

Once a Broadway Star....William John Coast¹

To his friends he was known as Jack, but his father registered the birth of his son as William John Coast, born on 20.12 1892 in Chislehurst. The father, Thomas Harry Coast was born into a large family in Lenham in 1864. The numerous members of the family were mainly carpenters by profession and a row of cottages 'Coasts Cottages' in Maidstone Road bore the name of the family.



Thomas Harry Coast and his young family did not live in Lenham but when he passed away at the age of 28, he was buried in his home village. His wife, Jane, followed him 49 years later in 1947 at a time when the Lenham churchyard had long been closed and only close family members could be interred in existing graves.

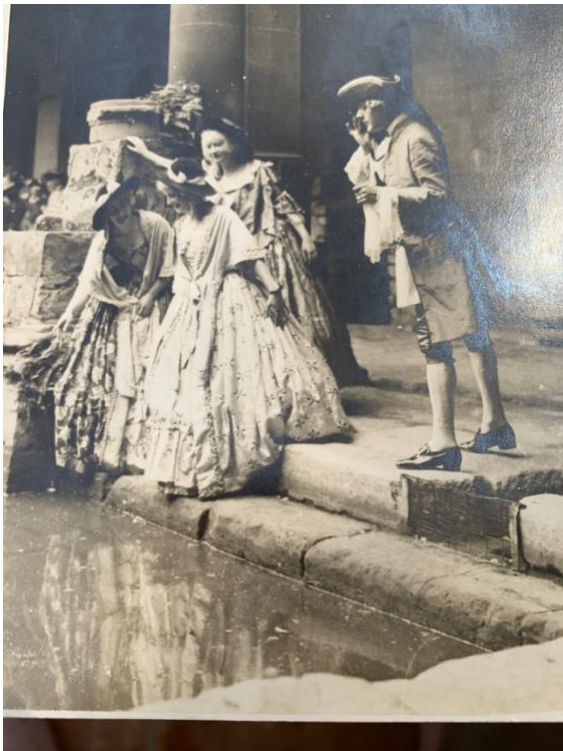
Thomas and Jane's son was only four years old when his father died, and he grew up with his mother and aunts.

It was during his college days at Reading University that he had the desire to go on the stage. He began his professional life in a play called 'The Marriage Market' and was subsequently promoted to a leading part in a play called 'Betty' only to have the first world war intervene. He enlisted in the Royal Berkshire Regiment. After the war, on resuming theatrical work, he secured parts in several other productions, all these appearances being in London.



¹ We are grateful to David and Janet Humphrey for sharing this fascinating aspect of their family history with us.

He enjoyed performing whilst serving in the army (he is the gentleman marked with No. 2)



He later appeared in 'Monsieur Beaucaire', a play with music, advertised as 'Opera' which is based on a novel (by Booth Tarkington, 1900). The play is set in Bath².

This was a promotional photograph (left), the play being performed at The Bristol Hippodrome.



² The play was turned into a silent movie in 1923 with Rudolpho Valentino in the lead role. The movie can be watched here: http://www.sidneyolcott.com/Monsieur_Beaucaire.htm.

SPECIAL SEASON

COMMENCING MONDAY, AUGUST 31st. ONCE NIGHTLY AT 7.30.
MATINEES THURSDAY AND SATURDAY AT 2.15

SIR OSWALD STOLL announces
THE MOST MAGNIFICENT MUSICAL PRODUCTION
EVER STAGED IN BRISTOL

MONSIEUR BEAUCAIRE

A Romantic Opera.

By BOOTH TARKINGTON.
Lyrics By ADRIAN ROSS.
Libretto By FREDERICK LONSDALE.
Music By ANDRE MESSEGER.

With **RAYMOND NEWELL** of "The Three Musketeers" and "The Song Of The Drum"
Fame as "Monsieur Beaucaire"
HELEN BREEN as "Lady Mary Carlisle," "The Beauty of Bath."
AND BRILLIANT CAST OF LONDON STARS.

SIR OSWALD STOLL will make entertainmen
history in Bristol with

WOUND IN A STAGE DUEL

Actor Hurt In A Bristol Performance

"EVENING WORLD" EXCLUSIVE
NEWS

Mr. Raymond Newell, who is playing the title rôle in "Monsieur Beaucaire," the romantic opera at the Bristol Hippodrome, was actually wounded in a stage duel during the performance of the opera.

