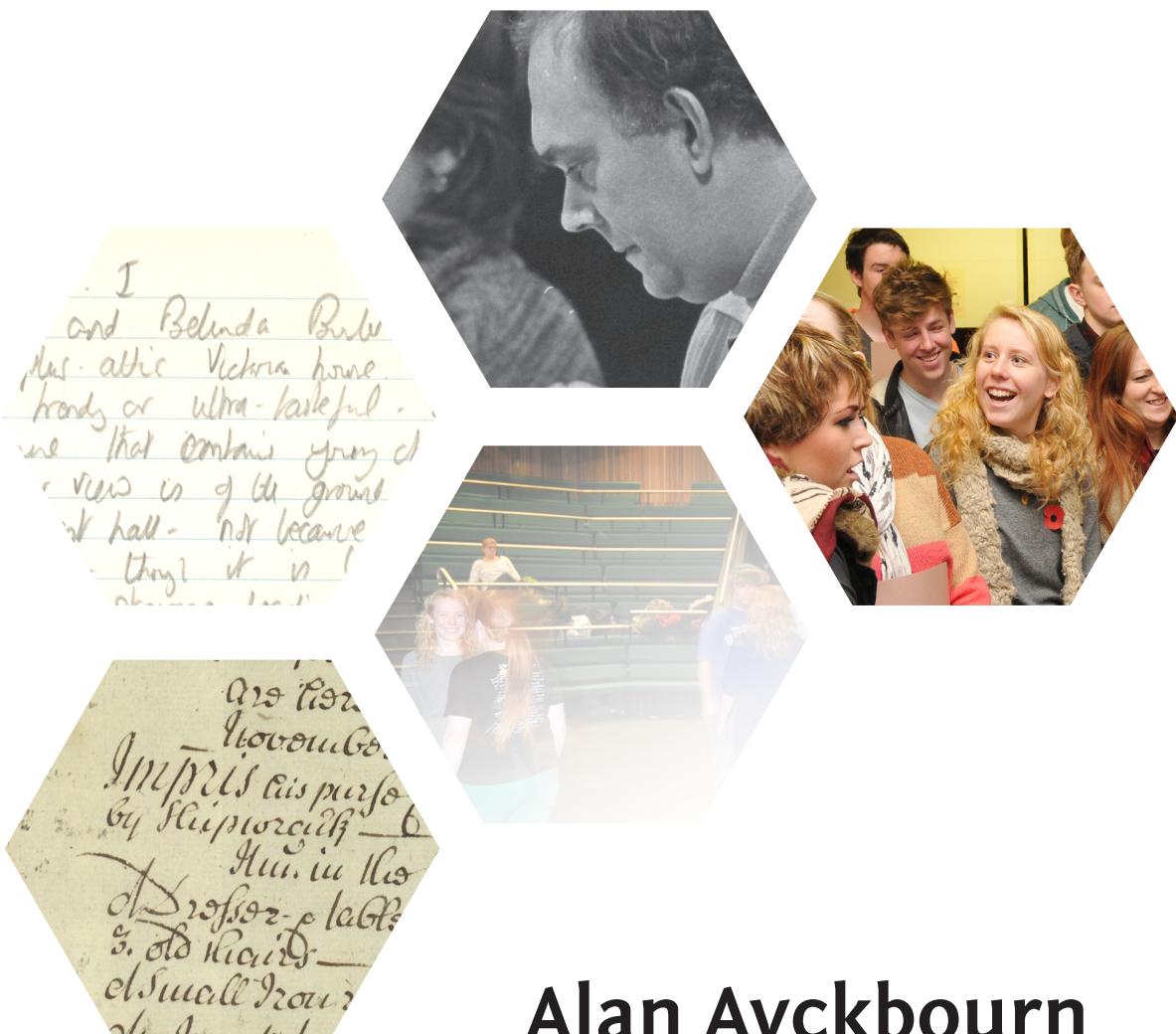


The Borthwick Institute for Archives



Alan Ayckbourn Archive Resource Pack

Editor: Tom Wright
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ARCHIVES
www.york.ac.uk/archives

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Photos by Paul Shields, University Photographer

With thanks to the students of Leeds City College for allowing us to photograph them during their visit

Introduction

Welcome to the Alan Ayckbourn Archive Resource Pack.

In 2011 thanks to support from Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), the Samuel Storey Charitable Trust, the MLA/V&A Purchase Grant Fund and the Friends of the National Libraries the Borthwick Archive was able to purchase Alan Ayckbourn's personal archive, containing letters, drafts, notes and posters covering his entire professional career.

One of the world's leading directors and playwrights, Sir Alan Ayckbourn is:

- One of the world's most performed living playwrights.
- Incredibly prolific (as of 2013, he's written 77 plays).
- Local, with the vast majority of his work having been written and premiered at the Stephen Joseph Theatre, Scarborough, which he ran for 37 years.

In addition to supporting the purchase of the Archive, the Heritage Lottery Fund also supported the creation of a new post, The Comedy Outreach Officer at the University of York. As the COO, my job has been to organise trips for schools and colleges to come and visit

“This workshop really helped me to prep for my auditions”

--Student Feedback

the archive. These Curriculum Enrichment Days featured:

- A tour of the Borthwick Institute (one of the most technologically advanced archives in the country) and the Alan Ayckbourn Archive.
- A practical research workshop using the archive to unearth key details about Sir Alan's work.
- A practical drama workshop in the state-of-the-art rehearsal and performance spaces of the Theatre, Film and Television Department, where I used the facts the students found in the archive to illuminate scenes from Sir Alan's plays and explore his use of in-the-round

staging.

“The archive was really interesting and the drama workshop was educational and demanding for the students”

-- Teacher Feedback

Through the workshop, students developed:

- Generally applicable acting skills, including physical and vocal techniques, as well as the specifics of performing comedy and in-the-round.
- Research skills on how to use resources such as archives and libraries to enrich work on a text.
- Evaluation skills, including terminology to analyse and review modern comedy performances.
- An awareness of the resources and opportunities available through higher education.

This pack will help teachers develop their own workshops based on the material used in the Enrichment days.

The pack follows the structure of the Enrichment Days, starting with a virtual tour of the archives and an introduction to the range of material in the Ayckbourn Archive. We then provide practical exercises and background material for exploring one of his plays, *Season's Greetings*. Finally, there are photocopyable hand-outs at the back of the pack.

We are deeply indebted to Simon Murgatroyd for his original research, and for hosting such a wealth of information on Ayckbourn's official website, www.alanayckbourn.net. This website is regularly updated, incredibly detailed, and the perfect first stop for exploring Ayckbourn's life and work.

We hope you find this pack of use, and if you

have any feedback, please get in touch at bihr500@york.ac.uk.



LOTTERY FUNDED

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage.

HLF has awarded over £4.5 billion in grants to heritage projects throughout the UK.

The Department of Film, Theatre and Television (TFTV)

The Department of Theatre, Film and Television, established in 2006, currently comprises eighteen academic staff, a Commercial Manager, six technicians and seven

administrative staff, with several further staff to be appointed from October 2012. There are at present some 350 students, with plans to expand to around 500. The Department currently offers two undergraduate degrees and five taught postgraduate degrees, with further programmes under development; it also has a thriving PhD programme bringing together students from across the department's constituent disciplines. For full details, see the departmental website at <http://www.york.ac.uk/tftv/>.

In October 2010 the department moved into a magnificent new, specially designed building on the Heslington East campus which is equipped to the highest technical standards. This building incorporates a 200 seat theatre, a 'Black Box' which doubles as a flexible theatre space and a film shooting stage, two television studios, a cinema, and a range of professional standard postproduction facilities. As well as their use for teaching, these facilities are available to commercial partners either collaboratively or on a rental basis.

The Department's undergraduate theatre programme is the BA in Writing, Directing and Performance. One of this degree course's specialisms is work, both practical and analytical, in comedy across a wide historical span. The acquisition of the Ayckbourn archive represents a significant enrichment of the comedy resources in the Samuel Storey Collection, which was established to underpin the TFTV theatre team's teaching and research.



The Borthwick Institute for Archives

The Borthwick Institute moved into its current, purpose-built premises, which are part of the University Library complex, following an award of £4.415 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The Borthwick is a public access repository, providing public access to archives from the thirteenth to the twenty-first centuries. It is one of the busiest archives in the Higher Education sector, housing one of the most significant collections of archives in the north of England.

It serves academic departments as a repository for primary research materials, and guides students, researchers and staff in the use of those materials.

In 2011, the Borthwick Institute at the University of York was able to raise the funds to buy the archive and to provide access to it, thanks to support from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), the Samuel Storey Charitable Trust, the MLA/V&A Purchase Grant Fund and the Friends of

the National Libraries.

For more details please go to www.york.ac.uk/borthwick.

Comedy Outreach Officer

The workshops were co-ordinated, planned, and partially delivered by experienced director and facilitator Tom Wright. Tom trained as an assistant with the Young Vic, Royal Shakespeare Company and West Yorkshire Playhouse, directed award-winning shows, such as The Container (Fringe First and Amnesty International Award), and has worked extensively with young people, most recently running the Royal & Derngate Youth Theatre in Northampton. He now divides his time between his role as Comedy Outreach Officer and as Associate Director of Freedom Studios, Bradford.

To find out more about Tom's work please visit www.tomwrightdirector.com.



An Overview of Sir Alan Ayckbourn

By Simon Murgatroyd

All material in this section is taken, with permission, from Alan Ayckbourn's official website
- www.alanayckbourn.net

Full Biography

Alan Ayckbourn is one of the world's most popular and prolific professional playwrights. He has written 77 full length plays and more than 20 other revues and plays for children. He is also an acclaimed director, who Arthur Miller said directed the definitive version of his play *A View From The Bridge*.

Alan was born in Hampstead, London, on 12 April, 1939. His mother was Irene Maud Worley – better known as the novelist Mary James – and his father Horace Ayckbourn, lead violinist with the London Symphony Orchestra.

Educated at Haileybury, Alan left school at the age of 17 to pursue a career in the theatre immediately, gaining a job with the theatre impresario Sir Donald Wolfit. He was with the company for three weeks as an acting stage manager for the production *The Strong Are Lonely* at the Edinburgh Festival.

Alan went on to work at theatres in Worthing, Leatherhead and Oxford, before being employed in 1957 as a stage manager and actor at the Library Theatre, Scarborough.

The Library Theatre had been founded in 1955 by Stephen Joseph and was home to the UK's first professional theatre in the round company, Studio Theatre Ltd. Alan was inspired by Stephen Joseph, who became a mentor and encouraged

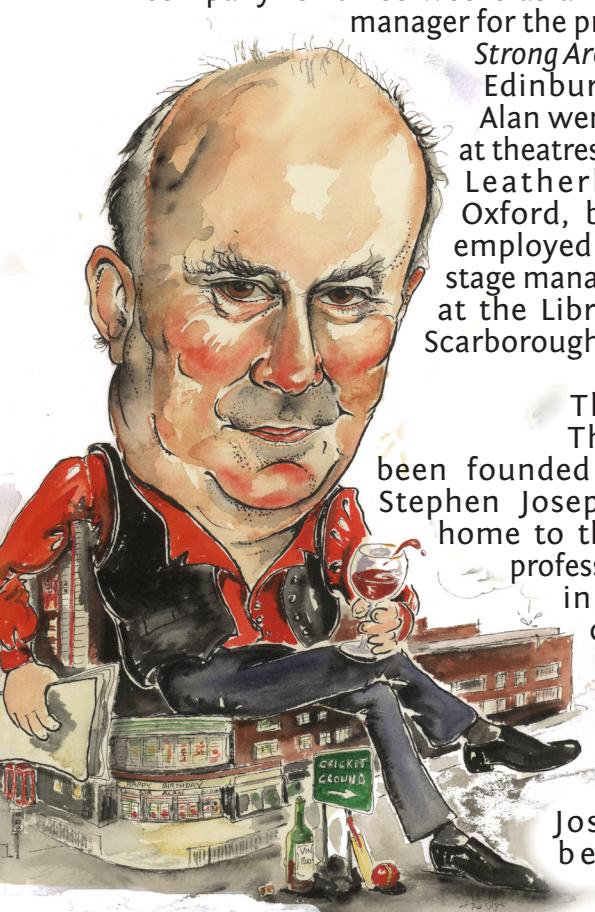
Alan to both write and direct. Alan's first professional writing commission was inadvertently inspired by his acting career when he complained about a role he was playing; Stephen threw down the gauntlet saying that if Alan wanted better roles, he should write one himself. Alan wrote *The Square Cat*. This was a success for the company in the summer of 1959 and Stephen immediately commissioned a second play, *Love After All*, for the winter of 1959.

Alan continued to act and write for the Library Theatre until 1962 when he was involved in the formation of the Victoria Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, with Stephen Joseph and Peter Cheeseman. This was the country's first permanent professional theatre in the round and Alan premiered two plays there, *Christmas V Mastermind* and *Mr Whatnot*. The latter was produced in London in 1964 and received such a critical mauling that Alan retreated to the BBC in Leeds as a radio drama producer where he worked between 1964 and 1970.

Alan continued writing, though, and produced *Meet My Father* for the Library Theatre in 1965. This would be a turning point in his life. In 1967, the play – retitled *Relatively Speaking* – opened in the West End and was a phenomenal hit.

It launched him in the public eye and in quick succession plays such as *How The Other Half Loves*, *Absurd Person Singular* and *The Norman Conquests*, established Alan Ayckbourn as one of the country's most popular and successful playwrights. As of 2013, he has written 77 full length plays, more than half of which have transferred to either the West End or the National Theatre. At one point in 1975, he held the record for having the most professional productions being performed simultaneously in the West End (*The Norman Conquests*, *Absurd Person Singular* and *Absent Friends*). His work has been translated into more than 35 languages and his plays are regularly performed throughout the world.

Stephen Joseph died in 1967 and Alan, alongside Ken Boden, Alfred Bradley and Rodney Wood,



worked together to keep the Library Theatre alive. Although Alan was closely involved with the theatre during this period, both writing, directing and choosing plays for the company, he would not formally become Artistic Director until 1972. Apart from a two year hiatus between 1986 and 1988 when he became a visiting director at the National Theatre, he remained Artistic Director until retiring from that role on 31 March 2009.

Concurrent to this, Alan's directing career also flourished. He directed his first play in 1961, *Gaslight*, at the Library Theatre and in 1963 directed the world premiere of one of his own plays for the first time. Since 1967

he has directed the world premieres of all his plays and since 1977, he has directed all the West End premieres of his plays bar one. Since 1961, Alan has directed more than 300 productions and is considered one of the world's pre-eminent directors of in the round staging.

He is hugely committed to theatre-in-the-round, for which he has written the majority of his plays. It is always worth remembering that when he stages a play in London or they are performed in the proscenium arch, it is a step away from the author's original intention. It has frequently been stated that the definitive production of Alan's plays is the premiere production in the round in Scarborough, where he has premiered all but four of his plays.

Alan Ayckbourn has received more than 35 awards and honours including two Oliviers, a Tony, two Molières and Lifetime Achievement Awards from both the Variety Club of Great Britain and the Writers' Guild of Great Britain. He was the 1992 Cameron Mackintosh Professor of Contemporary Theatre at Oxford University and is also the recipient of a Montblanc de la Culture Award for Europe for 'establishing a thriving theatrical tradition in Scarborough and for his dedication and commitment to it'. In 2009, he was inducted into American Theater's Hall of Fame and received the

prestigious Society's Special Award at the Laurence Olivier Awards. The holder of a number of honorary degrees, he was appointed a CBE in 1987 and in 1997 was knighted for services to the theatre.

In 2010, he received the prestigious Special Tony Award for Lifetime Achievement in the Theatre. His plays have been regularly staged in America and more than 10 have been produced on Broadway and Off-Broadway. In 1975 he held the record for having the most plays simultaneously running on Broadway (*The Norman Conquests* and *Absurd Person Singular*). However, he would probably consider his greatest success in the States came in 2005, when he took his Scarborough company to the 59E59 Theaters' Brits Off Broadway Festival to present *Private Fears In Public Places*. The month-long run was an unprecedented success receiving great acclaim from audiences and critics alike. The New York Times proclaimed it "altogether wonderful" and the cast "flawless". In 2007, his production of *Intimate Exchanges* also toured to the Festival where it broke box office records at 59E59 Theaters and received a Drama Desk nomination for Outstanding Play. Since then he

has also toured *My Wonderful Day* in 2009, which also received a Drama Desk Outstanding Play award nomination, and *Neighbourhood Watch* in 2011 to the festival.

In February 2006, Alan suffered a stroke leading to the announcement in June 2007 that he would step down as the Artistic Director of the Stephen Joseph Theatre. He would officially step down in 2009 but continues to be committed to premiering and producing plays at the venue.



1) When did Alan become the Artistic Director of the Stephen Joseph Theatre?

1972. This is generally misquoted as 1970 (or even 1969 or 1971) but the minutes of Scarborough Theatre Trust are quite clear he was asked to become the Director Of Productions for the Library Theatre in 1972 and later that year was offered the permanent position of Artistic Director of the theatre. The confusion possibly arises as he held the temporary position of Director Of Productions in both 1969 and 1970.

2) What have been Alan's roles at the Stephen Joseph Theatre?

Alan has held a number of roles at the Stephen Joseph Theatre:
1957: Acting Stage Manager (stage manager / actor)
1958 – 1962: Actor
1959 – 1962: Writer in residence (alongside David Campton)
1961 – 2008: Director
1969 – 1970: Director of Productions (voted by the Trust each year)
1972 – 2009: Artistic Director
2009 - present: Guest director

3) When did Alan leave the Library Theatre?

Alan left the Library Theatre in 1962 to help create the Victoria Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, alongside Peter Cheeseman (the project was instigated by Stephen Joseph). Alan became an Associate Director and directed and acted at the venue as well as premiering two of his own plays. In 1964, he left the Victoria Theatre to join the BBC as a radio drama producer. He returned to the Library Theatre as Director of Productions for two seasons in 1969 and 1970 (continuing to work at the BBC) before returning permanently to Scarborough in 1972 when he assumed the position of Artistic Director.

4) How long did Alan work at the BBC?

Alan joined the BBC in 1965 as a radio drama producer, based in Leeds. He stayed in the job until June 1970.

5) When did Alan Ayckbourn step down as Artistic Director of the Stephen Joseph Theatre?

Alan Ayckbourn stepped down as Artistic Director of the Stephen Joseph Theatre on 31 March 2009 - although to all intents and purposes, he left the position on 17 January 2009 when the 2008/9 winter season ended. His successor, Chris Monks, officially became the Artistic Director on 1 April 2009.

6) How many of Alan Ayckbourn's full length plays have premiered in Scarborough?

As of 2013, 73 of Alan Ayckbourn's 77 plays have premiered in Scarborough at either the Library Theatre, the Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round or the Stephen Joseph Theatre. The plays which did not receive their premieres in Scarborough are: *Christmas V Mastermind* (1962) and *Mr Whatnot* (1963), which premiered at the Victoria Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent; *Jeeves* (1975), which premiered at Her Majesty's Theatre, London; and *A Small Family Business*, which premiered at the National Theatre, London.

