

# Bloomsbury & British Theatre: The Marlowe Story

TIM CRIBB

*with a foreword by Ian McKellen*



CAMBRIDGE

PUBLISHED BY SALT PUBLISHING  
PO Box 937, Great Wilbraham. Cambridge PDO CB21 5JX United Kingdom

All rights reserved

© Tim Cribb, 2007

The right of Tim Cribb to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with Section 77 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Salt Publishing.

First published 2007

Printed and bound in the United Kingdom by Lightning Source

Typeset in Swift 10/12

*This book is sold subject to the conditions that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.*

ISBN 978 1 84471 414 8 paperback

Salt Publishing Ltd gratefully acknowledges  
the financial assistance of Arts Council England



1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

# Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	v
CHAPTER 1	
Ghosts of Theatre Past: Before the Marlowe	1
CHAPTER 2	
The Two Brookes and Old Bloomsbury	10
CHAPTER 3	
New Bloomsbury: Enter Dadie Rylands	56
CHAPTER 4	
Voices on Vinyl: The Argo Recordings	92
CHAPTER 5	
From Bloomsbury to Stratford: Enter John Barton	104
CHAPTER 6	
<i>Cymbeline</i> : The Boundary Of Bloomsbury	135
CHAPTER 7	
After Bloomsbury	155
CHAPTER 8	
Ghosts of Theatre Future: Radical Potential	164
APPENDIX A	
Chronology of Productions 1907–2007	187
APPENDIX B	
Genesis, Acknowledgements and Sources	192



# Foreword

I still relish a day in 1960 when, as undergraduate President of the Marlowe, I visited its founder, Justin Brooke, on his fruit farm and country estate near Bury St. Edmund's. We spoke little of blank verse but a lot about eating, drinking and hare coursing!

In a university which does not have a Drama Department, Cambridge should cherish the continuity of its theatre institutions. As one of the oldest of these, the Marlowe has a special responsibility, grounded as it is in a devotion to Elizabethan and Jacobean plays. Beyond Cambridge, the Marlowe's effect is felt in the professional theatre and those who care about understanding dramatic verse and how best to speak it. During my time, we were taught by George Rylands, whose influence on John Barton, Peter Hall and Trevor Nunn has been passed on to generations of actors, particularly members of the Royal Shakespeare Company.

The Marlowe can be proud of its achievement. What was founded a century ago by a small group of privileged amateur undergraduate actors has long since developed into a powerhouse of theatrical expertise. Long may it flourish for the enjoyment of student actors, theatre enthusiasts and the rest of us.

Ian McKellen  
President 1960–61



## *Ghosts of Theatre Past: Before the Marlowe*

This is the story of the most influential amateur dramatic society in Britain, probably in the world: Cambridge University Marlowe Dramatic Society. The history of Shakespearean theatre production during the middle fifty years of the twentieth century cannot be understood without it, and yet it is a tale that has never been told. One reason for this may be that the phrase 'amateur dramatic' is dismissive; after all, 'am dram' activities are not normally associated with an important word like 'influence'. Yet the sheer amount of amateur theatre in Britain is in itself an astonishing phenomenon, strangely ignored by social historians and sociologists, let alone historians of theatre. A survey by the Policy Studies Institute at the beginning of the 1990s estimated that there were 3,575 drama societies in the UK performing to just under twelve million people a year, and that leaves out of account some seven hundred youth theatre groups with an estimated 50,000 members. This background of vigorous activity must be a main reason why professional theatre in Britain reaches the heights it does, for not only do actors, directors and designers cross over from the amateur to the professional, but amateur theatre supplies the knowledgeable audiences that put a professional company on its mettle. There is no comparable tradition in the U.S.A. or France. The story of the Marlowe Society illustrates all of this and more. It shows that an amateur society, not based in London, but with a strategic position on the margin, and with a consistent and innovative set of principles, can make theatre history and change the course of professional theatre at the centre.

