

Southport Dramatic Club

# The Constant Wife

A sparkling social comedy of manners

By W. Somerset Maugham

Directed by David Davies



23rd - 31st January 2015

7.45pm



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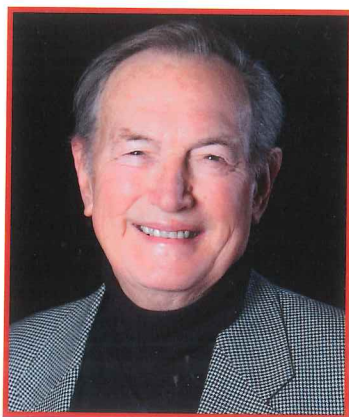


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# Director's notes

Some years ago I directed 'A Doll's House' by Henrik Ibsen, the play in which the heroine, Nora, cosseted but completely dominated by her weak, selfish and narcissistic husband, Torvald, finally achieves freedom and emancipation when she leaves the family home, slamming the door behind her. In 1879, the date of its first production, the play was vilified by an outraged public. 'Womens' Rights' was unheard of. A woman's place was in the home, bringing up children and keeping her husband happy. Move on forty years to 1920's Britain and this attitude was widespread in many middle and upper-class households, despite the success of the Suffragette movement and the economic freedoms acquired by many women during the 1<sup>st</sup> World War. Women worked to keep their families while their menfolk were fighting abroad and these freedoms continued for many of them after the war. Today, at least in the West, women have freedoms undreamt of in Ibsen's day or, indeed, the 1920s.

Against this background, Somerset Maugham, possibly influenced by Ibsen's earlier play, sets tonight's comedy. 'The Constant Wife' in an upper middle-class household in Harley Street, London. Outwardly a happy couple, the husband's affairs are an open secret which his wife, economically dependent upon him, tolerates with apparent



**David Davies**  
Director

equanimity, while working towards a degree of financial independence. To say more would give the plot away of this witty yet sharp-edged comedy of manners.

As with all the plays I have directed for the company in past years, I have been most fortunate in having assembled an experienced and dedicated cast. Working with them and seeing the play come to life under their skilled acting

abilities has been a sheer delight. Many, I have worked with previously, which has been a great pleasure for me, so I know their talents and I am sure they will both entertain and amuse you. My thanks to all of them, including David Lonsdale, for assistance with vocal-coaching and, indeed, all those hard-working members of the club who have put in hours of work to bring this, for me, delightful yet largely forgotten play, to the stage.

On a practical note I have decided to dispense with smoking in some scenes in the play and, where appropriate, have substituted suitable alternatives. I trust these changes will not affect your pleasure!

So, please sit back and enjoy an evening of sparkling wit and humour in Maugham's comedy, 'The Constant Wife'.

David Davies  
Director





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# The Author

W. Somerset Maugham, was born on Christmas Day 1874 in Paris at the British Embassy. Maugham's mother, Edith Mary, died at the age of forty-one from tuberculosis. His father, Robert Maugham, died two years later in France of cancer. Orphaned at the young age of ten, Maugham was looked after by his uncle, Henry Maugham, the Vicar of All Saints, Whitstable, in Kent.



**W. Somerset Maugham**

The writer was educated at King's School, Canterbury, and developed a stutter due to being bullied while studying there. He left school at sixteen but continued his education at Heidelberg University in Germany where he studied literature and philosophy.

Maugham began writing at the age of fifteen but kept his aspirations hidden from his uncle. Upon returning from university he studied medicine at St Thomas' Hospital in London. He qualified as a physician and was able to draw on the characters he met, while training to be a doctor, in his novels. The same year that Maugham qualified (1897) his first novel, *Liza of Lambeth*, was published. The novel was a success and sold out very quickly. This marked the beginning of his literary career and he said he took to writing as "a duck takes to water." The writer did not find success again

with his works until he wrote the play *Lady Frederick* (1907). In 1908 he had four plays on London's West End stage at one time.

During World War I, Maugham, being too old to enlist, volunteered to be an ambulance driver. It was around this time that he met Gerald Haxton who became his lover. In 1915 while stationed in Dunkirk, Maugham wrote what many consider to be his masterpiece – *Of Human Bondage*.

