

Ned generously donated estate buildings to the local community including 'The Lathom Club.' He moved to London and opened an antique shop in a street off Grosvenor Square, almost opposite Claridges. He lived in various flats at different times in Portland Place, Park Lane and Mount Street. In 1927 he surprisingly married the aging actress Maria Xenia Morison which one source claims to

be the result of a rash promise made while wining and dining in a London hotel. Ned's fall to comparative poverty, and the tuberculosis that started in his twenties, finally killed him. He died in 1930, without an heir, at the age of 35 and was cremated at Golders Green. Noël Coward, Ivor Novello, Beverley Nichols and Collie Knox appear to be amongst the few who may have

helped Ned at the end of his life when most of the sponging acolytes had vanished. His generous actions helped many but his lifestyle, foolish spending and his role in the demise of one of the most historically important and noble estates of Lancashire, is still a matter of local controversy over 70 years later.

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### Do You Know who they are?

(Please let John Knowles know if you do!)

Picture of 'The Venturers' taken at The Lathom Club in Lancashire. Some are known - others not. Can you identify anyone?

**Back row:** unknown - unknown - Noël Coward - Lady Rosemary Bootle-Wilbraham - Mrs. Patrick Campbell  
**3rd Earl of Lathom (Ned Lathom) - unknown - Ivor Novello - Lady Barbara Seymour - unknown - unknown.**  
**Standing in middle row:** Olga Lynn **Front row:** unknown - Matthias Cave (local solicitor) - unknown.

### Results of the Christies Auction of Coward items largely from Goldenhurst (Lot No: Item and winning bid)

30 Porcelain Figures, Gifts from Vivien Leigh & Binkie Beaumont	£881		
31 Cufflinks given to NC by Charles Vido at Frank Sinatra party at time of Las Vegas Cabaret	£1,175		
32 Cufflinks given to NC by Radclyffe Hall	£329		
33 Jade coloured quartz figure of a Guanyin, given to NC by Sir Charles Cochran	£446		
34 Brass clown given to NC on his 70th by Irene Worth & copper dish presented on Middle East tour	£176		
35 Two costume designs by Gladys Calthrop	£199		
36 A pair of Persian gouaches presented to NC on his 70th by the Aga Khan	not published		
37 Three prints, one a 70th gift from Elizabeth Taylor	not published		
38 A view across St Margarets Bay by Derek Hill from White Cliffs	£199		
39 Oil painting "Very Flat Norfolk" by Esmond Knight, a gift to NC on his 70th	£4,112		
40 A view over St Margaret's Bay & The Harves by Edward Molyneux	£352		
41 Coastal Landscape, picture by Edward Molyneux	£411		
42 Picture: Cliff face & sea near St Margaret's Bay, by Clemence Dane	£305		
43 Picture: Hydrangeas in a terracotta vase, by Clemence Dane	£493		
44 Picture: Spring Flowers in a vase, by Clemence Dane	£411		
45 Picture: The Pier, by Hedley Briggs, previously hung in Gerald Road	£352		
46 Picture: Beached Fishing Boats, attributed to Johan Barthold Jongkind	£411		
47 Picture: Alpine Landscape, by Buaufle, previously hung in Gerald Road	not published		
48 Picture: The Seine Paris, by Billette. Housekeeper thought it Sloane Sq. & referred to as such by NC	£528		
49 Picture: Parisian River Landscape, by Chochoy, previously hung in Gerald Road	£528		
50 Picture: Head of a young girl, by a follower of Berthe Morisot, previously hung in Gerald Road	£705		
51 Picture: Skier, by Noël Coward	£2,115		
52 Picture: Figures on a coastal promenade, by Noël Coward	£2,115		
53 Part dinner service from NC's wartime Paris apartment	£329		
54 Three pieces of porcelain from NC's wartime Paris apartment	not published		
55 Silver: candlesticks, cigarette case, salver, toast racks & stainless steel hot water jug from Goldenhurst/Gerald Road	£411		
56 Electric heater from Gerald Road	£411	67 Dutch style chandelier	£293
57 Four glass match holders from Gerald Road	£1,527	68 Glass model of a ship from Goldenhurst	not published
58 A blackamoor figure	£2,937	69 Cut glass table lamp from Goldenhurst	not published
59 Occasional table & tripod table - Gerald Road/Goldenhurst	£129	70 Tortoiseshell and ivory casket	not published
60 Victorian High Back Chair from Gerald Road	£199	71 Walnut whatnot from Goldehurst	£881
61 Queen Anne style armchair	£822	72 Giltwood wall trophy from Goldenhurst	£2,232
62 Oak bed from Gerald Road	£705	73 Venetian wall mirror from Goldenhurst	£822
63 A gilt brass firescreen from Goldenhurst	£188	74 Regency wall mirror from Goldenhurst	£2,820
64 Ndlwk coat of arms & cushion - Goldenhurst	£352	75 Timepiece from Goldenhurst	£2,350
65 Pair/lead jardinières from Goldenhurst	£329	76 Bookcase from Goldenhurst	£1,762
66 Pair/gilt twin branch wall appliques - Goldenhurst	£1,116	77 Writing table from Goldenhurst	£2,115
		78 Bureau from Goldenhurst	£2,937
		79 Broadwood baby grand piano - Goldenhurst	£11,750



