthur Miller, Marilyn Monroe;  
The long affection of the lovely Jean  
Dawnay, now the Princess Galitzine;  
The winsome boy-friends, of whom I was one;  
Euphoria – till 1961.  
Pad in Bermuda, work in Hollywood,  
Let's face it, luvvies, Terry had it good,  
In conversation being seldom lost  
For mad proposal or for sharp riposte;  
With – let's be frank now, for it's not a sin –  
The frequent standby of a glass of gin.  
His silky charm, his poise, his ready wit.  
Brought him success.

But only part of it  
Contented him; so let us think instead  
Of what was going on inside the head  
Of one who practised all his craft and art  
To show the secrets of the human heart,  
To plumb the depths of pain that well might be  
Concealed beneath the calmest Deep Blue Sea,  
What founts of feeling might break surface if  
That upper lip was held not quite so stiff  
How untold secrets between man and wife  
Exposed our very British way of life;  
How feigned contentment might conceal disaster –  
Revealing all this, Terry was a master.

He had his own griefs needing our compassion  
In bitter years when he was "out of fashion",  
With everything he'd written or he'd thought  
Dismissed as nothing by the Royal Court;  
When all that much-enjoyed applause and laughter

Had died, and he must swallow what came after,  
Those unfamiliar bitter thoughts that press  
On those who – up to then – had known success.  
So he sought exile – in Bermuda, Ischia,  
And there grew sadder, even whiskier.  
We'll draw a veil.....

Time brings in changes though, and his survival  
Is witnessed by last year's acclaimed revival,  
When *Cause Célèbre*, *Flare Path* are brought to  
mind,  
After the Dance, and my own *Less Than Kind*.  
A portent for the future hopefully  
To follow.

So, returning to the tree  
This tribute planted here will soon allow  
Dear 'Terry' to take yet another bough,  
Turn over a new leaf, and once more go  
Branching out to meet new publics; so  
After a life deep-rooted in the stage –  
Though cut down at by far too young an age –  
As good companion, playwright, gentleman,  
We honour you, Sir Terence Rattigan.



*Adrian read his Elegy at the Celebration Service for  
Sir Terence Rattigan at the Actors' Church in May.*

## Editor's Note

We have three Society events to cover in this issue, hence the (temporary) increase to eight pages. It was felt that the Celebration Service and the Annual Dinner deserved extensive coverage, especially of Adrian's *Elegy* and Sir Ronald Harwood's speech. Indeed we could have included the Tribute given by David Suchet and written by Geoffrey Wansell, but something had to give.

We also had the excellent Masterclass given by Thea Sharrock, who has proved herself to be a major exponent of the Rattigan craft in her productions of *After the Dance* and *Cause Célèbre*. We would not normally have scheduled three such important occasions within weeks of each other, but we were governed by people's availability, and in the world of theatre availability is all.

Our AGM takes place on 29 September, coupled with the visit to RAF High Wycombe and the screening of *Journey Together*. This event is being organised by our RAF Liaison officer, Clive Montellier, and I hope many of you will indeed wish to journey together to High Wycombe for another Society exclusive.

Please feel free to make contributions to this newsletter. It is a forum for all.



**David Suchet receiving his Vice-President's scroll at the Garrick Club reception**

### **Introducing Michael Darlow *continued from p2***

In many ways being invited by Graham to do the TV obit changed my life. It gave me the opening to work in the BBC Drama Department which, although I had made programmes for other BBC departments and had done drama in ITV, I had never done except years earlier as an actor playing generally small parts. The effect on my life continues, of course, in the amount of work and my time that all things Rattigan still take up. That initial phone call could also be said to have changed Graham Benson's life to an even greater extent - a few months later I introduced him to a young colleague of mine called Christine Fox. Not long after that they asked me to be the best man at their wedding! Today they have a beautiful daughter who has herself recently got married. All of which can be said to be down to Terence Rattigan. 🌀

