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# ALL-ENGLAND THEATRE FESTIVAL

Reaching out to drama groups throughout England



*The only countrywide,  
competitive festival  
of one-act plays.*

Chairman: Ian Clarke  
'Briardene', Silver Hill, Pa-  
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HG3 5PQ

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#### England

I'm sure it's a sign of old age, but the gap between one festival season and the next seems to get shorter and shorter. Thus, here I am, at the turn of the year, ruing my close season indolence and desperately trying to make up for it by getting this Newsletter out before our first festivals of 2018 in Bristol and on the Isle of Man get underway.

2017 saw three loyal AETF servants bid farewell to their roles as trustees on the National Committee - Denis Yardley of Northern Area and Dennis Dunford and Martin Clifton of Western Area. We thank them all for their selfless contribution to the management of our festival over the years and warmly welcome their replacements, respectively Sue Pierce (last year's Geoffrey Whitworth winner), Ron Roberts (the new Chairman of Western Area) and Lorraine Biddlecombe.

With similar sadness we also bid farewell to the Cumbria festival, which 'closed its doors' at the end of the 2017 season after a protracted struggle with declining participation and attendances. I would like to put on record my thanks to John Larkham who worked tirelessly as Chairman of the festival despite increasing ill-health. I know that a small group of enthusiasts from Cumbria Amateur Theatre Society are working behind the scenes to revivify the event and we wish them luck in their endeavours.

Thanks to the tireless work of Rebekah Fortune, we made great strides in 2017 in harnessing social media platforms to give the AETF a bigger profile. Expect another big push in 2018 on this front. Inside this Newsletter Rebekah tells you how you can do your bit to evangelise on behalf of the festival. Also in this issue you can catch up, via Ian Thomas, on the progress of our initiative to work more closely with NDFA, our major drama festival partner.

Congratulations to our friends in Totton who celebrate 40 years of their festival in

2018. Their Chairman, Mike Farleigh, contributes an anniversary article in this issue.

The responsibility for organising this year's AETF Grand Final, our flagship event, lies in the capable hands of our friends and colleagues in Central Area. They are relishing the task ahead and I confidently predict they will lay on a memorable show at the Mitchell Memorial Arts Centre in Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent. The climax of the festival season, the British Final, will take place in Stirling, Scotland's ancient capital and 'Gateway to the Highlands'. Neither of these mouth watering events should be missed. AETF champions, TACT, won last year's British with their memorable *Lear's Daughters* (pictured below). Perhaps this year's AETF champions will repeat that success.



I could not possibly close without extending our sincere gratitude to Crusoe Farm Company Limited for the generous donation it made to the AETF early in 2017. In our 'Treasurer's Ramblings' below, you will find out a little bit more about how we have divided up the money and how we intend to use it.

I wish you all a happy new year and a memorable festival season.

**Ian Clarke - National Chairman**

# All-England Theatre Festival

'Briardene', Silver Hill, Pateley Bridge, Harrogate, HG3 5PQ



## Northern Area

News of the sad demise of the Cumbria festival (see National Chairman's report above) is tempered by the fact that Northern Area will see the birth this year of a brand new affiliated festival, the Durham and Sunderland, which will open its doors at Washington Arts Centre from 7-10 March. We wish Alan Godfrey, the festival's mover and shaker, every success in this brave new venture. It was agreed at our Area AGM that the segment of the Crusoe Farm donation which Northern Area has been allocated will be used to help defray start-up costs for the new festival and (subject to assurances that the money will be used wisely) help the small team who are intent on revivifying the Cumbria event.

As mentioned above, Dennis Yardley has stepped down as one of Northern Area's three trustees on the National Committee. Thankfully, he will continue his fine work as Area Treasurer until the end of the 2019 festival season after which he will have far more time to devote to his beloved Accrington Stanley. We will be looking to identify a replacement for Dennis as Treasurer well before the end of his tenure. Is there anybody out there? Please let me know if you are interested.