# HOME CHAT

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE NOEL COWARD SOCIETY

February  
2001

## OUR FIRST ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Last month when the pre-Christmas rush was at its height, members were celebrating the anniversary of the Master's birth. The Society held its first Annual General Meeting in the Theatre Museum at Covent Garden, London. In the small theatre workshop, amongst the warm maroon coloured drapes and with the nostalgic smell of wicker stage trunks, the members who gathered took the opportunity to look back at the first year of operation and decide the best ways forward into the new millennium. The atmosphere was one of support for what had already been achieved - challenges for the future are to try and provide more for our international members and those in the UK who live away from London by establishing international and regional representatives to develop events around the UK and the World. The growth of the Society will depend a great deal on increasing our membership and asking existing members to help foster and develop the Society. The task of getting the Society off the ground, instigating a variety of publications, arranging visits, tickets, programmes, meetings, postings and administering the Society and membership has been done largely by Gareth Pike with support from Michael Imison and his committee. In the future more help will be needed if we are to flourish. This year we plan to have a Membership officer who will manage applications for membership and be responsible for maintaining links with members during the year. We are asking all current members to renew their membership and find someone else who might wish to join the Society.

### HOME CHAT CHANGES

Gareth has handed over the monthly challenge of providing this newsletter to members to John Knowles, who has agreed to take on the management, production and posting of HOME CHAT. If you have any item of news or an article, puzzle, picture ... whatever for HOME CHAT then send it by email to johnknowles@ukgateway.net or by post to: John Knowles, 29, Waldemar Avenue, Hellesdon, Norwich, NR6 6TB, United Kingdom.

**Our thanks go to Gareth for all he continues to do for the Noël Coward Society and for his commitment in providing members with all of our publications in our first year of operation.**

### THE MASTER'S ANNIVERSARY *(with thanks to Richard Ellis for his thoughts)*

In London members enjoyed an unrivalled day of Coward. Following the AGM at the Theatre Museum, members went to the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane just as theatregoers were leaving the matinee of *The Witches of Eastwick*. Sat patiently in the foyer was the unruffled statue of Noël contemplating a cigarette and waiting for the fuss to die down. As the crowds thinned a Rolls drew up and Sir John Mills and his wife Mary, accompanied by Dorothy Hawkins (Jack Hawkin's wife) made their way up the stairs where a younger John Mills had first trod when in Cavalcade as Joe Marryot some 69 years ago. The sheer style of Sir John, dressed in an immaculate pinstriped suit, pastel tie and red socks said it all - as a member said - "where do you see such style today amongst the acting fraternity!" Joined by Sheridan Morley, Joel Kaplan, Michael Imison and Gareth Pike the party on the dais listened as Sir John spoke of his early days in the touring theatre company *The Quaints* when he first met Noël Coward and how Noël joined the company for a short spell. The anecdotes and memories captivated us - spoken in the clear quiet voice of a consummate professional - with an occasional self-deprecating comment or two. Sheridan Morley, who welcomed Sir John's party, also introduced Joel Kaplan, the co-editor of the new Methuen publication *Look Back In Pleasure*, a book that contains the papers presented at the Birmingham



