



# *The* Rattigan

The Newsletter of  
The Terence Rattigan Society

ISSUE NO. 25 JULY 2018

# *Version*

## Changing views on Rattigan

**T**he first time I taught Rattigan in the mid-1970s, he was the second half of a seminar, the first half being Shaw. The student reaction I remember most vividly was from a Chinese young woman. She used a striking image when she told me she thought Rattigan was “weak tea” compared to Shaw, in the sense that Shaw came on with the big guns, big ideas, big characters, most of them fighters, ready to argue with one another, trying to persuade one another, trying to dominate others or assert themselves. To her, because Rattigan’s characters were weak, his plays were weak. As Jacques Barzun has pointed out, if you open a Shaw play to any page and begin reading you will think the characters are discussing life and death issues. Rattigan’s characters are more likely to retreat from self-assertion, to hide themselves and their pain, or if they do assert themselves, it will be at a great cost.

“The next time I taught Rattigan was in a Modern British Drama course, where I was able to test *The Deep Blue Sea* against *Look Back in Anger*, a play I dislike intensely, the book of which I usually abuse in class by jumping up and down on it, to convey to the students my feelings. Much to my chagrin, though they liked *Deep Blue Sea* quite a bit, when we subsequently read *Look Back*, they opined that they found it more exciting and provocative than *Deep Blue Sea*. One representative student in particular was drawn to Jimmy Porter’s violent rhetoric, shouted from the window on the street.

“I must now insert a comic memory from this same

period regarding *The Winslow Boy*. One bold student declared in response to my question about whether they were moved by Ronnie Winslow’s plight, “I think the little bastard did it.” No argument I gave

him would convince him that the play tells us Ronnie is innocent, that without his innocence the play falls apart.

“Back from the ridiculous and on to the sublime: somewhere during the late 1990s the students had changed in their views of Rattigan. The turning point became evident to me when teaching *Flare Path*—a play I thought to be a masterpiece upon first reading. I noticed the change of attitude when I was discussing the scene where Teddy breaks down in front of his wife, Patricia, and reveals the part of himself he has hidden from everyone including his wife. He tries to convey the feelings he has whenever he goes on a mission in which he bears the responsibility for seeing

that his men return alive. Teddy tries to express the fear he experiences and the connection he feels to his men. He says to Patricia, “I’m their captain.” And then he repeats the last two words, “Their captain”—a separate sentence that is as understated as it can be and therefore implies so much about the great burden of being responsible for their lives.

“Henceforth whenever I taught Rattigan, the students responded intensely, particularly to the emotions of the plays especially where they were conveyed through Rattigan’s highly wrought language of understatement and implication.” ∞

**For a report on the Birthday Dinner see page 3...**



**An extract from  
Professor John  
A. Bertolini’s  
address at the  
Annual Birthday  
Dinner**

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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.

## Keep Revivals Simple says Roger Mills

Four revivals of twentieth century plays, three from the forties, seen in around six weeks displayed such varied approaches I fell to wondering how directors and actors *should* ideally approach such things. Mind you, the really furious thinking kicked off after one of my infrequent exposures to Brecht, which brought back all that 'nature of theatre' stuff imbibed in seventies seminar rooms—time which would have been better spent in the bar.

So I'll deal first with the Royal Central's production of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1948) in the new translation by Frank McGuinness. Sadly for me this was an almost total disappointment. OK, this production, which had two directors, was obviously designed to show what as many as possible final year students could do. It ended up with too many cooks spoiling the pot and sank torpedoed by the weight of the sometimes conflicting ideas it was expected to bear. The plot, which is essentially simple, was lost to view amongst a *mêlée* of acting and technical notions, a grossly intrusive sound design, and the distraction of an 'in the round' presentation which left the audience opposite and the technical crew in clear view. Some of this was based, I suspect, on Brecht's theories of the theatre driven by the urge of doing right by the playwright's views but the result was overthought and overwrought. I got the impression the students were having a blast. I could see, or think I could see, what they and the show were trying to do. For that reason I'd vote it in the end a very noble failure.

