

Newsletter

SUMMER 2026

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Editorial

Thank you to all who contributed to this edition of the ADAS newsletter. I do hope you enjoy it. The Autumn Newsletter will be published in October so please save up any anecdotes, photos, links and news – especially from the upcoming Edinburgh Fringe and Festival - and send to address below.

Thank you

Veronica veronica@kinahan.co.uk

Notes from the Chair

Amanda Foster, Chair of ADA Scotland

I am really delighted to be the Chair of ADA Scotland for another year. We had a very successful Annual General Meeting on 9th May - minutes will be available soon for members to read. Thankfully we have now appointed a new treasurer, Jennifer Waterton. Thank you, Jennifer for taking on this role.

This year, I'm hoping that we can get our training up to scratch after the summer. I'm also hoping to get everybody meeting on zoom 'pull-ups' every couple of months so people can chat and give advice to either audio describers who have issues or if people need advice - or just get to know one another.

Finally, I just like to see how sad I was when I heard about the death of Irene McKenzie. I worked with her when she came up to Aberdeen to assess new audio describers and she was a pleasure to work with.

Thanks – Amanda aburt123@sky.com.

REMEMBERING IRENE MACKENZIE

Bridget Stevens writes:

It was with great sadness that we heard from her daughter Mary that Irene MacKenzie had died peacefully at the beginning of May.

Many audio describers around Scotland will remember Irene as a towering figure of experience and authority who achieved great things for both ADA(S) and for the service generally. Her insistence on the highest standards of preparation and delivery was an example to us all, not just during her chairmanship of ADA(S) but also when she led the ADA(S) Training Team and as an Assessor and Quality Monitor. Even though details of the AD training now undoubtedly need to be reviewed and updated, it is to be hoped that Irene's high standards can be built into the fabric of whatever emerges.



“Like so many of us, I fondly remember my training with Irene. She was such an encouraging yet no-nonsense trainer; I always felt that I was the best I could be after training under her. Irene was one of my trainers back in 2011. I still remember her clipped voice and no-nonsense manner. I always felt in safe hands when receiving feedback from Irene: she wouldn't let bad practice slide but she was encouraging. I always felt like she would help me do my best.”

Anna Fancett, Audio Describer

“I was sad to hear the news about Irene. She, along with Marjorie, trained me back in 2010, at the Tron Theatre, and it soon became clear that she would stand for no nonsense. Praise from Irene was praise indeed! My only - I think - experience of describing with her was when we described 'The Steamie' in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Inverness in 2012. This was in the days before videos of the show were available, so I attended every performance that first week, including on my birthday, when I sat beside Irene, scared to make any notes, because we had had it drummed into us on the training course that for the first viewing our eyes and ears must be focused on the stage at all times! It's been a long time since I saw Irene, but I remember her with affection, and can only aspire to her high standards.”

Alison Downey, Audio Describer

“Irene was my trainer back in 2011. When I'm working now, I can still hear her voice in my head, tutting at my use of adverbs and coyness at describing sex scenes “ 😊

Christopher McKiddie, Audio Describer

“Irene did indeed make an outstanding contribution to the work of ADA(S) and was the inspiration to many describers. We had known one another for many years through our membership of the Edinburgh Makars Drama Club but on my retirement from work, it was Irene who persuaded me - as only she could! - to attend the training course she was running in 2014. Audio Describing was something I knew nothing about, so I was somewhat doubtful as to whether it was something I wanted to do with my spare time. However, Irene knew me better than myself and I will always be grateful to her for pushing me into it, for encouraging me to be involved, in a very small way, in such a rewarding and challenging role as an audio describer for the visually impaired.”

Jo Barrow, Audio Describer

“When I joined Capital Theatres, I found Irene’s name on the theatres’ list of describers. But we really became close when she was made Chair of ADA(S) and she persuaded me to become her Vice Chair. We traipsed all over Scotland together, visiting every theatre to tell them about audio description and the benefits to a visually impaired audience. I really enjoyed our trips, talking about everything and nothing. Irene had a warmth that put you at ease right away, and she was a kind and generous person who was always interested in the theatre, in me and my family. We were unlikely friends but friends we were.”

