



CAAPA NEWSLETTER DECEMBER 2020 - JANUARY 2021

Dear CaAPA members,

We hope this still finds all our members and their families, friends and loved ones continuing in health and safety during this third lockdown period - and particularly for anyone alone. We hope that you are finding the courage and resilience to live with the changing guidelines, and able to keep spirits high despite the challenges.



The appeal for playlets on our theme **Action for the Church in Need** is continuing to bear fruit, as scripts are submitted. We would still welcome more of your creative work conceived during the various lockdowns! Please be daring and send in those masterpieces! (*The intended date for the event has obviously been pushed back to later this year, but fear not, it will happen eventually!*).

We also always welcome any news that members would like to share.

What online projects are you involved in?

What are your future professional plans?!

Or how have you occupied yourself during this past year?

We would love to hear from you! 😊



In this December 2020 – January 2021 Newsletter we exclusively remember the past members of CaAPA, whose anniversaries occur at this time. This includes many names who have made a very valuable contribution to the life of our predecessor, The Catholic Stage Guild.

MEMORIAL LIST FOR DECEMBER

1992 Cyril Conway: Honorary Treasurer

1992 Michael Robbins: Vice-President

1994 Vere Laurie

1995 Fr. Francis Frayne

1997 George Walshe

1998 Jack Wilby: Honorary Northern Secretary

2002 Mgr George Tancred: Associate National Chaplain

2003 J. Brian Faul : Honorary Treasurer





2005 Audrey Joyce: Vice-Chairman

2006 Neil Macleod

2007 Thora Tolson: Committee Member

2009 Alan Martell

2010 Kitty Fitzgerald

2011 Phyllis Roe

2011 Hal Dyer

MEMORIAL LIST FOR JANUARY

1993 Mgr. George Leonard : National Chaplain

2001 Joseph O'Connor : Vice-President

2001 Michael Williams : Vice-President

2005 Gabrielle Daye

2007 Florence Gleeson

2008 Jim Brown

2011 Peggy Marshall

2016 Frank Finlay CBE.

We are indebted to Michael Slater for his memories and reflections of the following cherished souls:

Cyril Conway, father of **Gabby Lister**, was CSG Treasurer for many years and kept us going during difficult times, with the help of his wife **Louise Lister** - holding jumble sales each year at the CAA to raise funds. (So good to see *Cyril in an Agatha Christie film over Christmas!*) Could this be *Evil Under the Sun*?

Michael Robbins Although he was known for playing Olive's husband in **On the Buses**, he had spent many years treading the boards and produced many charity shows at the **Wimbledon Theatre**. He was rewarded with the Papal Medal **Pro Ecclesia Et Pontificie**. Although I acted with Michael in *On the Buses*, it was only later that I got to know him through the Catholic Stage Guild. He was always very supportive of all our events.

Audrey Joyce, and her husband **Richard Andrews**, contributed so much over the years, producing shows and starring in them at the **CAA** - they were real artists! Audrey gave so many years of service to the **CSG Committee** and as Vice Chairman she was held in great affection by the members.

Mgr George Tancred - Assistant National Chaplain, was very much loved by all those that met him. When **Miss Saigon** arrived at **London's Theatre Royal**, Fr George celebrated a Mass front-of-house there for the company.





This resulted from the first question the actors had asked when they landed at Heathrow: 'Where is the catholic church?' Fr George loved actors and the theatre and attended many West End shows to support our members.

AN IRISHMAN'S DIARY

Kenneth Michaels, who has links with **Co Louth**, the smallest county in the Irish Republic, came across this obituary article about **George Tancred** from *The Irish Times*:

On a misty afternoon just before Christmas an English priest was laid to rest in the grounds of **Mellifont Abbey**, the **Cistercian monastery in Co Louth**. The headstone on the adjoining grave gives his mother's name, **Hilda Mary Tancred**. That two such people should now lie side by side in a monastic cemetery is both wonderful and surely unique, for Hilda was once a show dancer in England, one of the celebrated **Tiller girls**, and her son George was a Monsignor of the Catholic Church, writes **Denis Tuohy**.

Fittingly, my friendship with **George Tancred** began at a funeral in south-west London that was also a theatrical occasion. The priest who was to conduct the service for the playwright **Alun Owen** had cried off at short notice and into the breach stepped George. He seemed utterly at home in a gathering of family and friends that included actors, writers, musicians, and producers, very few of whom he was likely to encounter at **St James's, Twickenham**, where he was parish priest for most of the 1990s.