There are some minor calendar changes to our festival this year with the Richmond Festival, normally one of the earliest to get off the mark in February, experimenting with a new April slot. We hope that this will have the desired effect of boosting entrant numbers and audiences. Another change will be the migration from the Hull and East Riding Festival to my own Nidderdale and District event of Dewsbury Arts Group, the last Northern winners of the John Maude Trophy. We hope they will adjust happily from the large stage at Bridlington Spa to the more cramped conditions of the Frazer Theatre in Knaresborough.

For this year's Area semi final we migrate back across the Pennines to the unique surroundings of Port Sunlight where the splendid Gladstone Theatre (*pictured below*) will accom-



modate the event over the weekend of 5-6 May. Next year will see Northern Area host the British Final Festival of One-Act Plays at the same venue on 12-13 July.

I wish all festival goers and festival participants north of the Dee and Humber a happy and healthy new year and a memorable season of one-act drama.

Ian Clarke - Secretary, Northern Area



## Central Area

As I look out of the window for inspiration, I see eight inches of snow on top of my car - more than I can remember in Birmingham for many a year. Then I'm kick-started by the news that our local festival is full. Hopefully the three unlucky groups on the waiting list will get their applications in nice and early to secure a place at the 2019 event.

As an Area Committee we were very happy with last year's festival season. It was a good year and bodes well for the future.

Our 14<sup>th</sup> AGM took place on 16 September in Solihull and, although not particularly well attended, resulted in a productive discussion about our future direction.

Could I underline the fact that although most members of the various AETF committees belong to a preliminary round, this is not a statutory requirement. We are an inclusive organisation open to all-comers. Talk to us so that we can show you how much fun you can have by being involved.

All of the festivals in our Area seem to be in a good state of health at the moment. We are working to build on our success in maintaining eight independent Preliminary Round Festivals, the winners and runners-up of which progress to the AETF festival proper. Our three quarter finals and the semi-final all seem set for a good season. Audience support is our main goal as we know that the standard of plays coming into the later rounds will be great.

Our semi final will take place at the Swan Theatre, Worcester on 12 May. Your support, as always, will be what makes it a success and that is no less true of the Grand Final which Central Area proudly hosts at the Mitchell Arts Centre (*pictured below*) in Stoke-on-Trent on 2 June. We are well prepared for the latter, and that includes the financial arrangements. The venue is splendid and the surrounding area has a rich artist heritage.



# All-England Theatre Festival

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With three quarter-finals, a semi final and the Grand Final all taking place within Central Area in 2018, why not spoil yourselves and block-book the lot – you won't regret it and by so doing will further enhance the credentials of the Area – we have the largest number of AETF members in all categories, including four Patrons, and there is a palpable sense of ownership and belonging across the festival scene here. Thank you all for your continuing support. Long may it continue!

Looking further ahead, Central Area will be hosting the British Final of One-Act Plays in 2023. We are already heavily involved in securing funding for this event and we thank those who have already made a commitment in this regard. We have also developed some great ideas about how we want the event to 'look'.

As usual, Jean and I plan to visit all festival events in the Area and will hopefully see as many of you as possible. Perhaps some of you will be tempted to visit first round festivals different from your own. If you do so, it will provide fresh perspective and give added insight into what adjudicators are looking for.

A happy new year to you all.

Roger Cunningham - Chairman, Central Area



## Western Area

**VALE DENNIS.** At our AGM in October, Dennis Dunford (*pictured below*) stood down from our Committee, having faithfully served the Area for years, five of them as Chairman. For this Newsletter, Dennis was invited to briefly review his theatre involvement in the Area. He responded as follows:



*'On leaving the RAF in 1955 I joined Dorchester Community Players and, two years later, Weymouth Drama Club. As an actor, I have played many parts from Shakespeare and the classics to murderers and the murdered, light comedies, farce, straight plays and a Dame in pantomime. My involvement with the AETF started in 1962 when I directed Act One of 'The Return' by Bridget Boland for Weymouth*

