

FESPA NEWS

Friends of East Suffolk Performing Arts

37th issue

Autumn 2010

JILL WRITES...

Dear Theatregoer,

Many of you have said that last Season was, all round, the best ever. It was certainly one of the happiest and the company had a great time with each production.

I thought Maurice Rubens' sets were remarkable: a fabulous 1930s Cabaret look for *Cowardy Custard*, a



wealthy minimalist interior for *Dangerous Obsession*, the haunting, period feel of *My Cousin Rachel*, the tiled, sunlit Portuguese villa for *Holiday Snap* and the deliberately bad taste of *Abigail's*

Party. Don't tell him I said so, but the man is a genius!

We are fortunate, too, in our directors. Who but Tony Falkingham could nurse a cast through a fiendishly demanding musical and get it smoothly on in less than three weeks—and how lucky to have Sidi Scott not only as choreographer but also shining in the show.

Mark Sterling did a brilliant job on *My Cousin Rachel* and Richard Frost was, as always, masterly with his two shows. My personal high was being on stage in his production of *Holiday Snap*, watching the antics of Paul Leonard and listening to an audience helpless with laughter. Phil Clark joined us for the first time, to direct *Dangerous Obsession* and made it utterly compelling. Incidentally, his acclaimed production of David Almond's *Skellig* is due to open on Broadway in March.

As usual, no firm news on the availability of Sutherland House for next year's Lunchtime Theatre season but, if all else fails, we have some double-bills planned for our



Top: Paul Leonard with Jill Freud in *Holiday Snap*. Above: Mark Jackson, Rosanna Miles, Richard Gibson, Paul Leonard, Amy Price and Richard Emerson in *Cowardy Custard*. (All pictures on this page by James Laws)

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'Sundays at Seven' programme at the Theatre.

I hope I haven't sounded too boastful about the Season but I have been hugely encouraged to know that so many of you returned to see plays for a second time.

We all know that 2011 may be difficult but we have one great advantage—being an unsubsidised Company, there is no grant for them to take away!

Jill Freud



Charles Davies and Paul Mooney in *Dangerous Obsession*.



Sidi at her spinning wheel in Coward's Custard which she also choreographed. (photo: James Laws)

I find it hard to realise that yet another year has gone as I sit here at my desk writing to you again with the rain beating against the windows. Where did those delightful warm evenings at the theatres go? Nevertheless, even as I write, the next Season is stirring as we plan the 2011 AGM, the Member's evening and the Fête.

As your Trustees we continue to meet regularly to discuss the main business of the Trust, that of helping the Company wherever we can and

assisting young students to achieve their goals in studying the Performing Arts.

This year there was much increased interest in our Bursaries and a healthy number of high-quality applicants. We are delighted to have been able to offer five Bursaries this year. On pages 4 and 5 you can read about all the successful applicants.

The Trustees take this duty very seriously indeed as it becomes more difficult to find funds to help the Arts. There is a happier side, though, when we hear of the successes of our past students.

I hope you agree that the past Season was one of the best! I had the honour of being part of it in *Coward's Custard*. As ever the Company was a refreshing mix of old and new faces, and the Town seemed full of the actors on their bikes like a flock of colourful birds!

I would like to thank my fellow Trustees for their support throughout this year and to wish you all a happy and healthy Christmas and New Year.

Sidi Scott, Chairman, FESPA

Sidi wrote her piece just before checking in to Papworth Hospital for a long-scheduled operation. I am sure that all Friends will wish her a speedy return home and a complete return to her accustomed health and vigour.

Ed.

FOR YOUR 2011 DIARY

Friday 15 April - FESPA AGM. Walberswick Village Hall. 6.30 for 7.00

Friday 24 June - *Friends'* Evening at Westons. 6.30. Bring a plate of eats. Collect your supply of programme cards for distribution in your area

Sunday 26 June - FESPA Theatre Fete at Westons. Gates open at 1.00

Thursday 7 July - Southwold Season opens

Monday 25 July - Aldeburgh Season opens (provisional date—to be confirmed)

Saturday 27 August - Last night in Aldeburgh (provisional date—to be confirmed)

Saturday 10 September - Last night in Southwold

FRIENDS GROW IN NUMBERS & IN GENEROSITY

Our Treasurer, Peter Gibbs, reports that our recruitment efforts have begun to pay off with a small but significant net increase in FESPA membership this year. A number of *Friends* have been particularly successful in introducing new members and we are grateful for their pro-active help. Do, please, keep up the missionary work. During the Season, we made sure that all the free copies of FESPA News on our foyer table had membership forms inserted in them and this, too, has helped to swell applications.