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### LATE NEWS

Joan Hirst (Coward's last secretary and a tireless mainstay for all Coward enquiries since then) has retired. All of the Coward files have been transferred to the Coward archive at Birmingham University where they are currently being catalogued. They include her archive of photos of Noel and all the press-cuttings. Anyone looking for pictures or cuttings should apply to Birmingham in future.

Also transferred were a collection of Coward recordings which will be made available for listening in due course.

### STOP PRESS HIGH SPIRITS

Members of the Coward Society may obtain a special concession of 2 tickets for the price of 1 for performances of High Spirits on 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> January and 1<sup>st</sup> February. Simply identify yourselves at the Bridewell box-office. (See page 4 for theatre and production details.)

Contact Gareth for one of two copies of the programme for Fallen Angels All signed by the whole cast. £10 each including postage.

Conference on Coward held in November 1999. It provides a range of insights into the Master and his work and also contains interviews with Judy Campbell, Maria Aitkin, Philip Prowse and Juliet Stephenson. (Available from the Society for only £11.95 plus postage - £5 off the book price!) After a speedy respite at an Italian restaurant in Jermyn Street, members made their way to the Jermyn Street Theatre to see Moira Lister (one of only three of Coward's leading ladies still with us!) in her one-woman show *My memories of Noël Coward*. It was a marvellous



recollection in words and music. Moira was witty, charming and most of all informative about the Master, his contemporaries and her own working relationship with Coward. The songs included *Piccolo Marina* and *Marvellous Party*. The evening finished with a cake dedicated *In Memory of Darling Noël* and the wine flowed as the cake was cut and the audience, including many guests (Maureen Lipman was spotted) and Moira, came together for a fitting end to a perfect day!



## Ned Lathom

*John Knowles has been researching Ned, Noël Coward's first patron. The following is a thumbnail sketch of his all too short life!*

Edward William Bootle-Wilbraham, the third and last Earl of Lathom and Baron of Skelmersdale was known as Ned Lathom by the theatrical world. His riotous parties at Blythe Hall in Lathom were the stuff of legend and a source of local gossip. Theatrical luminaries of the day, Ivor Novello, Noël Coward, Gertrude Lawrence and a myriad of others were his frequent guests. Lathom locals saw Ned and guests singing and dancing down country lanes fizzing with champagne and trailing perfume. Footmen were sent on a whim and at great expense to London to buy a packet of chocolate almonds or a crystal-cut decanter of perfume for guests. Ned poured his family fortune into countless, often unsuccessful, theatrical ventures, and gave and lent money to aspiring young stars. He was an early and notable patron of the young Noël Coward at a time when Coward was desperately climbing social and career ladders. He died in comparative poverty in London in 1930 at the age of 35 from tuberculosis.

On the death of his father and at the tender age of 14 Ned was left to manage the large Lathom Estate and its vast fortune. At this moment of greatest need, his mother was whisked away by her own mother, the Countess Radnor, to Venice where she remained for an extended stay leaving the young earl to the care of estate trustees and Eton College. His ancestral home, Lathom Hall (near Ormskirk in Lancashire) was requisitioned as a Remount Depot for the cavalry at the start of the First World War and was largely ruined by the less than caring hooves and feet of tens of thousands of horses and soldiers.

