

# Unseen Ayckbourn

*Inside The Ayckbourn Archive*



by Simon Murgatroyd

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## Dedication

To

Alan Ayckbourn & Heather Stoney

And to my wife, Shari,  
and my girls, Kate & Sarah,  
for support and love.

*Simon Murgatroyd, October 2011*

Simon Murgatroyd is the playwright Alan Ayckbourn's Archivist.

He is also the creator and administrator of Alan Ayckbourn's Official Website

[www.alanayckbourn.net](http://www.alanayckbourn.net).

# Foreword

In 2009, the predecessor to this book, *Sight Unseen*, was published by Alan Ayckbourn's Official Website. It contained, by and large, material relating to Alan Ayckbourn's plays which had never been collected together before and rarely acknowledged, dealing as it did with material that had either never been in the public eye or had long since been withdrawn from public consumption. It was an insight into elements of Alan Ayckbourn's long writing career which had never been and seemed unlikely to ever be made public.

How circumstances can alter in such a short period. In June 2011, Alan Ayckbourn's personal archive was acquired for the nation by the University of York, where it is now held in the Borthwick Institute for Archives. It is a remarkable acquisition as practically nothing has been held back by the playwright. Early unproduced writing, alternative drafts of plays and early hand-written drafts are all present in the archive. Thousands of page of correspondence between the likes of his agent Margaret 'Peggy' Ramsay and Sir Peter Hall reveal a hitherto unseen side of Alan Ayckbourn and his working relationships as well as press cuttings from 1959 to the present day, offering a comprehensive guide to the his work and the perception of it through the years. Apparently, the university calculated it had received more than a tonne in weight of written material offering the most comprehensive guide to Alan Ayckbourn's life and career in existence.

One of the reasons the University of York acquired the collection was its plans to make it a living and active archive; one of the obvious results of which is that all this material will be accessible to researchers for the first time. Thus all the plays, concepts, ideas and notes mentioned in *Sight Unseen* and this volume are, as such, available for the public to see and research.

Given this, it might seem strange to publish an expanded and largely re-written second edition of *Sight Unseen*. Yet it is perhaps now more pertinent than in 1999, as covering a wider range of discoveries from the Ayckbourn Archive, it offers a guide to what can be found in the archive and also puts the subjects into a wider context. All the topics covered in *Unseen Ayckbourn* - and they range from unproduced to withdrawn plays, concepts to alternative titles, notes and ideas to alternative drafts as well as a variety of other ephemera - have, where possible, been supported by quotes by Alan Ayckbourn relating to each subject and their history. As a result, *Unseen Ayckbourn* is not only an interesting guide to the unpublished and unproduced works of Alan Ayckbourn, but a starting point for anyone interested in researching the Ayckbourn Archive.

As with the first edition, *Unseen Ayckbourn* has a broad remit - and occasionally you must forgive the author for taking slight liberties with the title. Some of the plays within have been seen; albeit not by significant numbers of people. There are entries on Alan's withdrawn plays - largely his first few creations - which although produced have long since been kept out of the public eye and might as well be considered lost and unseen for the majority of people interested in his plays. There are also alternative versions of now familiar plays - a number of his most famous creations premiered in Scarborough only to have notable alterations before they were produced in London. There are also the Grey Plays, which have had limited production before being withdrawn and are not considered as part of the writer's acknowledged canon. In all these cases though, these are works which have largely been ignored by other authors and which do

not feature in broader texts about Alan's Ayckbourn's career. All but unseen, they have found a home within these pages.

If some of the material seems familiar, this is because *Unseen Ayckbourn* is a considerably expanded and revised version of *Sight Unseen*. However, more than half the material presented here though is either new to this edition or heavily revised and updated. *Unseen Ayckbourn* also holds what I believe to be the first in-depth look at *Jeeves*; Alan Ayckbourn's musical collaboration with the composer Andrew Lloyd Webber and his most famous withdrawn work. There is also an exclusive transcript of Alan talking about his early plays and writing career.

*Unseen Ayckbourn* celebrates an extraordinary playwriting career, which more than 50 years after it began continues to surprise and entertain. If it achieves a broader purpose, it will illustrate that the road to the enormous success Alan Ayckbourn has achieved is paved with so much more work and ideas than we are ever made privy to. I hope it offers a fresh insight into the familiar and, as it unfolds, it demonstrates that wherever you turn, just out of view but present nonetheless, are glimpses of what actually was and all the successes that have become an established part of British theatre history.

Simon Murgatroyd

July 2011

# Guide to Unseen Ayckbourn

Every entry in *Unseen Ayckbourn* is placed into one of the following categories to provide a basic context.

## **Abandoned**

A play begun by the playwright, which has either been re-written or abandoned altogether.

## **Title – Alternative**

An alternative title for a canon play

## **Title – Discarded**

An early unused title for a canon play.

## **Concept**

An idea or concept for an unwritten play or an early substantially different idea for an actual written play.

## **Ephemera**

A play or piece of writing that has not been officially acknowledged or which does not fit into any other category.

## **Grey Play**

An acknowledged play which is not part of the official canon, but which has been produced and then withdrawn.

## **Screenplay**

A screenplay or a treatment for an unwritten screenplay.

## **Unproduced**

A completed play which has not been produced to the best of the author's knowledge.

## **Variant**

An alternative version of an existing play within the acknowledged canon.

## **Withdrawn**

A full length play which is considered to be part of the official play canon, but which has been withdrawn.

When the term 'canon' is used, this refers to one of Alan Ayckbourn's 75 full-length plays, a full list of which can be found in the appendix.

## **A Note On Sources And Manuscripts**

Although much of the content of *Unseen Ayckbourn* concentrates on unwritten plays and ideas, manuscripts do exist for a number of the plays mentioned. Where these exist and have been quoted and referenced, they have predominantly been drawn from the Ayckbourn Archive held in the Borthwick Institute at the University of York.

## **Further Research**

*Unseen Ayckbourn* makes reference to many of Alan Ayckbourn's acknowledged works. Further information and in-depth discussion of all the playwright's canon plays and other acknowledged writing can be found on his official website [www.alanayckbourn.net](http://www.alanayckbourn.net).

The website also contains detailed biographical information about Alan Ayckbourn as well as many other features dedicated to the playwright and his career in theatre.

# Unseen Ayckbourn

## Absent Friends

*Description: Concept*

Having written his ambitious trilogy *The Norman Conquests* in 1973, Alan Ayckbourn decided he would write something on a more intimate scale for his next play in 1974. This would be *Absent Friends*, a play set in one location running in real time and directly inspired by a scene from *The Norman Conquests*.

“At the beginning of the second act of *Living Together* the whole action pulled up with a jolt and the family sat and talked and read magazines. I'd never done that sort of thing before, with people just sitting and talking about themselves. Writing it, I felt nothing was actually happening; and it was wonderful to get it onto the stage and find a response coming off the audience. So I went back to Scarborough and attempted to write something that would involve the audience in an afternoon.”<sup>1</sup>

The structure of *Absent Friends* was ground-breaking for Alan, being the first play he had written where the same amount of time passed on stage for the characters as for the audience watching; in essence it is an extreme close-up of two hours of these characters' lives. However, the earliest notes for the play survive in the Ayckbourn Archive and do not utilize this structure, although the basic premise appears to have been the same.

This early concept is centered on Sunday dinner or lunch with two of the acts (the play is described in both three and four act versions) being the same event, the dinner, but viewed entirely from the point of view of each sex: the three women in one act followed by the three men in the next. The final act would see all the characters brought together, presumably highlighting the different perspectives and experiences of the preceding dinner. Although an intriguing idea, the fact that there are no other surviving notes relating to anything other than the structure of the play suggests Alan abandoned this idea early in the writing process.<sup>2</sup>

## Absent Friends

*Description: Title - Alternative*

Within the Ayckbourn Archive, there are a number of hand-written notes relating to early concepts for what would eventually become the play *Absent Friends*. Amongst them is a list of titles which Alan considered for the play – at the time set around a dinner party – which not only include *Absent Friends* but also *A House Divided...*, *According To Taste...* and *Dividing Line*.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Plays And Players, September 1975

<sup>2</sup> Preliminary notes regarding *Absent Friends* held in the Ayckbourn Archive

<sup>3</sup> Preliminary notes regarding *Absent Friends* held in the Ayckbourn Archive

## Absurd Person Singular

*Description: Concept*

Much ingenuity and effort has been exhausted over the years attempting to decipher the meaning of the title of one of Alan Ayckbourn's most popular plays, *Absurd Person Singular*. Unfortunately for all concerned the title has absolutely nothing to do with the play; it was intended for an entirely different work which was either abandoned or never begun – Alan has never been specific as to its fate. No details are known about the prototype *Absurd Person Singular*, although it seems likely the play had an entirely different concept to the finished piece.

“*Absurd Person Singular* - the title was originally intended for a play I didn't write and subsequently, because I rather cared for it, given to the play I did write.”<sup>4</sup>

Given this statement originated just five years after he wrote *Absurd Person Singular* it should be given credence. However, it is notable that the existence of an earlier unwritten play is rarely mentioned in more recent interviews. In platform events in both 2008 and 2010, Alan mentions the title was something he just thought of and decided to keep for the appropriate occasion.

“We were in a lift up to [the producer] Michael Codron's office and I suddenly said ‘*Absurd Person Singular*. That's a good title.’ I hadn't got a play!”<sup>5</sup>

## Absurd Person Singular

*Description: Concept*

There are times when Alan Ayckbourn admits he got it wrong – often with plays regarded as classics of his extensive playwriting canon. Perhaps the most famous example of this is the original draft of *Absurd Person Singular* which was set in the living rooms of three couples over three Christmas celebrations. Having completed the first act, Alan realised the play was not fulfilling its potential.

“I like to have a problem, because I think it takes care of one aspect of the play. Take *Absurd Person Singular*. I had the theme of the ascendancy of one couple and the decline of the other two, set it in the sitting room, started off as normal, and I think in terms of content it was quite interesting - you know, I'd got the couples sketched rather well. But there was an edge missing off it and by transferring it into the kitchens - setting it backstage, as it were - one got an additional angle on it, which made it

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<sup>4</sup> Preface to *Three Plays* (Chatto & Windus, 1977, ISBN 070112203X)

<sup>5</sup> Alan Ayckbourn, *Tea For Two* platform, Stephen Joseph Theatre, 24 July 2008

much more interesting. I think it lifted it from being a reasonable play into a better play.”<sup>6</sup>

Candidly admitting that the play got “desperately boring very quickly”<sup>7</sup> in the living room, Alan duly relocated the play to the couples’ kitchens and began writing the play afresh.

There were two memorable off-shoots of this alteration: firstly, by moving the action to the kitchen it removed the need for some of the less interesting aspects of parties.

“As a footnote: since I was writing about parties and guests arriving, it also relieved me of the tedium of all that hallo-how-are-you-good-bye-nice-to-see-you business.”<sup>8</sup>

The second – and by far most wide-reaching – alteration was the inadvertent creation of two of the most monstrously memorable of Alan Ayckbourn’s off-stage characters, Dick and Lottie Potter. As originally conceived, Dick and Lottie were a fourth couple present on stage in the living room and there can be little doubt they would have dominated proceedings. By relocating the action to the kitchen and confining the Potters to the living room, Alan was to create two of his most renowned off-stage characters, who would go on to make another off-stage ‘appearance’ in *Bedroom Farce*.

“I was halfway through the act before I realized that I was viewing the evening from totally the wrong perspective. Dick and Lottie were indeed monstrously overwhelming, hearty and ultimately very boring, and far better heard occasionally but not seen. By a simple switch of setting to the kitchen, the problem was all but solved, adding incidentally far greater comic possibilities than the sitting room ever held. For in this particular case, the obvious offstage action was far more relevant than its onstage counterpart.”<sup>9</sup>

## **According To Taste**

*Description: Title – Discarded*

One of several proposed titles for *Absent Friends* which Alan Ayckbourn had written in his early notes for the play.

## **Am I Famous Yet?**

*Description: Title - Discarded*

It would be fair to say that Alan Ayckbourn has probably abandoned more titles than he cares to remember during his career as a playwright – some of which have been lost to posterity,

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<sup>6</sup> Municipal Entertainment, May 1978

<sup>7</sup> Scarborough Evening News, 13 December 1989

<sup>8</sup> Preface to Three Plays

<sup>9</sup> Preface to Three Plays

whilst others have been recycled for entirely different plays. Most of these possible titles have been lost to time, but several examples survive such as *Am I Famous Yet?*

This was an early proposed title for the 2004 play *Drowning On Dry Land*, which deals with the phenomenon of celebrity and how people with no apparent talent achieve fame. The proposed title was inspired by a television documentary investigating the same phenomenon and “a girl on TV jumping up and down, waving her arms and asking, “am I famous yet?” when she really hadn’t done anything.”<sup>10</sup>

As to the origin of the eventual title, inspiration often comes from the most obscure places....

“I originally considered calling the play *Am I Famous Yet?*, but browsing through one of my dictionaries of quotations I came across an old English proverb: “It is folly to drown on dry land.” Heaven knows how old or English it is, but I liked it, especially since I had chosen to set the play in a folly. Not that there’s anything symbolic in that, of course. Heaven forbid.”<sup>11</sup>

## **As A Sister**

*Description: Title – Discarded*

One of several proposed titles for *Sisterly Feelings* which Alan Ayckbourn had written on early notes for the play.

## **Ayckbourn On Song**

*See Todd On Ayckbourn On Song*

## **Backnumbers**

*Description: Grey Play*

*Backnumbers* is best described as a greatest hits collection of songs by Alan Ayckbourn and the composer Paul Todd. It actually comprises two revues consisting entirely of songs drawn from the back catalogue of musicals and revues written by the pair between 1978 and 1983.