Maugham married Syrie Wellcome in 1917. When they met Syrie was married to Sir Henry Wellcome. Somerset and Syrie had a daughter named Mary Maugham. During World War One the writer also worked for British Intelligence, and it is believed he used these experiences in his work *Ashenden: Or the British Agent* (1928). This book is said to

have been the forerunner to Ian Fleming's James Bond books. Maugham enjoyed spending time on the French Riviera and bought a house at Cap Ferrat called The Villa Mauresque. He divorced Syrie in 1929.

At the time of World War II, he was based in America and the British government asked him to persuade the Americans to join the war. He wrote *The Razor's Edge* in 1944. His companion, Gerald Haxton, died in 1944. Maugham then struck up a relationship with Alan Searle.

When World War II ended, Maugham returned to the south of France, but continued to make visits to England until he died in 1965. After his death, a Times obituary described him as "**the most assured English writer of his time.**"

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# The Constant Wife

W. Somerset Maugham's play, *The Constant Wife*, was written in 1926; it is a social comedy set in 1920s London, and was first staged at the Ohio Theatre in Cleveland, America on November 1st 1926. Ethel Barrymore played the lead role. Also in the cast were C. Aubrey Smith and Mabel Terry-Lewis. The production transferred to Broadway, where it ran for two hundred and ninety-five performances and toured across America with Ms Barrymore in the cast.

*The Constant Wife* opened in London's West End in April

1927 at the Strand Theatre and starred Fay Compton, but ran for only sixty performances. On the opening night, someone in the box office made a mistake and opened stall seats to people with pit tickets creating a fiasco.

It is believed that people, at that time, were not ready for Maugham's take on the modern wife's role. The play has been revived many times in the West End and on Broadway. In 1973, Ingrid Bergman played the lead in a production of the work at the Albery Theatre in London which was directed by John

Gielgud. Gielgud then took the production to the Shubert Theatre on Broadway in New York.

In 2002, Jenny Seagrove played the title role in *The Constant Wife* at the West End in London at the Lyric Theatre. Lynn Redgrave starred in a revival of the show at the American Airlines Theatre on Broadway in 2005, which ran for seventy-seven performances. The work was made into a film in 1933 starring Lionel Belmore.



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# Synopsis of Scenes

The action throughout takes place in the drawing-room of the Middleton's first-floor flat in Harley Street, London. Period 1920s.

## Act 1

Scene 1 A summer's afternoon

Scene 2 The same two weeks later. Late afternoon

## Act 2

Scene 1 The same. Action continuing from Act 1, Scene 2

Scene 2 The same one year later. Afternoon

**There will be blackouts between scenes to allow for minor set changes.**

There will be a twenty minute interval between Act 1 and Act 2. It is recommended that interval drinks be ordered prior to the performance in order to 'beat the rush'.



### The Little Theatre - Home of the Southport Dramatic Club.

The SDC wishes to ensure that all our patrons enjoy a comfortable, enjoyable and safe visit to our theatre. We should be grateful for your co-operation in helping us to achieve this. Please note the following:

- Should you arrive after the performance has started, you will be guided to your seats when a suitable opportunity occurs.
- At the end of the performance, exits will be open at both the front and back of the auditorium.
- First Aid assistance is regularly provided by volunteers from the St. John Ambulance Brigade. Should you require help, please advise our stewards on duty in the Foyer.
- Patrons with hearing impairments should note that the auditorium has an Induction Loop System for your assistance.
- Please ensure that all mobile phones and electronic devices are switched off during the performance.
- Photography and video recording are not allowed during the performance.

Designated Premises Supervisor, Alan Newport



# The Constance



**Margaret Mann**  
*Mrs. Culver*  
(mother to Constance and Martha)



**Trudi Hirsch**  
*Martha Culver*  
(a spinster)



**Sandra U...**  
*Constance*  
(married)



**Howard Kernahan**  
*John Middleton*  
(a Harley Street surgeon)



**Leslie Cheesman**  
*Bernard Kersal*  
(businessman and previous suitor to Constance)

# ne nt Wife



**answorth  
Middleton**  
(mistress to John)



**Diane Mackley**  
**Barbara Fawcett**  
(successful businesswoman)



**Philippa Hipwell**  
**Marie-Louise Durham**  
(mistress to John and married to  
Mortimer Durham)



**Peter Slater**  
**Mortimer Durham**  
(husband to Marie-Louise and  
successful businessman)



**Simon Hawkins**  
**Bentley**  
(the butler)

# Nigel Hess

Nigel Hess was born in 1953 in Weston Super Mare, Somerset. He is the great nephew of Myra Hess known for her piano recitals during the war in the National Gallery and her famous recording of *Jesu, joy of man's desiring*.