The innovative principles were those of Bloomsbury. That too is surprising. To name the Bloomsbury Group is to prompt associations with the art and art theory of Duncan Grant, Roger Fry, Post-Impressionism and the

Omega workshops, or with the novels of Virginia Woolf, the essays of Lytton Strachey and the publications of the Hogarth Press, together with the free thinking and progressive manners of the circle around them and the reforming liberal economist, Maynard Keynes. No one thinks of the Bloomsbury Group as exerting a powerful influence on British theatre. Some are aware that Keynes actually built a theatre in Cambridge and in his biography of the great man, Robert Skidelsky duly chronicles this, raising an eyebrow of surprise at the amount of energy as well as money that Keynes invested in the project. But that theatre, like the Omega Workshops, like the Hogarth Press, was in fact another of the institutions through which the Group disseminated its influence. The Marlowe was in at the birth of Keynes's theatre—indeed, Dadie Rylands, the leading spirit of the Marlowe for the main part of its history to date, helped to conceive it. What the Marlowe was and how this came about is the story the following pages will unfold.

There is perhaps another reason why the story has been neglected. It is a ghost story. Anyone who has ventured into an empty theatre, especially onto a deserted stage set, will have felt the peculiar atmosphere that haunts the place. There is something existential about it, a sense of having just missed something intensely significant or delightful, a feeling that some god has just left the temple. All around bears mute witness to the fact that a few hours ago people had gathered together in this place to make believe in an imaginary world where they laughed or cried or thought or wondered, and now, although in appearance that world is still there, the life of it has gone, for the spirit has left the body. Dickens catches the thing exactly when he describes Little Dorrit venturing into the backstage world of her actress sister: she felt she had got 'on the wrong side of the pattern of the universe'. The theatre historian consequently faces a peculiar problem in trying to bring past performances back to life. All historians seek to reanimate the past and in that sense can be thought of as telling ghost stories, but they count themselves satisfied if they succeed in telling the story of the events, whether of men or institutions or social forces. The theatre historian's event is a peculiarly intense, peculiarly ephemeral transaction in a particular space between a company of players and an audience. If you are not present at the event, which varies with each performance, you cannot tell what it was. It notoriously cannot be captured on film or video: only think how unconvincing Olivier's Othello appears on film compared with the shattering experience of his live performance at the Old Vic. The theatre historian is forced to guess at the event through any

accounts that may survive by people present at the time, most commonly those much-abused but essential witnesses, the newspaper critics. How grateful one is when they supply impressions instead of opinions, descriptions instead of judgements, especially if the description includes the reactions of the audience!

In seeking to raise the ghosts of past performances, the theatre historian follows, at a humble remove, the actor. Here the ghost story becomes more like possession, for the actor is the vehicle or medium for the character, and the ensemble of actors and backstage production crew are the vehicles and mediums for the whole play. If it is a new play, the actors 'create' the characters, for the text exists in a curious limbo of incompleteness until it is brought to life in performance. Once created, the characters travel through time in endless re-creations, leap-frogging from actor to actor down the decades, and thus the actors make up a tradition. The painter, Tom Phillips, is fond of tracing the series of apprenticeships that lead from his own master, Frank Auerbach, to Auerbach's master, David Bomberg, to his master, Walter Sickert and so on via an unbroken succession of French court painters all the way back to Raphael. Painters learn by seeing and doing and so do actors, but in the case of actors the medium is not paint on canvas but their own bodies and feelings, even their own souls; when the audience is present the bodies come alive with the spirits they carry and the peculiar event that is theatre takes place. Thus, the plays live on like ghosts taking flesh through successive human generations.

This particular theatre history comes close to being a ghost story in another sense. To gather the material, I have relied not only on archives and newspaper records and memoirs but also on interviews, both formally conducted as such, and informally jotted down as notes of conversations. Many of the formal interviews were conducted by Shevaun Wilder, herself an actress and director, and while at Cambridge a President of the Marlowe Society. A key interview with Dadie Rylands himself was recorded some years before his death by Pippa Harris, an executrix of the Rupert Brooke estate and also an undergraduate President of the Marlowe, then a programme controller at the BBC. So although I have set my name to the story, it is largely told in other people's words, for I have drawn on these resources freely. I often quote without acknowledgement, in the hope that even when there is no direct speech the reader will sense the voices behind my own, voices arguing in committees, experimenting and exploring in ad hoc rehearsal rooms, recording in studios, recreating characters on stages,

telling the story for which I now serve as medium. Thus, the Marlowe Society is its own author and I am its ghostwriter.