By 1914 Ned had become an officer in the army and spent his 21st birthday in the trenches in France. Towards the end of hostilities he became an aide-de-camp to Lord Willoughby, Governor of India, and spent a year in service there. When he returned home he is reported as being a changed man with a strong desire to constantly be with others. He decided to give up his country home at Lathom Hall, or what remained of it, and live at the dower house of Blythe Hall which he

refurbished and enlarged in a spectacular and dazzling manner. The pillars of its main staircase balustrade were fashioned in cut glass encased in black ebony. When all the chandeliers and hundreds of electric candles were lit it was "like a fairyland." Other extravagancies were a bowling alley (taken from Lathom Hall) and a Roman-style swimming pool surrounded with electric lights, that kept shadows from falling on the water, and 12 imposing Corinthian columns rising from floor to ceiling. A secret staircase led from a hidden door on the ground floor to his bedroom and became the subject of local speculation. A new billiard room and later a library were added. £36,000 was spent on the refurbishment including £10,000 for the pool.

In 1922 he finally moved into Blythe as his country home. From then on, for two years, Ned proceeded to entertain the glitterati of the theatre world he loved, as if there were 'no tomorrow!' They came by train from London to Lime Street Station in Liverpool, were met by chauffeurs in his Rolls Royce, Studebaker and Chrysler cars and taken to Blythe Hall. Ivor Novello, Noël Coward, Gertrude Lawrence, designer Oliver Messel, Gladys Cooper, Marie Tempest and Mrs. Patrick Campbell were amongst numerous guests. Of the many local stories of the high life at Blythe Hall under the Lathoms, one recalled Ned Lathom, Noël Coward and Ivor Novello, clearly the better for drink, dancing and singing down the lane and on one occasion bounding along on pogo sticks leaving a 'trail of sweet-smelling perfume' behind them. Others recall watching Ned's extravagant and sometimes risqué plays. His play *Wet Paint* was banned from the London stage by the Lord Chamberlain but many of his plays were staged at the Strand and Prince of Wales theatres albeit mostly at 'one-off' Sunday performances. At Lathom they were performed by his guests (in the guise of *The Venturers*) at 'The Lathom Club.' This was a wooden 'theatre' in the grounds of Lathom House, now, still with its original stage, used as a scout hut.

Guests at his Cumberland Place house and his weekend parties at Blythe Hall remember servants pouring perfume into heated spoons to create a heady atmosphere as they arrived. According to Bryan Connon in *'Beverley Nicholls - A Life'* one of his favoured perfumes

was, 'Suivez Moi, Jeune Homme' which he says summed up Ned's attitude to life! Each guest would receive a costly gift, often a cut-glass decanter of perfume costing £50. Expensive wine flowed and only the richest foods were served. The rooms were covered in flowers and "orchids massed in front of long mirrors." Young acolytes were rewarded with money or "lavish presents from Cartier."

For Noël Coward he was a significant friend and supporter. Coward is honest about his dependency on Ned in his autobiography *'Present Indicative'*. His value in solving Coward's financial problems was vital. Coward freely admits that he sold two songs to Ned Lathom who didn't really want them and bought them out of charity to help buy his fare to America in 1921 with Jeffrey Holmsdale (Lord Amherst) on the Aquitania. This trip became critical in developing Coward's crisp, pacy, dramatic style. On his return after living 'close to the ground' in New York he produced his first major successes, the social shocker, 'The Vortex' and the hilarious comedy, 'Hay Fever.'

Later when Coward needed financial help for himself and his family he went to see Ned who claimed that he had so many problems in getting money returned that he would rather give Noël two hundred pounds. In November 1922 Ned Lathom was recovering in Davos from further bouts of tuberculosis. Noël records that he went and stayed for Christmas where other rising stars appeared to share Ned's hospitality. André Charlot with whom Ned shared the cost of leasing the Prince of Wales Theatre, was summoned to hear Coward's songs and revue sketches - as a result *'London Calling'* was born.

Theatre's gain was Lancashire's loss. The legacy of Ned's excesses was insurmountable debt and eventual penury. His patronage of too many unsuccessful theatrical productions, and an over-generous and often wild lifestyle, led to his downfall. His financial indulgences finally caught up with him in January 1924 when most of the Lathom estate of some 60 farms and smallholdings, several public houses, 140 houses and cottages, 4,000 acres of park and farm land and swathes of woodland were sold by public auction in Ormskirk.

