

# The Rattigan

The Newsletter of  
The Terence Rattigan Society

ISSUE NO. 23 JANUARY 2018

# Version

## A Room with a River View

Fifty of us gathered on a dull, damp Saturday, 18 November, on the second floor of the Doggett's public house at the corner of Blackfriars Bridge. We had a private room with a beautiful view overlooking the River Thames and we had come to enjoy a rehearsed reading of the second prize-winning play in the recent Terence Rattigan Society Awards – *Going Back* by Roy Chatfield. After the reading there was to be a Christmas buffet lunch followed by the Society's sixth AGM.

Our chairman, Barbara Longford, gave us a brief introduction and welcomed the author who was present with his wife Marion and friends Pauline and John Hammond-Spencer and Penny Gold. She also welcomed Roy Kendall, whose play, *The Onion at the End*, will be performed in Broadstairs in February, new members Vera Christiansen from Paris, Anita and Richard Barley, Jennifer and Michael Mills, and one of our long established members all the way from New York, Sandy Marshall.

She then handed over to Adrian Brown, an honorary member, a close friend of Terry's and a well-known theatre and TV director and poet, who directed the reading. Adrian introduced the actors

and talked about the subject matter of the play – the return to his family of a long term captive, Jules, who had been kept hostage by freedom fighters in an unnamed African country. Adrian himself had been a friend of Terry Waite, who spent five years as a captive in Lebanon, so was able to bring considerable insight to the complex feelings and emotions that are an inevitable consequence of such separation.

We were all looking forward to the rehearsed reading and were not disappointed. Esop Evard, an experienced drama student and one of our bright young members, enjoyed the play so much that he has written a review:

*"I'm not typically a fan of new writing within the theatre. At best, I usually enjoy only one out of every ten modern plays I hear! Roy Chatfield's bold new play Going Back - praise be - was thankfully within the ten percent, and may very well have been of interest to Rattigan himself."*

*The play was fresh, evocative and clearly benefited from Adrian Brown's strong direction. It is not always the case that a group of performers ping so dynamically off each other. Continued on p 3...*



**Diana Scotney and Esop Evard report on the AGM and a play reading**

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## The Terence Rattigan Society

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Vice-Presidents: Michael Darlow, Julian Fellowes, Dr. Holly Hill, Greta Scacchi, Geoffrey Wansell

Chairman	Barbara Longford	Membership Secretary	Diana Scotney
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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

#### Michael Wheatley-Ward *The Society's Theatre Liaison Officer*

Michael has been in the professional theatre for over 52 years, having commenced at the Theatre Royal, Stratford East in 1965, before moving west into central London to work with the Stoll Theatres Corporation. A spell as a lighting technician with Binkie Beaumont's H. M. Tennent Ltd followed. He underwent an apprenticeship as a Management Trainee at the ABC circuit, where he rose through the ranks to control the theatre sales operation in over 80 theatres by the age of 20.

Perhaps not quite trusting the world of theatre to provide him with a reliable income, Michael also established a parallel business career in retail. He became the owner of several menswear shops, including Radnor's of Windsor, which gave him the capital to become a producer in 1984, under the mentorship of Sir Peter Saunders. His happiest days were at the Theatre Royal, Margate, built in 1786, which he re-opened in 1992. Sadly, the Arts Council did not support his view of theatre – bringing a full programme of live shows to a culturally under-endowed corner of the country – because its offering was not sufficiently highbrow. Although audiences were rising to record numbers, a deal was done whereby the local authority bought the theatre. It was re-invented as a “community-focused” arts centre to complement a new contemporary art gallery in the area.

Nothing daunted, Michael went on to form the Sarah Thorne Theatre Company at a previously disused theatre in Broadstairs in 2007. He still works as a “very small” (his quotes) producer arranging try-outs of new works and the only Summer Rep Season in Kent and the South East. He also stages an annual pantomime and other community events.

He insists that his pantomimes are strictly traditional, with live music, standard storylines, no TV names, and




no booking fees. He involves himself in just about everything, from the overall producing to Front of House duties and changing scenic cloths. He plainly loves the whole business of putting on shows and the highlight, for him, is seeing youngsters coming to the theatre for the first time,

getting hooked and coming back again.