Every story has to make itself heard amidst the babble of competing stories, so first one needs to listen to the kind of theatre people were attending to before the Marlowe story begins. Here I lean on conversations, notes and an essay by the late Richard David, known to Cambridge University as Secretary to the Syndics of the University Press and Publisher to the University, known to the world of botany as President of the Botanical Society of the British Isles and co-editor of the standard survey on sedges, known to Shakespeareans for his edition of *Love's Labours Lost* for the New Arden in 1951 and his in-depth reviews of the Royal Shakespeare Company's annual season at Stratford, remembered by his comrades in arms for his naval exploits in the Mediterranean during the War, and remembered by the Marlowe for his undergraduate performance as Antony in a remarkable production of *Antony and Cleopatra* in 1934, described later in this volume. He was an Antony who could fairly lay claim to the infinite variety of his leading lady, though entirely without her volatility and flamboyance.

What was the scene in British theatre when the Marlowe made its entrance in 1907? Dick David describes it as a scene that had been changing and was ripe for further change. It is a fair generalisation to say that before 1860 the theatre in London was a popular and even lower-class medium of entertainment and the plays performed were predominantly either extravagant melodramas or highly artificial, even farcical, comedies 'borrowed', often without acknowledgement, from France. In 1867 T.W. Robertson's *Caste*, though styled 'A Comedy' and with many farcical elements, attempted to present something nearer to real life, and the trend was continued and strengthened by the work of Henry Arthur Jones and Arthur Wing Pinero, active from the 1870s until around the time of the First World War. Both these writers continued to deliver light comedies or pure entertainment, but their better plays, such as Pinero's *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* and Jones's *The Liars*, tackled, albeit somewhat melodramatically, real social issues. This concern with social issues is the development taken up and crowned by George Bernard Shaw, whose first play, *Widowers' Houses*, in fact preceded *Mrs Tanqueray* by a year. It may have been a consequence of this process, or perhaps it was partly its cause, that at the same time theatre-going began to attract a more up-market and intellectual audience.

The British development was a reflection, though a pale one, of what was happening on the continent—in Sweden, Strindberg's *The Father* and

*Miss Julie* in 1887 and 1888; in Germany, Wedekind's *Spring Awakening* in 1891; in Russia, Chekov's *Seagull* in 1896. These may have received little notice in England at the time (as we shall see, Rupert Brooke was still discovering Wedekind in 1910), but at least the plays of Ibsen made a thunderous impact. No commercial management would put them on. It makes an interesting anticipation of the role of the Marlowe Society that production was left to private societies, with largely young and untried actors, who took on the task of presenting *Pillars of Society* in 1880 and the even more unconventional *Rosmersholm* in 1891. The performances were greeted with horror and invective by the established critics. One of them described Ibsen as a 'muck-ferreting dog', another as 'a dramatist who, apart from the non-construction of his alleged plays, deliberately selects his subjects from the most sordid, abject, even the most revolting corners of human life'; while the doyen of the profession, Clement Scott, urged his readers to 'go out from the moral leper-house' of the theatre performing *The Doll's House*. On the other hand, Ibsen was strongly defended by his translator, the critic William Archer, and by Shaw in *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, as representing serious theatre in contrast to the timid and artificial productions of the contemporary British stage.

At the same time, Shaw conducted a parallel campaign against the manner in which classical plays (almost exclusively Shakespeare's) were presented. In this he followed Henry James, whose acquaintance with French classical acting had revealed to him how lacking the English were in the techniques of performance that Elizabethan texts demanded. Measuring by the standards of the Comédie Française, James did not hesitate to dub the great Henry Irving amateurish and even the irresistible Ellen Terry as lacking the authority of the true comedienne, despite their tremendous natural talents. This state of affairs had come about through the dominance of the great actor managers since the reign of Charles Kemble in the 1820s; one could indeed say that the practice went back at least as far as Garrick in the 1770s. Later managers, above all Macready, had done something to purge Shakespeare's texts of the distortions and interpolations of Davenant, Tate and Cibber, but Macready retired early, discouraged, and most were still very ready to cut and rearrange the plays in order to give prominence to their own fat parts rather than to the play as an artistic whole. One of Irving's favourite parts was the crazed Mathias in Leopold Lewis's *The Bells*. They also, following the fashion of the melodramatists, liked to

