



## Fifteen Originals at Turner Hill

As the present U.K. 'heat wave' got underway (could this be summer?) thirty members attended the Society's Luncheon at the Alexander House Hotel at Turner's Hill, West Sussex. Fifteen original works by The Master were displayed and described by their present owners at a very successful event in a beautiful dining and reception room at this famous hotel that boasts Noel's painting 'Jamaica Bay' in one of its lounges. This painting that cost about £46,000 when bought from Christie's in 1988 is among the group of paintings that many feel were Noel's best. The range of oils and watercolours brought along included studies of coastal views, scenes of significance in Noel's life including an on-stage picture of Graham Payn in sailor suit (Matelot?) lit dramatically by two angled spotlights in front of Mantovani and His Orchestra, and a watercolour of the Tivoli Theatre during 'Cavalcade'.

Unfortunately Sheridan Morley was unable to be with us due to family illness. This was however an opportunity for those who own and enjoy their Coward paintings to talk about them. Slides of some of his less well-known paintings, discovered at Noel's London Office, were shown and discussed before the highlight of the afternoon - Moira Lister - who provided a sparkling recollection of her first audition for Noel, read some of The Master's finest verses. The Society was proud to invite her to become a Vice-President of the Society - which she graciously accepted. Our thanks go to her. This was a wonderful climax to a memorable summer luncheon. Shown below are: On the left, George Humphreys, Moira Lister, Joan Hirst, Michael Imison and Robert Gardiner who brought their paintings along and on the right, Michael Imison greeting us at the beginning of the luncheon.



## CAVALCADE PLAYS ON by Terence Trimmer

I recently discovered an exciting long play record of excerpts from "Cavalcade." It is in fact, a re-recording made in the USA in 1984 by AE I. Records of an earlier one of 28 December 1936. Although there is no mention of this on the sleeve, I understand it was originally an American radio production.

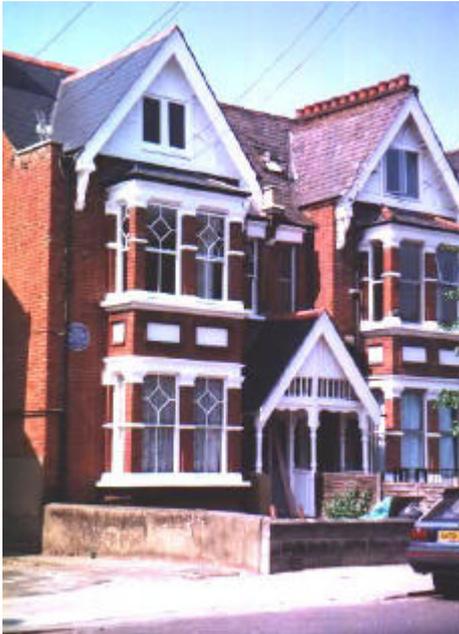
Herbert Marshall and Madeleine Carroll are heard playing the leading roles of Robert and Jane Marryot. Also on the recording are the voices of Una O'Connor, a character actress often seen in old Hollywood films, and David Niven. Una repeated her role of Ellen Bridges from the original production at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane in 1931. As a bonus, Noel Coward gives a short introduction in which he mentions that his inspiration for Cavalcade came from an old copy of the Illustrated London News which carried a picture of a troopship leaving for the Boer War.

The reverse side of the sleeve includes a cast list for the Drury Lane performance. One name instantly recognised is that of our Honorary President, Sir John Mills, who played the younger son of the Marryot family.



# FROM BLUE PLAQUES TO BLUE HARBOUR

The Homes of Noel Coward  
with contributions from Terence Trimmer,  
Alan Rolph and Alan Brodie



131 Waldegrave Road, Teddington, Middlesex, England the birthplace of Noël Coward.



17, Gerald Road, Belgravia, London, SW1  
Noel's home from 1930 to 1956



Above, Goldenhurst Farm, Coward's country home from 1926 until after WW2. Below, White Cliffs, where Coward lived while Goldenhurst was used by the army.



111, Ebury Street, Belgravia where Noel lived from 1917 to 1930. Now the *Noel Coward Hotel*.

Below Noel Coward's living room at 22, Place Vendome, Paris at the beginning of WW2. This painting is by Catherine Serebriakoff.



Finally Firefly, where *The Master* still enjoys the view.