A keen theatrical historian, Michael has co-funded with the Emile Littler Foundation the erection of a wall plaque on the Mariner Arms in Ramsgate, where the great theatrical dynasty Prince, Blanche and Emile Littler were born or brought up. The author Michael Flagg is currently writing a biography on Michael, entitled *Surviving in the Theatre*, which will include full details of his life, including the way the authorities destroyed the successful operation at the Theatre Royal in Margate in 2007. Anyone interested in receiving publishing dates should contact Michael W-W direct.

Michael took on the role of Theatre Liaison Officer when the Society was founded. He makes contact with both professional and amateur producers of Rattigan's work in the UK and aims to raise the profile of the Society as well as Rattigan's work.

As many of you will know, in February he will be producing the world première of *The Onion at the End*, the winning play in the Society play competition. A Society outing is planned (members should already have received a flyer) and no doubt Michael will be there on FOH duty to welcome us.

A thespian through and through, retirement is not a word in his vocabulary and the only time he has ever acted is in front of the bank manager (he says). 

## A Room with a River View

*continued from p 1*

*The juxtaposition of themes (both serious and light) worked beautifully, as all good plays ought, and managed to tell a difficult story with just enough charm and good humour. Such a production will surely tantalise when it hits commercial theatres.*

*We follow the trials and tribulations of Giles Cole's resolute character Jules, as he tries to repair the family life from which he was unexpectedly torn away (played with noteworthy ardour, I add). His wife Penny, played subtly and effectively by Natasha Alderslade, does her best to keep a level head through his protracted absence as emotional catharsis ensues. Sean Garvey's character Andy positively shines as Jules' comic nemesis; 'stepping in' for Jules within the family unit (under the guise of orchestrating a rescue effort on Jules' behalf).*

*Jules' environmentally-protective teenage daughter - played by an effervescent Emily Laing - keeps quite an eye, and occasional tight leash, on her father, much to our amusement. And of course, whilst all this is going on, we are taken back a chapter in time to Jules' experience as a hostage in Africa. His captor, a strong-willed rebel leader Kalisa, played most strikingly by the lively Tayo Elesin, is gentle but firm; Jules is to be kept prisoner until a nation's political warfare is resolved."*

After the performance, we enjoyed a plentiful Christmas buffet lunch and then Clive Montellier conducted the AGM in his usual admirably meticulous but concise way. For those not able to be present, here is a summary:

We had to start the busy year on a sad note: we were enormously sad to lose our dear first President last December. However, Jean would have been delighted to know that she was succeeded in that role by David Suchet.

David's vacated Vice Presidency has been filled by Dr. Holly Hill, a scholar and expert on Rattigan's work, and our latest appointment as a Vice President is Julian Fellowes.



New VP Dr. Holly Hill

(See pages 4 and 5.) We also have three new Committee members since the last AGM, Susan Cooper, Professor Michael Gaunt and Roger Mills, and this should enable the Society to expand its activities.

Barbara reviewed the achievements of the TRS in 2017 starting with one of our most important to date: The Terence Rattigan Society Award. She thanked colleagues and readers for their hard work and considerable contribution to the success of the awards and looked forward to seeing the winning play at Broadstairs in February. (*Everyone has had full details from Susan Cooper, who is arranging the visit for us.*)

Other events included: a visit to The Cinema Museum to see the Rattigan film *The Sound Barrier* with Liz Fraser as our guest speaker; a party at Rattigan's birthplace for the 35 members who had read scripts for the TRS Award; a visit to Rattigan's former home in Brighton, followed by a superb amateur performance of *The Deep Blue Sea*; our Annual Birthday Dinner at the Garrick Club with Hugo Vickers as our Guest; and last, but by no means least, the awards ceremony for the Terence Rattigan Society Award, held at his alma mater – Harrow School.