smother the plays in the most opulent spectacle, while sharing the growing tendency among playwrights and directors of contemporary plays to go all out for realism. In her autobiography, *The Story of My Life*, Ellen Terry relates the not necessarily extreme example of Charles Reade who, in an attempt to increase the verisimilitude of his rustic drama, *Rachel the Reaper*, sought to put on the stage real pigs, real sheep, a real goat and a real dog while real litter was spread all over the boards which also carried a real brick wall (necessary for the secure tethering of the goat). In the event the pigs were so unruly in rehearsal that they had to be dismissed from the cast, and on the first night the dog bit the actor playing the farmer who thereupon kicked the animal off the stage into the orchestral drum. Tree's live rabbits in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* seem to have been more disciplined performers.

Against all this arose a remarkable revolt. Its leader was William Poel, an indifferent actor with but two years' experience in a provincial repertory company. His gospel was: back to Shakespeare's bare stage, back to Shakespeare's text, play the scenes continuously, and 'find the right tune for the lines'. None of these articles of faith, except perhaps the third, was ever fully realised in Poel's productions. The true nature and qualities of the Elizabethan and Jacobean stages were still imperfectly understood. Victorian taste was squeamish about Shakespeare's bawdry, and even the rebel Poel, when he presented *Measure for Measure* as his second full production of Shakespeare in 1893, felt it necessary to bowdlerise heavily. Furthermore, he was curiously insensitive to poetry and would mercilessly cut lyrical passages in order to bring out (as he thought) the dramatic shape and effects of the plays. Lastly, his idea of the 'tune' of the verse appears to have been highly idiosyncratic, and his largely amateur actors, though rigorously drilled to copy his demonstrations, often failed to make their lines sound either natural or alive. The theatrical establishment was outraged by his presumption in attempting to teach the professionals their business and his naivety in supposing that Shakespeare would not have welcomed all the improvements to his staging that modern technology had made possible. Poel, however, continued his crusade in stage productions, in lectures, and in articles in the press. His first production was of the First Quarto *Hamlet*, at St George's Hall, and this was followed (under the aegis of his newly founded Elizabethan Stage Society) by a whole series not only of some dozen of Shakespeare's plays, especially the early ones, but also of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and *Edward II*, Webster's *Duchess of Malfi*, the anonymous *Arden of Faversham* and *Edward III*, Beaumont and Fletcher's

*The Coxcomb*, Jonson's *Sad Shepherd* and *Alchemist*, as well as modern plays by Rossetti and others. Poel's procedures, applauded by Shaw and others and respected and built upon by assistants and disciples such as Granville Barker, Robert Atkins at the Old Vic, Bridges Adams at Stratford and Nugent Monck at the Norwich Maddermarket, inaugurated a new and more clean-cut style for the production of Elizabethan plays, a style whose influence can be traced all the way to today's Royal Shakespeare Company. It was Poel who discovered the teenaged Edith Evans when she was a milliner's assistant; it was Edith Evans who later passed on to Peter Hall what she had gleaned from survivors of Macready's companies; these fragments, combined with what he had learnt in the Marlowe Society, enabled Hall to reconstitute a tradition. But that is to anticipate our story.

In the university town of Cambridge, though theatrical tastes may have differed very little from those in London, theatrical performances were under special restrictions. In order to prevent the corruption of 'the manners of the youth committed to the University's care', the Vice-Chancellor possessed statutory powers, first granted by Elizabeth I and constantly renewed by legislation up to the Theatres Act of 1843, to control by licence all performances 'within the precincts of the university and the places adjacent' and, backed by a puritan element in the townspeople, who regarded theatres as houses of the devil, he might well prohibit any play that in the opinion of the authorities might create scandal or cause riot—a form of behaviour to which undergraduate audiences appear to have been particularly liable. The Vice-Chancellor had a strong executive arm in his own police force, the Proctors, and his grip was tight.

