

# Interview with Roger Wooster

**12 August 2022, Pontypool**

*Roger Wooster, actor, theatre in educationalist and teacher, died on 5<sup>th</sup> October 2022, after a long courageous and graceful period of living with his cancer. Roger was a long-time associate of the Standing Conference of Young People's Theatre (SCYPT) and the National Association for the Teaching of Drama (NATD). He made significant contributions to the development of the theoretical journal of NATD as a member of its editorial committee over a number of years.*

*Shortly before his death, Chris Cooper interviewed Roger at his home in Pontypool, Wales. The following transcript of that interview is printed here in recognition and celebration of Roger's life, his work and his steadfast determination to defend and develop a theoretically guided approach to the related fields of theatre and drama in education.*

**Chris Cooper (CC):** Okay, so the date is the 12th of August at 2.22 in 2022. There you go. 2.22 in 2022 and I'm talking to Roger Wooster here in his home, and we're just going to talk a little bit about your life and work in TiE, Roger. First question, just out of interest, tell me a little bit about how you ended up in Wales and how you got here in the first place?

**Roger Wooster (RW):** Well, I was born in Buckinghamshire, and I decided to go to university in Swansea, so that brought me to Wales initially. To be honest, the main reason was it was far enough away from Mum and Dad not to be expected to go home every weekend. So yeah, I did a degree in English Language and Literature, and after that I did two years VSM in Sudan teaching English. I think that is what made me start to think about cultural issues; of important ways of thinking about another culture. So, when I came back to Wales afterwards, I was much more alert to the fact that there was a distinctive Welsh culture, history, language and although it didn't make much difference in my life at the time, it became more important later on. So, then I did a PGCE, in Swansea, and it proved very useful in opening doors when you're trying to persuade educational authorities that you know what you're doing and ....

**CC:** What year would this be?

**RW:** This was in 1974. And then with other very like-minded graduates we decided to set up our own theatre company, called Open Cast Theatre

**CC:** Now, does that name ring a bell? Or am I ...?

**RW:** It may or may not. It survived several, several years. And looking back, I think we were really riding on the Arts Council's interest at the time in the notion of theatre and education, and their ambition to have a company in each of the then nine counties of Wales.

**CC:** So, this is the Welsh Arts Council.

**RW:** Yes, the Welsh Arts Council.

**CC:** So, it was actually a TIE company from the beginning?

**RW:** Ah well, TiE as I understood it then, yea? And looking back, really, you're doing children's theatre in schools. There was no workshop element, there were no ideas of creating thinking or problem solving, stuff like that. ... It just wasn't ... we didn't know what we were doing, but we still called it TIE because that was what was what was opening doors at the time. And unlocking the money.

**CC:** And was there any, apart from the Welsh Arts Council's policy which was opening doors, was there any kind of influences you can name that you were drawing on for developing your practice?

**RW:** I have to say no to that. We really didn't know what we were doing but, as, as time went on, I got more and more frustrated with the fact that the stuff I'd been doing in my PGCE, in the educational... you know we used to study child psychology in those days, and sociology as part of that...wasn't really impacting the work ... They just were not, and that's when I went, you know, to Theatr Powys (TP).

**CC:** So, when did you make that move?

**RW:** Now, that would have been, late 1976.

**CC:** And where? Because Theatr Powys wasn't always based in Llandrindod Wells?

**RW:** They were based in Brecon at the time.

**CC:** So, you went from Swansea to Brecon.

**RW:** Yea.

**CC:** And who was in TP at that time?

**RW:** Hmm, there was David Coslett, and Maggie Todd and the director was John Greatorex – I spoke to him on the phone the other day, he’s still going. Although he was the Artistic Director in name only because he was Drama Advisor to the County. In those days you had Drama advisors, and English advisors; people to help guide you before we had the national curriculum, which told us what to do! So, Joan Mills, who is now a voice specialist in Aberystwyth, although I think she's retired, was the actual director. So even from the beginning TP was a mixture of community theatre and TiE. but looking back on it, again, some of the early projects were much more, applied theatre. They were naive. I think looking back at the projects, you know, the usual ‘don’t smoke’, ‘don't drink’, “how to choose a career”, and things like that, went on until the late 70s. Then Greg Cullen joined the company, and also Louise Osborn, and they started to introduce us all to the ideas of Dorothy Heathcote

**CC:** So that's, that's how it came in.

**RW:** That’s how it came in. We could see that what we'd been doing before wasn’t really hitting the spot, although it pleased the teachers . We’d given them what they wanted and pleased the local authority, but it wasn't educationally sound, you know, I came to realise.

