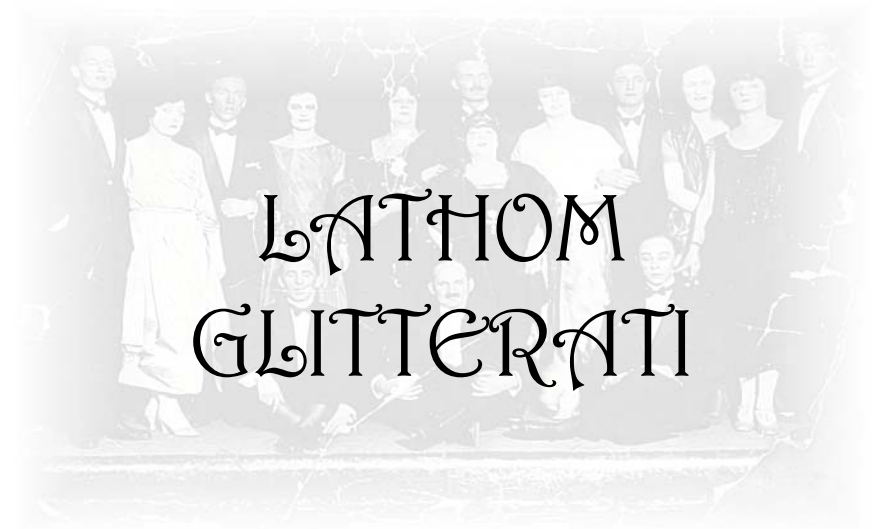




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Young Ned Lathom at Lathom House



The story of Ned Lathom
The 3rd Earl of Lathom
4th Baron Skelmersdale

CAST

Emma Nanson

Caroline Woodruff

Adrian Wright

John Knowles

Piano - Nancy Wells

Performed on 26th and 27th April, 2002
at The Lathom Club, Hall Lane, Lathom
In support of The Lathom Park Trust

*The cast would like to thank all those
who have provided help, support, information, costumes,
properties, photographs, publicity and sales, decor, lighting,
design and printing, physical labour and refreshments
and thus enabled this performance to take place.*

*John Knowles would particularly like to thank the
cast and stage crew in tonight's show and everyone who
has contributed so far to the research into the
Earls of Lathom and their families, including members of
The Lathom Park Trust, Ormskirk Library &
the Ormskirk Advertiser.*

*Dedicated, with special thanks, to Joan and Stanley Gaskell,
Beryl Knowles, Pam Nanson, Howard Whitaker and
The Noel Coward Society
without whom none of this would have happened.*



*Edward William Bootle-Wilbraham
the 3rd Earl of Lathom, 4th Baron Skelmersdale*

new light on this fascinating family with the aim of publishing resources for historical study on this period of Lathom's history. These will include a biography of the Earls of Lathom, the 3rd Earl of Lathom's 'Complete Plays' and a Lathom Cook Book that reflects domestic life at Lathom House from 1837 to 1910. John hopes that this show presents a balanced view of Ned Lathom as a generous, imaginative and intelligent man with considerable skill in playwriting and theatre production. He says: "*Not so long ago Lord Lathom was a ghost character, so little was really known about him. Now it's all flowing in. From the end of his war service in France and India he had just eleven years into which he packed a tremendous amount of living and a lot of it the theatre has got to be grateful for. Noel Coward brought a new dramatic style into the British theatre and Ned was part of his young team.*"

Madeleine Were & John Knowles



Ned Lathom aged 3

The story of Ned Lathom is recounted across West Lancashire and far beyond. The story is told in good faith, based on local memories and texts passed down from those who worked for the 3rd Earl, or knew him or his relatives. It has never before been told using his own published work and personal letters to support those memories or set in the context of the music of the age.

Tonight's performance sets out to present a limited, often light-hearted, but hopefully balanced picture of this controversial figure, born of a respected aristocratic family with strong musical and theatrical interests, who lived on and managed one of the finest and historically significant estates in Lancashire.

The Plays

Martin Secker published six of Ned's plays between 1927 & 1928. He was particularly kind to him in the last few years before Ned died of tuberculosis in 1930.

The published plays are:

Wet Paint

Tuppence Coloured

The Way You Look At It

Ostriches

Fear

Twenty Houses In A Row

Known unpublished works are:

A World of Our Own

No Flowers By Request

Ned also wrote the book for a musical entitled:

Happily Ever After

with music by Vivian Ellis and lyrics by Collie Knox

Ned was a true post-Victorian dilettante. Without his money and enthusiasm many rising stars would not have been given the chance to put their developing talents on display to the theatregoing public. Those who knew him well were intensely fond of him, some owed him a great personal debt and endeavoured to repay it, whilst others sadly used and abused him.