Your Trustees are especially impressed by the surge in generosity of our *Friends* whose spontaneous donations this year swelled by £1000 to £3400. A big thank-you to all who contributed, especially those listed below whose donations were of £25 and above.

The Summer Fete and associated Grand Draw were another great success story this year, resulting in a net profit of some £4500, fractionally up on last year, despite the economic gloom and the competing attractions on offer that very afternoon... Wangford's undulating belly dancers on the field of Walberswick v. Our Lads on the field of Bloemfontein...No contest!

Another fine fund-raising success this year has been our Chairman, Sidi Scott's lunchtime Joyce Grenfell show *Letters from Aldeburgh* at the Wentworth Hotel, Aldeburgh in May with Jonathan Rutherford at the piano. The lunchtime performance was a memorable success and raised over £300.

Thanks to the good offices of our Subscription Secretary, Jenny Bird, her employer, HSBC, has once again donated a very welcome cheque for £500.

Finally, thank-you to the many *Friends* and other theatregoers who purchased picture-postcards from the FESPA foyer table. Our honesty jam jar showed a profit of £90 which included several generous keep-the-changes.

The following *Friends* made donations of £25 or more in addition to their subscriptions:

**Miss A Ainscough
Mr & Mrs D J Baggott
Mr & Mrs R Barker
Mr & Mrs M R Bird
Mr & Mrs A G Bayley
Mr & Mrs B Bradnum
Mr G Burnett
Baroness Byford
Mrs B L Carter
Mrs P Cuerden
Mr & Mrs M Cunliffe
Mr & Mrs R O Greener
Mrs T Heyworth
Mrs S A Higgins
Ms J Jackson
Mr & Mrs M Jones
Mr & Mrs J R Neicho
Mr C Newens
Mr & Mrs S F Pears
Mrs C Pearson
Mr B Raven
Ms C Sheridan
Mr & Mrs J A Symes
Mr & Mrs G Tinnion
Dr R E Watkins**

ABIGAIL - STILL PARTYING 33 YEARS ON

Director, Richard Frost reflects on the pleasures and perils of daring to revisit a cult classic



When Jill and Tony chose Mike Leigh's *Abigail's Party* for the season and asked me to direct it, I was delighted but also a little apprehensive. The BBC Television version was broadcast in 1977 during an ITV strike and was therefore seen by millions. Since then the play has acquired an almost cult status. Devoted fans even hold parties where they dress up, recite favourite lines, hand round 'cheesy-pineapple ones' and dance to Demis Roussos.

It was developed through intensive and lengthy improvisations with the actors, but was then turned into a script which remained unchanged. Contrary to popular belief it was never improvised during actual performance.

The first question was: should we change the location from outer London to eradicate memories of the original? We toyed with the idea of moving it to Birmingham or Liverpool but the rhythms of the dialogue are unmistakably Southern. Could we change the period and bring it up to date? Hardly! It is so much a satire on the aspirations and tastes of the new 'upwardly mobile' class that emerged in Britain during the seventies. And how satisfying it was on our



opening night in Aldeburgh when the lights went up and the audience murmured with nostalgic pleasure (or was it incredulity?) at Maurice Rubens' perfect recreation of 1970s decor, Ian Sheward's meticulously researched period props and Vissey Safavi's beautifully chosen costumes.

Costing the play was particularly daunting because audiences who know it have such strong memories of the actors who created the parts. The actress playing Beverly always faces a 'no-win' situation; it is either: "Oh, she's exactly like Alison Steadman", or "She's nothing like the original". Rebecca Raybone was very conscious of this and in no way did she offer an impersonation. Jonathan Ashley, Louise Shuttleworth and Ben Tillett were not only ideal as Laurence, Angela and her husband Tony, but also had the advantage of all being Essex born, so that the sound was authentic.



