

FRIENDS OF CHESTER LITERATURE FESTIVAL NEWSLETTER



SUMMER 2015

Dear Litfest Friend

Welcome to our summer newsletter. As well as a roundup of past Friends' events we shall also be looking ahead to future events, including a sneak preview of some of the names already on the list for this year's **Chester Literature Festival**, which is scheduled to take place from **10th to 25th October**.

At a recent meeting with Paul Lavin, who many of you will know as the Festivals Manager at Chester Performs, he told us about some of the exciting people who have already been booked to appear at the Festival – these include the poets Simon Armitage, Don Paterson and Tony Harrison, novelists Deborah Moggach and Francesca Haigh, theatre critic Michael Billington, adventurer Ranulph Fiennes, historian David Starkey and comedian Don Joly to name just a few! Needless to say we can expect a full and varied programme of events including talks, workshops and shows. As always Friends will have the benefit of **priority booking, which is due to open on 22nd July, followed by the opening of public booking on 31st July.**

As concerns events still to come, the next one is **on Thursday 23rd July to the Buxton Festival**. At the time of writing tickets for this were selling well but there were still a few available so please contact us. We shall also be holding a special Friends' event as usual during the Litfest itself, details of which will be announced nearer the time. Meanwhile the other date that you should put in your diaries from now is **Thursday 26th November** when we will be holding our **annual coffee morning at Bishop Lloyd's Palace**. Whilst this festive get together has become something of a tradition over the years, we did have a particularly good time last year due to the singular musical talents of Theatre in the Quarter's Matt Baker who had us all singing along to some rousing choruses! It will be a hard act to follow this year, but we're working on it.

We continue to sponsor events for local children. This time they will be going to see 'The Wind in the Willows' at Grosvenor Park. An Action Transport theatre workshop is also in prospect, to be held in the Autumn in Ellesmere Port.

We look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at future events and during the Festival. You will be pleased to hear that you will be getting a 2 month bonus this year, as we have decided to change the **membership year to run from 1st January rather than 1st November** – although renewal reminders will still be going out in November together with the Winter Newsletter. We do hope that you enjoy being part of the Friends and that you will renew your membership, as well as telling other people about us!

All the best, Elizabeth Lambrakis/Gill King/Carol Archer/Norma Duffill/Marie Hughes/Jennie Roberts/Helen Hill/Marigold Roy/Jan Bengree

LOOK OUT FOR OUR NEW WEBSITE!

We are working on a website for Friends which will be going live this summer. Watch this space!

THE PLAY'S THE THING !



Award winning writer and director of Action Transport Theatre, Kevin Dyer, led a theatrical writing workshop on the 26th of February at the Little Theatre in Chester.

As a writer of poetry and fiction I was unsure what to expect but I found this to be not only a fascinating insight into play writing, characterisation and drivers, it was a masterclass in thinking outside the box! Kevin Dyer was a brilliant workshop leader – stimulating, energetic and encouraging. We learned about the basics of playwriting, tension points, the beats in each scene. A few prompts and we conjured up a character. Then came the lateral thinking. We tore up bits of programmes into fingernail sized scraps, pure concentration on everyone's faces as we held a fragment (our character) in the palm of our hands. We rummaged in a gorgeous heap of multi-coloured fabrics to find the scraps that best represented the character. We talked, we let our imagination run free, we wrote - and everyone produced something. Even those who didn't expect to write! And then came the readings, wide ranging and hugely enjoyable. I was hooked! The time absolutely flew by. It was fun, it was thought provoking and best of all, it was liberating!

Marigold Roy

SONNETS AND SANDWICHES

On February 20 a crowd of us travelled to Theatr Clwyd, Mold, where we enjoyed a backstage tour, a picnic lunch and a Shakespearean masterclass by the renowned artistic director of the theatre, Terry Hands. Fascinating is an understatement! The tour, by Technical Manager Pat Nelder, began with a look at mocked-up mini stage sets, essential for director, set makers and actors, and then went to Studio 2, a television studio when the theatre was built in 1976 and now a high, black, capacious space used for rehearsals, mini productions, even overflow dressing rooms. It was one of many examples of the foresight in the planning of the theatre, and the built-in flexibility. Chester, take note!

In the costume department we saw exquisitely tailored clothes for the coming production of *The Herbal Bed*, design to stage taking 3 to 5 weeks by a permanent team of three. Costumes are stored for five years, hired out,, then sold off. Actors rarely wear their own clothes apparently and in Victorian dramas, yes, the ladies of the cast do wear authentic corsets!

