



## **The Society for Theatre Research**

### **73<sup>rd</sup> ANNUAL REPORT**

**1<sup>st</sup> OCTOBER 2019 – 30<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2020**

PRESIDENT: Mr Timothy West CBE

VICE-PRESIDENTS: Mrs Eileen Cottis, Mr Ian Herbert,  
Dr Neville Hunnings, Mr Barry Sheppard

OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE 2019-2020

CHAIR: Mr Simon Sladen

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

HONORARY SECRETARY: Ms Diana Fraser

HONORARY TREASURER: Mr Geoffrey Davidson

LEGAL ADVISER: Mr Lee Greaves

INDEPENDENT EXAMINER: Mr Paul Barron

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

COMMITTEE:

Dr Christopher Abbott

Mrs Jennie Bisset

Ms Kate Quartano Brown

Professor Richard Foulkes

Mr Mark Fox

Professor Trevor Griffiths

Mr Ian Herbert

Dr Valerie Kaneko-Lucas

Mr Howard Loxton

Professor Steve Nicholson

Dr Michael Read

Ms Harriet Reed

Miss Susan 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 72<sup>nd</sup> Annual General Meeting of the Society online in June 2020, two of the retiring members of the Committee, Mr Mark Fox and Miss Susan Solomon, offered themselves for re-election, and were re-elected unopposed to the Committee for the term 2020-2024. Professor Trevor Griffiths, hitherto a co-opted member, and Dr Valerie Kaneko-Lucas, the Co-ordinator of the Annual Lecture Series, were willing to offer themselves for appointment to the remaining vacancies, and were elected unopposed to the Committee for the term 2020-2024.

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's plans for the year were seriously compromised by the Covid-19 crisis as it evolved so that cancellations and postponements are referred to frequently in this Report. The Society did, however, make a strong response to the critical conditions affecting our community, by establishing an Inclusivity Working Group, introducing our highly successful Covid-19 Support Grants and embracing Zoom technology for the Annual Lecture Programme and Committee Meetings. Work on the Society's Constitution took a new and different direction as it became evident that the challenges the Society was facing were becoming radically re-defined by the crisis, and we will keep members informed of our new thinking as it is defined in discussion by your Committee.

**Professor Donald Roy:** We begin with the sad news that Professor Donald Roy died peacefully in early June 2020 at the age of 90. He founded the Drama Department at the University of Hull (then only the third in existence in the UK). Under his leadership it soon established itself as one of the leading UK departments and its main theatre was subsequently named for him. His thirty years' tenure there was based on the belief that a study of drama and theatre history at a high academic level should be accompanied by practical experience in the skills of theatre including design, stage management and directing as well as acting. These principles differed from those in American and European universities where the practical and academic studies were more usually kept separate. Professor Roy was an enthusiastic member of the Standing Conference of University Drama Departments (SCUDD) from its inception in the 1960s. He was also a longstanding member of the STR, contributing especially as a member of the main Committee from 2010 to 2016 and also as stalwart of the Publications Sub-Committee. The Committee extended its sincere condolences to his family, friends, and colleagues.

**AGM 2020, Review of Online Process:** The process had been successful. A high proportion of members had opened the various online communications. Such comments as had been received had been positive, and the Chair (from whose email address communications were sent) had received emails complimenting the Society for keeping on top of business matters during Lockdown. The President's Address had been made available in the members' section of the website.

**Committee and Officers:** Dr Marion O'Connor, hitherto the co Vice-Chair, had decided after 10 years in the role not to stand for re-election in July 2020. It was agreed that the Committee would move forward with a single Vice-Chair for the time being. Dr O'Connor was thanked for the support, help and guidance she had offered to the Committee over the period of her tenure. Mr Ian Herbert was elected as a Vice-President of the Society. It was noted that he had been a highly regarded Chair of the Committee and had been asked to serve for an additional year beyond the normal four year tenure in that post, and that he had been a stalwart member of both the Publications and the Research Awards Sub-Committees over many years. As a Committee Member he had always been ready to offer advice and professional support. Mr Geoff Davidson generously agreed to continue to carry out the role of Honorary Treasurer until 31<sup>st</sup> August 2020 or a successor was appointed.

