



**The Society for Theatre Research**

**76<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL REPORT**

**1st OCTOBER 2022 - 30<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2023**

PRESIDENT: Mr Timothy West CBE

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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

## **I: Introduction**

The 76<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting of the Society took place in person and online on 21 May 2023.

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

Plans are afoot for the STR's 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2023-24.

## **II: Activities of the Society**

**Annual Lecture Programme:** As in previous years, we offered an exceptionally wide-ranging programme for the 2022-2023 series:

**October 2022** 'Theatres in Manchester 1968 to 1995 – Old and New' Sir Bob Scott (Theatre manager & author, *Win a Few Lose a Few*) (Attendees: 32)

**November 2022** 'Stirring Up Sheffield: The Battle to build the Crucible Theatre' Dr. Tedd George (Author, *Stirring up Sheffield*) (Attendees: 42)

**December 2022** 'Don't Forget the Pierrots: Seaside Follies on the Prom' Tony Liddington (University of Exeter & author, *Don't Forget the Pierrots*) (Attendees: 101)

**January 2023** 'Theatre on the Spectrum: Theatre Training and Neurodivergence' Jorik Mol (Educator & advocate, Professionally Autistic) (Attendees: 21)

**February 2023** 'The Making of a Monster: An Anatomy of Musical Flops' Christopher Howell (Musical Theatre Director) (Attendees: 58)

**March 2023** 'Re-staging Inconvenient British Histories' Postponed.

**April 2023** 'Gentrifying popular entertainment: Operetta and burlesque at the Gaiety Theatre, London, 1868-1886' Dr. Eilidh Innes (Independent Researcher) (Attendees: 38)

*Culminating in the Annual Address followed by*

**May 2023** 'Theatre Performances are Ephemeral While Buildings Endure' Iain Mackintosh (Theatre consultant and scholar, author of *Theatre Spaces 1920-2020 Finding the Fun in Functionalism*) (Attendees: 160)

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) and the UK Pantomime Association took place on 1 June 2023.

**The Wickham Lecture** - in collaboration with the Department of Theatre at Bristol University - will not be run until 2024.

**Partner Organisations:** We have yet to re-establish effective post-COVID contact with our partner organisations, although the signs are good for the coming year.

**Communications:** The Communications Officer continued to send out the monthly newsletter and posting events on the STR social media channels. Newsletter 'open' rates averaged at 60% and 'click' rates for articles averaged at 12%. Follower numbers continue to grow across Instagram, Facebook and Twitter. The STR 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Event and the Theatre Book Prize were popular events during this period, attracting press from *The Stage* newspaper. The Society's annual publication *Theatre Spaces 1920-2020* also received a review from Michael Billington in *The Guardian*. In January 2023 we secured a supporter's sponsorship of The Stage Awards 2023 for £650. This included a ¼ page ad in the print edition plus our logo on banners at the event and on the website, and 10,000 impressions on the advertising campaign. The awards ceremony was held on 30th January, and the print edition was published in early February.

**Finance:** This year we were again fortunate to receive some very generous legacies, for which we are extremely grateful. Together with some legacy money from last year, these enabled us to add £100,000 to our investments as well as helping bridge the deficit this year between our normal income and expenditure. With increased activity in the Society our expenditure was much higher than the previous few years. The most significant differences were in the amounts granted to research awards, workshops and lectures and in publication costs. These increases were partly met by the recovery of royalties from the previous year but also from legacy money. Given rising costs it is now proposed that membership fees, which have not risen for several years, should now be increased by a modest amount, and that postage and packing fees should be added to all online purchases.

**Membership:** The membership database is going through an investigation in depth to iron out some anomalies and mistakes that have crept in during the past couple of years. Many former members understandably lapsed during the pandemic period but gradually are coming back to the Society where we welcome them warmly. We now have a better system for reminding people to renew their membership - many of course renew in October when the subscription year begins (some even in September!) but the appearance of the first issue of *Theatre Notebook* or the Annual Publication is an excellent opportunity to remind people of what they might be missing, and we now send out emails in spring to tell them about exciting forthcoming publications and to remind them that after two years their membership records will be first cancelled and then removed. This exercise is working well and membership numbers are staying stable.

