



The Society for Theatre Research

72nd ANNUAL REPORT

1st OCTOBER 2018 – 30th SEPTEMBER 2019

PRESIDENT: Mr Timothy West CBE

VICE-PRESIDENTS: Mrs Eileen Cottis, Mr Derek Forbes,

Dr Neville Hunnings, Mr Barry Sheppard

OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE 2018-2019

CHAIR: Mr Simon Sladen

VICE-CHAIRS: Dr Marion O'Connor, Professor Trevor Griffiths

HONORARY SECRETARY: Ms Diana Fraser

HONORARY TREASURER: Mr Geoffrey Davidson

HONORARY LEGAL ADVISER: Mr Lee Greaves

HONORARY INDEPENDENT EXAMINER: Mr Paul Barron

[Communications Officer: Ms Harriet Reed / Minutes Clerk: Mr Peter Close]

COMMITTEE:

Dr Christopher Abbott

Professor Christopher
Baugh

Mrs Jennie Bisset

Ms Kate Quartano Brown

Professor Richard Foulkes

Mr Mark Fox

Mr Ian Herbert

Mr Howard Loxton

Professor Steve Nicholson

Dr Michael Read

Ms Harriet Reed

Miss Sue Solomon

Dr Pieter van der Merwe
MBE

CO-OPTED:

A representative of the
Theatre Collections of the
Victoria and Albert
Museum

A representative of the
Editors of *Theatre
Notebook*

A representative of the
Theatres Trust

Dr Moira Goff

Dr Anselm Heinrich

At the 71st Annual General Meeting of the Society on Tuesday 9th May 2019 the retiring members of the Committee, Mr Howard Loxton, Ms Kate Quartano Brown, Ms Harriet Reed, and Mr Simon Sladen, offered themselves for re-election, and were re-elected unopposed to the Committee for the term 2019-2023 in the cases of Mr Loxton, Ms Quartano Brown, and Ms Reed, and for the term 2019-2022 in the case of Mr Sladen. Following his retirement from a Co-opted Membership of the Committee, Dr Christopher Abbott was elected unopposed as a full member of the Committee for the term 2019-2023.

Ms Diana Fraser was elected unopposed to the post of Honorary Secretary of the Society for the year 2019-2020.

Mr Geoffrey Davidson was elected unopposed to the post of Honorary Treasurer of the Society for the year 2019-2020.

The co-options and the appointments of Advisers shown above were approved unopposed for the coming year.

Activities of the Society

Introduction

The Society began the year in a very strong position. The Chair and Committee devised a list of targets for the year: a Members' Survey; a review of the Constitution; the launch of the Website; identification of an STR House Style (logo, colour palette, font, style sheets, etc.); the recruitment of a Communications Officer; agreed templates for posters, stationery, leaflets, letterhead, and the Annual Lecture Programme leaflet, etc.; the re-initiation of communication with other similar bodies and the initiation of joint projects; and a look at new ways to deliver the AGM. All of the above and much more has been achieved, albeit some things needed a final few tweaks. The website has been a welcome instigator of change, with the STR's online presence now stronger than ever and the parallel appointment of a Communications Officer means that we have a better relationship with our members. It has been encouraging to see an STR presence across a number of online platforms and media outlets, as well as articles in *The Stage* and advertisements in the *Matcham Journal*. The STR Members Survey was a very useful exercise in obtaining feedback from users and some changes have already been initiated in response to its findings. People now know the Society from its refreshed logo, colour palette and 'house style' and it has been wonderful to initiate new projects with TaPRA, APAC and the British Library within the space of the year.

Annual Lecture Series 2018-2019: As always, the programme for the series was devised with a view to providing members with a broad range of stimulating and enlightening experiences. We heard from:

- Barrie Rutter OBE describing his personal approach to Shakespearean performance 'From Shakespeare to Buddy Holly, it's all rock n roll'
- Dr Joanne Scott talking about 'The Performer and the Digital: networks of feeling in intermedial practices'
- Sir Peter Wright discussing his life and career in the ballet in conversation with Jane Pritchard MBE
- Michael Diamond discussing 'Evidence of a Lost World: Posters for Victorian Theatre', and what they can tell us about the staging of melodrama
- Claire Appleby updating us on 'The Theatres Trust and Theatres at Risk Register'
- Committee Member's Sue Solomon's 'The Frankenstein Phenomenon', a rehearsed reading of "Presumption: or the Fate of Frankenstein" by Richard Brinsley Peake from 1823,

- Dr Vicky Angelaki talking about ‘The Country and the City in Contemporary British Theatre: Binary, Crisis, Futures’ and
- Yvonne Brewster OBE, founder of the Talawa Theatre, gave the Annual Address. ‘You’ll Never work’ reflecting on her life and career.