Kim McKenna, Capital Theatres Front of House and Access Manager.

A Seat Dedication

In celebration of the life and contribution Irene MacKenzie made to Audio Description in Scotland, and in direct response from emails from some members who contacted us, seeking a way to honour her memory, ADA(S) is launching an appeal to help purchase a seat in Irene’s name, in the auditorium, at the Kings’s Theatre, Edinburgh. The engraved plaque will be in place for 10 years.

We now kindly ask our community of Audio Describers to support this appeal by donating to help meet the cost (£400) of her seat dedication. You can donate by bank transfer to:

Audio Description Association (Scotland)

Bank of Scotland

Sort Code 80-09-41

Account No 06001680

 Please support and share this important petition for visually impaired children.

Many families of children with nystagmus and other visual impairments face significant costs for specialist glasses, tinted lenses, and visual aids that are medically necessary but not fully funded by the NHS. These aids can make a huge difference to a child's ability to learn, access education, and navigate daily life.

This petition calls on the Government to fully fund clinically necessary specialist glasses and tinted lenses for all visually impaired children through the NHS, helping to end the postcode lottery that leaves some families paying hundreds of pounds out of pocket for essential visual support.

If you agree that no child should miss out on the visual aids they need because of cost, please consider signing and sharing:

<https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/769645>

Every signature helps raise awareness and move this issue closer to a Government response and potential Parliamentary debate. Thank you for your support. 

Glyndebourne has taken trigger warnings to a new level. With but days to go of its run, the Slipped Disc blog spotted that the festival's production of *The Marriage of Figaro* warned that the opera includes scenes where “characters of lesser status are subject to unwanted sexual advances and physically aggressive behaviour”.

We look forward to the RSC following suit and telling us that their forthcoming *Macbeth* features “high status characters being subject to unwanted knife play and physically aggressive woodland”.

John Cummings writes about meeting Dr Joel Snyder (apologies for leaving this out of the last newsletter, Ed.)



Attached is a photo of a meeting facilitated by Carol McGregor with Dr Joel Snyder, who is regarded as the person who first introduced the concept of audio describing back in the early 1980s in Washington. Carol McGregor, mother of ADA(S)'s patron, trained as an audio describer in Perth and was instrumental in establishing audio description in films.

The photo is of self (JC) in the background, Esther Snyder, Carol McGregor, Joel Snyder and Bridget Stevens in the foreground.

Tales of celebrities' ridiculous demands are legion (a thousand white lilies, toilet paper facing into the wall not out, that kind of thing), but sometimes you have to admit the star has a point.

According to *Pots of Gold*, David Hendon's new book about the history of snooker, world champion Fred Davis once arrived at a social club to give an exhibition performance. When he asked to see the table on which he would be playing, Davis was met with puzzled looks. "What table?" asked the club owner. "We thought you'd bring it with you."

Lawrence of Arabia audio described – John Cummings



GMac Films, based in Glasgow, launched their *Little Pictures* programme four years ago and asked me to audio describe them. Designed to encourage and support new film directors and producers making their first film, the programme offers funding, training and technical support. The films are 10-15mins in length and a variety of drama, animation and

documentary. The standard is high, and many have gone on to appear in national and international film festivals, which require them to be audio described.

Recently we were able to show a number of these films to a blind and partially sighted audience. Such was the positive response, that it is anticipated that this will become a regular event.



One film was *Lawrence of Arabia* though perhaps not the one that everyone knows, although Peter O'Toole and Alec Guinness both appeared in it. The film maker, Mar Felices, had discovered a reel of film made by her late grandfather who was a keen film maker and the historical archivist of Seville. This showed the filming of the Cairo scenes from *Lawrence of Arabia* which were shot in Seville. *Return to Arabia* became a sensitive homage to the director's grandfather who had inspired her own passion for film making.