**New Researchers Network (NRN):** The NRN has continued to follow its brief of supporting early career scholars and was delighted to have the opportunity to co-edit two special editions of *Theatre Notebook* - giving PhD and early career

researchers the opportunity to get their work published and to experience the publication process. Following the resignation of Alessandra Grossi, Clare Chandler also announced that she would be resigning from the committee following the publication of the second edition of *Theatre Notebook*. Whilst recruitment was underway for new committee members, it was decided that all activities and events would be put on hold. However, the NRN is looking forward to announcing new events soon.

**New Scholars Prize:** Decisions on the New Scholars Prize have been deferred until after the projected publishing reports have been fully digested.

**Poel Workshops:** During 2023 an important development took place when the first Poel Workshop was held in a regional theatre. The implementation of the initiative to run the workshop beyond London had been delayed because of the pandemic, but from the start of 2023 the pre-covid connections with Leeds Playhouse were renewed, and arrangements were made for the event to take place on 30<sup>th</sup> June.

Because of constraints of time, money, and availability of space at Leeds Playhouse the two-day pattern of the London/Central School/National Theatre Poel Workshop was modified to form a single day event. There were four linked workshop sessions run by Peter Knapp on breathing techniques for delivering complex and challenging text, Ben Crystal on the clues for actors implicit in Shakespeare text, David Thacker on character and the balance of heightened text and naturalistic delivery, and Ishia Bennison on rehearsing and sustaining performance. Because it was a new venture it seemed sensible to invite session leaders who had previously been involved with the workshop. Leeds Playhouse was invited to propose two actors to participate in the workshop, but in the end, this proved impractical for the company. The day was very successful with a diverse group of actors including two older participants who fulfilled the criteria for participation because they had taken a change of direction later in life and only recently trained and begun their professional careers. Leeds Playhouse provided the workshop with excellent facilities, and we are grateful to them for their support. The feedback from the actors was unanimously excellent.

**The Poel Workshop:** This was held in October at The National Theatre. This was a one-day event because The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, who have been good supporters and have hosted The Poel Workshop over several years, had trouble accommodating the workshop into their schedule. In order to give the participants as full an experience as possible at the NT, time was allocated so that sessions were continuous through the day. This allowed for five sessions but reduced the amount of time the actors had to assimilate the teaching and learning processes. While it made maximum use of the time and the allocated use of the Olivier Stage, it possibly overstretched the actors. However, a very successful workshop with good feedback can be recorded. At the time of writing another regional workshop is about to take place in Manchester, then again returning to the NT in October. This may be the place to note that reduced opportunities for actors to perform Shakespeare professionally has led to a downgrading of Shakespeare in drama school training. In turn there has been a small reduction in the number of applicants for The Poel Workshop, although many of the actors applying are extremely keen to take advantage of the workshop as a way of augmenting the reduced emphasis they have had in training and professional circumstances.

**Research Grants:** Details of the Research Awards for 2023 may be found in the Minutes of the 75<sup>th</sup> 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.

**Awards:** The STR is delighted to announce the following Research Grants have been distributed for 2023:

**The Anthony Denning Award was given to**

**Caroline Radcliffe** (Reader in Drama and Performance, Birmingham) towards the cost of image rights from the Pierpont Morgan Library to accompany the first volume of her edition of *The Dramas of Wilkie Collins*

**The Kathleen Barker Award was given to**

**Helen Keen** (PhD research student 4th Year, Exeter) for travel to Kent and Edinburgh) to research her project on *Laugh And The (Neurotypical) World Laughs With You*

**The Stephen Joseph Award was given to**

**Deirdre Osborne** (Reader in English Literature and Drama, Goldsmiths) towards travel and accommodation in Manchester to conduct interviews and research on her forthcoming monograph on *SuAndi's Performance Poetics* (commissioned by Cambridge University Press)

**and a grant from the Craig Fund was given to**

**Emma Chapman and Rob Halliday** (Lighting designers) towards image rights for their forthcoming book *Theatre lighting design: conversations on art, craft and life* (to be published by Methuen).

