

CHAIR'S REPORT FOR 2017

I'm going to report briefly on the past year, and then turn to plans for the year to come.

The past year

2017 was a busy and successful year, sadly marked by the loss of our former Chair and longstanding Committee member Helen Bennett in June. I am sure Helen would have been delighted with the response to the change of venue for the Society's meetings here at the Actors Centre, now that we have had a full year of the new format for our meetings.

Meetings and performances

We held nine meetings at the Actors Centre in 2017: there were six script-in-hand performances and three talks – and a very eclectic mix they were.

January saw the inaugural script-in-hand performance, with *Shaw Cornered* directed by Maurice Thorogood with Hayward Morse as Shaw. In February, Lorenzo Mason marked the centenary of the 1917 Russian Revolution with *Annajanska the Bolshevik Empress*, followed in March by *Far Fetched Fables* directed by Michael Friend. April saw *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets* directed by Jonas Cemm.

In May we welcomed Barbara Roisman Cooper for a talk about the filming of *Major Barbara*, and in June Alice McEwan of Shaw's Corner presented an illustrated talk about Shaw and May Morris, including the May Morris Valentine which she had discovered during her research.

Our autumn season opened in September with "The British Party System", a playlet drawn from Shaw's treatise *Everybody's Political What's What*, devised by Lorenzo Mason. In October Jonas Cemm presented *How He Lied to her Husband*, and the year closed with an evening of readings from Shaw's art, music and theatre criticism devised by Richard-Digby Day with Toni Kanal – topped up with a reading of the first part of *Village Wooing*.

I would like to thank Evelyn Ellis for organising the programme of meetings, the directors and speakers, and of course the actors, drawn from our own newly-formed company, who gave of their time and expertise. We're all delighted to welcome the actor members to the Shaw Society – and it's great that they support each other and come to the meetings, giving us a wider mix of attendees and the opportunity for very lively and interesting discussions.

Particular thanks go to Jonas Cemm for recruiting actor members to the Society, and assembling and organising the actors company, giving the Society a brilliant new direction.

The Shavian

There were three editions of *The Shavian*, in Spring, Autumn and Winter 2017, with again a varied mix of original features, research and academic article, book reviews, theatre reviews and favourite items including Shaw's Corner's Corner and the Playreading Group. I am

pleased that we are now getting proposals for items for *The Shavian* from members of the International Shaw Society as well as our own members, giving the journal an international flavour as well as focussing on what is unique and special about the Shaw Society in the UK. I would like to thank all the contributors, and Martin Wright for his work on the production process including design and layout, illustrations and copyright permissions. Thanks too to proofreaders Barbara Smoker and Evelyn Ellis.

Playreading Group

The playreading group led and organised by Alan Knight met regularly throughout the year, covering a very distinctive choice of plays, and beginning with *The Best of Friends*, which portrays the relationship through correspondence between Shaw and an Anglican nun Dame Laura MacLachlan. Playwrights represented included Tom Stoppard, Oscar Wilde, Alan Ayckbourn, John Godber, Brian Freeland, William Golding, Harley Granville-Barker, and Trevor Griffiths. The Playreading Group is very popular, and warm thanks go to Alan for all his hard work in drawing the programme together – and getting copies, no mean task!

Website and social media

We have been well served on the communication side by the Shaw Society website, managed by Peter Sims – again, thanks are due to Peter. We now have a social media presence on both Facebook and Twitter, with links on the website – and thanks to Jonas for making energetic use of Twitter to raise the Society's profile.

Shaw and H G Wells Societies Joint Conference 23 September

Finally, in relation to the past year, a special event of 2017 – the joint conference of the Shaw and H G Wells Societies held at the London School of Economics on 23 September 2017. The conference was well attended, with a number of speakers from the Shaw Society, with papers on a variety of topics very well received. We hope to have further collaboration with the H G Wells Society in the future, and a joint outing to Shaw's Corner is being organised for later this year.

Plans for the Year Ahead

In addition to the usual activities of the Shaw Society, the Committee has identified several development projects for the year ahead:

Governance: to recruit at least one new Trustee to fulfil the requirement of six Trustees; to review the constitution in the light of Charity Commission reporting requirements and also our new direction with the actor members' company SHAW2020

Digital strategy: to redevelop the Shaw Society website so as to give new features including access on mobile phones, ability to pay subscriptions online, and a members' area; and to have an integrated approach to online communications and content including social media and the Shaw Institute; and to provide online access to *The Shavian*

SHAW2020: to develop further the vision and plan for the actors' company, preparing for a full launch when Shaw comes out of copyright

Fundraising: to develop a plan for fundraising to support our activities, building on the current base, and with a provisional target of £1500 for the coming year. Fundraising and will be overseen by the Trustees.

A full report will be brought to the next AGM, with interim updates to members on these projects as needed.

Anne Wright, Chair