

LTG Open Forum 77th AGM, 3 June 2023

The Questors Theatre, Ealing, London



Chairman Jo Matthews handed over to Nick Morley to lead the Open Forum Discussion.

1. Nick introduced the first of two guests speakers: **Mark White from ABTT (Association of British Theatre Technicians)**. Mark outlined the history of ABTT¹ which was established in 1961 based on a French idea after a conference on flexible theatres. The UK also held a similar conference and stole the idea but stressing the importance of the technician element. He noted that in France, the technician is an engineer but here 'technician' has evolved into someone not quite an engineer but someone who works with their hands. There is a perception that ABTT is only for technicians but its remit is much wider and includes those who build theatres as well as the administrators, indeed anyone who is part of the theatre community.
2. He noted that The Questors was designed by Norman Branson² who was a founder member of the Institute of Theatre Consultants. After Margaret Thatcher abolished the GLC (Greater London Council) in 1986, local licencing bodies became responsible for the rules governing theatres such as how to get the audience out in a hurry and fire curtains. In the early days, each London borough had their own set of rules so they banded together to create a single guidance which is the start of the technical standards for places of entertainment.
3. Mark showed us a large book and said "this is the bible" –, known as the Yellow Book³, that says what you need to do for H&S and things like ventilation and building standards. You need to consult this if you need to know how to do something safely. He noted that all theatres are subject to the H&S & Welfare at work Act but that it took quite a long time for amateur theatres to understand this. If a theatre, amateur or professional does something very wrong, the minimum fine is £100,000 plus 10% of the theatre's turnover. ABTT provides guidance and training and he reminded delegates that gravity and electricity are the same in amateur as in professional theatres. Trustees are responsible for everything and ABTT is open to everyone. In the early days when Alfred Emmet wanted to join and ABTT it was only for professional theatres, but they changed the rules to let Alfred and The Questors join.
4. Today, ABTT has actors as well as technicians as members and provide a wide range of courses which, if you wish to attend, you need to become a member⁴. Information is on the ABTT website along with guidance notes. He noted that the ABTT Green Book provided guidance for management and ABTT decided to amalgamate the two so there are additional chapters in the yellow book about how to run your theatre. The yellow book is updated about every 6 months. An online version is available as well as a printed version and we refer to changes – such as the fire regulations that have come out of Grenfell; Martin's Law; Strobe Lighting and its

¹ www.abtt.org.uk/who-we-are/our-history/

² Questors Archive [HERE](#)

³ www.abtt.org.uk/committees/the-abtt-safety-committee/

⁴ LTG is a member of ABTT and Mike Smith sits on the [ABTT Theatre Safety Committee](#)

LTG Open Forum 77th AGM, 3 June 2023

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impact on about 2% of the population. With regard to lighting he noted the rules that say there should be no more than four flashes a second and it has been discovered that there are more epileptic seizures using red flashing lights.

5. There is also published guidance that says that if you have a firearm on stage you must notify your local police to say when and when you are going to do it and you must have a secure cupboard. There is also guidance about immersive theatre: if you stage an event in an old warehouse there must be sufficient fire escapes and it must be structurally safe. It is possible to have a total blackout but it must be for no more than 45 seconds, and someone must have a button that holds the emergency lights off and if you have exit signs you can hold a card over the sign so it is hidden. He concluded by saying that ABTT is open to everyone and we like to say yes. We will explain how you will do your own risk assessment to make it safe.

6. **Jon Morgan Head of Sales and Marketing, Nick Hern** sent best wishes from Tamara who was sad not to be able to attend. He said he could only speak about matters specific to Nick Hern and not what others do. He noted that if you have a specific question on rights, do speak to Tamara. The Nick Hern policy on play readings is to determine what the reading is for and who will be present. The blanket policy is that if there is more than one non-participating person present at a play reading, that is a performance but Nick Hern gives groups the chance to read a script digitally for free. So, a closed door reading with a director does not need a licence. But if you have an audience that does require a licence. We want to try and say yes so do call and talk it through with us and we will see what we can do.

7. On the general issue of licencing people ask why they cannot stage a specific play. We always want to say yes to everything but we are not necessarily the final arbiter. There may be a professional production taking place or a TV adaptation is being shown. If we can point to a West End production that is clear, but a professional production might be planned either in a theatre or on tour and this is why the rights might be refused. Sometimes a producer will take up an option but if the production does not happen, they may release the rights. He asked delegates to please let us know if you want to stage something because they may be able to argue your case. They recently came to the agreement with the agents that an amateur company could stage a play but they had to agree to a check list such as whether the image was too like the professional poster. But we will let you know when you can perform the production. Never assume the rights are available: always check before you start rehearsing and advertising that the rights are available. It does not usually take long to get an answer.

8. On the question of videoing a production, you can video no more than 3 mins of a full-length play but we have no restriction on the text but, if the play is short, the 3 mins limit may be reduced.