Ben Tillett as Tony, Rebecca Raybone as Beverly, Pauline Whitaker as Susan, Jonathan Ashley as Laurence and Louise Shuttleworth as Angela.
(Photo: James Laws)

Newcomer Pauline Whitaker was perfect as middle class outsider Susan (mother of the unseen Abigail) who, as Pauline observed, thought she had been invited to supper, which is why, after being plied with endless drinks, she became poorly.

Rehearsals were rewarding and fun as the actors explored their characters, relationships and sub-text — as in all good drama there is so much that is not said. The endless pouring of drinks was a play in itself. We worked out that during the action 25 Gin and Tonics, 5 Bacardi and Cokes, 3 Whiskies, 2 Brandies and 2 Light Ales are consumed. The only way to keep track of them as we rehearsed was to label the glasses. Our excellent stage management team spent most of their time washing up and refilling bottles with coloured water. We decided not to repeat

"...characterisation and timing were top-class throughout and the tensions between the couples were carefully built by the cast directed by Richard Frost. A fine, polished production with which to bring the Southwold and Aldeburgh summer theatre season to an end."
David Green, Ipswich Evening Star

the experiment of one company who held a rehearsal with the real drinks... They didn't reach the second Act! Smoking is also a necessary element as Laurence and Beverly force cigarettes and cigars on their guests. Our cast consisted of four non-smokers and one who had only recently given up. All insisted on indulging for the sake of the play.

Abigail's Party was a bold choice for the company but a worthwhile venture. It was certainly a memorable experience for all of us who participated in the production.



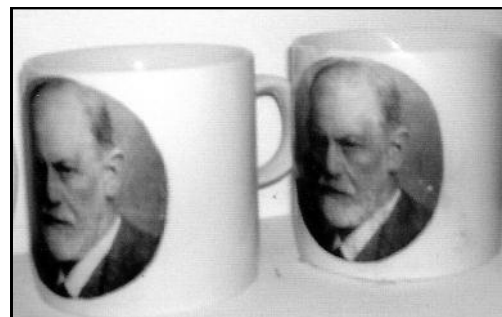
The Freudian secret lurking in every Rubens set!

It's a little known and slightly geekish fact that every season there is a trivial but fascinating covert 'theme' running through every set — virtually imperceptible to audiences but imposing intolerable additional burdens on the already stretched ingenuity of stage management! It's Maurice's way of "keeping 'em on their toes", he says. This year he decreed that the subliminal theme, appropriately enough, was to be Sigmund Freud himself.

How many *Friends* spotted the Great Man as the author of Sidi's useful phrase book in *Cowardy Custard*? Or as a Portuguese net-mending fisherman in *Holiday Snap*? Or as the subject of the Ben Shahn portrait drawing hanging in the hallway in *Dangerous Obsession*? Or as a tiny carved head

hidden in the pillared hall of *My Cousin Rachel*?

Maurice tells us that the most challenging exercise in pointless product placement this year was posed by *Abigail's Party*. Keen eyed front-rowers might just have spotted these kitsch souvenirs occupying pride of place in Bev's kitchen...



Freudian Sip?

THE FESPA CLASS OF 2010

Bursaries unearth a rich new seam of local performance potential

There was a record number of applicants for FESPA Bursaries this summer and the levels of talent and potential that emerged among budding performing arts students in East Suffolk surprised and delighted our selection panel and gave them plenty to consider. In the end they decided to make five awards this year, instead of the customary two or three and your Trustees agreed to increase the total available fund accordingly.

Just to recap: the Bursaries are intended to provide financial support and encouragement to deserving students of the performing arts who either live in East Suffolk or have strong local connections and who have already obtained a place in a recognised college.

This year the successful applicants are all performers and include two dancers and three actors. Here is a brief introduction to them as they embark on their chosen courses. In future issues we hope to catch up with their progress as their careers develop.