**CC:** So you were in the company then as an actor-teacher, in the late 70s. So where did Greg and Louise come in from?

**RW:** From Chat’s Palace. I think they both worked in, in London from memory and they were the main influence in starting to get the Company involved with the Standing Conference of Young Peoples Theatre (SCYPT). We started going to SCYPT Conferences and obviously, that was the big, big leap. We actually saw what other companies were doing based on sound educational principles

**CC:** So, what was your first SCYPT Conference, do you remember?

**RW:** You know, I don’t. They all merge into one, and the events I remember, or one of them, was when Dorothy Heathcote gave a demonstration workshop based on the story of the Holly Bush. It focused on the girl who went missing playing Hide and Seek. They can't find her the next day and she’s been hiding in a chest all the time. She was working with a group of 15 year old’s from a local school. And I remember when Chris Vine did a workshop on the work of Boal. My memory for dates is never good enough. But yeah, you saw a lot of good theatre based on TiE principles. Of course, the nature of demonstrations at a conference are that they tend to be the performance bits. So again, you don’t get to see the workshop. And that we had to work out on our own I think. The first project where I thought ‘ Yes, we're doing this now in TP’ was when Greg wrote *Past Caring*.

**CC:** Is that the one there is an article on in one of the SCYPT Journals? I'm sure there is a case study. [SCYPT Journal 14 – case study by Tessa Gearing]

**RW:** Yes.

**CC:** That must have been a significant moment for the company. Not only are you developing internally, but you were putting your work back out there into the movement.

**RW:** Yes, yes. It was about the notion of change. How we cope with change, what you can do to resist it, or to adapt to it? Or make things acceptable? And the children involved had to ask themselves, listening to this newfangled thing called the radio, and claiming it would destroy community life... But you know, talking about that and thinking about that, also got them talking about mechanisation, agricultural redundancy ....

**CC:** So this one [Past Caring] was set in when, the 1920s?

**RW:** The 1930s. So, then the final, quite touching scene, was with the blacksmith, who'd been a character throughout. His job was no longer viable, people had cars and things. The children gathered around to say goodbye to him because he was leaving them, leaving the town, which led to a whole discussion about how to cope with that and what it might bring to their lives in terms of change.

**CC:** That is interesting because I think I've seen a photograph of the blacksmith.

**RW:** Yes, it is in the SCYPT Journal.

**CC:** It sounds to me, I suppose I'm checking with you, that in a way it was a qualitative development and, it's interesting because you're introducing concepts, conceptual learning, as the basis for the programme.

**RW:** Conceptual learning, and participation as the way of children protecting themselves into sharing ideas, which they hadn't verbalised before. You know, 'this is me speaking but it's not me speaking'. And that is such an important part of a strategy of processes.

**CC:** Yeah. And you're not trying to teach them not to smoke or to become obese, you're actually asking them to think about the concept of change, and how that appears in every aspect of their lives. So what were the developments coming out of that *Past Caring* that were significant for you?

**RW:** Well, firstly, it was about that time, that I was starting to push for Welsh language development within the Company. Now there was a lot of resistance to the notion of TiE amongst the companies in Wales who were a bit nervous about using that description [TiE Company]. They tended to be more performance based than TiE, and there was a tension there. They were very reluctant to even consider the ideas of somebody like Dorothy Heathcote because she was from across the border – ‘we don't need English ideas to help us develop our own TiE’. I can sort of understand that, but it was sort of keeping them in rut. I remember going up to, I think, [Theatr] Clwyd in North Wales, and giving a lecture to them in Welsh, my first public engagement speaking in Welsh, you know with slides and stuff and demonstrating how there are ways of framing questions which don't contain the answer within the musing tone and all those ideas from Dorothy Heathcote. I don't know if it had any impact, but it helped me crystallise what it was that was lacking in Welsh language TiE. I'm skipping through... we're in the late eighties, and I offered to direct a Welsh language project about the French Revolution. It would have been on the anniversary in 1989 [bicentenary]. A small team of Welsh actors, I can't remember their names I'm afraid. The programme was called *Bara Neu farw*, which is a slogan from the French Revolution - ‘bread or death’. And the children were in and out of role discussing the actions of the characters and advising them on what they could do, or what they should do; when it was appropriate to use civil disobedience, or worse, and some people at the time said it was the most advanced TiE programme that had happened in Welsh at that time, so I was pleased with that. But it was becoming time. People began to point out that I'd been with Theatr Powys for 14 years and perhaps we all needed a change after that sort of period of time. At that time Coleg Powys, which was part of the local authority then, was starting to set up a performing arts course in Newtown, so I applied for that and was appointed to lead the course.