**Annual Lecture Programme:** As in previous years, we offered an exceptionally wide-ranging programme for the 2019-2020 series:

Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> October 2019, Ms Gemma Brace  
'Wake Up and Dream: Exploring the Archive of Oliver Messel'  
Number of attendees: 32

Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> November 2019, Ms Clare Ferraby and Mr Nick Thompson  
'Creating Theatrical Magic: 50 Years of Designing Theatres'  
Number of attendees: 38

Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> December 2019, Mr Horatio Blood  
'London on Stage: A Theatrical Excursion in Toy Theatre'  
Number of attendees: 53

Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> January 2020, Dr Hannah Coleman Manktelow (STR/TaPRA Fellow)  
'The STR Archive: Uncovering a Legacy of Theatrical Preservation, Legislation and Education'  
Number of attendees: 19

Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> February 2020, Ms Claire Appleby  
'The Theatres Trust: Theatres at Risk Register 2020'  
Number of attendees: 15

Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> March 2020, Dr Emma Parker  
'The Joe Orton Diaries: Love, Death and Wolfenden'  
Number of attendees: 14

Unfortunately both the Wickham Lecture and the Gordon Craig Memorial Lecture had to be postponed as the pandemic crisis intensified.

**Associated Organisations:** Although we continued 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, this became increasingly challenging as the pandemic crisis worsened. In particular, the initiative to collaborate with the British Library in re-igniting observance of the Reading Amendment and raising awareness among playwrights of the requirement to deposit the scripts of performed plays at the British Library had to be put on hold. We will resume work on this as soon as it is practically possible to do so.

**Communications Officer:** The work of Harriet Reed in this new role continued to have an incrementally positive impact on all aspects of the Society's activities, raising its profile and engaging new audiences. Since March 2020 there had been several key events to communicate, including the Theatre Book Prize, the Society's Covid-19 and Black Lives Matter statements and the AGM. The coverage of the Theatre Book Prize was smaller this year, as many outlets focused on the Coronavirus's devastating impact on the arts industry. However, it was still picked up by several publications. Social Media followers were: Facebook, 1,064 (up 31 since March); Twitter, 1,818 followers (up 126 since March). Over half of members opened the monthly Newsletter and numbers doing so continued steadily to increase. Although it is important for us to reach out to new audiences and, in doing so, to potential new members, we continue to respect the wishes of members who prefer postal mailings: a hard copy version of each of our regular Newsletters and other notifications is therefore sent out to them.

**Covid-19 Support Grants and Donations:** These were devised in principle and developed in detail through extensive consultation with Committee Members. The Society had established twelve (later increased by means of a charitable donation to seventeen) enabling Grants of £200 available to help theatre practitioners and researchers working in the UK facilitate British and British-related theatre projects during the Covid-19 pandemic. Applications were particularly welcomed for projects working with under-represented voices in British Theatre which underlined the principled intention to support a diverse range of projects, including black British theatre, Asian British theatre, disabled performance, queer performance, women's theatre, and working class theatre. In return the STR asked to be credited and for a short report for the website. The Grants supported theatre practitioners and researchers working in the UK, both individuals and groups to:

- Support British and British-related theatre projects to help facilitate knowledge exchange and creative networking. This might take the form of online panels, conferences, Q&As, workshops, master classes etc.
- aid research into adapting / making a piece of theatre accessible during Covid-19
- enable research that would contribute towards and inform a production

- provide a part-budget for research materials and software licences to enable research and its dissemination.

The Grants could be spent on: subscriptions to software or online providers such as Zoom, Vimeo Pro or Dropbox; paying for improved broadband; purchasing books etc. for research; subscription to an online resource for research, such as the British Library Newspaper Archive; contribution to the cost of materials such as stationery, hard-drives, dictaphones, microphones, props; paying a fee for expert advice, speaker, workshop, etc. As with the Research Awards, proof of what the Grant had been spent on would be evidenced in the report. 100 applications were received and the successful applicants were as follows:

