



The Society for Theatre Research

75th ANNUAL REPORT

1st OCTOBER 2021 - 30th SEPTEMBER 2022

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 2021-2022

CHAIR: Mr Simon Sladen *

VICE-CHAIR: Professor Trevor Griffiths

HONORARY SECRETARY: Ms Diana Fraser

HONORARY TREASURER: Mr Mark Fox

LEGAL ADVISER: Reed Smith **

INDEPENDENT EXAMINER: Mr Paul Barron

* The proposed new chair, Professor Michael Burden, was co-opted to the committee during the year; he and Mr Sladen served as CO-CHAIRS for the latter part of the STR year.

** Appointed in 2022

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
Miss Susan Solomon

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

The 75th Annual General Meeting of the Society took place in person and online on 25 May 2022. After eight years on the committee, the last five of them guiding the society expertly through numerous changes as Chair, Simon Sladen stepped into the role of co-opted Member representing the theatre and performance collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

After many years of service, Ms Diana Fraser stood down from the post of Honorary Secretary of the Society; she would, however, stay on the committee. Dr Brianna Robertson-Kirkland was elected to the post of Honorary Secretary of the Society.

Dr Marion O'Connor joined the Society over 30 years ago, since when she had been an active and enthusiastic member, holding several senior positions. In addition to being a long-standing member of the Committee, she was for several years an Editor of *Theatre Notebook* until she took on the huge responsibility of being General Editor of Publications, producing a wide-ranging series of books as the Annual Publication.

After more than 20 years, Professor Steve Nicholson stepped down from the STR Committee, where he had Committee Member and as a Chair of the Research Awards (now Research Grants) Sub-Committee.

The Society's Finance and Membership Officer, Ms Yona Lesger, also stepped down, having had achieved during her tenure, in particular the oversight and introduction of new technologies to improve the Society's financial procedures.

Also stepping down was Mr Peter Close, the Society's Minutes Clerk. He was fundamental in the preparation of material for the Annual General Meeting. STR thanked him very much for his sterling service.

During the year, Mr Robin Cave left the post of *Theatre Notebook* Business Manager after some fifteen years in the role.

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

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, the plans of the Society to increase inclusivity and to reach wider and different audiences continued, and indeed, the crisis offered the chance to employ technology to reach both old and new audiences in different ways. Plans are afoot for the STR's **75th Anniversary in 2023**.

Activities of the Society

Annual Lecture Programme: As in previous years, we offered an exceptionally wide-ranging programme for the 2021-2022 series:

October 2021 'In conversation: That Other British Asian Theatre: British East and Southeast Asian Performance' Kumiko Mendl (Director, New Earth) and Kwong Loke (Founder Member, Stone Crabs) (Attendees: 27)

November 2021 'Moll Frith: in Search of Renaissance Drag Kings' S.L. Grange (Multi-disciplinary artist) (Attendees: 47)

December 2021 'Windrush and Beyond: Voices of Black Britain' Ensemble Performance
Curated by Dr Valerie Kaneko-Lucas (Attendees: 19)

January 2022 'The Importance of Editing Noël?' Professor Russell Jackson (University of Birmingham) (Attendees: 37)

February 2022 'London's burning: Social housing, performance and politics of fire in an overheated market' Dr Katie Beswick (University of Exeter)

March 2022 'Edward Stirling: Victorian actor, adapter and bigamist – with readings from his plays, including The Cabin Boy' Miss Susan Solomon (Society for Theatre Research) (Attendees: 32)

April 2022 'Theatres at Risk Update' Ms Clare Appleby (Theatres Trust)

Culminating in the Annual Address

May 2022 'Memory Lanes: reflections on historical pageantry' Professor Mick Wallis (University of Leeds)

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.

The Gordon Craig Memorial Lecture - in collaboration with the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama (RCSSD) - postponed for COVID-19, took place on 16 June 2022.

The Wickham Lecture - in collaboration with the Department of Theatre at Bristol University - will not be run until 2023.

Associated Organisations: Throughout COVID-19, we have continued to maintain the society's relationships with our Associated Organisations and our wider professional community. Nevertheless, endeavors of collaborative nature have remained – and remain problematic. In person meetings still faced post COVID-19 challenges, and it has been difficult to have effective contact while these uncertainties continue.

