



HOME CHAT

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE NOËL COWARD SOCIETY

JUNE
2001



Society's Summer Event

Sunday Luncheon and Exhibition of some original Noël Coward Paintings

with Sheridan Morley and a guest Singer

Following our earlier announcement the Society is now offering a Sunday luncheon and talk by Sheridan Morley on Noël's paintings at the Alexander House Hotel and Restaurant at Turner's Hill on Sunday 22nd July. The hotel, in a part 17th C. house, is set in extensive parkland and has Noël's major painting *Jamaica Bay* permanently on display. This event will provide an opportunity to view some of The Master's original watercolour and oil paintings. In addition there will be a chance to see the coloured slides taken of Noël's paintings in 1988 - some not previously seen in published works. The price of the

event with full roast lunch (with a vegetarian option) is £42 a head. Following lunch we plan to have a guest singer with accompanist to provide a programme of Coward songs. The Hotel will offer a special rate of £65 per person, for two sharing a room, for bed and breakfast on Sunday night - unfortunately they are completely booked for Saturday night!

The address of the Hotel is: Alexander House Hotel, East Street, Turners Hill, Crawley, West Sussex, RH10 4QD, Tel: +44 (0) 1342 - 714914, Fax: +44 (0) 1342 - 717328 E-mail: info@alexanderhouse.co.uk, website: <http://www.alexanderhouse.co.uk>.

**Please let us know if you are interested by contacting Gareth Pike by June 15th at the latest.
email: ncsociety@aol.com Tel/Fax: +44(0)1963 351 421**



EVENTS THIS AUTUMN

The Society is looking forward to the Autumn when it will be arranging a theatre visit to see Bill Kenwright's *Star Quality*, hopefully on the night before the Press Night. It opens on 7th August at the Theatre Royal, Windsor - and is due in the West End in late October. It stars Penelope Keith.

At this year's Birthday celebrations we are planning a day of events on Saturday 15th December in London in Covent Garden and Drury Lane.

EVENTS NEXT SPRING

We are planning a major spring event at Portmeirion on the Welsh coast, where Noël wrote *Blithe Spirit*. The event will be a weekend of events based on *Blithe Spirit*. Members will be offered a special accommodation package in the hotel where The Master penned one of his most famous works, plus a play reading and more ... Members can also enjoy the Italianate buildings and scenery made famous by *The Prisoner* TV series, and the beautiful sandy estuary.

The Society's formal structure

An explanation from Gareth Pike

Once in a while, for the benefit of new members (and for old members who have forgotten) it is useful to explain the structure of the Society. We are not a typical association of members; instead we are a limited company (Noël Coward Limited). The Company is wholly owned by the Noël Coward Foundation, a charitable trust recently established by the Noël Coward Estate.

The company has two directors (Michael Imison and Gareth Pike), and a Company Secretary (Graham Martin of Blinkhorns). Normal trading accounts are produced and we obviously operate within company law and practice. Graham Martin will happily provide a copy of the accounts to any member who wants to see them (they are lodged with Companies House and are part of the public record anyway). Because we are a limited company, and members are clients, we don't have a formal structure of electing a council or formal resolutions at general meetings to get anything done. We can be more flexible than that. In practice, the Society is

run by an Executive Committee, under the Chairmanship of Michael Imison, and with Gareth Pike acting as Secretary. The Committee is made up of representatives of many of the bodies that have an interest in the works of Noël Coward (i.e. Samuel French, Warner Chappell, the BBC etc), plus some members of the Society who were brave enough to show willing. We are always pleased to invite any member who has a contribution to make to our meetings to join us (just get in touch with Michael or Gareth).

Of special mention must be John Knowles who does such an excellent job of running the Society's web site (over 8000 individual visitors in a month!) and now publishes *Home Chat*, and Robert Gardiner who also sits on the board of the Foundation, and therefore gives us a formal link back to the shareholders.

Graham Martin of Blinkhorns should be thanked for his time sitting on the Executive Committee, for producing the Company accounts and very kindly providing the venue for our Committee Meetings at the Blinkhorns' offices in Mortimer Street London (and not only for free, but Blinkhorns kindly subscribe as a corporate member).



Christopher Isherwood and Noël Coward

A news item, written and sent in by David Norris

Christopher Isherwood (1904 -1986) was a celebrated novelist who, among other things, is the author of the Berlin stories upon which the musical, "Cabaret" is based. There does not appear to be any really important connection between him and Noël Coward. Moreover it seems that for many years Isherwood had somewhat hostile feelings towards Coward. For instance, in Valerie Groves' biography of Isherwood's friend, Dodie Smith, there is a reference to Isherwood entertaining people with "killingly funny" imitations of Coward in his role in "In Which We Serve." This is perhaps not too surprising considering that Isherwood appears to have had a strong anti-authoritarian and anti-establishment streak and presumably reacted against certain elements in Coward's portrayal of a naval captain. However in recent weeks a new book by Isherwood has been published posthumously. It is entitled "Lost Years: A Memoir 1945 - 1951" and provides an account (written for stylistic reasons in the third person) of his early years as an emigrant in the United States. On page 30 I was surprised to read a quite riveting description of an actual meeting between Isherwood and Coward. This occurred at a party in New York in 1947 and it is evident that Coward spoke to Isherwood so kindly and charmingly that the latter's attitude towards him changed completely. The piece in the book read as follows:

