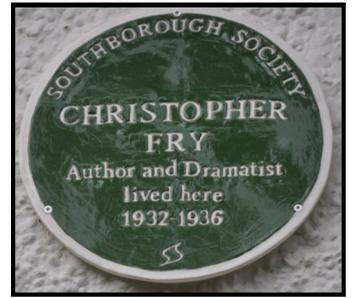


## **Christopher Fry—Author and Dramatist**

**by Michael Howes**

**Location of plaque—St Andrews Park Road, Southborough**

Christopher Fry was born on 18 December 1907 at Bristol, the second son of former builder and Anglican Lay Preacher Charles John Harris and his wife Emma Marguerite. His real name was Arthur Hammond Harris but he took his grandmother's maiden name and called himself Christopher Fry. He believed - on very tenuous, unproven grounds - that his grandmother was related to the prison reformer Elizabeth Fry (whose portrait appears on the reverse of the current five pound note).



He attended Bedford Modern School where at a young age he developed a passion for the arts, writing amateur plays and teaching himself the piano and composition. He later worked as a schoolteacher but gave this up early on to found the Tunbridge Wells Repertory Players in 1932. It was in this year that he moved to “Red Roofs”, St Andrew's Park Road, Southborough, where he lived for four years.

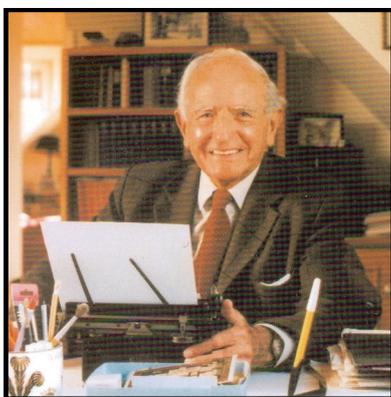
During this time Christopher wrote, staged and acted in plays, at least one of which was performed at the Royal Victoria Hall. The black-and-white photograph of the young playwright, inset, was taken at the hall. Despite wanting to turn the Tunbridge Wells area into a provincial theatrical Mecca (as Chichester is today), he never really achieved this. He did, however, find love at this time and he married Southborough girl Phyllis Hart in December 1936. They adopted one son, Tam.



**A young Christopher Fry.**

His breakthrough came with *The Lady's not for Burning* which was first performed in 1948. It enjoyed a long run in the West End with John Gielgud as one of the leads and a young Richard Burton in support. This play featured in the top 100 plays of the twentieth century in a poll organised by the National Theatre in 1999. The play's title was of course famously altered by Margaret Thatcher at the 1980 Conservative Party Conference when she said “You turn if you want to – the lady's not for turning”.

Fry later worked in film and in the 1950s was heavily involved with the script for *Ben Hur*, a film which went on to win eleven Academy Awards. He was elected a fellow of the Royal Society for Literature in 1962.



**Christopher Fry with his trusty typewriter.**

He lived the latter part of his life in Chichester where he died in June 2005, aged 97.

Christopher's green plaque at “Red Roofs” was unveiled in the summer of 2012 by his son, Tam Fry. The large gathering was treated to afternoon tea in the sunshine by the house owners Mr and Mrs Owens, to whom we are most grateful.

### **Sources**

*By Christopher, a Celebration of the Works of Christopher Fry*

(2005).

*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (entry by Michael Billington).

*Wikipedia*.