*Drama Club. I have directed over thirty plays for the Festival and we reached the English Final on three occasions. Over the years I have held every committee post except Treasurer - my dislike of anything mathematical continues to this day! I can't remember when I was persuaded to go on to the committee of the Dorset Drama League but I do recall that it was against my better judgement – I suspected them of being egotists rather than team players! Next came AETF's Southern Division. I have been Secretary for more years than I care to remember and am still in post. In due course, Western Area beckoned. I joined the Committee in 2003 and became Chairman in 2012. In that capacity I presided over the British Final in 2012 and the English Final in 2017 and enjoyed both very much'.*

On behalf of the AETF in general and Western Area in particular, we thank you, Dennis, for your sterling service. We look forward to seeing you and Cathrin at many festivals in the future.

**'Curtain Up': RR.** In taking on the Chair of Western Area I am first, very conscious of the honour conferred on me by my colleagues and second, of the work ahead of us as a committee. It is to be a pattern of evolution - in other words, it will take time to resolve the issues that I hope to see us address. My personal objective is to get to know each of the Divisions in more detail and to identify current problems. I also intend that we should examine the AETF's constitution and operational rules in order to re-define and re-state our structures and accountability. In the longer term, I hope we shall (in the following order) support and regenerate competitive theatre in Dorset, Cornwall and Gloucestershire and revive it in Wiltshire. Finally, I would like us to evaluate the relative strengths of competitive theatre throughout the Area in case we detect a need to re-assess its Divisional structure. In all this, I shall welcome such support as is available within the Divisions. Given the proven quality of my colleagues, I am confident that we will resolve matters sensibly. There's work to be done. Let's go to it!

Ron Roberts – Chairman, Western Area



## Eastern Area

As a new year dawns, it's time to reflect on the past and future. 2017 was a stable year for the Eastern Area festivals, illuminated by the return of the Cambridge Drama Festival after an interval of three years. The festival was won by 'Big Squirrel' (theatre company) with a performance of *Uke "Belong To Me"* (*pictured below*) written by Kattreya Scheurer-Smith, who also appeared in this innovative, two-handed comedy.



Although 'Big Squirrel' elected to go forward in the AETF competition, in the event they were unable to do so due to a work commitment. Their place at the Eastern Area Final was taken by BAWDS drama group performing *Anyone Can Dance* by Sean Baker (*pictured below*).

# All-England Theatre Festival

'Briardene', Silver Hill, Pateley Bridge, Harrogate, HG3 5PQ



Both groups enjoyed later success. 'Big Squirrel' won the NDFA British All-Winners one-act title at Barnsley in July, while BAWDS won the Eastern Area Final before participating in a highly competitive Grand Final in Bridgwater where they lost to the eventual British Winners, TACT.

We wish Cambridge much success in their 50<sup>th</sup> year in 2018. Meanwhile, planning for this and the other 2018 Eastern Area festivals at Elmbridge, Southern Counties, Maidenhead and Waltham Forest continues apace, thanks to the unstinting efforts of a small number of unsung volunteers. We should never lose sight of the efforts made by a few on behalf of the many. Without these efforts there would be no festivals at any tier of competition. I urge all of you who can to lighten the load by offering your time and skills to your local festival or Area – contact details are elsewhere in this newsletter.

Elmbridge, my own festival, has been struggling for several years. This is partly due to the loss of many long-established local groups who are unable to support loss-making festival productions. It is also, I believe, due to the domination of the festival for the past 15 years by Runnymede Drama Group and Woking College Theatre Company. This domination has been a double-edged sword – ensuring a high quality festival, but discouraging other groups with aspirations in the AETF competition. 2018 looks likely to offer fresh hope to the other groups as it is likely that neither Runnymede nor Woking will be entering, which is itself a concern. Runnymede initially doubted whether their stage team could support an eighth production in the calendar year. In the event (as I write this) they have been unable to cast their chosen play. Woking's problem is the proximity of the festival to A-Level mock exams. The loss of both groups is a significant one and it remains to be seen how the festival copes without them.