Hess has composed many scores for American and British television productions including: *Maigret*, *Wycliffe*, *Dangerfield*, *Hetty Wainthropp Investigates* and others. His best known film score is *Ladies in Lavender* starring Dame Judi

Dench and Dame Maggie Smith (Classical Brits Nomination for Best Soundtrack Composer).

Hess was House Composer for the RSC and wrote some 20 scores for RSC productions. Highlights from his Shakespeare scores have been recorded and performed by the RPO in concert as *The Food of Love* hosted by Dame Judi Dench and Sir Patrick Stewart. Hess was awarded the New York Drama Desk Award for 'Outstanding Music in a Play'

for the productions of *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Cyrano de Bergerac* on Broadway. Recently he has written theatre scores for Shakespeare's Globe in London including: *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Romeo & Juliet* and *Henry VIII*.

July 2007 saw the premiere of Hess's Concerto for Piano and Orchestra (Classical Brits Nomination for Composer of the Year), commissioned by HRH The Prince of Wales in memory of his grandmother.



# Staging

Stage Manager	.....	Pete Beswick
Assistant Stage Manager	.....	Georgina Gillen
Prompt	.....	Fran Percival
Properties	.....	Muriel Leefe & Barbara Galvin
Wardrobe	.....	Diane Hutchinson & Kate Hargreaves
Lighting Design	.....	Alan Gosling & Team LX
Sound Design	.....	Brian Hodge
Scenic Artist	.....	Bob Jessamine
Set Design	.....	Pete Beswick
Set Construction	.....	The SDC Construction Team
Photographs	.....	Fletcherhill Photography
Programme Editor	.....	Jacquie Bolshaw
Programme Sub Editor	.....	Nathan Colman
Programme Content & Research	.....	Henry James
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## Music in this Production

The theme music in this evening's production is a setting by Nigel Hess of Christopher Marlow's poem 'Come Live With Me and Be My Love', used by kind permission of The Royal Shakespeare Company. The music played before the show and during the interval is a selection of 1920's orchestral numbers.



# The 'Flapper' Age

The 'Roaring Twenties' was a period of great excitement and growing freedoms – especially for women. There was a surge of creativity and interest in the arts (Cubism, Futurism and Art Deco), architecture and archaeology. Victorian England and to some extent the Edwardian period which followed, as with most European countries, had been an 'up-tight old world' of colonial idealism, full of social restrictions, coldness and intense rationalism. Indeed, it was the First World War that wiped away much of this cultural stranglehold and upper-class, male-dominated, hegemony.

It was in these new found freedoms that 'the new woman' was born. Increasing numbers of women were being educated beyond the home and taking jobs; at least until they were married, as to have an economically stable and successful marriage was still seen as the desirable goal of most women.

This concept was popularised in magazines and the new 'movies'. Nevertheless, as they were no longer working as 'domestics', women could now earn money by taking factory work, clerical jobs in offices and as shop assistants and designers in retail trades, or, in

the big cities, in restaurants, hotels and a variety of clubs. There was more money to spend on trendy fashion items and popular cosmetic products. Advertising was increasingly targeting women, finding fresh angles to appeal to their new-found sense of independent femininity. The age of 'Consumerism' had arrived.

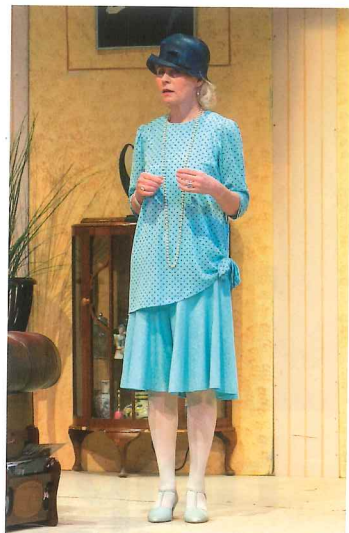
Thus, the 'new woman' who could afford it, danced to jazz-bands, dined out, wore make-up, partied and, often, adopted a risky throw-away attitude to life. This new breed of younger women were called 'flappers'. A flapper would wear the latest fashions, know the latest dances, smoke and drink alcohol. She had a rather scandalous image: "the giddy flapper rouged and clipped, careening in a drunken stupor to the lewd strains of a jazz quartet"; (*Jackie Hatton, 'Flappers'; St James Encyclopedia of Popular Culture, 2000*).