**Other grants were given as follows:**

**Siobhan Keenan** (Associate Dean, Research & Innovation, Faculty of Arts, Design and Humanities, De Montfort University)

towards costs of a series of archival visits relating to the two final chapters of her forthcoming monograph: *Richard Burbage and the Shakespearean Stage: A 'Delightful Proteus'*

*Siobhan was given the Anthony Denning award for another aspect of this research in 2020.*

*Note that people may apply up to three times for a research grant, though it has to be for a different project or a different part of the same project.*

**Rachel Walker** (Independent scholar)

towards travel costs for *Research to complete a monograph on history of the Victoria Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent*

*Rachel received the Kathleen Barker award for another aspect of this in 2021.*

**Louise Peacock** (Associate Professor in Drama, De Montfort)

towards travel costs for her book to be published by Routledge 2024: *Present Laughter/Past Laughter: The Longevity of Stage Comedy Techniques*

**Kelly Jones** (Senior Lecturer in Drama, University of Lincoln)

towards travel and accommodation Lincoln – York – London to research her project *Staging the Ghost Story*

**Lucy Thompson** (PhD Student, University of Cambridge)

towards travel to New York and Washington to research *Stepping in Time and Space with Circum-Atlantic Performance: A Cultural and Historical Geography of Tap Dance'*

**Sophie Horrocks** (PhD Student, Durham)

towards travel and accommodation Durham – London – Lille etc, researching *The circulation of English theatre troupes in Northern France, 1815-1820*

**Geraldine Biddle-Perry** (Lecturer Cultural Studies, UAL Central St Martins)

towards travel and accommodation in Bristol to research her project *Hair and the Art of Stagecraft: Performance, Practice, Production*

**Mary Kate Connolly** (Writer and Researcher)

towards colour image rights for a projected book: *Smithereens: An Encounter with Fabric Ghosts – Adventures in the Costume Archive of The Cholmondeleys & The Featherstonehaughs*

**Practitioner Grants:** The STR is delighted to announce the following Practitioner Grants have been distributed for 2023:

**Caroline Astell-Burt** (puppeteer)

towards costs for her project *A Very British Imagery for Pre-School Audiences*

**Bogdan Mihai Florea** (independent researcher and theatre maker at Nu Nu Theatre)

towards preparation costs to enable the realisation of the project '*Practising second language English through theatre-making*'

**Matthew Hahn** (freelance theatre director and facilitator)

towards covering costs to enable ensemble training workshops in Folkestone

**Emma Lindsay** (performance artist)

towards costs associated with her project '*Miracle Fish: an expanded performance poem that dances with fortune telling, anxieties, letter writing and folklore*'

**Sarah McCourt** (senior lecturer in Drama at Wolverhampton University and freelance actor and theatre-maker)  
towards the cost of a handheld projector for her project *'Monstrous Love Revisited'*

**Stuart Macbeth** (musician/writer)  
towards sundry expenses and travel to the British Library and National Jazz Archives for *'The Maxine Daniels Story'*, telling the story of Maxine Daniels, a forgotten figure in British Jazz.