Peter O'Toole

Before that, though, he had been based in Chelsea and worked with the **Catholic Stage Guild**. He once paid a dressing-room visit to Peter O'Toole, who received him with what George described as good-humoured condescension.

"Well now, mon-sign-YAWR, have you ever been in a place like this?"

"The first time," replied George, *"was when I was seven. My mother was a dancer, and she took me backstage to meet the pantomime star Dorothy Ward."*

The star was astonished. *"You've been in Dorothy Ward's dressing-room? Then you and I, mon-sign-YAWR, have much to talk about!"*

I didn't find out that George Arden Tancred was a Monsignor until I made my first visit to St James's and saw his full name and title on the board outside. But to parishioners and the Twickenham community in general he was always Father George or simply George. He came to a party at my flat one scorching August afternoon. When he departed, some of my friends were astonished to learn that the slightly built man in the white T-shirt and shorts, with whom they had enjoyed such wide-ranging and often hilarious conversation, was a Catholic priest.

But he was utterly dedicated to his priesthood and to its purpose - serving God through serving others. Yes, ritual and ceremony were important to him - indeed he loved them - but as pointers to that greater purpose, and not to be mistaken for it. After a long talk with him once about some emotional disaster of mine I suggested, unconvincingly, that one day I might think of going to confession again.

"But you've just been," he smiled, blessing me.



Fuss about Millennium

Then there was the time he bent my ear about the upcoming Millennium. With other clergy he had been called to a rehearsal for some diocesan celebration.

"We'll be parading around all afternoon," he grumbled, "carrying banners and chanting." Meanwhile there were sick parishioners to visit and a lapsed Catholic couple who wanted to negotiate a Church wedding.

"And anyway, why such a fuss about the Millennium? Is it really 2,000 years of achievement? Let's celebrate every day by doing what needs to be done."

He was particularly loved by waifs and strays. Among them was a young tearaway who would have been sent to jail more than once but for George's intervention. One evening when this not quite lost sheep was visiting the parochial house, an abusive drunk came to the door, demanding money. As the priest tried in vain to placate him, he felt a tap on his shoulder.

"Please step inside, father," said the tearaway. "I'll handle this."

From behind the door George heard him handle it.

*"I don't like what you said to my friend. He's a good man, not like you and not like me. So, if you ever give him aggravation again, I'll break your f***in' legs. Now f*** off."*

George Tancred was born in Manchester and after ordination in 1958 served in various parishes in the north of England before coming south to Chelsea and eventually Twickenham. But somewhere along the way, with the help of an Irish friend and a small inheritance, he acquired a run-down farm cottage in Co Louth. When he first saw it, he thought of **Yeats's Innisfree** and the peace that *"comes dropping slow"*.

Retirement

Over the years the cottage was lovingly renovated, but it was only an occasional hideaway until 2001 when he asked the **Westminster Diocese** for permission to retire to Ireland on grounds of ill-health. As anyone who knew him could have predicted, he didn't really retire. He worked long hours in a **Drogheda hospital**, including night calls, and he helped out in his local parish. But he did live uninterruptedly, at last, in the house he had cherished for so long. And it was there that he died suddenly, aged 69, a few days before Christmas.

There have been church requiems in Ireland and England and private requiems in the hearts of those who were fortunate to have known him on both sides of the water. But to mourn for George is to experience the truth of the Beatitude that calls mourners blessed. It is impossible to think of him without picturing his smile. This was his most distinctive feature - a life-enriching smile that could manifest warmth, compassion, mischief, or delight, and sometimes all together. As this smile infiltrates our sadness, we find ourselves smiling back, giving thanks that so fine a priest, so fine a man, is forever part of our lives.

Michael Slater continues with his reflections:

Kitty Fitzgerald I first met Kitty Fitzgerald in 1953 at the **Interval Club**. She was a fine actress and very much The Lady, in the nicest possible way! Kitty had a strong faith which shone throughout her many years. Sadly, there's not enough space here to give Kitty full justice for her contribution to the Guild and CaAPA over so many years.



Our now-retired Honorary Secretary Molly Steele shares her memories of Kitty:

I first met Kitty when she came to a committee meeting, after having filmed *Waking Ned Devine* - with **Ian Bannen**. We became good friends from that moment.

Kitty was born in Ireland. She left there in the early 1950s to pursue her acting career in London, where she became a member of the Catholic Stage Guild, CSG. On Fridays she used to invite her friends to her apartment in **Ormond Street** for a drink and a laugh. Kitty had a very dry sense of humour.