Florence Barker, age 13 Classical Ballet at the Royal Ballet School



Florence is one of just two students in her age group invited to join this year's Royal Ballet Lower School at White Lodge, Richmond Park. It is an enormous tribute to the talent and determination of this young dancer from the Suffolk village of Mendham. Florence went to the village primary school and then on to Hartismere School in Eye. She

was described by her teachers as one of the brightest pupils in her year. But, even at the age of three it was in dance that she really shone. When she was nine she went with other girls in her class to a charity dance school called 'Norfolk Scholars' and was spotted by a teacher from the RBS who just happened to be visiting. Days later, the RBS phoned to invite Florence to attend a class at their Covent Garden Studios following which she was offered a place on the School's Associate Programme and thereafter attended regular Saturday classes in London. In her first attempt to join the Royal Ballet School itself, at the age of 10, she narrowly missed being accepted. She was determined to try again and embarked on extra formal training at the

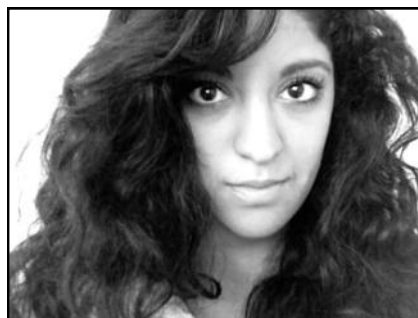
Saxtead School of Dance. This year, the hard work paid off. A generous proportion of Florence's fees will be covered by the Government's Music and Dance scheme but there is a hefty residual parental contribution of £5,500 a year – well beyond the resources of Florence's parents, Toby and Lorraine. The FESPA Bursary has, therefore, been a timely addition to the coffers. When we last heard from Toby, he told us: "Florence seems to be settling in well. The training is, as anticipated, very tough indeed... but she is thriving and enjoying herself hugely, and doesn't seem to be missing home much - if at all... which is goodI suppose!"

Corall-Jay Blowers, age 18 Three-year course at Masters Performing Arts College, Rayleigh, Essex

Masters is one of the leading colleges in the country for intensive career training in dance and musical theatre. For Corall, whose family home is in Carlton Colville, the offer of a place there was a dream come true. Her mother Claire tells us that Corall has lived for dancing since she was eight – ballet, tap, modern, street – you name it! After passing her GCSEs at Kirkley High in Lowestoft she enrolled in a foundation course at The Venue of Performing Arts in Oulton Broad where, for a year, she has been coached in preparation for entering the world of musical theatre. The principal there, Libby Hawkins, remarks how "at home" Corall is on stage: "She lights up for any audience and is a joy to watch." The course which she is now embarking on carries fees which her parents describe as "huge" and Corall has been working part-time as a waitress throughout her foundation course to contribute to the cost. "The bursary will help take pressure off my Mum and Dad. They have always done their best to support whatever I have wanted to do."



Yasmeen Khalaf, age 18 Acting foundation course at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art



Yasmeen is from Lowestoft but went to Langley School in Norwich where latterly she was Head Girl, leaving with three excellent A Levels. Yasmeen has long had a fierce determination to make her career as an actress. So, alongside

her school work, she has been studying towards her LAMDA qualification, finally gaining Gold Medals in both Scripted Acting and Devised Performance. Her tutor describes her as a student of "extraordinary talent". She is a member of the

National Youth Theatre and has worked as a volunteer at The Lowestoft Seagull Theatre. Whilst her acceptance by RADA is a huge tribute to her (there are more than 20 applicants for every place) the financial burden is overwhelming and, even after taking out student loans, Yasmeen is faced with an £8,600 bill. Thanks to further personal loans, money saved from weekend and holiday work and the FESPA Bursary, she has scraped the required sum together. "Nothing inspires and motivates me in the way acting does," says Yasmeen. "Through it I have learned who I am and have grown because of it. This bursary will help me achieve a goal which I have set my mind on since I was fourteen."