Communications: Our social media channels (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram) continue to be effective communicators with our members and a wider audience. Our follower numbers have continued to increase, particularly on Twitter (which rose from 2,313 to 2,454 followers during this period), where there is a wide and engaged network amongst theatre companies, fans and academics. From 15th – 23rd February 2022 we ran an Instagram 'takeover' from Dr Billy Rough, who received one of our research grants. He introduced his project on Walter Sickert and music halls and took followers on a tour of the 'Sickert: Art in Life' exhibition at the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool. As well as promotion for the society, Billy fed back that he'd also made some good contacts and attracted new followers to his own Instagram account. We are continuing to send out monthly newsletters, publicising events, grants and other items of interest, which have had positive feedback from members. The 'open' and 'click' rates increased from 58.4% and 13.3%, to 65.9% and 22.1% respectively (October 2021 to September 2022). Lastly, during 2022 I also began consulting with various outlets about advertising the Society, including Theatres Trust, SOLT, Whatsonstage and The Stage to begin planning publicity for the next year.

Finance and Membership: At last year's AGM, Yona Lesger stepped down as Treasurer and her position was filled by Dr Irena Cholij. We are grateful to Yona for her dedicated work and new systems established for recording of income received and expended.

This year the Society's income was boosted by a generous legacy of £70,000. Despite this, the basic income, although slightly lower than last year's, was £2000 more than expenditure. In line with general market trends, our investments have fallen in value, though the income from these investments was £1000 more than the previous year. The investments have subsequently recovered some of their previous value. Due to a change in system, we were unable to receive royalties from Project Muse for the year. After much work by our previous Treasurer Geoff Davidson, we have now recovered £9,750 from the year which will be included in next year's accounts.

Institutional memberships continued to be strong, with a trend for the journal being required only in digital form. However, the STR was not the only academic society experiencing a decline in individual 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. With Brexit-related increases in postage costs we may need to consider how we address this rather than consider raising fees at present. We are conscious of the general financial pressures on people in the current economic climate.

New Researchers Network (NRN): The NRN has followed its brief of supporting early career scholars. The NRN blog continued to be a platform encouraging emerging scholars' virtual networking. The NRN continued 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: Decisions on the New Scholars Prize have been deferred until after the projected publishing reports have been fully digested.

Poel Workshops The last Poel Workshop was in 2019. The planned Workshop for 2020 was not possible because of the pandemic and the following year, 2021, was impossible because of intermittent problems caused by covid and, at any other time, because of Royal Central School and the National Theatre were both blocked as they packed their schedules with their own backlog of events. However, in 2022 we resumed with the normal pattern of the Poel Workshop. Auditions were held at The Spotlight with two places reserved for young actors at from the National Theatre. a day at Central and a day at the NT. On Friday 21st October we had a day of events at Central. Max Keeble, a movement teacher, and expert in animal studies at RADA, began the day with an exhilarating warm up. This was followed by in intensive voice session with Jane Boston, Principal Lecturer, Course Leader MA/MFA Voice Studies, Head of The International Network for Voice at Central. Ben Crystal's session, Shakespeare's Words, introduced the theme of textual exploration. Ben Crystal is an acclaimed. Actor, author, international producer, and explorer of original practices in Shakespeare rehearsal and production. He also introduced the intrinsic acting instructions Shakespeare verse. Shakespeare Rhythm was the title of the session taken by Nona Sheppard. Nona is an international theatre director and the consultant director at The Lir Academy Dublin. She ran a focussed session on unlocking the verse with attention to rhythm. The day ended with a short talk on Shakespearean Pronunciation given by Richard Williams. The second day, at the NT began with Max Keeble continuing his warm up theme. This was followed by Peter Knapp, vocal specialist who works with actors and singers on breathing techniques. This was a highly informative and practical session on breathing and vocal production. Jeannette Nelson, Head of Voice at the National Theatre ran a session called Releasing the Verse on The Olivier Stage, as always a highlight of the workshop. The

second session on the Olivier Stage was taken by Annie Tyson. Actor, teacher, director, and author. She has also run workshops on classical text across Europe and in USA. Her session was titled Action in Shakespeare

The final session of the workshop was a lively and much appreciated session run by Ishia Bennison, actor with the RSC, West End, founder member Northern Broadsides. Her session, Shakespeare Rehearsal, explored several different approaches to rehearsing and working with directors with different techniques. As always, we are seriously indebted to The Spotlight, Royal Central School of Speech and Drama and the National Theatre for their generous support. Of course, many thanks for the wonderful support all our expert workshop leaders give to The Poel Workshop. Plans are now well advanced for the long awaited Poel Workshop at Leeds Playhouse. Barry Sheppard had laid the foundations for this event, but again covid had interrupted the process. After some delays earlier this year we are due to run the workshop in late June this year.