A further looming challenge to Elmbridge is a recent diktat by the local council that any technicians rigging lights in the Cecil Hepworth Playhouse (our home for the past 56 years) must be 'ladder-trained' and wear a safety harness, apparently following an accident in 2017 - the first in living memory. At first sight these precautions appear reasonable. Unfortunately the Council has maintained a deafening silence in the face of my question as to who will provide, test and certify the safety harness and fixing points (there are presently none).

I am sure these issues aren't exclusive to Elmbridge, but they do illustrate some of the challenges involved in running a

festival – which reminds me to remind you to reflect on what you can offer in 2018.

It remains for me to wish you **all** (producers, directors, actors, set builders, lighting and sound technicians, stage managers, supporters et al) a successful and above all enjoyable 2018.

Ian Thomas - Chairman, Eastern Area

## FROM OUR PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICER



Our Social Media campaign continues to thrive with over 20,000 views and a huge increase in likes and follows to the @AETF.ORG page. The more posts you share and the more you tag @AETF.ORG in your own group's posts the more new groups we will attract. We have had quite a few enquiries from new groups wishing to join the AETF

community which bodes well for the continued well-being of our festivals. My thanks to all those who regularly share our posts and tag @AETF.ORG into theirs. This really does help to spread the word. In the coming months I will be posting about each festival as it comes up so any programme news etc would be much appreciated. I would also love to hear from groups about their preparations (casting, play choice decisions et al). Photos always add value to these communications. We want our Facebook page to be a place to share stories, information and advice and to function as a tool to raise awareness about the AETF festival. Do please send all your information to me at [aetfpro@gmail.com](mailto:aetfpro@gmail.com) or via Facebook.

Rebekah Fortune - AETF PRO



## Treasurer's Ramblings



As you have read earlier, the AETF received a substantial donation in 2017 which is to be used to develop an ongoing legacy. The donation has been divided equally between the four Areas and the National Committee. Areas have autonomy as to how they use their share. To date one

intends to use the money to develop a new AETF preliminary round and help revive one that has recently been disbanded. Another is using its share to support two existing preliminary rounds. The National Committee has yet to decide how it intends to use its own portion. It is willing consider any suggestions that you, our loyal readers, may wish to make. Please send your thoughts to me at [cunnington@talk21.com](mailto:cunnington@talk21.com). One suggestion already made is to offer an annual training bursary



to a deserving young person. This, I believe, would require the AETF to develop an ongoing stream of income. Your thoughts are most welcome.

I reported in the last Newsletter that the UK Community Drama Festivals Federation (UKCDDF) was looking for a dynamic new vice chair. I am pleased to report that Rebekah Fortune is to take on the role and we all wish her well. Becky will retain her role as AETF Public Relations Officer.

The National Committee decided a couple of years ago that donations received with membership renewals would be spent on specific projects furthering the aims of the AETF. To that end we have, this year, spent some of the money by advertising on Facebook to enhance our presence on this important social media platform. As you've read earlier this has proved most successful. Please keep Becky informed of all updates affecting your events and do your bit to spread the word about the AETF by sharing your posts and encouraging your group members and supporters to do the same. (<https://www.facebook.com/AETF.ORG/>)

During these ramblings I regularly ask questions but rarely receive replies. I hope this means that the AETF is generally on the right track. Whether that is true or not, please feel free to provide the National Committee with feedback – positive or negative. One piece of positive feedback I did receive from a couple at an AETF festival event resulted in the guarantee of two generous donations - one for this year's Grand Final and one for a future British Final. I would like to thank these donors (who wish to remain anonymous) for their magnificent gesture.

Finally, another positive to report – we have experienced a net increase in AETF Membership this year (more new members have joined than those who have not renewed). Please keep up the good work of encouraging your friends and local drama groups to become members of the AETF.

**Roger Cunningham, National Treasurer.**

## THE AUSTIN HAWKINS COLUMN



### Play Casting and its Perils

*'Don't be silly Ken, you know our rules here, there's no pre-casting in this Company.'*

So says Linda, the Chair of a fictional theatre company in my play *Moving Aside*. I had been a member of a theatre company for about five years when that line came into my head after I'd overheard the dreaded topic of pre-casting

being picked over in the theatre bar on a number of occasions. In fact it seemed to be one of the most frequent grumbles.

