

A  
Registered Charity  
Number 1071518

News & Review

January 2019  
Issue 1  
Number 37

# 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

It hardly seems more than a few weeks since the curtain came down on the 2018 season amid the bucolic surrounds of Stirling University where our friends in Scotland hosted a splendid British Final over a sweltering July weekend. Now, with the festive season cleared mercifully out of the way, our earliest preliminary round events (in Bristol and on the Isle of Man) are almost under starter's orders.

The prospects for the year ahead are full of pluses and minuses. On the one hand we will celebrate the unveiling of a brand new preliminary round festival, the Cheshire (see *Northern Area report*) and on the other, our Eastern Area colleagues will see their festival strength shrink further from five to four. Although we expect that this will be a temporary glitch, it does add to the already extant problem of Area and competitive imbalance. We shall be discussing these issues at a special executive meeting in February.



In June our flagship event, the Grand Final, returns to the superbly appointed Norden Farm Centre for the Arts (pictured above) where our Eastern Area colleagues will, I feel sure, provide the same high standard of hosting and organisation as they did four years ago at the same venue.

This year it is all hands on deck right into July since it is our (or rather Northern Area's) turn to host the 'British' in elegant Harrogate, North Yorkshire, a town which boasts exclusive shopping, a parkland

setting, old-world tea shops and the accessible hinterland of the Yorkshire Dales. Harrogate Theatre, the venue for the event (pictured below), is a 500-seat, late Victorian gem. The lead hotel is the Cairn on Ripon Road where social events are planned for both nights of the festival. A civic reception awaits the teams at the local council offices and the Frazer Theatre in nearby Knaresborough will host a rehearsed reading of the 2019 Geoffrey Whitworth-winning play. All we now need is an **audience**. Do please support this year's British. You can download a leaflet and a booking form from the AETF web site. Don't delay!



The organisers of each year's British Final are tasked with the responsibility of raising £4,500 to help cover the accommodation and travel costs of the four finalists. So far the Nidderdale and District Drama Association, Woodlands Drama Group, Knaresborough Players, Harrogate Dramatic Society and Pateley Bridge Dramatic Society (as well as two private donors) have generously pledged £1,200 of this sum. To date, however, we have failed to land a sponsor or sponsors for the residual amount. **If you can help directly or suggest potentially profitable avenues of enquiry, do please contact me.**

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2018 was a particularly busy period for the AETF behind the scenes and on the following pages you will read about the fruits of some of our committee work in respect of such topics as fund-raising, General Data Protection and insurance. We also provide advance warning that, from 2020, we shall be introducing an opting fee of £10 for all teams electing to go forward from a preliminary round event to the AETF proper (see page 4)

No year seems to go by without the sad loss of old colleagues and friends. 2018 saw the deaths of three outstanding servants of festival drama, Barbara Prince, Doug Waft and John White. You can read an appreciation of Barbara in this Newsletter. Doug's contribution to festival drama in the North and John's in the South East will be commemorated in the next issue. Both were highly respected former trustees of our organisation (Doug was AETF Chairman from 1992-5)

I couldn't possibly end this article without paying tribute to Ian Thomas who stood down as AETF Vice Chair in October. Ian has been an astute and dynamic presence on the Executive Committee for some years and I've been fortunate indeed that his period as Vice Chair overlapped my incumbency as National Chair. Ian devised the AETF's first ever business plan and we have benefited hugely over the years from his sound common sense, clarity of vision and willingness to think outside the box. Thankfully he will continue to serve Eastern Area and the national committee for the foreseeable future. We welcome Rebekah Fortune as our new Vice Chair. Rebekah, as many of you know, comes with an enviable track record of accomplishment in all facets of festival drama.

## Ian Clarke - National Chairman



Northern Area

I start on a sad note. In September last year Barbara Prince, Chairman of the Hull and East Riding Festival for many years and a hugely loved and respected figure across Northern Area passed away at the age of 87. You can read an appreciation of this remarkable lady by one of her closest festival associates on page 5.

