



THE WIT IN QUESTION
NOEL COWARD

WEDNESDAY 11 NOVEMBER

"I am determined to travel through life first class" declared Sir Noel Coward (16 December 1899-26 March 1973), son of a Teddington piano salesman, before becoming one of England's most beloved and treasured playwrights, composers, directors, actors and singers. Known for his wit, flamboyance, and what *Time* magazine called "a sense of personal style, a combination of cheek and chic, pose and poise", he began his career being booed off the stage only later to earn the equivalent of £3 million a year. A successful child actor, protégé of no less a figure than Charles Hawtrey, unschooled but a voracious reader, he achieved his first success as a playwright in the West End at the age of 21. Following the advice of Winston Churchill he toured, acted and sang indefatigably in Europe, Africa, Asia and America. His wit was described by Kenneth Tynan as emerging 'with the blind impulsiveness of a machine-gun'. His friends and colleagues included his "best friend" Gertrude Lawrence, Marlene Dietrich, Lord Louis Mountbatten, the Queen Mother, Lawrence Olivier, Lynn Fontane, David Lean, Claudette Colbert, George Cukor, Edith Sitwell and Alfred Lunt. Coward's most important relationship with South African stage and film actor Graham Payn began in the mid-40's and lasted until his death. At his memorial service in St Martin-in-the-Fields, John Gielgud and Laurence Olivier read verse, and Yehudi Menuhin played Bach.

All *Culture in Question* lectures take place in the Art Workers Guild, Bloomsbury. Please join us for coffee at 10.30 (optional), the lecture at 11, and a light lunch with wine served at 1pm. The event ends by 3.30 p.m. Cost: £85 INSCAPE members, £95 non-members. First time guests are welcome at no cost.