At this time, the **CSG** had a '**Northern Branch**', which held an annual mass in Blackpool. On one occasion Kitty, Charlotte Williams and I decided we would go and support it. To our amazement when the priest appeared, he flung his biretta onto the altar - which to us felt very strange. Kitty raised her eyes to heaven and said, '*Thank God Nessa isn't here!*' [Nessa was a rather traditionalist member of CSG!!!]

When Kitty died, her body was taken back to Ireland, where she now rests in peace.

Michael Slater remembers:

Hal Dyer was married to **Michael Robbins** and always supported CSG activities. I remember she gave a memorable evening at the old *Theatre Museum* in **Covent Garden**, performing the life of **Ellen Terry** - not to be forgotten by those that were lucky enough to see it!

Judy Morrison, a correspondent known to Michael Slater, has kindly contributed her memories of past CaAPA member Dr Mary Remnant:

MEMORIES OF DR MARY REMNANT (13/1/1935 - 15/5/2020)

Much has been written of Mary's achievements in the field of early music, her publications, her unique lecture-recitals, her role as a founding member of the Confraternity of St James, her membership of learned societies, and her investiture as a Papal Dame of the Order of St Gregory the Great. What follows is a personal memoir.

It was in the summer of 1979 that we first became aware of our neighbour's house in Fernshaw Road. Through the ground floor window, we had often seen a lady at her typewriter but on this warm afternoon, classical piano music wafted from the first-floor window. Not long afterwards, my husband extended his hand to stroke a large black cat sunning himself on the gatepost. As the claws drew blood, the upstairs window was flung open with the *warning "Do take care - he is unreliable"*. And so, we met **Mary Remnant** and her mother **Mrs Joan Remnant**. A concern for the local cats and a shared faith fuelled a friendship which would last for 40 years. Mary was godmother to our son and taught piano to our children; she was viewed quite simply, as one of the family, sharing celebrations at Easter and Christmas and even playing her legendary bells at the weddings of her godson and his sisters.

Mary was the only child of **Eustace Remnant**, an architect and conservationist, and his wife, Joan, a piano teacher. Mary's musical talent was evident from an early age; amongst the multiplicity of memorabilia in the Chelsea abode was a telegram from Mary's father congratulating his 4-year-old daughter on her first piano scale. Following in her mother's footsteps, Mary attended the **Royal College of Music (RCM)** studying both piano and violin. For as



long as I can remember, a photo of Mary at her RCM graduation with the **Queen Mother** took pride of place on her Bechstein grand until Christmas Eve when it was moved aside to make way for the nativity scene which had been sent to Mary by her father from France during World War II. It had arrived wrapped in the local newspaper to give an indication of his whereabouts. Over the years, friends and pupils added figures; Mary, an amusing raconteuse, had a story for each one.

Mary loved to travel, driving alone in her distinctive car festooned with stickers from all the places she had visited. Along the way she collected musical instruments and photographed others as they appeared in sculptures and paintings; from her photographs she commissioned more instruments to be made, eventually amassing an impressive collection. Perhaps her favourite journey was the **Camino to Santiago de Compostela** on which she became a much-respected authority. She had a particular skill for imparting enthusiasm for her subject to others.

Alongside her academic and performing life, Mary had a long teaching career which began at **Colet Court Prep School**. She later lectured for many years at the **Royal College of Music** and taught piano and violin to the **London Oratory Junior Choir** for almost 40 years. The numerous pupils with whom she was still in touch, decades later, is tribute to her dedication and enthusiasm. Just weeks before her death she gave her beloved violin to one of her very first pupils.

It was always a privilege to be invited to Mary's parties in the Chelsea house in which she had lived all her life. If children were present, there would be a performance of the **Toy Symphony**; on other occasions there would be pilgrim songs with members of the **Confraternity Choir**. Always the atmosphere was welcoming, and Mary would perform not only with great aplomb but with the same infectious enthusiasm she brought to her lecture-recitals.

She remained splendidly detached from the hurly-burly of modern life, eschewing television and computer with the comment that she would prefer to have another musical instrument. Sustained always by an abiding faith, Mary's example was an inspiration to all who knew her. We will be lessened in spirit and much saddened by her passing.

<https://catholicherald.co.uk/obituary-mary-remnant-musician-and-medievalist/>

<https://catholicherald.co.uk/in-my-friend-marys-recitals-you-heard-echoes-of-an-age-of-faith/>

Michael Slater continues:

Joseph O'Connor - Vice President. Joseph was a very respected actor, happy to perform in any medium. Whilst he was playing in **Carousel** at **the Princes Theatre** (now **the Shaftesbury Theatre**) he used to walk down to **Maiden Lane** after the Saturday matinee and read at the 6pm Mass. This was in the time of **Canon John**, who was delighted to have such a rich voice to complement the service. Joseph also played **St Thomas More** in the tour of **A Man for All Seasons**. It was during this time that we held our annual retreat at **Allen Hall** and Joseph joined us. Happily, it just so happened that, as part of the retreat, we were performing extracts from *A Man for All Seasons*! Joseph gave the most moving performance - as **St Thomas More**. A day to be always cherished, with the knowledge of the history that we were so near to.