Research Grants: Details of the Research Awards for 2022 may be found in the enclosed Minutes of the 74th Annual General Meeting of the Society. These Grants have 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.

The Anthony Denning Award

James Hudson senior lecturer Lincoln

The British Council and the Marat/Sade Controversy: travel and accommodation to the archives in London

The Kathleen Barker Award

Brooke Nicole Martin PhD student, Bangor

Unpublished Welsh opera: travel to Aberystwyth to look at manuscripts

The Stephen Joseph Award and the Craig Fund Award

Neither the Stephen Joseph award nor an award from the Craig Fund were given this year as there were no obviously suitable projects. The committee is giving more thought to the Stephen Joseph and this may well still be awarded.

Other awards

Tony Lidington showman and independent scholar

Don't Forget the Pierrots book commissioned by Routledge: image permissions

Christopher Beeching writer, researcher, performer, based in Greece

George Leybourne biography Vol II (The Heaviest of Swells): image rights from various collections

Jacqueline Bolton (Lincoln) and Nicholas Holden (Greenwich) lecturers in Drama £400

Beautiful Doom: the work of Dennis Kelly on stage and screen: image reproduction

Clare Chandler Senior Lecturer Wolverhampton

Contemporary British Musicals: travel to London for interviews

Madeleine Saidenberg DPhil candidate at Oxford

Shakespeare and the Debate for a National Theatre in Dublin, 1745-60: travel and accommodation to archives in Dublin

Helen Dallas DPhil candidate at Oxford

Material Afterlives: Dramatic Characters in Romantic Material Culture: travel to archives at Bristol, Cambridge, London

Olivia Kershaw Research Officer for the Ramsbottom Co-op Hall Heritage Trust
From the Mill to the Music Hall: *The theatrical heritage of Ramsbottom Co-op Hall:* subscriptions to archives

Rowan Thompson Fellow, Institute of Historical Research

Naval Pageantry, Heritage, and Commemoration in Interwar Britain: travel/accomm London

Ben Walters writer, researcher, programmer, producer

Untitled Oral History of the Royal Vauxhall Tavern: best-practice training in the professional research techniques of oral history in the form of two courses offered by the Oral History Society

WenYan Pu PhD candidate Exeter

Comic Male-to-female Cross-dressing in English Pantomime and Chinese Traditional Theatre: Archival research on English panto dames – Bristol, London, Kent

One further grant was given, towards a subscription to the British Newspaper archives, to

Juliette Cook Staff, Monmouth Theatre

Authorised History of the Savoy Theatre, Monmouth: total budget £2600, but broken down to books, travel, etc.

Practitioner Grants: These were introduced as the Society's response to COVID, and no competition was run in 2021-2022. However, it has been decided that they should be retained and will be run in 2022-23.

Theatre Book Prize: The winner of the 2022 Society for Theatre Research Theatre Book Prize (for books published in 2021) was *Stirring Up Sheffield* by Colin and Tedd George published by Wordville. The judges 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, chaired by Mr Loxton for the Society.

The judges discussed their choices during the online presentation, available to view here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vlrkniJsv5c>.

The announcement of the winner was made by Dr Nicola Abram who won the prize for her 2020 book *Black British Women's Theatre*.

In his response Tedd George, who edited and completed material his father left incomplete, spoke of Colin George's 40-year struggle to write about his experience as the figurehead of the enterprise to build a radical thrust stage in Sheffield, and thanked the Society for recognising one of the great theatre stories that was in danger of being lost.

The judges for the Theatre Book Prize for books published in 2022 are: actor and countertenor William Purefoy, archivist and dance historian Jennifer Thorp, and theatre

critic Cindy Marcolina.

Publications STR Publication for 2020/21, Professor Simon Shepherd's edition of *The Unknown Granville-Barker: Letters to Helen and Other Writings, 1915-1918*, was distributed to members in February 2022. The volume had been copy-edited by Dr Ann Featherstone, and the PDF from which it was printed had been designed by Ms Leigh Forbes.

