

# *The* Rattigan

The Newsletter of  
The Terence Rattigan Society

ISSUE NO. 29 JULY 2019

# *Version*

## A subtle staging in Torquay

Over the years I have sat in many theatres converted from decommissioned churches. The Little Theatre in Torquay is in a class of its own. Without denying its origins (there is even a stained glass window in the bar) it is an impressive undertaking on both sides of the stage. This became apparent when the TRS members who had come down for a performance of *The Browning Version* were given a conducted tour. It was apparent too when we met in the comfortable, well-appointed coffee bar before the show, and again when we took our seats in the stylish raked auditorium. And it was especially apparent when the curtains opened to reveal the Crocker-Harris's flat in the unnamed public school. Even before anyone entered, it perfectly realised the constrained, genteel gloom of staff life in a public school at the time, made all the more real by a view, through the inevitable French windows, of clouds passing and trees in the garden rustling in the breeze.

Crocker-Harris is probably based on Rattigan's Classics tutor, J.W. Coke Norris, like him a cold, reserved, unsympathetic disciplinarian but a brilliant classical scholar. So presumably the school he had in mind was Harrow, as is borne out by references to cricket at Lords – in 1929 Rattigan himself scored 29 there in the Eton and Harrow



**John Scotney**

reviews 'The Browning Version' and 'Red Peppers'  
directed by our former Treasurer Andrew Kenyon at  
the Little Theatre, Torquay. Photograph by Brian Tilley

match. In Andrew Kenyon's subtle staging this is no Harrow but perhaps a school that aspired to be like Harrow. His lovers are not the handsome, stylish young people usually portrayed, but a middle-aged couple brought together by the poisonous claustrophobia of the world in which they live. Millie Crocker-Harris's pretensions to gentility are all the more pathetic, as is her desperate clinging to the Science master Hunter: a balding, ageing roué in an ill-fitting suit whom she knows has no love for her. This Millie we feel has never loved her husband. **Continued on p3...**

☞ *THE BROWNING VERSION* IN TORQUAY, PP 1, 3

☞ THE ANNUAL BIRTHDAY DINNER, PP 4, 5

☞ *WHILE THE SUN SHINES* IN RICHMOND, PP 6, 7

☞ PROFILE OF OUR NEW SECRETARY, P 2

☞ THE PLAYWRIGHT AS BATTLEFIELD, P 5

☞ A GALA PERFORMANCE, P 7 / OUR PRESIDENT NOMINATED, P 8



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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 our new Secretary Martin Amherst Lock

As a schoolboy in the 1970s, Martin's 'artistic apogee', as he puts it, was performing *Katisha* in *The Mikado*. He was a music scholar at King's School, Canterbury, and had previously attended Canterbury Cathedral Choir School, becoming a Senior Chorister, so music was clearly in his blood.

His musical progress continued at Corpus Christi, Cambridge, where was also a choral scholar and took part in numerous musicals, ranging from *Patience* to *No, No, Nanette*. So here we see the drama entering his bloodstream too perhaps! This was certainly the case a few years later when he became Head of English and Director of Drama at Repton School. His productions there included *The Beggar's Opera*, *A Man for All Seasons*, *Amadeus*, *Cabaret*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, *Great Expectations* and *Oh! What a Lovely War*, a very wide range by anyone's standards.

Leaving Repton in 2001, he went on to Harrow where he was also Head of English and his productions there included *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, *Billy Budd*, *On the Razzle* and *Another Country*. In 2009 he moved on again to Queen's College, London, where he taught English and added these fine titles to his growing collection of productions: *The Real Inspector Hound*, *Twelve Angry Men*, *Unman*,



*Wittering and Zigo*, and perhaps most tellingly his first Rattigan in the form of *Separate Tables*.

He had clearly acquired a taste for directing as he was also responsible for productions of

other top-notch plays such as *Hay Fever* and *Ten Times Table*. Apart from his obvious interests of theatre, opera and choral singing, he also enjoys travelling, especially walking the various caminos to Santiago, which comes as a bit of a surprise after the foregoing and sounds enormously impressive!