Next year's events include the Harold & Pegs French Award. The Royal Central School will be its first recipient with their production—probably *Flare Path*—taking place from 22–25 November 2018 and we'll be arranging an event to see it.

Another diary date is Tuesday 10 July—our Annual Birthday Dinner at the Oxford & Cambridge Club. The guest speaker will be Professor John Bertolini, who has recently published *The Case for Terence Rattigan: Playwright*, reviewed by Holly Hill in issue 21.

After reading out the brief membership report and reporting on our financial status (healthy), Clive reminded us that we do everything required of an organisation which has charitable status. We could indeed reapply for charitable status but this could involve a lot of unnecessary red tape.

After the re-election of the Committee, Michael Gaunt thanked Adrian for all his hard work on the rehearsed reading of *Going Back* and presented him with a gift. Then Clive brought the event to an end in his usual accomplished manner. A good time was had by all and we somewhat reluctantly left the convivial atmosphere of Doggett's to commence a rather rain-soaked journey home. ☹



# Lord Kilwillie to Lord Fellowes

*The Editor welcomes the newest Vice-President*

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In the early noughties, Julian Fellowes was probably best known to British television audiences as Lord Kilwillie in *Monarch of the Glen*, the comedy drama which occupied our screens for seven series from 2000 to 2005.

However, in 2001 he won an Academy Award for his original screenplay, *Gosford Park*, which, in the words of Lynn Barber in *The Guardian* in 2004, established him as Hollywood's "top toff, the man you turn to when you want to know how a duchess holds a teaspoon". He is reported to have been a little irritated by being labelled a "toff" and is not aristocratic at all, his family belonging to the class more correctly known as the untitled landed gentry. But he has earned the title of Baron Fellowes of West Stafford, and moves in the highest possible artistic circles.

He was born in Cairo, brought up in Sussex and went to Ampleforth because his father, a diplomat (a parallel with Rattigan there), preferred it to Eton. He then went on to Cambridge and perhaps it was a brush with the Footlights that set him on track for a career in the theatre, for he then finished his education at the Webber-Douglas Academy of Dramatic Art in London.

He started writing early, for some time as a romantic novelist under the pseudonym Rebecca Greville, but it was *Gosford Park* and, later, the screen adaptation of *Vanity Fair* that set him firmly on track as a top-drawer writer/director, which can perhaps be seen as a creative graduation from his days as an actor. Not that he was exactly unsuccessful in that career either, with several high profile West End appearances behind him (he was a notable Roland Maule in Coward's *Present Laughter* to Donald Sinden's Garry Essendine in 1981) as well as his film and TV roles.



Lord Fellowes seen here with our late President and our Chairman at the Annual Birthday Dinner in 2014.

There have been other novels too, under his own name (*Snobs*, *Past Imperfect*, *Belgravia*—the last via a downloadable app), a few more adaptations of classic books (*Mary Poppins*, *Half a Sixpence*, *The Wind in the Willows*) for stage and screen, and then there was the period drama series called *Downton*

*Abbey*—a huge television project distinguished by the fact that he wrote every episode himself. No writing team for this originator. Does that smack of control freakery? Or is it simply that he knew perfectly well that no one else would possess the same instinctive knowledge both of the period and the social mores of those decades leading up to the First World War and beyond?

Whichever way one looks at it, Julian Fellowes is a triumphant example of an actor turning the tables and becoming the creator of a vast number of jobs for other actors. And this role as writer/director/producer seems to suit him as well as any other that he has played in the past. He certainly inhabits it with style, enthusiasm and panache. As Elizabeth Grice put it in *The Telegraph* in 2016, "Lord Fellowes is as sleek and beautifully polished as a billiard ball moving confidently towards its cushioned pocket."

I don't know whether Julian plays billiards or snooker, but I hope he will have taken that as a compliment! Just as there is a certain inevitability about a top-class player compiling a century break, so there is about Julian's seemingly effortless ability to produce one success after another. But let's not labour this analogy, as there is also an element of naughtiness in Ms Grice's phrasing, but it offers a nicely jaunty image. And one senses that Lord Fellowes is not entirely averse to being a somewhat jaunty peer of the realm, and who might

perhaps relish the fact that there are still rather few life peers who come from within the ranks of the showbusiness fraternity.