7) Which Ayckbourn plays were not premiered in the round?

Of the plays which have premiered in Scarborough, the following were not originally performed in the round: *Confusions* (three-sided), *Just Between Ourselves* (three-sided), *Bedroom Farce* (three-sided), *Things We Do For Love* (end-stage), *Garden* (end-stage) and *Virtual Reality* (end-stage). Of these only *Things We Do For Love* and *Virtual Reality* are specifically intended for end-stage performance and the rest can - and have been - performed in the round or other staging configurations.

Alan Ayckbourn – The Complete Plays

This is the definitive list of all plays and publications by Alan Ayckbourn written between 1959 and November 2012. It was compiled by Simon Murgatroyd for www.alanayckbourn.net and has been officially approved.

Plays by Alan Ayckbourn

- 1959 The Square Cat
- 1959 Love After All
- 1960 Dad's Tale
- 1961 Standing Room Only
- 1962 Christmas V Mastermind
- 1963 Mr Whatnot
- 1965 Meet My Father *subsequently* Relatively Speaking (*revised*)
- 1967 The Sparrow
- 1969 How The Other Half Loves
- 1970 The Story So Far... *subsequently* Me Times Me Time Me (*revised*) *subsequently* Me Times Me (*revised*) *subsequently* Family Circles (*revised*)
- 1971 Time And Time Again
- 1972 Absurd Person Singular
- 1973 The Norman Conquests *comprising* Fancy Meeting You, *subsequently* Table Manners, Make Yourself At Home *subsequently* Living Together, Round And Round The Garden
- 1974 Absent Friends
- 1974 Confusions
- 1975 Jeeves (*with Andrew Lloyd Webber*) *subsequently* By Jeeves (*with Andrew Lloyd Webber*) (*revised*)
- 1975 Bedroom Farce



Sir Alan in rehearsals for Absent Friends (1974), copyright Scarborough Theatre Trust

- 1976 Just Between Ourselves
- 1977 Ten Times Table
- 1978 Joking Apart
- 1979 Sisterly Feelings
- 1979 Taking Steps
- 1980 Suburban Strains (*with Paul Todd*)
- 1980 Season's Greetings
- 1981 Way Upstream
- 1981 Making Tracks (*with Paul Todd*)
- 1982 Intimate Exchanges *comprising* Events On A Hotel, Terrace Affairs, In A Tent, Love In The Mist, A Cricket Match, A Game Of Golf, A Pageant, A Garden Fete, A One Man Protest
- 1983 It Could Be Any One Of Us *subsequently* It Could Be Any One Of Us (*revised*)
- 1984 A Chorus Of Disapproval
- 1985 Woman In Mind
- 1987 A Small Family Business
- 1987 Henceforward...



Sir Alan directing Sisterly Feelings (1979) copyright Scarborough Theatre Trust

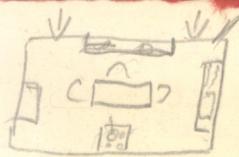
1988	Man Of The Moment	
1988	Mr. A's Amazing Maze Plays	
1989	The Revengers' Comedies	
1989	Invisible Friends	
1990	Body Language <i>subsequently</i> Body Language (<i>revised</i>)	
1990	This Is Where We Came In	JACK McCACKEN, a business man
1990	Callisto 5 <i>subsequently</i> Callisto#7 (<i>revised</i>)	OPPY, his wife
1991	Wildest Dreams	
1991	My Very Own Story	
1992	Time Of My Life	KEN AYRES, his father-in-law
1992	Dreams From A Summer House (<i>with John Pattison</i>)	
1994	Communicating Doors	
1994	Haunting Julia	TINA, his elder daughter
1994	The Musical Jigsaw Play (<i>with John Pattison</i>)	
1995	A Word From Our Sponsor (<i>with John Pattison</i>)	TINA Tina's husband
1996	The Champion Of Paribanou	
1997	Things We Do For Love	
1998	Comic Potential	SAMANTHA, his younger daughter
1998	The Boy Who Fell Into A Book	
1999	House & Garden	CLIFF, his brother
2000	Virtual Reality	CLIFF, his brother
2000	Whenever (<i>with Denis King</i>)	ANITA, Cliff's wife
2001	Damsels In Distress comprising GamePlan, FlatSpin, RolePlay	
2002	Snake In The Grass	
2002	The Jollies	DESMOND, his brother-in-law
2003	Sugar Daddies	ROBERT Desmond's wife
2003	Orvin: Champion Of Champions (<i>with Denis King</i>)	
2003	My Sister Sadie	
2004	Drowning On Dry Land	
2004	Private Fears In Public Places	YVONNE DOGGETT, Harriet's sister
2004	Miss Yesterday	
2005	Improbable Fiction	BENEDICT HOUGH, a private investigator
2006	If I Were You	
2008	Life And Beth	
2008	Awaking Beauty (<i>with Denis King</i>)	
2009	My Wonderful Day	UBERTO RIVETTI)
2010	Life Of Riley	LOTARIO RIVETTI)
2011	Neighbourhood Watch	ORLANDO RIVETTI) Italian business men
2012	Surprises	VINCENZO RIVETTI)
2013	Arrivals & Departures	GIORGIO RIVETTI)

Revs and Musical Entertainments

1978	Men On Women On Men (<i>with Paul Todd</i>)	***
1980	First Course (<i>with Paul Todd</i>)	
1980	Second Helping (<i>with Paul Todd</i>)	
1981	Me, Myself & I (<i>with Paul Todd</i>)	
1983	Incidental Music (<i>with Paul Todd</i>)	
1984	The 7 Deadly Virtues (<i>with Paul Todd</i>)	
1984	The Westwoods (<i>with Paul Todd</i>)	
1985	Boy Meets Girl (<i>with Paul Todd</i>)	
1985	Girl Meets Boy (<i>with Paul Todd</i>)	Living room, kitchen, hall, landing, bathroom and
1986	Mere Soup Songs (<i>with Paul Todd</i>)	the houses of various members of the family
1998	Cheap And Cheerful (<i>with Denis King</i>)	one autumn week.

One Act Plays

1962	Countdown	
1984	A Cut In The Rates	
2013	Chloë with Love	
2013	The Kidderminster Affair	



Plays For Children And Young People

- 1969 Ernie's Incredible Illuminations
- 1989 The Inside Outside Slide Show
- 1999 Gizmo
- 2002 The Princess And The Mouse
- 2003 The Ten Magic Bridges
- 2004 Miranda's Magic Mirror
- 2005 The Girl Who Lost Her Voice

Adaptations

- 1982 A Trip To Scarborough
(*Variations on A Trip To Scarborough by R. B. Sheridan*)
- 1985 Tons Of Money
(*Adapted from Tons Of Money by Will Evans & Valentine*)
- 1989 Wolf At The Door
(*Adapted from Les Corbeaux by Henry Becque; Translation - David Walker*)
- 1999 The Forest
(*Adapted from The Forest by Ostrovsky; Translation - Vera Liber*)
- 2011 Dear Uncle
(*Adapted from Uncle Vanya by Anton Chekhov; Translation - Vera Liber*)

Plays For Television

- 1974 Service Not Included

Books

- 2002 The Crafty Art Of Playmaking

The Grey Plays (Performed but never published and not included in the canon)

- 1960 Double Hitch
- 1961 Love Undertaken
- 1962 Follow The Lover
- 1975 Dracula (*sketch from What The Devil!*)
- 1977 The Jubilee Show
- 1983 Backnumbers (*with Paul Todd*)
- 1987 An Evening With PALOS
- 1991 Ron & Julie
- 1992 Between The Lines (*book by Paul Todd; lyrics by Alan Ayckbourn*)
- 2005 Untitled Farce

Early Writing (Confirmed as written by Alan Ayckbourn, but never performed or published and held in the Ayckbourn Archive at The Borthwick Institute)

- 1957 The Season *
- 1958 The Party Game *
- 1959 Relative Values *
- 1959 Mind Over Murder *

* All dates for the early plays are approximate. None of the early plays are available for production. The only extant copies are held by the Borthwick Institute.

20 Facts

1. Alan Ayckbourn was born on 12 April 1939 to Irene Maud Worley (better known as 'Lolly' and who also wrote under the pen-name of Mary James) and Horace Ayckbourn in Hampstead.
2. Alan attended school at Wisborough Lodge and then Haileybury.
3. Alan's professional career began as an acting stage manager (a stage manager who also acted) with Donald Wolfit's company for a three week engagement at the Edinburgh Festival.
4. Alan's early career saw him work as an acting stage manager at the Connaught Theatre (Worthing), the Thorndike Theatre (Leatherhead), the Oxford Playhouse and the Library Theatre (Scarborough). He joined the latter in 1957.
5. Alan's acting career ran from 1956 to 1964 and encompassed approximately 70 different roles – the majority performed in-the-round.
6. Alan's professional playwriting career began in 1959 with *The Square Cat* (having confronted Stephen Joseph about his role in David Campton's *Ring Of Roses*). As of 2013, Alan has written 77 full-length plays.
7. Alan married his first wife Christine Roland in 1957; together they had two sons Steven and Philip. Alan's second marriage was to Heather Stoney in 1997.
8. Alan's first production as a professional director was *Gaslight* at the Library Theatre in 1961. Since then he has directed more than 300 productions in the UK and abroad, including the London premieres of 32 of his plays in the West End or at the National Theatre.
9. In 1962 Alan moved with the Studio Theatre Company to the Victoria Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, as Associate Director. He both directed and acted there, as well as premiering two new plays, before leaving the company in 1964.
10. From 1964 to 1970, Alan worked as a radio drama producer for the BBC, based in Leeds.
11. Alan's first major West End success was *Relatively Speaking* in 1967; as of 2012, 39 of Alan's plays have been produced in the West End or at the National Theatre (this does not include major fringe productions).
12. Alan Ayckbourn became the Artistic Director of the Library Theatre, Scarborough, in 1972. He stepped down from the position (of what is now the Stephen Joseph Theatre) on March 31 2009.
13. In 1974, Alan held the record for having the most plays running simultaneously in the West End with *Living Together*, *Table Manners*, *Round And Round The Garden*, *Absurd Person Singular* and *Absent Friends*. Only Andrew Lloyd Webber since has had more productions running concurrently.
14. The Variety Club named Alan 'Playwright of the Year' in 1974; between 1973 and 2009, Alan has received more than 35 major theatre awards including an Olivier Special Award in 2009 and the Special Tony Award For Lifetime Achievement In The Theatre in 2010. Awards for his plays include two Oliviers, two Molieres and a Tony award.
15. In 1976 Alan wrote his first play intended for end-stage performance (*Bedroom Farce*);

although he is primarily associated with the Round, he has written five plays intended for the end-stage: *Bedroom Farce*, *A Small Family Business*, *Haunting Julia*, *Things We Do For Love* and *Virtual Reality*. (For the record *Jeeves* and *House* were also first performed in the end-stage, but were not specifically written for end-stage performance)

16. In 1976, Alan and the Library Theatre company moved to the Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round (based at the former Boys' Grammar School). In 1996, he would again move the company to the Stephen Joseph Theatre (based at a former Odeon cinema).

17. From 1986 to 1988, Alan was invited by Sir Peter Hall to form his own company at the National Theatre. He directed *A Small Family Business*, *A View From The Bridge*, *Tons Of Money* and *'Tis Pity She's A Whore*.

18. In 1992, Alan was appointed Cameron Macintosh Visiting Professor of Contemporary Theatre, at the University of Oxford.

19. Alan was awarded a CBE (Companion of the Order of the British Empire) in 1987. Ten years later to the day, he was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II 'for services to the theatre.'

20. Fatuous fact: Alan Ayckbourn has been said to be the most performed living playwright in the world. There is no plausible way either to prove or disprove this. But he is undoubtedly very, very popular....

These facts have been compiled by Simon Murgatroyd with the help of Sir Alan and Lady Ayckbourn. They are correct at the time of publication.

'Source: Alan Ayckbourn's official website - www.alanayckbourn.net' Copyright: Simon Murgatroyd

Virtual Tour of the Borthwick Institute for Archives

By Paul Dryburgh

Welcome to the Borthwick Institute for Archives. The Borthwick is the archive of the University of York and keeps records created by departments, administrators, lecturers, researchers and students. This even includes student journalists and theatre groups. It has a long history and holds tens of thousands of records from the twelfth century to the present day, relating to the archbishops of York, some of York, Yorkshire and the north of England's most important industries and societies, writers and poets, hospitals and mental asylums, as well as material relating to southern African politics and history.

What is an archive?

While a library holds copies of books, CDs and DVDs that are available in other libraries, an archive such as the Borthwick keeps things that are usually unique and not found anywhere else, like the draft script of *Season's Greetings* written in pencil by Sir Alan Ayckbourn in 1980.

A 'record' can be a physical or virtual object created as evidence of an activity. It can be a medieval charter written in Latin or French and sealed with a wax seal, granting lands or rights, account ledgers of an aristocratic estate, posters advertising new products, architectural drawings for a new theatre, scripts for plays, emails and sound recordings, to name a few.



The Borthwick Institute celebrates its sixtieth birthday in 2013. The Borthwick was founded by York Academic Trust, with help from the legacy of William Borthwick, a perfume manufacturer from Bridlington, who wanted his fortune to support educational projects in Yorkshire. The Trust's aim was to show that York was a proper place for the government to found a new university; and it achieved this aim by establishing a home for the archive of the Archbishop of York. The Borthwick's aim is to collect, manage and ensure the continued preservation and access for study of material of historical significance (and of significance to the organisations or people creating it) in a wide variety of formats and media. Most of the items we care for are unique. The entire Borthwick archive is worth tens of millions of pounds and includes records of local, national and international importance. Therefore, the records have to be kept in secure, controlled conditions.

Everything we do, from the building itself to the team who work here, is directed towards providing the optimum conditions for safe storage and use. The best way to show you what we do, and how, is to take you on a virtual tour of the Borthwick. We'll start in our Exhibition Area, the Samuel Storey Family Exhibition Gallery.

John Vanbrugh's account book

One of the Borthwick's most valuable individual items is an account book of Sir John Vanbrugh (1664-1726), soldier, dramatist, theatre manager and architect, who wrote several Restoration comedies and designed Castle Howard and Blenheim Palace. This is worth tens of thousands of pounds and gives details of his income and expenses from 1715-1726. Sir John married into the Yarburgh family of Heslington, York, and there is a college named after him at the University. Born in London just before the Great Fire of 1666, Sir John was a staunch Protestant and even among those who persuaded William of Orange to invade in 1688 and restore the country and crown to Protestantism.



Samuel Storey Family Exhibition Gallery

The aim of this tour is to demonstrate to you that if you're studying and/or performing dramatic works (and especially the plays of Sir Alan Ayckbourn), there is a place you can come to view original material, such as draft scripts, some of which are for plays that have never been performed, marketing material, business records and correspondence with the great and good of the theatrical world locally, nationally and internationally. This will hopefully inform and enrich your studies, performances and productions, and perhaps even show you the writer's original intentions.



It is also to show you how we keep this material and the infinite variety of other research material we hold alongside the playwright's archive that informs so many aspects of life.

So, here we are in our exhibition gallery. This is where we display some of our newest archives or those of special interest at particular times. At the minute, we are exhibiting the archive of the Tuke Family of York. The

Tukes were Quakers, Christians

who, from the seventeenth century, no longer wanted to conform to the Church of England, and instead wanted to practice their own style of religion. They believed in having a personal relationship with God rather than a priest telling them how to get to Heaven. The Tukes were also among the leading businessmen in York and beyond. Originally tea dealers, they went on to found Barclays Bank. Their Quaker faith motivated them to engage in charitable work. The exhibition shows some of the posters and literature surrounding their opposition to slavery in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and members of the family travelled to West Africa to see the consequences of slavery for themselves. The Tukes also became committed to developing more humane treatments for mental illness (things like depression, dementia and schizophrenia). Patients admitted to The Retreat, a psychiatric hospital around whose grounds the University has developed, were treated more sympathetically and more comfortably than in other asylums. The collection includes two sets of manacles. One set – the smaller – is an example of what we might think of as a more barbaric way of treating patients with mental illness. Their small links bound their hands and feet tightly so they couldn't lash out and harm anyone else. The other is larger and padded; the aim was to prevent the patient harming him- or herself.

You will have seen then that not everything in the display is simple written documents (letters, posters, etc.) Archives contain a great variety of material; these are not just museum pieces. They are as important a record of actions and beliefs as any written document. The archives are displayed in temperature and humidity controlled cases and are fully and appropriately supported. To find out why this is, read on, and Catherine will tell you more about conservation of archives.

The Retreat Museum

The Retreat catered for middle-class patients. It aimed to create a comfortable atmosphere where patients would be gradually nursed back to health. Senior doctors believed one way to achieve this was to have a museum in the hospital that displayed interesting artefacts from around the world that patients may have themselves seen on their travels. So, would you believe, in the Retreat archive at the Borthwick there are a couple of large eggs, a pair of Algerian slippers and our very own crown of thorns!

Searchroom Reception

Okay, so you're interested in finding out more about what the Borthwick holds on Sir Alan Ayckbourn. First thing to do is to check out the Borthwick's website (<http://www.york.ac.uk/library/borthwick/>) and especially the Sir Alan Ayckbourn Archive sub-page. This will give you a general idea about our holdings. Next step is to contact us by phone or email and come in to view the catalogue to identify exactly which items you want to see.



In the reception area you are able to view all of our paper catalogues and ask any questions of us you like. Before you can see your documents you need to put your coats and bags in a locker – you are only allowed to take a few items into the searchroom.

Have a look at our searchroom regulations. These are designed to prevent harm to fragile paper and parchment documents and books. The last thing we want is for ancient and modern documents to be stained, torn, marked, strained, or damaged in any way that makes them unusable for others. Basically, they are just a few sensible things to consider whether you're in an archive or working on a piece of coursework at home or at school or college.

Searchroom Do's and Don'ts

- Do leave all liquids and food in your bags. THIS INCLUDES CHEWING GUM!
- Don't use hand cream. You'll need to wash it off if you have.
- Don't bring in sharp objects like pencil sharpeners or penknives
- Don't use an eraser
- Do only use a pencil and loose sheets of notepaper, or a laptop to take notes
- Do use a digital camera (even on a mobile phone or I-Pad) to take photographs – for a small fee, obviously!
- Do try and keep chatter to a minimum. Other people are trying to work.
- Do use the book supports and weights we provide.

Every year we get thousands of visitors in our searchroom, many of whom want to research their family tree. The Borthwick has hundreds of registers of the Church of England which record baptisms, marriages and burials from the 1538 to today. We've also got thousands of wills, which are the documents in which, like today, people made provision for their family, friends and charities (often churches) after their death.



note of the 23 baptis'ms, marriages,
burials in Scarborough. 1603.

1603.1 Baptised. // Marche /
William, Son to William Thomson. 25.
April.

Thomas, S. to Ralf Webster. 1
Thomas, S. to Christopher Robinson. 13.
Elizabeth, Daught. to John Barker. 1

Thomas, S. to Mr. Willm Hickson. 15-1
Agnes, Daugh. to Tho. Potter. 1

Agnes, D. to George Smith. 17.
George, S. to George Weare. 129.