The cast of Chichester Festival Theatre's revival of Noel Coward's *Present Laughter* (1942) seemed also to be having a blast, none more so than the lead Rufus Hound. For me Deputy Dawg might have felt equally at home in this unceasingly noisy overblown farce which

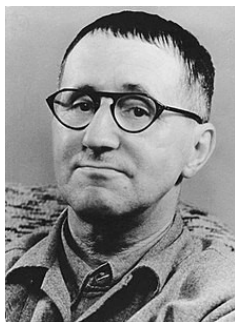
owed more of a debt to Brian Rix than any other theatrical figure of living memory. Well that's the view of yours truly who knows the piece and has seen it a few times. My family, who'd not, thought it was a good show and enjoyed it thoroughly. Which just goes to show something. The reviews were similarly split. But my question here concerns again the duty to the play and the playwright. Crudely, would the newcomer gain any sense of the real Coward, the delicacy, the wit, the pathos from this pratfall-packed highly physical and bellowed interpretation?



*Laughter*, with which it shares many similarities in my view. But this was resisted and in a fairly straight reading, which let the lines have their full value, the humour flowed unforced and naturally. I spoke to some of the cast afterwards and Coward was to all a new, but I felt a pleasant, discovery. Coward wasn't much older than an undergrad when he wrote this piece and the cast I think instinctively knew this and reacted to it.

Which brings me to *The Winslow Boy* (1944) which opened at Chichester in February and completed its tour at Richmond in May. I don't expect ever to see a better version - or indeed a better Arthur Winslow than that given us by Aden Gillett (*see our review on pp 4 & 5*). I can pay it no higher compliment than to say I felt for all the world as if I was seeing this wonderful piece for the first time. Even its Edwardian setting seemed somehow contemporary and relevant. Insight followed insight, delight followed delight. Best of all was the sense of the Winslows as an ordinary family trying to do their best in

extraordinary circumstances with Arthur more wracked by doubts than he is allowed in many an interpretation. And yet there was nothing novel here, no line I hadn't heard a zillion times before, no new version, no bells and whistles. It was a straight down the middle interpretation by an ensemble of unusual mutual sympathy where one could 'hear the music' so clearly on its own terms. It should be running in the West End yet and Rachael Kavanaugh showered with awards....



If this quartet has convinced me of anything it's that revivals are best when they keep things simple, letting the script prove its worth as an evening out. And these four plays are simple. *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* is not a political tract: it is a good old fashioned fairy story with villains, heroes and a happy ending. It does not need the burden of theoretical baggage. Winslow, like *Chalk Circle*, is a plea for everybody to do right. It's also a fairy story. But politics, real politics, like the role of the state, underpin every page. One of the enduring strengths of *Winslow* is the treatment of women's rights, which gets a pretty deep analysis when you think about it – but being Rattigan without the sledgehammer. This was beautifully done here, merely by letting the playwright's lines be heard. Both the Cowards are lighter weight without being either trivial or banal. *Hay Fever* is a fly on the wall look at a self-absorbed family perfectly happy on their own eccentric terms, *Present Laughter* an interesting insight into the pathos of midlife crisis. All four deserved their outings.



OK, Rattigan is perhaps less of a challenge to revivals since the scripts left to themselves in the hands a group of reasonably competent actors will play like well oiled machines. But in *Winslow* and *Hay Fever* the most enjoyable, satisfying and best of these four efforts the fact that the 'play is the thing' was kept most clearly in mind. The skill of the director was to be pretty well invisible. They had not been overthought – perhaps the biggest fault with many a contemporary show. Most of all they had repose.

Coward, Rattigan and Brecht were first class storytellers.