To stand in the wings was magical; to step on the black reflecting stage, look out on a sea of red plush seats, was doubly so. Then to lunch, in brown paper bags, consumed as Terry Hands reflected on the sonnets with passionate readings by the cast of *Hamlet*. How cleverly he showed the relationship of the sonnets to *Hamlet*'s soliloquies and to *Romeo and Juliet*'s impassioned exchanges. A lunch to remember!

Peggy Woodcock

Note: A special thank you to Jean Thomason who kindly looked after Norma so well after her accident in the car park just before the tour. We're glad to say Norma is now fully recovered.



Review of Daphne Du Maurier's 'Rebecca – A Study in Jealousy' The Lowry, Wednesday, April 8th

Having never been to a Kneehigh production before I held no expectations as to how this classic story would be adapted. My only query was how such a dark psychological story could be portrayed successfully on the stage. With its strange opening of the young second Mrs De Winter (Imogen Sage) reminiscing on the cove shore, a boat descending from the ceiling with Rebecca's body beneath and fishermen singing haunting folk songs and shanties in the shadows, I realised I was in for a challenging and vibrant performance. I needed to shift my thinking accordingly.

The set was a creative wonder combining the rather neglected, beautiful house Manderley with a menacing cove front of stage. Changing scenes and lighting effects produced an atmospheric setting and the cottage on the cove was conjured up convincingly with a hand held window and a few throws and cushions.

I marvelled at the versatility of the actors who, as well as acting could sing, dance, play a variety of instruments, change costumes quickly and move props around with effortless timing. Imogen Sage successfully portrayed the young Mrs De Winter as being an innocent intruder under the shadow of Rebecca's ghost and her transformation at the end when she realises Maxim hated Rebecca.. Mrs Danvers's (Emily Raymond) intimidating and contemptuous presence didn't seem to go far enough, (perhaps Hitchcock's 1940 film's close up shots of her face are too embedded in my mind!) but she portrayed her obsession with Rebecca effectively. Maxim de Winter (Tristan Sturrock) was good, but perhaps not commanding enough, whilst Jack Favell (Ewan Wardrop) swaggered convincingly throughout.



A lively discussion ensued on the journey home about all aspects of the play. I think this is the joy of theatre when opinions polarise and we can appreciate each others' points of view. Thank you to Elizabeth for organising this memorable trip and a first for me with Litfest Friends. I look forward to the next one. *Sue Buckley*

STOP PRESS: POEMS AFLOAT WITH JO BELL/ VISIT TO HOME THEATRE

Saturday 10th October 2015, 3.45pm to 5.30pm Mill Hotel Restaurant Cruiser. come and join us for afternoon tea on a luxury canal boat in the heart of historic Chester, accompanied by published poet Jo Bell. She is going to entertain us with some of her inspirational poetry as well as tales of her life as the UK's very first Canal Poet Laureate.
<https://belljarblog.wordpress.com/live-readings/>

Wednesday 4th November, an evening visit to Manchester's brand new Home Theatre to see Ted Hughes' version of The Oresteia preceded by a director's talk.

Full details and booking information coming out shortly.

OUR DAY IN HAY!

Here are some thoughts put forward by members on the return journey from The Hay Festival on 28th May:

An excellent, stimulating day of intellectual, retail, cultural and



gastronomic experiences. Such diversity of speakers, food and music. Thought provoking talks by Raymond Tallis and Phil Hammond. Pam Ayres, witty and entertaining. Meandering around the Mappa Mundi; the passion and compassion of Virginia McKenna and Lauren St. John of the Born Free Foundation. Charles Jenks' inspiring "Architecture of Hope". John Sergeant extolling the delights of barging round Britain. Great to meet the team of Radio 4's The Listening Project and the talk on radio drama. Enjoyed hearing voices in poetry and prose and the drawing sessions..Wonderful experience soaking up the atmosphere, all ages with families very much in evidence; what a gift to a book-lover! A cream tea, a blackcurrant ice cream and a big dollop of culture on top!

Thank you so much, so well organised. Can we come again next year please? (Compiled by Sue Taylor and Gwen Connelly)

MORE DATESFOR YOUR DIARY –

4-6 SEPTEMBER GLADFEST LITERARY FESTIVAL in HAWARDEN www.gladstoneslibrary.org

12-25 October MANCHESTER LITERATURE FESTIVAL www.manchesterliteraturefestival.co.uk

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