Mark Bellis tells me that the countertenor James Bowman would talk about a service in St James's Palace where the anthem was a discordant piece by Sir Michael Tippett. Afterwards, the late Queen thanked the choir saying: "It must have been difficult to rehearse." Before they could reply, Prince Philip said: "Difficult? It was bloody awful!"

One Day – the Musical.

There was a lot of hype surrounding the opening of this musical at the Royal Lyceum Theatre in Edinburgh. ‘Read the book, seen the film, tv series and now.....’ so frankly I was slightly cynical when asked to describe it. However, it blew me away! Directed by Max Webster with intelligent and funny dialogue by David Greig, the set by Rae Smith had the floor raised, with stalls on both sides of a stage that features some cabaret tables and chairs, making the audience part of the show.

There was also an excellent band of fine musicians with great acting and singing by the cast (especially Sharon Rose as Emma)

Touch tours were fantastic – sombreros, costumes and bicycle – and we heard that Sharon Rose (Emma) had never ridden a bike before and had to learn before rehearsals began. And then learn to ride the said bike round in a circle – while singing!



Pic - Mihaela Bodlovic

Em and Dex embrace in the middle of a ‘maze’ created by fairy lights lying spiralled on the floor

Pic: Marc Brenner

Wedding party, with the bride (Tilly) standing on a swagged table, glitter balls above, surrounded by dancing guests .



The Marriage of Figaro – Scottish Opera

Another very successful touch tour was conducted by Donny Ross, stage manager of Scottish Opera, plus Pauline and Siobhan from Wardrobe, who guided us round the sets and costumes of this season's Marriage of Figaro - ably helped (in Edinburgh) by Alex from the Festival Theatre FOH staff.