We all know that there is no way back for a play that is badly miscast. In a perfect world the right person for the role will wander into the audition (right age, correct height, perfect demeanour) and then read the part flawlessly. With the limitations inherent in amateur drama the reality is more prosaic. You've carefully selected your play and plans for a brilliant set are being drawn up. Now it's time for the auditions. But will the

dreaded words: *'Nice play, pity about the casting'* be heard in the bar on opening night?

If a company's remit is to have open auditions, the director will be uttering a silent prayer and hoping that the 'right' people turn up. Companies both large and small find that casting is often the biggest challenge and that compromises need to be considered.



In that part of the UK where I live times have changed; once there was a choice of actors; now it's common for directors to be desperate to cast roles, especially minor ones. In fact some companies are finding that the choice of plays is often driven by casting realities. Currently, in our small pond, there is a choice of older performers but far fewer are available in the middle age range. To make matters worse there is a dearth of young males.

I know of a theatre company run by individuals who own the name and the assets. They enjoy the freedom to cast productions by whatever method suits them and their focus is on getting the best available actors for the roles. They can hold auditions or simply hand-pick individuals based on previous knowledge.

But most amateur companies are, in contrast, owned and operated by a membership; democracy rules. Members who have joined with a desire to 'tread the boards' want fair and equal treatment when plays are cast – they expect to have the right to attend auditions and have the chance of being cast. It is that phrase 'fair and equal treatment' that causes most upset. There is the ever-present risk that loyal members who regularly fail to land roles will quietly, or perhaps not so quietly, leave the company.

I know of one director, well-known for directing farces, who invariably casts the same people. His productions are generally very good and, as Frank Sinatra famously remarked: *'You can't argue with success'*. But what about a new member of the same company who might be absolutely brilliant in comedy but doesn't get to read for a part that has already been pre-cast to a regular? Is it worth rejecting a potentially excellent actor in favour of a good, safe and familiar pair of hands?

Would it not be more honest to leave all casting to the discretion of the director of the play (or the artistic director if the company is large and wise enough to have one) and leave it at that? No one wants to cause offence to a loyal and hard-working company member keen for a stage role. However, casting on the basis of 'buggins' turn' or to massage the ego of one individual is fraught with danger. One feature of amateur drama which is not shared with many hobbies is that the public pay for the privilege of seeing the results. But if the paying customer, or if your prefer 'patron' (not punter, please!) sees a production in which a character is badly miscast or an actor performs whose talent is unequal to the demands of a role, he or she might not buy a ticket for the next play.



If loyal members of a company are not being cast because of lack of talent then a workshop or two will surely help raise their standard and the company may avoid losing them.

On the other hand directors, aware of somebody they think ideal for a part, are often tempted to 'tip them the wink': 'You need to be there, George. I've had you in mind for this part for ages.' Then, horror of horrors, someone turns up who is clearly more suitable and George ends up leaving in a strop.

Selecting someone for a role in order to massage their ego is a dangerous, quality-compromising indulgence. I recall carrying out front of house duties for a play that had been less than impressive, due partly to the casting of several people whose acting talents were somewhat limited. In the theatre bar after a performance I overheard some of the actors, clearly pleased with themselves, saying things like: 'We had so much fun doing this play.' They were evidently unaware that, both artistically and from an audience perspective, the play had failed and very possibly damaged the company's reputation.

The driving force behind any production should be a determination to give the paying audience value for money and maintain artistic integrity. Casting should always reflect that, notwithstanding the many challenges involved.