Alexandra Rowles, age 19 Drama course at the University of Northampton



Since her first taste of acting at the age of four, Alex has never seen herself on any other career path. Neither has her mother, Debbie, who "knew from the start that she was destined to be a real drama queen one day". Born and bred in Leiston and educated at Leiston Middle and High Schools, Alex fulfilled predictions by excelling in drama and theatre studies at every stage. Her Head of Drama, Donna Burch, says: "From the

moment she arrived, she made a large impact within the school community, becoming involved in all the Christmas productions and school concerts." She was Molly in *Annie*, Puck in *Midsummer Night's Dream* and Oliver in *Oliver*. In this, her final year, she was awarded the Jane Zarins Drama Student of the Year Award for her contribution to Performing Arts. In the last couple of years Alex has been working as a waitress in her spare time at the Thorpness Brasserie & Emporium and The Lighthouse at Aldeburgh. She has loved the work and valued the small income it generated. Ideally she

would have liked to continue with similar part-time work in Northampton in order to supplement her grant. However she realises that the intensity of her course work will make this out of the question. "This is where the FESPA Bursary will benefit me so much," she says, "giving me that little extra security as I start university life." Alex's mum is pleased it's Northampton... "As a close family, we know that it's far enough away for her to have to do her own washing but close enough to bring her home to us every so often!"

Daniel Walker, age 19 Theatre Arts course at East 15 Acting School



Daniel, whose family home is in Lowestoft, already has an impressive portfolio of performance skills to his name including playing the piano and guitar, singing, dance – even juggling and slapstick! But his main love is acting. In this he has proved his adaptability in a wide range of contrasting roles both in school productions and with respected local companies. This year alone he has worked with Yakety Yak (playing Laurie in *Little Women*), Shoestring Productions (Ralph in *Bouncers*) and Nudge Productions (Wilson in Joe Orton's *The Ruffian on the Stair*). Daniel was recently accepted as a member of the prestigious National Youth Theatre where he attended a two-week workshop this summer. He describes his acceptance by East 15 as "a fantastic opportunity in which I intend to learn and develop as a performer. I come from a low-income household and my parents support me in any way they can. I myself work as many hours as I can to help fund these opportunities. I would like to say thank you to everyone at FESPA. The generous bursary I have received has changed my life, and I am very grateful."

TEN GREEN BOTTLES AND OTHER DELIGHTS DISCOVERED IN THE SECRET GARDEN

The Southwold Lunchtime Theatre season is a very special ritual with a loyal club-like following of sandwich-munching groupies. This year we enjoyed a particularly rich and varied diet given extra piquancy by the awareness that it could be the last-ever season spent in the 'secret garden' of Sutherland House.

By turns we were plunged into the pathos of Alan Bennett's 'Talking Head', *The Hand of God*, performed deliciously by Mary Roscoe... knocked sideways (and several other alarming ways too) during *Sex with Searles*... treated altogether more gently and more lyrically by Patience Tomlinson and David Timson (*If Music and Sweet Poetry Agree*) and by Alister Cameron and Moir Leslie (*Great British Eccentrics*)... suffered the agonies of *Hancock's last Half-Hour* with the remarkable Simon Snashall...got spoken to like cows by the funny and original Claire Carroll in *Beef Encounter*...

...and last but by no means least, blown away by a beautifully written, wonderfully, comically poignant monologue *Ten Green Bottles* by Graham Richards, performed to perfection by Pauline Whitaker.

That's Pauline in the picture enjoying a *Coronation Street* moment in the 'secret garden' with Peter Baldwin (left) - the long-time on/off husband of the Cabin's Mavis, and our own Stephen Hancock who was Ernie Bishop, Corrie's popular local photographer who died of shotgun wounds in 1978 and looks none the worse for it. Both had come especially to see Pauline perform.



Pauline Whitaker, star of *Ten Green Bottles*, pictured in the Sutherland House garden with Peter Baldwin (left) and Stephen Hancock. Pauline was later to become Abigail's desperately anxious and inadvertently gin-soaked Mum in Abigail's Party. Photo courtesy of Maurice Rubens.