*Backnumbers* was originally performed as a lunchtime entertainment in the Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round in 1983. It consists of two parts, performed separately, entitled *Backnumbers 1-10* and *Backnumbers 11-20*. There is no plot or linking material with each part consisting of ten songs taken from Alan and Paul Todd’s previous collaborations: *First Course*; *Making Tracks*; *Me, Myself And I*; *Men On Women On Men*; *Second Helping*; *Suburban Strains*. There is no record of *Backnumbers* having ever been performed again.

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<sup>10</sup> Yorkshire Post, 26 April 2004

<sup>11</sup> Preface to Alan Ayckbourn: *Plays 3* (Faber & Faber, 2005, ISBN 0571226884)

## ‘Bath’ play

### *Description: Concept*

Having set plays in practically every other room in the suburban house by the end of the 1970s, Alan Ayckbourn declared in an interview in 1981 he was actively considering setting a play in the bathroom. Alas, the play was never written although the bathroom would eventually come to play a major part in *A Small Family Business*, where deceit, murder and drug-taking are prevalent in the smallest room, but where no-one is seen taking a bath.

As to the concept for a bathroom-set play, the inspiration appears to have come from the 1970 movie *Lovers And Other Strangers*.

“[A play] where no one actually has a bath, runs any water or uses the bathroom as a bathroom. I once saw a very funny film with Gig Young getting rid of his mistress in the bathroom. She was sitting on the loo seat and he was on the side of the bath, and it was all very incongruous.”<sup>12</sup>

## Bedroom Farce

### *Description: Concept*

Alan Ayckbourn has written five plays which are intended for end-stage performance (the plays being *Bedroom Farce*, *A Small Family Business*, *Haunting Julia*, *Things We Do For Love* and *Virtual Reality*); although Alan has also directed two of these in both the end-stage and the round.

The first of the end-stage plays is *Bedroom Farce*, which was originally commissioned for the National Theatre with the agreement it would be premiered at the Library Theatre, Scarborough. Although commissioned as an end-stage play, Alan wrote it with enough flexibility so it could be produced in the round.

The earliest notes for the play indicate a concept which clearly favoured the round. Alan began work on the play in 1975, whilst still involved with his and Andrew Lloyd Webber’s West End musical *Jeeves* and the earliest notes pertaining to *Bedroom Farce* can be found on the back of pages from an early hand-written *Jeeves* manuscript. These notes and sketches offer an insight into Alan’s earliest thoughts on the play which featured four, rather than three, bedrooms. Two of his sketches of the proposed set show a cross comprised of four beds, the foot of each bed meeting in the middle. Four couples are also named: Ernest and Delia, Trevor and Susannah, Nick and Patsy, Austin and Marie. The first five names are familiar from the final play, the latter three were altered.

By the time Alan wrote the play, he had reduced the set to three bedrooms and four couples with the bedless couple, Trevor and Susannah, moving between the three rooms.<sup>13</sup>

Incidentally, the play was actually never produced in the round at the Library Theatre. Although this was the original intention, when it came to staging the winter 1975 season it transpired the Concert Room, normally used by the company, was unavailable and a smaller

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<sup>12</sup> Weekend Post, 11 July 1981

<sup>13</sup> Preliminary set design sketches for *Bedroom Farce* from the second draft *Jeeves* manuscript held in the Ayckbourn Archive

room in Scarborough's public library was offered instead. As a result, the play had to be re-designed and staged three-sided.

When *Bedroom Farce* opened at the National Theatre in 1977, it was produced as originally intended in the end-stage Lyttelton and it would be another 23 years before Alan was able to stage the play in the round, when he revived it in 2000 at the Stephen Joseph Theatre.

## **Bedroom Farce**

*Description: Title - Discarded*

In 1974, Alan Ayckbourn announced the title of his next play which would also be the first of his plays to be produced at the National Theatre. He announced the play as *Bedroom Farce, A Comedy*, which would later be shortened to just *Bedroom Farce* when it premiered at the Library Theatre, Scarborough, in 1975. Given the number of critics over the years who have failed to appreciate that just because the word farce is in the play title, it doesn't necessarily have to be a farce, perhaps it would have been better left unaltered!

"I'm going to call it *Bedroom Farce, A Comedy*. I'm worrying about it a bit because I've never written for the posh fellers before. It'll have everything about bedrooms but copulation, something which I believe is hardly practised in the British bedroom anyway."<sup>14</sup>

## **Beside Manners**

*Description: Ephemera*

*Beside Manners* is a short piece by Alan Ayckbourn which bears comparison to his one act play *Countdown*; which is part of *Mixed Doubles*. *Beside Manners* features a couple in bed who speak their internal monologues having both just woken up an hour before the alarm is due to go off. Their thoughts - the woman's effusive, the man's concise - reflect their views on the state of their marriage as they analyze every movement and breathe the other takes. The dialogue ends with them falling back asleep and vocalizing their dreams just before the alarm clock goes off.

The piece is similar in length and style to the duologue *Countdown*, which also features a couple speaking their internal thoughts over breakfast. Intriguingly both feature the man talking about a dream involving a motor-mower. There is no means of dating the piece, however a surviving copy of the script is credited to Alan Ayckbourn, which suggests the play was written post 1962 (plays prior to that date are generally credited to Roland Allen), which would make *Beside Manners* a later play than *Countdown*, which was definitely written no later than 1962<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> Sunday Times, 30 June 1974

<sup>15</sup> *Countdown* was first produced as part of *If Love Decay...* in September 1962; *If Love Decay...* would eventually become *Mixed Doubles* in 1969. Alan was writing under the pseudonym Roland Allen until at the latest March 1962 when he was first represented by the Literary agent Margaret Ramsay.

Although no details of *Bedside Manners* being produced exist and there is no record of a performance license being issued by the Lord Chamberlain's Office, there are an actor's notes on the sole surviving copy. The play's cover also indicates the woman's role was taken by Heather Stoney, who Alan did not work with until October 1962 when the Victoria Theatre opened in Stoke-on-Trent with Alan as an Associate Director. As a result, it seems probable that, if performed, *Bedside Manners* could not have been produced until late 1962 at the earliest and probably in Stoke-on-Trent.

Man / Woman (simultaneously): We are not really asleep.

Man: And though both of us think we are deceiving the other...

Woman: Neither of us are.

Man / Woman (simultaneously): We know each other far too well.

Man: Unfortunately.<sup>16</sup>

## **Between The Lines**

*Description: Grey Play*

Alan Ayckbourn's Grey Plays consist of a number of plays and revues which have been produced but never published. As a result of this, they tend to be quite obscure pieces; one of the most obscure being *Between The Lines*, a revue with material by Alan Ayckbourn that cannot actually be credited to the playwright.

Between 1978 and 1986, Alan Ayckbourn and the composer Paul Todd collaborated on 10 revues and two musicals. In 1992, Paul Todd premiered a new revue called *Between The Lines* at the Etcetera Theatre, Camden, which featured 18 songs by the pair linked by a back-stage, rehearsal-room set plot. The original narrative was written by Paul Todd, which he describes as:

"The story starts at their respective auditions. They are cast and meet to rehearse only to find that there is, as yet, no script. The script and the lyrics arrive throughout the show. They rehearse open and tour. The actor and actress play Jenny and Roger as well as many attendant characters. Paralleling the pressure of their professional life a personal relationship may be developing, too, unlikely though it seems at one point."<sup>17</sup>

Alan Ayckbourn had no involvement in the piece other than his lyrics are featured. The revue has been rarely produced but when it is staged, it is contractually stated that Alan must only be credited as lyricist so as not to give the impression *Between The Lines* is an original Ayckbourn creation.

*Between The Lines* is itself a reworking of an earlier unproduced piece by Paul Todd entitled *Todd On Ayckbourn On Song* (see separate entry).

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<sup>16</sup> Extract from *Bedside Manners*

<sup>17</sup> Extract from Paul Todd's show breakdown for *Between The Lines*

## ‘Blizzard’ play

*Description: Concept*

When the acclaimed French director Alain Resnais adapted Alan Ayckbourn’s *Private Fears In Public Places* for film in 2006, he transferred the setting to a snowbound Paris with every scene punctuated by falling snow. Alan was struck by this effect and discussed the idea of using snow in his next play. Whilst the idea may seem impractical, that has rarely stopped Alan before....

“I was immediately taken by the snowstorm which I thought was typically him [the director, Alain Resnais]. There was no storm on stage obviously; although I did get a yearning to perhaps set a play in snow immediately afterwards.”<sup>18</sup>

“Thanks to Alain, I’ve got my first idea: it starts in a blizzard. I can already feel technicians running for the hills, saying, “Snow? For Two Hours? It’ll have the audience tunneling out.””<sup>19</sup>

## Board Game

*Description: Unproduced*

Given Alan Ayckbourn’s interest in board games – something hinted at in several of his plays, most notably *The Norman Conquests* – it is hardly surprising that at one point he actually wrote a short play based around several famous games. *Board Game* is a short one-act play in which one of the playing pieces from *Monopoly*, Top Hat, finds himself moving across several different games on each roll of the die. He moves through *Cluedo*, chess, *Escape From Colditz* and draughts before returning to the *Monopoly* board. Along the way, he is pursued by a German guard from *Escape From Colditz*, who shoots the *Monopoly* piece Old Boot, leading Top Hat to decide to Go To Jail as the safest option.

Col Mustard Enters

Col: Just one moment. Hold it right there. I suggest that the Old Boot was murdered by the Hun with the gun in the middle of Coventry Street.<sup>20</sup>

It is not known when the piece was written and it has no providence, although judging by the only surviving typed copy it is an early play, probably written between 1958 and 1961.

It is worth noting the piece bears certain similarities to *The Boy Who Fell Into A Book*, which Alan wrote in 1998 to mark the National Year Of Reading. There the hero, Kevin, finds himself moving from book to book, rather than game to game, but at one stage does find himself in a game of chess having stumbled into *Chess For Beginners*.

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<sup>18</sup> Alan Ayckbourn interview, *Private Fears In Public Places* region 2 DVD

<sup>19</sup> The Guardian, 6 July 2007

<sup>20</sup> Extract from *Board Game*

## Body Language

*Description: Variant*

For a play dedicated to body issues and the perception of people's bodies, it seems ironic the original script for *Body Language* needed to be slimmed down before reaching a form Alan Ayckbourn was happy with. When originally produced in 1990, the body-swapping comedy ran for almost three hours and was criticised for its length.

Although some judicious pruning did take place at the time of this production, it was not substantially altered. Had the play transferred to the West End, it is probable Alan would have made extensive revisions at this point, but plans to take it to London fell through and Alan did not revise the play. It became an acknowledged part of the Ayckbourn canon, despite Alan admitting it was not in the best of shape.

“It was very popular when it was done in Scarborough in 1990 but there were so many other plays around at the time that it didn't get a West End transfer. It just slipped through the cracks, although it worked very well.”<sup>21</sup>

When the Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round moved to its new home – the Stephen Joseph Theatre - in 1996, Alan began looking at some of his earlier plays which he felt had not reached their full potential. The most obvious example of this resulted in his successful rehabilitation of the flop musical *Jeeves as By Jeeves*, which was quickly followed by a revised revival of *It Could Be Any One Of Us*. At approximately the same time, Alan returned to the *Body Language* script and revised it, mainly trimming extraneous material to bring the running time down. The major cuts were to the character of the photographer Derek Short. The end result, although not obviously different to the original production, was a leaner piece of writing which also generated better reviews when produced in 1999. The published version of the script is the revised version with the original held only in archive.

“I always wanted to do *Body Language* again, as I felt the first time around it needed some more work, but by the time I'd looked at it and decided that, it was already running. It was doing all right but I kept looking and thinking I'll tinker with it one day. Two or three years ago, I picked it up and in an afternoon went at it like a madman with a machete, as you do when you've been thinking about something that long, and I thought I'd do it one year.”<sup>22</sup>

## By Jeeves

*Description: Variant*

In the history of musical theatre, *Jeeves* (see the article *Behind The Scenes With Jeeves*) is regarded as an almost legendary West End flop. The first collaboration between Alan Ayckbourn

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<sup>21</sup> Yorkshire Post, 20 August 1999

<sup>22</sup> Scarborough Evening News, 22 September 1999

and the composer Andrew Lloyd Webber opened at Her Majesty's Theatre in London on 22 April 1975 and closed on 24 May, having been savaged by the critics.

Over the next two decades, both men raised the idea of rehabilitating the musical by reviving and revising it. In 1996, on its 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary, a new version of the musical opened the new Stephen Joseph Theatre in Scarborough. *By Jeeves* met with great success, which can largely be attributed to it being the polar opposite of its predecessor: *Jeeves* was an ungainly, sprawling piece of musical theatre, whereas *By Jeeves* kept the basics of the original piece, but scaled everything down to a simpler production and premise.

Although it faced few of the problems which blighted the original musical, *By Jeeves* did go through a number of alterations from its first public showing in 1994 through to its Broadway premiere in 2001. *By Jeeves* was work-shopped in 1994, where the revised musical was heard for the first time in front of an audience. Although the plot and book would largely be unaltered from this point forwards, there are notable variations in the show at different stages of its life due to alterations to the libretto.

This was the original song selection for the *By Jeeves* Workshop performance in 1994:

### **Act 1**

1. Banjo Boy
2. Code Of The Woosters
3. Travel Hopefully
4. That Could Have Been Us
5. Female Of The Species
6. The Hallo Song

### **Act 2**

1. By Jeeves
2. When Love Arrives
3. Scylla And Charybdis And The Deep Blue Sea
4. Half A Moment
5. It's A Pig
6. Banjo Boy
7. The Wizard Rainbow Finale<sup>23</sup>

When the play premiered at the Stephen Joseph Theatre in May 1996, the following alterations took place: *Scylla And Charybdis And The Deep Blue Sea* was replaced by *What Have You Got To Say, Jeeves!* and the title of *That Could Have Been Us* was revised to *That Was Nearly Us*.