Following his life-changing experience in the trenches of the Great War, he sought the constant company of an ever-changing pool of theatrical stars, both ancient and modern.

He was a passionate playwright who wrote what he felt and did not always find it easy to accept the views of his audiences, critics or the censor. In the preface to his first book of plays he says:

“If an author does not write of what he sees and knows, of what then can he write?”

Passages in all of his plays show the wit and intelligence of the author and at times real flair and imagination. The ideas were fresh and daring for their day, yet with one or two exceptions seem underdeveloped. Contemporary critics are not always kind to new writers but they did recognise Ned’s abilities in what are considered to be his two best plays, *Wet Paint* and *Fear*. Commentary on *Fear* compared it favourably with Coward’s watershed production of *The Vortex*. Both plays explore issues that offer that delicious ‘social shock’ that is the lifeblood of all successful innovation in the theatre. Ned’s work was a small part of the new wave of American-influenced theatre that rapidly changed the expectations of a public bored with stages dominated by acting dynasties and moral tales and seeking the faster-paced plots and moral dilemmas that mirrored the changing attitudes of The Twenties.

Most of the plays deal with sexual relationships that lie well outside the Victorian concept of marriage and morality and proved to be totally unacceptable to the Lord Chamberlain of the day.

Theatre, Liverpool, the West Yorkshire Playhouse, Leeds, and with English Touring Theatre Outreach. Her most recent work has been with a touring stage production for schools with members of the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra and this resumes in June. She does voice-overs for audio-visual productions and Cable TV advertisements.

ADRIAN WRIGHT started his career as a boy actor, appearing in Shakespearean roles before he was ten years old. His introduction to the lighter stage was in *The Sleeping Beauty* with Cyril Fletcher. He went on to star in a TV series *The Junior Angle Club* with the bird impressionist Percy Edwards. He subsequently spent many years directing Victorian music hall at the famous Maddermarket Theatre in Norwich, and making countless cabaret appearances all over the country. He has written seven books, including biographies of Hollywood stars, and acclaimed biographies of the novelist L P Hartley, and the writer and poet John Lehmann. He is currently writing the official biography of the symphonist and film composer William Alwyn. An acknowledged authority on British musical theatre, he runs his own record company, Must Close Saturday Records, specialising in rare British theatre music. Adrian can be heard on his new CD of songs from British revues of the 50s and 60s, *Living With Pleasure*, and is soon to record a collection of rarely heard numbers from 1950s British musicals. His other plans include a full studio recording of the 1962 musical *Scapa*, and a disc of previously unheard revue songs by Donald Swann. In May he is singing songs at the revue celebration held at the Theatre Museum, Covent Garden.

JOHN KNOWLES has been involved in education most of his life and has a passionate interest in theatre and music. He is a singer, writer and producer of all things theatrical. His interest in the link between Noel Coward and Ned Lathom began 18 years ago when he first saw the West Wing of Lathom House. As a founder member of the Noel Coward Society and its present secretary, he is researching the three Earls of Lathom to throw

EMMA NANSON has worked in television appearing in ‘Coronation Street’ and ‘Emmerdale’ and has enjoyed some breaks on the way in her acting career. One was when she got a job as understudy in the national tour of Dave Simpson’s Northern comedy ‘Girl’s Night Out’ and due to an accident found herself playing Sarah for a few weeks in the West End before continuing in the role on another big national tour. Now she is counting herself very privileged to be taking part in ‘Lathom Glitterati’ on the actual stage where Ned Lathom and his friends, including Noel Coward, Ivor Novello and Gladys Cooper, relaxed and had great fun doing sketches and ‘turns’, applauded by local people and estate workers. Emma grew up in the Lathom area and this provided a happy talking point when she was being interviewed for a degree course in drama at Aberystwyth University. “Do you know anything about Lord Lathom’s ‘little theatre’?” she was asked. As her mother, Pam, was a local history enthusiast, Emma knew a lot! After gaining her degree there, Emma did a post-graduate course at the Webber-Douglas Dramatic Academy in London.