LTG Open Forum 77th AGM, 3 June 2023

The Questors Theatre, Ealing, London



9. Eddie Redfern noted that Nick Hern gave a 30% discount on plays for LTG members and they offer free shipping on orders over £40. James McCann, Thame Players had started streaming during COVID and found it difficult to find someone who understood what that meant and how many would watch it. Jon confirmed that during COVID, Nick Hern had established a policy for plays shown online but they needed to know the platform and the links to be used. Each live stream is a performance and each day the stream is up that is a performance for one day. The forms now ask if there will be an online element and any issues we will discuss them with you.
10. Nick thanked Mark and Jon for their very valuable contributions.
11. Mike Smith, NLO, spoke about Martyn's Law ([draft Terrorism \(Protection of Premises\) Bill](#)) and noted that no amateur theatre had been subject to a terrorist attack but since the Manchester arena tragedy, there had been 14 terrorist events. Delegates needed to think about their theatre's capacity: a theatre's capacity is the number of seats plus anyone else who could be in the theatre – cast and crew and bar, box office, front of house people. The basic tier is under 100 capacity, the standard tier is between 100 and 800 and the enhanced tier is over 800. LTG has no-one in the highest category and most of our theatre fall in the standard tier. The Home Office have talked about a proportionate approach but they have confirmed that theatres will be a qualified activity so LTG will follow developments.
12. The Bill is before parliament and has all party support so a general election is unlikely to change the direction of travel. After the Act is passed there will be a period in which venues will need to prepare. There will be an obligation to have a preparedness plan which will cover volunteer staff who will need to know what to do in case of a terrorist attack. Questions to consider are detailed in the draft guidance ([Standard Terrorism Evaluation](#)) and guidance on completing it [HERE](#) and include issues such as how will you warn people – an announcement over the PA or will someone walk on stage? You will need to say how you might cope with a lockdown and you will need to know your points of entry and have a plan to evacuate your premises. This is different from a fire alarm but there is the same element of people in the theatre knowing what to do. There will also need to be a plan to call the emergency services and have relevant phone numbers to hand. You will need to make sure your First Aid and Fire Safety procedures and equipment is in working order and available. There will also be a need to alert neighbouring properties. The Home Office says you will be able to write your plan in 6 hours and have it available for inspection and review it annually.
13. There will be an inspectorate set up to ensure compliance and consultation with the voluntary sector. Mike noted that volunteers in LTG Member theatres are often older and may not be happy to deal with terrorism, but they will need to know how to react to an incident. Mike

LTG Open Forum 77th AGM, 3 June 2023

The Questors Theatre, Ealing, London



noted the information available on the [Protect UK Website](#) and LTG recommends that each theatre has someone who will prepare the plan and undertake training. We do not want to discourage volunteers but this is something that all LTG Members will need to address. There will need to be awareness training so that staff and volunteers know and understand their responsibilities. There is yet no timetable for the bill and its introduction. We recommend each LTG Member does an elementary plan and prepare for when the rules come in. There are a lot of commercial firms out suggesting they know what you will need to do but ignore them, no one knows yet.

14. Adam Taussik, Maskers Theatre, noted they have under 100 seats and therefore likely to be under 100 capacity - but they perform in venues over 100 and asked should it be possible to see their plan. Mike thought that would be likely. Philip Bradley, Peoples, noted this is an area for all in the LTG and all will have similar issues and concerns. But if, for example you have a man with a gun who starts shooting your response must be different from having a bomb go off in the park opposite: two very different situations that would need very different responses and how to cover that? Mike thought your plan would need to consider that people panic in situations and don't respond rationally. He confirmed that LTG would issue a Grey Paper when the guidance comes out.

15. Kevin Spence noted the comment about guns on stage from ABTT and advised theatres to be aware of the rules and regulations. **Post meeting note:** ABTT publishes a Weapons in Stage Productions guidance, price to LTG as ABTT members is £10.⁵

16. Sue Tunley, Grove Park Theatre asked Mark if the ABTT advice covers the country and he noted it covers England, Wales, and N Ireland but not Scotland.

17. Adam Taussik, Maskers will stage *Jane Eyre* in open air and want to have realistic burning effect and asked if anyone had experience on this.

18. Eddie Redfern, Archway Theatre said they had opened unisex toilets and asked if anyone else had gone down this route. Anne Gilmour noted that one set of toilets in the Questors had a unisex sign up but no-one had commented as far as she was aware.

19. Nick Morley drew the meeting to a close and thanked the speakers and delegates for their attention and questions.

⁵ The note about the document says "This code has been tailored to theatrical needs and the associated necessary minimum safe standards for staff, performers and public. It has been written as a guide to all concerned with the acquisition, possession and use of firearms and ammunition in places of entertainment. This is an updated version of the 1994 COPO06: Firearms and Ammunition.