*Michael Darlow is a writer, director, TV producer and lecturer. As well as writing for TV he has written four major books, including his biography of Rattigan, and numerous articles for newspapers and magazines.*

## **Jean Galitzine MBE**

Many congratulations to our President, who was awarded an MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List for her many charitable services, most particularly to PHAB (Physically Handicapped and Able Bodied). Jean says it was Frankie Vaughan who first got her involved in charity work when they made the film *Wonderful Things!* for Herbert Wilcox in 1958. 🌀

## **Inaugural Annual Dinner**

*A report by our Chairman, Barbara Longford*

The Society plans to celebrate Sir Terence's birthday every year with a lunch or dinner on a date close to the anniversary (10<sup>th</sup> June) at a place well known to him.

Our first such event this June was hugely enjoyable and hosted with great style and warmth by our Vice President and the Garrick Club's official historian – Geoffrey Wansell. Sir Terence joined the Garrick Club in 1944, resigned in 1958, re-joined in 1968 and remained a member until his death.

As befits such exquisite surroundings and to pay tribute to Sir Terence's elegance, this was a black tie event and we were seated at round tables, each named after one of the plays, in the Milne Room. Members were curious to know if they had been seated on, for example, 'French Without Tears' for any particular reason.

After the meal, Geoffrey introduced our Guest of Honour and speaker, the Academy award-winning playwright, screenwriter and novelist, Sir Ronald Harwood, CBE, who delivered what many of us consider to be one of the finest after-dinner speeches about a playwright ever made. The Society is deeply grateful to Sir Ronald for giving such an unforgettable inaugural speech. We are printing it now, in full, so that all the members can enjoy it:-

### **Speech by Sir Ronald Harwood, CBE at the first Annual Birthday Dinner of The Terence Rattigan Society**

"A famous and beautiful actress was responsible for the one conversation I had with Sir Terence Rattigan in this Club about forty years ago. The actress was Margaret Leighton and she had just been in a one woman play of mine on television called *The Guests* in which she gave a glorious performance - her last, I think, just before her untimely death. We had a rather good lunch, she, my wife, her husband, Michael Wilding, and I. After several 'snifters' as she'd have called them, - yes, we drank at lunch in those days - she said, 'Did I tell you, Mervyn's staying with us in Almodington for a week or two, but he doesn't get out of bed until twelve. I think he's writing something. One must hope there's a part for me but you never know with Merv. Oh yes, and he admired the play and he'd like to meet you.' She never explained who Mervyn or Merv was. She took it for granted that I understood what was, after all, a very West End sort of theatrical joke. Michael Wilding, a great film star of the post war period explained, 'Merv is Terry Rattigan.' 'Why does Maggie call him Merv?' I asked. Michael mumbled something, but because he had the worst diction of any actor I

have ever met, I couldn't entirely follow the explanation.

"It was only recently, when reading about the great playwright, that I learned he had been given no middle name by his parents, and had in his teens taken as a middle name Mervyn and no one seems to have been able to give a satisfactory explanation as to why. Well, I think I can. All great cricketers had at least two initials – W. G. Grace, W. R. Hammond, known as Wally, and sometimes three, as in D. C. S. Compton – so my guess is that Sir Terence was getting himself ready for a career not in the theatre but in the game he loved and played well. But why, Mervyn, I wonder? We will never know because secrets were Sir Terence Rattigan's stock-in-trade.

"Before I recount my meeting with him, let me first try to describe the part he played in the theatrical world that possessed me when growing up in Cape Town and on arrival here in England. I do this because I believe it is essential to appreciate how great a figure he was in the English-speaking world, and how disgracefully he was eventually treated. And then all the more delicious his victory now over third-rate drama critics whose interest was not in the theatre but in political allegiances. And not only were drama critics to blame but also, of course, that wretched *leitmotif* of British culture, the class system into which, as an immigrant, I have no insights whatsoever, except to say I think it is one of our greatest exports, beautifully packaged and called *Down-ton Abbey*.