CAROLINE WOODRUFF has worked in radio, TV, theatre and film, and back in the 80s she toured nationally with rock band ‘Wishbone Ash’ as unofficial photographer, on-stage announcer and lighting assistant. Now she looks forward to experiencing something quite different again in ‘Lathom Glitterati’. “This is the first time I have rubbed shoulders with Noel Coward and I was delighted to be asked to do it,” she says. On TV Caroline has appeared in Emmerdale, Coronation Street, Cold Feet, Dangerfield and A Touch of Frost. She will soon be filming an episode of Fat Friends for Granada. At one time Caroline presented her own daily two-hour Arts programme for BBC Greater Manchester Radio. She interviewed many celebrities including John Cleese, Ruth Rendell, Martin Amis, and Lord Howe. As a radio producer for BBC Leeds and Manchester she has produced work submitted for the Sony Radio Awards. In theatre she has appeared at Liverpool Playhouse, the Unity

They deal with every conceivable variation on a theme: married men with lovers, kept women and men and the use of marriage and money to support extramarital love and sexual relationships. In two of the plays there is a mere hint of what was later called, ‘*the love that dare not speak its name.*’

Fear and *Twenty Houses In A Row* are psychological dramas that depict changes in the personality of an individual that impact dramatically on those closest to them. In my view they are the better plays. In one of his letters to Martin Secker, Ned writes about this change in writing style,

“Noël’s (Noel Coward) very nice about ‘Ostriches’ but of course it belongs to my old type – I am writing quite differently now. The last three “Fear” “Twenty Houses in a Row” & “A World of Our Own,” will all show that.”

The concerns of a Lord Chamberlain in the 1920s about the sexual and moral content of many of the plays may seem quaint in today’s ‘moral swamp’ where censorship has all but disappeared. These sexual dramas may be from a world that has long since gone yet they explore the same dilemmas in the human condition that we still see on our stages and televisions and even hear on The Archers! The best of them can still hold our interest and have points to make. The insecure lead characters, with dubious values, grasping expectations and manipulative personalities are very familiar to us even if their language and context is not. “*Fear*,” has real ‘bite’ with an ability to capture the imagination and grip the audience. Its effectiveness may be due to its close proximity to the fears of its author. It is by far the most powerful of the plays. In its final Act, Ned, in the guise of the leading character, discloses his fears as a child, a soldier, and a dying man. All of us reveal more of ourselves in our writing than we may intend. As these plays are Ned’s only known personal legacy, they are the place where his thoughts are most likely to be revealed. We can observe elements of his vulnerability from preface to final Act. His fears, cares and views on life, are

revealed to the public, largely to entertain and challenge them and partly to meet his own emotional and intellectual needs. Most of the plays were performed just once, on Sunday evenings in the West End. It was general practice at the time to use Sundays to pilot new works and avoid the ‘blue pencil’ of the censor. Ned formed an actors’ company called *The Venturers* to perform the plays in England. He used the last of his diminishing wealth to finance them. Cast members came from a wide field of established actors. His declared mission was to push the boundaries of what was expected by audiences and the Lord Chamberlain and show his version of human life, performed on the English stage he adored.

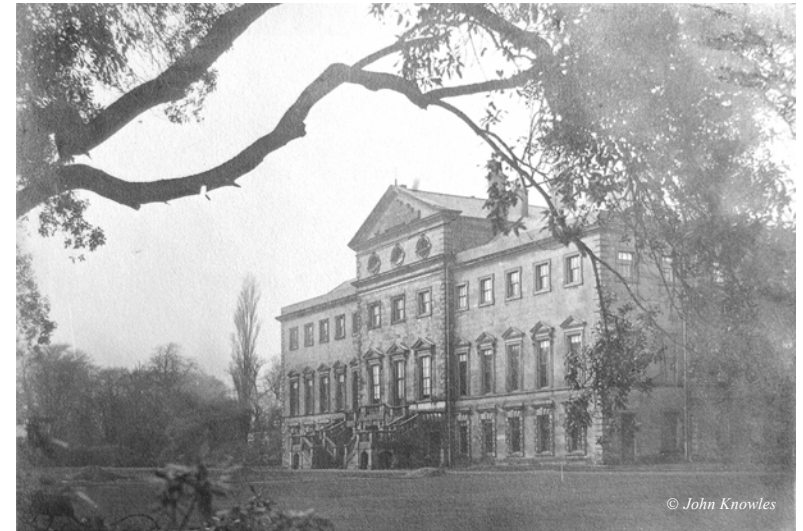
Whatever their merit, these plays are a valuable historical resource. They contain clues to Ned’s attitudes, values and sexuality, and his desperate desire to be considered as more than a theatrical amateur. The cry throughout these texts is:

“Please take me seriously!”

John Knowles



*Wilma, Countess of Lathom and her children - 1899.
L to R: Edward (Ned), Barbara, Margaret (in arms) and Helen (Nell)*



Lathom House - taken from the Visitor’s Book of the 2nd Earl



The walled garden at Lathom House - taken from the Visitor’s Book of the 2nd Earl