To evade these regulations three courses were possible: the first, to perform outside the town and the Vice-Chancellors' jurisdiction, and, if possible, outside term-time; the second, to form the players into a private club and play, at least ostensibly, to a private audience; the third, to beg the Vice-Chancellor for a special dispensation, on the grounds of the worthiness of the play or of the players. On the first ticket, a Norwich company in the 1780s regularly resorted to a theatre near the Stourbridge Fairground and there presented, as part of the Fair, a series of Shakespeare plays which were much appreciated by the eminent Shakespearean editors and senior members of the University, such as Richard Farmer and George Steevens, and occasional guests such as Edmund Malone. The tradition was continued at the Barnwell Theatre in the Newmarket Road, which hosted a number of nationally

distinguished actors, including Macready and Charles Kemble, from early in the nineteenth century until it financially collapsed at the time of the Crimean War. Puritanism then reasserted itself, for the theatre (designed by Wilkins, the architect of Downing College and the National Gallery) was bought by local tradesmen and converted into a mission hall; the Biblical texts inscribed along the front of the Circle and Gallery at that time are still preserved under later claddings. This is the theatre that was later resurrected for a glorious season of a few years from 1926 as the Festival Theatre, briefly home to the Marlowe Society's production of *Antony and Cleopatra* in which Dick David took so leading a part. The second ruse was initially adopted by the University Amateur Dramatic Society on its foundation in 1855. This was important because it established a permanent building for performances under student management. This little theatre, known as the A.D.C., then seating fewer than 200, would be the main venue for Marlowe productions during the first thirty years of the Society's activities. The third ruse seems to have been that adopted by W.B. Redfern, a Cambridge worthy (he was Mayor of the Borough from 1883–7) who from 1882 was the proprietor of St Andrew's Hall, between Emmanuel College and the University Arms Hotel. The appeal was most likely to succeed if the play proposed could be shown to have educational value, and it was this claim that in 1882 won for the Greek Play Committee the right to put on a play (in Greek) every third year. The first of the series, Sophocles's *Ajax*, was staged at Redfern's Hall that November. The Greek Play will have an important role to play in the Marlowe story.

It was the wide acclaim received by this venture, and the popular clamour resulting from it, that eventually, in the mid-1880s, effected the repeal of section 10 of the Theatres Act of 1843 which had given the Vice-Chancellor his control. Though his approval was still required for performances by those *in statu pupillari*, there was a general feeling of release. The Amateur Dramatic Club, whose activities until then had been predominantly social, increased its membership and became ardently theatrical, though it chose to restrict its performances to the lightest of light comedies. In 1896 Redfern rebuilt, enlarged and renamed St Andrew's Hall as The New Theatre and, by offering half-a-week stands to visiting companies such as Beerbohm Tree's or the D'Oyly Carte, raised Cambridge in the eyes of the theatrical profession to the status of a 'three-night town'.

A particularly interesting visitor was Poel's Elizabethan Stage Society, which in the late autumn of 1904 included Cambridge in a tour of

English cities. They performed in the Guildhall and the play they were touring was—Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*. And that takes us to the first chapter of the Marlowe story, for the Marlowe Society is the main strand in the tradition that links Poel and Bloomsbury to the Royal Shakespeare Company today.

## *The Two Brookes and Old Bloomsbury*

The story begins, appropriately enough, in King's College—appropriately because King's is the College which later turns out to play a major role in the development of theatre in Cambridge. There, the Marlowe was begotten by the spirit of the times on a very ordinary student failure. A distinctly un-academic undergraduate, by name of Hugh Wilson, in his second year reading Modern Languages, called on a distinctly academic contemporary and friend, Cosmo Gordon, also at King's, some time during 1906–07. Although un-academic, Wilson was by no means without sensibility, as the sequel shows. He happened to pick up a book, *Doctor Faustus*, that certainly would not have been lying around in his own rooms, making some slighting remark about bombast as he did so. He then read the last few lines of the play and found himself 'a sudden convert to its inexplicable merits'. It is not surprising that he found the merits inexplicable, for at that date no Elizabethans besides Shakespeare would have come his way at public school; there was no English Faculty at Cambridge, only a subsection of the Modern Languages examinations; nor were there any dramatic societies offering such fare, not even Shakespeare. As already noted, the A.D.C. offered only light comedy. Theatrically speaking, Cambridge was an intellectual desert. Given the unfamiliarity of the material, then, it is all the more interesting that Wilson instantly responded to its quality.