**Austin Hawkins - 2018**

***Austin is a former journalist and biographer who has turned his writing talents to fiction and the theatre. His one-act plays have won a clutch of awards in recent years. His three-act play, 'Friday's Child', was performed last November at the Ice Factory, Teignmouth.***

## **AETF AND NDFA AN UPDATE ON 'CLOSER WORKING' DISCUSSIONS**

We reported in last summer's Newsletter that the AETF had commenced a dialogue with the National Drama Festivals Association (NDFA), organisers of the annual 'British All-Winners' drama festival. This festival pits the selected winners of NDFA member festivals against each other over a week of competitive drama, with separate one-act, full-length and youth competitions and a showcase special needs performance.

Whilst the modus operandi of the NDFA British All-Winners differs from the AETF's tiered, knock-out structure, a significant number of festivals participate in both competitions. In addition both have performance time limits, are presided over by GoDA adjudicators and have a play-writing competition - so there is much commonality.

Representatives of both bodies attended an informal workshop during the July 2017 British All-Winners final to discuss shared challenges and opportunities. It is clear that both competitions share common problems, in particular:

- a gradual decline in the number of participating groups and festivals.
- increasing time pressure on festival organisers and participants due to work and other competing commitments and interests.
- increasing financial pressures for participating groups
- a skewed demographic with predominantly white, middle-class participation.
- the fact that drama (and competitive drama in particular) is a minority interest.



Both organisations agreed that closer working would be mutually beneficial, particularly for fundraising and publicity. The possibility of a merged, one-act drama competition was mooted. This would be extremely challenging in organisational terms but the AETF and NDFA agreed to continue the dialogue to explore potential opportunities for closer working.

I welcome readers' thoughts on this initiative and how the AETF in particular might better promote itself to ensure its future.

Ian Thomas, AETF Vice Chairman

**Ian Thomas, AETF Vice Chairman**

## **CELEBRATING 40 YEARS AT TOTTON.**

In 2018 Totton Drama Festival celebrates 40 years since the founding of its organising committee. When the first festival event was held in 1979 at a local church hall, I doubt that anyone then imagined it would be going strong so many years later. To celebrate our anniversary year I thought it would be nice to share with you some of the things that have helped make Totton a success over the years. Hopefully, it will provide other festivals with some useful ideas and perspectives.

1. **Totton is all about its participants:** The committee's prime objective is to encourage and support the groups taking part in the festival – helping them deliver the best performance possible and making sure they enjoy their festival experience and want to come back next year. We also make sure we support those groups that win through to later rounds of the AETF. They know that wherever they perform there'll always be a friendly face in the audience.



2. **Lowering barriers to participation:** We know that putting on a festival play can be very expensive and for that reason we have always kept our entry fee low – currently just £15 with free competitors' passes (for cast plus 2). Optional written adjudications are, of course, extra. We hope the above policy gives fewer reasons for groups to think twice before joining us each year.
3. **A fantastic committee:** I don't know about other festivals but I do think that Totton is blessed with a fantastic team to run the festival. Our committee of ten ranges in age from 18 to 80. It embraces a whole gamut of skills and everyone on the committee gets 'stuck in' both before and during the event. Some of our committee have been with us for less than a year. One founder member, Christine Farleigh, is still very involved and can be found working hard backstage during festival week as our Stage Manager. It really is a team and we are always heartened by the smiles we get from groups that come back year after year. It's like welcoming back old friends.
4. **Embracing social media:** The days of the big paper mail-out are over and now all groups communicate via the Internet. We've had our Facebook page since 2012. This is augmented by a Twitter account. Both are well used, as is our new website which has encouraged new groups to join us.
5. **Sponsorship:** We are lucky that the Town Council recognises the work that we do and gives us a couple of discounted days at our venue. This makes all the difference as regards covering our costs. Two committee members do a sterling job securing programme advertising revenue from local businesses. During the past two years we have secured over £1,400 in revenue from these sources.
6. **The venue:** We are fortunate to have the lovely Hanger Farm Arts Centre on our doorstep (**pictured below**). It is a converted barn that provides a wonderfully intimate space for a one-act play festival. We were not always so lucky with venues. As mentioned above our festival began life in a church hall before moving to the local secondary school. For 25 years we campaigned for a proper theatre in our village (once famed for being the largest in England). Once we heard about the possibility of converting the listed barn, we worked assiduously with the Town Council (commenting on the conversion plans and submitting documents to aid the lottery application). Our 2005 festival was one of the first events to be held at the new Arts Centre.
7. **Spreading the Word:** We evangelise on behalf of the festival by going out to meet new groups and speaking about the benefits and opportunities associated with festival drama. This year we are offering a mentoring service for groups new to festivals so they know what to expect.
8. **Willingness to try new things:** One of the more pleasing things about Totton is its willingness to adapt and experiment. For example, we have trialled 'Recall nights' with an American supper and our adjudicators now provide feedback at the end of each play rather than at the end of each evening. Although we stopped the 'Recall nights' over 10 years ago, we have kept the nibbles so that groups and the audience can socialise.