**CC:** Okay. So before we go on to that, can I just unpack a little. All this is very interesting because you started by saying that when you came back from Sudan you became very aware, probably as an Englishman as well, that the power of language and the fact that there's so much ideological value in language...that the English language was impacting upon what is a discrete Welsh culture. So, you are seeing that, and it made you very conscious and you said it really began to impact; not necessarily immediately but later in life. So, this feels like a moment where you were suddenly looking at the Welsh language work, recognising its weakness, but also recognising that a resistance to introducing theoretically guided practice was coming from that schism, that tension in the culture, you know, between Welsh identity and English speaking ideas. So, would you say that was the time when you first really felt that tension in your practice?

**RW:** I think it started very, very, very, very small. I mean, it was 1985 when I started to learn Welsh.

**CC:** And you gave a lecture in 1988?

**RW:** I did a lot of quite intensive courses and stuff, but I thought 'I can't keep on sitting in Company meetings saying the Welsh context is important without understanding a little bit about it.' So I did that and then I think in 1986 again, I came third in learner of the Year at the Eisteddfod.

**CC:** Congratulations!

**RW:** I won a course. Now they get trips to America but never mind.

**CC:** I suppose, that rebirthing of [the Welsh] language in Wales we take for granted now. I mean, when did that really start to kick in do you think?

**RW:** It must have been ... or no... is that cause or effect? I'm trying to think when the first Welsh Language Act was [1967]. There'd always been pressure. I was taught at Swansea University by somebody in the Philosophy Department for many years. He was a very old man. It was only years and years later, that I discovered he was one of the three people who burned down the Penderyn Ministry of Defence site, you know, as a Welsh nationalist. They'd just hijacked some agricultural land, turned people off, so they could throw bombs around on it. And then there were things like the drowning of valleys and that sort of thing... It was constantly in the news.

**CC:** I remember the second homes, that was in the news a lot in the 70s, the burning of holiday homes.

**RW:** The influence of the Welsh Language Society grew and grew. And there were really strong pressure groups for the language, and so it did lead to the first Welsh Language Act and there's been another one since.

**CC:** OK. So, the first Welsh Language Act, what was the substance of that in a nutshell?

**RW:** Basically, that trials, official documents should be available in Welsh. There was some nod to the rights of children to have a Welsh language education

**CC:** So it was significant?

**RW:** Yeah, significant, it was. And now that's much, much stronger now. It's very rare you pass somewhere and it hasn't got bi-lingual signs. Even the warning notice under the swimming pool will be bi-lingual, you know, even though you may be living in a very English-speaking area. The principle is, this is Wales therefore this is the language, and they have a target I think of having a million Welsh speakers by 2050.

**CC:** Really? That's pretty ambitious. So, if you were imagining you're sat in a team meeting with me in 1985, what would your argument be to me as a team member, as to why it's important to do Welsh speaking work in Theatr Powys?

**RW:** My argument would be, and was I think, that TiE is an important tool in a child's education, perhaps the most important in a child's education. SO the fact it's being presented to them in a parallel culture, I won't say alternative culture, that would be putting it too strongly, but a parallel culture, is actually contributing to the disruption of that culture and as artists that was not something we should be wanting to do. For me, I always said this in meetings at the time, the fact that there are lots of languages, each denoting a different way of thinking, is important. English is not the only way to think, you know, and we need to recognise that. We are all products of the past that our nations had, and it's ingrained in us to think English is great. But there are other ways of – the very fact that there are so many words which cannot be translated, that in itself, says that language is a reflection or different ways of thinking.

**CC:** I'm very familiar with this in my experience of China. It's very interesting. And so you introduced... did you introduce a particular post into Theatr Powys? Or did you argue for that in order to ... because I know that by the time I got to know Theatr Powys, it was already well established, you had the community tours, you had the TiE tours, but you had the Welsh Language TiE tours as well. How was that structurally introduced?

