



The Society for Theatre Research

74th ANNUAL REPORT

1st OCTOBER 2020 – 30th SEPTEMBER 2021

PRESIDENT: Mr Timothy West CBE

VICE-PRESIDENTS: Mrs Eileen Cottis, Mr Ian Herbert,
Dr Neville Hunnings, Mr Barry Sheppard, Dr Pieter van der Merwe MBE

OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE 2020-2021

CHAIR: Mr Simon Sladen

VICE-CHAIR: Professor Trevor Griffiths

HONORARY SECRETARY: Ms Diana Fraser

HONORARY TREASURER: Mr Mark Fox

LEGAL ADVISER: Mr Lee Greaves

INDEPENDENT EXAMINER: Mr Paul Barron

Finance and Membership Officer: Ms Yona Lesger. Communications Officer: Ms Harriet Reed. Website Officer: Mr Kalle Westerling. Minutes Clerk: Mr Peter Close

COMMITTEE:

Mrs Jennie Bisset

Ms Kate Quartano Brown

Dr Gabriela Curpan

Mr Geoff Davidson

Professor Trevor Griffiths

Ms Rebecca Infield

Ms Eilidh Innes

Dr Valerie Kaneko-Lucas

Mr Howard Loxton

Dr Katherine Newey

Professor Steve Nicholson

Dr Marion O'Connor

Dr Michael Read

Dr Fiona Ritchie*

Miss Susan Solomon

*Resigned 28th September 2021

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 Anselm Heinrich

At the 73rd Annual General Meeting of the Society, online in May 2021, Ms Jennie Bissett, a retiring member of the Committee, offered herself for re-election, and was re-elected unopposed to the Committee for the term 2021-2025. Mr Geoff Davidson, Ms Rebecca Infield, and Dr Fiona Ritchie were willing to offer themselves for appointment to the remaining full vacancies, and were elected unopposed to the Committee for the term 2021-2025. Dr Gabriela Curpan (term 2021 to 2024), Ms Eilidh Innes (term 2021 to 2023), and Professor Katherine Newey (term 2021 to 2023) were willing to offer themselves for appointment to vacancies arising in respect of unexpired terms of office, and were elected unopposed to the Committee for the terms shown next to their names.

Ms Diana Fraser was elected unopposed to the post of Honorary Secretary of the Society for the year 2020-2021.

Mr Mark Fox was elected unopposed to the post of Honorary Treasurer of the Society for the year 2020-2021.

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

Committee and Officers:

New Committee Members Dr Gabriela Curpan, Ms Rebecca Infield, Ms Eilidh Innes, Professor Katherine Newey (a stalwart of the Research Grants Sub-Committee), and Dr Fiona Ritchie were warmly welcomed to the Society. Mr Geoff Davidson, previously a longstanding Committee Member and former Honorary Treasurer, re-joined the Committee. We were delighted that long-serving Committee Member Dr Pieter van der Merwe MBE was elected a Vice-President of the Society in May 2021. He joined STR as a student member in 1969 and has been a Committee Member since 1981: a member of the Publications Sub-Committee from 1981 to 1987 and currently; a Member of the Research Awards Sub-Committee from 1987 to 1992, its Vice-Chairman and Chairman from 1993 to 1996; and Chairman of the main Committee from 1997 to 2001. He has written articles, notes and reviews in *Theatre Notebook* from 1977, and has given Society lectures and papers at both the STR Richmond and Cambridge conferences.

Introduction

The working group set up to consider potential candidates recommended the co-option of Professor Michael Burden to the Committee, with a view to him taking over as Chair in due course. Although the Society's plans were seriously compromised by the Covid-19 crisis, we continued to respond robustly through our work on Inclusivity, aiming to involve a more diverse range of people in our activities, and manifested by continuing to offer the successful Covid-19 Support Grants, re-named Practitioner Research and Development Grants, and through the recruitment of new members with fresh insights and perspectives to the main Committee. We consolidated and further extended our expertise in the use of Zoom technology for the Annual Lecture Programme, and Committee Meetings, which will stand us in good stead in the future.