During the original run of *By Jeeves* at the Stephen Joseph Theatre, another change took place with *Love's Maze* replacing *Female Of The Species*.

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<sup>23</sup> *By Jeeves* first draft workshop script, 1995

The play then transferred to London in July 1996, at which point several of the songs underwent alterations. *A False Start* replaced the first *Banjo Boy* and *Wooster Will Entertain You* replaced *The Code Of The Woosters*.

Finally, when the play opened on Broadway at the Helen Hayes Theatre, New York, in October 2001, there was one final change with *Wooster Will Entertain You* altered to *Never Fear*. This is considered to be the definitive version of the musical.

## **Callisto#7**

*Description: Variant*

*Callisto#7* is unique amongst Alan Ayckbourn's plays in being a revision of an earlier play which is still available to produce. The revised version, premiered at the Stephen Joseph Theatre in 1999, develops the plot and themes of the earlier *Callisto 5*, premiered at the Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round in 1990, but essentially has the same structure and narrative.

Both plays are set on a space station on the moon of Callisto, although in *Callisto 5*, the hero Jem is alone except for a robot; his sister being held in cryogenic suspension. In *Callisto#7*, Jem and his sister Jodi are both stranded on the space station. The plots then follow the same basic path as the station is apparently invaded by an invisible creature, actually a diversion created by the station computer IRIS.

*Callisto 5* was published in 1995 and made available for production. Despite it being revised to the arguably better constructed *Callisto#7* in 1999, the original play is still available to buy and produce whilst the latter – having replaced *Callisto 5* in the official canon – is also available to produce, but has not yet been published.

“I [re-]wrote it as *Callisto 7* - it's got another character in it. It's written with a little boy in it now - and a little girl. The girl is older. It made it slightly more human. She is now left to look after her little kid brother and he is the one who's going moody and she's doing her best - she's only thirteen - she's trying to keep control while the mother and father are away. But the kid is really giving her a bad time saying, "I don't wanna talk to you. I just want my mother and father." And she's saying, "So do I." And so the computer creates a monster, like it did before, in order to unite them because it sees they're on the verge of having a breakdown. So they create the old solution of having a common enemy. The little boy finds he's helping his sister to fight it and they both learn to have respect for each other. I think it's a better slant on it.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> 'A Guided Tour Through Ayckbourn Country' (second edition), Albert-Reiner Glaap, pp.138-140 (Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2004, ISBN 3884766783)

## A Chorus Of Disapproval

*Description: Concept*

*A Chorus Of Disapproval* marked the 25th anniversary of Alan Ayckbourn's career as a playwright in 1984 and was his 31st full-length play. From conception it was always highly ambitious. Wanting to write a piece about amateur musicals, Alan had the idea of a play based around Rudolf Friml's operetta *The Vagabond King*. The production would incorporate approximately 85 local amateur singers in the chorus<sup>25</sup> (in Alan's biography, Paul Allen writes it was 20 people<sup>26</sup> but Alan himself states his grander intentions in Ian Watson's *Conversations With Ayckbourn*) who would be scattered around the auditorium. Once the performance began, this clandestine chorus would have started singing 25 minutes in causing "the person next to them to look absolutely alarmed."<sup>27</sup> Subsequently on 9 March, 1984, the Scarborough Evening News ran an editorial article advertising auditions for amateur singers with soloing experiences.

However, a number of obstacles swiftly put paid to these plans. The actors' union, Equity, absolutely opposed the use of amateur actors in a professional show; Alan's audition experiences with the local amateur operatic societies proved to be less than fruitful with singers apparently expecting nothing less than the lead roles; and the Rudolf Friml Estate, fearing Alan was intending to send up *The Vagabond King*, denied him permission to use the play, claiming a major tour was imminent, but which never took place.

*A Chorus Of Disapproval* was planned from the outset to be produced at the National Theatre, where the Artistic Director Peter Hall had been aware of Alan's original intentions. Now Alan contacted him to notify him of the changes to the play.

"Needless to say, the play is vastly different from the one I described to you on the phone a few weeks ago. No chorus of amateurs. Just a few good singers. (Equity intervened there). I had to go back to John Gay as his agent was the only one who didn't raise an objection."<sup>28</sup>

The playwright would turn instead to John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* for inspiration; a musical not only out of copyright, but which mirrored Alan's themes for his play. He also dropped the plans for the amateur chorus – although rumours persist that several characters in *A Chorus Of Disapproval* were inspired by some of the people in amateur societies Alan met during auditions.

## Christmas V Mastermind

*Description: Withdrawn*

"The most disastrous play I've ever done."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> 'Conversations With Ayckbourn', Ian Watson, pp.138 (Faber, 1988, ISBN 0571151922)

<sup>26</sup> 'Grinning At The Edge', Paul Allen, pp.207 (Methuen, 2001, ISBN 0413771369)

<sup>27</sup> Watson, pp.138

<sup>28</sup> Correspondence between Alan Ayckbourn and Peter Hall, 14 April 1984

<sup>29</sup> Watson, pp.43

*Christmas V Mastermind* is the black sheep of the Ayckbourn canon, a play judged by the playwright to be so awful that it discouraged the playwright from writing for its target audience of children for more than 25 years.

The play was just one of two plays Alan Ayckbourn wrote for the Victoria Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent. In 1962, Stephen Joseph opened England's first permanent professional theatre-in-the-round venue (his Scarborough venture, formed in 1955, was the country's first professional theatre-in-the-round company); Alan Ayckbourn had accepted an invitation to become an Associate Director and was commissioned to write the theatre's first Christmas entertainment. Alan had previously written another Christmas play, *Dad's Tale*, which had been a major disappointment but this was as nothing compared to *Christmas V Mastermind*.

In the theatre's first season, a lack of funding, publicity and common sense had a fatal impact on the play's chances.

"It was our first attempt at a Christmas play for children and it happened to coincide with a winter of record cold. We did not realise then that children's audiences need most exclusive matinee scheduling and put it on in the evening to audiences of two or three wrapped in blankets with thermos flasks, etc. I can distinctly remember seeing the actors' breath on stage as we had only rudimentary boilers."<sup>30</sup>

The play concerns the machinations of a criminal mastermind, the Crimson Golliwog, as he tries to oust Santa Claus by inspiring belligerent gnomes to take industrial action. Santa's efforts to sort matters out are hindered by a pair of inept policeman intent on tracking down the criminal. In this extract, Santa's fairy secretary describes the man she works for.

Scrunch: Rather peculiar behaviour for a managing director

Fairy: Well, he's a bit old you see. So he gets funny ideas. Some of his staff have been with him for 500 years and he reckons some of them are getting stagnant. So we have community singing in the canteen and dancing classes for unskilled labour.

Scrunch: Sounds unethical to me.

Fairy: We had a Happy Work Week not long ago. You know, 'see the sunny side of your work' and all that. He wanted the whole building ringing with laughter.

Scrunch: Did it work.

Fairy: No. Ended up in a punch up on the Wednesday.<sup>31</sup>

With the Crimson Golliwog's original plan foiled, he decides to instead blow up Santa Claus's factory by stuffing a bear with TNT, which ends up in the hands of the inept policemen. As Santa desperately tries to get his factory working again with no workers to hand, the policemen try to return the teddy it to its rightful owner during the course of their investigations. The play ends with the Crimson Golliwog blown up as he tries to escape the apparently doomed Santa Claus and associates.

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<sup>30</sup> Interview with Peter Cheeseman, date unknown

<sup>31</sup> Extract from *Christmas V Mastermind*

Taken out of context, *Christmas V Mastermind* is, certainly for its time, an original idea and is surely the first children's play – and possibly the last - to be based around the concept of industrial action. This is also one of its most significant problems. Although there is much farcical humour for the children, the majority of the script seems far more suited to adults and it seems to be perched uneasily between the two audiences.

The one review held in archive points out the “plot’ is of no great significance”, but did “heartily recommend the show as wonderfully wholesome entertainment for anyone aged from nine to 90.”<sup>32</sup> Patently no-one was reading the Evening Sentinel that evening to take notice of the review.

“It was quite a broad, jolly farce, with lots of fights in telephone boxes. And there were two policemen, who tracked everything down, disguised as hedges and letterboxes. But it was received in dreadful silence. None of it seemed to succeed and we died the death with it.”<sup>33</sup>

In retrospect, the most notable aspect of the play is it is the first Ayckbourn play to feature his future wife Heather Stoney, playing a lush fairy kidnapped by the Crimson Golliwog and pushed out of a window with her wings fastened together by a bulldog clip.

Alan meanwhile swore he would never write for children again – which he managed until 1988 before discovering that, actually, he was rather better at it than he initially thought.

## **Cinderella’s Star Night**

*Description: Ephemera*

One of the most obscure Ayckbourn creations is his contribution to a charity evening in 1982. *Cinderella’s Star Night: An Evening Of Wit, Charm And Panic* was a fund-raising pantomime in aid of The Bobath Centre held at the Prince Edward Theatre, London, on 31 January 1982. Narrated by Ned Sherrin and directed by Tudor Davies, the pantomime featured a host of theatrical luminaries such as Ian McKellen, Joanna Lumley, Nigel Havers and Helen Mirren among many others. The script was written by a number of writers including Michael Frayn, Jack Rosenthal and John Cleese with the epilogue provided by Alan Ayckbourn.

*Narrator: Ian McKellen*

As theatre folk, we often say

The world’s a stage; that life’s a play.

And yes it’s true, it really is

There’s just no business like show biz!

To smell the greasepaint, sniff the sighs!

To stand beneath those open flies!

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<sup>32</sup> Evening Sentinel, 1 January 1963

<sup>33</sup> Watson, pp.43

To hear those cheery first act calls  
Of usherettes there in the stalls.  
To find an artist's role entails  
Filling the lull between bar sales.  
Yet realizing with certain pride  
One stands where Henry Irving dried!  
Ah, history! We're all a part  
Of this, the theatre's magic art!  
And if it would be quite untrue  
Were we to hide the facts from you.  
Despite our hopes, our actor's dreams  
The finest time of all it seems  
Is not that moment when it starts -  
When first the velvet curtain parts -  
But rather (just between us friends)  
When once the bloody thing descends!<sup>34</sup>

Alan's contribution to the pantomime – and indeed even the event – might have been lost to posterity were it not for the fact that an audio recording of the event was made and released on vinyl in 1983. Although extremely rare, it ensured Alan's contribution to the evening survived as no notes or record of Alan's epilogue survive in his own archive.

## **Clue (Cluedo)**

*Description: Screenplay*

Alan Ayckbourn's interest in board games has been well-documented over the years and whilst games have played a substantial part in several plays, he has never dedicated an entire full-length play to games. Yet in the early 1980s, he almost had that opportunity when Polygram Pictures and Universal Pictures were actively considering making a film based on the famed board game *Cluedo* (*Clue* in the USA). In January 1981, Lynda Obst, vice president in charge of creative affairs at Polygram, approached Alan's agent Margaret 'Peggy' Ramsay, noting that Alan had been suggested as a potential script-writer. The film was being produced by Debra Hill with Jon Peters and Peter Guber as executive producers (regarded as two of the most powerful producers in Hollywood during the 1980s). Peggy, knowing Alan's passion for board games, passed the request on to the writer which apparently "greatly amused"<sup>35</sup> him and, unusually for Alan with regard to screenplays, he replied he was open to the possibility of discussing the project.

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<sup>34</sup> Transcript from *Cinderella's Star Night* album, 1983 (transcription by Michael Mooney)

<sup>35</sup> Correspondence between Margaret Ramsay and Lynda Obst, 13 January 1981

Cleverly, Peggy suggested to Polygram that Alan first write *Clue* as a stage play, which could then be adapted into a film. This appealed to Alan as potentially it would involve Universal putting money into the theatre. Coincidentally, the previous year he had already begun work on a thriller called *Sight Unseen*, which had been abandoned at the last minute in favour of *Season's Greetings* (but would ultimately form the basis of *It Could Be Any One Of Us*). This, combined with the challenge of writing a script which could be successfully opened out into a movie, intrigued him. He suggested the play could be written for the summer of 1982 and joked that as his next play was due to go to the National Theatre; this would be a good play for them!<sup>36</sup>

Although the studio agreed in essence to this proposal, an initial screenplay was requested which seemed rather pointless to Alan as he felt there would be no need to write a play if a screenplay existed. He had also begun to have a number of reservations about the idea having gone back to the original board game.

“I dug out my old *Cluedo* board which was interesting. What of course the *Cluedo* inventor has done is what the inventors of all the classic games have done. He's taken every cliché from the genre and boiled them all down into a board game. It's even subtitled in the rules *Murder at Tudor Close*, and the whole thing is a mixture of every Christie, Ngaio Marsh, Allingham murder mystery you've ever read.... Nothing wrong with that I suppose, providing they want another in the endless series of nostalgia movies. Do they really want another *Murder on the Nile / Orient Express*, particularly when there's about two hundred of that good lady's books still left to adapt. Not to mention Dorothy L. Sayers.

“No, as I see it we must somehow concentrate on the project's most original theme, which is perhaps somewhat oddly the fact that it is a board game. I am not suggesting that the characters all be dressed as wooden counters whilst the audience are expected to throw a dice - though I wouldn't rule that out - but unless it's set somehow within the framework of a game then the *Cluedo* part of it will essentially be lost and all we'll have is a run of the mill thriller.”<sup>37</sup>

Alan's involvement in the project was reported by the *New Standard* newspaper in an article on 11 February 1981. However, by the time Alan had fulfilled his playwriting commitments and turned his attention to *Clue* in June 1981, the project was already unravelling. Peggy was not convinced a suitable deal could be arranged and shortly afterwards Alan withdrew from the project, which was put on the backburner.