**RW:** Well, they had me as the sort of cuckoo in the nest, arguing for some Welsh language product, and finances being what they were, we weren't in a position to expand the number of permanent actor-teachers. So, it was done on a project by project basis. People were brought in for whatever it might be, 12 weeks or something, to rehearse and tour. That's, I think that's how it was, even after I left, in fact. Generally, it became as much more hire and fire type arrangement.

**CC:** Yeah, so what was the deficit for that? In terms of, I imagine, that if you'd been doing this, developing within the core team, if you like, this synthesis of theatre, and drama in education pedagogy, really, driven by Heathcote and Bolton etc. How did this translate when you were getting in freelance Welsh actor?

**RW:** The Welsh language actor-teachers were coming in and you were introducing them to the ideas, and you know, to be fair, they picked up and ran with them fairly well and they were leading me as much, well more than, I was leading them. It was their culture that we were working with. So, the positive side of that is, I think, perhaps when they moved on to other TiE work, they were able to take some of that with them without it having the stigma of being English ideas, you know, because they'd actually worked on them through their own language.

**CC:** Yea. I mean, I'm only saying that, again, because it resonates very much with today if you're in a situation, say at Big Brum, for example, because they haven't got any core team left. So, every time there's a new project, if that's doing one of my plays, like, you know, Richard will have to nearly always bring in new people every time. And obviously, they don't really have any of that history or that practice to draw on. So, you have to constantly re-invent the wheel. So, it must have made it quite difficult, but as you say, you were still at that time, in a period of relative growth, within theatre-in-education. Whereas now we're in the death throes.

**RW:** I suppose the other thing that ran alongside that was the fact that there was a stronger attitude towards Welsh language in schools. I've sort of touched on it, but I mean I think, the Local Authority found it very appealing. So many things have saved Theatr Powys along the road... so, a time when, after the national curriculum came in, and the company was in danger of being totally chucked. Whereas John Grotorex, the Drama Advisor, managed to move the funding for Theatr Powys from education to community and thereby saved the day. And then on another occasion, as a part of our community touring, we actually did a Passion Play around all the churches, and that kept us afloat. You know, won over some people who'd perhaps never seen a Powys show before, and then as the, the desire for more, more Welsh language in schools came about and developed, then what the company could offer in that respect was more and more appreciated.

**CC:** Okay, that helps me sort of patch it all together a bit. So, then after 14 years, you moved on to Coleg Powys in Newtown. And what was this new course then?

**RW:** It was a BTec in performing arts. I don't know if you're familiar with the BTech, but there was a whole host of modules, you can choose. I made the selection and I made sure that TiE was one of them. Also I insisted that the information sheets for the course, were published bilingually, although the prospectus for the college was still very much in English. So, there were all sorts of modules from arts administration to straight theatre, to film acting, but every year, with the second year group, we did this TiE option. I would, well, we would put together a project and actually tour it as professionally as we could. These people are aged 17 or 18. And on occasions, well, on lots of occasions, they just produced amazing work because they had this added advantage of talking to their peers, you know. I take some credit for the fact that the techniques they were using, were good solid TiE approaches. But they were able to really communicate with the audiences they had. So, again, getting permission to go into schools was not always easy. And no, we did have a tendency to slip into what might be better called applied drama. But, we always insisted, I always insisted, that there were workshop elements in which ideas could be ... for example, we did a project called Smashed, which was about drugs, but also about parents not coping very well with prescription drugs, right? And at the end of the session, we would have discussions about what the characters should have done, what decisions were made, why they made the decisions they made. It was role play, basic, simple stuff, probably drawing more on the ideas of Boal



more than Heathcote, but it was very useful. We did one on child abuse too, I can't remember the title, but to see these young people dealing with issues of child abuse to people of their own age or just a little younger than they were, and drawing out of them ideas and opinions and then, as often happened, people would want to talk to them afterwards, 'I don't know who to tell about...' And they were very good at guiding them to an appropriate adult. I think that by doing that TiE unit, they grew up so much.

**CC:** Yeah, it gave them agency.

**RW:** Yes, yes it did.

**CC:** I was really, really struck by what you're saying about how, given the tools that TiE was giving these young students of yours, how impactful they were in their own community. And that's why I said it's gives them such agency. I wonder if you wanted to elaborate a bit more on that?