AGM: Responses from members to the 2021 AGM had been highly positive, referring to a smooth presentation featuring lots of content, seamless AV and two appearances from the President. There had been 78 members present: online AGMs seemed generally to attract larger than usual audiences. The Annual Address with Mr Jatinder Verma MBE in conversation with Dr Valerie Kaneko-Lucas had been an effective use of Zoom to show a discussion.

STR 75th Anniversary in 2023: The aim was for the year to have a legacy, raise awareness of the Society, and attract new members. A working group had been set up to consider the ideas generated by the Committee and members responding to the invitation in the STR's Newsletter to have their say. Possibilities included: a social event for members; an additional Publication; a special edition of *Theatre Notebook*.

Activities of the Society

Annual Lecture Programme: As in previous years, we offered an exceptionally wide-ranging programme for the 2020-2021 series:

October 2020: 'The Fatal Drop' a celebration of Black History Month,
A lecture by Dr Valerie Kaneko-Lucas
[Audience of 66 on Zoom]

December 2020: 'Nicholas Nickleby: Live'
A Rehearsed Reading
Directed by Miss Sue Solomon
[Audience of 193 on Zoom]

January 2021: 'Staging Afghan Women's Lives'
A lecture by Ms Amie Ferris-Rotman and Professor Lesley Ferris
[Audience of 70 on Zoom]

February 2021: 'Exploring Wonderlands: Alice on Stage and Screen'
A lecture by Mr Simon Sladen
[Audience of 96 on Zoom]

March 2021: 'Putting Britain on Point: A Century of Teaching Dance'
A lecture by Ms Jane Pritchard MBE
[Audience of 135 on Zoom]

April 2021: 'Is this What We Got Rid of the Lord Chamberlain For?: Censorship and British Theatre, 1968-1971'
A lecture by Professor Steve Nicholson
[Audience of 73 on Zoom]

May 2021: The Annual Address
By Mr Jatinder Verma MBE
[Audience of at least 55 on Zoom (for bookings, not including 'direct entry' from members clicking on the link)]

Continuing to offer Zoom attendance as well as face-to-face will empower participation by a less London-centric / more geographically distributed audience, and by those with disabilities.

Unfortunately the Wickham Lecture and the Gordon Craig Memorial Lecture had to be postponed again as the pandemic continued. The Gordon Craig Memorial Lecture in collaboration with the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama (RCSSD) would not now take place until June 2022. It would take the form of a panel discussion of 'Scenography: Designing for Today and Tomorrow' with members of the Scene/Change group of theatre designers.

Associated Organisations: Although we continued to maintain our relationships with our Associated Organisations and our wider professional community, collaborative endeavours remained problematic as the pandemic continued. In particular, the initiative to collaborate with the British Library (BL) to re-ignite observance of the Reading Amendment, raising awareness among playwrights of the requirement to deposit the scripts of performed plays at the BL, remained on hold.

Communications: Communications Officer Harriet Reed had worked with the NRN on the STR Instagram account, engaging with recent grant recipients about Instagram 'takeovers', where they could share their research and simultaneously promote the Society. There had been a very positive response and fifteen researchers had signed up to take part. The first 'takeover' took place in September 2021: Dr Aylwyn Walsh, one of the grant recipients in 2020, and Associate Professor of Performance and Social Change at the University of Leeds), had posted on the Society's Instagram account for an entire week to our audience of followers, sharing insights into her research, workshops and live productions, and offering tips and links about arts and mental health. More Instagram takeovers were being planned for the future. Social Media follower numbers continued to climb: Facebook, 1,276 followers (up 18 followers since August); Twitter, 2,313 followers (up 126 followers since August); and Instagram, 223 followers (up 53 followers since August). Newsletter 'open' and 'click' rates had steadily ticked upwards.

Finance and Membership: The Society had experienced a steady decline in income as a result of a reduction in investment income and subscriptions (as membership slowly declined). The Society had used last year's surplus to break even but had been unable to enhance any budgets. It would be necessary to budget very carefully going forward, and the Brexit-related increase in postage costs would be ongoing. Institutional memberships continued to be strong, with a trend for the journal being required only in digital form. The STR was not the only academic society experiencing a decline in membership and the Committee would be re-visiting the membership package rather than a recruitment drive as the optimal approach to redressing this: membership fees remained unchanged for the STR year 2021-2022.