In fashion, there was a revolution in women's dresses. Prior to the 1920s dress styles were highly structured with floor length skirts, large puffy sleeves, steel-boned bodices and bustles. They gave way to shorter, knee length dresses, lighter materials showing bare shoulders and arms, small-brimmed 'cloche' hats, feathered hair bands and short

hair, all giving a boyish look. Dresses and skirts, designed to reflect the latest artistic fashions, were often fringed with beads and extra materials which swirled and swished during Charlestons and Sambas. Shoe design changed with T-bars and crossover straps and innovatory pointed toes which assisted with the new, energetic dance steps.

Jewellery in this period was heavily influenced by far-Eastern and African shapes. Long necklaces were common often crafted from pearls or marcasite and individual pieces given angular and odd shapes to reflect the prevailing Art Deco influence; and if genuine jewels were too expensive fake items now flooded the market well within the range of the new working woman. Wrist watches began to be worn by women for the first time. They were functional and stylish and assisted the busy schedules many women now followed.

*Based on an article by Nicholas Hennell-Foley*



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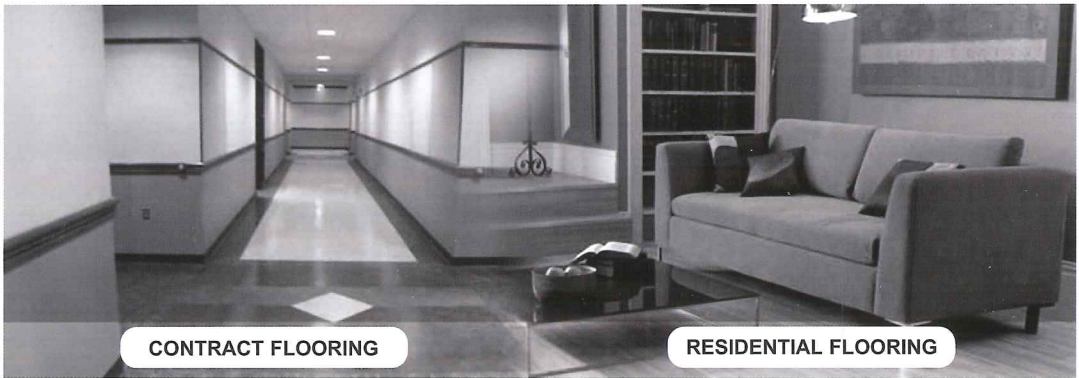
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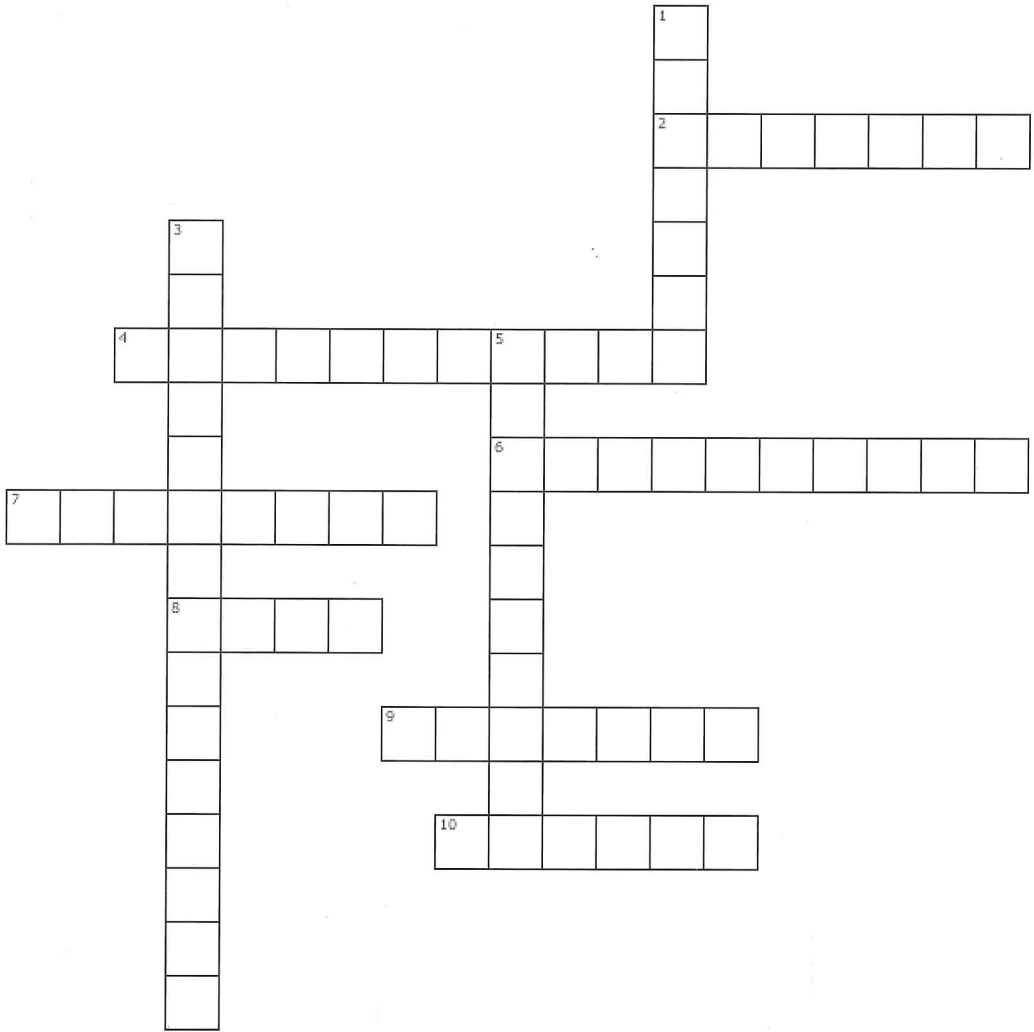