Gabrielle Daye - Vice President. Gabrielle Daye was a most distinguished actress, and although always busy, she still gave her support when she could. Among the many roles she played was **Albert Tatlock's daughter** in **Coronation Street** in her early days. She then went on to become a much sought-after character actress, playing **Miss Pring**, with **Arthur Lowe**, in **Bless Me Father**.

Michael Williams K.S.G. - Chairman

This being the 20th anniversary of his death, it is right and fitting to remember that Michael was an outstanding chairman of the **Catholic Stage Guild**. He worked tirelessly with **Gemma Craven** and **Mgr George Lennard**, the **National Chaplain**, to move the Guild forward. After all his service, and support of many charities, it was decided to see if it would be possible for Michael to be awarded the KSG. **Mrg James Curry**, who was private secretary to **Cardinal Basil Hume**, and had always been very supportive of the CSG, contacted the **Vatican** on our behalf. I was on pilgrimage in **Lourdes**, at a Mass in the **Cathedral of the Trees**, high above Lourdes, *when I felt a tug on my sleeve and Mrg Jim said 'we have got it! - but not a word to anyone – PROMISE!'*

Of course, the Vatican moves at its own pace and I knew Michael was not too well; so, I kept in touch from time to time with **Dame Judi's PA Sue Jennings** to see how Michael was. It was a worrying time. By the autumn I had to break my promise to Mrg Jim and explain to Sue why I was phoning about Michael. She understood and promised to keep it confidential. At last, it was confirmed to Michael that he had been made a **Knight of St Gregory**.

Michael was overjoyed to receive the news. A typical actor, when we spoke on the phone, he said, *'when do I wear the uniform?!'* Needless to say, he wanted to receive the award at Corpus Christi. Sadly, it was not to be. **Dame Judi** asked if **Canon John** and I could bring the award to their home. It was early January and when we arrived, we found a few close friends there, including **Dame Maggie Smith**. We went to the bedroom, his daughter **Finty** was with Michael, and Dame Judi had a baby alarm by Michael's side, so that the friends downstairs could hear **Fr John** present him with the award. The following day Michael said that it was the best day of his life, and could he have a replay?! Michael died peacefully later that day.

PS The baby alarm in fact belonged to Finty, as she had a small child at the time. Three months later she received a letter from the Macmillan nurse saying they had now adopted the baby alarm idea for other patients, so that they can talk to their grandchildren.

It has been a great joy to CaAPA to have **Finty Williams** as guest of honour at our annual dinner (10 December 2019). She was a delightful guest and gave a very moving speech recalling her father. Finty also attended the **Sir Alec Guinness Award** and the *students' evening*, joining the Panel to give very valuable insight into her life as an actress. Finty ended a very rewarding evening by presenting the Award to the winning student.

Florence Gleeson was not an actress, but a great supporter of the Catholic Stage Guild. Each Ash Wednesday, after Mass, she would place an envelope in my hand for **Canon John McDonald**. Her daughter **Colette Gleeson** is a lovely actress and singer, and over the years has given us her support and been part of the **Westminster Lourdes**



Pilgrimage, working in the hospital (**St Frai**). At the St Frai parties, with her musical theatre talents, she would lead the singsong, including favourites from **The Sound of Music**.

I often travelled with Colette by train to **Lourdes**, and during the journey across France the champagne would flow!!
This concludes Michael's reminiscences on all these wonderful personalities who supported the Guild (now Association) in years past and enabled it to survive through good times and hard. Long may we continue!

And now news of current members:

Jane Garioni It was lovely to catch up with Jane in the film of **The Wife** on TV, with **Glenn Close** and **Jonathan Pryce** - a stunning film! (says Mr Slater). *Jane you are known by the company you keep!!!*Jane also gave a sensitive performance as a doctor in **EastEnders**, looking after a cancer patient.



Nadia Ostacchini performed in a series of verbatim readings for The British Italian Society in an online webinar about the Italian community in Clerkenwell during the early part of the last century. She was marvellous, a real star



and said it made her day to receive a message from member BBC Correspondent **David Willey** the next day to congratulate her. She said she had no idea that David had Italian blood (his maternal grandparents migrated to London from Venice circa 1895) and has served as a correspondent for the Vatican since 1971!