Maye /

Peter, S. to Robt Ducke. 1.
Robt. S. to James Redhead. 1

Isabel, D. to Peter Rosdale. 15.
June /

Christopher, S. to Robt Mervil. 3.
Laurina, S. to John May. 30.

Julye /

Thomas, S. to Stephen Dickinson. 7.
Thomas, S. to Brian Russell. 1

Elizabeth, D. to Percival Dickinson, jun. 10.
Alia, D. to Richard Foord. 18.

Catherine, D. to fraunces Story. 1
Elizabeth D. to w^m Ruston. 31.

August /

Gregory, S. to Barthol. Oliver. 7.
Grace, D. to Willm Burton. 14.

Robert S. to Willm Thomson. 21.
October /

Thomas, D. to George Conyns. 1
Jane, D. to Richard Hudson. 9.
Anne, D. to John Husband. 13.

Catherine, D. to Tho. Pati. 1
John, S. to Mathew Granton. 16.
Anne, D. to Christopher Johnson. 1

Richard, Son to John Troughton. 28.
November /

Mathew, S. to Willm Brabinet. 1
Isabel D. to Willm Page. 6.

Curly, D. to John Brearcliffe. 1

Thomas, S. to Jeremy Stawpier. 13.
Jane, D. to Willm Lawson. 15.

Thomas, S. to Willm Brown. 20.
Josias, S. to John Lacy. 1

Richard S. to Michael Dunfly. 27.

December /

Christopher, S. to Edward Johnson. 11.
Stephen, S. to Stephen Tublay. 14.

Thomas, S. to Richard Wolfe. 18.
Paul, S. to Henry Midcalf. 21.

Willm S. to George Wmbs. 24.

Robt, S. to Philip wilford. 1
Isabel, D. to Willm Harrison. 1

Isabel, D. to Peter Sawton. 25.

Barbara, D. to John Lowther. 1
Anne, D. to John Hudson. 27.

January /

The document to the left is what's known as a Parish Register Transcript. It comes from Scarborough, which is where Sir Alan Ayckbourn has made his home, and dates to 1603. This was the year Elizabeth I died and the crowns of England and Scotland were united under James I. It was written only two years before the Gunpowder Plot.

Each year from 1598 parish priests made a copy of all of the baptisms, marriages and burials that had happened in their parish and sent it to the archbishop, so they are a really good source to tell us who lived and died where and when. It is a sobering thought that at the turn of the seventeenth century life expectancy was very low, with no disease control. Most people could expect to live to not much longer than thirty years; infant mortality was very high. Around 25% of children born in that year were dead before their first birthday, another 25% had died before reaching four, and a further 16% by the age of nine. For those people who made it to adulthood, women, of course, were vulnerable to problems in childbirth.

Searchroom

Right. Your documents are ready and are brought out for you into the searchroom. One thing you'll notice is how much colder it is. Documents made from natural materials respond adversely to changes in atmosphere. Temperatures that are too high or too low and an atmosphere that is too moist or too dry can seriously damage them. They can also be damaged by light. All of the lights and windows in the searchroom filter out harmful ultra-violet rays, and our windows have been cunningly designed; they are zig-zagged to prevent direct sunlight ever falling on the tables. Talking of which, the tables and all of the furniture is made from materials that don't give off harmful gasses or have rough edges.

Strongroom 1

We're going to take you behind the scenes now into the areas that only the staff get to see normally. Only people with a staff card can swipe their way through. This

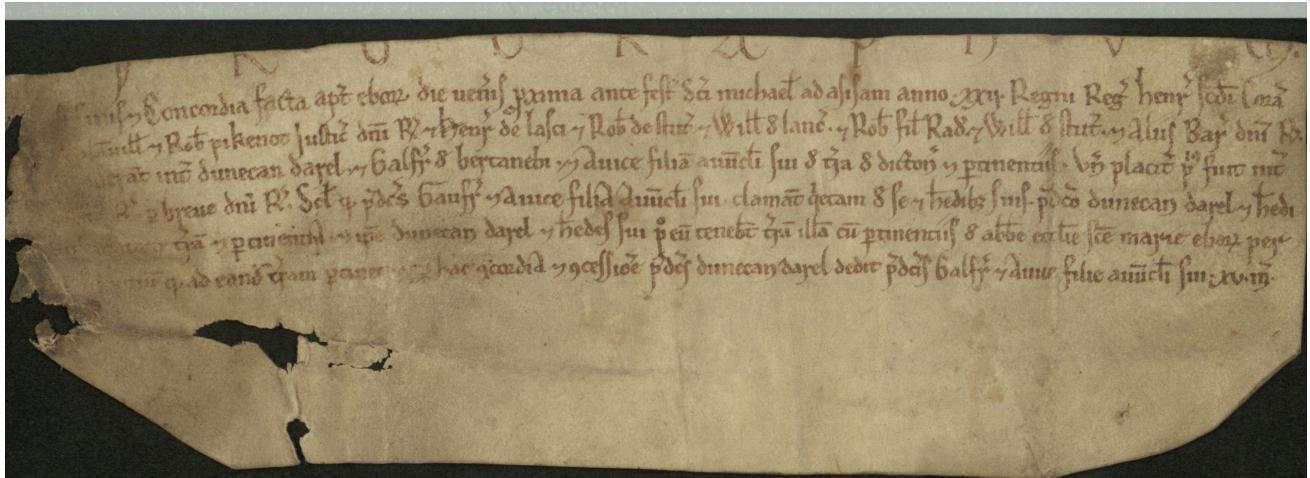


is so that the strongrooms, in which the archives are kept, are protected from unwanted visitors, and so that no one can wander around the building without permission. Remember, damage or loss (by theft) of archive material means that important historical information is lost.

The Borthwick has two strongrooms in which the archives are stored when they are not in use. Each strongroom is basically a concrete box with very thick walls. This means that we don't need air conditioning to regulate the temperature and the archives are protected from an external fire for at least four hours. Inside, the temperatures are even lower. Whereas the searchroom can be kept at somewhere between 16-21C, in the strongroom it is usually more like 13-16C. This is to keep the natural materials at their optimum temperature and to inhibit mould growth. With the exception of large rolled documents, like maps and plans, which are kept in special material and on special shelves, most of the archives, including the Sir Alan Ayckbourn Archive, are kept in boxes made from tough acid-free card. Acid, as you know, is very dangerous and can seriously damage anything it touches especially in the long term.

Think of an archive and you might think of Flourish & Botts book shop in the Harry Potter books, all wooden and dusty with ladders all over the place. Ok, so we've got the ladders, but our strongrooms have state-of-the-art shelving that can be moved with no effort at the touch of a button. We are often asked if it would be possible for someone to get crushed by the shelving if it started moving, but, fortunately, there are infra-red beams running along the bottom of the shelves. If the beam is broken (by touching your foot, for example) it automatically stops the shelves from moving.

The Sir Alan Ayckbourn Archive is stored in the main strongroom on the ground floor. It is stored alongside an enormous variety of different kinds of records dating back to the twelfth century.



How old?

The oldest document (above) stored at the Borthwick dates from as far back as 1176, making it almost forty years older than Magna Carta, which King John sealed in 1215 to give his people many new rights, including to a fair trial by peers. It is written on parchment and what is known as a chirograph. It records the details of an exchange of land at Deighton, south of York. It is written as the record of a land dispute between the two parties but really both sides agreed and just paid the king a sum to formalise their exchange.

It is a very clever document. The text is written one way up, it is then turned 180° and the same text is written the other way. The document is then cut in two. When one side wanted to prove their document was authentic they put it back together with the other half. If they matched, it was genuine; if not, it was fake. A great way to prevent forgery!

Alongside records that are centuries old, the Borthwick has some more modern records. Some of them tell us a lot about the kind of things our grandparents and parents would have enjoyed. How many of us don't like chocolate? But how many of us think about why we eat the brands we do? The archive of Rowntree of York contains hundreds of books full of advertising material from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards. They are a real eye-opener as to the changing tastes of people in Britain over time.

The Borthwick also holds an enormous number of documents that tell you so much about the lives of individuals at precise periods over the last seven hundred years. These are the papers of people making a will. The set of documents you can see on the next page are those related to the last will of Peter Shaw. Peter came from Scarborough and as a teenager in 1691 joined the Navy for a life at sea. His will, which leaves his possessions and any bounty, prize money or wages that he might earn as a sailor, was made before he set out to sea. A note tells us that in 1719 he was on board a ship that sank off Goodwin Sands in Kent and he was drowned. That means he had twenty-eight long years at sea just as the British Empire was really beginning to take shape. Attached to the will is an inventory (or survey) of his goods taken after his death. It starts with the sorry note that his purse and personal apparel are valued at nothing as they went down with him, but it goes on to list the property he left in his little house in Scarborough, things like an iron range and some small iron pots.





now all men by these presents that I Peter Shaw
Mariner Belonging unto their Maj:ts Ship Kent
have and by these presents doe make Ordaine and Constitute my deare
Sister *Eliz: Shaw* My true lawfull attorney

Irrevocable for me and in my name and for my use to ask, demand, and receive, of and from the Right hon:ble the Treasurer or Paymaster of their Maj:ts Navy and Comms: for Prize Money and whom else it may concern, As well all such Wages, and pay Bounty money, Prize money, and all other sume and sumes of money whatsoever, as now is and which hereafter shall or may be due or payable vnto me pursuant to their Maj:ts Gracious Declaration of the 23 of May 1689. And also all such Pensions, Salaryes, Smart Money, and all other Moneys and things whatsoever which now and at any time hereafter is and shall be due to me for my Service or otherwise in any of their Maj:ts Shippes, Trygotts, or Vessells, or any Merchant Shipp or Shippes. As also to demand Recover and receive of all other Person or Persons whatsoever whom it doth or may concern All e: singular such other sume sumes of money Goods, Wares, Effects, Wages, Debts, Dues, Claims, Demands, &c: ever which now and hereafter is or shall be due and payable vnto me either by Bond, Bill, Book, Acompt, or otherwise howsoeuer. And moreover in my name and for my proper use to demise, and let by Lease in Writing or Otherwise All or any of my Messuages, Lands, or Tenements, to such Person or Persons for such term of Years, Conditions, Reservations as my said Attorney or her Councill shall think fit and Convenient, YIUVING, and hereby Granting vnto my said Attorney my full & whole power in the p'mises to Recover and receive all and singular the summe and summes of money matters & things aforesaid upon non paym: thereof or any part thereof. All such person or Persons whom it may concern, wch: need shall require their Executors, Administrators goods to sue, arrest, Attach, Seize, Imprison, prosecute, Condemn, to Compound, agree, out of prison to Release and discharge And upon Receipt of the said p'mises or any part thereof Acquittances, Releases, or any other discharges, for me and in my name to make Seal & Deliver, one Attorney or more to substitute and at pleasure to revoke and Generally to Act and doe all other Acts, mattes, and things, whatsoever need full & necessary to be done, in touching the p'mises, as fully and Effectually as I might or could doe if I were personally p:ent. Ratifying and allowing for fime, Valid and Irrevocable all whatsoever my said Attorney shall lawfully doe or cause to be done in and touching the p'mises by Virtue of these presents

And I the said Peter Shaw Considering the incertainty of this Transitory Life doe make and Declare these presents to Containe my last Will and Testament That is to say I give and Bequeath vnto the above said Eliz: Shaw my true and Lawfull wife all and every such Wages sume and summes of money Lands Tenement Goods Chattells and Estates whatsoever wherof at the time of my Decesse I shall be possessed or Invested or which shall then belong or of right Appertaine vnto me I doe give Devise & bequeath Unto the said Eliz: Shaw her Heires or executors And doe hereby Nominate & appoint her my sole and only executor and doe revoke all former Wills & Deeds of gift by me at any time heretofore made and doe Ordaine these presents to stand & be for and as my only last Will & Testament In Witnessc whereof I have herevnto set my hand & Seal the first day of December Anno Dom: 1691 And in the 4th year of His Maj:ts Raigne of our Sovereigne Lord King Willm: and Mary by the grace of god King and Queen of Great Britaine &c

John Balling
William Brown
John Grailesford

Peter Shaw
Mark

Cold Room

As we've seen not every item in an archive is a simple piece of paper or parchment. We have to care for a vast array of different types of material. Some of the most difficult to preserve are things that must be kept at very low temperatures and low humidity. Things like photographs from the Rowntree archive and photographic negatives, films and audio tapes are made from plastics or treated with chemicals that can combust when exposed to air at normal archival storage temperatures. For this reason, we keep an awful lot of photographs and some film tapes in our special Cold Room. The temperature is maintained at 6-7°C and 30-35% humidity. It's really like a big butcher's fridge – too cold to stay in for long!

In the last year or so most of our sound archives (recordings on vinyl, cassette and CD) have been moved to our special new transfer suite. Because tapes are made from material that cannot be prevented from decaying, and because CDs and records are easily scratched, and because we have the equipment, we are transferring sound recordings to digital files that students can access online or at special listening stations in the University. The Borthwick even has a record label, M P Live, in association with a major archive depositor, Music Preserved (<http://www.musicpreserved.org.uk/>) where you can download rare recordings of classical music concerts and jazz performances from the last fifty years.

Staff offices

Just in case you thought all we did was work hard all day, we have our staff rest area. Usually we have large amounts of cake to enjoy. But, the staff area is surrounded by our staff offices. These are specially designed with walls of double thickness to make sure conversations inside cannot be heard and that if we are dealing with sensitive issues we can keep things private. Archives are subject to Data Protection and Freedom of Information laws, and often personal data can only be seen by the person about whom the information is recorded. Some archives like the Sir Alan Ayckbourn Archive have personal information about other people, and there are things in the collection (names, addresses, audition reviews, private letters and family business) that might be restricted from researchers. On the other hand, the public has a general right to access information, and archives need to think very carefully about the reasons for not releasing information they hold.

Conservation (by Catherine Dand)

The Conservation Department at the Borthwick Institute is responsible for the physical care of the archives. We class this care in two different ways. 'Preventative' care involves passive activities which are undertaken to prevent future damage. This includes tasks such as: packaging; monitoring and controlling the environment; preparing items for access or exhibition; and providing advice and training on handling and care. 'Interventive' care describes any activity which involves direct treatment of the archives themselves to make them more stable. Materials cared for here include paper and parchment documents, wax seals, bindings and maps and plans. Treatments can include cleaning and washing, removing acidity, repairing tears, infilling holes and much more, depending on the nature of the material and the type of damage.

The Ayckbourn archive is relatively modern, and the majority of the material is in good condition. However we often have more problems with



collections from the last 50 years than we do with those from 500 years ago! This is because over the years materials and manufacturing processes have changed, and as a result the quality of the materials we use for recording information has often deteriorated.

One example of this decrease in quality is in our writing materials. Before paper was available in this country we used parchment to write on. Parchment is made from animal skins and it is a very robust and hardwearing material; however, when paper was introduced it was found to be cheaper and quicker to produce, and gradually became the more commonly used material. Originally paper was made by hand, and it was made up of long rag fibres which created a very strong sheet. As the demand for paper grew, papermakers began to develop ways to manufacture paper even more quickly and at an even lower cost. Today the majority of paper is made by machine. It is often made with ground wood fibres, which can be very short and therefore create a much weaker sheet of paper. Cheap wood fibre can also contain impurities which will cause the paper to deteriorate more quickly.

More ‘modern’ archives such as the Ayckbourn archive often consist of less durable materials. This can relate to the paper found in the archive, but it can also refer to other aspects of the archives such as the inks, the adhesives and the books. This means that preventative measures of care are very important to these collections. They need to be given packaging which will protect them physically, and which is made of good quality materials so that the packaging will last well too. If the archives are stored in a stable temperature and relative humidity then this will slow down the rate at which they deteriorate. And just as importantly, the archives need to be handled carefully to ensure that they do not suffer accidental damage.

Hopefully by applying these measures now we can ensure that archives such as the Ayckbourn archive will still be accessible to people in 500 years time.



Display (Lifelong Learning Room)

We end our tour with a display that aims to give you an idea of just the kind of material Sir Alan Ayckbourn's Archive contains. The collection itself covers thirty-seven shelves in the strongroom and includes boxes full of play scripts, programmes, letters, newspaper cuttings and large posters amongst many other things:

1. *The Square Cat*, draft script, written on a typewriter with handwritten notes (1959). This might be the most precious item in the collection as it is Sir Alan's first play; it was written under the pseudonym 'Roland Allen' and came about when, as an actor, he criticised a play he was performing in and Stephen Joseph, his mentor, challenged him to do better. It launched the career of possibly the world's most successful living playwright. See this item on p. 26.
2. *Absurd Person Singular*, handwritten draft (1971). This is a rare example of a handwritten first draft of an Ayckbourn script. It has tiny sketches of stage sets at the top of the first page.
3. *Confusions*, typewritten draft script with handwritten notes by Sir Alan.
4. Letter from Donald Wolfit to Edgar Matthews, inviting Alan Ayckbourn to tour with his company (1956). This document essentially launched the acting career of Sir Alan Ayckbourn. Matthew, his master at Haileybury School, had asked his friend Wolfit whether he had a part for a young actor in a production at the Edinburgh Festival, and Wolfit replied that he would certainly take the boy. See this item on p.27.

5. Leach's Fancy Ball Costumes Catalogue (c. 1890). This amazing little booklet is the oldest item in the collection. Sir Alan is known for his love of early London comedy theatre and he acquires this catalogue of late nineteenth century costumes. He has written notes against certain of the costumes, probably as he was inspired to adapt them for his own work. See this item on p.26.

6. Caricature of Sir Alan Ayckbourn which you can see on p.6. As you can see he is sitting astride the Stephen Joseph Theatre in Scarborough and sipping a red wine. Sir Alan is a cricket nut. We've even got copies of the averages for the theatre cricket team in the archive!

7. Selection of First Night Cards for *Things We Do For Love* (1997). To celebrate the opening night of a new play and wish Sir Alan and the production team well for the run, a large number of First Night Cards would be sent to Sir Alan.

8. American Theater Hall of Fame, medal (2008). Sir Alan is enormously successful around the world. To recognise this fact, he has been inducted into the American Theater Hall of Fame alongside other British theatre greats such as Lynn and Vanessa Redgrave, Sir Ian McKellan and Tom Stoppard.

9. *Season's Greetings*, Advent Calendar in German (1981). Among the odd items in the archive is an advent calendar created for the German production of *Season's Greetings* in Cologne in 1981.

10. Photograph of Alan Ayckbourn and Michael Winner (1988). Sir Alan regularly collaborates with other artists and directors. In 1988 he worked with the late film director Michael Winner on a film of his play *A Chorus of Disapproval*.

11. Programmes for Aldwych farces, five items (1923-31). As a birthday present one year, Sir Alan received these copies of five West End farces from the 1920s and 1930s. This is the kind of theatre that had an influence on his own work.

12. Designs produced by Lindy Hemming for costumes for male and female characters in *A Small Family Business* (1987). See the designs for the costumes of the character Cliff below.