*Clue* would eventually be made into a movie with a story by John Landis and Jonathan Lynn and screenplay by Lynn. It was eventually filmed in November 1984 with Lynn directing, Debra Hill producing and featuring Tim Curry and Christopher Lloyd. It would prove to be a disastrous attempt to create a comedy thriller with several random final reels distributed to some cinemas to incorporate the game's element of a random killer (although most cinemas were apparently only given one climax, defeating the *raison d'être* of the film). However, critical opinion

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<sup>36</sup> Correspondence between Alan Ayckbourn and Margaret Ramsay, 31 January 1981

<sup>37</sup> Correspondence between Alan Ayckbourn and Margaret Ramsay, 16 February 1981

concluded this was just a gimmick and that none of the climaxes made much sense anyway; the movie had an approximate budget of \$15m and took just over \$14m at the US box office.<sup>38</sup>

Meanwhile, Alan's experiences with *Clue* and *Sight Unseen* would lead to the multiple choice murderer thriller *It Could Be Any One Of Us*.

## Communicating Doors

*Description: Concept*

Prior to starting his intense writing period on a new play, Alan Ayckbourn will often write out the main plot points for reference. Occasionally, these notes become a far more detailed synopsis which, judging by the few surviving examples, seem to occur when he is writing one of his more densely plotted plays.

A detailed synopsis of *Communicating Doors* survives in archive, offering a glimpse of not only how close Alan's finished play is to his pre-writing plan, but also demonstrating he is not afraid to make notable plot changes during the writing process.

The synopsis for *Communicating Doors* is to all intents and purposes the final play – with the exception of several minor alterations; of which two are rather notable. The plot, as briefly as possible, as written and performed is set in a hotel suite in 2014 with a communicating door that goes back in time 20 years. A dominatrix, Poopay, is asked by the elderly Reece to witness a confession of the murder of his two previous wives, but this is discovered by his associate Julian who attempts to kill her. She goes through the door and unexpectedly finds herself in 1994 with Reece's second wife, Ruella. Together they manage to alter time and save both wives' lives, whilst Julian also arrives from 2014 but is killed by slipping on a bar of soap whilst attempting to murder Poopay. She returns to 2014 to discover her actions have changed Reece and that she has been adopted by Ruella and Reece and her life has been utterly changed for the better.

The synopsis notably differs in that Julian follows Poopay back to 1994 but is killed by a heart attack whilst attempting to throw her out of the suite's window. The other major difference is at the climax of the play, Poopay returns to 2014 to discover her actions have altered time. Reece is now a good man, who did not murder his wives and lived happily with Ruella for many years. They did not, however, adopt Poopay who is still a dominatrix. Having altered time, she then offers to give the elderly Reece a final free session as the play ends! Needless to say, the actual ending of the play in which Poopay's timeline has been altered for the better is far more satisfying and considerably less disturbing!

## Confusions

*Description: Concept*

It's probable that at some point, Alan Ayckbourn has written notes, early concepts and ideas or the vast majority of the plays he has – and has not - written. However, rarely have any of those notes been preserved for posterity; surviving notes tend to surface on the back of manuscript drafts or documentation preserved for other reasons.

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<sup>38</sup> [www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com) (International Movie Database)

In the case of *Confusions*, there exists a hand-written note in archive which shows an early concept for the play, still incorporating several short plays and five actors but in a six act format with temporary titles. The only similarity to the final play is the inclusion of *Mother Figure*, which had been written for a separate aborted project, entitled *Mixed Doubles*, and around which *Confusions* was constructed. The concept details were:

1. Bride and groom – discovery (1m 1f)
2. Marriage breaker – re-union and interruption (2m 1f)
3. Mother Figure (1m 2f)
4. Man whose wife leaves him (3m 2f)
5. Reversals (1) (2m)
6. Reversals (2) (2f)<sup>39</sup>

Although we only have these surviving placeholder titles to compare with the actual play, they do not appear to bear any resemblance to the basic plots of the four one acts pieces - *Between Mouthfuls*, *Drinking Companions*, *Gosforth's Fete* and *A Talk In The Park* – which accompany *Mother Figure* in *Confusions*.

## Cover Version

*Description: Title – Discarded*

One of several titles Alan Ayckbourn considered for his 2005 play *Improbable Fiction*.

## A Cut In The Rates

*Description: Ephemera*

*A Cut In The Rates* was for many years considered one of only two screenplays Alan had written and which had been produced for television. It is actually a short one act play which merely has the distinction of its first performance being screened on television as part of a BBC educational programme on theatre.

*A Cut In The Rates* was commissioned as part of the *English Files* educational series on BBC2 as part of a programme, broadcast on 21 January 1984, looking behind the scenes of a play from read-through to production with the play then performed and recorded in front of a live audience. This was the only time Alan Ayckbourn has directed the play and it featured Michael Cashman, Liza Sadovy and Lavinia Bertram; it also made use of the set for the current production at the Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round, Michael Cashman's *Before Your Very Eyes*. *A Cut In The Rates* has been published but the *English Files* episode has rarely, if ever, been repeated and never been released commercially.

The play is about a rate collector attempting to collect taxes from an illusionist, who finds herself confronting the apparently dead victim of a magic act gone hideously wrong. When the

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<sup>39</sup> Hand-written note regarding *Confusions* held in the Ayckbourn archive

magician appears, saw in hand, the collector flees having been conned by an elaborate tax avoidance scam.

Miss Pickhart: You mean your -

Ratchet: Yes.

Miss Pickhart: In half?

Ratchet: It was a terrible mistake. I was acquitted. The coroner said it was a tragic case of a misguided search for artistic perfection.<sup>40</sup>

## Dad's Tale

*Description: Withdrawn*

“My first taste of theatrical failure.”<sup>41</sup>

*Dad's Tale* was Alan Ayckbourn's first play for children and one of two Christmas plays in quick succession, the failure of which led him to abandon children's theatre for more than 25 years.

It also marked the first time Alan would collaborate with someone else on a play, in this case fellow playwright David Campton. Stephen Joseph asked Campton and Alan to collaborate on the 1960 Christmas show for the Library Theatre, Scarborough, using Mary Norton's novel *The Borrowers* as a starting point; largely because Campton had already begun adapting the book.<sup>42</sup> Alan read the play, wasn't keen on it and the writing partnership dissolved leaving Alan to write the book alone.

And the ballet.

“Stephen just said: “Um... will you be putting any ballet into your play?”  
And I said “WHAT!” and he said: “Ballet.” Well I pointed out that I didn't write ballet but Stephen just said I should.”<sup>43</sup>

Alan was apparently unaware that Stephen had agreed the show would be a co-production with the British Dance Drama Theatre, which had appeared at the Library Theatre earlier that year. It is doubtful Stephen ever fully considered the practicalities of commissioning a play involving dance with a writer who knew nothing about dance, a co-production with very little budget and, astonishingly, a show where the two companies would only meet for the first time during dress rehearsals!

Alan cleverly circumvented the dance problem by writing dream sequences into which the dances could be dropped and which had little effect on what little plot there was.

Martin: (to audience) That night Auntie had dreams about giant turkeys that kept sticking their heads out of the oven and biting her. And well –

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<sup>40</sup> Extract from *A Cut In The Rates*

<sup>41</sup> Ayckbourn At 50 (Stephen Joseph Theatre souvenir programme)

<sup>42</sup> Watson, pp.33

<sup>43</sup> Allen, pp.80

Dad, I don't think Dad dreamed about anything much, he just snored, I know I heard him as I lay awake thinking about Jenny. When I did get to sleep though, I dreamt about joining the circus.

(The CIRCUS BALLET)

(The Christmas music fades to the sound of bells. It is Christmas morning)<sup>44</sup>

The play opened on 19 December 1960 to “an audience of five with an average age of forty”<sup>45</sup>, the intended school audience having already broken up for the Christmas holidays.

Although the play was a commercial failure and obviously misguided from conception, it is notable for a scene in which two characters tell the same story of Dad's theft of a Christmas hamper. The interpretations of the act are completely different and break the narrative structure to present alternative viewpoints. It has been argued this was a very early use of this technique in contemporary British theatre.<sup>46</sup>

*Dad's Tale* is the final canon play to be credited to Alan's pseudonym Roland Allen; *Standing Room Only*, written the following year, was originally credited to his pseudonym, but was later revived and credited to Alan Ayckbourn.

## **December Bee**

*Description: Title – Alternative*

*December Bee* is the subtitle for the play *Woman In Mind*; it is rarely used for actual productions, but is carried on the covers of the published editions. It refers to the protagonist Susan's distorted language during her breakdown, translated literally as: “Remember Me.”

## **Dividing Line**

*Description: Title - Discarded*

*Dividing Line* is one of a number of titles considered by Alan for the play which was eventually produced as *Absent Friends*. The potential title is listed on a hand-written note of early ideas which also includes the final title.

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<sup>44</sup> Extract from *Dad's Tale*

<sup>45</sup> Ayckbourn At 50

<sup>46</sup> ‘Modern Dramatists: Alan Ayckbourn’, Michael Billington, pp.7 (Grove Press, 1983, ISBN 0394620518)

## Double Hitch

*Description: Grey Play*

Long thought lost, *Double Hitch* is one of three one act plays written by Alan Ayckbourn, although attributed to his pseudonym Roland Allen, written during the first three years of his professional writing career.

The precise origin of *Double Hitch* is unknown; in Alan's biography, the author Paul Allen tentatively dates it as being written in late 1960<sup>47</sup>, however later research revealed a license to produce the play was not granted until 27 February 1962 by the Lord Chamberlain's Office.<sup>48</sup> Strictly speaking, until 1968 a license had to be issued by the Lord Chamberlain's Office for any play to be performed unless the performance was for a private club. Any public performances of the play before 1962 would have been unlicensed, which suggested the play was written later than originally thought.

However in 2009, a former member of Scarborough Theatre Guild Evelyn Corradine supplied The Bob Watson Archive at the Stephen Joseph Theatre with scans of programmes for productions of *Double Hitch* prior to 1962. She was able to date these programmes to 1960 at the latest and, again previously unknown, demonstrated the play was produced several times before February 1961 normally in conjunction with the play *Lonesome Like* by Harold Brighouse. It seem certain the play was premiered at the Library Theatre, Scarborough, in the round but not, as previously thought, in conjunction with another Ayckbourn one act play *Follow The Lover*, which is now known to have been premiered in 1962.

*Double Hitch* was probably first directed by Margaret Boden and comes from a period when Alan recalls writing a number of short one act plays for amateur production. These are known to include *Double Hitch*, *Follow The Lover*, *Love Undertaken* and *The Party Game*. Of the surviving manuscripts, only two copies of *Double Hitch* are known to exist, one held by the British Library and a second held in a private collection.

Unlike the other plays intended for amateur performance from that period, *Double Hitch* had an extended shelf-life. In addition to at least two recorded performances in 1960 (in all likelihood there were several more), it was also staged at the Fourth In-The-Round Festival, at the Library Theatre, Scarborough, by Anlaby Youth Drama Group in September 1963. A further production was presented by Scarborough Technical College Drama Group at the British Drama League Combined Theatre Festival at The Library Theatre, Scarborough, in the mid-1960s.

The plot centres on a young and an elderly newly-wed couple who have been double-booked into a decrepit rural cottage by a dubious man who looks like Blackbeard. The state of the house encourages distinct differences of opinions between the partners of each couple. When the husband of one couple and the wife of the other leave to try and find alternative accommodation without either of their partners' knowledge, those left behind presume the pair have eloped and so pretend to have slept with each other themselves in case the others return. When the partners do return, the original couples are restored presuming they have each been seduced against their wills by the opposite partner. With the couples restored, they all leave the cottage to book into a pub room. The same room, of course.

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<sup>47</sup> Allen, pp.82

<sup>48</sup> Lord Chamberlain's Collection card index, British Library

Phyllis: Darling, you're not a poor man. I'd never have married you if you were.<sup>49</sup>

## Dracula

*Description: Grey Play*

Given that Bram Stoker's *Dracula* is largely set in Whitby, just up the road from Scarborough, it seems only apt that Alan Ayckbourn should at some point write his own version of one of Yorkshire's most famous literary visitors. *Dracula*, as written by Alan Ayckbourn, has very little to do with the actual literary creation though, being a short sketch for the revue *What The Devil!*. This was devised in 1975 by Bob Eaton and Polly Warren for the Library Theatre company to tour to pubs in the Scarborough area with three actors; *Dracula* was not part of the original production.

It was then presented as a late night show at the Library Theatre and lengthened to two acts with an expanded cast of five actors; one of the additions being Alan Ayckbourn's *Dracula* sketch.

It had been assumed that *What The Devil!* – and consequently *Dracula* – was never produced again. However, *Dracula* was performed at least once more as part of a different revue, also compiled by Bob Eaton, produced at the New Victoria Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent in 1992. *The Night Before The Morning After Show* featured a variety of sketches including *Dracula*, although it appears to have been the only sketch taken from *What The Devil!*.

“Alan Ayckbourn's *Dracula* skit proves to be a little known comedy gem.”<sup>50</sup>

The plot of *Dracula* sees the infamous vampire and his hunch-backed henchman Squelch arrive at the home of an unintelligible shepherd Seth, his wife Martha and their peculiar daughter Deidre.

Martha (screaming): Lord help us, what is that?

Squelch: Nnnn.

Dracula: A thousand pardons. May I present my servant Squelch, he won't harm you. Be not alarmed. His appearance is, I confess, disconcerting. But I assure you he is quite harmless. Usually. On the whole. Mainly. More often than not. Come in, Squelch, come in.

Squelch: Nnn. Nnnn.