Directors just need to keep that in mind, themselves in the background and the theorists very much at arm's length. Well that's one playgoer's view anyway... ✨

## The Annual Birthday Dinner

A report by Michael Wheatley-Ward

The Society could not have organised the Annual Birthday Dinner better. Not only was it Terence Rattigan's birthday but also the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the RAF, in which he played a significant part. The weather was also less humid than in the recent past!

We offer a big thank you to Denis Moriarty, a staunch TRS member and our host for the evening. Denis is a long-standing member of the venerable Oxford and Cambridge Club. This prestigious building in the heart of Pall Mall was the perfect setting. The evening began with a sparkling wine reception in the Drawing Room. Prior to dinner Denis gave a welcoming speech, full of fascinating facts about the Club and its history, and offered anyone who was interested a tour of the Club after the festivities were concluded.

The dinner was impeccably served by very attentive staff in the Princess Marie Louise Room. The table layout, food and wine were all of a high quality which, although expected of a London Club, is not always the case.

Geoffrey Wansell opened the proceedings by asking us all to raise our glasses to Barbara Longford for all her hard work for the Society. He also took the opportunity of presenting The Lord Fellows of West Stafford, with his scroll of honour as our most recent Vice-President.

During coffee the Principal Guest, Professor John Bertolini, author of the latest study of Rattigan and his work—*The Case for Terence Rattigan, Playwright*—was introduced by our own professor, Michael Gaunt. Professor Bertolini gave a very entertaining speech, admitting that in his native America theatre critics were still denying the brilliance of Rattigan's work, seeing him as too commercially based. However, the test of time brought out the truth that Rattigan had been an outstanding dramatist, the like of which we do not encounter these days. A vote of thanks was given by Geoffrey Wansell, and Lord Fellows asked us to raise our glasses in a birthday toast to the man still very much of the moment, Sir Terence Rattigan.

The evening was a complete success and it was very noticeable on our table that the new membership leaflet designed by Roger Mills brought high praise, as did the organiser of the evening, Susan Cooper. ✨

Editor's note: More of Professor Bertolini's speech will, by his kind permission, appear in the next issue of this newsletter.



# The Winslow Boy on tour

*A review by Alison Du Cane*

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A TRS group sallied forth to the Richmond Theatre on 12 May, to see a performance of *The Winslow Boy*. It is arguably his most famous play, judging by the number of film adaptations there have been, as well as stage presentations, though *The Deep Blue Sea* and *The Browning Version* would also be contenders. But the really great thing is that there has been such a plethora of different Rattigan productions recently in both professional and amateur theatre, ranging from high drama and emotion in *Flare Path* and *Cause Célèbre* through to sparkling comedy in *French Without Tears* and *Love in Idleness* – not to mention *Harlequinade*. The Rattigan revival looks set to be cementing his position as one of England's finest playwrights.

*The Winslow Boy* incorporates serious drama, comedy and pathos. I imagine that most TRS readers will be familiar with the story of a father's fight for justice after his son is expelled from naval college for allegedly stealing a postal order. However, at least one member there said he had not known that the play was based closely on real events, the Archer-Shee case. It reflects Rattigan's interest in famous trials, but it is more significant in being the first of Rattigan's plays that clearly demonstrated his skills in play-writing and portraying so subtly and movingly the emotions of the human heart – usually well concealed in a repressed English middle-class persona. It is cunningly constructed in conveying the whole drama, including cross-examination, parliamentary debates and a courtroom trial, in one domestic interior.