1. **Jeremy Allen** – to adapt and develop Shakespeare inspired *Analyse Thou* for online performance working with Oxfordshire-based organisation Response which helped people with mental health problems to live their life to the full and become more independent.
2. **Julie Rose Bower** – to purchase research materials for project *This is what a feminist sound like; performed sound design from Foley to ASMR*. These materials would then form part of a feminist sound design library which would be itemised and made publicly available.
3. **Emma Clifton** – to research, plan and create a workshop that teaches Costume Designers and Makers the basics of Clo3D digital software technology. The first workshop would be delivered via an online platform and be free to participants.
4. **Tristan Fynn-Aidenu** – to deliver a one day workshop *Black Queer Male Actors' Playground*: a space for Black Queer or SGL Male Actors and Artists to explore using drama as a way to connect. The workshop would encompass physical theatre, improvisation, readings of new material and storytelling techniques and practice.
5. **Nell Hardy** – to facilitate one-to-one support sessions for people with learning difficulties using drama and to develop and enable online coaching for projects including LAUNCH, Jacksons Lane's young theatre company; a safe space in which young people could find and share their creative and social voices.
6. **Alissa Anne Jeun Yi and Clare Taylor** – to purchase equipment for COVID-safe research and interviews with under-represented East Asian, Pan-Asian and queer communities for *Daddy Issues*. The autobiographical performance art show explores how the medium of drag could be used as a safe space and empowering tool for womxn and built on Alissa's personal experiences as a mixed-race Chinese womxn.
7. **Nur Khairiyah** – to develop and deliver RUMAH Fest online. The festival supports the artistic practice and development of Asian artists who are invisible and under-represented. The online festival would focus on first time collaboration of Asian Artists based in London and encompass spoken word, new work, music collaboration, cooking demonstration and ComediAsians, a collective of Asian comedians.
8. **Light Ladd & Emberton** – to adapt and develop *Disgo Distaw Owain Glyndwr Silent Disco* for online performance working with Taking Flight Theatre Co, specialists in accessible and inclusive theatre making, and Stage Text on the

technical delivery of Welsh and English captions to make the show fully accessible to d/Deaf people.

9. **Lanre Malaolu** – for research and development of a new dance-theatre production *SAMSKARA*, a piece that untangles the questions, challenges and contradictions of what it means to be a black man in 21st century Britain. Through a fusion of physical theatre, hip-hop dance and text, the work follows the journey of four generations of black men and explores how cycles of fatherhood affect masculinity, concepts of vulnerability and the harbouring of emotional pain.
10. **Lisa McKinley** – to help facilitate the socially distanced return of Theatre Mix by contributing to a PA system. Theatre Mix is a monthly cross-artform performance night, part scratch night, part open-mic, featuring the work-in-progress of local Birmingham artists where they can network and develop their work.
11. **Magdalena Mosteanu** – to develop *Easy as Pie* into an online installation and resource. The Reading-based project in collaboration with the Museum of English Rural Life uses food and food storytelling as a mediator for cross-cultural contact. Contributions from Algerian, Ukrainian, Romanian and English participants would be shared, as well as a resource outlining the project's collaborative and interdisciplinary methodology.
12. **Ridiculusmus** – to edit, upload and curate a season of full-length videos of Ridiculusmus's current repertoire, prepare supporting documentation for dissemination, archival and research purposes, and convert recordings into digital formats. In addition, educational content about the Ridiculusmus methodology and a DIY documentary would be uploaded to the Ridiculusmus website.
13. **Fiona Templeton** – to research Gaelic songs and women's poetry in Gaelic for *Songs Between Worlds*, a collaborative theatre work with Japanese musician/composer Yumiko Tanaka. *Songs Between Worlds* brings together threads from the cultures of north-eastern Japan and north-western Scotland, exploring parallels and focusing on the prevalent stories of journey, distance, disaster and encounters with death.
14. **Stage Management Association** – to expand the reach of the Stage Management Association's Continuing Professional Development training and support for the stage management community online during the extended COVID-19 period via online open Tea Break meetings and a Buddy Scheme with the aim of supporting mental health and well-being. Online resources would also be improved.
15. **Theatre Directors Scotland** – to facilitate a Big Sector Meeting in October 2020, following on from 2019's which focused on Transparency, Resources, Current Obstacles, and Futureproofing. The meeting would help devise a new action plan to address the gaps in the post-pandemic context and involve directors, funders, and council representatives together with freelance/grassroots theatre directors.
16. **Aylwyn Walsh** – to research and create a Leeds-based Playback Theatre group with those affected by mental health and the stigma associated with it. Playback Theatre is an interactive form of theatre created through audience / performer collaboration. Original research would be conducted that spoke to the specific needs for digital platforms for sustaining creative communities

which would be of value to arts and health debates, contributing to discussions on aesthetics, participatory practice and wellbeing.