New Researchers Network (NRN): The special issue of *Theatre Notebook (TN)* co-edited by the NRN had attracted so many high-quality abstracts that the NRN Committee and *TN's* editors were now envisioning a second such edition. The issue had a theme of absence as featured in different aspects of British Theatre, such as archival gaps and textual lacunae. The NRN Committee had appreciated the opportunity to provide Early Career Researchers with a prestigious platform for their research and share the range of scholarship that would be published there. The NRN continued to platform events and calls for papers of various kinds, especially via Twitter. Facebook, hitherto used to publicise NRN events, was used less while no face-to-face events were planned. The NRN blog continued to be a platform encouraging emerging scholars' virtual networking: PhD students and Early Career Researchers summarised their research in blog posts published on the NRN website. The NRN was also working with the Communications Officer across the STR's social media platforms. NRN's intention was to expand membership of its Committee and explore options for the future, revisiting events postponed because of lockdown to see which remained appropriate.

New Scholars Prize: The repositioning of the New Scholars Prize with a view to enhancing inclusivity was under continuing consideration.

Poel Workshops: Planning was under way to return to the RCSSD and the National Theatre. There had been fruitful exchanges with Leeds Playhouse, planning for a one

day version of the Poel to be held there in the future, which would help fulfil the ambition to make the Poel less London-centric. This process had started with funding from the Garrick which enabled the STR to offer bursaries to actors not resident in the South East, and could lead to the establishment of a longer, annual event in the regions.

Practitioner Research and Development Grants: As last year, the Grants were for practitioners working in the UK to facilitate British and British-related theatre projects. Applications were particularly welcomed from projects working with under-represented voices in British Theatre. The projects aimed to help facilitate knowledge exchange and creative networking; aid research into making a piece of accessible theatre or adapting a piece of theatre to make it accessible; and enable research that would contribute towards and inform a production. Grants could be put towards research materials and software licences to enable research and its dissemination. In return the Society asked to be credited and for a short report for the website.

There had been fewer applications than last year, probably due to the ongoing pandemic-related uncertainty in the profession. The successful recipients were announced in August 2021 via Social Media and the STR website, and in a subsequent Newsletter. We are grateful to everyone involved in the process, and especially Ms Kate Quartano Brown and Ms Harriet Reed for their work in organising and publicising the Grants, as well as the two anonymous donors whose contributions increased the number of grants of £200 which could be awarded to 20. The recipients were:

1. Museum of Richmond: Towards a free exhibition at the Museum of Richmond celebrating 50 years of the Orange Tree Theatre, a powerhouse of independent theatre and London's only permanent theatre in the round, accompanied by a programme of family workshops and learning activities inspired by the displays.
2. Dramaturgs' Network: Anti-racist Strategies in Dramaturgy – a live-streamed roundtable, as part of the d'n20 anniversary and Kenneth Tynan Award celebrations on 20th November 2021.
3. Souradeep Roy: Comparative research project looking at anti-colonial and anti-imperialist plays by playwrights such as Mulk Raj Anand and Bijan Bhattacharya staged in London and Calcutta during the Second World War.
4. Running at Walls: Green screens for digital workshops by Running at Walls theatre and dance company to widen the ability to explore consent in a range of scenarios and through different creative methods.
5. J. Eva Collins Alonso: Research and development material for [RADIOPHONICS], a show based on alternative histories of radio re-told from a female perspective.
6. Anna-Helena McLean: Working with multimodal documentation to stage a living, participatory process. This project aimed to demonstrate the important work of women in actor/voice training via multimodal autoethnography and performative events.
7. B.O.O.K: To purchase plays by black British playwrights for Building Our Own Knowledge (B.O.O.K) as part of an open access library running artists in residencies for Black artists across the West Midlands.
8. Hannah Ballou: *goo:ga II*, a live art film that investigates the iterability of autobiographical performance, feminist parenting praxis, and pregnancy trauma narrative in a comedic context.