Last year Northern Area benefited from the initiative, personal investment and sheer hard graft of Alan Godfrey who established a brand new first found festival, the Durham and Sunderland, as the AETF's most northerly outpost. This year, Bev Clark and Sue Doherty, both busy GODA adjudicators, have shown comparable tenacity and organisational prowess in setting up the new Cheshire Festival which will host six aspiring productions at Nantwich Players Theatre in early March. This new event, which is a most welcome string to our bow, will reduce the geographic imbalance of festivals in the North and, like Alan's festival, will tap into a hitherto unexploited hinterland of amateur theatre for the AETF. Bless you for your hard graft, Bev and Sue!

The 'big one' for Northern Area this season is, of course, its hosting of the British Final in Harrogate. Since I have already

given this event a big build up in the National Chairman's column above, let me give space here, instead, to our Area Final which is to be hosted by Alan Godfrey and his Durham and Sunderland colleagues at the well-appointed Washington Arts Centre (*pictured below*). Occupying the weekend of the early May Bank Holiday, it promises to be a highly competitive event and, in recognition of this fact, we have hired one of the best - Jan Palmer Sayer, the GoDA Chairman - to officiate as adjudicator.



Before I close, may I take this opportunity to extend best Northern Area wishes (and thanks) to Elaine Devaney, who this year takes on the big responsibility of following the legendary Phyllis Driscoll as the organiser of the Leverhulme festival. This week-long celebration of amateur drama across Greater Merseyside and beyond has produced some splendid Area finalists over the years and we hope the same will be true this year.

It remains for me to wish all festival supporters - from the Isle of Man in the west to Hull in the east, and from Nantwich in the south to Durham and Sunderland in the north - a hugely enjoyable festival season.

## Ian Clarke - Secretary, Northern Area



Central Area

As I look forward to the new festival season I am hearing from many preliminary round events that their entries are already coming in and at least two of the nine festivals are already full. I then realise that, in spite of everything, the Area does seem to be in a happy place. Our 15<sup>th</sup> AGM took place on 23 September in Nuneaton and, as is now becoming the norm, we failed to attract much of a gathering. It did, however, afford the opportunity for open discussion about where we are heading. From a financial point of view we are agreed that first round winners and runners-up should continue go through to the next round. This policy also creates a more festive occasion. The 2019 Area Final will be at the Brewhouse (*pictured below*) in Burton-on-Trent on 4 May. Our AGM will take place on 22 September at the Abbey Theatre, Nuneaton.

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Please remember that attending festivals other than your own can be a rewarding learning experience. It broadens perspective, not least about what adjudicators are looking for. Why not follow all four rounds of competition and take friends along. You will augment the audience and maybe win the AETF new followers.

As we move into the new season we can again congratulate ourselves. We have the largest number of AETF members across all categories (including four Gold Members - formerly Patrons). This is important on two counts; it shows that there is a great sense of commitment to the festival scene in Central Area and it brings in much needed cash. So, many thanks to you all for spreading the word about the benefits of AETF membership - please keep it up.

I would commend you to this year's British Final of One-Act Plays which is being held at Harrogate Theatre on 5 & 6 July. It will be a wonderful weekend. Central Area will host the event in 2023 and our plans are already taking positive shape although we haven't yet chosen a theatre. We are happy to consider your venue suggestions and, indeed, anything which you feel would help us secure capacity houses on both nights.

Jean and I intend visiting as many Central Area events this year as we can. We hope to see as many of you as possible. Don't be afraid to bend our ears with comments, suggestions and reminiscences.