So realistic was the acting of Mr. John Coash in the part of Mr. Towarake in the duel scene in the second act of "Monsieur Beaucaire" that the point of his rapier actually pierced the costume Mr. Newell was wearing and caused a slight wound.

The audience did not notice the small bloodstain on Mr. Newell's costume, just above his left hip, and were given no indication that the accident had occurred.

RE-APPEARANCE

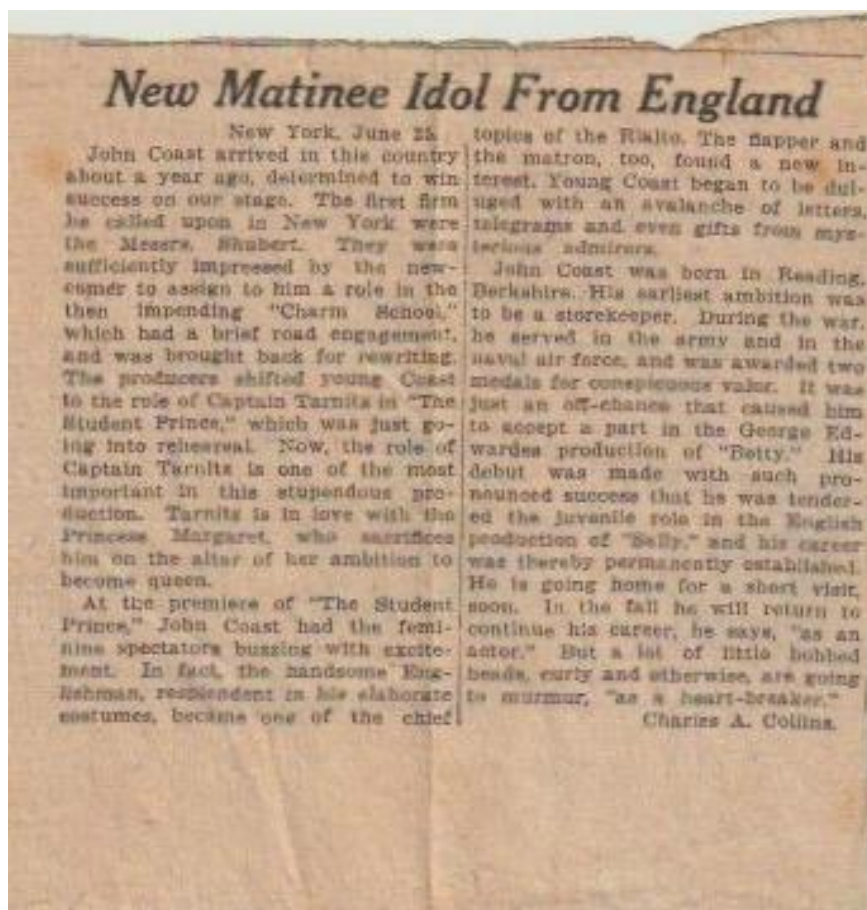
The wound was promptly treated with iodine in the interval and Mr. Newell re-appeared in the third act as though nothing had happened.

The wounding was, of course, entirely accidental, and no one was more anxious to aid Mr. Newell than Mr. Coash, who plays his part with exceptional realism.

Acting can be dangerous...

John Coast arrived in America in 1924 determined to win success on their stage. His first call was to Messrs, Shubert in New York. Later, the producers put the young Coast to the role of Captain Tarnitz in 'The Student Prince' – the original stage production at The Jolson Theatre on Broadway.³

At the premier, young Coast had the feminine spectators 'buzzing with excitement' and began to be deluged with letters, telegrams and even gifts from mysterious admirers. Press cuttings reported him as the "New Matinee Idol from England" and that the "American Stage has claimed him".



3 See [The Student Prince](#) (Dec 02, 1924 - May 22, 1926)



THE STUDENT PRINCE IN HEIDELBERG





This official actor photograph was taken by Dorothy Wilding who had her studio in New York until 1929. She became famous for her photographic portraits of our Royal Family and many stars of stage and screen. ⁴



Later, on returning to England, John was to play Captain Tarnitz at His Majesty's Theatre in London's West End.