THE STORY OF SOUTHWOLD'S THEATRE

We had hoped that in this issue James Laws would tell the story of Caryl Jenner's 1950s mobile rep company but unexpected London teaching commitments have intervened. James now hopes to prepare his piece for our Spring issue. Meanwhile we have received three interesting responses to earlier chapters of our history...

1. A tendency to extravagance

Michael Cole of York discovered the FESPA website www.fespa.co.uk while he was attempting to research a photo album he had acquired containing 20 photos of a 1925 amateur production of *The School for Scandal* in Southwold. Michael runs a web-based business trading in unique and rare collectibles: www.uniqueorrare.com. Noting our ongoing theatre history series, he very generously offered FESPA the opportunity to reproduce these pictures. It turns out that the photos are by the renowned Southwold photographer and Mayor, Frederick Jenkins, whose equally distinguished son, Barrett Jenkins was in the cast. Barrett's daughter, Ann Thornton still lives in Southwold and Michael Cole kindly donated a solo print of him - in costume - as a memento for her.

We searched Southwold Museum's archive for references to this production and were rewarded with a newspaper review of what was, in fact, the inaugural production of "The Southwold Players". It played for two nights at the Pier Pavilion and proceeds went to the local branch of the RNLI with Coxswain and crew of the Southwold lifeboat in the audience.

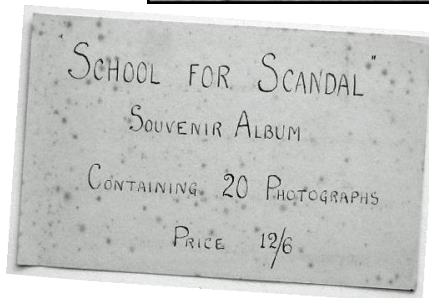
The reviewer is generous in his praise: "The Southwold circle of social pleasures has been brightened by the inception of the Players... Whereas it is frequently difficult to be kind in writing of amateurs, with Southwold it is easy to be genuinely complimentary..." There is, however, just a hint of a carp lest the reader feel the review to be a little too uncritical: "So was it that the ripe humour and fidelity to human nature was conveyed - save now and again for a tendency to extravagance in accentuating the necessary contrasts - with an ease which left those slight imperfections forgotten..."

As a fascinating postscript, during our conversation with Michael Cole, it emerged that he went to school with our own Ben Marriner—Organiser of the Theatre Fete and recently co-opted to the FESPA Trustees.



Miss Mary Debney was described as "highly praiseworthy as Mrs Candour".

Violet Southern as Lady Sneerwell "sensed the slandering idea well" while Frank Jacobs as Joseph Surface "was a convincing impersonation of a man of the world."



The hand-lettered frontispiece for the album which was evidently produced in a very limited edition



Cowardy Custard: Far left: Mark Jackson, Moir Leslie & Richard Emerson. Above left: Kate Middleton & Paul Leonard. **Holiday Snap:** Above right: Rosanna Miles, Ben Tillett & Paul Leonard. **Dangerous Obsession:** Right: Louise Shuttleworth & Charles Davies.



2. A theatrical dynasty uncovered on the FESPA website

Tim Beckett emailed us from London, having landed on the FESPA website whilst researching his family tree. He had Googled his great great uncle Fred Beckett. What caught his attention was the reference in Paul Scriven's article (November 2009, P.6) to "Miss Linington's Dramatic Company under the Management of Mr Fred Beckett" which had brought a production of *Trilby* to the Southwold Drill Hall in 1898. Tim knew that Lizzie Linington was also an ancestor of his and suspected that there were other relatives in the cast list. Frustratingly, the reproduction of the playbill we had included was too small to read. We emailed him an enlarged version. Tim was enthralled by what he discovered...

"I have been researching my family history for a couple of years. Once I got back a few generations I found lots of actors and Lizzie Linington and her husband Frederick Lorton Loncrain were notable if not famous. (The Fred mentioned here is Lizzie's son; her husband had died 6 years earlier) Lizzie was clearly a remarkable woman. Frederick's stepfather was John George Beckett, also an actor, as was his mother Sarah Ann Jesson, so he adopted the stage name of Fred Beckett.