17. **Lilac Yosiphon** – for socially-distanced research and development devising *Kummerspeck*, a new work focusing on a bilingual exploration of emotional eating as a response to crisis and loss, in both British Sign Language and English. The work would address the processing of grief and loss post Covid-19, especially within the D/deaf and Disabled communities, and explore the inner conflicts within the same character performed by female Deaf and hearing performers.

**Inclusivity Working Group (IWG):** The inaugural meeting of the STR's Inclusivity Working Group took place in June 2020. The IWG's overarching aim is to involve a more diverse range of people in the Society's activities. One of the group's first tasks was to oversee the Covid-19 Support Grants, which you can read about above. Another IWG initiative is to prepare and maintain the currency of a list of associated organisations: some which were new contacts; some with which the STR had lost contact; relevant university departments; industry practitioners; and groups hitherto under-represented in the Society's activities. This will be an important tool in the development of a new outreach strategy. The repositioning of the New Scholars Prize with a view to enhancing inclusivity is under consideration.

**Financial Management:** The Committee reimagined the Finance function, appointing Committee Member Mark Fox as Honorary Treasurer to oversee the work of Ms Yona Lesger in the new post of Finance and Membership Officer. This new structure took place with effect from the 1<sup>st</sup> October 2020. The Society achieved a great deal in 2019-2020: made extra awards; funded the distribution of two Annual Publications and three issues of *Theatre Notebook*. A donation of £1,000 and savings on other activities enabled the financing of the special Covid-19 awards. However, there was a significant reduction in the interest received from investments due to the economic situation, and the Society therefore continued to be mindful of the need to exercise prudence in discharging its financial commitments.

**New Researchers' Network (NRN):** The NRN Committee continued to be represented at and to work closely with your Committee, and with both the Communications Officer and Kate Quartano Brown to maintain the NRN's presence on the STR website, and with Trevor Griffiths, General Editor of *Theatre Notebook (TN)*, on their proposed guest editing of a special issue of the Society's Journal.

**New Scholars Prize:** The 2020 New Scholars Prize was awarded jointly to Dr David Bullen, Ms Yizhou Huang and Dr Annette Rubery. Dr Bullen's essay was 'Dionysus the New Woman: Maenadic and Feminist Intersections in Lillah McCarthy's 1908 *Bacchae*'; Yizhou Huang's essay was 'The Birth of Widow Twankey'; and Dr Rubery's was on 'Peg Woffington as Lothario in *The Fair Penitent*'.

**Poel Workshops:** It was not possible to run the Workshops during the Lockdown. However, applicants were asked what they had been doing over the period of the Lockdown to help keep theatre alive. A number did so and their responses were posted on the Poel Page of the STR Website: <https://www.str.org.uk/events/the-poel->

[workshop-page/what-did-you-do-in-the-great-theatre-shutdown/](#) . A donation of £1,000 was made to the Leeds Playhouse, the Poel Workshops' new partner in the North, using some of the Society's income which would normally have been applied to the 2020 event. The Playhouse sent a letter of thanks saying that it would put the donation towards its Furnace Programme for artistic development (generating and creating new performance work in the context of support for its local community). The Playhouse had also kindly undertaken to publicise the STR's Covid-19 Support Grants to its 1,000 strong mailing list. We are grateful to Mr Barry Sheppard for organising all these initiatives to such positive effect.