On August 3, Caskey and Christopher were at Isa Jennings's country house, to swim and have supper. Garbo was there, with George Schlee. Noël Coward arrived late and made a big theatrical entrance. Christopher had always been rather prejudiced against Coward - whom I don't think he had ever properly met. He watched sourly as Coward moved with the modest graciousness of royalty among the guests. Garbo got a speech of homage which Christopher thought disgustingly phoney and even the lesser lights were presented with a compliment apiece; Christopher had to admit that Coward was inventive, he found a different way of flattering each of them, and each one beamed. Just before Christopher's turn came, he said to himself, "I wonder what kind of shit he'll try on me." They were introduced. Coward reacted strongly. Then, in an almost lover-like tone of shyness, he told Christopher, "It's extraordinary - you look so much like one of the great heroes of my youth, Lawrence of Arabia!" Christopher often told this story later, mockingly. Yet that day was the beginning of a permanent change in his attitude to Coward. Subconsciously, Christopher started finding reasons to admire him and think him sympathetic. Which wasn't difficult, for there are many. Christopher, that shameless flatterer, had had his ass tickled by a master, and had loved it. Characteristically, he didn't bother to remember what compliment (if any) Coward had paid Caskey.

© Christopher Isherwood - Lost Years A Memoir 1945 - 1951
Edited by Katherine Bucknell and published by Chatto & Windus

A word of warning! Should anyone feel inclined to read the full text of "Lost years" they may get an uncomfortable surprise. Isherwood's continuous revelations about his emotional and sexual life are quite shocking and most un-Coward-like in their lack of reticence.

The Noël Coward Centenary in France

Professeur Héléne Catsiapis has sent a photograph of her students performing a classroom performance of Private Lives in her college (Ecole Centrale de Lille) as an exercise in English. She has sent us a copy of a French publication "revue d'histoire du théâtre" which contains a detailed article on the works of Coward and the celebrations in England. She also writes, "I am delighted to read that Jeanne Moreau will direct and play Fallen Angels in Paris. I loved the production in London."



NEWS - VIEWS AND GOSSIP

A star studded production of Private Lives is promised for the autumn in the West End prior to Broadway. Watch this space! Sail Away is still a strong possibility for Broadway though it is unlikely that Elaine Stritch will be available.

Finds from Noël Coward's London Office

As the archive at the London office of Noël Coward is dispatched either to the Noël Coward Special Collection at Birmingham University, or to the care of the Noël Coward Foundation and the Society, many delightful surprises have emerged. Amongst the numerous copies of his printed works and recordings are some privately printed gems and photographs that will appear here and on the Society's website. Amongst the first to raise an eye is another privately printed satirical collection from the semi-fictional Hernia Whittlebot - including an ode to The Master:

"TO NOËL COWARD."

Pale faced rat!

Wallowing in the pit of middle-class degeneracy.
Juggling clumsily with the immortal souls

Of your superiors.
Illogically defying the very canons of beauty.

Defiling with your touch the plagency of Art,
Restlessly groping with inadequate comprehension
Among the tinsel stars and tawdry imaginings
Of a squalid mentality.

Pitifully mean, your very appearance an offence,
Slimy as the ooze of a sluggish river.

Rough to the insensate touch,
Rough to the insensate fingers.

Pig-brained, pig-eyed and stupid,
Vulgar, blatant, and self-confident,
Early beginning of a nauseating manhood,

If such term can be applied to you
Hob-Goblin habits in an ass's skin,
Picking your mental food from garbage heaps
Rotting in the sun.

Drab-Putrefying-Soul-sickening!
And anyhow you smell awful.



PHOTOGRAPHS OF BLITHE SPIRIT

Other items to emerge from the London office are a marvellous collection of photographs that will be featured both here and on the Society's website. As a taster we include some small copies of unusual photographs of Noël. They can be seen later this month in a larger size on the site.



The two photographs show Judy Campbell as Elvira, Joyce Carey as Ruth and Noël as Charles. This production started life as a touring show (as part of a programme called *Play Parade* that featured *Blithe Spirit*, *Present Laughter* and *This Happy Breed*). It ran from September 1942 for 25 weeks. Most of the principals eventually, and at various times, appeared in the London production that followed. Staged these these photographs are, they have a wonderful quality and evoke the strange blend of the occult, crisp comedy and tension that made the play such a success and led to the 1944/45 film version, the musical version *High Spirits*, and a succession of recent films copying the theme.

The Unknown Coward

A limited edition of Barry Day's book is soon to be published. Initially this publication will be made available to Coward Society members only. Michael Imison writes ... "I have just read the manuscript and it's full of fascinating stuff which includes an unpublished preface to *Semi Monde*. The price has yet to be fixed but it will be out in plenty of time for Christmas. Those who are interested should register with Gareth Pike." Further details will appear shortly here! Members can view extracts from *The Unknown Coward* on the Society website!