This touring production was directed by Rachel Kavanaugh. I was looking forward to the show, while anticipating being quite a stern critic, since *The Winslow Boy* is one of my favourite plays, and I directed it myself for the Ladbroke Players only 18 months ago. A TRS group also saw my production and we were lucky enough to receive a favourable review in the Society newsletter. I must admit, though, that this

production was also excellent! This may be partly because, like our version, it observed a traditional format in set, costumes and characters. Rattigan's most accomplished and heart-rending plays are set in particular times and locations, which have a bearing on the story and how the characters behave – think of *The Browning Version* or *Separate Tables*. This *Winslow Boy* was set absolutely in period with a delightful Edwardian living room – beautifully furnished and out-doing what we could achieve in an amateur theatre. The art deco French windows and suitably charming curtains looked marvellous, although it would have been nice to have had a hint of garden greenery outside the windows. I was not wholly convinced by the back projection between the scenes, showing a building façade with classical pillars, presumably meant to conjure up Parliament and the Courtroom – a good idea in theory, but the picture didn't seem to be quite right. The sound effects worked better.

The costumes were equally elegant and lavish in period detail. However, I was intrigued to notice that the skirts of Mrs Winslow and daughter Catherine (Kate) were 'recycled' from the first scene of Act I at the end of Act II – I was curious to know if this was deliberately showing that the Winslows were short of money or whether it was just the Costume Department making savings! Having some pictures removed from the walls before the final scene was certainly a nice reminder of how penurious the Winslows' position had become, due to the expense of the court case. I presume the dishev-

elled state of Arthur's tie in the final scene was meant to indicate that Arthur could not bother with his appearance while anxiously awaiting court news, but it seemed less credible that his wife would have allowed his tie to gape below his waistcoat during the first scene before any drama had ensued!

Of course, much more fundamental than scenery or costumes are the performances of the actors, and the direction, and these did not disappoint. Most of the characters were strongly delineated and the direction appeared coherent and invigorated. As someone who has directed and acted in many 'drawing room' style plays, where the possible permutations for movements are limited, I am always interested to see how other directors tackle this challenge. The answer this time was 'pretty well'; good use was made of most of the sofas/chairs/chair arms and floor area, and the choreography was interesting. If anything, there was occasionally too much moving around for the sake of it, but perhaps the director wished to illustrate restlessness in some of the characters.

Although Aden Gillett and Tessa Peake-Jones were billed as the 'stars' (being the most well-known actors), I felt it was Aden Gillett and Dorothea Myer-Bennett who were the real stars. This was partly because they were playing the largest roles of Arthur and Kate; these are the characters that are most fully fleshed out by Rattigan, and an audience tends to identify most strongly with them. But they brought real life and energy to their roles, holding our attention whenever they were on stage, as the father determined (to the point of obsession) to prove his son's innocence and the feisty suffragette who believes in the principle that everyone is entitled to a fair trial.

In the other key role, Timothy Watson made an intriguing Sir Robert Morton – not the conventionally good-looking, charismatic figure that an audience expects, but he was indeed coldly "fishlike" with his slightly odd looks and manner, and he gave an intense and curiously compelling performance.

Tessa Peake-Jones gave a credible performance as the loyal but bewildered wife Grace, but the character is perhaps less rewarding than the other members of the Winslow family. However, her Act II duologue with Arthur is crucial, when she expresses the frustrations and hardships that the family are enduring because of the long drawn out case, which should reveal the downside of Arthur's apparently noble fight to "Let right be done".

Theo Bamber had fun playing the charmingly irresponsible older brother Dickie, while bringing serious overtones to the family dynamics when pointing out his father's favouritism towards Ronnie. Misha Butler was suitably overwrought and overawed as Ronnie in the first part of the play, transforming into a

cheeky carefree schoolboy by the end. It was a special pleasure for me to watch Misha in this part, as he first played Ronnie for us in our production. It was gratifying to see there didn't appear to be many changes in the way he acted Ronnie, and I like to think we may have helped him onto the ladder of a professional career. William Belchambers was a believably conventional, slightly pompous suitor for Kate as John Watherstone, while Soo Drouet as the maid Violet presented an amusing composite of *Downton Abbey* and *Upstairs, Downstairs*, even if I couldn't entirely reconcile her interpretation of the big speech reporting the trial results with my own version!