Kenneth Michaels has sadly lost his father after a short illness, which accounts for the delay in preparing this Newsletter. He writes:

What was truly heart-warming was the sight of so many neighbours gathering on the road, as the hearse arrived to take my father to the church for his *Requiem Mass*. They had met to pay their respects, and this had all been achieved quietly – almost stealthily – by something called WhatsApp. The neighbours had set up an online message board exclusively for their road, and this had resulted in everyone knowing that my father was to start his final journey that morning.

The gentleman who told me this is an impressively voiced Welshman, now a retired schoolteacher, who reminded me that I had cast him as the narrator in a play of **Christ's Passion** I had written, directed and starred in (as Jesus), that we were to perform in the local church. I was a mere 15 or 16 years old at the time and he considerably older with a young family! To his eternal credit he took the casting very seriously and took direction with good grace from this young whippersnapper!



I referred earlier to my links with Ireland. As a child I enjoyed truly idyllic summer holidays in a tiny rural hamlet on the coast of **County Louth**, sandwiched between the mountains of **Mourne** and the **Irish Sea** (the area nearby – **Carlingford Lough** - is named daily on R4's Shipping Forecast). There is a partially ruined medieval church across the fields from my lovely old grandparents' house, next to a Lady Well – whose waters miraculously rise and fall on the same day each year – and an old Celtic graveyard. I have two aunts that I never knew who were buried here. They died as teenagers of TB in the 1950s – dual tragedies my devoutly Catholic grandparents never spoke of.



The graveyard had not had much attention paid to it for - perhaps – centuries, except for an annual cursory tidy before the 15 August (**The Assumption of the BVM**) pilgrimage by the local country congregation.



All this changed just a few years ago when a certain future president of the USA came to visit! Yes, none other than **Joe Biden** has relatives in this obscure country cemetery. On a visit to Ireland, he travelled to the west, and later to Louth in the east, to find the resting places of his ancestors. With a full entourage of Irish American dignitaries and secret service personnel he drove down ever-narrower country lanes until he reached the track leading to the graveyard. His limousines could take him no further – before him was a mere path. He had to walk.

After reaching the decaying iron gates and clambering over the neglected mounds he found his relatives and resolved then to do something about the state of the ruin. It appears that after returning to the States he instructed that he wished to pay for the track leading to those rusting gates to be tarmacadamed and fit for elderly relatives to be able to visit their departed loved ones. And he was as good as his word – today the track carries cars as well as tractors. From a centuries-old Celtic graveyard to **The White House!**

A true story!

Nadia Ostacchini *has suggested the following:*



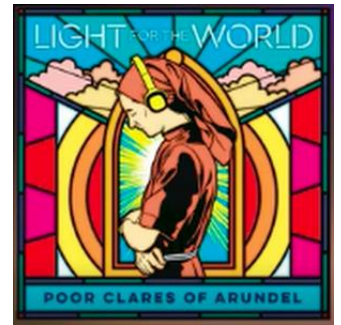
FILM: FATIMA

A trial of faith unfolds at the apex of World War I, when secrets are revealed to three courageous Portuguese children through a series of apparitions, while their doubting family and aggressive government officials try to silence them. See: www.fatimathemovie.com/



MUSIC: LIGHT FOR THE WORLD BY THE POOR CLARES OF ARUNDEL

We are sisters, who share prayer, work, laughter and struggles, and live according to the Form of Life drawn up by St Clare of Assisi in 1253. Called to a life of prayer we seek to live the Gospel in and for our world of today. We share our lives and all that we do. Here is our new album, 'Light for the World'. Enjoy listening to our music. We hope it will help you find a place of peace and inner calm.



A reminder that archive copies of the Newsletter are available on the CaAPA website Members' area. You can access this only if you have a login and password. Do set up an account next time you visit if you haven't already registered. Go to: www.catholicassociationofperformingarts.org.uk/members-area/members-login/



Lastly, please do send in any items you have written, or may be of interest to members, for inclusion in future Newsletters to kennethmichaels@hotmail.com

Feel free to send us any accompanying *photos* too!



Until next month stay safe and God Bless,

Kenneth Michaels
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coordinator@caapa.org.uk



www.catholicassociationofperformingarts.org.uk/ 



Our diverse group of members, whom are comprised of actors, directors, writers, singers, musicians and other entertainers, share in a creative community where they can also grow in their spiritual values. We also aim to serve the wider community by presenting productions for charitable causes or by taking productions on tour to schools, local theatres, parishes and elderly homes.