13. Poster advertising the closure of *Way Upstream* due to theatre flooding (1981). The play *Way Upstream* is set on a boat. The stage for the first production of this play in London was a tank filled with water on which a boat moved throughout the play. Unfortunately, after the first performance, the tank sprang a leak and the National Theatre had to be closed and the show cancelled. This poster shows that it hasn't always been plain sailing for Sir Alan!

14. *Confusions*, poster (A1) for production at Theater am Kurfürstendamm, Berlin (c. 1977). The Sir Alan Ayckbourn Archive doesn't just contain items relating to plays performed in the UK and in the English language. Sir Alan has universal appeal as a writer and he is very popular in Germany, Japan, the Netherlands and France, to name but a few places.

15. Photographs of Sir Alan in the studio. On p. 10 you will see examples of him at work rehearsing for Scarborough productions of *Absent Friends* (1974) and *Sisterly Feelings* (1979).

CLIFF. . Page 1. RUSSELL DIXON p. 78 p 107.



SWIFT COTTAGE,
IBTHORPE,
HURSTBOURNE TARRANT,
NR. ANDOVER, HANTS.

HURSTBOURNE TARRANT 245.

27.7.58

Dear Edgar Matthews.

Thank you for your kind letter.
The wedding was a great success and now
I look on to Falmouth with the Jermits!

Certainly I will see the boy you mention -
would it be possible for him to come
with me to Falmouth to walk-on?

This would mean re-hearsing in London
for two weeks August 6th & 13th &
being three weeks in Falmouth 20. 27th Sept- 3rd.
I could manage £3-0-0 a week expenses
for him for the 3 weeks there.

I shall be in London several days
this week - if the boy is interested it
would be best to write to me here and
give a phone number where I can
reach him.

The wedding went very smoothly
the bride & groom looked so young and

4) Letter from Donald Wolfit to Edgar
Matthews (front)

4) Letter from Donald Wolfit to
Edgar Matthews (back)

Happy - Imogen was in great form
and I think enjoyed herself.

Oh dear this storm - the havoc
in the garden is unbelievable - we
have so little time.

With all good wishes to you &
from us both

Yours
Donald Wolfit.

Workshop

All page references are for *The Crafty Art of Playmaking*, Alan Ayckbourn, (Faber & Faber, 2004)

This workshop is based on Alan Ayckbourn's rehearsal process. In order to understand his process I drew heavily on his book *The Crafty Art of Playmaking*, and my own interviews with people who had observed his process, and, briefly, the man himself.

As you will have seen in Ayckbourn's biography, he was an apprentice actor who learnt on the job, through the demands of the rep system, rather than through formal acting training. He is also a director, not an actor trainer; his actors are either highly trained, experienced or naturally gifted. Because of this he seldom uses specific games, exercises or techniques in a rehearsal. Rather, he has a set of principles which under-pin in his work.

In attempting to create a workshop teaching these principles to students and actors-in-training, I have developed (or re-appropriated from others) the exercises below. They are ways of revealing the underlining ethos Ayckbourn bases his process on, rather than direct techniques he uses with his actors.

As acting techniques and drama games are disseminated they evolve and are adapted. Having worked with hundreds of practitioners in my career, and run thousands of workshops, it is difficult to untangle which exercises I learnt from which practitioner and which I developed independently. So I am going to take this opportunity to thank everyone whose work has informed the workshop plan, and apologies in advance for not being able to give sufficient credit to each individual. I would also like to thank all the students and teachers who acted as test subjects for this workshop, and gave me valuable feedback.

I've chosen to use *Season's Greetings* (1980) as the key text, due to the richness of the archival material on it. Obviously, all the exercises can be applied to any Ayckbourn piece, or indeed to text work in general.

Before each group of activities I provide some context in terms of Ayckbourn's work, which is in italics. This is a version of a conversation I have with students in the session, sometimes before, sometimes after the exercises. Feel free to use these verbatim, adapt, or omit entirely, based on the needs of your group.

Introduction

It's always good to start work by being silly, and this is the silliest game I know.

I stand the students in a circle and ask them to practise being the different creatures in the game. They all involve repeating the name of the creature while performing the following actions:

- 1) Amoeba –bending over and waving your arms around amorphously.
- 2) Wormy – keeping legs together and hands together above the head, wiggle.
- 3) Bunny – use hands to make bunny ears



and hop about.

- 4) Monkey – hopping from one leg to another making monkey arms (obvious really).
- 5) People – wander around making small-talk gestures.
- 6) Higher Beings – Sit crossed legged and look enlightened (they don't say 'higher being,' they either go 'Om' or laugh at everyone else).

At the beginning the whole group are amoebas. They amoeba around until they find another amoeba and then they do battle. They stand facing each other, count, '1, 2, 3' and then produce one hand from behind their back 'in one of the three sacred hand gestures written into the DNA of all living beings,' either a flat palm, parted fingers, or a clenched fist. (Yes, all right, they play 'Rock, Paper, Scissors.') The winner evolves up to the next level (Amoebas become Wormies and so on), losers evolve down (except for Amoebas who can't go any lower), draw means they fight again. They can only fight others of the same type of creature. Once they become Higher Beings, they have won and they don't need to fight any more.

Who is Alan Ayckbourn?

Everyone sits in a circle and I ask for any Ayckbourn-related knowledge the group might have. If stuck, you can roll out the facts from p. 8. Especially relevant, however, in terms of establishing his level of success, are:

- *In 1974, Alan held the record for having the most plays running simultaneously in the West End with Living Together, Table Manners, Round And Round The Garden, Absurd Person Singular and Absent Friends. Only Andrew Lloyd Webber since has had more productions running concurrently.*
- *The Variety Club named Alan 'Playwright of the Year' in 1974; between 1973 and 2009, Alan has received more than 35 major theatre awards including an Olivier Special Award in 2009 and the Special Tony Award For Lifetime Achievement In The Theatre in 2010. Awards for his plays include two Oliviers, two Molières and a Tony award.*
- *Alan was awarded a CBE (Companion of the Order of the British Empire) in 1987. He was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II 'for services to the theatre' in 1997.*
- *Fatuous fact: Alan Ayckbourn has been said to be the most performed living playwright in the world. There is no plausible way either to prove or disprove this. But he is undoubtedly very, very popular....*



This workshop will explore why he is such a popular writer and director. Part of his success is his ability in both roles; having started off as an actor, he then became both a writer and a director, and achieved great success as both. Because of this, we can learn from him how to write, direct and act in theatre; he is in the rare position of understanding each of these crucial roles and how they fit together. The recurrent theme in his advice is trust. Directors need to trust their actors and actors need to trust the text. The following exercises will explore these further.

The Role of the Director

For this brief discussion, I start by ask the students what they think a director does. We often start with, 'They tell people what to do,' so then I dig a bit deeper, 'Which people? How does the director know what they should do? What if the actors have a good idea of their own?' I then tell them we will test their ideas out to see if they are right.

Charades

I divide the group into sub-groups, ideally of four or five students. Then I ask each group to come up with a name for themselves that I can write up on a scoreboard. Finally, I go around and whisper the name of a well-known fairy tale to each group. They are given two minutes to devise a still image of that fairy tale which makes it very clear who is playing what and how they feel about what is going on.

At the end of the time we go around and see each group individually. Points are awarded – 1 to 5 for clarity (based on how quickly the other groups guess what the fairy story is) and 1 to 5 for how visually pleasing/imaginative it is, and whether the audience can see all of the details. (A bonus point is given to the first group to guess another's story correctly.)

I then ask everybody how they found that exercise; how did they make decisions, how did they arrive at decisions?

Staying in those groups, I ask each group to elect a leader and send them to me. I then ask the leaders to think of a well-known film (which is not *Titanic*). They will have a couple of minutes to think about it (I explain that per hour actors are fairly expensive, so it's often cost effective to have a director on a flat fee do a lot of prep before rehearsals start.) They then go back to their groups and tell them exactly how to stand but without telling them the name of the film or inviting any input. The directors do not appear in the image.

Again we award points and discuss how that differed from the previous time. Often the images are less imaginative, but are more clearly focused on the audience's viewpoint.

Finally, the groups choose a new director, or stick with their old one. Again the directors pick the film, but this time they tell the cast the title and are open to suggestions. Then marks are awarded and the results discussed. Often the images here are both imaginative and clear.

Normally, most groups express a preference for the having a director who involves them in the work. Some people prefer the freedom of having no director at all, some the clarity (and possibly the abnegation of responsibility) of having a director tell them exactly what to do, but most like to feel involved while having the reassurance of an outside eye.

Originally there were no theatre directors. Actors performed outside and had a good idea of what the audience could see. The acting troupes were often led by the lead actor, or the one who had invested the money, the 'actor-manager.' As time went on, performances got more complex; they moved indoors, acquired sets and complex lighting and sound effects, and all these things needed to be co-ordinated with the audience in mind. So someone was needed to sit out in the auditorium and draw it all together. The person had responsibility because of their perspective, not because they were necessarily more talented than everyone else.

'A director is a comparatively recent phenomenon in theatre. A relative newcomer, really... The emergence of the director coincided (and perhaps this was no coincidence) with the technical development of modern theatre and the decline of the actor-manager. From being an industry with basically two crafts – acting and writing – theatre developed, thanks to all the new technology, into the multi-skilled industry it is today. It was impossible for one mere actor-manager to keep track of it.' p.101

Ayckbourn feels strongly that the role of a director is to enable the actor to give the best possible performance, and that this is rarely done by forcing actors to do as they are told.

'It is important to build trust. Rehearsals are about people – often total strangers – being persuaded to take risks in order to discover how to play the part. This means being given the courage to try something potentially wrong and possibly downright embarrassing, without fear of come-back or ridicule from you, the director, or their colleagues. The lead from this must always come from you.'

Rehearsals explore choices. How to cry, how to laugh, how to come into a room, where you stand in that room in relation to other people. During rehearsals you discover how many options there are for one particular moment (usually dozens) and then gradually narrow them down. If an actor

trusts you, you will both make the final choice together.

If in doubt that it is genuinely going to be a joint choice, always let it be the actor's choice and not yours. If they feel you have reluctantly persuaded them to do something, the result will rarely be as convincing as if they had felt they had chosen it for themselves.' p. 145

Ayckbourn says that when his mentor, Stephen Joseph, was at his best he was a director 'who listened and encouraged and understood and watched, and for all the world seemed to care whether the performance you gave was good or bad' p. 103. Of course, a director can have a positive and negative impact. 'It is a role which carries an extraordinary power. If a director has it in them to build and encourage, they also have the potential, even inadvertently, to destroy. There is no actor living who is not vulnerable to criticism, no matter what they pretend to the contrary. Somewhere inside them, a negative remark, some sarcastic jibe, will hit home and eat away at the most confident, experienced, seemingly unflappable performer.' p. 104



Working on the text

In the early days of his Artistic Directorship at the Stephen Joseph Theatre Ayckbourn was in a position to be able to advertise a play with a slightly vague title and description, and then write the piece very close to the first day of rehearsal. Sometimes the first day would start slightly late as the scripts were still being printed.

'[On the first day of rehearsal] we get straight down to the text, sitting around a table on the first morning and reading the thing aloud from start to finish' p.137. He does this so everyone can get a sense of the piece, and he invites everyone else who works in the theatre, so that they all know what it's about.

In our workshop, reading the whole of a two-hour play is impractical (and unfair on students unused to sight reading) so I invented this slightly more playful way of enabling the whole group to get a grasp of the story.

Read Through

I begin by asking them to wait until I give the mark and then put their hands up. The first person to get their hand up is given the first character on the cast list (regardless of gender.) I tell them a little bit about the character and ask them to jump up and strike a characteristic pose of their choosing whenever the character's name is mentioned.

Neville, runs a successful electrical business.

Belinda, housewife, married to Neville for some time now, and mother to his young children. Very attractive, she is hostess at the family home this Christmas.



Phyllis, is Neville's sister and an alcoholic.

Bernard, is Phyllis' husband and a rubbish doctor. Every year he bores children and adults alike with a massively over-long puppet show. (This year it is "Three Little Pigs")

Harvey, slightly senile ex-security officer and uncle to Neville. He likes televisions, violence, guns, and winding up Bernard.

Rachel, Belinda's more dowdy and bookish sister, who, via her local bookclub has met and formed a crush on the glamorous writer:

Clive, a sort-of successful writer in that his one book so far has been very well received.

Eddie, Neville's best friend, ex-business colleague, currently running his own failing business as a photographer.

Pattie, Eddie's exhausted wife, who has brought three demanding children into the world and is quite far on in developing a fourth (she's seven months pregnant.)

The Kids, never seen on stage, Belinda and Neville's and Pattie and Eddie's children are evidently quite demanding, so I ask everyone who hasn't already got a role to stand up when 'The Kids' are mentioned and get them to have a little tantrum.

I then read through this heavily edited synopsis of the story. Every time a character's name is mentioned the student in question jumps up and strikes their characteristic pose. (If they really get into it and want to act out the action as described, then they should go for it!)

1) It is Christmas at Belinda and Neville's house and they have invited their family for a traditional Christmas celebration. The guests include: Neville's alcoholic sister Phyllis; her husband Bernard, a doctor whose annual puppet shows go on for hours and bore the Kids to death; Neville's friend Eddie and his pregnant wife Pattie; uncle Harvey, a slightly senile retired security guard and a television-addict; Belinda's unmarried sister, Rachel; Clive, a writer and friend of Rachel.

2) Christmas Eve, 7:30pm and Phyllis is drunkenly cooking the dinner, while hitting her head on things. Belinda is evidently feeling neglected by Neville and their relationship is frosty. Pattie is exhausted and sick of looking after the kids, while Eddie avoids his responsibilities. Harvey is winding Bernard up with his views on the importance of giving children toy guns. And the Kids are refusing to go to sleep.

2) Rachel goes to collect Clive from the train station, but instead he walks so she misses him and he arrives at the house to be greeted by Belinda. The two of them are immediately attracted to each other.

3) Christmas Day, Noon. Neville and Eddie try to fix one of the children's broken toys and Neville mentions that he's opening up a new store and Eddie could work there. The tension between Clive and Belinda is building and Belinda and Rachel compete over who will lend Clive a scarf when he goes walking. Belinda tries to get Neville to talk about their marriage but he goes off to the pub instead.

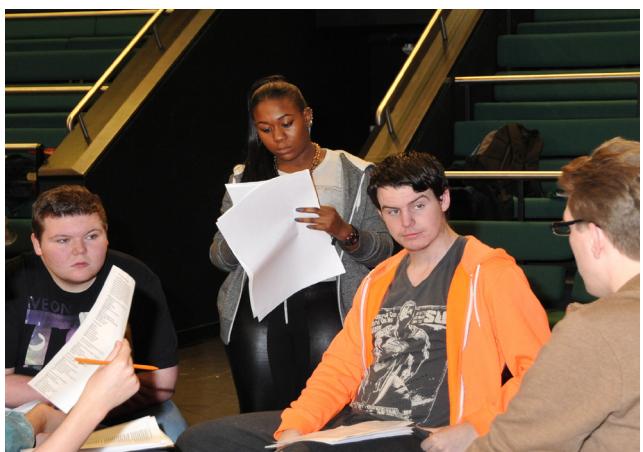
4) Christmas Night, Midnight. Some of the guests are drunkenly squabbling while playing Snakes and Ladders. Phyllis drunkenly flirts with Clive, which wakes up Harvey who tells them off. Phyllis goes to bed, and then Rachel appears and tells Clive that while she has strong feelings for him she doesn't want to have sex (ever) so they shouldn't have a relationship. The noise of her crying wakes Harvey again, who is now convinced that Clive is a thief. When Rachel and Harvey have gone, Belinda appears and she and Clive attempt to 'fulfill their mutual desire' under the Christmas tree in the main hall but are discovered when they set off the various electronic toys and lights beneath the tree in, initially, their lust and then their desperate attempts to turn everything off.

7) Boxing Day, mid-afternoon. Clive is dressed as Father Christmas in order to give the kids their presents. Despite the incident the night before, Harvey is now convinced that Clive is gay and a thief (the two things being linked in his mind, evidently.) Patti mentions to Belinda that, according to Eddie, Neville is going to make Eddie manager of a new branch of his store.

8) Clive is very embarrassed about the night before and apologises to Neville, who says it's fine and that he's sure Clive was very drunk. When Clive says that he wasn't that drunk Neville points out that if somebody had tried to have sex with his wife while sober he would 'take him apart bit by bit.'

9) Meanwhile, rehearsals are taking place for Bernard's puppet show The Three Little Pigs, despite being hindered by Patti as his useless stage hand, and Harvey jeering at him. Finally Harvey grabs the puppets and knocks everything over. Bernard is very upset but decides that the 'show must go on.'

10) Clive (while still dressed as Father



Christmas) tells Rachel that she mustn't feel guilty for rejecting him the other night as actually he was never attracted to her in the first place. He's ashamed of the emotional mess he's made and decides to get out of here on the first train, which is the 6:06 the next day.

11) 27th December, 5:15am. Clive, in the process of leaving, is intercepted by Harvey who believes he is a thief taking all the presents. Harvey promptly shoots Clive, who is pronounced dead by Bernard. However, Bernard is a rubbish doctor, and the 'corpse' promptly lets out a moan and calls for Belinda, rather than Rachel. Clive is taken to hospital. Neville contemplates phoning the police to tell them of Harvey's crime but gets distracted. Belinda asks him if he is going to make Eddie a manager in the new store, which he scoffs at. Belinda goes to make some tea.

Using Archival Materials to Understand the Characters Better

The actors in the original production had the distinct advantage of being directed by the author, so they would not have to research his intentions. We can, however, gain significant clues about the play by taking a visit to the Borthwick Archive and having a look at the material surrounding the play. In the envelope we find a number of documents:

- a) A couple of drafts of the blurb on Season's Greetings for the theatre brochure.
- b) A rough outline of a family tree for the characters.
- c) A description of the characters (we can tell this was written before the final version, as it makes reference to Harvey having a wife, Shirley, who was permanently off-stage in the production; she was later cut entirely, presumably leaving Harvey as a widower. Also worth noting is that Harvey started out as an ex-Major in the army, but there's no mention of that in the script.)
- d) A sketch of the stage layout.
- e) The first draft of the play, in pencil.

There is a challenge in working in an archive with original materials; people's handwriting can be difficult to read and this is certainly the case here.

As an exercise, I ask the students to go through the hand out description of the characters found and answer the questions found on page 57.

Casting and Read Through Scenes

Now is a good time to divide up the group (into teams of 3, 5, or 6) give out the scripts and ask them to cast themselves as the role in the scene (obviously, not every character is in every scene.) I ask them to read through the scene once to get a sense of the scene.

Sensitivity vs. Being Clever.

Answer any questions that anyone may have on the action or the content but avoid an in depth analysis of the text. We are about to see how much we can glean from the text by using our instincts and sensitivity to the writing, rather than through intellectual probing.