"I saw my first Rattigan just before the end of the Second World War in Cape Town. *Flare Path* was presented by the Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies Company. Dame Gwen had made her home in South Africa in the late 1930s and together with Marda Vanne, a South African born actress who had established a small reputation in London, they presented plays from the popular repertoire and current West End hits. *Flare Path* was one of them. It made a huge impression on me especially because I remember that my mother wept for some time after the curtain descended and said over and over again, 'Oh, what a wonderful writer. Oh, what a wonderful writer!'

"My elocution teacher in Cape Town, Miss Sybil Marks, held an end of year concert to show off her pupils and in 1949, she decided that I should appear as Ronnie Winslow in the famous cross-examination scene from *The Winslow Boy*. The part of the barrister, Sir Robert Morton, was played by another of her pupils, Nigel Hawthorne. We were of course stunning in the parts although I have to say I thought I was rather more stunning than Nigel.

"I arrived in England in December 1951 to study at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, and the following year, saw my second Rattigan, a haunting work of genius in my view, *The Deep Blue Sea* at the Duchess Theatre. So taken was I with it, that I went three times which is in itself a modest tribute to Sir Terence because I had very little money so must have persuaded visitors from South Africa, who asked what they should see, to treat me. And I saw three different actresses in the leading role, Peggy Ashcroft, Celia Johnson and Googie Withers. Of the three I thought Googie Withers the most outstanding. I cannot now tell you why but my impression of her in the part has remained indelibly imprinted on my senses like a powerful, heady scent.

"And a little later, in 1954 or early 1955, I remember seeing another Rattigan masterpiece, *Separate Tables*. I am told that the main parts were originally intended for Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh who had just scored a success in *The Sleeping Prince*, a rather fluffy play Rattigan wrote to celebrate the Queen's coronation. Because the Oliviers could not commit immediately it was decided not to wait for them and the play went ahead at the St James's Theatre with Maggie Leighton and Eric Portman and two better performances it would be hard to imagine.

"Then, as an actor in weekly rep, I encountered the playwright again when I played Laurence Harvey's part in *Variation on a Theme* in which my performance, I am told, gave a new meaning to the word camp. It is supposed to be the play in which Rattigan outed himself as a homosexual but no one seemed to know it at the time and I can't see any reason for believing it now. I have not seen or read the play since, and I'm not sure it is a very good play, but I remember one line given to a character based, I believe, on Sefton Delmer, a journalist who knew the Nazi thug, Ernst Röhm, and had interviewed Hitler. In the play the character says with hearty self-deprecation, 'Yes, I am a local boy made bad.' A lovely line.

"Much later, in 1994, I adapted for the screen *The Browning Version* which boasted two greatly underrated performances, one by Albert Finney as Crocker-Harris and the other Greta Scacchi as Laura, an interpretation to equal any other I have been privileged to see. The film is now available on DVD.

"Those are my Rattigan credentials. Well, almost, because I come now to my brief and only meeting with him under the stairs of the Club. It was in the early 1970s, just after he'd been knighted. In the early evening, I was at the notice board reading as usual the obituaries when someone tapped me on the shoulder. I turned to find Sir Terence, smiling. 'Mr Harwood,' he said, with period correctness and formality, no Ronald or Ronnie or Ron. 'My name's Terence Rattigan.' He

was, as you all know, amazingly handsome and elegant, with a smile that lit up the room or, in this case, the entrance hall to the club. And, smiling, he said, 'Maggie Leighton tells me you like cricket, let's meet after dinner under the stairs. By the way I liked the play she did of yours,' and he disappeared, to dine in a private room.

'I ate with suppressed excitement in the Coffee Room and afterwards made my way to appointed place where he was waiting for me. He ordered our drinks and then without preamble he said, 'The question I've been longing to ask you is, did you ever see Wally Hammond?'

'Just before my time,' I said, a little bewildered.

'What a shame, the greatest batsman I ever saw, and that includes Bradman.'

'I didn't see him either,' I said, by now beginning to feel somewhat forlorn.