**RW:** Looking back, I'm not, I'm not aware that very many of them went on to seek careers in theatre-in-education, but what I found a lot of them are doing is things like working with young people, working with children and taking an active part in that, and their local communities. At least a lot of them keep in contact with me, to tell me what they're up to. I just think that they grew up about five years in that one year of doing theatre-in-education. And there was only a lecture of a couple of hours a week and then loads of voluntary rehearsal time which the more they got into it, the more pleased they were to undertake even though they knew that their parents were never gonna see it. There wasn't any applause at the end, well they might get applause from the children they were working with, but so much of the course would be about jazz hands...

**CC:** But this was something different and they responded to it. So, from 1988, how long were you in Coleg Powys?

**RW:** Again it was another huge chunk of my career. I was there from 1990 until 2004.

**CC:** Oh right. Yeah. So, 14 years, 14 years at Powys. 14 At Coleg Powys and then you get itchy feet. Most people do it after 7.

**RW:** Yea well, you know, the trouble with the academic life is, you're not allowed to find something you enjoy doing and develop it. You've got to be thinking, when are you going to be doing your MA, when are you going to be doing your PhD or your next publication. Are you working towards – why aren't you working towards - becoming Head of Department or Dean or whatever it is. But I've never been that sort of person, I'm not interested in organising people's careers and lives. So, the pressure grew and

grew really, and I found I was getting stuck with doing loads of stuff that I didn't want to do, which is why I took the early retirement.

**CC:** From 2004 then, because you weren't really happy with how it was going -

**RW:** Yes. I went there to run the Performing Arts Course. Happy as a lamb. By 2004 I was expected to look after art and design, hairdressing, leisure and tourism you know. Sorry, I cannot be interested in these things. And then you just become a manager telling people to come to meetings and writing minutes and then nothing happens....

**CC:** So, then you found the opportunity at Newport?

**RW:** Yes, well that's it. I thought again, things being as they are, I'm not going to get anywhere else in terms of a University, unless I get an MA. So, I did an MA in educational drama up at Trinity Carmarthen, yea? Which was I think two years part time with a hefty dissertation at the end, which became my first book [Contemporary Theatre in Education – Intellect 2007]. And Kevin Matherick, I think, was leader of the course, and again he was, he was very influential, introducing me to some of the key players. By this time I was quite familiar with Dorothy's work, and Gavin Bolton's work, probably less so Boal, and certainly less so of the early people. The Caldwell Cooks, the Brian Ways, the Peter Slades, those are three who'd passed me by until that point, and it was really interesting for me to see where these ideas had come from and developed. I was still doing my MA and working at Coleg Powys, and I tried out some of the Brain Way exercises with my students and they loved them. They really got off on them. So, yea, that was really important to me. And then I did my dissertation on how theatre-in-education was developing in Wales and where it was at.

**CC:** Yes, so how did you end up in Newport?

**RW:** In Newport? Well, again, I'd got the MA, I just kept my eye on the adverts. Didn't want to leave Wales.

**CC:** You're an honorary Welshman now aren't you.

**RW:** Yes, honorary Welsh now. My children were still both in Wales – well one of them is in London now – I just didn't feel I wanted to go further afield. So, it could have been anywhere, you know, it could have been Bangor or Aberystwyth. But this opportunity came up in Newport. I applied for it. Got it.

**CC:** Is that a college as well?

**RW:** It's a university. It's part of the University of Wales. Yeah, I was quite surprised at the lack of facilities there. Obviously, they were trying to get something very new going. I think I joined the course when it was in its second year.

**CC:** What was the course titled? Was it an applied theatre course.

**RW:** No, it was more general than that. I think it was a degree in performing arts again, all different modules. But again, I snook in one on theatre-in-education. And also while I was there they started a course in applied drama and I taught on that as well. And then there were some sort of crossover ideas.

**CC:** So, what were you teaching as applied drama rather than, say, applied theatre?

**RW:** I suppose, the key things we were trying to teach was the ideas of how to extract thinking from young people. It was quite a practical course. The students have to go out and actually work with young people in local centres.

**CC:** So, in a sense, it's applied. I remember when the term first – I mean Nicholson wrote a book on applied drama before for she shifted over to the aesthetics of theatre. So, it was about how you apply all the drama and methodology in different contexts. In the community.

**RW:** That's right. I mean in terms of students, it was building up their workshop skills, just how to run a workshop, you know, what you're trying to do, how to frame questions, what sort of activities are useful and what are not.