**Roger Cunnington - Chairman, Central Area**



**Western Area**

Following the example of US presidents, it is incumbent on me to report, at the start of the year, on the state of the Western Area Divisions. It is partly a healthy report and partly not, despite the endeavours of dedicated administrators. Wessex Division thrives with Avon and Bristol still able to boast healthy participation in their preliminary rounds. Somerset is not at this level, but it still hopes to expand its festival to two days. Mercia Division is largely dormant apart from the Harold Jolliffe, which cannot participate in the AETF this year - a matter of some regret. Southern Division is blessed with Hampshire's very healthy Totton festival where a dozen or so entries are not unusual. Western Division survives by virtue of Dawlish's TADDfest and the Exmouth Festival, both in Devon. How do we promote greater interest in performance art? This year we are forced to run only two quarter finals, one in Sherborne on 4 May and the other in Bath on 13 April. Let us hope for decent

houses because low box office receipts reduce the contribution to central funds.



**The Young Creatives Portsmouth performing *Me, My Selfie and I* at the 2018 Totton Festival.**

The problems associated with regenerating local interest in community drama, especially festival drama, affect us all. Perhaps it is time to employ means that are unfamiliar to most of us but are in constant use commercially - promotional articles in newspapers, arts magazines, targeted local radio programmes et al. It is also incumbent on us to use all forms of modern social media to get our message out to a target audience. Western Area has a 'Publicity Brief' that covers such subjects and we will happily send a copy to anyone interested.

Finally let me give a brief progress report on our initiatives to kick-start new festivals. In Dorset we have held a preliminary meeting and set a timetable for a 2020 festival. In January letters will go out to every theatre group in that County to assess the likelihood of their participation. The committee of Cornwall's full-length festival are considering our request that they restart a one-act festival there. Gloucestershire and Wiltshire await their turn for enhancement and regeneration respectively. Fingers crossed but at least we're trying.

**Ron Roberts - Chairman, Western Area**



**Eastern Area**

Another year draws to a close and planning is well advanced for the 2019 preliminary round festivals and Eastern Area Final.

We are disappointed that the Cambridge Drama festival will not be participating in the AETF competition as it has relocated to a new venue that is unavailable until September 2019. We hope to welcome Cambridge back into the AETF (again) in the future.

The Elmbridge, Maidenhead, Southern Counties and Waltham Forest dates were confirmed last summer and these long-established and well-run festivals will doubtless maintain their

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track-record of putting forward high quality entries for the Area final.

The 2019 Eastern Area Final will be hosted by the Elmbridge Drama Festival at the Cecil Hepworth Playhouse (pictured below) on 1 June, just one week before the AETF Grand Final due to a lack of earlier availability of the venue. Although this will give the winners little time to prepare for the Grand Final, this potential handicap should not prove too challenging as Eastern Area has the honour of hosting this event, so the Area winners will not have to travel far or arrange accommodation.



Eastern Area is hosting the Grand Final at Norden Farm Centre for the Arts in Maidenhead, Berkshire (a short drive from Windsor & Eton) and we look forward to welcoming you to this delightful venue on Saturday 8 June.

As ever, festivals are facing challenges in relation to the number of participating groups. This is well illustrated by the Southern Counties Drama Festival (SCDF) based at the Barn Theatre, Oxted. The SCDF has typically attracted 12-16 entries annually but in 2018 this figure dipped to 8 due to two long-standing groups withdrawing and two pulling out at the last minute because of illness. The festival Secretary, Carolyn Rowley, emailed over 100 local groups in July, encouraging them to enter the 2019 SCDF and the text of this email is included below:

*"Does your group have a few actors (you only need two speaking parts) who like doing edgy, gritty plays, which it would not be possible to perform in your venue as ticket sales would be unlikely to cover costs? 'Nine' by Jane Shepard which was entered this year by Oxted Players won the SCDF and all those involved said how much they had enjoyed working on the play and how much they all felt that they had learnt. A play like this can be rehearsed at home, thereby saving money on rehearsal venues.*

*Is your group involved in writing plays or do you know someone who has a play which they are writing or have written? It can be very difficult to find a venue and finance to perform a new play but a drama festival can be a stepping stone to something much bigger, particularly if you win. The AETF supports the Geoffrey Whitworth Playwriting Competition and all new and unperformed plays can be entered for the Geoffrey Whitworth Trophy which then publishes your play if you win.*

*Does your group have a junior section which performs only one or two plays a year? Most of us know how many young people are very keen on drama but also how many other things they have going on in their lives, often so many that they cannot commit to the long rehearsal period of a major production. Festival is ideal for them, as rehearsals can be condensed into a shorter time period. One of our winning groups has said how much it has done for their youngsters who always 'up their game' when it is their turn to perform.*

*Does your group have a Director and actors but no technicians (or vice-versa) who are prepared to get involved? A plea to other groups nearby may find technicians who would be delighted to help; it is worth a try."*

The email also offered the 'carrot' of a £500 prize to the winning team.