We were also pleased to be able to assist in securing the agreement of the company holding the performing rights for a rehearsed reading of Terence Rattigan’s *Follow My Leader* by a cast led by our President Mr Timothy West which took place in the Lecture Theatre at the V&A in October 2018.

The 2019 Wickham Lecture took place at the University of Bristol’s Wickham Theatre on Wednesday 22nd May 2019. Professor Mary Luckhurst of the University of Bristol spoke on ‘Celebrity Actors and Actresses Playing Real People’. The lecture was well-attended and the background to this annual event and the contributory role of the STR was acknowledged: Professor Luckhurst said it was an honour to be there and that an STR Research Award had helped her on to her present career path. A protocol is being drawn up to set out the responsibilities of Bristol and the STR and, in particular, provide a guideline as to subject matter, re-aligning the event with Professor Wickham’s interests: ‘early English and post-war theatre and visual arts’.

The Gordon Craig Memorial Lecture for 2019 was delivered by prolific stage and costume designer Johannes Schütz, and took place at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama’s (RCSSD’s) Embassy Theatre on Tuesday 2nd July 2019. It had been well-attended with an audience of around 120. This year’s set up had been slightly different: after a welcome from the RCSSD’s Principal, our Chair was given the welcome opportunity to say a few words about the Society and to share the stage with the Society’s wonderful new banners proudly promoting the STR. Johannes Schütz had given a whistlestop PowerPoint presentation tour of his career, followed by a discussion. The Committee felt that as 2020 would be the 50th anniversary of Peter Brook’s now seminal *Dream*, the next speaker should be someone related to / influenced by / inspired by him.

It has taken some time to identify a new Annual Lecture Series Co-ordinator who could successfully ‘run’ all aspects of the lectures. Fortunately, the Society was in a very strong position as Ms Reed had already planned the 2019-2020 Lecture Series in its entirety.

Associated Organisations: We are continuing to maintain our relationships with our Associated Organisations and our wider professional community through collaborations which benefit participating organisations, the scholarly community, and the wider public. Most recently:

APAC: At the invitation of APAC (Association of Performance Collections) in putting on the joint APAC/STR Symposium 2019 ‘Clear Sailing: Navigating the Archive’. The symposium took place on Monday 1st July 2019 in the Hochhauser Lecture Theatre at the V&A. It built on the success and relevance of the APAC 2017 symposium which had focused on bridging the gap between archivists and researchers. There were seven papers and an audience of around 50 attendees, including STR members and a number of STR Research Award recipients, and exceeding APAC’s usual attendance figure by 20. APAC Chair Ms Erin Lee and Mr Sladen led a workshop with all delegates to try to come up with best practice advice for using archives, and will write up the workshop and the feedback from it as a resource. Feedback from the day had been overwhelmingly positive and we intend to do similar joint events with APAC in the future, particularly as the cost was so moderate. Such events were also great recruitment drivers and an opportunity for the Society to promote itself generally.

British Library (BL) Collaboration: Mr Sladen had met Ms Zoe Wilcox, the BL's Curator for Contemporary Performance and Creative Archives, to discuss how to re-ignite observance of the Reading Amendment and raise awareness among playwrights of the requirement to deposit the scripts of performed plays at the British Library. This was designated one of the Society's key priorities for 2019-2020. The BL would like to launch the initiative with an event at the BL in Summer 2020 which will appear on its press schedule. The resultant publicity will be very positive for the profile of the Society, as well as contributing to the better capture of the nation's playwriting landscape.

TaPRA: Building on the success of the TaPRA / STR Fellowship will be the formal outputs of the TaPRA-STR Fellow, Dr Hannah Manktelow's, work on the STR archive at the V&A, a presentation (at the 2020 TaPRA Conference to be held at Liverpool Hope University), and a journal article which would examine the STR's role in preserving theatre history in the twentieth century, focusing on the Society's involvement in legislation, the Theatre Museum, theatre preservation, and research/education.