We spoke before about the way in which Ayckbourn, as a director, trusts his actors. Similarly he encourages the actors to trust the words on the page. Ayckbourn has this to say about actors who over-think a role rather than trusting the text:

'Certain actors, if they see an open front door, will always go round to the back of the house, find a ladder and climb in through an upstairs window. They get to the front hall eventually but must reckon the detour has done them good. The benefit is never particularly discernible though, I have

to say.' (p. 48) In other words, there are actors who love to over-analyse but it's time consuming and doesn't greatly improve the resulting performance.

On the other hand, 'A lot of acting is purely instinctive. Respect that... There is no necessity for an actor to be educated at all (though it helps to be able to read.) Some of the least 'brainy' ones I know can play a nuclear physicist or a university professor with convincing ease.' p.152

The exercises below aim to develop this instinctive response, and work best if the students can be persuaded to put their intellectual analysis on hold for a while.

Word Choice

'English... is a God-given double-meaningful gift for dramatists. Most things we say to each other can be interpreted two, three or sometimes five ways. Our choice of words can betray class origin, attitude and mood... The choices are infinite and each one carries a different shade of meaning.' p.48

The example Ayckbourn gives is easily adapted into an exercise, based on a moment from Relatively Speaking. A man sits with his wife at the breakfast table and tells her he doesn't like the marmalade she has bought.

I read the following sentences, as neutrally as I can, and ask the group to share their gut instincts about the character and his attitude to his wife. (Ayckbourn's suggested responses are in brackets.)

'I can't say I'm very taken with this marmalade.'
(Dry, aloof, sarcastic, dispassionate.)

'I'm very much afraid I can't come to terms with this marmalade. Not at all I can't.'
(Pedantic, picky, probably suburban middle class.)

'Where d'you buy this marmalade, then? Eh? Eh?'
(More aggressive, almost menacing, lower class.)

'For heaven's sake, woman, this marmalade is completely and utterly inedible.'
(Impatient, dominant, upper class.)

It is possible, therefore, to tell a huge amount about a character from the specific words the playwright places in their mouths.

Mouthing through the text

It's time to explore the text.

1) To warm the face up, I challenge the students to alternate between pulling a Big Face, and scrunching up into a Tiny Face, as fast as possible, then to pretend to chew a huge piece of toffee (or tofu if they don't like sweet things) making sure to touch every part of every tooth with the tongue to ensure nothing is left over.

2) The students find a space in the room. They have to look and see another empty space, walk into it with some energy and purpose, see another space and then walk into that one, and so on, without talking or making eye-contact with anyone else. If someone walks in front of them they pause and allow the person to continue and then carry on. I normally stop them a couple of times and ask them to look around; if they are doing this well as a group then there should be no clumps or empty spaces.

3) The students mouth their way through their own lines (not the whole scene); as if they were speaking the lines while massively over-articulating each word, but without any breath, so only the hard consonant sounds are audible. I explain that little bits of spit may come out, which is great, but do try not to get them on other people.

There are three main benefits to mouthing the text:

a) It's a great warm up for the speech muscles! Speaking involves the use of approximately 100

small muscles. In order to speak clearly on stage, so that we can be understood, these muscles need to be strong. Like going to the gym (which, as you can see from the pictures, I have never done), where you lift a weight until the arm muscles become sore and then grow back stronger, if we work the muscles involved in articulating speech they too will grow stronger. Although you won't get some weird, rippling facial-six-pack.

b) It helps you remember lines. In the same way as a dancer uses muscle memory to recall dance moves, without having to consciously think about them, it's possible to engage the facial muscles in remembering lines. I've worked with lots of actors who have spent hours learning their lines but then stumble over their words as soon as they speak, because they have been thinking the line rather than saying it.

c) It builds an association between the words and being active. Often actors mumble their lines to themselves when prepping and then it becomes very difficult to energise them; an association has been unconsciously formed between those words and a lack of energy. This exercise associates the word on the page with an upright, engaged energy.

d) Ayckbourn chooses his words with great care, some of them may have a sharp, punchy feeling (like punch, kick, slap) or a soft, round feeling (love, hope, hippopotamus). This in turn might give a certain rhythm or flow to the text.

4) With that in mind, I challenge the students to repeat the exercise, but this time being very sensitive to the sensations which come from mouthing those words.

5) I ask anyone to share any discoveries they made through the exercises. Sometimes the results are great, but I tend to carry a tumbleweed around so that I can roll it across the space in the event of awkward silence.

Punctuation

If Ayckbourn's precise use of vocabulary conveys meaning to the sensitive actor, the same is definitely true of his punctuation. In another exercise adapted from *The Crafty Art* I ask two volunteers to read A and then B from the Punctuation sheet (p.60 of the pack).

I then ask the group to tell me their impressions of the kind of people A and B are. (It's also worth pointing out at this point that the sentences in A are grammatically incorrect; none of this work on punctuation is about accuracy, it's all about sensitivity.)



A is the text that Ayckbourn uses in *A Woman in Mind*, in which a woman loses her sanity in the course of the play, which is mirrored in her increasing inability to form flowing sentences.

'[A] is broken up (quite grammatically incorrectly) in order to give an indication to the actor of the preferred delivery: Not huge pauses. Just stop points to help shape the speech. [B] actually puts quite a different slant on the speech. The second way gives Susan a fluency of speech which she seldom possesses. Her pattern is breaking up like her personality.' p.63

I then challenge the group to punctuate the quote from *The Norman Conquests*. First they decide how they want their version of Ruth to sound; what class, attitude, mood she is in, and what is her relationship to the person to whom she is speaking. They then punctuate the speech with the aim of generating that effect.

We then 'Walk the Text.' This is similar to the walking and mouthing except now we follow these rules:

1) You walk in a straight line, speaking your text aloud, until you come to a full stop, at

which point you slightly drop the intonation of your voice and firmly plant both feet on the floor.

- 2) For question marks, the same applies, but with a rising intonation.
- 3) For exclamation marks, the same but, obviously, try end with some excitement and energy.
- 4) For ellipses (. . .) let your walk slowly run out of steam rather than stopping cleanly, it represents a 'tailing off rather than an interruption.' p. 63
- 5) For a – at the end of your line, this means you were interrupted so you stop with one foot in the air and your mouth open. If this happens inside your text you are interrupting yourself, the same thing applies, take your intonation up slightly to show you haven't finished a sentence, then sharply turn to begin the next bit of speech.
- 6) For commas, you keep moving, but you turn to move in a new direction, and change the pitch of your voice.
- 7) Colons, semi-colons, etc. are silly and hopefully no one has used them. If they have they are showing off, and they should treat them like commas.

We then ask a few students to read out their version of Ruth, standing still on the spot, but following their own punctuation. As with the vocab exercise we ask the group for their instinctive responses to the character each time.

Having seen the difference which punctuation makes, the students then walk their own text, from the scene, several times through. I ask them to give me a wave when they've gone through once, since some of them will have lots of lines compared to the others.



Most groups find this harder than they expect.

- 2) *Actors, whether due to being tired or struggling to remember lines, love to add pauses before they speak to buy themselves thinking time. Once one person does it, it's really easy for the next person to add a pause and then things get slower and slower. They can even start adding dramatic 'acting' moments to cover the pauses, which will end up making them even longer.*

"At some point in rehearsal there is invariably a cry from the director (usually it's the director) to speed things up. Pick up the cues and don't pause before every speech. It's a favourite habit of many actors and usually conceals either the fact that they're uncertain precisely what their cue is, or that they can't remember what they say next. But sometimes it's 'thoughtful' acting; I'm all for that in small doses, but not when the thought the character is busy forming in their mind has the rest of us hanging around impatiently waiting for them to speak." p. 91

I now challenge the pairs to tease their partner, to push them to pick up the cues faster by picking their cue up with speed and energy. To stress, however, that they are in this together, and to keep it playful, I add in that if either of them makes a mistake, both of them have to turn and bow to an imaginary audience.

- 3) Once they've got the hang of that, I ask them to replace the number one with, 'I can't have done it again,' and an exasperated hand to head expression. So:

Picking Up The Cues

The next exercise explores 'picking up the cues,' not having any gaps between one person finishing speaking and the next starting.

- 1) The students get into pairs and start to count up to 3. So, if the two partners are labelled A and B the exchange goes:
A: 1
B: 2
A: 3
B: 1
A: 2
B: 3 and so on.

A: 'I can't have done it again.'

B: 2

A: 3

B: 'I can't have done it again.'

A: 2

B: 3 and so on.

Obviously, do not allow the introduction of text to slow up the rhythm. On the other hand do not allow the picking up of the cues to rush the line so it just becomes a gabbled mess. The trick is to come in promptly but then you can proceed calmly and carefully.

4) Instead of '2' the group now say, 'Five! And down he goes!' with a smug face and a downward point. (Might be worth providing the context that this takes place during a game of snakes and ladders.)

5) Instead of '3' the group now say, 'Oh, this is ridiculous,' with an exasperated open-palm gesture. Don't let the pace flag. Pick out a couple of exemplary groups to watch. If they stumble badly ask them if having an audience made it harder and draw a parallel between the pressure they are under and that on actors who have to remember lines and deliver them with pace and energy in front of an audience.

6) Ask the group to get back into their teams for the scenes. They now stand in a circle and read their section through without pausing before the lines (unless Ayckbourn has written a pause in specifically, or a complex stage direction which requires time to complete.) If someone pauses the group repeats the line before and they try again.

7) In asking the groups how they found this, responses vary from, 'hard work' and 'exhausting' to 'it sounded more like natural speech,' or, 'it was more dramatic.'

It is worth noting that often in real conversations people are waiting to leap in, rather than waiting to be sure that someone has finished before

starting to speak. Also in arguments, each person builds on the anger of the comment before; if there are pauses it often

has the effect of allowing everyone to calm down. So, the obvious moral is avoid pausing unless written,

and try to take the energy off the previous speaker rather than let it fall dead.

Because the cast have now read through their lines a number of times, without pressure on them to 'act' the role, it will hopefully have created an opportunity for those who are daunted by reading out loud to gain confidence in their reading. They will need it as we are now moving on to the hardest challenge facing actors: walking and talking.

Moving the Text

Fixed Distance

1) The groups get into pairs and stand facing each other about two paces apart. They label themselves A and B.

2) They imagine that between them is a stick, running chest to chest. The aim of both participants is to keep the length of the stick constant. Note this is not mirroring; while a move to the side is matched by the partner a step forward by A necessitates a step back by B and a turn of the body in B leads to A running around in a big arc in order to keep that stick chest to chest. Note that while A and B's stick is real to them they can walk through C and D's stick and vice versa without the sticks dropping.

3) A's task is to tease B, to make it difficult for them to keep the stick the same size. However, A also has responsibility for not making it impossible, and for pausing for B to catch up if they get left behind. Finally A is responsible for keeping B safe so that he/she does not crash into anyone or thing.

4) Swap and let B lead.



5) There is now no designated leader, but they tease each other, negotiating wordlessly who is leading at each moment.

6) Give them thirty seconds or so to keep playing the game, but when they come near another pair they have to readjust themselves to be facing a new partner.

7) With their new partner they take a big step back each and now repeat, taking it in turns to lead and then tease each other.

8) They swap to find a new partner but now repeat the exercise with only approx. 30cm between.

9) Again they swap and they find a two-stride distance with their new partner. This time, though, they are going to speak as well as move. A has always loved B and has decided that today is the day they are going to ask them for a date. B cares deeply for A as a friend, doesn't want to hurt their feelings, but doesn't want a relationship with them. The aim is to allow the scene to build gradually so they should avoid playing it like this (real example):

A: I love you! Marry me!

B: No, you smell!

While they improvise this scene they are going to keep that fixed distance going and tease each other with different movements to keep themselves on their toes.

10) Half the group sits out to watch, while half carries on (resetting their conversation to the beginning, but not necessarily repeating what they did). However, if I shout, 'Game' they have to play the game really hard, while still talking. If I shout, 'Scene,' then the most important thing is the reality of the scene and they need to hide the game.

I ask the group if they have ever seen productions where the actor stands woodenly, then thinks, 'oh, I haven't moved for ages, better had,' and then take a few awkward steps for no reason. Exercises like this, if they make sense within the logic of the scene (A wanting to get close to B, B wanting to keep their distance) then they can free the actors up to get moving. Sometimes the game yields very persuasive movements when the 'scene' is most important, so that someone wandering into the room may think that the group are acting out the scene naturalistically.

Finding characterful reasons to keep some distance and movement apart will be very important when we look at performing:

In-The-Round

'The first read-through completed, I like to start moving the play around physically, albeit with the actors still with script in hand. I term this a second reading 'on its feet.' Ironically for a writer, I have a great fear of allowing a play to become text-bound. What the characters are saying is important, yes, but what the characters are doing whilst they're saying it is of equal importance.'
p. 138

So, in following the rough order of Ayckbourn's first day of rehearsals, it's time to start putting the scene into the space. Ayckbourn wrote this play, as with the vast majority of his works, for an in-the-round theatre. Inspired by his mentor Stephen Joseph, he has mastered this way of working to the degree that he structures each scene to get maximum use out of the space. It is also going to be very important for the actors to start practically exploring the different ways of staging the scene.

'I suppose that working predominantly in the round has rather emphasised the importance of this for me. There is, in that type of production, a need for actors to explore physicality early on: both in regard to how they express their own character through their bodies, and also in relation to





other actors. The distance, the angle from each other, the area they currently occupy on stage – at the edge, in the middle, hovering nervously at an entrance, sitting, standing, lying down, kneeling – all need early exploration...’ p. 39

I set out chairs around the room to represent the stage of the Stephen Joseph theatre (see p. 62/63) complete with spaces for the voms (vomitorium, the entrances through the audiences, so called because in classical theatre they look like mouths spewing actors onto the stage.) I give the cast the hand out, so they can see how the seating in the room corresponds to the seating plan in the Stephen Joseph (one is a seating plan, showing all the individual seats, the other is a plan of the stage structure, the empty spaces representing the voms.)

The play was originally written not for the current Stephen Joseph Theatre, which opened in 1996, but the Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round. This was the second home of Stephen Joseph's theatre-in-the-round company after the Library Theatre and was based on the ground floor of Scarborough's former Boys' Grammar School. Initially seen as a temporary home for the company, Westwood - as it was alternatively known - was used by the company between 1976 and 1996. The dimensions and layout of the round in this venue were reproduced fairly faithfully in the new theatre. I have not yet been able to unearth plans of Westwood, so we will be using plans for the current theatre.

The group spread out over these chairs. We discuss the advantages of working in-the-round (which can be more natural than angling towards the audience on a proscenium stage and it brings you closer to the audience; 400 people can sit five rows deep rather than 20 end-on) and there's the excitement of knowing your view is unique. On the other hand, it can be a complicated job ensuring that no-one feels that their view is worse than everyone else's. I cite an incident where a good production on a thrust stage got a terrible review (and thus poor box office) because they had put an actor standing in front of the review's seat for ten minutes. As a rule of thumb, audiences can take twenty seconds or so of not being able to see the face of at least one of the major players in a scene before getting annoyed.

We explore this in our mock up theatre in the round. I ask for two volunteers and get them to stand facing each other in a straight line, parallel to the lines of the walls of the theatre, one in the middle of the space and the other with their back right to an audience member. We discover that the audience member has a hard job seeing anything, even if they crane their neck around they will struggle to see the other actor. If the actors adjust so they are standing more on a diagonal, it should be easier for everyone to see at least one actor.

Then I ask the volunteers to play the fixed distance game. The audience have to raise one hand

for each face they can see (if you can tell if the actor is smiling or crying, that counts as seeing a face) so if they can see both performers both hands go up, if they can't see either of them, no hands go up. Our volunteers play the stick game with a very big imaginary stick, just a bit smaller than the width of the space, then a two-stride distance, then really close. I ask the audience which variation had the most hands up; usually it is very clear that more people could see more face the greater the distance. Here I mention Ayckbourn's rule (adapted based on the age of the group) 'Keep your distance on stage except when fighting or fornicating.'

He continues: 'Encourage, where possible, distance between actors, especially on open stages – first, this widens the angle of vision for the audience and second, a small woman standing close to a very tall man doesn't stand a chance of being seen by anyone.' p. 149

It's good to identify the importance of distance early. 'There is a tendency for actors new to the round to do two things; hold eye contact as much as possible for mutual support, and stand as close together as possible, for the same reason. Help, we're surrounded! It's an understandable thing to do, but it must be discouraged' p. 148. It also means that when characters do get close to each other, it reads as being a more dramatic moment (fighting or fornicating.)

Finally I add a third actor who just watches the other two; where can we put this performer so they don't block the audience's view? The answer, obviously, is in front of the voms or the steps.

So this exercise shows the general guidelines for working in the round;

- 1) Use diagonals.
- 2) Keep moving.
- 3) Keep your distance.
- 4) If you have to stand for a long time, do so in front of the voms or steps.

There are nuances to be found in these guidelines, for example, 'Keep moving' might be as simple as turn your head from time to time, rather than a massive movement.

In Ayckbourn's rehearsals does he tell them exactly what movement to make? 'I wait for them to make the first move. If they remain static too long – through inhibition, inexperience or sheer initial terror – then it may become necessary to suggest a move or two. But always with the proviso that these may – almost certainly will – be changed as the production develops' p. 139. For him, with professional actors, that will be in the form of a suggestion; for us it could be the introduction of a playful game, like keeping a certain distance apart, for example.

Staging The Scenes

I present the group with the handout (on pack p.61), a detailed description of the stage layout and ask them to try and figure out how to fit the necessary spaces onto our stage. After a few minutes I stop them and sympathise with how difficult the task is; fortunately we have Ayckbourn's first draft of the stage (and a later published floor-plan, p.65 of pack) on the hand out. I allow the cast to study this plan and then set up the space using chairs.

The challenge then is for the groups to figure out how to use the space to stage their scenes. I tend to allow ten to fifteen minutes for this. It may be worth reminding them that Ayckbourn says trust the text; if they follow his stage directions closely to begin with they may gain valuable insights. It is also worth pointing out that we are recreating the first day of Ayckbourn's rehearsal; in the afternoon his cast begin to explore the use of the space, and that's what we are doing here. We are not aiming to recreate the standards his actors would reach after three weeks' rehearsal.

It can get a bit crowded with all the groups rehearsing on the same set, but I have seen this work with groups of up to 30 without descending into complete anarchy.

Notes on the Scenes

The actors in Scene A face a real challenge: for the first minute or two the scene is two people looking at a television screen. There are two keys to cracking this; if the cast follow the stage directions Bernard should stay in the doorway, which is level with the stairs. This separates them and means that each has to turn their head and body to talk to the other. This is enough to stave off frustration in the audience behind. Just as their patience is stretched, Belinda comes on and Ayckbourn switches the angle of the scene to face in the other direction.

After Belinda has left, note the effect on picking up the cues in terms of allowing the argument between Harvey and Bernard to build to a suitable pitch.

In B the main point here is that the to-ing and fro-ing of all the characters creates a strong sense of lots of the house as a busy and chaotic place, as they often are at big family gatherings. Note especially the way he places Patti behind the audience to shout down to Belinda, who shouts to Eddie. Vocally the actors need to play this as if shouting through doorways, even though the stage is open. Again, picking up the cues is vital for the humour of that section to work. If the stage directions are followed the blocking should look after itself, provided the actors remember not to get too close to each other.