Now, of course, as some members will know, Martin has bravely taken on the task of succeeding Clive Montellier as Secretary to the Society, and there is no doubt that he will bring the same thoroughness, dedication and attention to detail as Clive so notably has. So, while expressing regret at Clive having to leave for pastures new, we must surely be delighted to have found so well-qualified a successor. We give enormous thanks to Clive for his tremendous work in getting the Society so firmly grounded constitutionally and administratively, and we warmly welcome Martin, who will now become an even more familiar figure at our Society events. ∞

## A subtle staging in Torquay

*Continued from page 1*

She is simply the disappointed daughter of a Bradford Men's Outfitter who caught a man she thought would be a high-flyer, a brilliant Oxford graduate. Over many years her vicious bitterness at his failure to achieve what she expected of him has become all-consuming. The over-dressed headmaster too seems false, not quite what he seems, unquestioningly willing to accept Millie's fantasies about her titled relatives and replacing the over-qualified Crocker-Harris with an under-qualified gauche former prep-school master.

And so we come to Crocker-Harris himself. The actor Martin Waddington and Andrew Kenyon, the director, have created the most satisfying portrait of this tragic figure that I have ever come across. I have seen several Crocker-Harrises on film and stage but never one who rang so true. We have heard the man parodied by Taplow before he appears, and when he comes on we recognise the truth of the parody. He is indeed an absurd figure, clearly in his mid-fifties, as was Coke Norris when Rattigan knew him, and he is obviously ill. We see at once, as never before in my experience, why the boys scoff at him. Martin Waddington soon shows us why they fear him too. The voice, the manner, the jokes that we later learn were deliberately cultivated in his younger days to make the boys laugh have become fixed, frozen in stone. As he parses a passage from Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* with Taplow we are made aware of his pedantry, always preferring the literal translation to Taplow's more imaginative version.


From the frigid, almost distasteful ridiculousness of this first appearance, layer by layer, brick by brick, a supremely tragic figure is built up. Martin Waddington makes us come to understand his love for the magnificence of Greek verse, his sense of vocation, and disappointment at the sad fact that in teaching a vocation can be millstone round the neck. We learn of his care for his pupils, however unrequited, his stoic acceptance of his wife's infidelities and her hatred of him; of his hurt when he learns the staff and boys compare him to Himmler, or when his wife cruelly undermines his moment of happiness. And perhaps most tragically of all, when afterwards he bolts the gates of his heart shut.

One of the film versions of the play, in which Albert Finney played Crocker-Harris, makes it obvious that Taplow had a real affection for him. How much more effective is the ambiguity of the play. We never know. Incidentally, Martin Waddington's performance shows clearly at the end that Taplow got his promotion from the Remove irrespective of any possible emotional bribery.

Rattigan's use of the Greek Language theme is remarkable. As has often been pointed out, the play reflects Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* in that the Greek king is destroyed by his wife. But the action also reflects the fact that the language our hero loves is itself soon to be redundant, eased out of the curriculum. Taplow wants to escape it to do 'Science' with Hunter. It is perhaps significant of the backwardness of public schools at the time that Hunter is not a Chemistry, Biology or Physics teacher, simply a 'Science' master.

The great Greek tragedies, and this is undoubtedly a great tragedy, followed their hand-wringing anguish with a Satyr Play: a short, broad, bawdy comedy. Heaven forbid that bawdiness should have any place in a Torbay church, even a decommissioned one. However, Andrew Kenyon did provide a short, broad but non-bawdy comedy to cheer us up.

*Red Peppers* was originally one of a series of brief pieces written to display the virtuoso skills of its author Noël Coward and of Gertrude Lawrence. The amateurs of Torbay could not match their stylishness but made up for it with their gusto. The piece is about an ageing variety act somewhere in the North. Andrew cunningly chose to direct it as a Satyr Play: so his version included the same sort of stock, overblown one-dimensional caricatures. As well as the knockabout performers themselves there was the skinny, whining, drunken musical director, the hugely obese, bullying Yorkshire theatre manager, the supercilious, superannuated diva and the boy delivering the bottled beer. Except for Martin Waddington the cast was largely the same as that of the previous play. One felt that they appreciated the chance to wind down and have a bit of fun, and so did the audience.

After the performances Andrew took a Q&A session with members, who then enjoyed a supper at a local restaurant. A most successful occasion, smoothly arranged by Susan Cooper, and greatly enhanced by the Devon sunshine. 

# A regular, splendid occasion

**Anthony Campling  
reports on the Annual Birthday  
Dinner at the Garrick Club**

**T**he Annual Birthday Dinner was held on Monday 10 June at the Garrick Club, and was the regular splendid occasion it always is.