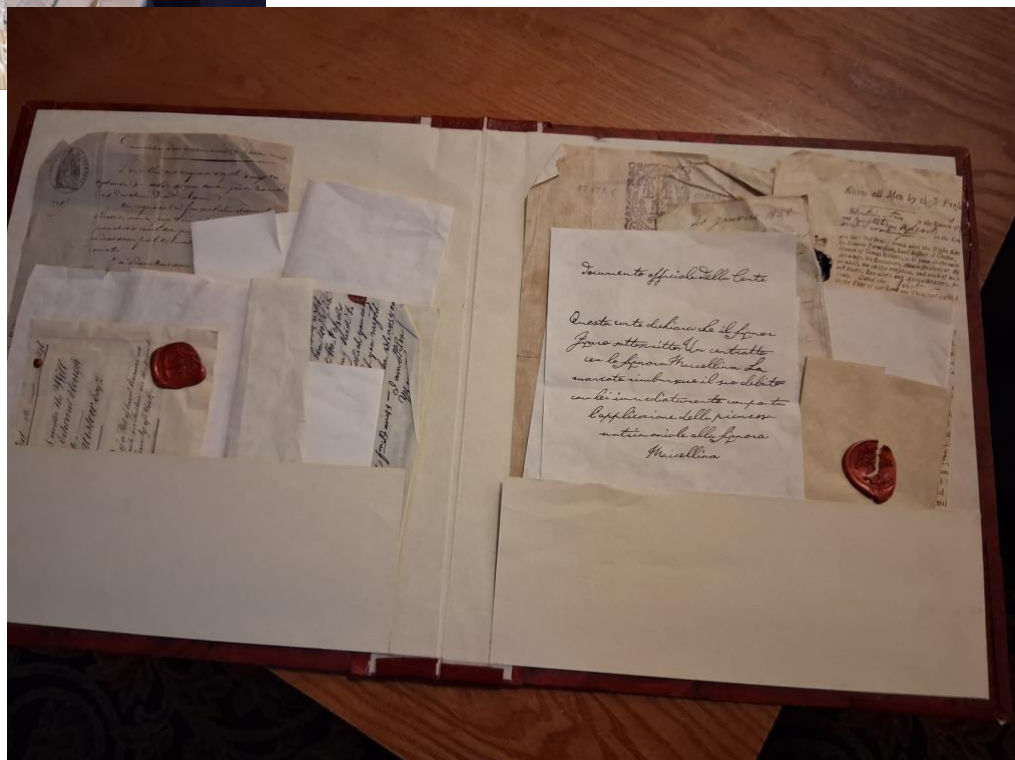


Picture above– we admire one of the wheat stooks

What impressed us most was the incredible detail of the sets: the wheat stooks were real (on the outside) and stalks were checked and replenished after each performance. The wheat ‘field’ was also watered! The only problem they’ve had is with mice seeking a home.

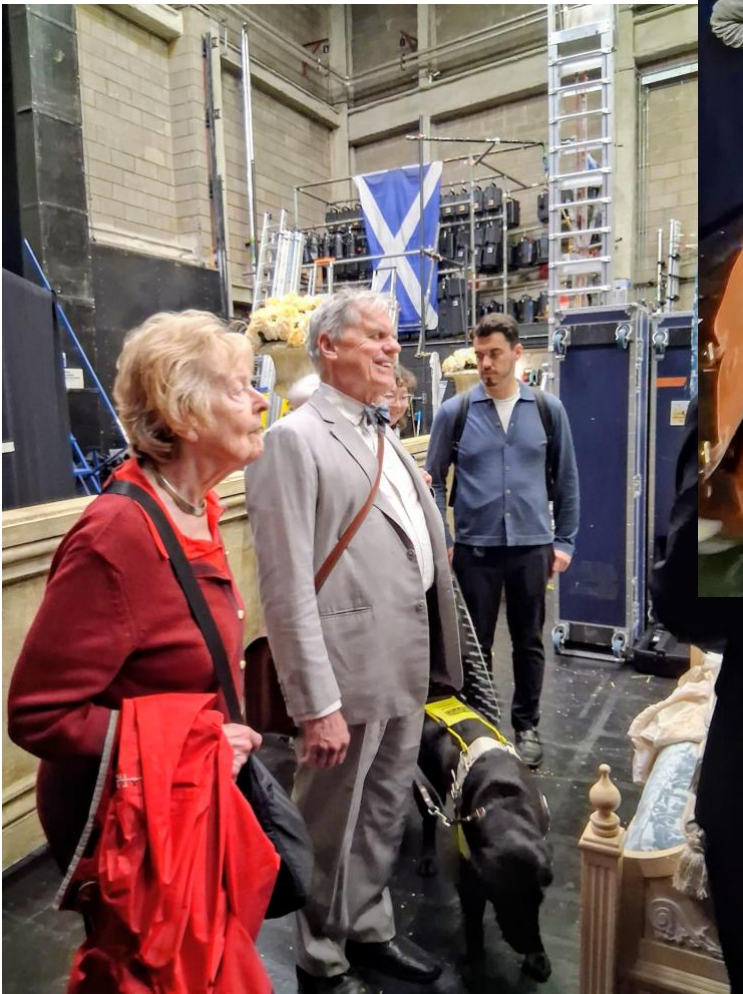
The lawyer’s folio was filled with documents written with ink and quill, in French and Italian and sealed with proper sealing wax.

Of course the costumes were beautiful – all handmade, specially stored, or recycled for every production. We learned that the countess’s large hat was 18 years old and still going strong; and that this year, the (new) count – Ian Rucker – was 6’5” tall and slim so his riding coat had to be remade – using hard-wearing denim with velvet collar and cuffs



Picture right – the folio

Picture right, Peter admires the workmanship of Count Almaviva's coat, with Alex, FOH staff member from the Festival Theatre



Picture left: we might have been enjoying a performance sung in English, but there was no doubt which football team the stage crew supported! (Scottish saltire draped over scaffolding at the rear)

ADA(S) SPOTLIGHT - Jennifer Waterton (the new Treasurer of ADA-S)

1. Can you summarize who you are and where you are based?

I am a freelance social researcher, analyst and writer based in Edinburgh. I worked in the academic, public and voluntary sectors for 20 years before setting up my own consultancy business in 2007. I am now scaling down my paid work and scaling up my volunteering as I move into the 'third age'!