Seth: Woor.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Extract from *Double Hitch*

<sup>50</sup> The Stage, 16 January 1992

<sup>51</sup> Extract from *Dracula*

## Early Writing

*Description: Ephemera*

Alan Ayckbourn recalls writing from a very early age, influenced by his mother, Mary James, who was a professional writer.

“I watched her write them, because she used to thump them out in the kitchen. And it sounds a corny anecdote, but she really did. I suppose if Mummy had been washing up all day, I’d probably have become a very good washer-up – she gave me a little typewriter and I started to thunder out my own awful tales. I wrote stories and I wanted to be a journalist: later things changed!”<sup>52</sup>

He would continue to write whilst at primary school, particularly during a period when he was ill and at home, creating a play based around Anthony Buckeridge’s *Jennings* novels.<sup>53</sup> When he went to Haileybury, he also recalls writing end-of-term plays; although none of his school-day writing survives.

As a teenager, Alan went straight from school into professional acting and was writing extensively throughout his teenage years, leading up to his first professional commission of *The Square Cat* in 1959 when he was 20. Most of these plays, unfortunately now lost, were early attempts to emulate other writers as Alan learnt his craft and were often read by his mentor Stephen Joseph.

“I began around the age of nine, I suppose! Certainly I was tapping out plays in my early teens and had written a good half dozen before I had my first one professionally produced.”<sup>54</sup>

As it stands, the plays which can be tentatively – but not definitively - dated to this period prior to his first professional commission are: *The Season*; *The Party Game*; *Relative Values*; *Mind Over Matter*; a play inspired by Pirandello; a play inspired by Ionescu.

## Ecraf

*Description: Concept*

*Ecraf* is a concept for a farce that Alan has mentioned repeatedly in interviews since the late 1960s. Whether it is anything more than a clever concept or something that will eventually be realised is anyone’s guess.

Essentially, the concept is a farce which runs backwards – hence the title - presumably structured in the manner of such a play as Harold Pinter’s *Betrayal*.

“I’ve always wanted to play around. I wanted to write one play backwards, which started with a cupboard full of vicars with no trousers on, and then

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<sup>52</sup> Watson, pp.4

<sup>53</sup> Watson, pp.6-7

<sup>54</sup> Alan Ayckbourn personal correspondence, 14 July 1990

wound down to two people having breakfast, And call it whatever farce is backwards – *Ecraft*.”<sup>55</sup>

That the playwright is fond of the concept is highlighted by the fact that 30 years after this quote (which may not even be the earliest reference to *Ecraft*), Alan was still mentioning the proposed play during interviews.

John Moore (Denver Post): What’s your best idea for a play you’ve never written?”

Alan Ayckbourn: *Ecraft*, which is farce backwards. But then farces are notoriously difficult to write. And one that runs backward would be very hard indeed. But it’s there, so, I suppose, all things being equal, I might have a go at it one day.<sup>56</sup>

## **Elevator / Escalator play**

*Description: Concept*

This is another concept occasionally mentioned by Alan Ayckbourn based on a desire to create a play with vertical movement on stage. The initial concept appears to have been for two working escalators on stage – and there have been hints the announced but unwritten 1994 play *Private Fears In Public Places* might have utilised this idea.

In interviews since 1996, Alan has sometimes refined this idea to an elevator play (his home theatre, the Stephen Joseph Theatre in Scarborough, has under stage access and it would be possible to have elevators rising and falling through the stage), but it has remained nothing more than an intriguing concept.

## **Ernest & Delia**

*Description: Ephemera*

Not strictly an Ayckbourn creation, *Ernest & Delia* was a proposed television spin-off from Alan Ayckbourn’s 1975 play *Bedroom Farce*. Following the success of the television adaptation of the National Theatre’s production of *Bedroom Farce* in 1980, Thames Television approached Alan about creating a spin-off series featuring the two elderly characters from the play. The proposal was always contingent on having the actors Michael Gough and Joan Hickson reprise the roles of Ernest and Delia they played on stage (although Gough’s role had been played by Michael Denison in the television adaptation of the play). Alan, who has never shown any interest in writing for television, declined the offer to write the pilot<sup>57</sup>, but cautiously backed the idea of them approaching another writer offering firm suggestions as to how to approach the characters.

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<sup>55</sup> The Times, 4 July 1973

<sup>56</sup> Denver Post, 03 March 2003

<sup>57</sup> Correspondence between Alan Ayckbourn and Philip Jones (director of light entertainment, Thames TV), 30 November 1981

“I think, were I writing them, I’d keep them very much within the confines of the house. Ernest and Delia make only occasional forays elsewhere. They mistrust it.”<sup>58</sup>

A proposed format was suggested to Alan’s agent, Margaret Ramsay, consisting of four series of six half-hour episodes.<sup>59</sup> Lacking Alan’s involvement as a writer, Thames approached the playwright Peter Tinniswood, who Alan had worked with and was a friend of, who was commissioned to write the pilot. Peter had similarly strong feelings about the characters and it seems likely these may have jarred with Thames’ vision for the show.

“Michael Mills [producer of the planned show] was talking about moving Ernest and Delia out of the house and giving them ‘adventures’. I threw my hands up in horror and said that under no circumstances must they be moved from the house, In fact, if we could do everything in the bedroom itself, I should be happy.”<sup>60</sup>

Peter wrote a script for the pilot and Mills set plans in motion to begin filming. However, when Joan Hickson made Alan aware she was unhappy with the piece; Alan decided to withdraw from the project and made clear his intentions on 25 July 1982. Lacking the playwright’s support, Thames confirmed made a decision to halt the project and officially confirmed the project’s termination on 4 August.<sup>61</sup> The only substantive attempt to make a television spin-off of an Ayckbourn play was never discussed again.<sup>62</sup>

Peter Tinniswood died in 2003 and it is doubtful any copies of the pilot script for *Ernest And Delia* still exist.

## **An Evening With PALOS**

*Description: Grey Play*

When the award-winning National Theatre production of *A Chorus Of Disapproval* transferred to the West End in 1986, it was without its leading man Michael Gambon. Into his shoes stepped the acclaimed actor Colin Blakely playing the role of Dafydd ap Llewellyn; tragically his final stage role when he died on 7 May 1987, just two months after the play closed.

The shock death of an actor perceived to be at the height of his career led to a special evening at the Lyric Theatre on 4 October 1987 to commemorate the actor’s life and achievements. Hosted by Albert Finney and directed by Bill Bryden, the event featured contributions from luminaries such as Harold Pinter, Michael Frayn and Alan Ayckbourn. Alan’s contribution was a one act play written specially for the evening to honour the actor’s final role in *A Chorus Of Disapproval*.

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<sup>58</sup> Correspondence between Alan Ayckbourn and Philip Jones, 30 November 1981

<sup>59</sup> Correspondence between Margaret Ramsay and Alan Ayckbourn, 18 January 1982

<sup>60</sup> Correspondence between Peter Tinniswood and Alan Ayckbourn, 8 February 1982

<sup>61</sup> Correspondence between Philip Jones and Alan Ayckbourn, 4 August 1982

<sup>62</sup> There have been several proposals for spin-offs from Alan’s plays, mostly centred around *The Norman Conquests*, but *Ernest & Delia* is unique in being the only one to get further than a proposal.

An *Evening With PALOS* centres on a rehearsed reading, by several members of Pendon Amateur Light Operatic Society, of Murdoch Parkes' epic poem on rural life *A View From The Pump* (Parkes being one of Pendon's most pre-eminent authors and a major influence for Dylan Thomas - or possibly vice versa). Being PALOS, things run far from smoothly.

The role of Dafydd for the evening was taken by David Jason and the production featured several members of the National Theatre company reprising their roles from *A Chorus of Disapproval*. *An Evening With PALOS* has never been performed again and has never been published.

Dafydd: So on with the show, to coin an already well-minted phrase. Tonight we present for you a short, rehearsed - (*glancing at his colleagues*) – a semi-rehearsed - play-reading of an unfinished fragment by a writer - sadly no longer with us - but in his day a living legend - certainly within the borough boundaries of Pendon itself - I refer of course to the late Murdoch Parkes. Those of you who were fortunate to see his fine adaptation - some years ago admittedly - of *The Tale Of The Genji, Almond Blossom Time* or those of you who perhaps admired his final, though sadly unrealised, musical biography of Lord Nelson, *Kiss Me, Hardy Hardy, Kiss Me* - will know what a treat we have in store for us tonight. As I say, this is but an unfinished fragment. But what a fragment, ladies and gentlemen, what a fragrant fragment. Discovered in the basement of his bungalow by his lovely widow and leading contralto Evadne Parkes, discovered as the result of an unfortunate incident with a faulty gas-fired central heating boiler - we have reason on this occasion to raise our voices and say, God Bless the Gas Board. For this is a bird's eye picture, a worm's level view of life within a living village. Intended originally as a panoramic experience to be spoken and sung by a cast of ninety-five plus brass band, I have tonight not without some regret been forced to render it down to be spoken by a mere six voices.

Enid: (*sotto*) Five.<sup>63</sup>

## Fancy Meeting You

*Description: Title - Alternative*

*Fancy Meeting You* was the original title for *Table Manners*; one part of *The Norman Conquests* trilogy. After its world premiere at the Library Theatre, Scarborough, in 1973, the title was altered for its original London production at the Greenwich Theatre, which later transferred to the Globe Theatre.

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<sup>63</sup> Extract from *An Evening With PALOS*

## Father's Day

*Description: Title - Discarded*

When first performed at the Library Theatre, Scarborough, in 1965, *Relatively Speaking* had the title *Meet My Father*. However, the producer Peter Bridge - who had optioned the play for London - was unhappy with this, feeling it was a little too provincial and he asked Alan to think of a new title. As a result, the play went through several title revisions on its journey to the West End including *Father's Day*, before finally settling on *Relatively Speaking*.

“By the following February [1967] the play having been re-christened *Taken For Granted*, *Father's Day* and finally *Relatively Speaking* was in rehearsal in London.”<sup>64</sup>

## Five To Five

*Description: Title - Discarded*

*Five To Five* was an early potential title for what would become the play *Confusions*. The title playing on the fact it consists of five plays performed by five people.<sup>65</sup>

## FlatSpin

*Description: Abandoned*

For the 2001 summer season at the Stephen Joseph Theatre, Alan Ayckbourn set out to revive the repertory company tradition at the Scarborough venue. He intended to write two plays featuring the same cast and the same set which would run in repertory with each other. In the autumn of 2000 he began writing a duology, but by Christmas realized neither play fitted the bill so he discarded these ideas – of which no details are known about the original *FlatSpin* – and started writing afresh.

“I started work on two linked plays in October of last year (2000), but a few days before Christmas, I realised that one of them was horribly wrong. Then I realised the other wasn't worth doing at all, and ditched them both.... I thought 'Wow. You're not secure in the process even now.' But my maturity meant I could bin both original plays. I remember pressing the delete key on my computer and thinking: 'Now what have I done?'"<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> *Relatively Speaking* programme note, 1968

<sup>65</sup> Correspondence Between Michael Codron and Alan Ayckbourn, 27 September 1974

<sup>66</sup> Artscene, June 2001

## Floor 71

*Description: Screenplay*

Following the completion of Alan's first play *The Square Cat* in 1959 and his marriage to his first wife Christine Roland in the same year, a newspaper article local to Christine's parents ran a story about the couple noting they were writing a number of treatments for television dramas, which they hoped might lead to screenplay commissions. A number of these plot outlines survive in the Ayckbourn Archive, which are presumably the result of these efforts. It is worth noting that Alan's mentor Stephen Joseph had close associations with the TV company Associated Redifussion and the couple may have been looking to take advantage of his contacts.

*Floor 71* is a proposal (incomplete as it stands) for an hour-long futuristic drama, set in vast buildings from which people never leave as everything they need is present in each building – somewhat reminiscent of the Mega City One city-blocks created for the British comic strip *Judge Dredd* during the 1970s. Each floor is the equivalent of a city with each corridor a street, thereby giving the impression of a real city. The action is set on Floor 71 in a world where social standing is judged by floors; the higher one's position in the world, the higher the floor occupied.<sup>67</sup>

“At the very top, here, we have floor 96 and at the very bottom, here, is floor five. What, asks a child, is underneath floor five, Miss? Nothing at all, she replies guardedly, you just fall and fall and fall.”<sup>68</sup>

## Folk From T'Smoke

*Description: Screenplay*

*Folk From T'Smoke* was discovered in the Ayckbourn Archive in 2009 and is little more than a collection of unorganised hand-written notes. It comprises of several unfinished sketches which appear to have been written as the basis for a television production; although it is impossible to say with complete certainty what the author's intentions were.

Each sketch features a presenter, Trish, filming the latest edition of *Folk From T'Smoke: Singers And Their Songs From The North*. Each sketch has the same format with filming beginning before stopping as it develops into a rant by Trish with commentary by the film and stage-crew, much of which is conducted while Trish's microphone is still live. Although unfinished, some of the ideas from the sketches recur in later plays *A Chorus Of Disapproval* and *Man Of The Moment*.

Although undated, the notes do include a suggested cast list featuring members of the Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round company, which narrows the period it was written very specifically to the year 1977 and the company which was working in Scarborough at that point.

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<sup>67</sup> *Floor 71* synopsis held in the Ayckbourn Archive

<sup>68</sup> Extract from *Floor 71* synopsis held in the Ayckbourn Archive

## Follow The Lover

*Description: Grey Play*

*Follow The Lover* is one of several one act plays written by Alan Ayckbourn during the formative years of his professional playwriting career. It was originally presented during 1962 in a double bill alongside an earlier one act play, *Double Hitch*.

It was written by Alan under the pseudonym of Roland Allen, probably in early 1962. Although, intriguingly, no copy of *Follow The Lover* is held at the British Library and there is no record of a license being issued for performance by the Lord Chamberlain's Office.