Your correspondent successfully used the inclement weather to persuade his wife, Jenny, a keen climate-change activist, that getting drenched would be disappointing and car use was sanctioned really without too much trouble at all... After a particularly easy run, taking in London's best view – east from Waterloo Bridge – we parked nearby in Covent Garden a few minutes early and, having caught up with goings-on in Ambridge, we were soon ascending the Garrick's magnificent front steps. We carried on ascending, enjoying the many portraits of Thespians, some readily recognisable, others less so, until we reached the very top of the building where we were happily greeted by our Chairman, Barbara, and given glasses of champagne: we knew at once we were in the right place.

Eventually, we were called down to dinner in the (A. A.) Milne Room where the seating had been planned for six tables of eight, representing a capacity but comfortable crowd which seemed to have little trouble making its way to *French Without Tears*, *While the Sun Shines*, *Separate Tables* (ha-ha!), *First Episode*, *The Deep Blue Sea* (the top table) or, as in our case, *Ross*. What, no Browning?

Sitting down (how enjoyable), we were treated to some introductory remarks from our President, David Suchet, who started by telling us that we were celebrating what would have been the very day of Sir Terry's 108<sup>th</sup> Birthday (if we were prepared to overlook that the birth in fact occurred at a few minutes to midnight on the previous day). Terry joined the Garrick in 1944, aged 33. He resigned his membership in 1958 but rejoined in 1968 after his wilderness years. John Osborne joined in 1970 and, David informed us, he and Terry got on well, no doubt helped by Osborne allegedly conceding that Terry was the better playwright – as all of us know!

After the toast to Sir Terence Rattigan, we were deliciously interrupted by Vodka & Lime Marinated Chalk Stream Trout with Potted Smoked Salmon – no less – and a glass of Muscadet, which were followed by courses of Devon Lamb and Tarte Tatin each with their accompaniments, to be finished with coffee and chocolates, all magnificent fare from the Club's kitchen.




Our Chairman then introduced the Guest of Honour, Dr Holly Hill (*pictured*), originally from Texas but now living in Massachusetts and, of course, well-known to many members from the Society's conference at Trinity College, Oxford and other occasions. Broadway correspondent for *The Times* from 1983 to 1995, Dr Hill is an enthusiastic and active supporter of the Society and her recent donation for the establishment of the Harold and Pegs French Award had already led to two excellent Rattigan productions, *Flare Path* at the Royal Central School and *After the Dance* at the Oxford School of Drama, both of which had provided occasions for enjoyable and well-supported outings for Society members.

Dr Hill began by speaking of her determination, despite opposition, to write her PhD thesis at City University, New York on the works of Rattigan. At the end of it, one of her examiners said that the only reason that he hadn't asked that she omit detailed analysis of the plays was that he knew she would include it anyway! The bulk of her dissertation was based on weeks of research on Terry's papers at his Albany set, thanks to a big welcome from Terry's friend and assistant

Pegs French (wife of actor and director Harold French); these are the papers now in the British Library which the Society is visiting on 17<sup>th</sup> September.

She told us that it meant so much to her to be amongst Rattigan enthusiasts. She remembered wearing a grey dress to interview Terry at his hotel in 1974 at the opening of *In Praise of Love* on Broadway. Terry told her that the most important thing in the play is the stage direction for Lydia: “*She smiles radiantly*”. Asked what is a great play, Terry responded with “Hamlet” who, he said, must have surprised Shakespeare himself. In what was clearly a wide-ranging interview Terry expressed the view that Asquith could have settled WW1 had he not been so ill. She concluded the interview story by saying that Clive Barnes didn’t like it and it wasn’t published!

There was much else and Dr Hill’s speech was very well received. She was thanked by Martin Amherst Lock who spoke of her generosity which had led so directly to an augmentation of the Society’s activities. He expressed the view that the plays we are all so fond of and admire encourage us to care for each other. Martin also presented her with her official ‘scroll’ marking her appointment as a Vice-President of the Society “in recognition of her pioneering support for the work of Sir Terence Rattigan CBE and her continued belief in his enduring reputation”.

The evening concluded with thanks to the Garrick and its staff, to Barbara for her usual impeccable organisation and to Geoffrey Wansell, our host at the Club. 