Although un-academic and uncomplicated Wilson was earnest and a reader, a serious smoker of pipes, a devotee of Robert Louis Stevenson and church music and the open air. Later, he would become a devoted and popular teacher; a few years later still, in 1914, he would enlist as a private. Meanwhile, in Cambridge in 1906, he takes his place in Virginia

Woolf's sketch of his and her brother's generation in her early novel, *Jacob's Room*:

Young men who read, lying in shallow arm-chairs, holding their books as if they had hold in their hands of something that would see them through; they being all in a torment, coming from midland towns, clergymen's sons.

Wilson's correspondence shows no signs of torment, but like his contemporaries he did feel that sense of a great gulf fixed between his generation and that of his parents which comes only with a sense of changing times. And for this reason he also shared with his contemporaries a special cult of Cambridge, since it was there that as undergraduates they had first begun to feel liberated from Victorian constraints and first felt able to be, or to re-invent, themselves.

Hugh Wilson was soon to have to seek some explanation of the merits of *Doctor Faustus*, for in June 1906 he learnt that he had failed the first part of his Honours examinations in French, so if he wanted a degree at all he would have to spend his third year reading for the Special Examination, which would earn him only an Ordinary. A merciful University tempered the Continental winds to shorn British lambs who had failed in French by setting part of this Special Examination in English. By an extraordinary stroke of luck a set text for that year was *Doctor Faustus*. Wilson was equally lucky in his friends. One of these has been mentioned already, Cosmo Gordon, a scholarly soul, who assisted Geoffrey Keynes, when he came up in 1906, to collect such seventeenth-century authors as John Donne and Sir Thomas Browne. Keynes had been initiated into these by his friend at Rugby, Rupert Brooke, who had cultivated a taste for Elizabethan literature alongside Swinburne and obscure Pre-Raphaelite artists like Simeon Solomon, as a way of being outré and shocking his teachers. When Wilson moved into digs for his third year, Brooke inherited his rooms in college together with some of his furniture. Supported by this network of exceptionally well-read undergraduate friends, there was little danger of Wilson failing his Special Examination, especially when the subject was drama and when another of his friends was Justin Brooke.

It was in Justin Brooke's rooms in Emmanuel College early next academic year that Wilson lamented the fact that he couldn't see a play like *Doctor Faustus* acted. It is curious that he was apparently unaware that in his first term he had missed his opportunity when Poel and the



*Justin Brooke, about the time he was at Cambridge  
(Property of his daughter, Mrs Elizabeth Hollingsworth)*

Elizabethan Stage Society had been in town. But no matter: he could not have proposed the impossibility to a better person. Justin Brooke's school background was quite different from that of most of his contemporaries, for he had been at Bedales, then only ten years old and wildly avant-garde in its mixing of the sexes, opportunities for theatre and emphasis on English literature. It seems a surprising choice of school by his father, a grocer and founder of the Brooke Bond tea firm, whose own father had received a commercial education through a fund set up for orphans of the Battle of Waterloo. Perhaps that tradesman's background in itself denied him entry to the more established public schools. Be that as it may, Justin Brooke was temperamentally an enthusiast and man of action and moreover he was theatrical. He had joined the Amateur Dramatic Club on coming up and, since women were not allowed to act, Justin had become its leading lady. As Club Secretary he had already been badgering the Committee to try their hand at Shakespeare but they had stuck to their policy of light entertainment. Faced with Hugh Wilson's lament, he was just the man to convert it into a challenge. It was Justin Brooke's idea that a society should be founded specifically for the performance of plays by Shakespeare's contemporaries.