9. Karen Morash: *Another Time This Time* was a collaborative performance project (text compiled by John London and Kit Danowski) which used extractions from historical artefacts to reflect on the current time of pandemic.
10. Roz Symon: to explore sustainable models of making theatre which could be used in future lockdowns.
11. Badapple Theatre Company: Research and development for *Elephant Rock* a new comedy touring to rural non-theatre spaces in Spring 2022, exploring the impact of coastal erosion and the legacy of family ties stretching back generations at an old music hall by the sea.
12. Emma Bentley: A five-day Research and Development Phase of Emma Bentley's debut play *Peaceful Disease* at NDT Broadgate.
13. Lucinda Coyle: Workshopping the play *Pas De Deux*, which had roles to be played by anyone and everyone, inspired by a lack of diverse roles, in particular for people who identified as non-binary.
14. Bridget Foreman: Research for a new play that explored what the centuries-long circus surrounding the reputation of Richard III might tell us about the way in which fake news endured, and how the apparently ephemeral world of Elizabethan theatre had shaped our sense of history today.
15. Jonathan Le Billon: A research and development table read of a Sherlock Holmes script for performance (for a re-opened London theatre).
16. Liesbeth Tip: a musical event to raise awareness of the effects of adverse racist experiences on mental health, and open up the conversation on how those from minority backgrounds who might be affected could be supported.
17. Sheldon Chadwick: to develop interactive tools for the Showmen's Mental Health Awareness Charity to break the stigma surrounding mental health within the fairground community.
18. Emily Garside: working on LGBTQ+ playwriting in line with her production *Don't Send Flowers* by running workshops (one in person, one online) on writing LGBTQ+ stories for the stage.
19. Eleanor Chadwick: Research and development into ways of performing the Medieval Mystery Play *Mankind* for a contemporary audience while remaining true to the roots of, and impetus behind, the original script.
20. Bella Enahoro: This grant would be used to assist the Beyond Elsinore in Research Materials: Consultation Fee, with a Jazz pianist for original compositions, and Venue Hire for a workshop with actors.

Publications: STR volumes which had appeared since the end of 2019 were Jean Baker's *Sarah Baker & her Kentish Theatres, 1737-1816: challenging the status quo* and the revised paperback edition of Professor Steve Nicholson's *The Censorship of British Drama 1900-1968*. Professor Simon Shepherd's *The Unknown Granville Barker: Letters to Helen & Other Texts 1915-1918* will be the STR Publication for the current membership year 2020-2021. *STR Books in Print 2021*, a revised edition of the printed catalogue which STR Publications Secretary Miss Francesca Franchi had been preparing with input from Mr Barry Sheppard and Ms Forbes, had been completed, and copies

would be sent out in early December 2021 with the year's final issue of *Theatre Notebook*. Consideration was being given to the twin necessities of making STR Publications commitments years in advance, and of undertaking to honour them regardless of changes to the Society in 2023 or thereafter. Dr David Pattie of the University of Birmingham had joined Dr Ann Featherstone as volume co-editor of Dr Kate Crehan's biography of her mother, *But Will It Get a Laugh?: The Life of Doris Hare in Three Acts* (winner of the 2020 Tony Lothian Prize for an uncommissioned biography by a first-time biographer). Stock of both past Publications and back issues of *Theatre Notebook* continued to sell well.

Research Grants: Details of the Research Awards for 2021 may be found in the enclosed Minutes of the 73rd Annual General Meeting of the Society. These Grants had all been distributed. Reports from earlier years were still coming in, much delayed by the pandemic, however, many researchers had shown a lot of initiative and energy in getting on with things in spite of the restrictions. Reports were published on the website and can be found here: <https://www.str.org.uk/grants-prizes/research-awards/> The Sub-Committee had agreed to extensions for recipients whose work could not be completed in year as a result of the pandemic, subject to receipt of interim reports.

Terence Rattigan Memorial: The Society had been concerned to hear that the condition of the family grave of playwright Sir Terence Rattigan had seriously deteriorated. Moreover, his name had not been inscribed on it despite his ashes being interred in the family vault. The STR had a strong record of interest in this area and the Finance Sub-Committee, in consultation with Mrs Jennie Bisset, who manages the Society's Memorial Fund, had recommended supporting the Terence Rattigan Society's appeal to have it restored. Following consultation with the wider Committee, the Society had pledged a donation comprising the balance of £212 in its Memorial Fund plus a further £288 from general funds to make a total donation of £500.