But of course what we in the Society most applaud at the moment is that Lord Kilwillie, now Lord Kitchener-Fellowes, has lent his considerable profile to us by consenting to be a Vice-President. We are extremely fortunate in our President and Vice-Presidents, as they are all so distinguished, both in their own achievements and in what one might call their 'Rattigan connection'.

They have all written, or spoken, or both, at considerable length on the life and works of T. M. Rattigan, and with enormous knowledge, research and insight. Our President has brilliantly played the lead in a major revival of a Rattigan play, as has another Vice-President. Two Vice-Presidents have written acclaimed biographies of Rattigan; and another did the unthinkable in basing her postgraduate degree dissertation on Rattigan when he was regarded, in American academic circles, as not worth the bother of any such prolonged research.

To these illustrious champions of Rattigan's work we now add the man who so firmly believed in the Society's Award for a new play in Rattigan's memory that he turned up not only to launch the competition at Jermyn Street Theatre with David Suchet and Geoffrey Wansell, but also came to Harrow to announce the results. He told the assembled hopefuls that what he admired most about Rattigan was his ability to depict characters with utter truthfulness and without a false note. A rare quality.

He was also our guest of honour at the Annual Birthday Dinner in 2014 where he blithely fielded a barrage of questions about his career, most of which centred on *Downton*. But he was also quick to point out on that occasion that he had other projects on the go, such as the adaptation of *School of Rock* from film to a stage musical with Andrew Lloyd Webber. He has demonstrated a real support for the Society from its inception and his support is now 'official'. We are indebted to him, and appreciate the support of Lady Kitchener-Fellowes too. ✂



## A Winslow Boy for our times

**Michael Darlow reflects on a new production**

I recently met the director and cast of a new production of *The Winslow Boy*, which opens in Chichester in February before touring major theatres throughout the UK. The Society is organising a group visit to the production in Richmond on Saturday 12 May.

I was asked to go along a couple of days into rehearsals to talk to the cast about Rattigan, how he came to write the play and answer questions. The director is the Olivier Award-nominated Rachel Kavanaugh, who has a record as a courageous campaigner on behalf of women and directors in the theatre. She has recently spoken out about stagnant pay levels for directors, telling *The Stage* newspaper "There has not been an increase in the amount directors get paid since I started directing twenty years ago. I think in many ways, because people in the creative industries have a passion for what they do, it is sometimes taken advantage of. There's a feeling people will do it because they want to, and the terrible thing is that is partly true." She has spoken in support of the campaign group Parents In the Performing Arts about the difficulties faced by parents, especially women, working in the theatre and backs the group's call for a London-based crèche for performers and other theatre creatives.

Meeting Rachel and her cast I was struck not only by their enthusiasm but their commitment to the play and Rattigan's intentions in writing it. The play has been repeatedly hailed for its defence of the rights of the individual against the over-mighty state. In 1990 when a BBC television production, starring Emma Thompson and Ian Richardson, was screened coast-to-coast across the United States, newspapers described it as "a hymn to individual liberty against despots everywhere" and highlighted the vital distinction Rattigan makes in the final scene between the need to do 'right' rather than simply dispense 'justice'. In 1999, Senator Henry Hyde in his closing argument to the Senate's Clinton impeachment hearings cited Rattigan's treatment of the Archer-Shee case in *The Winslow Boy* alongside Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* and Shakespeare's *Henry V*. He urged senators to follow Arthur Winslow's example and speak truth to power – in the words of the play to "Let Right Be Done".