The play was directed by Margaret Boden and Alan vaguely recalls acting in this production in the role of Phil. It was performed in the round at the Library Theatre, Scarborough, and does not appear to have been performed again; *Follow The Lover* has also never been published and is considered one of Alan Ayckbourn's Grey Plays.

The plot revolves around an older couple, Mr and Mrs Poulton Smith, who each believe the other is having an affair and have each hired detectives, Philip and Jennifer, to discover the truth. Naturally both of the couple believes the presence of the attractive young detectives is proof of each other's infidelities.

Mr Poulton-Smith: But I never make mistakes. Can't afford to – not in my business.

Young Lady: But your wife is hardly business.

Mr Poulton-Smith: Of course she's business – what else do you call her? I've invested a lot of money in that woman and if it looks as though the market is going to crash, I mean to sell out – quick.<sup>69</sup>

## GamePlan

*Description: Abandoned*

In the autumn of 2000, Alan Ayckbourn began writing a duology with the intent of reviving the repertory company tradition at the Stephen Joseph Theatre. Both plays would share the same set and the same cast and would be performed in repertory with each other. However by Christmas, Alan realised the first play – it is not known whether this piece was actually then called *GamePlan* – was not working and he ditched the idea and began again from scratch. Just to compound matters, the second play was also abandoned as Alan felt his initial concept for that did not work either.

"I started work on two linked plays in October of last year (2000), but a few days before Christmas, I realised that one of them was horribly wrong. Then I realised the other wasn't worth doing at all, and ditched them both."<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Extract from *Follow The Lover*

<sup>70</sup> Artscene, June 2001

## **The Game's The Thing**

*Description: Title – Discarded*

One of several proposed titles for *Time And Time Again*, which Alan Ayckbourn had written in his early notes for the play.

## **The Garden Pact**

*Description: Title – Discarded*

Another one of several proposed titles for *Time And Time Again* which Alan Ayckbourn had written in his early notes for the play.

## **The Ghost Of 'Enry Albert**

*Description: Ephemera*

*The Ghost Of 'Enry Albert* is not a play but actually a song written by Alan Ayckbourn with Bob Eaton and presented as part of the 1975 revue *What The Devil!*. This was a touring show with a supernatural theme, which was later expanded and performed at the Library Theatre, Scarborough. Alan contributed two pieces to the revue, this song and the one act sketch *Dracula*.

The Malcolm referred to performing a soft shoe shuffle is the actor Malcolm Hebden; well known for his role of Norris Cole in the long-running television soap opera *Coronation Street*. At the time he was in performing in his first season at Scarborough.

### **The Ghost Of 'Enry Albert**

I've had only one ambition  
And it's always been the same  
To get married and have children round me feet.  
When I met this electrician  
'Enry Albert was his name  
Then I really thought me happiness complete.

Henry was a little terror  
He was only five foot three

Quite the nicest geezer you could hope to meet  
Till he made his final error  
When he tried to carry me  
Through the doorway of our brand new bridal suite.

Now, I told him not to do so  
I've got heavy bones, you see  
Thus, he breathed his last upon our Welcome mat  
Leaving me to count my trousseau  
In my see-through negligee.  
From a bride into a widow just like that.

As a token of my sorrow  
I decided I'd observe  
Deepest mourning all of Tuesday afternoon  
But before teatime tomorrow  
And before I lost me nerve  
I'd remarry to forget my honeymoon.

I looked round in desperation  
Till a sailor boy called Fred  
'E decided we would make a lovely pair.  
But imagine our frustration  
As we cuddled up in bed  
When we saw the ghost of 'Enry standing there.

#### CHORUS

What's a blushing bride to do upon. her wedding night?  
How's she ever going to get herself enjoyed  
When the bridegroom dims the light and just shrivels up with fright  
At the sight of 'Enry Albert Murgatroyd.

So my second true love story

Ended briefly as the first  
Just as I was all prepared to heed the call  
Lying there for Queen and Glory  
As I called out "do your worst"  
Fred ran screaming and stark naked down the hall.

Still it's always my contention  
They can't blame you if you've tried  
I forget the times I've wed and changed me name.  
But I hardly need to mention  
As he bends to kiss his bride  
'Enry Albert always spoils his little game.

#### CHORUS

Now I've had no education  
As you're probably aware  
But I know I'd make some man an honest wife.  
For I've always known my station  
And I've always paid my fare  
On this grand old railway line that we call life.

Listen, ladies, heed a warning  
When your husband is deceased  
Don't be hasty in your race to start anew  
Give the bloke a decent mourning  
For a week or two at least  
Or you'll find the bleeders started haunting you,

#### CHORUS

(MALCOLM IN GHOST OUTFIT, DOES A SOFT SHOE SHUFFLE)

REPEAT CHORUS<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Extract from *What The Devil!* script (two act version)

## Grass Widow

*Description: Title - Discarded*

*Grass Widow* was an early proposed title for Alan Ayckbourn's 2002 thriller, *Snake In The Grass*.

## Haileybury Revues

*Description: Ephemera*

Alan Ayckbourn's first real interest in theatre developed whilst he was a pupil boarding at Haileybury. One of the masters, Edgar Matthews, encouraged Alan to take an interest in theatre and would become an early guide and mentor to the budding young actor.

Although Alan was primarily interested in acting at the time, he did apparently contribute sketches to the end of term plays. These – alongside the *Jennings* play written at prep school – were the sum of Alan Ayckbourn's playwriting interests as a student, although nothing survives of the writing.

“I used to write the house play at the end of every term. That was in the way of revue sketches, really. And I also edited the house magazine. Which, because I was such an inefficient editor and could never get any contributions, I used to finish up writing myself as well, under various assumed names.”<sup>72</sup>

## Hark At Barker

*Description: Screenplay*

Alan Ayckbourn has rarely ventured into the realms of television, being most happy working in theatre. Early in his career though, he did contribute material for the comedian Ronnie Barker's first major television sketch show *Hark At Barker*.

At the time Alan was working as a radio drama producer at the BBC and was contractually forbidden to write for any other company, but Barker – who had appeared in the disastrously received 1964 West End production of Alan's play *Mr Whatnot* – persuaded him to contribute some sketches for the first season of the show in 1969. Alan thus wrote under the pseudonym Peter Caulfield and provided linking sketches for the series featuring the character Lord Rustless, who was inspired by the character Lord Slingsby-Craddock which Barker had played in *Mr Whatnot*.

“That character stayed at the back of my mind and he became Lord Rustless, because I [Ronnie Barker] enjoyed playing him so much. He's also in *The Picnic* and *By the Sea*, but he just mutters in those. He's not

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<sup>72</sup> Watson, pp.10

called Lord Rustless, no-one's called anything. But to me he was Rustless. He was one of my favourite characters. When I did *Hark at Barker* - that was him, albeit with sketches. Alan Ayckbourn wrote all the links for that show but I don't think he admits it. He called himself Peter Caulfield, but I don't know whether he would like people to know that was him or not. He liked the character in *Mr Whatnot*, so he knew what the character was about. Rustless was really giving a lecture to the audience on a subject, such as "communication" or "servants" or something and he would illustrate it with sketches, which enabled me to play lots of different parts.”<sup>73</sup>

## Haunting Julia

*Description: Variant*

A minor variation, but *Haunting Julia* was originally conceived and presented in 1994 as a one act play without an interval. Complaints from the Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round's accounts department that bar takings substantially dropped as a result of this decision, led Alan to produce it as a two-act version when he revived the play in 1999 at the Stephen Joseph Theatre.

The two act script was unaltered with the exception of an interval at a cliff-hanging moment. When the play resumed, the final few lines of the previous act were repeated to emphasise time had not moved forward and the play was – in essence – still in real time.

The play was restored to its one act form when published by Faber in the volume *Alan Ayckbourn: Plays 3* in 2002. When it was revived in 2008 at the Stephen Joseph Theatre as part of the *Things That Go Bump* season, it was also presented as the one act version with Alan Ayckbourn stating the interval ruined the tension.

“We are taking part in a séance. We're trying to triangulate an image of the girl with these actors on stage, which is why there's no interval: there's no way you can take 15 minutes from a séance to have a drink and come back and say: 'Where were we? Was anybody there?'”<sup>74</sup>

It is also worth noting that *Haunting Julia* is one of only several plays Alan has conceived as an end-stage play and which was intended to open The McCarthy auditorium at the Stephen Joseph Theatre for its original intended completion in 1994. However, delays in the renovation of Scarborough's former Odeon cinema meant the theatre did not actually open until April 1996. With the play written two years prior to the point when he could actually stage it, Alan decided to premiere the play in the Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round in 1994. When he revived it in 1999, it would finally be produced as originally intended for the end-stage in The McCarthy.

“I remember originally thinking that I would write something for The McCarthy. I think there were two things changed: The McCarthy was delayed and I also had a time-span in my mind and *Haunting Julia* was very clear in my head and I didn't want to delay writing it. I hate the idea

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<sup>73</sup> The Authorised Biography of Ronnie Barker, Bob McCabe, (BBC Books, 2005, ISBN 978-0563522461)

<sup>74</sup> Interview with Simon Murgatroyd, May 2008

of sitting on a play, deliberately not giving birth to it as it was already three dimensional in my head. And therefore I did do it in Westwood [the Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round] in the round.”<sup>75</sup>

## Henceforward...

*Description: Abandoned*

That *Henceforward...* was abandoned, destroyed and then rewritten - probably in much the same form - is one of the less well known pieces of Ayckbourn ephemera. He has only publicly referred to his problems with the play in the second edition of Ian Watson's book *Conversations With Ayckbourn*, published in 1988, and an interview for LA Theater Works in 2010.

In 1987, Alan began writing his new play *Henceforward...*, which he completed but then apparently destroyed as it was felt to be too dark. His uncertainty about the play was later revealed to be as a result of the reaction of his then partner and later wife, Heather Stoney, to the piece.

“I wrote it on my word processor and then showed it to Heather, who hated it. She said it was so serious, so awful that she couldn't bear it. So I erased it, without keeping a copy. But when we only had four days until rehearsals, I just sat down and wrote it again.”<sup>76</sup>

Having apparently destroyed the play and with less than a week before the play was due to go into rehearsal, Alan announced he would instead be writing a piece called *Meeting Like This*. As noted though, with such a limited time-frame to complete the play, Alan returned to *Henceforward...*, having actually kept a back-up of the original play. He rehabilitated *Henceforward...*, keeping the basic plot of the play but subtly altering a major dynamic.

“I've found in one or two cases that I have to write out the subtext, actually put it on to paper, a very black format of a play - and then find ways of telling it which are bearable to watch. Some of my plays are very, very dark, and if you wrote *Woman in Mind* without the humour (although there will always be people who will say, 'This is what should be happening'), I claim that people would not watch it. Or rather, the people who should be watching it wouldn't watch it. Those who are already converted to this sort of thing don't need to watch it anyway. You have to be careful how you get your laughter from a subject but, at the same time, a subject needs its laughter just to make it flow. In this case [*Henceforward...*], in the end I was writing about one or two themes I have obviously touched on before: what people do to other people, particularly men to women, and also, something I haven't covered before, the nature of the creative artist, and his relationship with reality, and people, and those he purports to love.”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Interview with Simon Murgatroyd, May 2008

<sup>76</sup> Northwest Portfolio, March 1989

<sup>77</sup> Watson, pp.143

It had never been explicitly stated what element Alan changed in the play until an interview for LA Theater Works, first broadcast in 2011. Recorded to promote the company's radio adaptation of *Henceforward...*, Alan candidly revealed for the first time what changed in the play (and that there was, contrary to the interview given in 1989 and quoted earlier, a back-up copy of the play).

“I'd written it [*Henceforward...*] and the speech at the beginning, he [Jerome] says, “I want to write about the misery and the despair in the world and what I want is to make everyone aware of how dreadful life is.” It was really the most depressing play and it spiraled down. And then Heather [Stoney] turned to me at the end and said: “You can't possibly do this! It's just terrible, it's so depressing.” And I went: “Well, right.” Picked up the hard-copy and ripped it in half, rather dramatically and I said: “Right, that's it, I'll write another one.” And she said: “Well, I'm sorry, but that's the way I feel.” And after she'd gone, of course I had a copy and just had another floppy disc hidden under the desk and I just wrote ‘for hate, read love’ and I just inverted it and it made all the difference.”<sup>78</sup>

## **The Honeymoon**

*Description: Unproduced*

Next to nothing is known about *The Honeymoon*, a play written by Alan shortly after his marriage to Christine Roland in 1959. He has never spoken publicly about the play and the only written reference to it is a quote from Christine in Paul Allen's Ayckbourn biography, *Grimacing At The Edge*

When Allen enquired about the play, the playwright believed it got no further than a reading but its precise history and contents are likely to be shrouded in mystery forever as no copy of the play is known to exist and there is no record of it ever being performed.

“We enjoyed a happy and snowy Christmas [1958] including an out-of-work actor who arrived on the doorstep with no money and nowhere to stay and who later appeared as ‘HB’ in *The Honeymoon*, a play Alan wrote shortly after our marriage the following year.”<sup>79</sup>

## **‘Hotel’ Play**

*Description: Concept*

The ‘Hotel’ play was a concept discussed by Alan Ayckbourn in an interview with The Stage newspaper in 2007. The sheer scale of the piece suggests it is both nothing more than a flight of fancy and a means of highlighting an issue mentioned earlier in the interview: that British theatres are increasingly being run by administrators and accountants and that financial considerations are often given priority over artistic considerations.

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<sup>78</sup> Interview with Susan Lowenberg, first streamed at [www.latw.org](http://www.latw.org) on 1 January 2011.