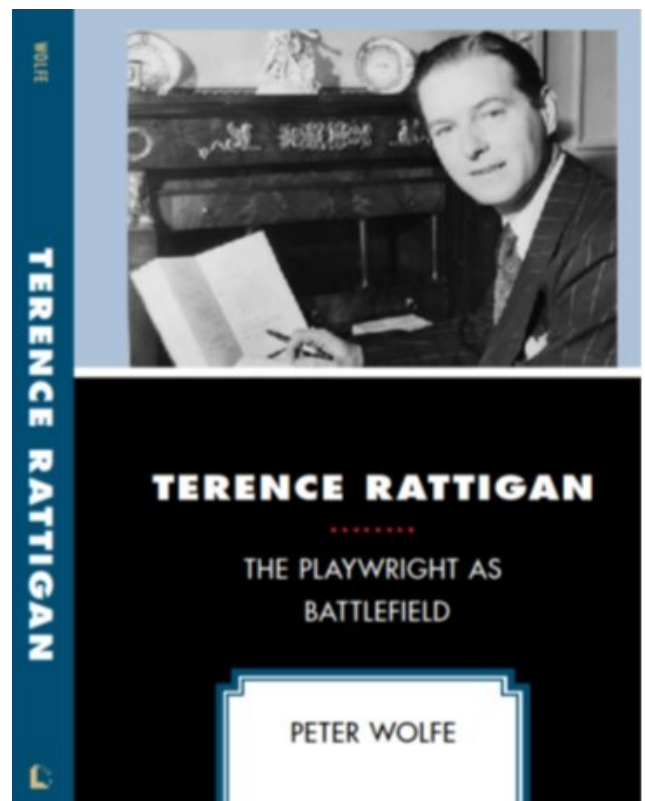
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## The Playwright as Battlefield

Society member Peter Wolfe (*pictured*) has just published his new study of TR with the intriguing title *Terence Rattigan: The Playwright as Battlefield*. Peter is Curators Professor Emeritus of English at the University of Missouri–St. Louis and has written critical studies of a variety of other writers including the playwrights Simon Gray and Tony Lifetime Achievement award-winner this year Terrence McNally. His other writer subjects include Raymond Chandler and John Le Carré. The new book is described thus:

‘The thin line Rattigan walked between restraint and

invention helped him convey, subtly, and deceptively, the obstinacy that thwarts our daily actions. He did it stylistically. His sentences aren’t impacted or fractured, and his plots usually obey a linear time sequence. Yet his realism isn’t all that real. Though sentence by sentence his dialogue sounds natural, the creative pulse driving it is distinctive. A gay man, he wrote mostly at a time when homosexuality was a felony in the United Kingdom. He approached this problem by developing a technique more observational than visionary. Invoking his preference for questions over answers, *Terence Rattigan: The Playwright as Battlefield* shows his avoidance of explanations, deepening our commitment to both his people and the outcomes that await them. By covering Rattigan’s whole playwriting career, Peter Wolfe’s new book discusses the stagecraft that delivers meaning within an ever-changing cultural framework.’



Publication took place in mid-July. Many congratulations to Peter for adding to the canon of works that now rightfully celebrate Terence Rattigan as a pre-eminent figure in the theatre of the 20th century. 

# While The Sun Shines at the Orange Tree

A review by Paddy Briggs

At the beginning of the Orange Tree Theatre's production of *While the Sun Shines*, the butler, Horton, enters the darkened stage, walks over to the window and draws back the shutters and a bright shaft of sunlight illuminates the stage. There is a metaphor at work here. The characters are going to make hay, but also we are going to see them, warts and all, revealed in the bright light. We are also going to see the darkness of the times brightened by sunlight to cheer us all up.



The year is 1943 and the location London - the Albany "chambers" of the young Earl of Harpenden - a rich, charming aristocrat but not over burdened with the grey matter. The action revolves around the fact that within 24 hours he is due to marry Lady Elisabeth Randall, his childhood sweetheart. The previous night he was in a nightclub on a pre-nuptial bender where he met a very sozzled American airman, Lieutenant Mulvaney, and offered him a bed for the night - a share of his bed as it happens. *While the Sun Shines* is a "Gay Play" in the usage of the times but not, I think, in any way in the modern vernacular. The male bed sharing (there's more to come) is innocent and practical rather than lustful. Meanwhile Elisabeth, when travelling by train from Scotland, meets a French Officer, Lieutenant Colbert, who makes love to her ("chats her up" in modern jargon) and sows the seed of doubt in her mind about the suitability of her intended.