Theatre Book Prize: The winner of the 2021 Society for Theatre Research Theatre Book Prize (for books published in 2020) was Dr Nicola Abram for *Black British Women's Theatre: Intersectionality, Archives, Aesthetics*, published by Palgrave Macmillan. The judges were journalist Ms Lucy Popescu, actress Ms Cleo Sylvestre and Professor Steve Nicholson, chaired by Mr Loxton, and discussed their choices during the online presentation, available to view here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IObZGMRyX9c> The announcement was made by theatre director and biographer Mr Alan Strachan who himself won the Prize last year for *Dark Star* his 2019 biography of Vivien Leigh. Dr Abram said: "My research also took me to several formal archives and at the time perhaps I felt that the history preserved by those institutions was somehow less fragile, being professionally preserved and carefully catalogued but the on-going threat to the V&A Theatre and Performance Collections proves me wrong. So receiving this year's Book Prize I think confirms the vital importance of archives of every kind as well as making the vibrant history of Black British women's theatre all the more visible."

The judges for the Theatre Book Prize for books published in 2021 were: representing the profession, Mr Jatinder Verma, MBE, theatre director, co-founder of Tara Arts, its artistic director from 1977-2019, and now developing new work as JV Productions; representing academe, Ms Erin Lee, head of the National Theatre Archive; and, representing Critics, Mr Paul Vale, theatre critic and feature writer for *The Stage* since 1998.

We thank Mr Howard Loxton for all the work he does to ensure that the Book Prize continues to be so successful.

Theatre Notebook (TN): The year saw Issue 75/3, the first special NRN issue, prepared for distribution. The second 'NRN' edition would follow in 2022. The first in a new series of occasional essays, "Gather Round ... ' Stephen Joseph and the Art of Celebration' by Dr Barbara Day MBE had been published on the STR website in commemoration of his Centenary. Two further pieces were under consideration: Dr David Bertenshaw's *Schwabe-Hasait Cyclorama Lighting: a Misnomer but also Elements of a Revolution in Stagecraft* might yield an essay on Basil Dean and Cycloramas for publication in the journal and material on Cycloramas in Germany, comprising fascinating images and informative text, for the STR website; and the work of Dr Robert Kenny, the recipient of past STR Research Awards for his work on aspects of French theatre. His introduction to *Arlequin à la Foire* might be an occasional essay <https://www.str.org.uk/occasional-essays-a-new-str-venture/> and would be linked electronically to the online version of the play. It was hoped to extend this promising new exploration of the opportunities afforded by the web format. Possible Notes and Queries, a feature of interest to several members, were under consideration for future issues of *TN*.

Journal articles continued to be distinguished by original scholarship and wide-ranging themes and topics including: Kitty Clive's birth and marriage dates; the continuation of the three part survey of the theatrical career of Mary Canning 1747-1827; the working lives of English rope dancers in the seventeenth century Netherlands; the world of nineteenth century Penny Theatres; stage directions referring to three stage doors in early modern theatre; Peg Woffington as Lothario in *The Fair Penitent*; and poachers and the Game Laws on the nineteenth century stage.

Website Development: This had reached a stage where best value could be achieved by appointing a Website Officer on an honorarium basis, who could resolve a range of issues in addition to the enhancements currently carried out by external contractors on a fee basis. This cost-effective option allowed much more work to be tackled. The cost of the role this year sat inside the budget, and was for an initial 6-month period to be extended as necessary. Visitors to the website remained a steady 50 or so a day: the biggest 'hits' were on the Practitioner Grants page; many were referred from Facebook, quite a few from Twitter, and most from Opportunities Creative Scotland (where a notice had been placed). Graeme Cruickshank's *magnum opus* on Music Hall licensing continued to attract a lot of interest from all over the world.

New recruits to the Website editorial team were Committee Member Ms Eilidh Innes who was contributing news articles and helping with general upkeep, and the NRN's Mr Alessandro Simari who had taken on responsibility for the *Theatre Notebook* page.

The interface for what had been Members' Notices had been improved. Re-labelled 'Members' Notes and Queries' it allowed images and links to be added.

As always we are indebted to Committee Member Kate Quartano Brown for her committed stewardship of the website.

Administration: The Society's postal address is: PO Box 78086, London, W4 9LP

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.