On the page, C looks impossible to stage without blocking the audience's view; five people sat around a table with very little movement. How is the audience supposed to be able to see anything? There are a number of reasons why it can work, however. Firstly, none of the seated characters have long speeches; the dialogue is short and fast, so you don't need to see everyone to follow what is happening. Secondly, if the actors move their heads to deliver the lines to each other the audience keeps seeing different faces. Finally, if Patti keeps moving around the table while clearing it, different characters can turn out to address her. Of all the sequences, this is the one where the picking up of cues has the most evident effect. It's worth noting that, 'obviously, short, sharp exchanges between characters tend to help speed things up,' p. 90 so that's the effect we are hoping for.

Emergency Energy Lift: Finger Fencing

If at any time the energy is lagging, I break open this.

- 1) Get into pairs. Stand very close to your partner. (Close enough to smell what they had for breakfast, but not so close that you can taste it.)
- 2) Place one hand flat on your back, with the other make a pointy finger. With both feet fixed to the floor, shoulder width apart, practise moving your spine and knees and explore how much movement you can get.
- 3) Fight! You score a point by touching the hand on your partners back. Obviously, you want to get a higher score than them, so try to defend as well as attack. Minus one point if you move your feet. Minus infinity if you headbutt your partner, even by mistake.
- 4) Next round and, after a caution about safety, the group can move their feet.
- 5) Final round and anyone can score a point off anyone else's back.
- 6) After this they are quite giddy so I ask them to arrange themselves in a line from the lowest score to the highest, but they are not allowed to talk.



Season's Greetings

By Simon Murgatroyd

All material in this section is taken, with permission, from Alan Ayckbourn's official website
- www.alanayckbourn.net

World Premiere: 25 September 1980
Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round, Scarborough
London Premiere: 13 October 1980
The Round House, London
Play Number: 26
Published: Samuel French; Faber
Media Adaptations: Television; Radio
or enquiries about staging the play:
Amateur: www.samuel french-london.co.uk

Background

Season's Greetings is now regarded as something of a classic Ayckbourn play and has become a perennially popular production for professional and amateur companies around the festive season. Yet despite its success, the play originally had a rough ride in London and almost missed out on West End success.

The play was Alan's second to be set around Christmas, following the rather brutal treatment of the festivities in the acclaimed play *Absurd Person Singular*. On the surface, *Season's Greetings* deals with a far more traditional Christmas celebration at the home of the Bunkers with all the family gathered around. Of course, this is ripe ground for the playwright, who slowly begins to reveal all the insecurities, tensions and frustrations of the family. As Alan once noted to his agent, Christmas is a gift for dramatists when people who can't stand each other are forced together! The play also cleverly made sure the children are seen but not heard, which is more than made up for by the adults practically regressing to their childhoods as the celebrations progress.

Rather worryingly, Alan has said on numerous occasions, the play is also a reflection of his own family Christmas experiences and Bernard's hideous puppet show is inspired by Alan's own experiences of giving his sons a puppet theatre for Christmas and his attempts to stage a show!

Intriguingly *Season's Greetings* was actually announced as a totally different play. In July

1980, the *Evening Standard* reported Alan's new play was to be *Sight Unseen*, later revealed to be a thriller. However, when Alan began writing the play, he had difficulties realising the idea and abandoned *Sight Unseen* for a totally different play. This play became *Season's Greetings* and the only element which survived from his original concept was its setting of a hallway and some of the characters' names. The play was also billed as Alan's silver anniversary play being his 25th and the programme even had a silver cover to mark this. At the time, Alan did not count *Jeeves* as part of his play canon and, as a result, *Season's Greetings* is now considered his 26th play.

The play premiered at the Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round, Scarborough, on 25 September 1980 and was an immediate success; it opened a day later than originally scheduled due to the problems writing the play and it arriving only just in time for rehearsals. It then toured with the original Scarborough company to London to the Roundhouse theatre. Alan's experiences with the West End had become increasingly negative in recent years and he was looking for alternative solutions to the traditional star-led West End transfers. He had been in talks with Thelma Holt, artistic director of The Round House, for some time about the possibilities of transferring the Scarborough company to the venue with the hope of exposing London to the plays as they were conceived in the round and for an ensemble company, rather than in the proscenium arch with a star-dominated company. The experience, while worthwhile, was not a success. The Round House was considerably larger than Scarborough in both its stage size and audience size and the play got lost in the space and was met with agreeable reviews but very poor audiences.

It is difficult to judge how much the London tour affected the play's potential viability for the West End. Alan's regular producer Michael Codron was unsure about the play and correspondence indicates neither he nor Alan's agent were convinced the play could move into a West End theatre so soon after a less than triumphant tour of the play to London.

With apparently little interest in taking the play to the West End, Alan refined the play - shortening it and altering it from a three act to a two act play - and revived it in 1981 in Scarborough to success again. The biggest difference between the two versions is the original play featured Harvey's wife, Shirley, an unseen and unheard character who nonetheless is constantly addressed by all the characters. Shirley, who Alan felt made Harvey seem even more mad than he actually was by virtue of him constantly talking to an off-stage character, was excised from the script.

At the same time, the artistic director of Greenwich Theatre, Alan Strachan, contacted Alan enquiring whether he would be interested in staging the play at Greenwich, as he'd enjoyed the play. Alan suggested he'd be interested in directing a new production for Greenwich and it has to be assumed he had in mind the circumstances surrounding *The Norman Conquests*; the trilogy had also seemed unlikely to transfer to the West End until it was staged at Greenwich Theatre, where it was so successful the entire trilogy immediately transferred to the West End with memorable results.

Alan Strachan agreed to this and a strong ensemble cast was assembled with Alan directing the play, which opened in January 1982. There was an option to transfer the production to London if successful and Michael Codron asked to be involved in the production, presumably with an eye to a West End transfer. This was again similar to *The Norman Conquests* where Codron had been quietly and intrinsically involved with the Greenwich production from the start; when it proved to be a success he had the first option to take it into the West End despite great interest from other producers.

Season's Greetings was a phenomenal success at Greenwich Theatre with excellent audiences and very positive reviews. Although he had been initially unsure about the play, Codron's decision to invest in Greenwich Theatre's production paid dividends as he immediately began negotiating its transfer into the West End. The production transferred to the Apollo Theatre and opened on 29 March with most of the Greenwich company intact. Although Alan felt something was lost in the transfer, it was nonetheless very well received and deemed a success.

The success in the West End led to an attempt to tour the play; Alan's recent experiences of the post West End tour had increasingly led him to believe they did not serve the play well

and were an unnecessary delay before they could be released for regional repertory theatres to produce. *Season's Greetings* more than confirmed these feelings when after 18 months, the tour had still not been produced and - aside from several exceptions - the play had not been released for general repertory production. By 1984, the rights to produce the tour were not renewed and the go-ahead was given for repertory theatres to produce the play. Since then, *Season's Greetings* has gone on to become one of Alan's most popular and consistently revived plays by both professional and amateur companies.

It is also worth noting that given its success over the years, *Season's Greetings* has probably more than any of Alan's other plays highlighted the liberties that a minority of companies take with Alan's plays and, ultimately, their lack of understanding or respect for an author's work (presumably not just Alan's plays). This has been illustrated by the critic and Ayckbourn specialist Michael Billington who has noted how the play has been criticised for keeping the children off-stage and how it is not unknown for some productions to actually bring the children on to the stage. As Billington points out, to do so is to show a fundamental misunderstanding of the play. Ayckbourn shows us the children before our very eyes; the real children are the adults and their childish needs and desires propel the play forward. Fortunately, the majority of companies aim to present the best possible production of Alan's plays, but if you do see a production of *Season's Greetings* which shows the slightest hint of a child on-stage, you're not seeing *Season's Greetings* as written by the author!

In 1985, the play was adapted for the radio and broadcast on the BBC World Service, directed by Gordon House. This production would later be released on audio cassette by the BBC (a rare example of one of the BBC's many radio adaptations to have gained a commercial release). The next year saw the play adapted for television again by the BBC, directed by Michael Simpson and featuring an excellent cast. This was the third Ayckbourn television adaptation in the space of two years by the BBC and this director, all of which were very successful. In 2003, the British Film Institute chose to incorporate it as one of the best examples of the 'television play' on British television and it is considered one of the finest screen adaptations of Alan's plays. Rarely repeated since, the television adaptation finally got a repeat on BBC4 in December 2011 to tie in with the BBC's *Imagine* documentary on Alan Ayckbourn (ironically, despite *Season's Greetings*

being one of the most requested repeats of an Ayckbourn television adaptation, its viewing figures did not even dent BBC4's top ten for that week). In 1999, it would be again adapted for BBC radio, this time directed by Polly Thomas and this version was subsequently released on CD and as a digital download in 2011.

In 2004, Alan Ayckbourn returned to the play reviving it for a tour starring Liza Goddard and Matthew Kelly. The tour was a joint production between the Stephen Joseph Theatre and the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre, Guildford. It was unusual in being the first attempt by Alan's home theatre, the Stephen Joseph Theatre, to stage a tour designed for larger end-stage venues. The tour was successful and the play received some excellent reviews.

In December 2010, *Season's Greetings* was revived at the National Theatre, marking the first time an Ayckbourn play has been seen at the National Theatre since *House & Garden* in 2000. The play received an extremely positive critical response and was directed by Marianne Elliott in the Lyttelton auditorium with Catherine Tate as Belinda, Mark Gatiss as Bernard and David Troughton as Harvey. To mark the National Theatre's production, Faber & Faber published the play and also made it available as a Kindle ebook; this marked the first Ayckbourn play to be published in a digital format.

Timeline

The Timeline offers a chronological view of significant events in the history of the play *Season's Greetings*.

25 July 1980

An article in the Evening Standard reveals the title of Alan Ayckbourn's latest play will be *Sight Unseen*.

Mid August 1980

Alan Ayckbourn begins writing what is still titled *Sight Unseen*.

Circa 1 September 1980

Alan Ayckbourn abandons *Sight Unseen* and writes a totally different play, *Season's Greetings*, completing it just as rehearsals are about to commence.

5 September 1980

Rehearsals begin for *Season's Greetings* at the

Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round, Scarborough. Due to Alan's re-writing the rehearsals start slightly later than scheduled and the opening date of the play is pushed back by a day,

25 September 1980

World premiere of *Season's Greetings* at the Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round, Scarborough, directed by Alan Ayckbourn.

13 October 1980

Season's Greetings tours to The Round House, London, directed by Alan Ayckbourn.

20 May 1981

Season's Greetings is revived at the Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round, Scarborough, directed by Alan Ayckbourn. The version is slightly altered being two acts rather than three and is slightly shorter.

28 January 1982

Season's Greetings opens at the Greenwich Theatre, London, directed by Alan Ayckbourn.

29 March 1982

Season's Greetings transfers to the Apollo Theatre, London, directed by Alan Ayckbourn.

18 September 1982

Season's Greetings closes at the Apollo Theatre, London.

1982

Season's Greetings is published by Samuel French.

Mid-1984

Season's Greetings is officially released for general professional production. Despite Alan's desire for his plays to be made immediately available for repertory production following the West End production, an unsuccessful attempt to tour the play led to it being generally unavailable for 18 months.

1 September 1985

Season's Greetings is released for amateur production.

28 December 1985

Season's Greetings is broadcast on radio on BBC Radio, directed by Gordon House.

24 December 1986

Season's Greetings is broadcast on television on BBC1, directed by Michael Simpson.

1990

The BBC Radio adaptation of *Season's Greetings*

is released on audio-cassette in a double-bill with *Relatively Speaking*.

26 December 1999

A second radio adaptation of *Season's Greetings* is broadcast by BBC Radio, directed by Polly Thomas.

6 October 2004

Season's Greetings tour opens at the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre, Guildford, directed by Alan Ayckbourn.

2 December 2010

Season's Greetings is published by Faber & Faber in both print and as an ebook; this marks the first Ayckbourn play to be published digitally.

8 December 2010

Season's Greetings opens at the National Theatre, London, directed by Marianne Elliott.

13 March 2011

Season's Greetings closes at the National Theatre.

4 August 2011

The 1999 BBC Radio adaptation of *Season's Greetings*, directed by Polly Thomas, is released on CD and digital formats.

12 September 2011

UK tour of *Season's Greetings*, directed by Robin Herford and produced by Bill Kenwright, launches at Norwich Theatre Royal.

10 December 2011

UK tour of *Season's Greetings*, directed by Robin Herford, ends at the Bath Theatre Royal.

Synopsis

Season's Greetings

Cast: 9 (5m/4f)

Running time (approximate): 2 hours 30 minutes - not including the interval

It is Christmas at Belinda and Neville's house and they have invited their family for a traditional Christmas celebration. The guests include: Neville's exhausted sister Phyllis; her husband Bernard, a doctor whose annual puppet shows are the stuff of legend and terror to both young and old alike; Neville's friend Eddie and his pregnant wife Pattie; uncle Harvey, a slightly senile retired security guard and a television-addict; Belinda's unmarried sister, Rachel; Clive, a writer and friend of Rachel.

Clive arrives late by train, is missed by Rachel, and is instead welcomed by Belinda, who is immediately attracted to him. Harvey, as a result of a misunderstanding, takes an immediate dislike to Clive, believing him to be a homosexual and prospective thief. Clive falls for the frustrated Belinda after Rachel tells him she is looking for no more than friendship. He and Belinda attempt to fulfil their passions beneath the Christmas tree, but are discovered when they set off the various electronic toys and lights beneath the tree in, initially, their lust and then their desperate attempts to turn everything off.



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On Boxing Day, Clive arranges to leave as soon as he can. Meanwhile, rehearsals are taking place for Bernard's puppet show *The Three Little Pigs*, all his efforts being undermined by Harvey. Bernard eventually snaps and tirades against Harvey. Very early the following morning, Clive, in the process of leaving, is intercepted by Harvey who believes he is a thief taking all the presents. Harvey promptly shoots Clive, who is pronounced dead by the ineffectual Bernard. The 'corpse' promptly lets out a moan and calls for Belinda, rather than Rachel. He is taken to hospital and Belinda and Neville are left together, Neville choosing to ignore all that has happened.

Season's Greetings

Cast

Neville

Belinda
His wife

Phyllis
His sister

Harvey
His uncle

Bernard
Phyllis's husband

Rachel
Belinda's sister

Eddie

Pattie
Eddie's wife

Clive

dwarfed by its surroundings and the play got rather lost. Luckily, Alan Strachan saved the day when he invited me to re-do the show at Greenwich. We assembled a wonderful cast including Bernard Hepton and Peter Vaughan as the uncles and Marcia Warren returning from the original Scarborough production.”
(*Ayckbourn At 50* souvenir programme)

“A dissatisfied local tradesman demanded his money back saying some of the sexual explicitness disgusted him. I felt rather proud. I’d never never disgusted anyone dramatically before. Well, not to my knowledge.”
(*Celebrating 20 Years At Westwood* souvenir programme)

The family reunion, the pile of brightly wrapped presents; the log roaring in the grate; a children’s puppet show and a Boxing Day tea; turkey dinners; paper hats; crackers and streamers; around the base of the gaily decorated tree an extramarital relationship; a couple of stray gunshots in the hall. All the ingredients for a traditional English Christmas.
(Alan Ayckbourn’s publicity note from the 1980 Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round winter brochure)

Copyright: Alan Ayckbourn

Ayckbourn Quotes

“My late agent, the great eccentric Peggy Ramsay, hated me writing plays set at Christmas. ‘Oh Alan,’ she’d say, ‘not another bloody Christmas play.’ But I’d explain to her that Christmas was a gift to a dramatist. You’re always looking for a reason to stick a group of people together who can’t stand each other, aren’t you? Dinner parties are good, but what better time than Christmas? You’ve got three days together and there’s always bound to be at least a cousin no one can stand. I’ve seen it at my own Christmases - two relatives arguing bitterly over who should sit in which chair.”
(*The Guardian*, 20 December 2007)

“It’s the first time anybody really got shot in a play of mine! It’s quite dark, but it’s quite fun as well, and it seems to catch on with people at Christmas. Everyone seemed to warm to the play. [The critic] Michael Billington was very enthusiastic, comparing it to Ibsen and things like that, which was very nice.”
(Interview from *Conversations With Ayckbourn* by Ian Watson)

“This one got two shots at London. The first was a rather unhappy transfer of the original Scarborough production to the Roundhouse. Unhappy because the production was absolutely

Alan Ayckbourn’s programme note for the Century Theatre, Keswick

Season's Greetings is my second play to be concerned with Christmas and with what might be termed its more grisly side. The first was *Absurd Person Singular* which dealt, I hope fairly humorously, with three of the most awful festivities imaginable. Why then return to the scene of the crime, as it were?

I think in part because, this time, I wanted to paint the rosier side of the picture. To write instead about log fires, Christmas trees, excited children’s faces, candle-light, the holly and the mistletoe. The Bunkers’ home has all these. It’s comfy and cosy and it swarms with children. Not the smaller, shorter variety though who remain unseen, usually lurking just out of sight in muddy gum boots.

But the taller older ones are on view. Those currently going through the ‘awkward’ age, the twenty-five to seventy year olds. They’re all there. Fighting over their toys, clamouring for attention, bullying, sneaking and crying, then kissing and making up and generally getting far too overexcited, as they always do every year at Christmas.



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Season's Greetings is a play about love and about, as Rachel puts it, how unfair it all is. And success and failure. And jealousy and self-deception. And greed and envy and lust and gluttony. Just an average family Christmas. And looming over the proceedings in true pantomime spirit the shadows of two eccentric uncles, the good angel and the bad one...

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Season's Greetings

by Paul Allen

Well, it's all about the children really. Or so we say every year as we prepare for living in siege conditions by stocking up with industrial quantities of alcohol and gadgetry that will be broken by Boxing Day - and then settling down to watch the same film we watched last year, smug in the knowledge that even more of the actors are now dead or decrepit but we aren't, quite.

It was certainly the kids that Alan Ayckbourn wanted to write about in the summer of 1980

as he settled down to his second major play set at Christmas. Eight years before, *Absurd Person Singular* had alerted critics all over the world to the fact that here was a writer who was much more than a boulevard comedian. Not only did the middle act consist almost entirely of a woman's attempts to commit suicide (wilfully misunderstood by all the guests at her own Christmas drinks party), but it had ended with a domestic bully being revealed as something more akin to a petty dictator. It was hilarious all right, but one of those comedies that provoke the now-legendary response from an audience member in Ayckbourn's home theatre in Scarborough: 'If I'd known what I was laughing at when I was laughing I wouldn't have laughed'.

In *Season's Greetings*, Ayckbourn has pointed out, 'I wanted to paint the rosier side of the picture. To write instead about log fires, Christmas trees, excited children's faces, candlelight, the holly and the mistletoe'. The home of Neville and Belinda Bunker has all these things and more, including kids. It's just that we never actually see the little ones. The kids Ayckbourn had in mind were ones at the 'awkward age' - between 25 and 70 - 'fighting over their toys, clamouring for attention, bullying, sneaking and crying, then kissing and making up and generally getting far too over-excited, as they do every year'.