I view this revival as being particularly timely because around the world today we have governments riding rough-shod over individual human rights, discriminating against religious and ethnic minorities and refugees fleeing persecution. In this country successive governments have employed **Cont. on p 8...**

# A catholic approach to London's theatres

**Roger Mills reviews a sumptuous new coffee-table book  
by Michael Coveney and Peter Dazeley**

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As a purely accidental birthday treat a few years ago I toured two Delfont Mackintosh theatres – the Prince of Wales and the Noël Coward – with other members of the Royal Central School's Pivot Club. In all my years connected with drama in one way or another it was the first time I'd ever been shown round a theatre by a commercial manager – and, by George, that gave one a different perspective. Probably a first time, too, that I'd ever looked – really looked – at the detail of an auditorium and front of house. OK, we backstage workers' interest never really goes past the pass door, if I'm honest. But I reckon it's not a thing even the serious theatre-goer often does. Think about it. Usually there's very little time once FOH open the doors: the houselights are for atmosphere, not for visibility; if you're in the rear stalls most of the house is invisible; the bar that the architect slaved over is simply heaving and all you want to do is get served; or you're queuing for the facilities. At the curtain they want you out to go home.

Or you might not even go to the place at all. The Prince of Wales was a case in point. *The Book of Mormon* has set up camp there seemingly for the foreseeable future and nothing but nothing would induce me to cross the road for that. The Novello is hosting *Mamma Mia* on its journey round the West End – so ditto. Similarly, I'll probably never live long enough to willingly visit the inside of the Lyceum, and were it not for the occasional invitation to a central showcase I'd never enter perhaps my favourite little house, the Fortune, at the present.

Good luck to all these blockbuster shows, course, but the seeming fashion for inordinately long runs these days must necessarily limit one's appetite for savouring any particular theatre or for darkening the doors of others. One also has to question too, I think, what milking these shows year after year will do for the long term artistic health of the West End.

Thankfully, though, help is at hand in the form of a sumptuous coffee table book by Michael Coveney (text) and Peter Dazeley (pictures), which takes a detailed and excellently photographed look at a selection of theatres from across the capital. Not a complete gazetteer this – some of your personal favourites may well be absent – but any tome which includes Wilton's, the BBC Radio

Theatre, the echoing empty space that is Alexandra Palace's soon-to-be-restored theatre and the wonderful stage machinery of the Playhouse has to have its heart in the right place. And this one does. I should also thank it for introducing me to the gorgeous interior of the New Wimbledon, which has a delicacy and beauty at once endearing and impressive in its audacity. The Other Place, the Tricycle and the Donmar, as well as the Regent's Park Open Air theatres and the Hackney Empire show a catholic approach which is to be applauded too. Even if it does occasionally illustrate graphically the difference between building down to a price and up to an aspiration. Michael's two- or three-page essays on each are inevitably thumbnail sketches, but all the important names are here.

My last visit to the Palladium was for the memorial to Fred Benthams of Strand Electric and I do wonder what he would have to say about the amount of lighting and sound equipment which desecrates many of these lovely theatres. In his foreword Sir Mark Rylance tells us he declares the boxes in any house he

works in 'lighting-rig-free' and one only wishes that a few more would join him. I won't give any spoilers for what is a very thoughtful introductory essay, but just gently mention that techies are not helped by the fact that everything can be had in any colour providing it's black. Or that no effort at all seems to have gone into making this equipment look anything other than horrible. As for the arrays of speaker cabinets that infest even Frank Matcham-designed spaces, the sound engineers I grew up with would sling seven-eighths of it away on

the grounds of overkill. One can only heave a sigh of relief at the clear-minded and brave action of the trustees of Shakespeare's Globe last year when it returned to shared light approaches.

But at least the long runs, raucous musicals and guaranteed returns have done one thing. For the first time in years managements and owners have the resources to really invest in our theatres. What Delfont Mackintosh have done in the Prince of Wales is quite stupendous but they are not alone.