<sup>79</sup> Christine Roland quoted in Allen, pp.66

“I want to do a play where we turn this whole building into a hotel. The main auditorium is a conference on some incredibly boring subject. The whole audience has delegate badges. This man, from some distant country, talks to them in a difficult accent. Actors planted in the audience take the audience off to different areas and they get involved in various different shows all over the building. The actors can go off and have lunch. They'll say, 'Oh, I've got to go back now and do a fight scene in the bar'.

"You'd need 50 actors and about 30 directors. It just carries on all day and all night. You don't know what is real or what isn't. People would come from miles. The accountants would say, 'These figures don't stand up'. But it would be great fun.”<sup>80</sup>

## House & Garden

### *Description: Concept*

*House & Garden* is famously Alan Ayckbourn's 1999 creation in which two plays are performed simultaneously in two separate auditoria sharing the same cast with the characters moving between the two plays. Although both plays can be seen independently of each other, together they form a much wider narrative.

The impetus for writing the play came about as a result of being based in a venue with two auditoria; the Stephen Joseph Theatre is home to both The Round and The McCarthy auditoria. Alan decided in 1999 to write something epic for his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday and created *House & Garden* to utilize both spaces.

What is not well known is this wasn't a new idea, but one which Alan had thought of 24 years earlier when the Sheffield Playhouse has independently asked him to write two plays for their auditoriums. Although this project never came to fruition, Alan's solution of two interlinked plays is likely the genesis of what would eventually become *House & Garden*.

“It started at Sheffield Playhouse, where they have a main auditorium and a studio theater. I breezed in there one day to see the director, and he asked me for a play. I said fine (I always say fine to everybody). Twenty minutes later the studio theatre director asked me for a play, and I said fine again. I then thought it would be a lovely joke to have a play going on in the big house and the off-stage action going on in the studio, with the actors cross-fertilizing.”<sup>81</sup>

That this idea was something Alan never abandoned and was looking at the opportunity to write and direct in subsequent years is confirmed by a letter to the BBC in 1994, proposing Alan write two plays for television which would be screened simultaneously on BBC1 and BBC2.

“I've always wanted to write a play for two theatres simultaneously – and might still do so for our new theatre in Scarborough when it opens.”<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> The Stage, 22 March 2007

<sup>81</sup> Los Angeles Times, 5 October 1975

<sup>82</sup> Correspondence from Alan Ayckbourn to Rob Walker, 2 October 1994

## **A House Divided**

*Description: Title – Discarded*

One of several proposed titles for *Absent Friends* which Alan Ayckbourn had written in his early notes for the play.

## **How The Other Half Loves**

*Description: Variant*

*How The Other Half Loves* was originally performed at the Library Theatre, Scarborough, in 1969 and became Alan Ayckbourn's second major commercial success when it transferred to London in 1970.

Prior to its West End premiere, the play had a try-out at the Phoenix Theatre, Leicester, as well as a short tour during which the play underwent minor revisions and refinements. Although there was apparently an element of sharpening of the script, the plot and the majority of the text stayed the same.

When the play opened in London however, it arrived with the actor Robert Morley in tow. This larger-than-life actor, playing the role of Frank Foster, was a huge box office draw and had a strong belief – probably not mistaken – the majority of the audience came to see him rather than the play. As a result, what was an ensemble play came to be dominated by Morley, who proceeded to take enormous liberties with the script, improvising on a nightly basis. Frequently the play only bore a passing resemblance to the script as Alan had written it or how it would eventually be published; although some of the alterations in the definitive script owe something to Morley's own contributions.

“Robert Morley was a great ad-libber and history has a way of revenging itself. So within the script are the very best of Robert's jokes – now claimed as my own!”<sup>83</sup>

It should be noted that at the time Alan was not quite so sanguine about the situation, which from rehearsal through to performance was affected by Morley's improvisations and contributions.

“I didn't actually go to see it after a bit, because there was no point in getting unnecessarily upset. I was a younger, more vulnerable author then. The night I did see it, I was terribly upset because nothing seemed to be as we had originally arranged it.”<sup>84</sup>

Other alterations to the final script were also prompted by an unexpected intervention in the original production by the playwright during the play's original production in 1969.

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<sup>83</sup> *How The Other Half Loves* follow up talk with Alan Ayckbourn, Stephen Joseph Theatre, Scarborough, 18 June 2009

<sup>84</sup> Watson, pp.58

“It's had three different endings and several beginnings and I won't say that the middle hasn't been altered from time to time. For several performances early on I was actually forced, through illness in the cast, to take over the part of Frank. I distinguished myself, not only by having to carry a script (I can never learn my own lines), but by actually losing several pages during the action and having to ad-lib a scene. My fellow actors, confronted by the sight of this actor-director-author in full flow, spouting fresh dialogue, stood uncertainly about convinced that these must be new re-writes about which they hadn't been told. I later rushed off, jotted it down, and it's in there somewhere to this day.”<sup>85</sup>

## **If I Were You**

*Description: Concept*

*If I Were You* is Alan Ayckbourn's 70th play, which premiered in 2006. An early draft of the play also exists – a rarity for Alan – although there is no indication of when it was written in relation to the finished play.

The differences between the original and the final draft largely comprise the omission of three characters; the removal of a hotel foyer from the composite set; altered names and a variation in how the play's plot twist is presented. While the plot is practically identical, the finished play is leaner, tighter and puts almost all its emphasis on the central family to the benefit of the script.

Pat: What's he need to learn boxing for?

Mike: Because he's getting beaten up at school, love. No son of mine's going to get beaten up at school. Not without putting up a fight.<sup>86</sup>

## **Incommunicado**

*Description: Title – Discarded*

A proposed title for a play conceived by Alan Ayckbourn circa 1994. The title and brief notes are written on the back of a set-sketch for the world premiere of *Communicating Doors*. Although the limited nature of the notes do not obviously refer to any completed work, there is a possibility this was his earliest idea – and thus his earliest working title – for his 2000 play *Virtual Reality*.

## **'Ionescu' Play**

*Description: Unproduced*

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<sup>85</sup> *How The Other Half Loves* programme, 1973

<sup>86</sup> Extract from *If I Were You* (first version)

Prior to writing his first professional commission, *The Square Cat*, Alan Ayckbourn has frequently noted he had written approximately nine plays. Most of these plays have not survived, but apparently one of the plays was in the style of Ionescu (the French dramatist who pioneered Theatre Of The Absurd).

“I’d written a little before then [*The Square Cat*]. Pseudo Pirandello and Ionescu. All awful plays, so awful no actor would even read them.”<sup>87</sup>

“I was very influenced by Ionescu.”<sup>88</sup>

## **It Could Be Any One Of Us**

*See Sight Unseen*

## **It Could Be Any One Of Us**

*Description: Variant*

*It Could Be Any One Of Us* was premiered at the Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round in October 1983. For several years Alan had toyed with the idea of a thriller – he had made notes for the thriller *Sight Unseen* in 1980 – but had not actually written one. When he did write *It Could Be Any One Of Us* in 1982, the finished play was unusual in that the protagonist altered every evening; the assailant of the piece being randomly chosen by the drawing of a playing card in the opening scene of each performance.

The play was relatively successful, although it did not transfer to the West End and was perceived as having a flaw: no murder victim.

“As a writer, a major problem I had was in justifying why there was a complete household of homicidal maniacs! I’m prepared to admit there may be one, but that an entire family is capable of killing struck me as strange....”<sup>89</sup>

Although the play proved to be quite popular in Germany, Alan was unhappy with it and it was never published. In 1996, he revived the play at the Stephen Joseph Theatre in Scarborough, having re-written it to include a murder half-way through. This version, which satisfies the tropes of the genre, was published and is now regarded as the definitive version of *It Could Be Any One Of Us*. The original version of the play has now been withdrawn and is held only in archive.

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<sup>87</sup> Wigan Evening Post, 1 July 1980

<sup>88</sup> Watson, pp.52

<sup>89</sup> Scarborough Evening News, August 1996

## **I To I**

*Description: Title – Discarded*

*I To I* was the original title of Alan Ayckbourn's 70<sup>th</sup> play which was completed just weeks before he suffered a stroke in February 2006. In correspondence, the play is titled *I To I*<sup>90</sup>, although when it was then announced to the Stephen Joseph Theatre company in June 2006, the title had been amended to *If I Were You*.

However, it very briefly reverted to *I To I* when the company was informed of the change shortly afterwards, before being restored to its final title of *If I Were You* several weeks later. At least one early draft of the script and a rough sketch of the set exist in the Ayckbourn Archive with the title *I To I*.<sup>91</sup>

## **Jeeves**

*Description: Withdrawn*

*Jeeves* was the infamous collaboration between Alan Ayckbourn and the composer Andrew Lloyd Webber, which resulted in one of the great flops of musical theatre.

Based predominantly on P G Wodehouse's book *The Code Of The Woosters*, *Jeeves* opened at Her Majesty's Theatre, London, on 22 April 1975 and closed on 24 May 1975 having being vilified by the critics. It was directed by Eric Thompson, composed by Andrew Lloyd Webber with book and lyrics by Alan Ayckbourn, designed by Voytek, Choreographed by Christopher Bruce and featured David Hemmings as Bertie Wooster. None of whom had ever been involved in a major West End musical.

An extended and in-depth look at the musical *Jeeves* can be found in the article *Behind The Scenes With Jeeves*.

## **'Jennings' Play**

*Description: Ephemera*

Almost certainly Alan Ayckbourn's first 'play', this was an adaptation of one of Anthony Buckeridge's *Jennings* novels written by Alan while still at prep school and performed at the end of one term. The novels – the first of which *Jennings Goes To School* was published in 1950, following the character's radio premiere *Jennings Learns The Ropes* in 1948 - are set in a boarding school and feature an impulsive young pupil who frequently gets into trouble. Having heard the radio broadcasts as a child, Alan was very influenced by *Jennings*.

“When I was nine or ten I used to roll around on the floor laughing at the *Jennings* stories. First I heard them broadcast, but that was in those happy days when radio used to do that sort of thing. Then I read them.

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<sup>90</sup> Correspondence between Alan Ayckbourn and Amanda Saunders, 16 February 2006

<sup>91</sup> Various company memos, Stephen Joseph Theatre, Spring 2006

“By the time I was eleven I wanted to be Derbyshire more than anything in the world. As a result, I wrote – or rather plagiarised – my first play from a *Jennings* book. I forget which one. I do recall there was a very good part for Derbyshire, though. Alas, I fell ill and never played the part. Sadder still, isolated in the school sanatorium, I never even got to see it. All rather Jennings-like in a way.”<sup>92</sup>

Unfortunately – or perhaps fortunately from the playwright’s perspective – the play has not survived.

“My first play was actually produced at my Sussex prep school. I had started reading Anthony Buckridge's *Jennings* stories which reflected my own lot as an unhappy, homesick boarding school boy, left to fend for himself away from home in an alien, virtually all male institution. The *Jennings* books provided a refreshingly humorous perspective, mirroring my own life. I particularly identified with the bookish, unworldly character of Derbyshire, Jennings' best friend. Quite illegally and in total breach of the author's copyright, I adapted one *Jennings* story, turning it into a dramatic vehicle in which I intended to star as Derbyshire. Alas the best theatrical plans, as I later was to discover professionally, are never to be relied upon. On the day of the performance, I was in the school sanatorium quarantined with measles. I not only failed to star but missed the entire show which went ahead with a last minute understudy.”<sup>93</sup>

It was also the first play to be subjected to scrutiny by his peers. Fortunately, the reviews would get better....

“I plagiarised one of Anthony Buckeridge’s *Jennings* books, adapting it as a play with myself in the starring role, and presenting it to a reluctant prep-school audience. But I then fell ill, and had to hand the whole thing over to someone else. When I asked a friend how it had gone, he said: “S’all right.” That was my first review.”<sup>94</sup>

## **The Jollies**

### *Description: Concept*

In 2002, Alan Ayckbourn set out to write a family show for the Christmas slot at the Stephen Joseph Theatre, inspired by the country’s growing obsession with reality television shows such as *Big Brother*.

The premise of the play, *The Jollies*, involved a family living under the constant eye of the camera who begin to realise things aren’t quite what they seem. This plot information was passed on to the Stephen Joseph Theatre marketing department and letters sent out to schools in June; the first two weeks of the Christmas schedule being geared entirely towards school

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<sup>92</sup> Alan Ayckbourn, 26 February 1995

<sup>93</sup> *With Great Pleasure*, BBC Radio 3, 2 April 2009

<sup>94</sup> The Guardian, 5 October 2010

bookings with schools being informed about the Christmas show as early as possible and well in advance of the summer holidays.

What actually transpired was very different to what was advertised. Having announced the play in June, Alan began writing it at the start of August but suffered from writer's block and wasn't able to write the play he'd originally announced. A week later he contacted the theatre and announced there would be another play with a different title – neither of which he was sure of yet!

Fortunately, three weeks later, Alan was inspired and wrote a new play using the same title *The Jollies*, but totally different in content to his initial idea. The schools which had already booked were actually not informed of the change – although press releases and subsequent letters made no secret of the totally different plot – and there is no record of any school actually noticing the change and querying it with the theatre.

“I cleared a writing space three weeks ago and hit a brick wall. Total disaster. Nothing happened. I said to my wife, Heather, that's it - that's the end, I'm finished. Then I got back from Bath on Sunday and began a completely new play. It's got the same title as the one I'd abandoned, *The Jollies* - because we'd already sold 1500 seats - but it's a brand-new piece.”<sup>95</sup>

## **The Jubilee Show**

*Description: Grey Play*

Occasionally there are plays which are genuinely forgotten or lost. In the case of Alan Ayckbourn, this refers generally to very early unproduced plays. However, *The Jubilee Show* is a case of a play which was professionally produced at the Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round, but details of which were never recorded and it was forgotten and all mention of it lost for thirty years.

