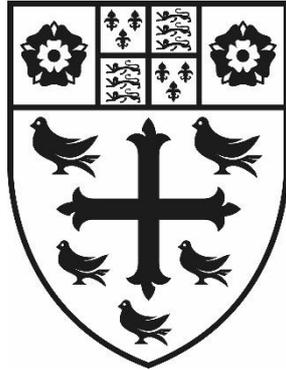


Westminster Abbey Poets' Corner



Sir John Gielgud OM CH
Memorial Stone Dedication

26th April 2022
6.15 pm

Sir John Gielgud OM CH

“We cannot hear the great voices of the past, but it is safe to say that in our time no actor has spoken Shakespeare with a finer ear for the poetry, or a voice more perfectly tuned to the music, than John Gielgud.” So spoke journalist Robert MacNeil in 1994 at the Folger Shakespeare Library as he helped The Shakespeare Guild launch the Gielgud Award for Excellence in the Dramatic Arts. Over the years this honour, which was warmly endorsed by Sir John, has been presented not only in Washington and New York but at several London venues, among them Middle Temple Hall, the Guildhall, and the beautiful Shaftesbury Avenue theatre that now bears Gielgud’s name.

Born 14th April 1904 into a family with deep thespian roots, Sir John began his career in the 1920s at settings such as the Old Vic, where he brought fresh perspectives not only to Shakespearean roles like Benedick, Hamlet, and Richard II but to modern classics by European dramatists such as Chekhov. Soon he was directing and producing as well as acting, and his innovative seasons in West End theatres like the Queen’s and in Stratford’s Shakespeare Memorial Theatre helped pave the way for both the RSC and the National Theatre.

By mid-century Gielgud, who was knighted in 1953, had shown that he could do compelling work with new directors like Peter Brook and with contemporary playwrights such as Edward Albee, Alan Bennett, John Osborne, and Harold Pinter. He was also delighting audiences with his celebrated Ages of Man presentation of Bardic highlights, and venturing into film and television. He would help Marlon Brando excel as a Shakespearean actor in a cinematic Julius Caesar, for example, and he would delight moviegoers in films like Arthur and Prospero’s Books. He would also work with younger stars such as Jeremy Irons in TV series such as *Brideshead Revisited* and with Meryl Streep and Ian McKellen in the film version of playwright David Hare’s *Plenty*.

In 1996 Sir John was inducted into the Order of Merit, and to commemorate that occasion Clive Francis, who had compiled a 90th-birthday tribute called *The Many Faces of Gielgud*, produced a delightful caricature of him, many prints of which Sir John inscribed. Framed originals of that image are now bestowed as trophies on recipients of the Gielgud Award, and it’s a delight to observe that several of those laureates are with us for this evening’s dedication of Wayne Hart’s stone memorial to Sir John’s life and legacy. It’s also a pleasure to feature another of Clive’s charming portrayals of Sir John on the page to the right.



Credit: Clive Francis

ORDER OF SERVICE

The Very Reverend Dr David Hoyle, Dean of Westminster, gives the Welcome

Dame Janet Suzman reads Psalm 19: 1–6

The heavens declare the glory of God;
and the firmament sheweth his handywork.
Day unto day uttereth speech,
and night unto night sheweth knowledge.
There is no speech nor language,
where their voice is not heard.
Their line is gone out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.
In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun,
which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,
and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race.
His going forth is from the end of the heaven,
and his circuit unto the ends of it:
and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof.

Sir Richard Eyre CH gives a Tribute

Sir Ian McKellen CH reads from a play about Sir Thomas More

Grant them removed and grant that this your noise
Hath chid down all the majesty of England,
Imagine that you see the wretched strangers,
Their babies at their backs, with their poor luggage
Plodding to th' ports and coasts for transportation,
And that you sit as kings in your desires,
Authority quite silenced by your brawl,
And you in ruff of your opinions cloth'd,
What had you got? I'll tell you, you had taught
How insolence and strong hand should prevail,
How order should be quell'd, and by this pattern
Not one of you should live an aged man,

For other ruffians, as their fancies wrought,
With self-same hand, self reasons, and self right,
Would shark on you, and men like ravenous fishes
Feed on one another. Desperate you are,
Wash your foul minds with tears, and those same hands
That you like rebels lift against the peace
Lift up for peace, and your unreverent knees,
Make them your feet, to kneel and be forgiven. . . .
You'll put down strangers,
Kill them, cut their throats, possess their houses,
And lead the majesty of law in lyam
To slip him like a hound; . . . say now the King,
As he is clement if th' offender mourn,
Should so much come too short of your great trespass
As but to banish you, whither would you go?
What country by the nature of your error
Should give you harbor? Go you to France or Flanders,
To any German province, Spain or Portugal,
Nay, any where that not adheres to England,
Why, you must needs be strangers; would you be pleas'd
To find a nation of such barbarous temper
That breaking out in hideous violence
Would not afford you an abode on earth,
Whet their detested knives against your throats,
Spurn you like dogs, and like as if that God
Owed not nor made not you, nor that the elements
Were not all appropriate to your comforts,
But charter'd unto them? What would you think
To be thus us'd? This is the strangers' case
And this your mountainish inhumanity.

William Shakespeare (1564–1616)

Sir David Hare gives a Tribute

Dame Judi Dench CH reads Sonnet 29

When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,
I all alone beweep my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
And look upon myself and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,
Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least;
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
(Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth) sings hymns at heaven's gate;
For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

William Shakespeare

Shana Farr sings

THE ANTHEM

And did those feet in ancient time
Walk upon England's mountains green?
And was the holy Lamb of God
on England's pleasant pastures seen?
And did the countenance divine
shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here
among those dark satanic mills?

Bring me my bow of burning gold!
Bring me my arrows of desire!
Bring me my spear! O clouds, unfold!
Bring me my chariot of fire!
I will not cease from mental fight,
nor shall my sword sleep in my hand,
till we have built Jerusalem
in England's green and pleasant land.

Jerusalem 488 NEH
Hubert Parry (1848–1918)

William Blake (1757–1827)

Dame Judi Dench CH says

I ask you, Mr Dean, to receive into the safe custody of the Dean and Chapter, this memorial in honour and memory of Sir John Gielgud.

The Dean replies

To the greater glory of God and in thankful memory of Sir John Gielgud, and of all that he achieved and contributed to the life of the United Kingdom and to the dramatic arts, I dedicate this memorial: in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Flowers are laid at the memorial by Dame Judi Dench CH.

The Reverend Robert Latham, Sacrist, leads the Prayers

Let us pray

*All sit. After each prayer, all respond **Amen.***

Watching in hope for the coming of Christ's Kingdom, we are bold to pray:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

All stand. The Dean pronounces the Blessing

Go forth into the world in peace; be of good courage; hold fast that which is good; render to no-one evil for evil; strengthen the faint-hearted; support the weak; help the afflicted; honour all people; love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