Feedback suggested that in some cases named group contacts are not necessarily the best recipients for enquiries such as this (they often fail to pass the message on). So Carolyn searched on Facebook for groups who had banded together (for example Kent Theatre Hub) posted her message on their Facebook pages and also tweeted.

The approach adopted by the SCDF is commendable and highlights the need to utilise all available forms of communication to spread the word. To date the level of interest in this festival has already exceeded that of last year.

It remains for me to wish all festival organisers, directors, technical crew, actors and supporters an enjoyable and rewarding season in 2019. I look forward to seeing you in Maidenhead in June.

**Ian Thomas - Chairman, Eastern Area**



## Advance Notice

### OPTING FEE TO BE INTRODUCED IN 2020

Unlike our sister organisation in Scotland, the AETF does not require its participating teams to be members of the organisation and teams who both opt and are selected to go through to the AETF proper from a preliminary round festival are not charged for the privilege of doing so. In the last Newsletter I floated the tentative proposal that all teams electing to go forward from a preliminary round should become Group Members of the AETF (subscription £20). The only response from our readership came from our friends at the Bristol Festival who were against the idea because they felt it would discourage efforts to maintain and expand their number of festival entries.

The draft proposal was vigorously debated at our Executive Committee meeting in October and rejected for the same reasons. However, it was unanimously agreed that the AETF was depriving itself of significant income in allowing teams to opt to

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go forward free of charge. The AETF will, therefore, be introducing a fee of £10 in the 2020 season for all groups opting to go forward from a first round event into the AETF proper. This halves the cost of the original proposal and will surely be within the budgets of festival participants. Although the logistics have yet to be finalised, it is expected that the fee (an annual, one-off payment irrespective of the number of later rounds negotiated by any given team) will be collected by preliminary round organisers. The payment will be an essential adjunct to filling out the Festival Declaration Form which will be amended accordingly.

Ian Clarke

## BARBARA PRINCE (1930-2018)



When Barbara passed away last September AETF Northern Area lost one of its most knowledgeable, respected, hard-working and supportive festival organisers. Barbara was the longest serving Chairman of the Hull and East Riding branch of the AETF, a position she held almost to the end of her long life. It is entirely characteristic of her commitment that she laboured long and hard to provide an

impeccably documented handover for her successor as Chairman. All Barbara's Northern Area colleagues were looking forward to the pleasure of her company at our AGM at the end of September. Sadly, it was not to be.

I can do no better than quote from an appreciation of Barbara penned by Sandra Crane, the Hull festival timekeeper for 32 years and its secretary for 20 years.

*'Barbara was a well-respected amateur actress in Hull where she performed for most of her life with groups including St John Patrushka Players, the Electricity Players, Kirkella Dramatic Society, Them and Willerby Drama Group. Her association with the British Theatre Association (BTA) / AETF began in 1983 at the first Hull and East Riding Festival at Spring Street Theatre when she appeared in Kirkella's production of 'Hidden Meanings' by Michael Snelgrove. That same year she made her international debut in the BTA's production of J. B. Priestley's classic 'When We Are Married' in Austin, Texas. Her acting skills were displayed in a total of twelve entries in the Hull Festival, including 1991 when she appeared twice – for Kirkella in the title role of 'The Ragwoman of the Shambles' by Don Roberts and, the following evening, for Them's winning production of 'No Why' by John Whiting. In 1997 Barbara, with Brian Watson, won the Comedy Award for Kirkella's production of 'The Evergreens' by David Campton. She also gave prize-winning performances at Haltemprice and other festivals. A*