**CC:** Real core teaching skills.

**RW:** Yes. By this time I think the University was experimenting with people mixing and matching modules across courses. So, I think quite a lot of the students were actually doing degrees in education, so they'd do TiE as one of those [modules]. A bit of a mess really, I think, looking back. And again, even then in those short years. I was getting pushed towards concentrating on publications and PhDs and 'wouldn't you like to run the applied drama rather than concentrating on the TiE', and 'by the way, we really like the way you teach the film school so...'. So, the teaching was great, I really enjoyed that, working with young people, but the ever changing bureaucracy behind it all just ... I thought ... you can't teach an old dog new tricks... so..

**CC:** That's why you took early retirement?

**RW:** Yes, well, I was 62 in 2011. It was about five years early. But then in the University I think you could retire from 55.

**CC:** Oh really? Those days have gone.

**RW:** Yes

**CC:** I won't be retiring. Full stop. Yeah. So, can I just take you back a little bit? Because what's always struck me is that I didn't know you as a member of TP. I knew you as a teacher from Coleg Powys who had a very strong connection with TP. So, I met you at TP on numerous occasions and you've maintained a very strong connection with the company and been very supportive of the company. So, I mean, I'd be interested to just get a sense from you what you felt the developments in TP were since you left. You reached retirement in the same year they were closed. I'm not trying to blame you.

**RW:** It's the case studies in the book. I thought the project Careless Talk [1986/87] was actually the high point of that sort of TiE that I've seen anywhere. And I wasn't part of that, I had left by then, so I can say that. But just the way the children became more and more involved, and more and more analytical, and more and more thoughtful, till by the end, they were able to sit down as a group together and decide what to do without any adults with them at all. And then go to explain to the Mam, the mother, exactly what was going on with the son – post traumatic stress - and explain it to her. These ten year olds, eleven year olds, it was just phenomenal.

**CC:** And that was still under the leadership of Greg at that point and Louise?

**RW:** Louise actually. Louise did most of the writing for the performances and had some tremendous actors – Karen McGuigan, Dave Lynn, bless his soul.

**CC:** Dave would have really started his career in Theatr Powys?

**RW:** Yes. He was part of, remember the Youth employment Schemes – YOPS, whatever they were called? Theatr Powys had a whole company of YOPS and so we had a second company working out of the building at one point and he was one of those. And when the YOP scheme ended, he was taken on as one of the actor teachers. He was a really good actor but also very sensitive to the needs of theatre-in-education. And Tessa Gearing of course. So, just the four of them, but just a tremendous project.

**CC:** So, then in 96, would it be 95 or 96? It would be 1996, when Ian [Yeoman] becomes the Artistic Director [of TP]. It's got to be 96. Yeah, because The Dukes was closed in 1995. And it was about a year

after. So, I mean what do you think that Ian brought particularly, and not just him but that that phase of the company's development, to the theatre-in-education work?

**RW:** Now, speaking of course, as someone who only saw the end product and not part of the process. But what I noticed is projects with just his own personality. He has that way of talking very calmly. You've got to shut up and listen or your going to miss it. What he's saying is really important, and that way of drawing the children in, the young people in, that's one of the things that struck me. The other thing I noticed, especially with the Romeo and Juliet project, I don't know if you saw that, was that use of the key images from the play which all came together at the end – it was the ring, the knife the cross the herbs whatever - and the young people had to arrange them as they felt they should be arranged. And then talk about why, or even not, which gave them that liberation of showing their understanding of the play and its themes without having to write an essay or talk in front of the class or whatever, which was something I'd never seen before in TiE.

**CC:** Okay, so that was kind of a new dimension, in use of objects particularly.

**RW:** Similarly, the very, very well used in schools, Mice and Men project. Two or three actors in that? Again, that way of taking something school really wanted, but actually opening up in new ways and not just telling the story, but actually getting them into the themes of the book, why it's an important novel. It's that way of giving the schools what they want but also giving them what they need, you know.

**CC:** And that's something that I think Big Brum learned while I was still the Artistic Director. Learning from that kind of approach. And I think Richard [Holmes] has taken that even further as a model. And actually it's his way of keeping - so if, for example, I will be asked to make an adaptation of something like Jekyll and Hyde or Romeo and Juliet actually. And yet, we will, he will create a subsidiary TiE programme, often that a new practitioner [writer] will create, and they get the school to buy both. So actually, the big performance is subsidising theatre-in-education. It's just finding those ways to survive. And it's worked well, because I think without that, Big Brum would have really struggled to continue to survive particularly since it was cut [by the Arts Council England] in 2014 as a national portfolio organisation.