Over three acts the fun unfolds (incidentally how splendid, and rare, to have a three-act play with two intervals as its author intended). The first act is light comedy, the second rather more manic and the third pure farce. Alan Ayckbourn once

said about his farce *Taking Steps*: "In the first act you take the audience by the hand and lead them across the floor. In the second you start to walk them up the wall. And in the third act you begin to walk them on the ceiling, so they end up hang-

ing upside down saying: 'Hey, what am I doing?' It's all sleight of hand." Well, Terence Rattigan did just the same some fifty years earlier!

This is a "ménage à quatre" with Elisabeth being pursued by the two lieutenants and, rather ineffec-

tually at first, belatedly by her fiancé. As in many classic farces there is mistaken identity, a bit of door slamming and a plot which serves the action and the comedy rather than being deeply meaningful. Rattigan is not really indulging in social comedy here or in any way preaching to us. *Flare Path*, also a 1943 play, is a more conventional and realistic wartime drama - albeit one with a happy ending. *While the Sun Shines* is escapist entertainment ideally suited to its rather dark times. Rattigan himself said that he wanted to "transform the present horrors [of wartime] into laughter". The Blitz may have stopped and there seems to be no blackout curtain on the window but the War is far from over, gas masks are still carried and even the Spam is rationed.

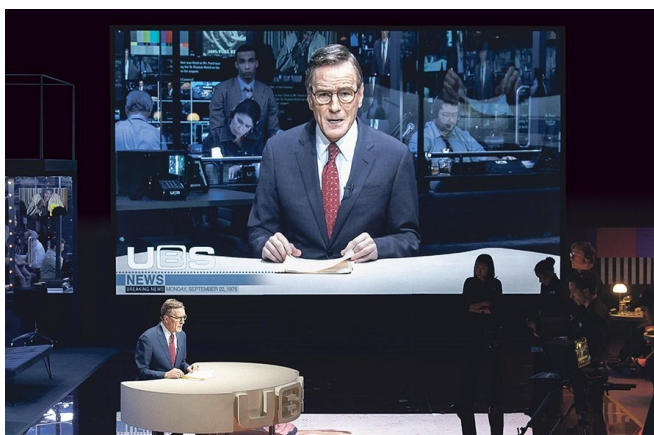
A play very much of its times then, which may be why it was largely forgotten for over sixty years before the revival by Christopher Luscombe at the Theatre Royal Bath in 2016. That was a good production in a conventional proscenium arch theatre (it was reviewed in *The Rattigan Version* of December 2016) and was for most of us the first time we had seen the play.

*While the Sun Shines* is not included in the

definitive four volume complete plays and is a genuine rarity. The Orange Tree is a theatre in the round and very intimate - the Director, Paul Miller, took full advantage of this and it meant that the audience was very absorbed in the action and the characters.

Farce is one of the most difficult of dramatic genres to pull off. Timing is crucial and in this production it was perfect. The actors never breached the fourth wall - something that distinguishes farce from pantomime. The audience was laughing uproariously and (in this very small theatre) responding visibly to the cast but this was quite rightly never acknowledged by the actors.

The original wartime production had a young Michel Wilding as Harpenden and Brenda Bruce as Mabel Crum and was directed by Anthony Asquith. The Times critic said that “...*Mr. Rattigan is well served once more, and once more deserves to be.*” I think that we can apply the same description to the Orange Tree Theatre – indeed I would go further and say that Paul Miller and his very strong cast have firmly put the play back into the Rattigan canon of great plays and I suspect that this won’t be the last production we see in these times when, as in 1943 but for different reason, turning horror into laughter is a noble task. ∞



TRS member **Lee Menzies** is a West End and Broadway producer whose most recent success is *Network*, starring Bryan Cranston (*pictured above*), at the National Theatre in London, then transferring to the Belasco Theater in New York, where Cranston won the Tony Award for Best Actor. Lee ran the Playhouse Theatre in London for two different owners and amongst many other plays and musicals, he produced Jeffrey Archer’s three plays.

## “This is for Terry”

### *Lee Menzies remembers a gala performance in 1971*

In 1971 I was part of the stage management team of *A Voyage Round My Father* at the Theatre Royal Haymarket, starring Alec Guinness. That was why we were asked to stage manage the evening. It was called ‘First Half’. The first act was *Harlequinade*, the second act was *Table Number Seven* from *Separate Tables*. I stage managed *Table Number Seven*.