*natural and sensitive actress, Barbara thoroughly researched her roles, always knew her lines and was a generous team player.*

*I got to know Barbara almost 40 years ago when she joined Kirkella. During her time as the Society's Chairman she cheerfully undertook various supporting jobs in addition to acting and directing. To quote one of her friends on hearing of her death, 'I think Barbara might be pleased know the picture which sprang to my mind was of her sitting alone at a table, centre stage, giving an excellent interpretation of Alan Bennett's 'A Lady of Letters' in 1996. It was an impressive performance.' The following year she demonstrated her tap dancing skills in 'Stepping Out'.*

*Thank you, Barbara, for giving so much time, energy and joy to Amateur Drama, finding and hosting adjudicators and for being a good friend to so many'.*

Ian Clarke



## Treasurer's Ramblings



"When did I first start rambling?  
Well, it's a long story..."

The AETF has direct lineage from the British Drama League (BDL) inaugurated in 1919. There have, it is true, been name changes along the way - the BDL became the British Drama Association (BDA) and the AETF was formed just before the BDA went bust. **Nevertheless we are officially 100 this year!**

As many of you are aware the AETF received a substantial donation last year which is to be spent on legacy initiatives. All four Areas have been using their allocated sum of money and, in some cases, it has helped to set up new festivals. The National Committee has yet to decide how best to implement its portion of the legacy. From the response to our question in the last Newsletter it appears that our members are more than happy to let us, the executive, decide how best to use this money. This also applies to the donations received with membership renewals. The executive has this very much in hand - more news to follow.

There are two areas not under my jurisdiction, which are, nonetheless, very relevant to the AETF as a whole:

### Child Protection

Following an incident concerning the use of licensed chaperones, which cost the organisers of a Divisional Final a substantial amount of money, the Executive Committee have reviewed our Child Protection Policy contained in Appendix 3 of the Operational Rules and declared it fit for purpose. For the





## STATISTICS - 2018 SEASON



Although I tried to get every festival to respond (as they did in 2017) eight festivals failed to provide me with returns in 2018. Despite this 78% return rate the figures overall are similar to those of the previous year.

### 1. PERFORMANCE STATISTICS (all festival events)

- There were 26 independently organised events and 13 AETF preliminary rounds and finals.
- 122 performance sessions took place across 37 venues.
- 299 groups took part with aggregate cast and crew numbers of 2,459.
- The festivals played to total houses of 6,036 and garnered an aggregate income of approximately £51,000.
- A number of independent festivals used our AETF programme covers thereby promoting the AETF as a whole. However, a number of independent festivals did not include our standard advert, the AETF logo and our web address in their programmes.

### 2. PLAY STATISTICS (preliminary rounds only)

#### Authors

The three most popular authors were:

- David Campton (4 titles performed at four events)
- Alan Ayckbourn (3 titles performed at five events)
- Richard James (2 titles performed at six events)

#### Play titles

The three most popular plays were:

- ***The Dreaming*** by Richard James (performed at five events)
- ***The Allotment*** by Gillian Plowman (performed at three events)
- ***Mediocrity*** by Anton Krueger (performed at three events)

**Breakdown of repertoire** (the figures in brackets below are those for 2017)

There were 250 (243) play titles performed of

which 37 (36) were original plays; 139 (163) different authors were featured.

34 (39) items of repertoire were monologues or two-handers and 20 (18) were three-handers. 79 (81) offered between four and seven roles; 60 (81) offered over 8 roles.

#### Opting

33 (26) adult and 17 (13) youth groups opted not to go on (if selected) to the AETF proper.

#### SUMMING UP

Around 200 groups vied for the ultimate honour of representing England at the British Final (only 4 less than last year). Whilst we are pleased that this decrease is minimal our aim is always to increase participation. Everybody has a role to play in selling our great annual event.

