



# Cambridge Arts Theatre

**Interview data sheet:** Behind the Scenes Project

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**Collection title:** Behind the Scenes

**Interviewee's surname:** Cribb

**Title:** Mr

**Interviewee's forename(s):** Tim

**Gender:** Male

**Occupation:** Senior Treasurer of The Marlowe Society

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**Name of interviewer:** Emily Bowen

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**Interviewer's comments:** None

**Abstract:** A stalwart of the Cambridge University theatre circuit and senior treasurer of The Marlowe Society, Tim Cribb explains the longstanding relationship between the society and Cambridge Arts Theatre and reflects on how the partnership has incubated some of the best of UK creative talent. He describes some memorable Marlowe society productions at the

	Theatre. He welcomes the Theatre's efforts to put its archive in order and explains his work doing the same for The Marlowe Society.
<b>Key words:</b>	Marlowe Society, wardrobe, ADC theatre, finance, opening season, Festival theatre, Derek Jacobi, Ian McKellen, Clive Swift, Peter Hall, Sam Mendes, Tom Hollander, Tom Piper, Dadie Rylands, Donald Beves, Humphrey Whitbread, John Barton, Ninette De Valois, Terrence Gray, Tim Supple, Tom Littler, Dave Murphy, Rebecca Hall, Judy Birdwood, Margaret Drabble, BATS, Tyrone Guthrie, Dominic Dromgoole
<b>File</b>	STE-005
00.40	Tim's relationship with the theatre started with school plays and continued with student theatre in Cambridge. It then continued in various jobs around the world in Universities, acting at the Minack Theatre in Cornwall for twenty years, and now working behind the scenes with the Marlowe society in Cambridge.
01.25	Tim said that when he was a student it was the habit of those interested in theatre to go to the Arts Theatre for whatever show was on that week, so he did this. He says that the Marlowe society was one of four student societies who performed at the Arts Theatre, and that several his friends were in it. Tim says that he auditioned for the Marlowe but didn't get in, due to those who were auditioning in his year: <b>Derek Jacobi, Ian McKellen, Clive Swift, Margaret Drabble</b> He said he made up for this by moving behind the scenes and becoming senior treasurer in 1988.
02.51	Tim says that as a student he saw plays both at the Cambridge Arts and the ADC Theatre. He then goes on to talk about his college's drama society BATS (Queen's College) and his time directing plays in France. Later he returned to Cambridge as a lecturer at Churchill College, Cambridge and recalls directing Pablo Neruda's only play. Cribb recounts the design of the set for this production involving the delivery and installation of a number of telegraph poles Tim says that he developed a theatre culture in the college and that every school should do a play as it brings people together. He quotes <b>Peter Hall</b> . None of the plays that Tim directed were performed at the Arts Theatre. None of his student productions were performed at the Arts Theatre.
08.32	It was only the Marlowe Society's productions that were performed at the Arts Theatre. Tim recalls how he became the senior treasurer of the Marlowe Society. He says that the first show he was a part of was at the Cambridge Arts Theatre, who told the Marlowe society that they did not have enough money to pay the director. He was told that the society did not have anywhere to interview a director, so he booked a room in the college. Tim says that ever since then he has been working on getting the money for the Marlowe. He says that they interviewed five candidates, one of whom was <b>Sam Mendes</b> , and he directed <b>Tom Hollander</b> in <i>Cyrano de Bergerac</i> . The set was designed by <b>Tom Piper</b> (later chief set designer at the RSC). Since then Tim says he has been involved behind the scenes in this way. He goes on to talk about the lack of

	<p>archives at the Marlowe before he started there and how he started to collate them following a call from the Festival Theatre.</p>
13.55	<p>Tim says that the Marlowe Society has put on one play at the Cambridge Arts every year since 1936. He says that the society were in the opening film season of the Theatre, which included early showings of the Mickey Mouse films, because the pentagram of the Arts Theatre meant that they showed all the arts: opera, music, dance, theatre and film. He says that the inclusion of film in the 1930s was very progressive and that was <b>Keynes</b>. For this opening season Tim says that the Marlowe Society <b>Dadie Rylands (George Rylands)</b> directed just about every production, he or <b>Donald Beves</b>, from 1928-1960. Tim says that <b>Rylands</b> had directed Hamlet at the ADC and revived it for the Arts Theatre with a change of cast. He says that there was a gala performance for all the vice chancellors of commonwealth universities, who had had a conference in Cambridge. Tim says that Hamlet was played by <b>Humphrey Whitbread</b>, who did a romantic style. He recalls at a Marlowe reunion <b>Whitbread</b> met the actor who played Hamlet 20years later and that there was a sense of tradition there. Tim says that this sense of tradition is something that the Marlowe can offer the Arts with their annual production. He says that there was more continuity when <b>Rylands</b> directed as he had strict policies on verse speaking. Tim then goes on to describe this policy and how <b>Rylands</b> trained <b>Peter Hall</b> who saw the Marlowe productions with school and later acted as a student in the Marlowe productions. He then talks about <b>Hall's</b> changes to the RSC in Stratford, how <b>Hall</b> sent for <b>John Barton</b> from the Marlowe Society and the impact this partnership had on the performance of Shakespeare around the world.</p>
21.00	<p>Tim speaks about how acting is now taught in drama schools and the impact of method acting on the performance of Shakespeare. He says that when <b>Stephen Walton</b> was running the Arts Theatre he encouraged the Marlowe to experiment with classical verse plays beyond Shakespeare. Tim says that the Marlowe did this for a while but there were box office problems because these shows were less popular. He says that the Cambridge audience is very conservative who aren't eagerly seeking the latest thing. Tim says that The Marlowe commissioned a translation of a Spanish golden age drama, which <b>Dominic Dromgoole</b> directed. He says that it was not all that popular with the public. Tim then speaks about Orson Well's Moby Dick that was performed at the theatre, and recalls the audience attendance was 29%, which led the theatre manager to ask for a return to Shakespeare! He says that the next production was Romeo and Juliet, which got to 70% straight away. Tim says that it was a shame as it would have been nice to continue with the more adventurous plays. He says that if the Arts Theatre had solved its financial problems and kept the Festival Theatre, then the Marlowe's more adventurous plays would have transferred there, making it the experimental theatre in Cambridge.</p>