The problem with adults, in much of Ayckbourn's work, is that they are every bit as greedy, self-obsessed and vindictive as children, and they have the extra ingredient of sexual hunger. Adding mistletoe and booze to this combination is like handing round the matches in a gunpowder shop.

All this, you might assume, Ayckbourn observed at first hand in his own childhood. He was already living much of his life through his imagination (watching films, writing embryonic plays to be performed by anyone close enough to hand) when his extremely Bohemian mother married her extremely conservative bank manager. At a succession of addresses in the country towns of Sussex, he had a close-up view of the kind of misery a hopelessly ill-assorted man and woman can dish out to each other when they are really trying. He generally took his mother's part, and the casual insensitivity with which husbands treat their wives is a running theme in his work. Sometimes couples who remain unmarried seem to make a better go of things, but in this play all the women are disappointed even if some have recognised it earlier than others.

But the way writers' lives turn into their plays is a complex thing, not least because so much of making art is instinctive, even unconscious. Ayckbourn didn't fully understand what he had written at the end of *Absurd Person Singular* until his technical dress rehearsal, when he put a spotlight on the small figure standing on a table and literally making everyone else dance to his tune.

Season's Greetings is rosier, give or take the odd gun-toting near-fascist and a doctor so inept he cannot tell if someone is dead or not, but life has filtered into it. Fast-forward from Ayckbourn's own childhood to another small boy waiting in another family home near Leeds for his increasingly famous father to return for Christmas. The boy has inherited his father's interest in drama and has created a puppet show for the family's entertainment; his father will perform it with him. But when they reach the climax of the piece, the strings of the boy's puppet - a dog - become entangled with the strings of the father's. Rather than stop the show, the father snatches the dog from his son's hands, rips the strings away and hands it back with only one paw still functioning. When the boy complains that this isn't much fun, the father reflects that 'fun is for amateurs'.

So is Uncle Bernard Alan Ayckbourn? Of course not. At least, not any more than the visiting writer enduring the usual banal questions about his ideas, or the husband too busy playing with his screwdriver to pay attention to his frustrated wife, or even the loathsome Uncle Harvey who is waiting for some kind of Armageddon on the streets of Britain: all these come out of Ayckbourn's psyche too. And Ayckbourn would never prepare a puppet version of the story of Ali Baba in which the Forty Thieves come on one by one, at ten-minute intervals. But the fury of Bernard's passion for his work, the dignified refusal to put sex and violence into *The Three Little Pigs* just because that is the children's diet on television and the fierce if temporary defiance of Harvey's destructive bigotry are all things you might catch him expressing in person.

So *Season's Greetings*, like much of Ayckbourn's work, is more personal than it sometimes looks. It had to be, because he was consciously defying his agent, the redoubtable Peggy Ramsay, who had made it very clear she didn't like plays about Christmas; and his usual commercial producer, Michael Codron, felt



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much the same. In fact Codron had just had his fingers burned with his ill-judged production of Ayckbourn's farce, *Taking Steps*, and was reluctant to take the next play on trust anyway.

Wary of the West End, Ayckbourn took *Season's Greetings* to the Round House, the former engine shed up the line from Euston Station where the great independent producer Thelma Holt was running an adventurous season. Being round, it replicated the shape of the various Stephen Joseph theatres in Scarborough that Ayckbourn has led. Unfortunately it didn't replicate its intimacy and *Season's Greetings* fizzled out in the huge space once animated by tons of steel, fire and steam.

And the play might have died there and then. But Greenwich Theatre, which had earlier relaunched *The Norman Conquests* to take the West End by storm when a trilogy had simply seemed impractical in the commercial theatre, now offered Ayckbourn a second chance with *Season's Greetings*. In March 1982 it transferred to Shaftesbury Avenue and Ayckbourn was wryly amused to see a play which had had a lukewarm reception at the Round House now described in large letters outside the theatre as simply 'his best'.

It is the plays that falter that Ayckbourn generally loves best, like sickly children. No wonder he wanted to do it again.

Paul Allen is the author of *Alan Ayckbourn: Grinning at the Edge* (Methuen 2001).

© Paul Allen (reproduced from the programme for the 2004 tour of *Season's Greetings*, directed by Alan Ayckbourn).

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Iain Meekley, Scarborough Evening News, 26
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David Jeffels, Yorkshire Evening Press, 27
September 1980
Things Are Not What They Seem
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Interviews

Genius At Work
Lynne Curry, Scarborough Evening News, 25
September 1980

Act. I

The home of Neville and Belinda Bunker - It is a six-bedroom, three-story-plus-attic Victoria home. Well kept without being either too brassy or ultra-tasteful - it has the distinct air of a home that contains young children.

Our view is of the ground floor - and is dominated by the front hall - not because it is of any great size or magnificence - though it is larger than some rectangular with the main staircase leading up upstairs, and besides the front door, two other doors, one opening on to the dining room, the other to the 'Sitting room'. The hall is furnished with an upright chair beside a telephone table and at the other side a small low bench. There is the usual hatstand inside the front door and, in the play dark, a large Xmas tree festooned with bulbs, but on just in front of it, in an air of gaiety. Around the base, a number of presents haphazardly wrapped and labelled.

Also, leading off the hall, a hidden passage runs alongside the dining room and contains a hatchway. The dining room itself is a large room. Our view of it, however, is restricted. We see probably a third - including half the sideboard with the hatchway over it - and a third of what must be a very long dining table. In fact we see 4 chairs, one at the head 2 one side and one at the other.

Similarly, we are able to see only a proportion of the sitting room. A window, with window seat, a single armchair facing towards an unseen fire and an unseen TV set. From the floor covering we can gather that the room again is fairly big.

It is now about 7:30 on Xmas Eve.

The house glows warm and cosy. A wonderful house for children or adults to spend Xmas.

HARVEY BUNKER, a man in his 60's, is seated in the sitting room armchair watching the offstage TV. He is immobile, cozy, an old adventure film. Across the room and also, of course, unseen in his wife Shirley Bunker. Harry will talk to us from time to time but, as with all characters offstage we cannot hear her thoughts. We hear his audience with what

Scenes

A - Christmas Eve, 7:30.

Harvey Bunker, a man in his sixties, with cropped hair and a slightly military appearance, is seated in the sitting-room armchair watching the off-stage television. He is immensely enjoying an old adventure film and laughs uproariously at something he is watching. In a moment, Dr Bernard Longstaff, a rather faded man in his forties comes pattering downstairs. He carries about half a dozen gift-wrapped presents. He reaches the bottom of the stairs, looks around and sees no-one. Then, hearing Harvey laughing, he goes to the sitting-room doorway and stands looking at the television screen.

Harvey This is a marvellous film you know. Marvellous.

Bernard I think I've seen it before, haven't I?

Harvey (slightly irritably) What's that?

Bernard I said, I have a feeling that this film's been on TV before. Hasn't it?

Harvey Probably. I think it was on last Christmas.

Bernard Ah.

Harvey Matter of fact, I think it's on every Christmas. It's very old.

Bernard Oh yes.

Harvey He's dead now. That one there.

Bernard Yes.

Harvey And him. He's definitely dead. He died not long ago.

Beranrd And her.

Harvey Oh, yes, she's dead. She's been dead for years.

Bernard Yes, I can remember her dying.

Harvey I don't know about this chap.

Bernard No.

They both stare at the screen.

Harvey I could be wrong, I think I read somewhere he's in a home. Alcoholic.

Bernard Oh dear.

They watch again. Harvey laughs.

Harvey Damn fine film though. Even if they are all dead.

At this moment, Belinda, an attractive woman in her early thirties comes downstairs. She is carrying some large boxes containing Christmas decorations for the tree. As she comes down, she calls back to the children behind her that she hears but we do not.

Belinda Not unless you go to sleep, you won't. You do as Pattie tells you and go to sleep. . .

A child apparently says something.

Go to sleep. (She puts the boxes by the tree.)

Bernard, on hearing her, comes out of the sitting-room.

Bernard Er. . .

Belinda Bernard?

Bernard (indicating his pile of parcels) All right if I put these. . .?

Belinda With the others? Of course. We're going to do the usual thing. Give the kids their stockings tomorrow morning with some little thing and save the big presents for Boxing Day.

Belinda goes off along the kitchen passageway.

Bernard Right, yes. That's – er – that's best. Yes. (*He arranges his parcel around the foot of the tree with the others.*)

Harvey (*still watching the television*) Bang! Look at that. Blown them to smithereens. Ought to have the kids down to watch this. Just up their street. Next time you do one of your shows for them, Bernard, take my tip. Put a bit of blood in it. They'll love it.

Bernard (*unconvinced*) Oh – hardly. . .

Harvey For God's sake, get them used to real life, man. You're a doctor, you ought to appreciate that. Give them some guts.

Bernard (*muttering*) I'm sorry, we don't agree, Harvey, we really don't. I'm sorry.

Harvey (*back at the television screen*) Boom! There goes another one.

Bernard We never have. It's a vicious spiral. You introduce children to violence in adults and the next you know, they're –

Harvey Well, I'll tell you this. . .

Bernard – imitating them. . .

Harvey I'll tell you what I've given them all for Christmas and I'm not ashamed to say so. I've given them all a gun. All except Gary who's got a crossbow because he had a gun last year. But Lydia, Katie, Flora and Zoe, they're not getting any of your wee-weeing dollies and nurses' uniforms from me. They've all got guns, so there.

Bernard Well, I'm sorry, I think that's irresponsible and if I were a parent, I would. . .

Harvey But you're not, Bernard, you're not and that's your trouble. You've got no kids and you don't know a bloody thing about them.

Bernard I'm not arguing, Harvey, I am not arguing. We have this discussion every Christmas and I am not going to be drawn into it again. We beg to differ.

Belinda returns from the kitchen with a small stepladder.

Belinda Now, what's going on?

Bernard Nothing. Nothing.

Belinda (*setting down the steps by the tree*) I don't want any of that, please. The holiday has only just started and I can do without that.

Bernard (*sulkily*) I should speak to Harvey, not me.

Harvey (*calling out through the sitting-room door*) Aha, wait till you see what I've got you for Christmas.

Bernard Me?

Harvey Yes, you.

Bernard What?

Harvey Aha. Something to wake your ideas up. You'll see.

Bernard If it's another one of your awful jokes, I'd prefer not to have it.

Belinda Bernard, Phyllis wants you in the kitchen.

Belinda (*immediately concerned*) Is she all right?

Belinda She seems to be. There's a lot of steam and groaning but I think she's coping.

Bernard (*hurrying off*) I'd better see what she wants.

Bernard goes off to the kitchen.

Belinda, about to decorate the tree, goes to the sitting room doorway.

Belinda Alright, Harvey?

Harvey (*totally absorbed*) Bel, look at this. Watch this bit.

Belinda Oh yes. Haven't I seen this?

B - Christmas Eve, 7:40pm.

Neville enters along the kitchen passageway. He is followed by Eddie. Neville carries a small, home-made remote radio control box, similar to the type used to control TV sets, but this with only two buttons.

Neville (as they enter) Personally, I find every single claim they can make can be taken with a huge pinch of salt and that includes their frequency response details which are pie-in-the-sky to start with, because I have personally tested every single speaker of theirs we have ever had in stock and they've got to be joking.

Eddie Really, really?

Neville It's all never-never-land and hallo-Hong Kong, I can tell you.

Belinda (coming out of the dining-room to meet them) Nev, where have you been?

Neville My darling.

Belinda (holding up an empty ginger wine bottle) Have we any more of this?

Neville We are awash.

Belinda Where is it?

Neville Out the back.

Belinda Would you fetch it, please?

Neville Of course, of course.

Belinda Otherwise I'll never get this tree done.

Bernard comes out of the dining-room and goes through the hall and back into the kitchen.

(Moving the steps into position) It's a ginger wine for Uncle Harvey, and a something or other, she didn't say, for Pattie.

Neville Right. (He goes into the dining-room, and takes out an ice-bucket.)

Eddie Pattie never knows. Don't bother asking her.

Belinda And she also wants you up there, Eddie.

Eddie Right. (He doesn't move but watches Belinda.)

Neville Eddie, could you do these while I get some more of this, please?

Eddie Fine.

Neville (going to the kitchen) I'll have a Scotch.

Eddie Fine.

Belinda (after Neville) And some ice.

Neville goes off with the ginger wine bottle and the ice bucket. Belinda starts to decorate the tree. During the following Eddie, unable to find any ginger wine, pours a ginger ale. Then he finds a bottle of Scotch and pours out two of these.

Harvey (calling out) Hey, you're missing a first-rate shark fight in here.

Belinda (busy with her decoration) Oh dear.

Harvey Killer sharks.

Pattie appears at the top of the stairs

Pattie Belinda, is Eddie down there?

Belinda (from her ladder) Eddie?

Eddie (from the dining room) Hallo.

Belinda Pattie wants you.

Eddie (pouring the drinks) What does she want?

Belinda What do you want, he says.

Pattie Can he come up?

Belinda Can you come up she says.

Eddie In a minute.

Belinda In a minute.

Pattie Well, Gary won't go to sleep until he's seen him. He doesn't believe he's here. Tell him I don't want to sit up in this bedroom all night. I want to come down and have a drink.

Pattie goes off upstairs.

Belinda Yes, well what are you going to have to. . . (*She sees that Pattie has gone.*) Oh.

Eddie What's that?

Belinda Nothing. Just trying to find out what she wanted.

Eddie (*drily*) If she tells you, let me know, won't you?

Belinda continues to decorate the tree. It is a task she enjoys.

Harvey You just missed a damn fine shark fight, you lot.

Belinda (*abstractedly*) Oh, what a pity. That's a wonderful bit, too.

Eddie comes to the dining-room doorway.

Eddie Nev's just been showing me his workshop out the back there.

Belinda oh yes?

Eddie He's got himself nicely set up now then, eh?

Belinda Yes.

Eddie Marvellous. All those power tools. I envy him those power tools.

Belinda Yes, its good to see where the money goes. It's all invested in a shed round the back of the house.

Eddie Ah, don't be like that. Man's got to have a hobby, hasn't he?

Belinda Why?

Eddie Well. . . (*He is momentarily floored*) He just does. He's got to get away, hasn't he?

Belinda Away from what?

Eddie Well. Everything.

Belinda Me?

Eddie I didn't say that.

Belinda Obviously me. What else? Me and the kids.

Eddie Well, I'm saying nothing. You take that up with Nev.

Belinda I would. Except I never see him. He's always in that bloody shed.

Eddie retreats back into the dining-room and finishes pouring the drinks.

Eddie Man's got to have a hobby.

Bernard comes through with some side plates from the kitchen.

Bernard Er. . .

Belinda (*without turning round*) Bernard?

Bernard Phyllis wants to know how many of us there's going to be.

Belinda I've told her. Nine.

Bernard I mean to say this man is definite is he? This Clive Thing man is definitely coming?

Belinda According to Rachel, he is. She's gone to the station to meet him.

Bernard She just didn't seem all that certain.

Belinda Well, he's coming as far as I know. Phyllis all right, is she?

Dropped anything else?

Bernard No she's – well, as a matter of fact, she's having a little nose bleed. It's not serious. She's lying down. She'll be fine.

Belinda (*mildly alarmed*) Are you sure?

Bernard Yes. When she felt dizzy, she straightened up too quickly, you see and she banged her head on the cupboard. It's only a nose bleed.

Belinda Lord. . .

C - Christmas Evening, around midnight.

The house party have wined and dined, particularly wined and there is an air of weary merriment about the place generally. In the dining-room playing a game of Snakes and Ladders, another present for the children, are Neville, Phyllis, Clive and Bernard. All, especially Phyllis, are noisier than usual. Bernard keeps giving his wife apprehensive glances. She is just having her turn at the game. It is all very drunk and hysterical.

Phyllis (the others counting with her) Three, four, five, six. I've missed it, I've missed the snake.

Neville Lucky, lucky.

Clive You missed that ladder too.

Neville Bernard's turn.

Bernard (unhappily) Oh, no, it isn't my turn again.

Phyllis Yes, it is.

Neville Go on.

Bernard Oh, I'm not enjoying this. It's really. . .

Phyllis Go on, Bernard. Shake the dice. For heaven's sake. . .

Bernard (doing so) Oh.

Clive Is he going to do it again?

Neville Five, five, get a five.

Bernard releases the dice.

Phyllis He has!

Bernard One, two. . .

Neville He's done it again.

Clive Go on, three, four. . .

Bernard I can't have done it again.

Phyllis Five! And down he goes.

Bernard Oh, this is ridiculous.

Pattie enters from the kitchen and looks around the hall. She has on an apron over her dress and carries a tray.

Neville That's what? Eight times that's happened to Bernard. That's unbelievable.

Bernard It always happens to me.

Neville I mean, what are the chances if you were calculating the odds. . .

Phyllis He never wins anything.

Clive Astronomic.

Neville That's a good word. Astronomic. See we've got a writer.

Pattie comes into the dining-room.

Bernard Well, I've finished. That's the end of me.

Neville Shame.

Bernard (to Phyllis) I'm going to get the bottles now, dear.

Neville Bottles? Get one for me, will you?

Bernard (rising) No, no. Hot-water-bottles.

Phyllis (screaming with laughter) Get one for me! (Nudging Clive) I thought he meant bottles, too.

Clive Yes.

Pattie starts clearing the table of coffee cups and used glasses.

Pattie These cups finished with?

Phyllis Yes, they're finished with. Whose turn?

Clive Mine.

Neville Clive's turn.

Clive (*preparing to shake the dice*) Now then, six, six, six.

Neville (*to Pattie*) Does she want a hand out there?

Pattie No, we've done it all now. Too late.

Bernard I'm fetching the bottles now.

Neville We'd have lent a hand. She didn't have to do it all.

Pattie Too late.

Bernard I'm fetching the bottles now, dear.

Phyllis Well, I'm afraid I'm not doing a thing. Not this evening.

Bernard Quite right, quite right.

Phyllis I did everything last night. It's somebody else's turn.

Pattie You didn't clear up last night because I did.

Phyllis And who cooked it, child? Who cooked that lovely lamb you were eating?

Bernard All right, dear, alright.

Neville Are we playing or not?

Pattie I'm not saying you didn't. All I'm saying. . .

Bernard (*relieving her of the tray*) I'll take those out Pattie. I'll take those out.

Pattie Thank you.

Bernard hurries out and along to the kitchen.

Clive Right, I'm having my turn. (*He shakes the dice.*)

Pattie There's more to a meal than just cooking it, you know.

Neville (*counting out Clive's throw*) One, two, three, four.

Clive Damn.

Phyllis All right, next year I shan't cook anything. We'll leave it all to you, shall we?

Pattie Suits me. (*She goes into the hall.*)

Phyllis See how you get on, little Miss Know-all. (*She smiles to her companions*) See how she gets on, shall we?

Neville (*who has meanwhile been having his turn*) Three, four on a ladder. I'm on a ladder.

Phyllis Oh, you cheated.

Neville (*winking at Clive*) Nonsense.

Phyllis When I wasn't looking.

Clive No, he wasn't.

Pattie (*to herself*) Silly old bag. (*She looks around the hall.*)

Neville I got four. See, one, two, three, four.