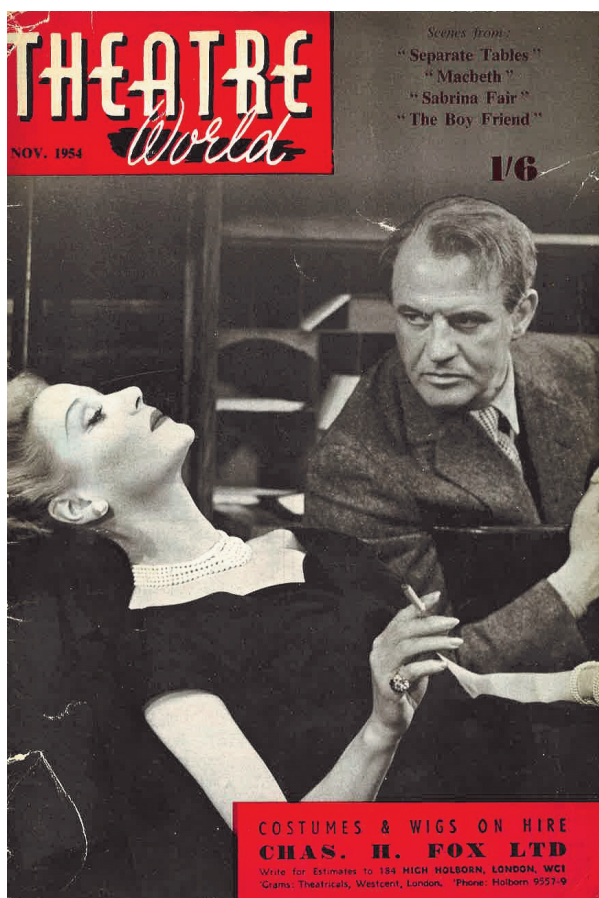
**Cont. on p 8...**





# A glance at the past: *Separate Tables* 1954

An occasional column featuring original photographs of Rattigan plays



With thanks to Barbara for providing archive copies of *Theatre World* magazine, we feature here the original production of *Separate Tables*, which starred Margaret Leighton and Eric Portman in the dual leading roles. How evocative those old black and white stills are!

## Cockpits of filth?

In response to an article in the last issue, **Shirley Jacobs** writes: "I wonder what is Tom Killigrew's definition of 'fringe' theatre? I have been to more fringe theatres over the past decade than West End theatres—at least this is what I thought they were. I don't recognise the 'cockpits of filth and incomprehension' he describes. In London we are fortunate to have many different theatres, small and large. Some are little more than a room over a pub, where I have seen literate and absorbing plays with excellent casts. Does he differentiate between them and, for instance, the Tricycle, the Arcola, the Young Vic and the Almeida?

### "Table Number Seven"


ERIC PORTMAN as Major Pollock in the second play, which takes place at the same hotel some four years after the first. His speech is clipped and exaggerated and his manner artificial. It is not long before our suspicions are aroused that his background was not the Public School and Sandhurst, as he so vehemently claims.

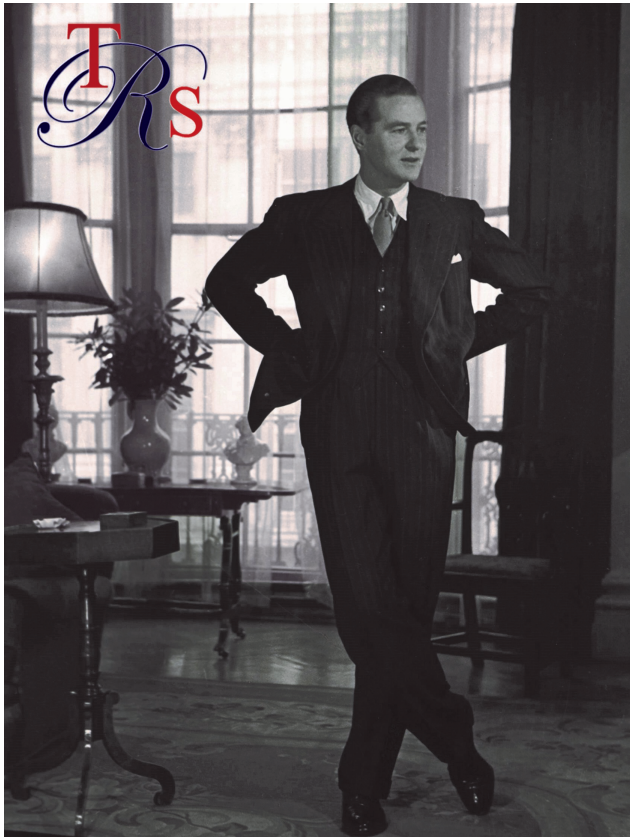


MARGARET LEIGHTON as Sybil, the pathetic, thirty-two-year-old, repressed daughter of Mrs. Railton-Bell, who at the time of the first play was on a visit to an aunt. Sybil, the undoubted victim of her selfish mother, is afraid of life and given to brain storms, but she has at least found a friend in the Major, and they often go for long walks together.



