

# **The International Noël Coward Society**

**November 2015**

Officers of the Noël Coward Society met in the summer of 2015 to discuss the future of the organisation with a view to consolidating the achievements to date whilst establishing the longer term sustainability of its activities on a stronger footing.

The committee felt that although the Society has generated a significant level of interest in Noël Coward in the fifteen years since its inception, and had involved members in a wide range of activities and events, the time had come to seek new ways of generating interest and participation in the world of Noël Coward by adopting a more collaborative relationship with other key organisations.

## **Outline**

The principal organisations in the UK with a key interest in Noël Coward include:

- The Noël Coward Foundation
- The Noël Coward Estate
- The Noël Coward Archive Trust (newly established)
- The Noël Coward Society (Trading as Noël Coward Limited).

## **Objective**

- To align the organisations within a collaborative arrangement that facilitates the dissemination of information, expertise and news on all things relating to the work of Noël Coward.
- To increase the membership and attract younger members.
- To attract those people with an interest in Noel Coward who might not want to be members of a 'Society'.

## **Background**

The Noël Coward Society operates under the trading name "Noël Coward Limited". Although we are currently constituted as a company limited by guarantee, the Society is in fact a not-for-profit organisation with charitable objectives. The Society has not, however, pursued charitable status.

The Society currently provides a service to the membership which includes:

- A Quarterly Magazine (Home Chat) mailed out directly to individual members around the world.
- Access to the website and its archives.
- Advance news of forthcoming theatrical productions & publications.
- Group rates to theatre productions for Society events.
- An annual lunch in London and New York celebrating the anniversaries of Noël Coward's birth.
- Events marking major anniversaries relating to Noël Coward and his work.
- Other ad hoc events and visits organised by the committee and Society officers.

The current membership stands at around 517. Members are predominantly located in the UK (221) and the USA (261) centred on London and New York. 19 members are domiciled in Europe, 8 in Australia and 8 across the rest of the world.

The income generated by the membership fee is supplemented by a grant from the Noël Coward Foundation of £10,000 per annum. The grant is specifically to support Home Chat. Together, these monies have financed the administrative and operational costs of running the Society and producing the magazine. Recent rises in the cost of postage have necessitated a reduction in the number of mail outs produced each year. The Society now distributes the newsletter "Home Chat" on a quarterly basis. The current format is a substantial magazine produced to a professional standard that reflects the Society's specialist interests.

To re-name & restructure the Society as:

### **THE INTERNATIONAL FRIENDS OF THE NOEL COWARD FOUNDATION**

It is felt that re-branding the Society as a "Friends" organisation affiliated with the Foundation and the other key partners will have greater appeal to a wider audience, particularly among younger people for whom the connotations of the "Society" nomenclature may appear to be somewhat staid and outmoded. The Friends organisation will continue to be run and administered by the current officers of the Noel Coward Society and continue to be wholly independent. Current benefits to the members of the Society will be transferred to the Friends.

There will be many details to work out, not least of which will be the relationship between the Friends organisation and the Foundation and how to absorb and expand the current membership internationally. This will also be a good opportunity to review the way the various organisations within the Coward 'family' are connected. If the Trustees approve the current proposal in principle, a working party will be appointed to make recommendations as soon as possible.

The additional potential benefits to those who become Friends might include (to be further discussed):

- Access to the Noël Coward room at ABR by appointment for study and research purposes.
- The option of the paper edition of Home Chat.
- Access to currently restricted archive resources.
- Advanced notification of a wide range of events and productions relating to Coward and theatre studies.
- Invitation to occasional events sponsored or supported by the Foundation and its Friends.
- Information on the organisations supported by the Foundation.
- Ability to be connected to the world of Noel Coward without feeling they have to be an active member of the organisation.
- The possibility of different tiers of subscription to encourage new members.

The benefits to the Foundation, Estate and Archive Trust include:

- Direct access to the Membership.
- Helping influence the content and distribution of "Home Chat".
- Simplification of the existing Foundation grant arrangements for Home Chat.

Any of the connected Coward organisations will be able to submit articles for publication in Home Chat which will continue to be edited by John Knowles for the foreseeable future. John Knowles will commission the print and despatch of the magazine as he does currently, but will then submit invoices directly to the Foundation up to a maximum of £2,500 per quarter. This means that the Society will no longer need to receive a direct "grant" from the Foundation.

It is thought that by subsuming the Limited Company within the Foundation we will provide long-term continuity, stability and security for the Society and consolidate national and international activities within a mature and professional framework that removes unhelpful elements of financial complexity. The new organisation could also focus on promoting its benefits to new members.