

Oration: Catherine Mallyon
Tuesday 25 July 2023, 3pm ceremony

Professor Carol Chillington Rutter

Vice-Chancellor,

1963. In a field at the bottom of a hill where the Coventry gibbet once stood, a new university rises out of the mud. Its first buildings: library, physics, humanities. The visionary architect of its innovative English syllabus, George Hunter, mandates that Shakespeare will crown the degree: taught not to freshers but finalists, and not as literature but theatre, placing Shakespeare as a jobbing man of the playhouse and his plays as documents of performance that need as much the attention of students as the imaginations of actors to give them a 'local habitation and a name'. Hunter invites another visionary, the young artistic director from just down the road who's lately managed to rebrand his local outfit the 'Royal Shakespeare Company', to come to Warwick as Associate Professor. Peter Hall thereafter delivers annual Shakespeare lectures, one of whose themes is the symbiotic relationship between theatre and university.

Fast forward twenty years. Another Warwick collaboration with another RSC visionary, Maurice Daniels, builds a programme to bring actors, directors, creatives to the university while sending busloads of students to the theatre. Warwick provides seed money for the first video recordings of RSC live performances. They're rudimentary, but create a unique research archive. They capture the theatrical ephemeral for study -- and show the way to all future broadcasting of live performance.

Fast forward another twenty years. Warwick wins major funding to set up the 'CAPITAL' Centre: Creativity and Performance in Teaching and Learning, a partnership with the RSC that busies the traffic between academy and theatre. Among much else, it realises Hunter's pedagogic vision: at Warwick, Shakespeare since CAPITAL, is taught in rehearsal conditions, 'without chairs'.

As this brief history shows, Warwick, from its inception, has enjoyed a 'special relationship' with the RSC. We've honoured directors -- Greg Doran, Declan Donnellan -- playwrights -- Tarell McCraney -- actors -- Simon Russell Beale, Rakie Ayola, the legendary Earl Cameron and Judi Dench -- and those who stand in the gap between theatre and university, the reviewer, Michael Billington, and the scholar, Stanley Wells.

That brings me to 2023. We're recognising Catherine Mallyon, Executive Director of the RSC, with our latest honorary degree. Placing her amongst this illustrious roll-call, we're again recognising a 'special relationship', honouring the administrator who's literally kept the RSC's show on the road for the past decade.

Catherine came to arts administration from banking, cutting her managerial teeth on stints at the Oxford Playhouse, London's Southbank Centre and the Hayward Gallery before arriving at the RSC in 2012. Her mission has been double: in-house, to manage the business operations of one of the UK's greatest cultural institutions so that its Shakespeare output flourishes on stage in Stratford, London, and around the world and not just in performances but in exhibitions and cultural collaborations. Looking outward, she's worked to extend the RSC's reach into audiences. She focuses on inclusivity and diversity, with partnerships across the Midlands, including developing Shakespeare's future audience, not least by enabling a £10 ticket deal for young people. She's committed to the RSC's wide-reaching education and enrichment activities. One example: the Next Generation Talent Development Programme which enables young people with little theatre access to explore careers in acting, directing, stage management, and technical production.

When the pandemic hit, Catherine's business brain spear-headed the RSC's response. Heroically, she kept the company's virtual doors open, managed the troops, and made difficult decisions: furloughing 90% of the staff while hanging on to 35 freelance actors and stage managers. She enabled the RSC Community Online and Homework Help for children and parents; and in 2021 launched the temporary outdoor theatre in Stratford that played -- in defiance of the cultural mood -- a rambunctious *Comedy of Errors* to packed audiences. That the RSC survived the financial storm, the largest crisis UK arts have ever faced, is largely down to Catherine -- efforts recognised with a CBE in the Queen's Platinum Jubilee Birthday Honours List.

In 1963 Peter Hall spoke about the way in both the theatre and the university, art is married to craft. Catherine Mallyon is someone who's made good on that relationship: placing the craft of her business acumen in the service of Shakespeare's art.

Honouring her, we're recognising that the outfit down the road and the playwright she enables it to produce remain in a mighty 'special relationship' with this university.

Vice-Chancellor: in the name of the Senate, I present to you for admission to the degree of Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa*, CATHERINE MALLYON.