Communications Officer: Harriet Reed has made an immediate impact in this challenging new role. She has devised a Communications Schedule for 2019-2020 to support the forward planning of publicity for events, and introduced regular posting on social media (Twitter and Facebook). This was rewarded by positive feedback and a steady growth in the number of our followers. She has also sent out more frequent Newsletters, encouraging those who received these electronically to click on the links therein and explore the STR's new website.

Constitution: The Society's Constitution had not been reviewed for some time and had become seriously out of date as to both content and nomenclature. The Chair and Vice-Chairs undertook a comprehensive review of it, and prepared a revised first draft together with a proposal for a streamlining of the Committee's structure. This was submitted to the Committee in September 2019 for consideration and further development. A final draft will be submitted to the STR's legal advisors, Harbottle and Lewis, to ensure that it reflects and complements the Society's current activities and aspirations for the future, and is fully compliant with the current legislative framework. The final document will be presented for adoption at a future AGM.

Finance: As last year, improvements to financial governance are continuing under the leadership of the Honorary Treasurer and our Chair. Up-to-date financial information is available at every Committee meeting, enabling confident responses to opportunities. Rigorous attention to cost-cutting is ongoing, resulting this year in a significant reduction in postal and distribution charges, freeing scarce resources to be reallocated into mission critical activities.

Grave Restoration: The Society held over a thousand pounds in its Grave Restoration Fund which came originally from the Frank Matcham Society (FMS). The FMS has agreed that this sum will be applied to the restoration of Dan Leno's Grave.

Membership: Membership has remained at the same level as the previous year. At the end of 2018/2019 it stood at 420.

Members' Visits: In response to feedback from Members, plans were made for a pilot visit to the Grand Order of Water Rats Museum To take place on Wednesday 4th March 2020. Feedback on this event will be considered by the Committee to establish whether such visits should be added to the Society's regular offer.

New Researchers' Network (NRN): A new NRN Committee has been formed which has devised a programme for the coming year for discussion with the Chair. This new Committee

had appointed two members to liaise with the STR Committee, Ms Clare Chandler and Ms Laura Milburn. As they were based at Wolverhampton and Birmingham respectively they would not always be able to attend STR Committee meetings but they would be included in the Committee mailing list. The NRN Committee has worked with Ms Quartano Brown to update the NRN's presence on the STR website.

New Scholars Prize: Arrangements were made to publicise the Prize for 2020.

Poel Workshops: The Society had used a £4,000 grant from the Garrick Club, originally intended to extend the Poel Workshops to the North, to offer bursaries for travel and accommodation to actors from there to come to London for the Poel. Places were offered for twelve participants (two reserved for actors from the North). The workshops took place on 8th March 2019 at the RCSSD, and at the National Theatre on the 22nd of March 2019 ending on the stage of the Olivier Theatre. As always the Workshops were greatly appreciated by the participants and their highly positive feedback was posted on the website. Alumni of the 2019 Workshops have continued to work together as reading group and made arrangements with Westminster Reference Library to give a free reading there.

Publications: The subscribers' volume for 2017-2018, John McCormick's *The Holdens: Monarchs of the Marionette Theatre* had sold exceptionally well. It had recently been favourably reviewed in the *Times Literary Supplement (TLS)* of 24th to 31st May 2019, in the Puppeteers UK (PUK) newsletter, and in *De Wereld van het Poppenspel*, the magazine of the Dutch UNIMA (Unione Internationale de la Marionnette). The subscribers' volume for 2015-2016, Don-John Dugas's *Shakespeare for Everyman: Ben Greet in Early 20th-Century America*, had recently received positive and lengthy reviews in both *Shakespeare Survey* and *Theatre Annual*. The subscription volume for 2018-2019 was to be Dr Jean Baker's *Sarah Baker and her Kentish Theatres 1737-1816: Challenging the Status Quo*. Professor Jim Davis was serving as Volume Editor. In late summer 2018 STR Publications had accepted an offer from the University of Exeter Press (UEP) to co-publish a revised paperback edition of Professor Steve Nicholson's four-volume *Censorship of British Drama 1900-1968*. The fourth and final volume had won the STR Theatre Book Prize for 2016. STR Publications had secured very favourable terms including the right to sell the volumes at retail so long as this took place outside the commercial book trade, and the price to non-members did not fall below an agreed minimum. At present the tentatively agreed date for delivery of the volumes was July or August 2020, and a set of them would constitute the STR Publication for the 2019-2020 subscription year. Among half a dozen new book proposals which STR Publications had received and considered in the course of the membership year 2018-2019, Professor Simon Shepherd's proposal *Granville-Barker: the Unknown Texts* had been definitely accepted, and Professor Colin Chambers had agreed to be its volume editor.