Photograph taken from a Christmas Card sent one year from Noël's home at Les Avant

MORE MEMBERS PLEASE!

Please keep up the campaign to encourage more Coward fans to become members of the Society. All applications for membership to Gareth Pike at: The Noel Coward Society, PO Box 2700, Castle Cary, BA7 7YT United Kingdom email: ncsociety@aol.com, Tel/Fax: +44(0)1963 351 421 - A reminder that it helps both the Society and yourself to arrange to pay by standing order from your account.

All contributions to HOME CHAT should be sent to: John Knowles, 29, Waldemar Avenue, Hellesdon, Norwich, NR6 6TB. email: johnknowles@hmsweb.co.uk, Tel: +44(0)1603 486188, Fax: +44(0)1603 400683



Current & Planned Productions - Professional and Amateur (All 2001 dates unless stated)

US and Canada:	<i>Blithe Spirit</i>	1st to 9th June 3rd to 14th July 12 Apr - 19 May, 2002.	East End Theatre, Orleans, Ontario Theatre Collingwood, Collingwood, Ontario Center Stage's Pearlstone Theater. www.centerstage.org Baltimore Playhouse, Halifax
	<i>Present Laughter</i>	4th to 11th August	The Alabama Shakespeare Festival
	<i>Relative Values</i>	27th March to 14th July	International Theatre of Vienna (in English)
Europe:	<i>Private Lives</i>	Current to 30 Jun 18 May to 14 Jun Nov/Dec	English Theatre Frankfurt State Theatre Co of South Australia, Adelaide
Australasia:	<i>Design For Living</i>	5th July to 22nd Sept	The Gate Theatre, Dublin
United Kingdom & Ireland:	<i>Blithe Spirit</i>	9th to 18th August Aug 2001 4th, 15th & 16th June 8th to 9th December 22nd to 24th November 12th & 13th October	The New Theatre Royal, Portsmouth Hever Lakeside Theatre Keswick Embassy Centre, Skegness, Lincolnshire Village Hall, Laleham NE Surrey College, Ewell, Surrey Village Hall, Whittington, Staffs.
	<i>Semi-Monde</i>	Booking to June 9th	Lyric Theatre, Shaftesbury Avenue,
	<i>Hay Fever</i>	11 Sept to 15 Sept 3rd to 9th June 25th & 26th June	Opera House Jersey (Ian Dickens productions) Alexander Theatre, Bognor Regis, Sussex Tower Arts Centre, Winchester, Hampshire
	Oxford Theatre Guild tour	4th to 9th June 10th to 15th June	Unicorn theatre Abingdon Corn Exchange, Wallingford
	Oxford Stage Co. UK tour	28th to 30th June 4th to 15th June 19th to 23rd June 25th June to 7th July 9th to 14th July	Village Hall, Broad Hinton, Wilts Northcott, Exeter Bury St. Edmunds Windsor Everyman Theatre, Cheltenham
	<i>Noel Coward Tonight</i>	9th May to June 9th	Jermyn Street Theatre Box office 020 7287 2875 Directed by Sheridan Morley
	<i>Present Laughter</i>	7 to 9th June	Courtyard Theatre, Hereford
	<i>Middle Ground Tour</i>	11th to 16th June 18th to 23rd June 26th to 30th June 4th to 7th July 9th to 13th July 17th to 21st July	Grand Theatre, Blackpool Connaught Theatre, Worthing Alexander Theatre, Birmingham Playhouse, Weston-Super-Mare Epsom Playhouse, Epsom Marlowe Theatre, Canterbury Directed by Michael Lunney, Designed by Ali Gorton Box Office: 01253 290 190
	<i>This Happy Breed</i>	11th to 14th July 14th to 16th June	Unicorn Theatre, Abingdon, Oxfordshire Theatre Royal, Margate
	<i>Come Into The Garden Maud and Fumed Oak.</i>		
	Rugeley Arts Tour	23rd June to 28th July (see local press for exact dates of perf.)	Village Hall, Hixon, Stafford, Staffs Highfields Hall, Highfields Village Hall, Hiddley
	<i>Star Quality</i>	Opens 7 Aug	Theatre Royal, Windsor - due West End late October
	<i>The Vortex</i>	Sept 2001	Crucible Theatre, Sheffield



LEAN TWO Productions Ltd. Present: Jeremy Clyde, Jane How, Peter Land, Annabel Leventon & Jeremy Nicholas in: **Shadows of the Evening** and **Red Peppers** by Noël Coward directed by Sheridan Morley at the Jermyn Street Theatre until June 9th. Neither has been seen in the West End for more than 30 years, not least because, as Noël himself once wrote, "the one-act play, the double bill and the idea of having the same actors cast in two very different roles have all fallen out of favour; I hope perhaps I can do a little to bring them back into fashion." **Box Office: 020 7287 2875**

Published by The Noel Coward Society, PO Box 2700, Castle Cary, BA7 7YT
United Kingdom, email: ncsociety@aol.com Tel/Fax: +44(0)1963 351 421