Overall, I only had a few niggles. Colour-blind casting didn't work for me with the part of Desmond Curry, especially in a play so strongly set in a specific period and place. Geff Francis gave a good performance, but I found it hard to believe in him as the epitome of a conventional family solicitor in middle-class Edwardian England. Dorothea Myer-Bennett's performance as Kate was sometimes almost too vivacious and 'knowing' – for me Kate should be passionate but not flirtatious, and her intensity should be more internalised. One punter commented that she needed to be more 'corseted'.

**Cont. on back page...**



**The real life 'Winslow Boy' and his father: George Archer-Shee and his father Martin Archer-Shee, a senior Bank of England official.**

**Pictured left are Aden Gillett and Misha Butler with Dorothea Myer-Bennett and Tessa Peake-Jones below.**





# The love of actors

**Hazel Kerr pays tribute to her friend  
and fellow TRS member,  
the late Rosalinda Zazzera**



Rosalinda Zazzera, who died on 24 February after a short illness, was born in Clerkenwell in 1934. A good vintage, she often told me, as it was the same year as three of her favourite actresses, Dames Eileen Atkins, Judi Dench and Maggie Smith. (Her absolute favourite was the mere stripling Dame Janet Suzman!)

In 1938, for health reasons, Rosalinda, accompanied by her older sister Olga, went to stay with an aunt in Italy, where they became stranded due to the onset of war, not returning to London until 1945. There were many harrowing experiences during this time away from their parents, not least the episode where the two girls had to hide for several days in the sheep barn to avoid a potential sexual encounter with a German soldier.


Rosalinda was a successful PA, and although I didn't know her during her working lifetime, she told me how going to the theatre was her escape from the often demanding role in the advertising and fashion world. Of course, anyone with even a passing acquaintance with Rosalinda would have been aware of her deep and abiding love of the theatre. Which is how our paths crossed. We had been briefly introduced at the King's Head Theatre in Islington where Rosalinda was a long standing and much valued volunteer and where I worked on a project for a short time.

However, it was an occasion a few years later when we found ourselves double-booked on complimentary tickets into the same seat for an unmemorable short-lived musical called *The Fields of Ambrosia* at the Aldwych Theatre. It didn't seem

necessary in the half empty theatre to sort out who should have the seat, Rosalinda simply suggesting we sit together in the row behind. And that was the first of many many theatre trips she and I enjoyed together.

Often we wouldn't even sit together as her favourite spot in any theatre was the front row, mine a little further back. But we'd meet up in the interval for a glass of wine and discuss all things theatrical. I loved listening to her numerous anecdotes of great actors she had seen in the past: Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh, Peggy Ashcroft, Alec Guinness, John Gielgud, Ralph Richardson, Peter O'Toole, Paul Scofield. The list was endless and her knowledge of acting technique, built up over the years, was impressive. She had of course trodden the boards herself as can be seen from the photo of this Islington amateur dramatic production.

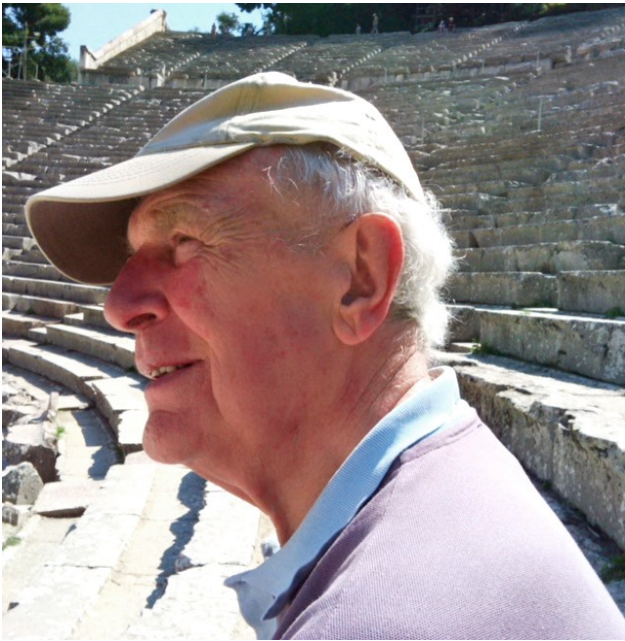
But it was not just the great stars. Rosalinda was also a regular attendee of many small off-West End theatres, supporting young actors at the start of their careers. She loved actors for all the joy they brought into her life - although that didn't stop her having strong opinions on certain 'bad habits' some actors fell into!