9. **Local Support:** We get great support from our local community. The reliably good houses create a great atmosphere for our performing groups and help us cover our costs.

Although the Totton festival isn't perfect it is always striving to improve and we relish the chance to add value to the event each year. Thank you for reading this. We'd be delighted to share your experiences and perspectives.

**Mike Farleigh, Chair, Totton Festival of Drama**

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## STATISTICS - 2017 SEASON

All thirty eight festivals made their returns this year although one was unable to provide a programme and a number had to be coerced into providing data late in the day. For these statistics to be meaningful it is important that both the programme and the returns sheet are sent to me as soon as possible after your event. However, we are getting there and I'm immensely grateful to the vast majority of festival organisers who comply in a timely manner.



### PERFORMANCE STATISTICS

These are based on returns from all festivals making up the AETF family.

- There were 25 independently organised festivals and 13 AETF events proper (preliminary rounds, quarter finals, semi finals and the Grand Final). One independently organised festival cancelled due to lack of entries.
- There were 123 performing sessions spread across 38 venues. 300 groups took part with a total cast and crew of 3,184. The festival events were watched by an audience of 7,742 who provided ticket returns of £58k.
- A number of independent festivals used our AETF programme covers. This helps to promote the AETF as a whole. However, several failed to include our small advert or the AETF logo and web address in their programmes.

### PLAY STATISTICS (Preliminary round events only)

#### Authors

The most popular authors were: -

David Tristram (4 titles performed at 4 events).

Richard James (3 titles performed at 5 events)

David Campton (3 titles performed at 5 events)

#### Play titles / Casts (2016 figures in brackets)

There were 243 (286) performances of 188 different plays written by 163 (153) authors). 39 were monologues or two-handers and 18 were three-handers. Of the remainder, 86 had casts of between four and seven and 81 had casts of more than eight.

Because a. one festival with nineteen entries did not provide me with a programme and b. many groups performed the same play at two or three separate events it is not possible to make a reliable statement about which play was the most popular across the whole competition.

#### Original work

36 (43) works performed were original. A further five were anonymously authored. The amount of original work performed may well be an underestimate as I suspect that some festival organisers do not flag such work in their programmes.

#### SUMMARY

I thank all festival organisers for providing the data used in compiling these statistics.

In 2017 there were potentially 204 groups vying for the honour of representing England at the British Final, 20 fewer than last year. The trustees are trying to discover why the number is declining and what can be done about it. 26 (40) adult and 13 (19) youth groups elected not to go forward to later rounds of the competition.

As ever, I thank festival organisers for providing the data for these statistics. I believe they show that we are still providing a worthwhile platform for communities across the length and breadth of England to participate in one-act, competitive drama.

Roger Cunnington

#### A Quote for our Age

**'WE ARE MADE WISE NOT BY THE RECOLLECTION OF OUR PAST BUT BY THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR FUTURE'**

George Bernard Shaw



**YOUR COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS ABOUT THE CONTENT AND PRESENTATION OF THIS NEWSLETTER ARE ALWAYS WELCOME. IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO PROVIDE COPY FOR FUTURE ISSUES, DO LET ME KNOW AND I SHALL DO MY BEST TO OBLIGE. HAVE A GREAT FESTIVAL SEASON.**

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