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# The 1920s



## Across

- 2. Architecture Style
- 4. Under Garment
- 6. Dance Craze
- 7. Hair Style
- 8. Shoe Style
- 9. Bust Concealer
- 10. Ladies Hat Style

## Down

- 1. Dress Style
- 3. Era Decade
- 5. Fashion Designer

Answers on page 18.



**CELIA TIMMINGTON**  
DIRECTOR

# NOW IN REHEARSAL DISPOSING OF THE BODY

BY HUGH WHITEMORE

Do you want to know a secret? Play directors have headaches! When in a wave of euphoria, we say "yes, I will do it", to the delightful Play Selection and Casting Committee, we forget that at this time of year actors, stage crew, and all the other very important human beings that work to entertain you, have lives of their own to live. Sometimes, "Kiss my Mistletoe", is the answer when they are asked to be part of a production. However, I can dispense with the paracetamol, everyone has said "yes", a superb team. Relax and enjoy.

'DISPOSING OF THE BODY', a mystery thriller, was crafted by Hugh Whitmore. His other works include, 'A Letter of Resignation,' 'Breaking the Code' and 'Pack of Lies.' He is a master of the art.

The characters narrate their version of the happenings to you and then 'live' the action with each other, giving you the chance to work on the mystery.

The story! .....In brief! .....A 'him' and a 'her' move house. Their neighbours, 'he' and 'she', visit them. The 'him' and the 'she' have an affair. Neither the 'her' of him nor the 'he' of 'she', are happy with this. A woman goes missing. Relations and the law have opinions on the matter.

If you have made any sense out of the last several lines then you may be in with a chance of solving the mystery on the evening that you attend the play. The names Henry, Angela, Alexander, Joanna, Ben, Kate, Poole and Basset (not a dog), may also help you.

The evenings of February 20th to 28th, could be cold, but in the plush seats and the warmth of our theatre this play is a 'must'. Somehow, our best actors have saved themselves for this production. We do so hope to see you there.



Answers to the crossword on page 17: Down: 1. Flapper; 2. Roaring Twenties; 3. Coco Chanel. Across: 2. Art Deco; 4. Cami Knicker; 6. Charleson; 7. Eton Crop; 8. T Bar; 9. Bandeau; 10. Cloche.

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Southport Dramatic Club

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DIRECTED BY CELIA TIMMINGTON

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