25.24	<p>Tim says that the Arts had to close for the radical rebuilding as it was going bankrupt, and if it hadn't had closed it would have gone bankrupt. He says that because the money came through for rebuilding it could reopen, and then have financial difficulties. During the closure period of two years, Tim says that the Arts was still supportive of the Marlowe, letting them use anything in storage such as cables but they had to find their own venues. He remembers the theatre manager recommending getting a temporary license for the Festival Theatre, as they could then do a show there. Tim then describes how a group of Marlovians stripped the theatre over the winter holidays, gutted the Festival Theatre rewired it, built a bar, got abandoned theatre seats from London and applied for a health and safety license. He says that they were given a license to perform but not on the stage as this was deemed too dangerous. They could use the circle for the audience, however. Tim says that they did <i>The Lady of Pleasure</i> in the stalls, which was the acting area, with a limited audience number of about 200. He then recalls getting a telegram from <b>Ninette De Valois</b> who had been in the founding company that opened the Arts theatre in 1936, but before this she had acted in the Festival Theatre when <b>Tyrone Guthrie</b> had been running it and <b>Terrence Gray</b> had financed it. Tim says that the Arts financial problems continued, and they had to sell the Festival Theatre. He then recalls how a group of young actors had attempted to buy the Festival theatre backed by Peter Dawe but were outbid by the Buddhists. Tim says that the Festival Theatre is now the Buddhist Centre for East Anglia. He describes it as a magical place.</p>
30.00	<p>Tim says that his favourite play that the Marlowe has put on at the Arts is <i>Tamburlaine</i>, which was the last production they did before the Arts Theatre closed. He says that it was directed by <b>Tim Supple</b>. (Tim then goes on to talk about <b>Supple's</b> production of <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> in India). He says that it was the centenary of Marlowe's death, and they wanted to do something special. He says that <b>Supple</b> took enormous risks and blew the budget. Tim recalls that the Arts stage was flooded with a mysterious red liquid (representing wine? Or blood?) and the actors acted on catwalks that came in in various intervals. He says that the back wall was Perspex that would slide so people could enter, and that there was a throne centre stage at the back which resembled a ladder. Tim then talks about <b>Supple's</b> staging, <i>Tamburlaine</i> is the leader of a guerrilla groups, and describes the plot of <i>Tamburlaine</i>. He recalls that the actor's clothes dripped in the liquid, which would then creep up and make them seem virtually nude. Tim then describes a scene in the play where the actor's fingers could be seen on the other side of the Perspex dragging down in blood. He says that the production cost a fortune but the manager of the Arts thought it was so good he saw it again with the financial director, and they wept as they admired it because it had cost so much. Tim says that <b>Supple</b> continued like this, taking risks and being adventurous and innovative.</p>
35.18	<p>Tim says that the performance of <i>Richard III</i> wasn't very good from some years ago, and this is the only one that he would</p>

	<p>call bad. He says that the two plays that <b>Tom Littler</b> did for The Marlowe – <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> and <i>Measure for Measure</i> – were exceptionally good. Tim then goes on to describe <b>Littler's</b> interpretations of the plays and his theatre. He then remembers a play that (current Chief Executive) <b>Dave Murphy</b> hated but he liked. Tim says that it was a very physical production of <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>, in which they had a whole tree as staging, beautifully lit. He then describes how in one scene Oberon flung Puck offstage, which resulted in a broken leg which is why <b>Dave</b> didn't like the production. Insurance issues, but very exciting! Tim speaks about the performance of Macbeth, which he found okay but not great, which <b>Rebecca Hall</b> was in as Lady Macbeth. He then recalls asking her mother what her father, <b>Peter Hall</b>, thought and she responded positively because she had not heard too much sighing. The director of the production had workshop with <b>John Barton</b> and the cast and had followed Hall's approach to language which perhaps explained the positive review.</p>
41.18	<p>Tim says that he hopes the Arts finds a photo album in its archive belonging to <b>Judy Birdwood</b> who was the wardrobe manager at the Arts when it still had a wardrobe and made its own costumes. He says that she kept a good photographic record of all the performances and put the names of the actor's underneath. Tim says that this is valuable as up until 1973 all the actors were anonymous. He says that a friend of his transferred it into digital form and produced two volumes, which he gave to <b>Dave (Murphy)</b>. Tim says that it was a shame that the Arts had to prune away its scenery dock, wardrobe facility and the restaurant before it could reopen. It has been very educational the Arts Theatre, and of course Keynes made sure it was an educational charity, being an economist he got benefits from that for tax.</p>
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