The evening was a fundraiser for the combined theatrical charities but it was built round a tribute to Sir Terence Rattigan. It was a midnight matinee and the whole evening was glittering. The audience was star-studded, as was the cast. I had a little spy hole in the prompt corner and could just see Noël Coward chatting to Harold Prince.

The cast was Trevor Howard as Major Pollock, Deborah Kerr as Miss Railton Bell, Celia Johnson as Mrs Railton Bell, Wendy Hiller as Miss Cooper, Andrew Cruickshank as Mr Fowler and Joyce Carey as Miss Meacham. The scene change in the middle was done by stage managers from almost every show in London. The play was directed by Nigel Patrick.

Deborah flew from Switzerland and put herself up at the Connaught at her own expense. Trevor Howard pulled me to one side on the first day of rehearsal and told me that he could be difficult and drink a little too much. He then said: “Not this time. This is for Terry”.

After the performance Terry came and thanked us all. He looked wonderful with his buttonhole and cigarette holder. After it was all over a lot of us went to the Cavendish Hotel for a very late supper—or perhaps very early breakfast!

The next day we were all in to see everything was ready for that evening’s performance of *Voyage*. I went in to see Sir Alec who had lent all the ladies his dressing room. He had it stocked with bottles of everything. He was very amused that the girls, as he called them, had polished off the lot. It was a magical evening for a magical man. I still remember every moment to this day.

∞

## Our President nominated for an Olivier for his star turn in Miller's *The Price*

Photo: Nobby Clark



David Suchet's acclaimed performance as the Russian-Jewish furniture dealer Gregory Solomon in Arthur Miller's *The Price* was rightly nominated for an Olivier award in this year's ceremony. Unfortunately he lost out to Kyle Soller in *The Inheritance*, but he was in very good company: Sir Ian McKellen was also nominated for his *King Lear*, alongside the three actors in *The Lehman Trilogy*, Simon Russell Beale, Ben Miles and Adam Godley.

*The Price* dates from 1968 and is not in the first rank of Miller plays, being unevenly structured and somewhat overlaid with exposition for the first twenty minutes; but it is a fine study of fraternal discord and distrust and offers a peach of a role to an actor of David's charisma. He took full advantage and positively revelled in the darkly comedic recesses of the character.

At a post-theatre supper at the Garrick Club he gave a razor-sharp description of his approach to the play, and the contrast with Poirot: Solomon, he said, "comes from life and pain in the gut" whereas the fastidious Poirot is "all in the head".

## Date for your diary

Tuesday 17 September 2019

**Rattigan Archive: Show and Tell**—A rare opportunity to take a look at Rattigan's archive at the British Library. Exclusive to TRS members. See the flyer enclosed with this issue. This will be followed on the same evening by:

**Craftsman at Work! Secrets from the Rattigan Archive**—Rattigan scholar Dan Rebellato leads both these events. Again see the enclosed flyer (*Craftsman at Work!* must be booked direct with the British Library).

**This year's AGM (November) is currently in preparation—an announcement will follow soon. We are also hoping for a tour of Lord's Cricket Ground with a screening of the Rattigan film *The Final Test*.**

And that applied to the vocal characteristics as well. Each character has a 'voice print' akin to a thumbprint, which makes their sound unique. That is their gift to the actor: their own individual sound. It was mentioned that some actors begin to construct a performance from external factors such as the shoes they would wear, but for David it is always the voice that is the defining factor. The cadences and the timings of the lines spoken give a direct insight into what and how the character is thinking. He decided that the sound of Solomon was basically East European/Lithuanian with a touch of American. And this sound was energetic, argumentative, manipulative, wheedling and cajoling by turns. This was a fascinating insight into the actor's craft.

Giles Cole ☞

## In Brief...

We note with sadness the death of former Honorary Member **Adrian Brown**, our last known direct link with Terence Rattigan.

An interview with Adrian appeared in the first issue of *The Rattigan Version*; he was later interviewed for a Society event at Kensington Town Hall and he also conducted a directing masterclass for the Society at Rose Bruford Drama College. Obituaries have appeared in *The Times*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Stage*. A tribute will appear in the next issue of this newsletter. ☞