Independent, generous, vivacious, kind, a devoted animal lover and a wonderful raconteur—just some of the qualities of this much loved and much missed lady. 

*Editor's note: Rosalinda was an avid attendee of TRS events, enthusiastic to the last and always very good company.*



## In appreciation of Patrick

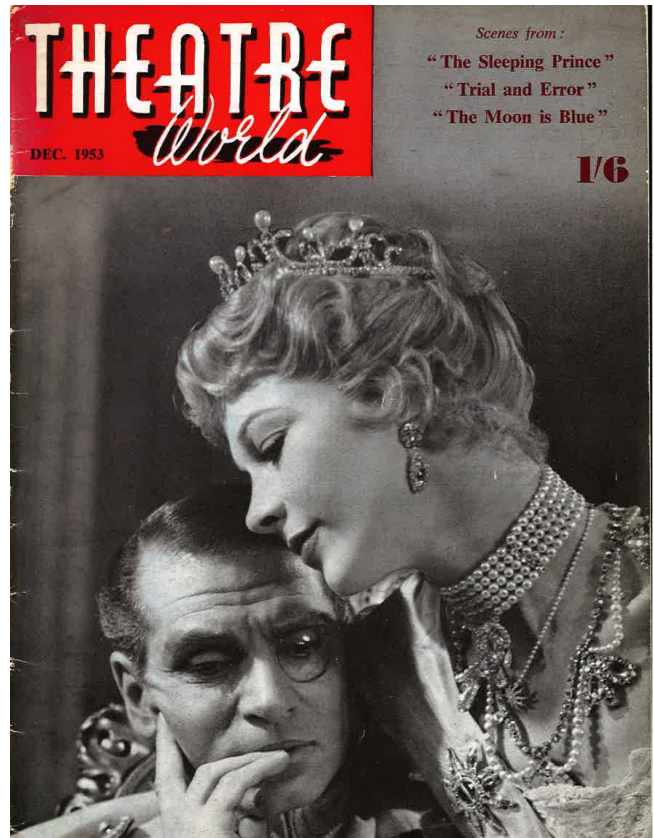


We have been shocked and saddened to learn of the death of Barbara's husband, Patrick Longford. Barbara is unable to participate in Society matters at the moment and I am sure we all send love and good wishes to her. They had been together for 47 years and of this photograph Barbara says: "This is Patrick doing one of his favourite things—visiting an ancient site. It was taken at Epidaureus."

**Diana Scotney** has compiled the following appreciation: The son of a doctor, Patrick was educated at one of the oldest schools in Ireland: Portora Royal School, founded in 1618 and sometimes known as 'the Irish Eton'. However it seems to have been rather less 'establishment orientated' than Eton: other notable alumni include Oscar Wilde and the only winner of the Nobel Prize for literature to have played first class cricket: Samuel Beckett. Though a perfect gentleman, Patrick was careful to avoid the usual career path of an Irish gentleman, choosing not to go to Trinity College Dublin, nor take a commission when he did his National Service. He spent most of his life happily working as an assistant librarian in Kensington. Unlike many librarians he not only looked after books but read them voraciously. With little interest in fiction he read mostly history and biographies. He was especially fond of the Greek classics and of Greek history, often visiting the ancient sites with Barbara. He had a prodigious memory for what he had read and relied on his memory for the sort of knowledge most of us

## A glance at the past: The Sleeping Prince 1953

*An occasional column featuring original photographs of Rattigan plays*



Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh in Rattigan's *The Sleeping Prince*, later filmed as *The Prince and the Showgirl* with Marilyn Monroe.

get from tapping in to Google. He loved visiting museums and art galleries, about which he also had a great knowledge.

