

IMMEDIATE RELEASE: *The Actors' Crucible* Launches on the Anniversary of Richard Burton's Birth

On the 10th November, on the 90th anniversary of Richard Burton's birth, a new book is released which examines the actor's background. Although many biographies have been written about him, they have focused on his life in the limelight. This book, written by someone who knew him and his family and comes from his hometown, looks at his life before he was famous. It seeks to understand him within his own community and to explore the influence of Philip Burton and other mentors on him and on other actors.

Richard Burton, Anthony Hopkins and Michael Sheen count amongst the world's most renowned and gifted actors. Yet they have something else in common: they all came from the south Wales steel town of Port Talbot. What is it about this much-maligned industrial community that has produced such superstars?

*The Actors' Crucible: Port Talbot and the Making of Burton, Hopkins, Sheen and All the Others* is a biography with a difference. Covering the careers of 50 men and women who have made their name on the stage and the small and big screen since the inter-war years in Wales, in London and in Hollywood, the book delves particularly into the backgrounds of 'the big three': Richard Burton, Anthony Hopkins and Michael Sheen.



Angela V. John, also from the town, examines the stories behind these acting legends. Upending the usual focus on their fame, she explores their lives before they became famous and presents their emergence as part of a rich culture and commitment to drama long embedded in the town's history. She shows the importance of the unsung heroes who helped to nurture talent through schools, youth centres and youth theatre. Drawing on extensive interviews, she explains how and why Port Talbot has also generated other famous faces, from Ronald Lewis and Ivor Emmanuel to more recent performers like Rob Brydon and Di Botcher, along with a cluster of exciting young actors beginning to make their mark on both

London's West End stage and the big and small screen. She also asks what the big names have put back into Port Talbot and examines the spectacular three-day event of Easter 2011 when Michael Sheen resurrected Port Talbot's pride and hopes through the immersive theatrical experience of *The Passion*.

Angela V. John is a widely published historian and biographer based in Pembrokeshire. Her previous publications include the award-winning *Coalmining Women* (Cambridge University Press), and the biography of an Ibsenite actress, suffragette and novelist: *Elizabeth Robins: Staging A Life 1862-1952* (Routledge and The History Press). She says 'As a historian I am in an especially good position to explore how and why this much-maligned town has generated such a wealth of actors... I look at the vital ingredients that help to explain Port Talbot's preeminent position as the actors' crucible.'

*The Actors' Crucible* puts centre-stage the shifting fortunes of a town, its actors and its enablers. It provides a refreshing way of looking at the history of a community and a profession as well as casting unexpected and new light on the backgrounds of its most famous stars.

**Published in hardback on 10th November 2015, ISBN 9781910409947, priced £20.00.**