**Hollie Miller** (freelance artist and performer)  
grant to help with funding rehearsal space for her show *'Leda and the Swan'*, to be premiered at The Palace Theatre in London

**Elizabeth Mounter** (actor)  
grant for travel expenses to Sheffield and consultation with history scholar Michael Braddick for the play *'Freeborn John'* that is in development

**Pedro Andrés Pérez Rothstein** (teacher, theatre practitioner, PhD researcher)  
towards travel costs for participants on the project: *'Dramaturgies of Mental Health: Stories from a Community Theatre Group at Arcola Theatre'*

**Annabelle Revak** (composer and lyricist)  
towards workshop development of a new historical, feminist musical *'Train on Fire'*

**Sarah Sigal** (freelance writer)  
to hire dramaturg Alice Malin for the project: *'Daniel Deronda: the process of adapting C19th literature and social values for the contemporary stage with a focus on British-Jewish identity'*

**Alys Williams** (theatre artist)  
to subsidise BSL training for the Lead Artist in the show *'The Light House'*

**STR Theatre Book Prize:** The 2023 STR Theatre Book Prize was awarded to An Actor's Life in Twelve Productions by Oliver Ford Davies published by Book Guild, an intriguing version of autobiography that forms a study of British theatre through a varied acting career spanning over sixty years. The judges for the year were dance historian and archivist Jennifer Thorpe, opera singer and actor William Purefoy and theatre critic Cindy Marcolina. Putting the pandemic behind us the Theatre Book Prize was able to return to a live presentation which formed part of the Society's 75th Anniversary commemoration in the Actors' Church, St Paul's, Covent Garden. The judges spoke about the books, all of which were on display, and presentation to the winner was made by our President Timothy West. A video recording of the event is available on the Actor's Church YouTube channel (but note the instruction to fast forward at the start).

**Publications:** The STR Publication for 2021/22 was Dr Kate Crehan's *But Will It Get a Laugh? A Biography of Doris Hare in Three Acts*. The author is Doris Hare's daughter, so this biography is informed by personal insight, and is abundantly illustrated by unfamiliar images. Dr Ann Featherstone and Dr David Pattie

(University of Birmingham) served as volume editors, Professor Trevor Griffiths was the copy editor and Ms Leigh Forbes designed the volume, which was published in 2022. Dr Marion O'Connor ended her distinguished career as Chair of STR publications with the 2022/23 annual publication of Iain Mackintosh's *Theatre Spaces 1920-2020*, for which Professor Chris Baugh served as volume editor. The book was co-published by Bloomsbury-Methuen in 2023. The STR owes Dr O'Connor a massive debt for her painstaking and meticulous work for STR Publications over many years and for the eclectic, erudite and intellectually challenging volumes that appeared under her aegis. Professor Trevor R Griffiths took over from Dr O'Connor as Chair of Publications and was fortunate to inherit from her the project that became the 2023-4 annual publication, Richard Pilbrow's *A Sense of Theatre*. Dr O'Connor made the initial contact with Richard Pilbrow, nourished the sometimes-flickering flame of the project, and guided it through many vicissitudes until its final stages when Professor Griffiths was able to negotiate the final contract with Unicorn. Richard Pilbrow died when the project was almost complete, and the final editing owes much to STR member Rob Halliday.

**Theatre Notebook:** The journal continues to be edited by Trevor R. Griffiths, Gabriel Egan and Anselm Heinrich, with book reviews edited by Claire Cochrane and typesetting by Leigh Forbes. Alessandro Simari is the website Assistant. The second NRN issue was edited by Clare Chandler, Alessandra Grossi and Laura Milburn, under the overall guidance of the editors. The Journal's articles continued to be distinguished by original scholarship and wide-ranging themes and topics. Subjects ranged from the eighteenth-century to the early twenty-first century with contributions on Thomas Addison, *Alice in Wonderland*, Chatsworth, Lillah McCarthy, St Aubyn Miller, H.G. Pelissier, theatrical supernumeraries, and Arnold Wesker.

**Website:** The website carries on, informing visitors of upcoming lectures and events and keeping a record of past ones, with pages on our publications, the Theatre Book Prize and our Grants programmes, with news from many other research and theatre sources, and it enjoys a steady stream of visitors. Members have access to their own 'backstage' area - once logged in they can take advantage of benefits such as the discounts on publications. We want the site to be of service to the membership as well as provide information for the general public - so please contribute notes and queries or announcements of your publications or shows and we'll always try to put them on the home page.

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

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