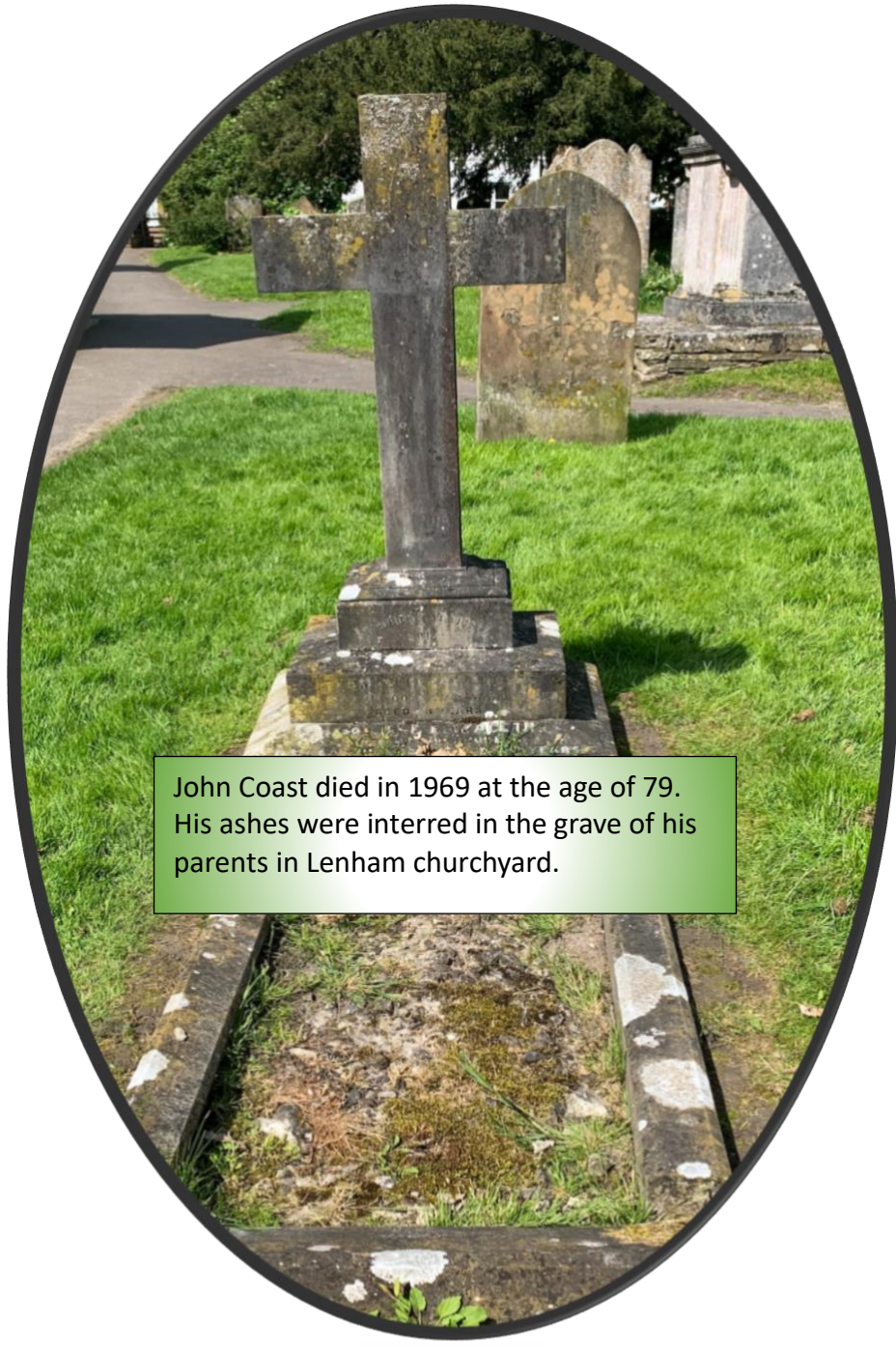


We don't know when and why John Coast's acting career ended. After WWII he was employed as a civil servant and is remembered as an elegant gentleman with an equally elegant walking stick

⁴ See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dorothy_Wilding

John Coast never lost touch with his family in Lenham. For Janet and David Humphrey, whose wedding he attended at St Mary's in 1967, he was simply "Uncle John".





John Coast died in 1969 at the age of 79. His ashes were interred in the grave of his parents in Lenham churchyard.