Patrick was a familiar face at many Society events and a great support to Barbara in all she does for the Society. ∞



**Anyone for TOADS? See back page...**



## Handling your personal data

Many of you will already be aware of the new piece of legislation that came into effect on 25 May reinforcing the rules on information handling. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) affects both how personal information is stored and how it is used.

As a membership organisation, we hold only as much information on our members as we need to deliver on their membership, and will never pass that information to any outside organisation. Likewise, we will only use that information to communicate with our members on matters directly related to their membership, including news of forthcoming events and sending out the newsletter and event flyers. That means we won't need to seek your individual consent to communicate with you, but we thought you'd like to be reassured that we'd thought about it!

**Clive Montellier**

## The Winslow Boy on tour *cont. from p 5*

Aden Gillett as Arthur Winslow had great energy, which really brought the play to life, but at times he seemed almost too brisk or even too likeable. In Rattigan's script Arthur Winslow is feared by most of his family except for Kate, and he comes across as being wry and repressed. These aspects were perhaps not fully conveyed by Gillett, yet he brought an endearing warmth and vigour to the role.

I am perhaps prejudiced as in my production Arthur was portrayed as quite a dry old stick on the surface, and Kate had a still and serious quality. But I loved the energy of the Richmond production. The scene between Kate and her father, after Violet has relayed the trial result, was truly affecting and beautifully acted. And of course, more than one portrayal of roles is valid, just as Rattigan himself altered some details of the real-life Archer-Shee story. ☺

Editor's note: readers may recall that our Vice President Michael Darlow wrote an excellent article about director Rachel Kavanaugh and this production of *The Winslow Boy* in issue 23 of this newsletter.

## Dates for your diary

### Saturday 13 October 2018

The Society AGM and play-reading of one of the final shortlisted entries in the play competition, *The Rattigan Affair* by Lynda Strudwick.

### 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.

### Saturday 15 June 2019

*The Browning Version* and *Red Peppers*—a double bill directed for the Torbay Operatic and Dramatic Society by our Treasurer Andrew Kenyon (see below).

## Anyone for TOADS?

The TOADS (Torbay Operatic and Dramatic Society) are a long-standing amateur theatrical company based in Torquay who have been producing seasons of plays since 1947. Originally their seasons were produced during the winter months at The Babbacombe Theatre, but in 1988 the Society was able to purchase a redundant church in Torquay which they have converted to their own theatre.

Known as 'The Little Theatre' this enterprise has been extraordinarily successful and you can find out more by visiting their website (see foot of article).

Recently relocated back to his roots in Torbay, our Treasurer, Andrew Kenyon, has been invited by the TOADS to direct their end of season production in June 2019. He has chosen a double bill of *The Browning Version* together with Coward's *Red Peppers* and the production dates are **10 – 15 June 2019**.

With a chance to take a trip to the seaside the committee would like to offer this as a Members' Event - probably opting for the matinee performance on Saturday 15 June - and would like to know if this would appeal to our membership. An 'expression of interest' form will be included with the next Newsletter. The Little Theatre is located a short (but uphill) walk from The Imperial Hotel (5 star) and it is hoped that concessionary tickets for the performance will be available. Torbay is known as 'The English Riviera' and still has an Edwardian charm with palm trees, golden beaches and one of the most beautiful natural bays in the UK.

More details to follow but please make a note of the dates in your diary. [www.toadstheatre.co.uk](http://www.toadstheatre.co.uk) ☺