"He mentions the difficulty of making a living writing plays. Sadly, the same is true of everyone in the theatre - writers, actors and directors. Sometimes a writer whose work is first put on at a fringe theatre becomes well-known in the commercial theatre: I first saw Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* at the National, but it started on the Edinburgh Fringe. Is something that appears incomprehensible always so? When the tiny Arts Theatre put on *Waiting for Godot* there was a first night argument amongst the audience between those who cheered and those who disagreed. My play-going would be immeasurably poorer without the work I have seen at these small theatres.

I felt sad for the unsuccessful writers at the Awards ceremony, but cheered that so many of the entries were of such a high standard as to make it there." 



At the turn of the year, here's a reminder that membership of the Society can be given as a gift. Contact the Membership Secretary for details and this gift card can be somebody's!

## London's theatres *cont. from p 6*

Michael Coveney points out just how much over the past two decades has gone into our West End infrastructure. Three cheers for the Lottery too.

But most of all three cheers for the authors. They've looked at every age and style of playhouse, introducing readers to the Normansfield, a lovely little space once part of an asylum, and giving a clear steer on what to look for—and why—when we next visit any theatre. It's a gem of a book and at twenty quid this is one that every theatregoer will sample again and again. ☞

## A Winslow Boy *cont. from p 5*

arguments similar to those used in the years before the First World War by the Government in the Archer-Shee case, citing national security as justification for denying young Archer-Shee his right to a full hearing in open court. And in recent years British Governments, of whichever political hue, have used similar arguments about the 'War On Terror' to justify setting aside the Human Rights Act and deny defendants the right to an open trial and full disclosure of evidence against them.

I have high hopes that Rachel Kavanaugh, with her record of theatrical success and courage in speaking out on issues, will do Rattigan and the play proud. ☞

## Dates for your diary

**Saturday 17 February 2018**

***The Onion at the End* at the Sarah Thorne Theatre in Broadstairs.** This play is the winner of the Terence Rattigan Society Award for a new play, and is written by Roy Kendall. This, the world premiere, is being produced by Michael Wheatley-Ward, who is profiled in this issue. Further details can be obtained from our Events Liaison Officer, Susan Cooper: [susan.cooper@talktalk.net](mailto:susan.cooper@talktalk.net).

**Saturday 12 May 2018**

***The Winslow Boy* at the Richmond Theatre** (see the article by Michael Darlow on p 5). The Society has made a block booking of best stalls seats at a reduced price for the 2.30pm matinee on Saturday 12 May. This will be followed by an early optional supper at The Duke, which is a five-minute walk from the theatre. A booking form is enclosed with this edition of 'The Rattigan Version'.

**Tuesday 10 July 2018**

**The Annual Birthday Dinner at the Oxford and Cambridge Club.** The guest of honour and speaker will be the academic, John Bertolini, Ellis Professor of Liberal Arts at Vermont's Middlebury College, whose book *The Case for Terence Rattigan: Playwright* was reviewed by Dr Holly Hill in issue 21.

**Saturday 24 November 2018**

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

## Life-enhancing company

I am very sad to report that our Founder Member, Douglas Gordon, passed away on Sunday 7 January, aged 87. Douglas was a wonderful friend to many of our members and happily he was able to attend our AGM and play-reading in November when we were able to enjoy his life-enhancing company, without realising that this would be for the very last time.

A full profile of Douglas appeared in the December 2015 edition (Issue 16) of *The Rattigan Version*, which you can read again on our website under the 'Society Newsletters' heading. ☞

**Barbara Longford**