So, you've seen a lot of that work, and maintained that support for the company to the bitter end, obviously. We all did. I mean, my only involvement actually wasn't in TiE strangely. I was commissioned to write quite a lot of the community tours. But, I suppose when it came to its final, I don't know to call it - the act of cultural vandalism that it was [closing down of Theatr Powys]. I mean, you know, what would you say, I suppose, that Welsh culture and Powys lost?

**RW:** They lost a way of understanding the world. Of seeing beyond. I won't say seeing beyond what. Just seeing beyond. It's taken the X ray vision away from them, I think.

Having said that, one of the things that, in my sadder moments, I think, well ... given all the great work that went on all over the UK, from the 60s to now. Why are we still where we are? You know, why do we put up with Johnson's of this world? Why do we still put up with this world? Why do we still.... I don't know... why do we hate immigrants? Why do we want to protect our borders? Did we really make a difference? And I want to believe we did. So, when I'm feeling down (*puffs out cheeks*), was it worthwhile? And I know it was but... you know... do you ever feel the same?

**CC:** That's such an interesting thing to say –

**RW:** It's not that we're changing the world, you know, by getting in and teaching kids how to think. You might think okay, they grow up to be adults. They're thinking... a lot of them are thinking wrong (*Laughs*).

**CC:** Well, that's interesting. That brings me to your first book which was Contemporary Theatre-in-Education, which was a reworking of your Masters. And I was, I was happy and pleased, to be asked to help with that process. And I think it produced a very valuable marking of the moment, particularly in Welsh TiE. And then you went on to produce this, which is your Theatre in Education: Origins, Development and Influence [Methuen Drama, 2017], which I think is an enormous contribution, for which I think anyone who's committed to the field will be grateful for, so thank you for that.

**RW:** Thank you for saying it.

**CC:** Well, it's true. But in terms of your last question to me I always, I always think this is a very interesting quote that you chose from Bond actually, from the 2014 NATD [National Association for the Teaching of Drama] Conference, you say [Quote] “Bond pointed out the importance of knowing oneself, and that it is the lack of self-knowledge that brings down all the great tragic figures of theatre”, which of course, is the essence of the tragic in the culture, because if ever, anyone demonstrated a great, great lack of self-knowledge it's someone like Boris Johnson. I mean, to go back to your earlier point, right down to the bitter end, his final speech, it could have been something written by Shakespeare, on a bad day, but in terms of the sheer lack of self-awareness. It's pure tragedy in that sense. And then he said [Bond], and you quote, “When children are engaged in TiE, they are enabled to think and you quote him, ‘we are making it happen *and* it is happening to us at the same time.’” And you say, “life itself, of course, can be described in these same words. Many applications of drama and much self-styled ‘TiE’ offer (often questionable) momentary solutions, but do not have the power to ask the question, ‘What is it that makes us human?’ And if the question remains unasked, it will remain unanswered.” Which I think is a wonderful paragraph.

So, to go back to your saying when you're in a 'down moment', I think, I think, I *don't* share that. I don't, I don't feel *that*, I don't feel that sense of 'Did we get it wrong?' I know that there's practice out there that doesn't ask that fundamental question about what it is to be human. I think you've just described in the last hour to me your journey to that point, when you began to find that way of crossing that boundary. Going from sort of utilitarian or instrumentalized thinking into conceptual, values based thinking.

**RW:** Yea, yea.

**CC:** And I think, I think the movement that was, made a massive difference. And I think your connection with your students from Coleg Powys nearly forty years later, is telling you that, but of course it's not enough.

**RW:** No.

**CC:** And I don't think in that sense it's because we, we have ultimately failed. I think actually it's a measure of our success, in asking that question, and I think that's why Theatr Powys got closed. And I think that's why the theatre-in-education movement has been completely emasculated. And that's why, why I think this is a really valuable book. And I think why people still resist this narrative, is because what you do in your book, is you really, you really pay attention to what the art form *is*, rather than what people might casually assume it is or claim it to be. And I think in that sense, I think our movement did have success.

**RW:** Right. Okay.

**CC:** And of course, it's imperfect. Because you show me a classroom where real learning is taking place and everything's good. I remember Dorothy saying to me after the first time I met her, I had a spectacular failure in role, and she said to me 'that's great'. I said 'Great?' I was like, traumatised, by having her next to me, and she said, 'yes, because now we will learn.' [referring to Chris' mistakes]. And that's what you learn from. And I think that is the difference.