2. What led you to join the committee of ADA-S?

I joined the committee in summer 2024 at the instigation of the previous chair, who is a close friend and a fellow member of a theatre group based in The Netherbow in the 1980s. I am a lover of the theatre, and I also have an aunt who is blind – so I am aware of the support she needs to fully enjoy events and productions of all kinds.

3. What is your role as a committee member?

I am just beginning to find my feet with the committee, and to work out how and where I can fit in and make a valuable contribution. I am hoping that in the fullness of time I will be able to help ADAS to write grant applications which will enable us to develop the infrastructure and reach of audio description in Scotland. Grant application writing is something I have had substantial experience of – with some notable successes!

4. Are you concerned about AI replacing live audio describers?

The spectre of AI and its impact on every sphere of life is something I think about almost every day. Recent research commissioned by RNIB (in 2025) concluded that AI has the potential to broaden the reach of audio description in the future, but more work is needed before it can be reliably put into practice. It will be important to contribute to this debate as it evolves.

5. What are the main challenges in delivering live description?

As someone who has only limited experience, the main challenges I see are the difficulties of synchronising the AD input with the production and finding the appropriate tone and level of AD for each event.

6. What keeps you motivated to work in AD?

I think there is a big job to be done to raise awareness with potential service users, as well as with theatre venues, festivals, producers etc. of what AD can offer. There is a long way to go before AD is seen as a completely normal and integrated part of every performance and production.

7. What have been your most memorable AD //theatre experiences – good **and** bad?

My most memorable theatre experiences are too many to mention Just thinking about Beckett, I absolutely loved Waiting for Godot with Ian McKellen and Patrick Stewart at the Kings Theatre in Edinburgh which my 8 year old daughter (at the time) laughed her head off at, Eh Joe at the Lyceum with Michael Gambon which my 18 year old daughter (at the time) sobbed at, Gary Oldman last year in York Theatre doing the one man show of Krapps Last Tape, and Not I at the Pleasance, performed by an actor with Tourettes. All extraordinary and deeply affecting performances.

8. Tell us one thing that no-one would guess about you!

I was interviewed for a post at Labour Party Headquarters in 1986 by Peter Mandelson! I guess I should keep quiet about that

Reminder from the ADA(S) Administrator

Email: - admin@adascotland.com

Facebook: - <https://www.facebook.com/ScotlandAda2>

Theatre Contacts

	Name of theatre	Telephone number
Aberdeen	His Majesty's Theatre	01224 641122
Ayr	The Gaiety Theatre	01292 270920
Cumbernauld	Cumbernauld Theatre	01236 737235
Dundee	Dundee Rep	01382 223530
Edinburgh	Festival and Kings	0131 529 6000
	Royal Lyceum	0131 248 4848
	Playhouse	0131 557 2692
	Assembly Roxy	0131 623 3001
	Edinburgh International Festival	0131 473 2000.
	Scottish Storytelling Centre	0131 556 9579
	Traverse	0131 228 3223
Glasgow	King's	0141 332 3321
	Theatre Royal	0141 332 3321
	Tron	0141 552 4267
	Citizens	0141 429 0022
Greenock	Beacon Arts Centre	01475 723723
Inverness	Eden Court	01463 234234
Perth	Perth Theatre	01738 621031
Peebles	Eastgate Theatre	01721 725777
Pitlochry	Pitlochry Festival Theatre	01796 484626
St. Andrew	Byre Theatre	01334 475000
Stirling	Macrobert Arts Centre	01786 466666

For updated information check our website www.adascotland.com

Scottish Charity Number SC029397