**Publications:** The STR Publication for 2019/20 was a revised paperback edition of Professor Steve Nicholson's four-volume *The Censorship of British Drama 1900-1968*, co-published with University of Exeter Press. UEP had published the original hardbacks: Volume I in 2003, II in 2005, III in 2011, and IV (which won the STR Book Prize) in 2015. STR Members contributed variously to the preparation of the revised paperback edition, which was distributed in August 2020. There were indications that it had attracted new members to the STR.

**Research Grants:** Details of the Research Awards for 2020 may be found in the enclosed Minutes of the 71<sup>st</sup> Annual General Meeting of the Society. The STR Research Awards have been re-designated Research Grants to avoid any misapprehension that they were an acknowledgement of merit not a mechanism for funding research to be undertaken. The Sub-Committee managed to support 15 applicants, which compares well with 16 last year and 18 the year before that. There was general agreement that preferential support should be given to those applicants the Sub-Committee understood to have less access to funding. The resulting list of successful applicants showed a wide variety of subjects with applicants from varied backgrounds. The Chair and Vice-Chairs decided that, by way of acknowledgement of applicants' efforts in difficult times, each would receive a copy of this year's Annual Publication, Professor Steve Nicholson's *The Censorship of British Drama 1900-1968*. All Awards have been distributed. At least one recipient, Christine Beddoe, had 'hit the ground running' with an article about her ongoing research into the music-hall community in Brixton. Reports from earlier years continued to appear at intervals on the Website: <https://www.str.org.uk/grants-prizes/research-awards/>

**Theatre Book Prize:** The six titles shortlisted for the Theatre Book Prize 2020 were as follows:

1. *The Art of the Artistic Director: Conversations with Leading Practitioners* by Christopher Haydon (Methuen Drama)
2. *The Birth of Modern Theatre: Rivalry, Riots, and Romance in the Age of Garrick* by Norman S. Poser (Routledge)
3. *Dark Star: A Biography of Vivien Leigh* by Alan Strachan (I B Tauris)
4. *An Illustrated History of British Theatre and Performance* by Robert Leach (Routledge)
5. *Playwriting: Structure, Character, How and What to Write* by Stephen Jeffreys (Nick Hern Books)
6. *Shakespeare Spelt Ruin: The Life of Frederick Balsir Chatterton, Drury Lane's Last Bankrupt* by Robert Whelan (Jacob Tonson)



The winner was *Dark Star: A Biography of Vivien Leigh* by Alan Strachan.

**Theatre Notebook (TN):** As always three issues of *Theatre Notebook* were published to the usual high standard. A call for papers went out for a special edition of *TN* to be guest-edited by the NRN. Two of the New Scholars Prize essays were being re-written to the rubric required for publication in a future edition of *TN*. *Theatre Notebook* continued to be distinguished by the breadth of its contributors' original scholarship, and its incisive and insightful book reviews. Journal articles covered: the career of eighteenth century star singer Baroness Margherita de L'Epine; rediscovering Nora Charrington, actress and Fabian; the working lives of Rope Dancers on the Continent, 1678-1682; the first of a three part survey of the theatrical career of Mary Canning 1747-1827 (mother of leading politician and eventual Prime Minister George Canning); 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; the working conditions of late seventeenth century touring companies; and the role of nineteenth century toy theatres in the cultivation of celebrity.

**Website Management:** Recent statistics showed a huge jump in daily visitors (over 250) in July 2020 when the Covid-19 Support Grants were announced. Before and after this the visitor total was rather more modest, averaging between 50 and 70. The previous peak (145) was in June 2020 following the announcement of the New Scholars Prize. Both Twitter and Facebook showed good clickthrough. Facebook was usually more productive than Twitter, though Twitter had given more visitors from the Covid-19 Support Grant announcement. New posts were added at least once a week and sometimes more often. Interest in the website had been generated by references to it on 'Easy as Pie', a storytelling website run by a Grant recipient. However, most people still accessed the site directly. The most popular pages indicated the continuing popularity of the late Graeme Cruickshank's work on theatre-and-music-hall-licensees. The prominence of the late Barbara Jefford OBE (a member since 1959) reflected an interesting exchange on the provenance of the photographs on the website associated with her obituary. As always we are grateful to Committee Member Kate Quartano Brown for her committed stewardship of the website.

**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 Legal Adviser.