Theatre Book Prize: This year's shortlist was:

- *Dramatic Exchanges* edited by Daniel Rosenthal (Profile Books)
- *Modern Playhouses* by Alistair Fair (Oxford University Press)
- *Peggy to her Playwrights* edited by Colin Chambers (Oberon Books)
- *Staging British South Asian Culture* by Jerri Daboo (Routledge)
- *Twenty Theatres to See Before You Die* by Amber Massie-Blomfield (Pinned in the Margin)
- *Year of the Mad King: The Lear Diaries* by Antony Sher (Nick Hern Books)

The presentation had taken place on Tuesday 11th June 2019 in the Delfont Room at the Prince of Wales Theatre. This year's judges were: Ms Daisy Bowie-Sell, Editor of UK Theatre website What'sonStage; Mr David Byrne, playwright and award-winning Artistic Director of the innovative New Diorama Theatre; and Professor Jim Davis, Professor of Theatre at Warwick University, and himself a previous winner of the Prize. Although a professional engagement made it impossible for the Society's President to attend and open the proceedings, the form of the event was changed slightly by introducing a presenter, which helped it to run more smoothly. STR member Mr Andrew Killian performed that role most effectively: he introduced the judging panel, who each spoke briefly about the Prize, the books on the short list and a few other favourite titles. The presentations to the shortlisted authors was made by special guest Mr David Wood OBE, a good friend of the Society. The winner was Sir Antony Sher's *Year of the Mad King: The Lear Diaries* (Nick Hern Books). Although Sir Antony had been unable to attend in person, Nicholas Hern of Nick Hern Books accepted on his behalf.

Research Awards for 2019: Details of the Awards may be found in the enclosed Minutes of the 71st Annual General Meeting of the Society.

Theatre Notebook (TN): *Theatre Notebook* continues to raise the curtain on a wide range of original scholarship. This year's articles covered: the career of eighteenth century singer Baroness Margherita de L'Epine; rediscovering Nora Charrington, actress and Fabian; Jacob Hall and other Rope Dancers on the Continent, 1678-1682; the theatrical career of Mary Canning 1747-1827; a re-appraisal of Benjamin Griffin's diary as a source for work performed at Lincoln's Inn Fields and Drury Lane in the early seventeenth century; new writing at the Victoria Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent in the 1960s; strolling with Shakespeare and friends (new evidence from the late seventeenth century); and toy theatres and the cultivation of celebrity. A feasibility study is under way to establish whether back numbers of *TN* can be made available to Members as a resource which is fully searchable online.

Website: Work on enhancing the new website is ongoing. The number of visitors shows a steady incremental level of improvement. We try to ensure that things change from week to week in order to persuade people to come back regularly. Google Analytics has been installed and provides an in-depth look at who uses the site and which sections are most popular. Visitors to the site come: mostly from the UK; a number from the USA; and other points of origin including Australia, Japan, France and India. Most use a desktop, some a phone, and come mainly via search engines or directly to the site, or via Twitter. Deeper into the site, the most popular pages are currently *Theatre Notebook* and the Grants and Prizes pages. The Member Directory is also popular. It will not be possible to hold large audio or video files such as the Theatre Book Prize or Annual Lecture Series recordings on the STR server, but these will be available on the STR's YouTube channel. Although of course we want to attract new members and new audiences we are very aware of the need to cater for those who have remained on board throughout. This means that, for example, we will remember those who rely on postal mailings to find out what we are doing, and include them in our communications planning. A hard copy newsletter will therefore be sent out, perhaps twice a year with *Theatre Notebook*, as well as regular electronic Newsletters. Enhancements to the Members only area, including page of notes for new members, were planned for the year ahead.

Administration: The Society's postal address is: c/o The Theatre and Performance Department, V&A Museum, Blythe House, 23 Blythe Road, London, W14 0QX

Acknowledgements: As in previous years, the Society acknowledges with gratitude the work of its officers and its Committee, and the invaluable advice of the Honorary Legal Adviser.