**RW:** Yes. Well, I think that the particular journey I took with TiE, has perhaps been unusual, in as much as most people will have had exposure to ideas of theatre-in-education and developed them. I seemed to spend the first sort of five years, just not knowing what I was doing. And then applying that [the ideas of theatre-in-education]. I got it back to front somehow. If I'd started off by reading Dorothy Heathcote, and Boal, and Gavin Bolton, and maybe even the ideas of Gardner in America, with multiple intelligences, had that experience maybe as part of my teaching qualification, I'd have got there much quicker, in terms of understanding what I was trying to do. But maybe that's true of all us?

**CC:** I think we could all say that in different ways. And maybe you wouldn't have been as alive to that cultural difference that you were, that you're experiencing in Africa as a young man really, which helped you see being in Wales differently. Maybe you wouldn't have had that point of entry and it's how you brought those things together. That's important. I mean, in the final, I mean, it's very nice in the book because you are looking for survivors and you are looking for places in which, if not the absolute art form, certain approaches, certain elements of it are being employed in different ways. And you wrote this in 2015 [published in 2017] and we're seven years on, I don't know if you've got any thoughts about any where you see that legacy, or any new results of that?

**RW:** No, not, not in terms of companies working. I'm not saying they're not out there, it's just that I haven't come across them or whatever... Except ... What's that.. the company that did Too Much Punch for Judy? When the book came out, I got quite a stropmy letter from the Director saying that they should have been mentioned as they were the most successful TiE project ever, you know, with more performances, more performances to children... but I had seen it. I saw it at Coleg Powys. And it was a straightforward performance piece, you know, don't drink and drive. Okay, which we all know. We shouldn't do that. You shouldn't smoke. You shouldn't do this, you shouldn't do that. But we do it, or some people do it. Even though, intellectually, they know. So, what's the point? You know? I know actor-teachers, or actors, you know, who go into schools and do a project about 'don't smoke' and then pop out for a fag in the interval. And you know, you've probably seen it happen yourself. But, post Punch for Judy, it was a very moving play, but the workshop consisted of 'has anyone got any questions?' to an audience of 250. Or 'what do you think about this?' as if anybody's gonna put up their hands in front of 249 other people and express an opinion or ask a question. And yes, they've done loads of performances, and yes, schools love it. But it, it didn't rate as a project which deserved to be in my book.

**CC:** Did you write back?

**RW:** I did. Not at great length. I just said, you know, for me theatre-in-education's got to have elements of some sort of participatory performance or some sort of engagement with the ideas rather than just a plenary at the end of the performance. And that was the end of the email correspondence. But he was obviously quite miffed because he was very proud of the fact that he'd done so many performances of the play.

**CC:** You see, I think that brings us back to your moments of being down, because it's rigour which actually demands an analysis of what it is that we are seeing in terms of practice [that makes the difference]. And being able to say, 'Well, no, that's, that's fine. It's legitimate. It's doing what that is doing. But it's not asking that question about what it is to be human. And I think that's what SCYPT, and you know, those



companies associated with it, were really successfully trying to do. To find new ways of asking that question.

**RW:** That's right and for me in a project like Too Much Punch for Judy, the question is 'why do we do things that we know are bad for us?'

**CC:** Which is a useful question.

**RW:** You know, that's the question that needs to be answered. There's no opportunity to even ask it.

**CC:** Why do we act against our own interests? It's the question of our times.

**RW:** *(Laughs)* Yes

**CC:** But if you've not got, if you've not got an understanding about what the role of theatre and education is, and what education is, and what learning is, you're really never going to address it.

Well, that's fantastic. Sorry, but I've kept you talking for about an hour and a half there. I just thought that it would be very valuable to have your thoughts. I don't know if there's anything else you want to say?

**RW:** No, I think with my general grazing over the years I've covered most of what I feel needs to be said anyway.

**CC:** Thank you very much. I think that's going to be a very valuable listen or read for people.

**RW:** Well do get it out before I drop dead, won't you?

**CC:** I promise, promise I will.

**Chats Palace was founded in 1976 to provide arts and education opportunities to the local community, when the Homerton Library moved to a new building a few yards down the road. The former library building was appropriated by members of the local community who wanted to ensure that the Grade II listed building, donated to Hackney in 1913 by philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, remained in community hands and 'For the Betterment of East Londoners'. Following its conversion to an arts centre, Chats Palace has remained an impressive architectural landmark and much loved community asset.**