

HOMECHAT

A MAGAZINE ABOUT THE LIFE AND WORK OF SIR NOËL COWARD

AUGUST 2011

COWARD IN LONDON

Saturday 17th September. A day of Coward events. A tour of Queen's Theatre where Noël's 'Wings' are on display

DRURY LANE CELEBRATIONS

News of our AGM and Noël Coward's Birthday celebrations at Drury Lane on Friday 16 December.

COWARD IN BIRMINGHAM

A visit to Birmingham in June 2012 to see Coward's ballet 'The Grand Tour' adapted and orchestrated by Hershy Kay with choreography by Joe Layton.

Photograph of Noël Coward in Ireland

Home Chat is a magazine produced by **The Noël Coward Society**, funded through the generosity of **The Noël Coward Foundation**.

Noël Coward Ltd.

Chairman: Robert Gardiner **Directors:** Denys Robinson, Stephen Greenman and John Knowles
Company Secretary: Graham Martin.

The Noël Coward Society:

President: HRH The Duke of Kent **Vice Presidents:** Maria Aitken, Barry Day OBE, Stephen Fry, Tammy Grimes, Penelope Keith CBE

Organising Committee:

General Manager: John H. Knowles, **Finance and Resources:** Stephen Greenman
Events Organiser: Denys Robinson, **Membership:** Stephen Duckham
Media: Michael Wheatley-ward, **North American Director:** Ken Starrett
US West Coast Liaison: Kathy Williams, **NCS in Australia:** Kerry Hailstone
NCS in France: Hélène Catsiapis

Home Chat:

Editor: John H. Knowles, **US NCS news:** Ken Starrett, **Publication:** Stephen Greenman
Assistant Editors and Proofing: Kathy Williams and Ken Starrett
Music correspondent: Dominic Vlasto.

Details of productions and events are as received, with our thanks, from:

Samuel French (Play Publishers and Author's Representatives), *Ken Starrett* (US), *Alan Brodie Representation* (Professional Productions), NCS members and theatre companies.

NCS website: www.noelcoward.net

Unless otherwise stated all images and text are copyright to NC Aventales AG

Key Addresses:

General Manager:

John Knowles, 29 Waldemar Avenue, Hellesdon, Norwich, NR6 6TB, UK
johnhunterknowles@mac.com +44 (0) 1603 486 188 & +44 (0) 7515 356 067

Finance & Resources:

Stephen Greenman, 64 Morant Street, London, E14 8EL stephen@krongthep.demon.co.uk

Events Organiser:

Denys Robinson, 4 Parkside, Vanbrugh Fields, London, SE30 7QQ
+ 44 (0) 2082 658 879 email: denysrobinson1@googlemail.com

Membership Secretary:

Stephen Duckham, 47 Compass Court, Norfolk Street, Coventry, West Midlands, CV1 3LJ +44 (0) 2476 229 502 stephenduckham50@btinternet.com

Press and Media Manager:

Michael Wheatley-Ward, Chandos House, 14 Vale Square, Ramsgate, Kent CT11 9DF
wheatleyward@btinternet.com

North American Director:

Ken Starrett, 49 West 68th Street, Apt 1 R New York, New York, 10023, USA cowardusa@nyc.rr.com

US West Coast Liaison:

Kathy Williams, 141 Stonegate Road, Portola Valley, California 94028-7648 USA
kathywilliams@noelcoward.net

NCS in Australia:

Kerry Hailstone, 10A Westall Street, Hyde Park, South Australia, 5061 Australia
khailstone@adam.com.au

NCS in France:

Hélène Catsiapis, 115, Boulevard de Port-Royal F-75014 Paris, France
helene.catsiapis@wanadoo.fr



EDITORIAL

CONTENTS

T

It is with some trepidation that we present Home Chat in its new A5 format - not I hasten to add a move made on design grounds alone but also as a measure designed to keep the postage costs at an acceptable level.

It does of course have the advantage of slipping more easily into pockets and bags and is, within a whisker or two, the size of the majority of theatre programmes - or at least Playbill!

This is an experiment in a sense but one that we hope you will support! Please let us know if this change is acceptable. We will continue to bring you views, news and archive images and text that we hope will be of interest to everyone.

In this edition there are articles by Caroline Underwood who until recently was

BERMUDA

The cover photograph from our last edition of Home Chat created quite a bit of interest. Our thanks go to NCS member Len Brown who says:

“The cover photograph is excellent; Spithead Lodge itself is not at water’s edge so I would assume the photo was taken at the small cottage, Watergate, which Noel took for himself (“my own little private cottage” as you quote in your article).

It overlooked Turtle Bay and beyond and sported the bathroom which Noel described as “the loo with the view” (Joy Bluck Waters in her book about Eugene O’Neill’s Bermuda days).