As the compiler of these annual statistics could I please re-iterate my annual plea for all independent festivals to give vital elements of information about the AETF in their programmes (our standard advert, our logo and our website address as a bare minimum).

Although there were 33 original plays recorded in the first round programmes I continue to believe that this is an underestimate and that some original work is not being flagged by programme compilers.

There is a body of opinion that sees the burgeoning number of original works performed at festivals as a cause of audience apathy or decline (perhaps exacerbated by their being performed at more than one event). Should we limit the amount of such work at any given festival in favour of more 'popular' productions by better-known authors? I'd love to hear your views.

As ever I close by thanking the great majority of festival organisers for taking the trouble to send in their returns. This information helps us monitor how successful we are in supporting and nurturing community drama across England.

**Roger Cunnington**

### AETF Fundraising Sub-Committee (FSC)



Comprising Ian Clarke, Carol Hennessy, Ron Roberts and myself, the committee has met twice since it was set up. Its remit is to '*Develop a Fund-Raising Strategy for the AETF*'. What follows is a precis of what we have agreed so far:



- The AETF is not yet in a position where it can raise funds on an **annual** basis to support all entries into the AETF finals.
- It is not yet realistic to offer support to all teams entering our AETF festivals.
- The primary responsibility for fundraising to support the winners of our finals rests with the local festival host organisation.
- The FSC will provide general guidance and strategic direction for the AETF.
- The FSC will carry out investigative work on Crowd Funding, Group / Individual Membership, general advertising and explore links with play publishers. It has already agreed that more can be done to raise money in-house and out of this has come the decision to introduce an opting fee in 2020 (see separate article on page 4)

**Roger Cunnington**

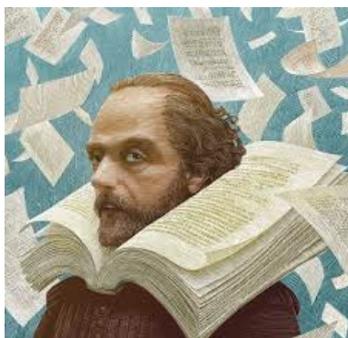
## QUALITY TIME WITH THE ADJUDICATOR

At the Drama Festivals Conference in Cambridge last summer, GoDA practitioners cited the lack of opportunities they often have to meet up with individual teams after a festival event to discuss and elaborate on the feedback provided from the stage. Could festival organisers give this some serious thought, please? There are, of course, often time and venue constraints militating against this happening, but even a short meet-up in a pub after the show would be grist to the mill.

**Ian Clarke**

## THE WIT AND WISDOM OF PLAY-WRIGHTS

(an occasional series)



***I am an atheist and I thank God for it*** - George Bernard Shaw

***She had lost the art of conversation but not, unfortunately, the art of speech*** – George Bernard Shaw

***The intensity of my impatience with him occasionally reaches such a pitch that it would be a relief to me to dig him up and throw stones at him*** – George Bernard Shaw on Shakespeare

***If Peter O'Toole was any prettier they'd have had to call it*** (the film) ***'Florence of Arabia'*** - Noel Coward

***Familiarity breeds contempt but without a little familiarity it's impossible to breed anything*** – Noel Coward

***This enormous dunghill*** – Voltaire on the works of Shakespeare

***People who keep dogs are cowards who haven't the guts to bite themselves*** – August Strindberg

***I love her and she loves me, and we hate each other with a wild hatred born of love*** – August Strindberg

***If you find a box labelled 'American Dry Goods' you can be reasonably sure it will contain nothing but their novels*** – Oscar Wilde

***Bigamy is having one wife too many. Monogamy is the same*** – Oscar Wilde

***Personally, I have no bone to pick with graveyards*** – Samuel Beckett

***Birth was the death of him*** – Samuel Beckett

***All the world's a stage and most of us are desperately unrehearsed*** – Sean O'Casey

***I know not, sir, whether Bacon wrote the works of Shakespeare but if he did not, it seems to me that he missed the opportunity of his life*** – J.M. Barrie



**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. THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT.**

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