*(Continued on page 4)*

## HIGH SPIRITS

Presented by Ballantrae Ltd at the Bridewell Theatre Bride Lane EC4Y 8EQ 29<sup>th</sup> December 2000 to 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2001

	Cast
<i>Charles Condomine</i>	James Staddon
<i>Edith</i>	Rachel Clarke
<i>Ruth Condomine</i>	Sarah Payne
<i>Dr. Bradman</i>	Geoffrey Abbott
<i>Mrs. Bradman</i>	Lilo Milward
<i>Madame Arcati</i>	Gay Hamilton
<i>Elvira</i>	Kate Graham
<i>Rupert</i>	Nigel Pilkington
<i>Ensemble</i>	
John McManus	Maria Rallings
James Spilling	Karen Evans
<i>Director</i>	Raymond Wright
<i>Choreographer</i>	Alison Pollard
<i>Musical Director</i>	Nathan Martin
<i>Designer</i>	Claire Lyth

The little Bridewell theatre is noted for its revivals of forgotten musicals. HIGH SPIRITS adapted by Hugh Martin and Timothy Gray from Noel Coward's play BLITHE SPIRIT has not been professionally produced in London since 1964 when it premiered at the Savoy Theatre with Cicely Courtneidge and Denis Quilley and was badly

received by the press. As musicals go it is not lavish. The book, adapted for this production, sticks closely to the text of the play, preserving most of the famous witticisms. The only opportunities for ensemble numbers occur at Madame Arcati's coffee shop, where her acolytes gather, a new setting introduced by Martin and Gray. At the Bridewell this necessitated use of the space in front of the Condomine's drawing room set, as did Madame Arcati's opening number on her bicycle. Effective though this was, theatres with less floor space than the Bridewell would find it difficult to imitate. The main problem is one Coward himself identified. He noted in his diary "*High Spirits* ... sets out to be high-powered satire from first to last and the least suspicion of genuine sentiment would destroy it". However, for Gray and Martin, a musical requires romantic songs, so Ruth and Elvira have to express genuine love for Charles and he has to appear to love them in return. This sugar-coating blurs Coward's portraits of the domineering Ruth and spoilt, self-indulgent Elvira and when, with Madame Arcati's assistance, Charles manages to escape from them both, his triumph is inevitably muted. Nevertheless the evening passes enjoyably enough.

*Michael Imison*

## Current Productions - Professional and Amateur

<b>US and Canada:</b>	Blithe Spirit	March 2nd - 4th & 8th - 10th	Garner Historic Auditorium, Garner, NC
		19 to 25th April	Georgetown Little Theatre, Acton, Ontario
		1st to 9th June	East End Theatre, Orleans, Ontario
		3rd to 14th July	Theatre Collingwood, Collingwood, Ontario
	Hay Fever	24th January to 4th March	Court Theatre, Chicago Box Office
		28th February to 2nd March	Lower Canada College, Montreal,
	Design for Living	Feb.(212.719.1300 for dates)	Roundabout Theatre Co. Broadway, NY
	Present Laughter	4th to 11th August	Playhouse, Halifax
<b>Australasia:</b>	Design for Living	10th to 14th April	Melbourne, Australia
<b>United Kingdom:</b>	Fallen Angels	Current extended run	Apollo Theatre, Shaftsbury Avenue, London
	High Spirits	6th January to 3rd February	Bridewell Theatre, off Fleet Street, London
	Easy Virtue	22nd February to March 3rd	Maddermarket Theatre, Norwich
	Blithe Spirit	6th to 10th March	Devonshire Park, Eastbourne
		16th to 19th May	St. John's Church Hall, Leeds
	Private Lives	1 Mar to 1 May	Volcano Theatre Company tour of Wales
	Waiting in the Wings	4th to 7th April	Memorial Hall, Little Baddow, Essex
		19th 20th February	Garrick theatre, Altrincham, Cheshire
		27th February to 3rd March	Secombe Theatre, Sutton, Surrey
		29th to 31st March	Somerset Hall, Portishead, Bristol
	16th to 19th May	Theatre, Harrogate	

The opening of *Semi Monde* is postponed to 21st March. It stars among others Georgina Hale and Nicola McAuliffe