With characteristic impetuosity he organised a committee consisting of himself, Wilson and Andrew Gow. Gow was another serious scholar;

when he finally achieved his ambition of becoming a Classics don at Trinity he would become the standard editor of Theocritus. However, there was a lion in the path, and as we have seen from the history of the university's opposition to theatre in Cambridge, it was a lion that could roar, the Vice-Chancellor: no performance would be possible without his written permission. So the next step was to recruit a don to act as Senior Treasurer and for this Gow obtained the goodwill of his Supervisor in Classics, the young Francis Cornford, later to be the author of a celebrated translation of Plato's *Republic*. At that date he was too junior to be of avail alone but he was able to recruit a real celebrity, Jane Harrison of Newnham, founder of the Cambridge school of anthropological approaches to the Classics and famous for her flamboyant style of lecturing; Augustus John came to Cambridge in his gypsy caravan expressly to paint her. She in turn brought in the heavyweights, such as the Master of Peterhouse, the Provost of King's and the Regius Professor of Greek. Armed with this battery of academic grandees, the fledgling society had a chance. Classicists were prominent because one unimpeachable theatrical activity was the triennial play in Greek, approved by the best Humanist tradition, although only relatively recently instituted at Cambridge. Justin Brooke had himself acted the Pythian Prophetess in Aeschylus's *The Eumenides* that Michaelmas Term. Having assembled his committee, Justin Brooke had Gow print fifty copies of a flyer grandly headed 'MARLOWE DRAMATIC SOCIETY', listing the senior members and proclaiming that it was intended to perform 'once a year a play of the Elizabethan period in accordance, so far as is possible and expedient, with the traditions of the Elizabethan stage'. William Poel's voice crying in the wilderness of commercial theatre now finds an echo in the new generation at university. Performances of *Doctor Faustus* were announced for 10 and 11 June at the A.D.C.. Justin assigned himself the part of Faustus and Hugh Wilson was to play Mephistophilis. This was in late February, some two or three weeks before the end of term. But the following term was, as always, dominated by examinations and it soon became clear that the June deadline was unrealistic. The provisional committee therefore agreed to postpone the production until the Michaelmas term that year. So poor Hugh Wilson never saw his production of *Doctor Faustus*; he had come to the end of his three years, and by the time October came he would be working as an assistant in a school in France. Hence it was the second Brooke, Rupert, now coming into his second year at university, who took over the part of Mephistophilis. His appearance in the first actual production and his prominent role

thereafter has given rise to the legend that he founded the Society but that is not the case. The Marlowe Dramatic Society owes its foundation and its principles to his namesake, distant relative and good friend, Justin Brooke.

Before appearing in *Doctor Faustus*, Brooke had taken the non-speaking part of the Herald in *The Eumenides*. Apart from this, no one save Justin had been on a stage before, let alone participated in an experimental theatre production. For experimental is what it was. Justin had strong ideas about how the play should be tackled, as he recorded in a letter to Rodolfo Colapaoli, an Italian researcher into the history of the Marlowe in 1956:

It is important to realise the condition of the English stage at that time. To go on stage was the career for the second-rate and ill-educated. No actor or actress of that time knew how to speak poetry. The early English dramatists were all neglected. Scenery was meretricious and over emphasised. Control of performances was in the hands of actor managers whose aim, apparently, was to exploit their own personalities rather than the dramatist's play. Verbal accuracy was flouted. Our object was to produce Elizabethan plays where these faults would be remedied. We excluded painted scenery and had instead black backcloth. We devoted much time to the right speaking of the verse; and we decided that the names of the actors should not appear on the programmes, so that attention should be concentrated on the play itself.

The principle that the actors should be anonymous lasted until 1971. This is in effect Poel's project; Justin was nothing if not ambitious. But even his sanguine temperament must have found it difficult to realise his ambitions with such inexperienced personnel, although of course their very inexperience made them open to innovation, a constant and underestimated asset of student productions: ignorance can be bliss. His chief difficulty was that everyone recited their lines 'as if they were reading the lessons in chapel at school'. There were also the inevitable problems with costumes, staging, printing and so on. How did they finance the production? Was the Marlowe floated on Brooke Bond tea? Or in those gentlemanly days did undergraduate credit suffice? From the accounts written up subsequently it appears that credit did suffice, perhaps Francis Cornford's. If so, it would not be the last time that a Senior Treasurer would be called on to bail out an ambitiously minded student society that had exceeded its financial strength. Cosmo Gordon and Geoffrey Keynes were roped in to help produce as well as act in the later stages. Yet even so the project came close to grief. Gow, who needed