## That Night at 8:30

by Joel Kaplan

On 20th January 1936, after a lengthy illness, King George V died peacefully in his sleep. His passing, Shaw tells us with uncharacteristic affection, left "the Monarchy in England at a higher standard of respectability and popularity than it had ever attained before." London's theatres paid their respects by shutting their doors on the day following the announcement as well as for the funeral itself. The King had been held in high esteem by the acting profession whose members now recalled his frequent theatre visits, his support of actors' charities and, above all, his appearance with the Royal Family five years earlier on the set of Coward's *Cavalcade*. The effect of his death would be felt in West End playhouses for months to come, as glittering first nights were intruded upon by the black gowns and sober accessories that signified Court mourning. The new King, Edward VIII, however, vowing to return the country to normality as quickly as possible, expressly asked the theatres to resume regular operations. Critics and audiences, accordingly, looked forward to the continuation of what had begun the previous autumn as a "boom" season. Indeed, one reviewer, predicting that 1936 would be "a year of triumph for London's Theatre-land," glanced back nostalgically to 1910, the year of the previous King's death, offering to match that "notable" season play for play. If 1936 were not a record year, he concluded, it would not be the fault of the plays or the players.

The point is well taken, particularly if we cast our eyes over what was on offer in early 1936 at some of London's principal playhouses. At the New Theatre on St Martin's Lane, John Gielgud's production of *Romeo and Juliet* was in the third month of what promised to be a record run. It featured a "dream cast" headed by Gielgud, Peggy Ashcroft, Laurence Olivier and Edith Evans. Across Leicester Square at the Lyric, Cedric Hardwicke provided robust competition in *Tovarich*, while Emyln Williams' psychological thriller *Night Must Fall* had settled into a long run at the Duchess. The latter featured not only Williams himself as the play's compelling psychopath but a "suitably terrified" Dame May Whitty, whose character's sweet tooth was rumoured to have resulted in the on-stage consumption of 58 pounds of chocolates since the piece opened the previous spring.

Playgoers with more literary leanings could witness the first London performances of T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* at the Mercury, or W.H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood's revue-style recycling of modern civilization, complete with masked Greek chorus, in *The Dog Beneath the Skin* at the Westminster. At the other end of the spectrum were the season's inevitable musicals and (acceptably) naughty revues. In 1936 these included *Please, Teacher!* at the Hippodrome, *Tulip Time* at the Alhambra and C.B. Cochran's *Follow the Sun* at the Adelphi, a piece that became notorious for its dance interpretation of Hogarth's painting "Strolling Actresses Dressing in a Barn." At the lag end of the Christmas season those intent upon entertainment of a more family bent could still catch the pantos: *Jack and the Beanstalk* at Drury

Lane, *Sleeping Beauty* at the Vaudeville, or *The Forty Thieves* at the Lyceum. By the end of January box-office business for all was remarkably brisk, with a healthy complement of advance sales.

The show, however, that bore the curious distinction of having been "least hit by the King's death" was Noel Coward's *Tonight at 8:30*. Having opened on 9 January at the tiny Phoenix Theatre on Charing Cross Road, Coward's offering of nine one-act plays performed in tandem over three nights averaged a consistently solid £3000 a week. The project, the most ambitious Coward ever attempted, had been conceived and written the previous year, arriving in London after a Manchester opening and a nine-week provincial tour. Coward's aim, set forth in a loftily worded programme essay, was to revive the fortunes of the one-act play. Grandly tracing the practice of "presenting three short plays in an evening" back to the tragedies of ancient Greece, Coward lamented the degeneration of the form into the provincial "curtain-raiser" produced only because the evening's main attraction was not of sufficient length. Coward's remedy was to exploit the form's unique ability to create and sustain moods, while underscoring the seriousness of his commitment by using it as a vehicle for himself and Gertrude Lawrence - in the mid 1930s the most bankable of London's celebrity couples.

What appealed particularly to Coward was the possibility of using the one-act play to extend his range as playwright, director and performer, as well as surprising audiences with a contrapuntal package of unexpected effects. In some pieces, such as *Hands Across the Sea*, he appeared in familiar form, offering variations on his well-made comedies of outsiders and insiders. Others such as *Fumed Oak* and *Still Life* showed him in a more sober mood. In the former he appeared as a henpecked husband who, after fifteen years of submitting to verbal abuse, strikes his wife and deserts his family. In the latter (revived at the Shaw Festival in 2000, and the basis for David Lean's film *Brief Encounter*) Coward's games of English restraint and reticence are played out in the public spaces of a Midlands railway station. By many accounts the most popular piece in the project was *Red Peppers*, an affectionate guying of the world of vaudeville. Appearing as a fractious third-rate song-and-dance team, George and Lily Pepper, Coward and Lawrence forsook their dressing gowns and cocktails to indulge in crude unwitty abuse, drink Guinness, and perform raucous parodies of two of vaudeville's hoariest set pieces, the "sailor-on-leave" and the "man-about-town".

The genius of *Tonight at 8:30* lay not in its component parts but in their overall effect, as each play -or "mood" -contributed to a mosaic that demonstrated both Coward's aesthetic virtuosity and his ability to repackage his public persona. As a result, the notorious bad boy of the 1920s and the slick, elegant stylist of the early '30s were joined by a multiplicity of characters and techniques that hitherto had seemed to lie outside Coward's sympathies. Critics stressed the modernity of the achievement by dwelling upon what they called the project's "filmic" or "cinematic" qualities, its ability to effect rapid cross-cuts between radically different episodes.



# MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

This last year has seen an increase in the range of activity undertaken by the Society. The monthly production of HOME CHAT and the regular updating of the Society's web site have almost reached the stage of being taken as read - if you will excuse the pun!

Our programme of events including theatre visits and lunches sets the scene for what we hope will be an interesting and varied programme of information and activity in the Autumn/Fall and Spring.

The correspondence received by the Society grows apace as people realise that we have amongst our members leading Coward historians, producers and actors. We announced last month that Coward's latest biographer, Philip Hoare is now the consultant to the Society.

The need for volunteers to assist in the running of the Society has grown and we would be very interested in hearing from anyone prepared to help in any capacity, however small. John Knowles has agreed to take on the role of Membership Secretary and will shortly be getting in touch with everyone.

You can renew or apply for membership by letter, email, or by using the Acrobat Reader form or new on-line application page both found on [www.noelcoward.net](http://www.noelcoward.net).

Applicants may pay by cash, cheque, credit card or save £5 by sending details for a Standing Order from your bank. There may be a letter addressed to you included with this edition of Home Chat checking your membership details with you or providing a receipt for this year's subscription.

From now on you will receive a written reminder when your membership is due for renewal. If however you have taken up our offer for membership by Standing Order then we will write with a receipt each year and you need do nothing more!

## **On Membership Matters write to:**

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

<b>US and Canada:</b>	<i>Present Laughter</i>	<i>4th to 11th August</i>	<i>Playhouse, Halifax</i>
	<i>Blithe Spirit</i>	<i>12 Apr to 19 May 2002</i>	<i>Directed by Tim Vasen. Center Stage's Pearlstone Theatre, North Calvert St., Baltimore. Website <a href="http://www.centerstage.org">www.centerstage.org</a></i>
<b>Australasia:</b>	<i>Design For Living</i>	<i>Nov/Dec</i>	<i>State Theatre Co of South Australia, Adelaide</i>
<b>United Kingdom &amp; Ireland:</b>	<i>Blithe Spirit</i>	<i>5th July to 22nd Sept</i>	<i>The Gate Theatre, Dublin</i>
		<i>9th to 18th August</i>	<i>The New Theatre Royal, Portsmouth</i>
		<i>15th to 25th August</i>	<i>Parish Church Hall, Murrayfield, Edinburgh</i>
		<i>Aug 2001</i>	<i>Hever Lakeside Theatre Keswick</i>
		<i>12th &amp; 13th October</i>	<i>Village Hall, Whittington, Staffs</i>
		<i>22nd to 24th November</i>	<i>NE Surrey College, Ewell, Surrey</i>
		<i>8th to 9th December</i>	<i>Village Hall, Laleham</i>
	<i>Hay Fever</i>	<i>11 Sept to 15 Sept</i>	<i>Opera House Jersey (Ian Dickens productions)</i>
		<i>16th to 20th October</i>	<i>Kenton Theatre, Henley-on-Thames</i>
		<i>8th to 10th November</i>	<i>Alsop Drama Group, Neptune Theatre, Liverpool</i>
	<i>Star Quality</i>	<i>Opens 7 Aug</i>	<i>Theatre Royal, Windsor - due West End late October starring Penelope Keith.</i>
	<i>The Vortex</i>	<i>Sept 2001</i>	<i>Crucible Theatre, Sheffield</i>
	<i>Private Lives</i>	<i>8th to 13th April 2002</i>	<i>Playgoers Theatre, Louth, Lincolnshire</i>
	<i>Present Laughter</i>	<i>4th to 11th August</i>	<i>Halifax Thespians, Playhouse, Halifax</i>
		<i>15th to 17th Feb. 2002</i>	<i>The Cuddington players, Nork Comm. Centre, Banstead, Surrey</i>
	<i>Noel and Gertie</i>	<i>11th Sep to 6th Oct</i>	<i>The Grace Theatre at Latchmere Pub, London</i>
			<i>Website <a href="http://www.richardmulholland.org/noel.htm">www.richardmulholland.org/noel.htm</a></i>
		<i>15th to 22nd September</i>	<i>Bolton Little Theatre, Bolton.</i>
	<i>Nude With Violin</i>	<i>17th to 20th October</i>	<i>Palace Theatre, Paignton, Devon</i>
	<i>Still Life</i>	<i>5th to 8th December</i>	<i>Garden Suburb Theatre - the Gatehouse, Highgate, London. Box Office: 020 7723 6609</i>
			<i>Website <a href="http://www.gardensuburbtheatre.org.uk">www.gardensuburbtheatre.org.uk</a></i>

*Please let us know if you have a Coward production or event that you wish to see advertised here.*