The photo was probably taken around 1956/7 rather than 1954 as Noel did not acquire the property until 1956.”

What Len says about the actual building may well be the case as the smaller building of ‘Watergate’ (a Bermudan ‘Firefly’) does have a similar construction and is undoubtedly nearer to the water as the photograph here shows.



Spithead Lodge itself is relatively near the water and in the lower part of the cover photograph a figure can be seen on a chair next to a table on a patio near a harbour wall. Looking at the photograph below this does not immediately seem possible. However in the Coward Diaries he says about ‘Watergate’,

“I am having the rocks below it cemented with a wall at either end to protect me from the tourists, and steps leading down to the water.”

So indeed such a patio at ‘Watergate’ was constructed! Perhaps after the time of this photograph or is it hidden from view by shrubbery or is that ‘the wall’ we can see?

There is also evidence of a double railing on the second story verandah shown in the picture below that does not feature in the cover photograph we used or in any other photograph we have of Spithead Lodge.

None of this is of course conclusive and the information that Len supplies adds to our understanding of the living arrangements in Noël’s relatively short sojourn on the island - and corrects the date.

This month’s cover picture is probably taken by Cole Lesley or Graham Payn and is shot using a stereo camera. It is not perhaps a great photograph of Noël but it places him in a country we rarely think of in connection to him. Perhaps someone can tell us exactly where it was shot?

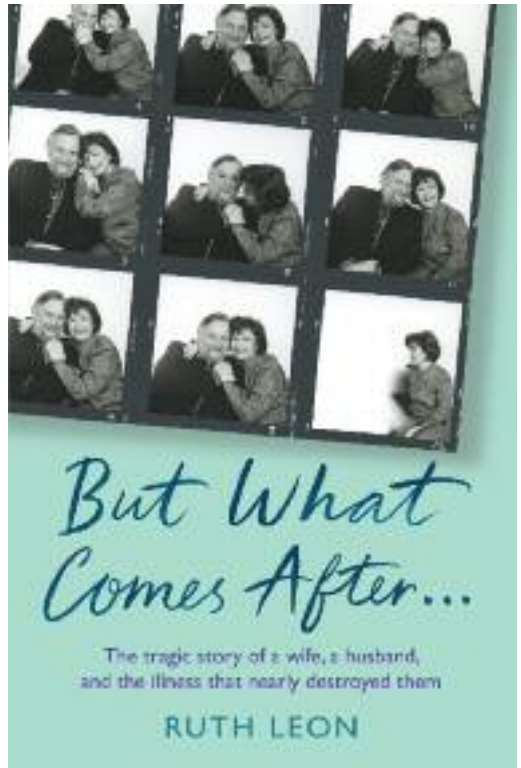
But What Comes After

I first met Sheridan Morley through his biography of the Noël Coward, read as a first introduction to his life and the breadth of his works. Later in 1999 I met Sheridan in the flesh for the first time at the Birmingham University conference on Coward and rather nervously asked him if he would sign a copy of his book on Gertrude Lawrence. I remembered his unique voice from radio broadcasts but to hear it from the man was to begin to understand the kind of authoritative reassurance such a voice can give. From that moment on in what was to prove the last few years of his life he became a firm friend of the Society always willing to give of his time to support its work.

During this period he became a regular contributor at our annual Coward Birthday events and gave generous amounts of time and support to our programme of events.

On one occasion at short notice he stepped in (with Michael Hall) to provide their show on Noël to an audience of members and residents of Norwich at the Maddermarket Theatre when a planned NCS event fell through at the last minute. Needless to say he gave his time for nothing. His generosity became legend and is referred to again and again in this beautifully crafted and constructed book by his wife Ruth Leon. The story of their struggle with his ever-burgeoning illness is told alongside their meeting and the development of their relationship as two timelines that inevitably meet at the point where his illness dominates both their lives.

It was clear in the short time that the Society knew him that he was at times



disorientated by his illness and far from well. But once 'on show' and talking about Noël or the theatre the stories would tumble out and his beautiful voice would entrance and his spirit return.

I once spied him outside the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane 'dressed to the nines' but looking rather lost. Once inside the theatre where Judy Campbell and Elaine Stritch were waiting to lay flowers on Noël's statue his eyes lit up and he was 'there'.

This painfully honest account of his illness and its impact on their lives is offset by the joy of their relationship, especially in earlier times and does, as it sets out to do, express the harsh reality of what it was

like for both the 'carer' and the 'cared for'.
Nothing is ducked - not the turmoil created
by the demands of such an illness and the
joys, often short-lived, of any
improvement. This moving account spares
nothing and reveals much but one is left
with