Clive Your turn. (*He pushes the dice to Phyllis.*)

Phyllis Now, my turn.

Pattie Eddie? (*Calling to the dining-room*) Has Eddie gone to bed?

Neville No, I think he's in the other room.

Clive Two, three and down a snake.

Phyllis (*with a cry*) Oh no.

Neville He's probably sleeping it off.

Phyllis Everyone's cheating. I'm the only one not cheating.

Clive My turn.

Character Description

Neville Bunker - late 30's

Inherited Dad's (Raymond's) electrical biz. which he's expanded

Belinda Bunker (née Hopkins), his wife. (aged 32)

'Knocked across a bar. Been married 7 years. Worked in an antique shop before Parents had a farm (still have).

They have two children Lydia (6) + Katy (4)

Rachel Hopkins

Belinda's sister. (35) works as a picture researcher. She is also secretary of her local writers' circle where she met guest of honour;

Clive Morris (30)

An author of 1 book - written on an autobiography he feels himself to be author of a recent comic hit. (Though he never intended it as such) He broke up with his wife and wrote really as a therapy. He has one son that he never sees aged 7. (wife's name is Celia). Trained as a surveyor -

Phyllis Longstaff (née. Bunker) Neville's stepM. younger sister (about 30).

She gave up a very good job with the Arts Council to marry Bernard and hopefully a life of luxury as a medical surgeon's wife. Bernard, though, has disappointed her.

Dr. Bernard Longstaff 40's. An amiable but inefficient man whose heart is no longer in medicine although he practices fairly alone. He's vague, usually wrong and adores children - which they never had. He's got over it though, perched in to organise the local entertainment, most especially the Pantomime Shows -

Eddie Grundy (35)

Neville's partner. Brought in by Nev to run the photographic side. Son a photographer on the local rag. New wet plate. Still does the odd odd job. Has connections. But is a cut beneath Neville but obviously a good lad to have around. Was in Showbiz briefly. Still does the stage. Married b.

Patricia 30. Who has gone all 3½ of her children

and is a pale faced shadow - to a result Eddie abandons her and the poor is going out of her.

They have Flora 7, Gary 6 and Zoe 4. And one on the way. She is expecting in Feb. ➤ over.

Character Questions

- 1) What sort of business does Neville have?
- 2) What did Belinda's parents do?
- 3) What is Rachel's job?
- 4) How old is Clive?
- 5) How old is his son?
- 6) What was Phyllis' job before marrying Bernard?
- 7) How many children do Bernard and Phyllis have?
- 8) What part of the electrical business did Eddie run?
- 9) How many children do Pattie and Eddie have?

Punctuation

From Woman in Mind:

A: Yes, it's usually about now that you come up with that invaluable piece of advice, Gerald. The point is it's not true. They don't. Furnish. All we need to ask. Not on their own. Whoever wrote it was talking through his hat. Anyway, how can you possibly believe anybody who rhymes 'road' with 'God'....

B: Yes, it's usually about now that you come up with that invaluable piece of advice, Gerald. The point is it's not true, they don't furnish all we need to ask, not on their own, whoever wrote it was talking through his hat. Anyway, how can you possibly believe anybody who rhymes 'road' with 'God'....

From The Norman Conquests:

RUTH: Well I don't normally you know you're perfectly free to come and go not that I could stop you but I object to having my Saturday nights ruined by all these bizarre phone calls first of all you ringing up screaming drunk and then Sarah practically at midnight simply demanding I come down now what is going on

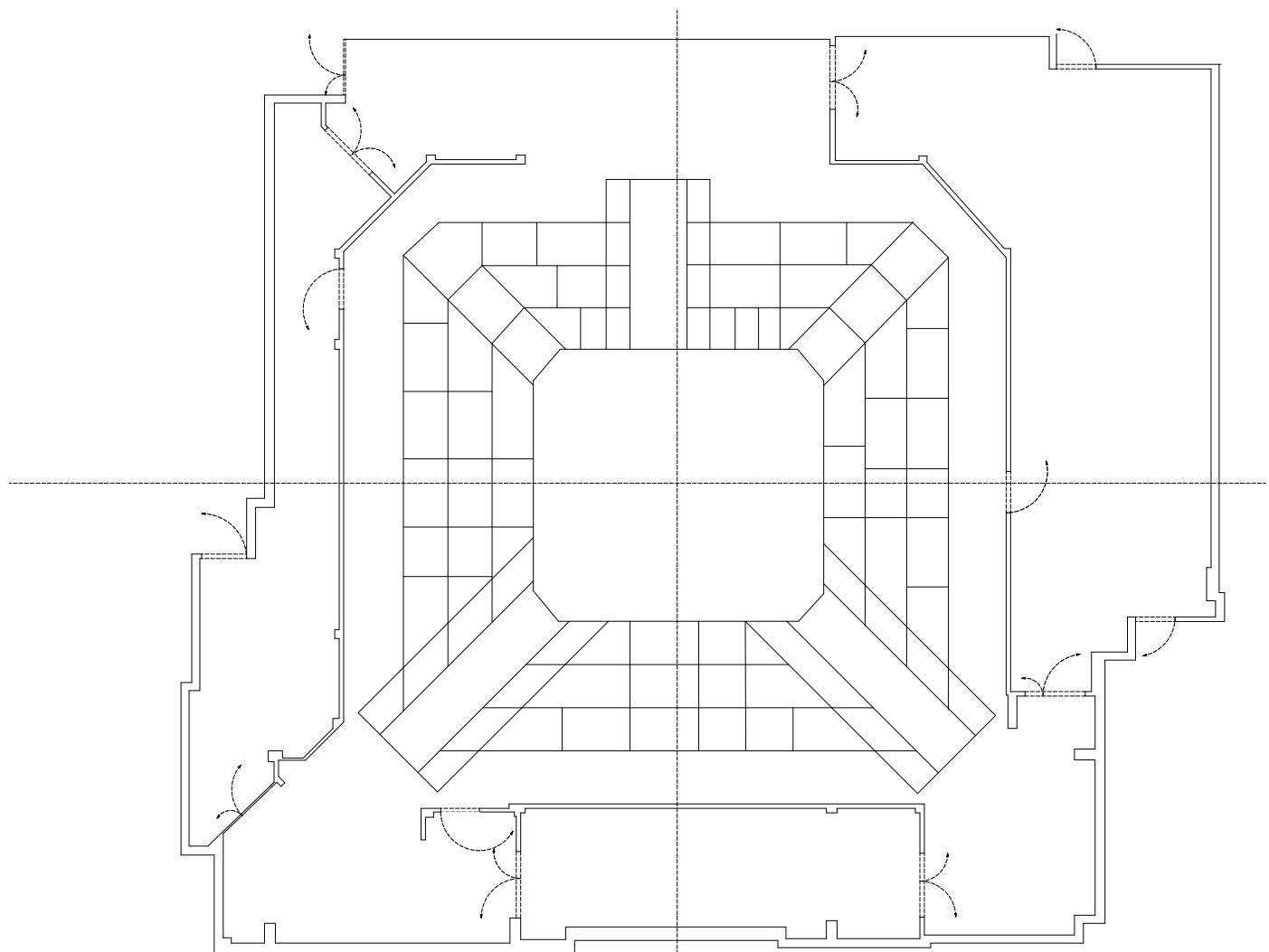
Description of the Staging

The home of Neville and Belinda Bunker. Christmas Eve, 7:30pm

It is a six-bedroomed, three storey-plus-attic, modern house. Well kept, without being too trendy or ultra tasteful, it also has that clear appearance of a house containing young children. Our view is of the ground floor and is dominated by the front hall though this isn't of any particular size or magnificence, larger than some, rectangular with a main staircase leading off upstairs. Besides the front door, there are two other doors: one opening on to a dining-room, the other to the sitting-room. The hall is furnished with an upright chair beside a telephone table which also has on it a table lamp. On the other side of the hall is a small carved wooden bench, and just inside the front door a coat- and umbrella-stand. Near the foot of the stairs, currently dominating everything, is a large Christmas tree, eight or nine feet high standing in a substantial tub. The tree is festooned with decorative bulbs but has not yet been fully dressed. Arranged around the base are a large number of presents, brightly gift wrapped and labelled. Also leading off the hall is a kitchen passageway. This runs alongside the dining-room itself is apparently large though our view of it is restricted. We see probably a third, including some of a sideboard and a third of what must be a very long dining-table. We see only one end of this, including the chair at the top and a maximum of two further chairs on each side. Similarly, we see only a portion of the sitting-room. This includes a window with window-seat, a single armchair with side-table. This chair faces away towards an unseen fire and an unseen television set. We can gather again from, amongst other things, the floor covering that this room too is fairly big.

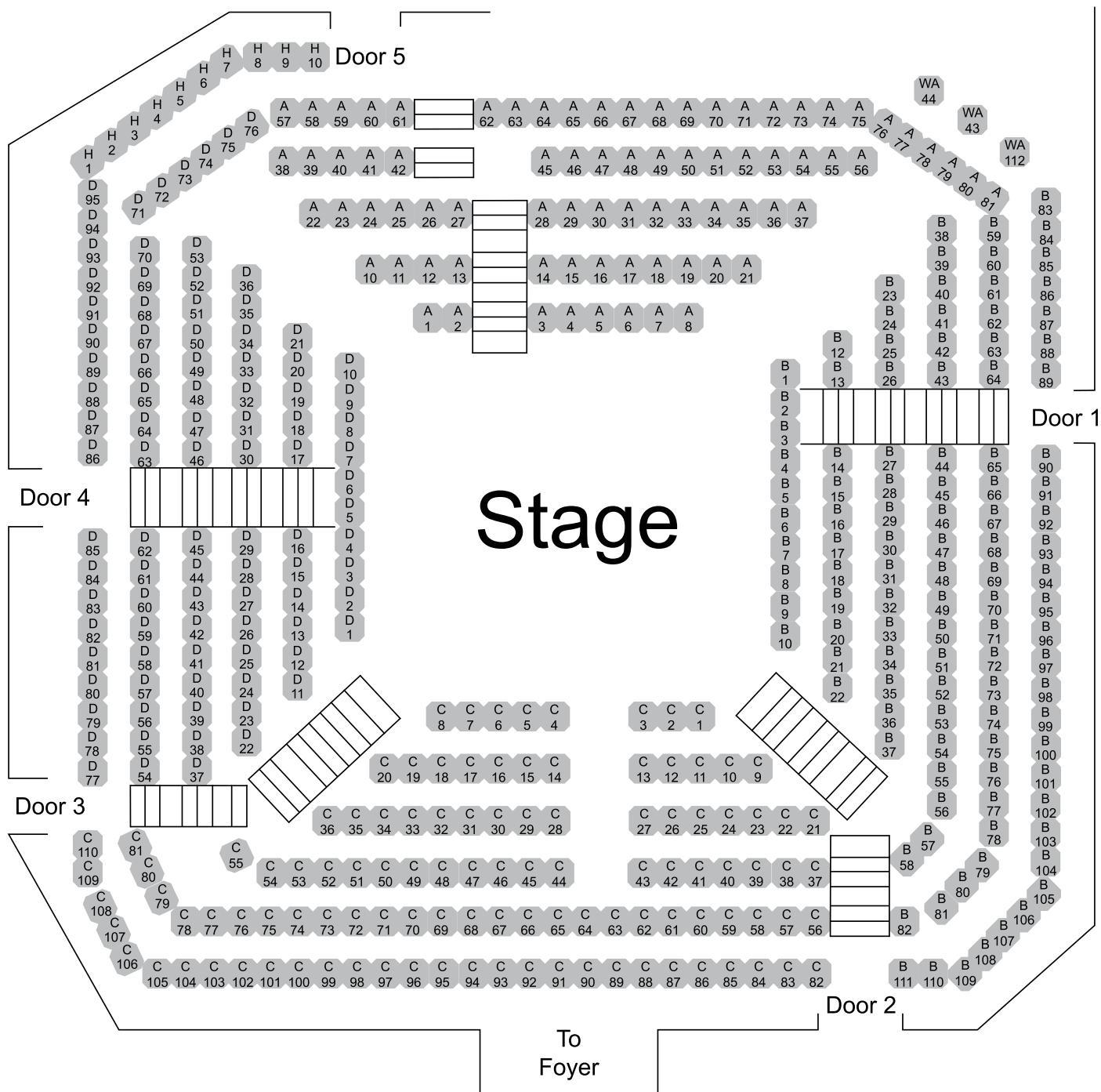
The house glows warm and cosy: a wonderful place for children and adults to spend Christmas.

Stephen Joseph Floor Plan



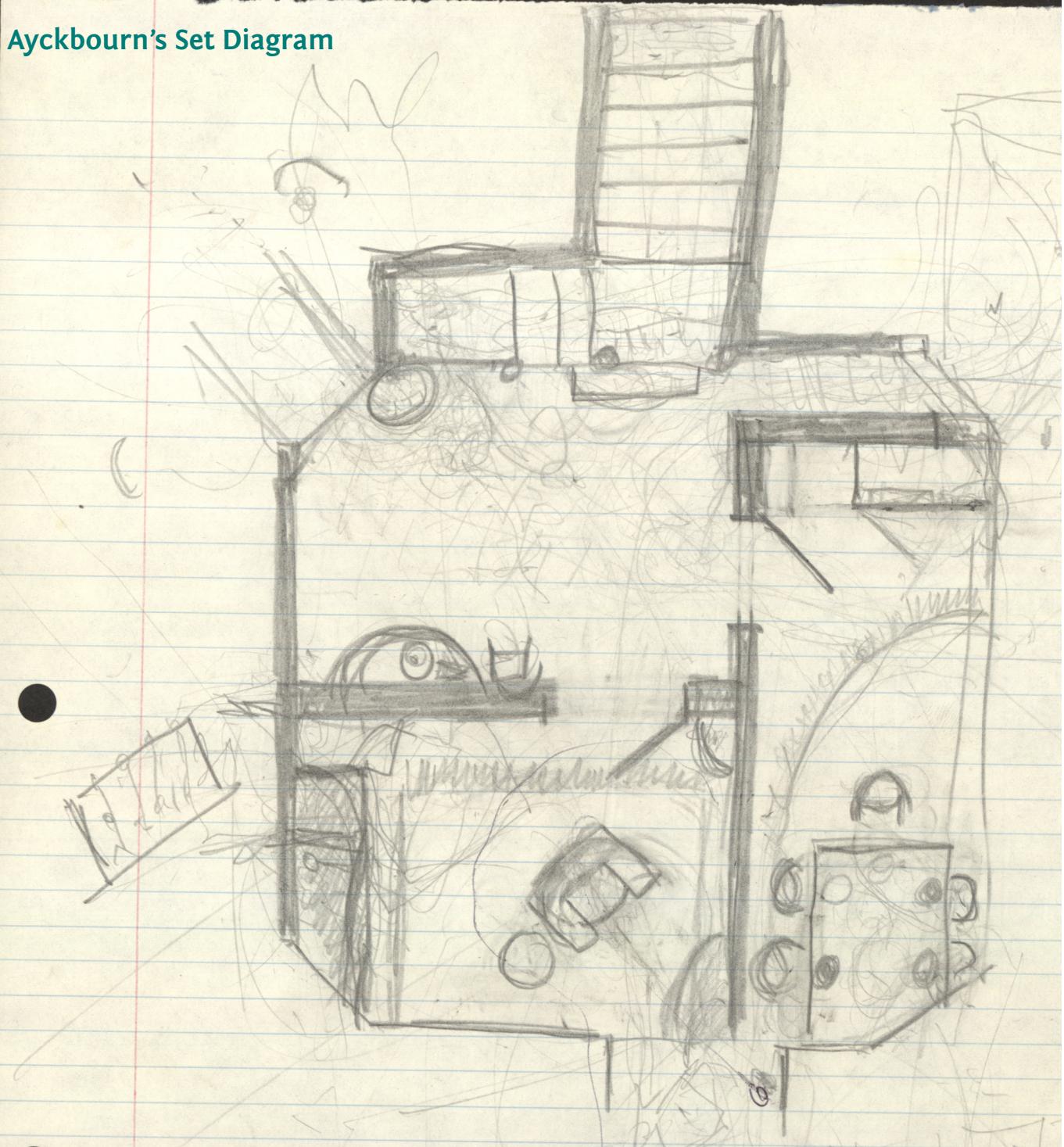
Source: <http://www.sjt.uk.com/>

Stephen Joseph Seating Plan



Source: <http://www.sjt.uk.com/>

Ayckbourn's Set Diagram



1. Xmas Eve. 7.30 ~~1st~~ - 8.30.

2a Xmas Day Morn. - 11ish.

2b Xmas Day Evening (Love scene etc.)

3a. Boxing Day. Early Pm. Puppet. (red/pink)

3b. Boxing Day. Nyer. Finale

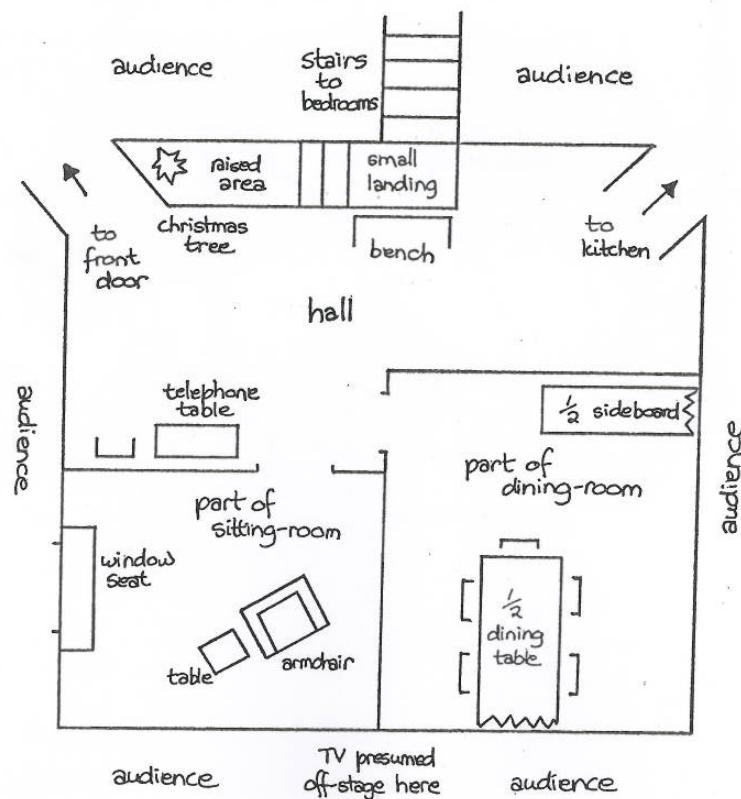
Eddie

Nerdy

Kids
Nyer

Ayckbourn's Set Diagram (Final version)

The following ground plan shows the set in the round as used in the original production. The dining-table and sideboard are chopped in half in a ragged manner as are the floors at the edges of the sitting- and dining-rooms, to give the effect that they continue off-stage. When the puppet theatre is set up in Act II, the armchair is turned round to face it.



Taken from *Season's Greetings: A Play*, Samuel French, 1982