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LTG National Conference 27 – 29 June 2025, Royalty Theatre, Sunderland

Report from The Chair

My tenure started at the Conference in Sutton Coldfield before I even became Chairman, hopefully with very few noticing. Rhys, our Northern Secretary, announced that he needed to step down for personal reasons and there was also no Northern Representative Committee Member (RCM) standing, with Sheila having to step down after serving us faithfully for 3 Years. After a little bit of discussion amongst other committee members and with a prospective replacement, Caroline agreed to take over the role temporarily and Rhys agreed to support her as the RCM. Also elected on to the Committee here was Sarah, as Central RCM, following Debbie agreeing to stand as Vice Chair.

The rest of the Conference went off very smoothly, except the Saturday evening meal at a local pub which I hope never to speak of again! And we complemented Sutton Arts on their production of *Bonnie and Clyde*, where the orchestra had to sit outside the auditorium with their sound relayed via modern tech. Thanks to Andy and Emily for taking on this event last minute.

Before the summer was over, I managed to visit Stroud, Oldbury, both theatres in Brighton, Putney Arts and South London with either Anne or Jo. At most of these theatres, I saw shows I'd never seen before, and all were very good with some outstanding. This is true of every LTG production I have been lucky enough to see this year.

As the AGM was in June it wasn't actually very long to our Regional Conference season. First up was Southern Conference at Medway on my birthday in October. The highlight for me came early in the day when some of their Youth group gave us the history of Shakespeare in about 20 minutes. Next up was Northern Conference in Grimsby, where highlights included an animated session on stage fighting and another from a puppet master, with encouraged participation. Finally, we had Central Conference at the Priory in Kenilworth, another town with 2 LTG Theatres. The highlights were being 'En Guard' with a Warwick Castle Knight and learning all about professional Pantomimes. Thank you to Dawn, Helen and Susi for organising these.

The rest of the Autumn was taken up with the Yearbook. We had to change publishers, as we had lost contact with Sardines, and after a small competition agreed to use John Good in Rugby, who mainly do theatrical printing including the programme for *Wicked* in London. This was quite a learning curve for us all and wouldn't have been possible without all the work put in by Anne and Jo. And we got it out to you all before Christmas!

We still had a vacancy for our Public Relations Officer, and it wasn't until December that Aleyn approached us to offer his services. He has a background in Publicity, so we obviously agreed to co-opt him until the AGM. One of the things your committee has discussed is this job title, which we've agreed should be amended to Publicity and Marketing Officer, so will seek to do this at the AGM.

The Guild has sadly in 2025 lost 3 of its Honorary Associates. First was Patricia Clough from Bingley, who had been our Treasurer in the past and had an entertaining way of reporting on our finances at the AGM that Brian openly admits he cannot replicate. Then Margaret Whitehouse from Hall Green, who had served as Central Regional Secretary. She was very proud of the Guild, which was commented on by her niece at her funeral. And finally, an absolute stalwart of the LTG, Tom Williams, who had served as Chairman and then became our first National Liaison Officer. Even up to the day he passed away he had been helping Stephanie, Chair at The Chesil Winchester, with their major fundraising campaign for an extension, a project that he had initiated over 20 Years previously. All will be sorely missed and celebrated at our AGM.

After an 8-year gap, we decided to hold some relationship meetings, where our theatres rather than the committee set the agenda. It was lovely to get out and about to see so many of you at the various locations. The consolidated minutes from all the meetings are on the website and we plan to hold them every 3 years, as they're a great way for a new Chair to get out and engage with you. Regarding our website, we're very aware that ours isn't the easiest to navigate. Your National Committee agreed to utilise some of our reserves to make it more modern and easier to read on a mobile device. John Cook, LTG Rep from Welwyn, has done work on websites before and agreed to take on this challenge, the results of which you will see at the AGM.

I have also managed to get to Devizes, Wembley, Wokingham, Teddington, Winchester and Richmond taking my tally up to 42 out of 125 Member Theatres, and enroute to Sunderland Jo and I, along with Mike and Wendy, will be calling in to South Shields and Cleadon.

We have also kept up associations with many other partner organisations. Mike sits on an ABTT Technical group and Brian gets the regular ABTT and Theatres Trust newsletters which we share with you via Facebook. For many years Creative Lives have run 2 webinars for us every year. Sadly, due to funding constraints and falling attendance, these wrapped up recently with one on Conflict Resolution. Thanks to Kelly for facilitating these. I met with Helen Nicholson and Anne-marie Greene in Wallingford to discuss their new research project, progress on which is the Keynote at our Conference. Jo and I have also met recently with Joshua McTaggart, CEO of Theatres Trust, and our Patron Jessica Swale. Jess has been so busy in the last year or so, directing a film in the USA and then returning to start working on *Paddington the Musical*, which opens in London on 1st November. She also got married last month and despite all of this has committed to come to some of our events. She is away for our National Conference but will be popping into Southern Conference in Stroud and hopefully holding Talks with Q&A in Oxfordshire and Brighton in

September. Josh was still getting his feet under the desk but then was hit with some challenging work by government, delaying our meeting a few weeks, and hopes to talk to us at next year's National. Mike hasn't yet got tired of talking about Martyn's Law, which received Royal Assent in April, and he will be updating you on this as we learn more about how this will be imposed on our member theatres. Hopefully there have been local events on this subject in your area that you have had the opportunity to attend. And I'm delighted that Suzanne, from Rugby, has facilitated Safeguarding meetings, now being held monthly.

I started my tenure by stating I wanted to build attendance at conferences. We had 105 at our first event in Southport after the pandemic and since then numbers have tumbled. There are 61 of us from 39 Theatres due in Sunderland and so I'm mainly addressing the other 86 Theatres when I ask you to try and support both your Regional Conference this autumn and our 80th Anniversary National in Birmingham from 15th – 17 May 2026. Between us we have knowledge of nearly every pro and con around running our theatres and by not attending you're missing the opportunity to learn or share best practice. And I hope that your theatre will fund at least one delegate to both conferences, as that is what our rules suggest they should do.

I will end by thanking all National Committee Members for their support this year and hope to see members from all theatres at a conference or other event soon.

Regards,

Nick Morley

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Volunteer Chair
Little Theatre Guild