In *Trilby* Lizzie is not performing but 4 of Fred and Lizzie's 5 children Paul, Ruby, Georgie and Ada (by then married) all are. Even

the exotic sounding Carl Sisto is a family member (real name Frederick Charles Preece).

They did start them young in those days; Ruby is listed in the 1881 census when she was aged 3 as being an 'Actress Comedian—The Little Wonder'. One of Fred's half-brothers was also called John George Beckett (same name as his father). JGB jnr was my great great grandfather and an actor. He married Clara Garside Neville (you guessed it—an actress and a daughter of an actor) whose half brother was Thomas Henry Gartside Neville, one of the most famous actors of his day.

Lizzie Linington ran her company for 30 years so it is likely she would have visited Southwold a number of times. After Lizzie died in 1902 (aged 51) her daughter Ada took over the company.

A fascinating article on Lizzie Linington's company can be found at www.19.bbk.ac.uk/index.php/19/article/viewFile/498/358

With thanks to the Southwold Museum & Historical Society



3. 'Post' Script on Christopher Rowan-Robinson's bookshop

When there's any kind of a dispute about street addresses, who better to consult than the postman? In our last issue, thanks to Mr Ronnie Waters, we thought we had cleared up the question of whether the location of the bookshop run by actor/director Christopher Rowan-Robinson was at No 80a or 82 Southwold High Street. The answer, we said, was 'both' - at different times in the '40s and '50s. Richard Fisk was a Southwold postman from 1947 and he wrote to us as follows:

"I found this article very interesting. As said, the Solebay Bookshop was in 82 High Street but I cannot recall it being elsewhere [in the High Street] other than 82 during my postal delivery days.

My first memory [of its owners] was of Mrs Neame who lived at Walberswick, and Mrs Read and her son who was rather a shy young man. No 80 was 'Rutlands' [children's clothes and toys] run by Misses Davey and Emerson and, some time before, Baxter the butchers opened next door; a small part of this was used to advertise Mumfords' goods.

Mr Christopher Rowan-Robinson did run a bookshop in 18 Queen Street which was formerly the 'International Stores', now the Queen Street Pharmacy. One of my special books is one I purchased from there: 'Ask the Fellows who Cut the Hay' by George Ewart Evans with a lovely dust cover on it.

Happy memories from my postal career 1947—1992.

Sincerely, Richard M Fisk PMN 507 Rtd."



Abigail's Party: Left: Rebecca Raybone & Louise Shuttleworth. Below left: Pauline Whitaker, Jonathan Ashley & Louise Shuttleworth. **My Cousin Rachel:** Centre bottom: Clive Flint & Mark Jackson., Inset: Antonia Christophers. Right: Imogen Slaughter.



Our thanks to James Laws for 'Snaps of the Season. Don't forget to visit www.fespa.co.uk for more—in colour.



Anthony Falkingham, Co-artistic Director and Administrator of The Jill Freud Company drops some familiar names, traces some fascinating connections and documents the cramped and uncomfortable birth of one of our most illustrious performing arts power houses...

Bristol Old Vic Theatre School

I think most of you will remember that my being on the staff of the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School (Let's use its acronym BOVTS) is the reason I am a member of The Jill Freud Company today.

My old principal Nat Brenner, became Artistic Director here in Southwold and recommended that I write to Jill for a job. The year that I wrote (1989) Richard Howard had directed Nicholas Geake in *A Man For All Seasons* in a production that subsequently went to Pakistan. Both Nick & Richard had trained at BOVTS.

In the seasons that followed we have had numerous former students from there, including my fellow director, Richard Frost and, in recent seasons: Simon Snashall, Jamie Chapman, Simon McCoy, Mark Jackson and Rosanna Miles.

I was a student at BOVTS in 1967- '69 and, among my class-mates was Tim Pigott-Smith, Simon Cadell, Jeremy Irons and Christopher Biggins. I taught acting there from 1974 to '78 and my students included, Miranda Richardson, Jenny Seagrove, Amanda Redman, Greta Scacchi, Trudie Styler, Daniel Day-Lewis, Alex Jennings and Simon Shepherd. The school can be justly proud of its inheritance, but how did it all start?