'But of course,' Rattigan said, 'you've seen Dennis Amiss of Warwickshire.'

'Yes,' I said with some relief. I've seen Amiss. Many times.'

'Well, he always reminds me of Hammond,' and for the next hour and with great delight he talked about cricket, Hammond and Amiss mostly. I didn't say very much. I must confess I would have liked to have discussed the theatre or films, but Sir Terence wasn't having any of it. 'Hammond's cover drive was a thing of great beauty,' I remember him saying. 'What a pity you didn't see him.'

'Yes,' I said, very forlorn by now, 'what a pity.'

'Somehow, right at the end of the evening, I managed to sneak in a question about the theatre, asking if he had any advice for me. He thought for a moment, then said, 'If you're having trouble with a scene always put someone in it who shouldn't be there.' Wonderful advice which I follow and pass on to young playwrights to this very day. We shook hands and parted. Weeks later, I met Maggie Leighton and she said, 'Mervyn very much enjoyed meeting you and thought you talked well about cricket.' Believe me, I'd hardly said a word.

'And of course that meeting took place when Rattigan's reputation was in decline. Up to the 1960s or thereabouts, as you all know, it was accepted without question that he was undoubtedly one of the great figures of the English theatre, a permanent resident at the top of Mount Olympus, living in Eaton Square. But something happened that was terrible and unfair. He fell from favour. To fall from favour happens at one time or another to most playwrights beginning with Shakespeare. I once heard Harold Pinter says to Gunter Grass of all people, "D'you know, Gunter, no one takes any notice of me here.' In Rattigan's case it was true. He

was ignored and it was sudden and brutal.


"In 1956, the English Stage Company at The Royal Court Theatre presented among other plays, *Look Back in Anger* by John Osborne and the world of the theatre, certainly the world of Rattigan's theatre, changed and changed rapidly. You all know what happened. The critics pounced. The pack was led by Kenneth Tynan of the *Observer*, a man who wrote marvellously about performers but whose judgement of plays was entirely based on political criteria. He was a brutal critic of Rattigan but it's always worth remembering he was at the same time a champion of Bertolt Brecht, a propagandist for totalitarianism, and whose plays may be the most readily available cure for insomnia known to man or woman.

"And in no time at all Rattigan was disparaged, his plays considered pot-boilers, right-wing West End trash, and most predictably of all, his plays were described as 'well-made'. Some of these critics still lurk in the stalls on first nights, all of them, I am delighted to report, now cowed and vanquished by the genius of Terence Rattigan.

"Why has this renaissance occurred? What is it about his work that has again captured audiences from one end of the Britain to the other and very likely beyond? First and foremost, Rattigan is a great story-teller and all art, from abstract painting to atonal music, tells a story, fulfilling an ancient human need, an answer to the question, 'And then? And then?'. Rattigan was better at telling a story than any other playwright I can think of, apart from Shakespeare, of course. Another reason for this extraordinary revival is not because he wrote about emotionally suppressed men and women, or disguised homosexuals as is so frequently and boringly claimed. It is because Terence Rattigan wrote about human beings, people, recognisable people, characters who loved, despaired, laughed, wept and in most cases survived.

"I want to draw in conclusion a comparison to Anton Chekhov. The Communists when they came to power in Russia in 1917 never condemned Chekhov for writing about the upper middle-class. On the contrary, they embraced him, hailed him as a prophet but above all bowed down before him as a great playwright, who wrote about human beings. Rattigan was in the Chekhov tradition.

"His temporary fall from grace wounded him deeply and probably hastened his end. But we here are honoured, I believe, to be members of this Society and to know that his plays will be revived and enjoyed as long as men can breathe or eyes can see."

This moving tribute was followed by a vote of thanks, given by our President with her customary wit and charm. 

# Thea Sharrock Masterclass

A report by Stephen Bradley

On Friday 1st June, I had the pleasure of attending the first of what the Society hopes will be a series of masterclasses at various drama schools around the country. This one took place at the Central School of Speech and Drama, organised by our Drama School Liaison officer, and former Central student, Elizabeth Donnelly.