An updated print edition of *STR Books in Print*, the first to appear in five years, was prepared by STR Publications Sub-Committee Secretary Francesca Franchi under the supervision of STR Publications General Editor Dr Marion O'Connor and with helpful input from STR Committee Member Barry Sheppard. The PDF from which this catalogue was printed had also been designed by Ms Forbes. Revision was completed at the end of November 2021, and *STR Books in Print 2021* was distributed to STR members the following month. APAC notified their members about this latest STR catalogue and invited them to request copies. Copies went to incoming Committee Chair Professor Michael Burden for conference circulation. Committee Members attending the IFTR Conference in Reykjavik in June 2022 in their personal capacities will be taking STR materials including copies of *STR Books in Print 2021* with them to distribute there. The Publication offer to each new STR member (five books at a bargain inclusive price of £25) remains an aid to recruitment.

The STR Publication for 2021/22 will be Dr Kate Crehan's *But Will It Get a Laugh? A Biography of Doris Hare in Three Acts*. The author being Doris Hare's daughter, this biography is informed by personal insight, and it is abundantly illustrated by unfamiliar images. (The proposal for it had won the 2020 Tony Lothian Prize, which is awarded to the best proposal for an uncommissioned biography by first-time biographer). Dr Featherstone and Dr David Pattie (University of Birmingham) have served as volume editors; Professor Trevor Griffiths is copyediting the text; and Ms Forbes will be designing the volume, for which publication is planned in late summer 2022.

The STR Publication for 2022/23 will be Iain Mackintosh's *Theatre Spaces 1920-2020*, for which Professor Chris Baugh has served as volume editor. This memoir is under contract for co-publication with Bloomsbury, who have scheduled it to appear in May or April 2023.

Wordville Press has initiated a strand called 'Performing Arts in Print'. The first title in this strand, Colin and Tedd George's *Stirring Up Sheffield: an insider's account of the battle to build the Crucible Theatre*, was published on 9 November 2021, with a launch two days later. Because the book had longstanding links to the STR, it was publicised on the society's website including a blurb about *Stirring Up Sheffield*, a link to the publisher, and an invitation to the launch. Wordville Press generously credited the success of that event in Sheffield to publicity on the STR website. Wordville has a link to a 'spin-off' series of podcasts about the theatre from its own site and has been sharing this connection with STR members through the society's website. Wordville has indicated that 'it means a lot for Wordville to work with the STR', and there is a possibility of mutual benefits going forward.

Theatre Notebook The year was notable for the second special New Researchers' Network-curated issue, as well as two issues edited by the normal editorial team. Journal articles continued to be distinguished by original scholarship and wide-ranging themes and topics. The NRN issue curated by Clare Chandler, Alexandra Grossi and Laura Milburn contained a lively and eclectic series of essays on very diverse topics ranging from Thomas Middleton and William Shakespeare, Alan Ramsay and Rose Lewenstein to London's Drill Hall. The other issues spanned the period from the seventeenth century to the early twentieth century with contributions on rope dancers in the Netherlands, doors in Renaissance theatres, stagings of *Romeo and Juliet*, George Colman the Younger, Talfourd, Charles Reade and Yeats. Progress with the new series of occasional website essays has been slow but it is still

hoped to extend this promising new exploration of the opportunities afforded by the web format.

For most of the year we were still able to call on the services of our Editorial Manager Robin Cave, but he was eventually forced to resign by the ill health that led to his death. His scrupulous attention to detail and meticulous work in a whole range of backstage duties made an essential contribution to the success of the journal. We miss him.

STR Website The website continues to go from strength to strength – the latest refinement is an option in the Events postings at the checkout to indicate that people are going to attend a lecture in person. Now that all our lectures are hybrid this will be a useful addition to help us manage the venues. Other improvements have been made behind the scenes to run the mailing lists efficiently and keep our members informed and up to date.

A glitch in the ‘Members Notes and Queries’ section has been resolved, and so I urge all members, if they have an interesting idea or question, or a book or event to publicise, to log in and create their own notice – if you have problems logging in or making a notice please do not hesitate to contact ‘membersinterests@str.org.uk’ and I will do my best to help.

This is **your** website! Let me know what you’d like to see on it and how it could provide more amusement and functionality, and we’ll try and make it work.

Kate Quartano Brown, website and members’ interests officer.

Administration: The Society’s postal address is: Savile House, 4 Mansfield Road, OXFORD OX3 4TA

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.