Beginnings

First its name, the 'Vic', is, of course, short for 'Victoria' as in the Royal Victoria Theatre in Waterloo Road, London, which became home to the famous Old Vic Theatre Company founded by Lilian Baylis in 1912. The London Old Vic Theatre School was founded by the theatrical genius Michel Saint-Denis in the war-torn London of 1947 and survived only five years. Meanwhile, in Bristol, an off-shoot of the London Old Vic was founded in 1946 at the historic Theatre Royal, King Street, which had been in continuous use since 1766. The new theatre company opened with a production of Farquhar's *The Beaux' Stratagem* on the 19th February 1946 and the opening of the school followed on the 21st October the same year.

Opposite the end of the street that led to the Stage Door of the theatre, was 27 Queen Street and up a flight of stairs, on the top floor lay the one room that was The Bristol Old Vic Theatre School. The small, dedicated staff were augmented the following month by a man who would give the school its international reputation — the legendary Rudi Shelley.

The school struggled on in these cramped premises for ten years, by making use of the theatre bars, sometimes the stage itself and the hall of St. Nicholas' Church School, nearby.

Change of fortune

By the early '50s it seemed inconceivable that the Company would ever be able to afford to rehouse its school. But its fate was about to change. In the Spring of 1954, the Company decided to put on a home-grown musical, *Salad Days*,

The reaction to it was unexpectedly enthusiastic and it transferred to the West End where it became a popular success alongside such extravaganzas as *Oklahoma* and *Guys and Dolls*.

The production gave £7,000 to the School and this, together with a grant from the Dulverton Trust, provided the funds to purchase 1-2, Downside Road, for £6,000 with a further £12,000 spent on the conversion. The new building was officially opened in June 1956 by Dame Sybil Thorndyke.

The fourth principal of the school, appointed in 1963 was Nat Brenner. Nat served all the time that I was a both a student and a teacher there, eventually retiring in 1980.

So we complete the circle, for in 1985, it was Nat's friendship with Peter O'Toole that was instrumental in securing from the latter a guarantee of £2,500 together with a further investment of £3,000. This provided the funds to rehearse two productions at the same time, thus lengthening the rehearsal time and setting the pattern for years to come.

FETE DEFIES ECONOMIC GRAVITY

Another brilliant summer's day, a huge crowd of visitors and the best range of attractions and entertainments we can remember. It all added up to an unmitigated success and the satisfaction of continuing our string of recent year-on-year record net profits. Huge thanks to organiser, Ben Marriner, to Val Anderson and to all the hard working stall holders and contributors. Special gratitude to Michael and Joy Venn who once again ran the Grand Draw which itself generated £2700—£200 more than last year. Michael & Joy have agreed to do it once more next year but after that intend to retire. We'll be looking for a replacement draw organiser for 2012. So have a think!

2010 Draw: Main winners

1. Top prize: 2 tickets for Billy Elliot plus two nights at the Landmark Hotel— Mrs D F Fisk, Reydon
2. 5-night holiday in Walberswick— Margaret Curwen, Ipswich
3. £50 vouchers for Red Lion, Southwold—Miss C Harvey, London N10
4. Golf for 4 at High Lodge—Alan Ogborn, Beccles
5. Dinner for 2 at the Wentworth Hotel, Aldeburgh—Mrs Zena Massey, Aldeburgh
6. Voucher for 2 seats at the Wolsey Theatre, Ipswich— E French, Reydon
7. Cream tea for 4 at the Potter's Wheel, Walberswick—Mrs A Oatway, Kettering

8. Barbecue lunch for 4 at The Anchor, Walberswick—Alan Ryley, Felixstowe
 9. £25 voucher from Tinkers of Walberswick—T Carter, Henham
 10. Blow-dry at the Cut Above, Southwold—Brad Abrahams, Woodbridge
 11. £15 voucher from Woottens of Wenhaston—S Braithwaite
- Congratulations to the winners and our thanks to all our generous prize contributors not least to Jill Freud for organising our fabulous first prize.



Tracy Marriott's Show Stoppers