The masterclass was conducted by none other than Thea Sharrock, an incredibly talented and successful director (credits include *Equus*, *Private Lives*, *The Deep Blue Sea*, *After the Dance* and more recently *The Sunshine Boys*). In the first scene, from *The Deep Blue Sea*, Elizabeth Donnelly played Hester and Matthew Bloxham played Freddie Page. As the performance took place Thea stepped in to give notes, involving the audience. By doing this she was able to bring more depth and meaning to the dialogue and stage directions. She explained about the “pace” of the scene and how important it was that the dialogue was performed maintaining the originally intended rhythm. Thea also emphasised the huge importance of stage directions and how each one plays its part in bringing the overall scene to life, and how altering or taking these directions out will result in the piece not working and the pace being affected.



Thea Sharrock (with bouquet) flanked by the three performers, Jonathan Rigby, Elizabeth Donnelly and Matthew Bloxham

Thea encouraged interaction with audience and the actors, and everyone was able to ask questions and contribute their opinions before the scene was performed again—this time with the addition of Thea pausing to add notes and directions as the scene was played out. She talked passionately about alternative characters outside the play and described them as being “in their own world”; she explored the depth of relationships that were portrayed as the scene developed. For myself, I found the experience awe-inspiring. The methods Thea used to break the scene down, allowing audience participation throughout, resulted in a stimulating and creative environment.

The next piece to be performed was a scene from *The Browning Version* with Jonathan Rigby as Crocker-Harris and Matthew Bloxham as Frank Hunter. Thea

## Date for your diary

There will be an excursion to RAF High Wycombe Officers' Mess on **Saturday 29 September** for a special screening of Rattigan's *Journey Together*. This is also the occasion of the Society's first AGM. Lunch will be available in the Officers' Mess at a modest £35 a head. The flyer was issued with the last newsletter but bookings may be made direct to the Chairman, Barbara Longford—by 31 July, please.

The film, featuring a host of British actors serving in the RAF during World War II, was written by Terence Rattigan during his RAF service and celebrates the contribution of multi-crewed aircraft, such as those in which he had flown as an Air Gunner on active service with RAF Coastal Command.

The venue is currently the Officers' Mess for RAF Air Command, formerly RAF Bomber Command and home to significant military commanders including Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur 'Bomber' Harris, wartime Commander-in-Chief and subject of our Vice-President, Michael Darlow's biographical TV play starring John Thaw and Robert Hardy. Michael has kindly agreed to introduce the film, and we hope that Robert Hardy will be able to join us on the day. As an active military headquarters Mess, public access is very limited and this occasion marks a rare opportunity to celebrate Flight Lieutenant Terence Rattigan's aircrew service in appropriate surroundings.

explained that Rattigan provides a lot of “clues” in the script and that if those clues are followed and an actor doesn't add anything extra, the scene will work brilliantly. This reinforced how important it is for actors to study the piece they are working on in depth and how preparation is a key to success.

As the piece was performed again, I could see a noticeable difference in the actors as she directed them with more emphasis on stage direction, bringing out the subtext and really focusing on pauses and punctuation. Even though time was running out and a shorter time was spent on this scene, the difference was plain to see.

I learnt so much, evidenced by the seven pages of notes I took! Thea's interactive style with the audience and the actors resulted in a fantastic learning experience for all who attended. ∞

*Stephen Bradley is a young actor as well as being the Society's Webmaster.*

Anyone interested in joining the Society should contact the Membership Secretary, Diana Scotney, on 01462 623941 or at [dianascotney@virginmedia.co.uk](mailto:dianascotney@virginmedia.co.uk). We are always keen to hear from potential new members.

Members are encouraged to submit news, views, letters, articles or anecdotes to this newsletter. Please contact the editor via email ([gc@gilescotney.com](mailto:gc@gilescotney.com)). The deadline for the next edition is Friday 14 September.