In 2007, the sole known surviving copy of *The Jubilee Show* was found at the back of a filing cabinet in the Stephen Joseph Theatre; there were no written details as to what it actually was nor was there any record of it having been performed.

*The Jubilee Show* is in fact a full-length revue which dates back to the 25th anniversary of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1977. The Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round was already celebrating the Jubilee with a successful lunchtime show called *Westwood Coronation Day Street Party* by Bob Eaton, which had proved to be a tremendous hit and, as a result, it was decided to mount a one-off revue for the actual night of the Jubilee celebrations. Mervyn Watson, then a director at the theatre, did the research and Alan shaped it into a revue with songs. The piece is ostensibly a trip through the major events of the previous 25 years delivered as a slightly surreal news broadcast, interspaced with music and songs. The entire acting company was involved alongside accompaniment by the pianist Michael Garrick. The play was staged on 7 June, 1977, to a practically empty house. What had seemed a good idea in the wake of *Westwood Coronation Day Street Party's* success (which had already been performed that day to a full house) was tempered in hindsight with the realisation most people were either

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<sup>95</sup> The Guardian, 4 September 2002

watching the celebrations on TV that evening or taking part in the myriad other events organised to celebrate the day.

The revue was never performed again and was forgotten. Because it was a late addition to the season, it was not included in any brochures and no flyers or programmes for the play survive – although it is not known whether these were even produced. The only public mention of *The Jubilee Show* known to exist is an advert from the Scarborough Evening News found in The Bob Watson Archive in 2009, although it does not even carry the final name of the revue.

The discovery of the script in 2007 led to the play being identified and its place in the Stephen Joseph Theatre's history restored. As it had been performed, but never published or made available to produce again, *The Jubilee Show* was classified as one of Alan Ayckbourn's Grey Plays.

“1967. The death of Stephen Joseph and the return of the professional company to the Library Theatre, Scarborough. You know, it beats me what people see in them. I mean, for a start there's no curtain, is there? I mean, if you're going to have theatre, you've got to have a curtain. Like the National Theatre. Well, not the Olivier Theatre because that doesn't have a curtain. Nor the Cottesloe. But the Lyttelton Theatre's got a curtain. I know it keeps sticking and you can only see Ralph Richardson's feet but it has got a curtain. And what about those backs? I mean, I'm not spending good money to see people's backs. I mean, I haven't been mind you. The wife goes. She enjoys it but I don't like the sound of it. I like a curtain.”<sup>96</sup>

## Just Between Ourselves

*Category: Concept*

As has been mentioned previously, it is very rare for actual documentation to survive offering an insight into the development of Alan Ayckbourn's plays between concept and the final manuscript. For *Just Between Ourselves*, several pages of early hand-written character notes survive though, which give an insight into the author's early thoughts on the characters and their paths through the play.

The earliest surviving concept paints a portrait not only of Vera undergoing a breakdown as a result of Dennis's actions – which is a major part of the final play – but that Dennis's actions are themselves driven by depressions and mood-swings. If *Just Between Ourselves* is considered one of Alan's bleakest plays, it is hard not to think from these few notes that it might have been even bleaker.

Dennis – The dominant, the ambitious – always a helping hand to his friend – dissolution into manic depression. The repercussions he causes.

His wife (Vera?) – who bears the brunt of his variations. What starts as a game (her clumsiness and general dimness) finishes as a total lack of self-

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<sup>96</sup> Extract from *The Jubilee Show*

confidence and neurosis – inability to cope with him. Wanting to get out and nowhere to go.<sup>97</sup>

In these early notes, Neil is also described as Dennis’s business partner and brother-in-law, rather than the stranger who comes to buy his car in the actual play. The final note on the page is ambiguous in the direction the play was taking, but offers an insight into a possible structure for the play with Neil’s wife then called Jenny rather than Pam.

D [Dennis] tells N [Neil] his wife is going round the twist.

V [Vera] tells J [Jenny] that D [Dennis] is going mad.

M [Marjorie] tells them she is going round the twist.<sup>98</sup>

A separate set of notes – it is unclear whether they are earlier or later than the notes above – offers a slight variation on these characters and their direction with a more familiar Dennis alongside a suicidal Neil. The notes again indicate a darker direction than even that of the final play.

Dennis – keeps on despairing cheerful tone throughout – end uncertain.

Neil – hypochondria and insecurity leads to ultimate depression and suicide attempt – numb nerve ends etc for final scene.

Vera – imminent collapse accelerated to a showdown with Dennis and empty void.

Pam – Imminent break up with Neil. But her own inadequacies and the fact that she has yet to find her vocation stops her.

Marjorie – physically wrecked. Unrelenting sheen of depression and sad smiles.<sup>99</sup>

## **Karaoke Play**

### *Description: Concept*

*Karaoke Play* was a concept suggested by Alan Ayckbourn for the summer 2005 season at the Stephen Joseph Theatre. From what little is known about the proposed play, it is probably as close to an improvised drama as Alan Ayckbourn has ever got. The play would apparently have involved people from the audience being drawn into the action on stage, partaking in the drama and influencing the direction of the plot. How this would have worked in practice is unknown.

“I woke up in the night in a cold sweat and thought: ‘Do I really want the audience on the stage with the actors? No...’”<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Preliminary notes regarding *Just Between Ourselves* held in Alan Ayckbourn’s archive

<sup>98</sup> Preliminary notes regarding *Just Between Ourselves* held in the Ayckbourn Archive

<sup>99</sup> Preliminary notes regarding *Just Between Ourselves* held in the Ayckbourn Archive

<sup>100</sup> Adrian McLoughlin quoting Alan Ayckbourn in the Two For Tea platform, Stephen Joseph Theatre, 30 July 2008

## Life After Beth

*Description: Title - Discarded*

Alan Ayckbourn's 71st play, *Life & Beth*, was premiered in 2008 at the Stephen Joseph Theatre. All existing drafts of the script have the same title, but in an interview in December 2007 published in *The Morning After: Performance Arts In Australia*, Alan calls the play *Life After Beth*.

"I have also written a new play which will also open here in Scarborough next year, a ghost story called *Life After Beth*. [N.B. Now called *Life & Beth*.]"<sup>101</sup>

In the summer of 2008, Alan confirmed the play had indeed originally been called *Life After Beth* and that in his original concept, Beth was dead – whether she was thus the prerequisite ghost of the piece is unknown.

"It was originally called *Life After Beth*: We didn't have a Beth in it then."<sup>102</sup>

The title *Life After Beth* does crop up again, but illustrates only careless journalism rather than Alan's thought processes. During the week of 12 April 2008, the Scarborough Evening News printed the play's title as *Life After Beth* several times. Unfortunately, the articles were primarily promoting the launch of the Stephen Joseph Theatre's summer season and the title had long since been established (and had even been reported correctly in previous articles!). Despite working from and having access to a correct press release, the new brochure and two official websites with the correct title, the newspaper carried the wrong title in at least two separate articles.

## Life Of Riley

*Description: Concept*

This is another example of Alan Ayckbourn thinking of a title for an earlier unused project and then keeping it for a later piece of writing. In the Ayckbourn Archive there is an undated hand-written note entitled *Life Of Riley* with a short synopsis involving a doctor, Jack, discovering his friend may have a terminal disease. The ailments, discovered by Jack's mentor, may or may not actually exist and, as a result, Jack is constrained from giving the news to his friend who he believes is about to die. This is not the plot for the play which eventually bore the title *Life Of Riley*, although this does involve a terminally ill unseen character.

That this note dates back prior to Alan writing *Life Of Riley* can be construed from the fact a list of characters includes an 11 year old girl, Winnie Barnstairs, who is studying French. Winnie – and her French studies – became the subject of Alan's 73<sup>rd</sup> play, *My Wonderful Day*, which he wrote in March 2009, a year before he actually wrote *Life Of Riley*.

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<sup>101</sup> <http://chrisboyd.blogspot.com/2008/04/alan-ayckbourn-by-request-or-one-more.html>

<sup>102</sup> Alan Ayckbourn, Tea For Two platform, Stephen Joseph Theatre, 24 July 2008

## Like A Sister

*Description: Title – Discarded*

One of several proposed titles for *Sisterly Feelings* which Alan Ayckbourn had written on early notes for the play.

## Love After All

*Description: Withdrawn*

For many years, *Love After All* was the great Ayckbourn enigma. This was his second play and the only full-length work in the Ayckbourn canon for which a manuscript apparently did not exist. It was performed just twice, in 1959 and 1960, and both versions were apparently very different from each other, serving only to confuse matters even more.

In 2007, The Bob Watson Archive, based at the Stephen Joseph Theatre, working in conjunction with the British Library, discovered a copy of the original play was held in the Lord Chamberlain's Collection at the British Library, untouched and unread since 1959. This significant discovery helped to clear up some of the mystery surrounding the play, but the full story remains tantalizingly out of reach due to the likelihood that no copies of the script for the second production have survived.

“Stephen Joseph warned me that the second one was going to be a lot harder but, because I stole the plot of this, it was actually a lot easier. It was about a very handsome young man - played of course by the author - wooing and winning the beautiful but brainless heroine, despite her father's objections. Actually the best character was a pig breeder called Rupert Hodge played by William Elmhirst who stole the show. The finale had several Chinamen rushing about. Heaven knows why.”<sup>103</sup>

*Love After All*, like Alan's first play *The Square Cat*, was written with input from his first wife Christine Roland under the pseudonym Roland Allen. It was commissioned by Stephen Joseph for the 1959 winter season at Scarborough's Library Theatre and written with the intention of Alan appearing in the lead role; this being stymied by Alan being called up for a very short-lived National Service.<sup>104</sup>

The play is loosely based on *The Barber Of Seville* and is an Edwardian farce centred around Jim Jone's attempts to win the hand of the beautiful Angelica, despite the machinations of her father Scrimmes who intends to marry her off to a member of the local aristocracy. Alan has frequently said that his early plays were written largely to show him off as an actor and *Love After All* certainly supports this as the hero appears on stage in a number of implausible disguises including Scrimmes's long-lost American female cousin! The play ends farcically with most of the characters dressed as Punjabi Indians – the Chinamen of Alan's recollections replacing the Indian characters in the 1960 revival.

Angelica: I've never been abducted before. What do you do?

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<sup>103</sup> Ayckbourn at 50

<sup>104</sup> Watson, pp.37-42

Minta: Just sit and wait till someone comes. They do all the work. You just scream or don't scream according to how you're feeling.

Angelica: Shouldn't I take sandwiches or something?

Minta: Don't think so, Miss. He'll arrange all that side.

Angelica: Minta – what shall I wear? I haven't got any abduction clothes.<sup>105</sup>

Unfortunately no script survives of the second version of the play, although it is known several of the characters' names were altered and the play was moved to a contemporary setting. About the only other thing that can be ascertained is the play must have had a decent production budget as the director Julian Herington was fired soon after the play opened, having allegedly spent the Library Theatre's entire season budget on just his productions, *Wuthering Heights* and *Love After All*.

“It [the original production] was very tight and quite fun, and we did it Edwardian. It was later revived, the following summer I think, with me playing the lead; and it was directed by Julian Herington, who decided there were certain bits of it he didn't like very much, like its Edwardianness, and its rather jokey names. He brought it up to date, and I don't think the play actually gained from what we did to it.”<sup>106</sup>

## Love Undertaken

*Description: Grey Play*

*Love Undertaken* is an early Ayckbourn one act play which only came to light in 2008; its existence having long been forgotten by the playwright.

It is one of several one-act plays Alan Ayckbourn wrote for amateur companies in the early 1960s and it was only when an actor in one of just two productions of the piece came forward, that its existence and a manuscript came to light.

It seems likely the play was written in 1961 as a record at the British Library notes the play was licensed for performance by the Lord Chamberlain's office on 4 October 1961.<sup>107</sup> The first production was staged at St Mary's Parish House, Scarborough, and seems likely to have been performed by Scarborough Theatre Guild with Alan Ayckbourn appearing in the play.<sup>108</sup>

The other production, from which one of the two surviving manuscripts is drawn, seems likely to have also taken place in 1961, performed by Scarborough's Cresta Players amateur dramatic society. The company was looking for a suitable play for a drama festival in Hull; not having any success, they approached Alan Ayckbourn who gave them *Love Undertaken* which was produced at the festival, possibly at the Little Theatre, Hull.

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<sup>105</sup> Extract from *Love After All*

<sup>106</sup> Watson, pp.42

<sup>107</sup> Lord Chamberlain's Collection card index, British Library

<sup>108</sup> Alan Ayckbourn personal correspondence, July 2008

The play is a light romantic comedy set around a couple forced to conduct an affair clandestinely in a village undertaker's parlour to keep it from prying eyes and their respective guardians. There are only two extant copies of the manuscript in existence; an incomplete copy is held by a private collector and a second copy – discovered as a result of the first coming to light – is held at the British Library in the Lord Chamberlain's Collection. Alan Ayckbourn did not keep a copy of the script and like several other plays written for amateur production in this period, it was forgotten and no record made of it.

Henry: For six months I've stood outside that door watching people go past – not wishing them actual harm of course but just wishing they didn't all look quite so healthy. I spoke to Dr Greenstreet about it. He says that business usually goes in bursts.

Miranda: I can't understand it. I thought people were always dying. Anyway surely Uncle Horatio will understand? He'll know about these bursts of business.

Henry: Understand? Doctor Horatio? He'll just ask me why I didn't go out and poison a few people off just to step up production.<sup>109</sup>

## **Make Yourself At Home**

*Description: Title – Alternative*

*Make Yourself At Home* was the original title for *Living Together*; one part of *The Norman Conquests* trilogy. The play was originally produced under this title at Scarborough's Library Theatre in 1973 and then altered for its London production and all subsequent productions.

## **Making Tracks**

*Description: Withdrawn*

*Making Tracks* is one of only a small number of Ayckbourn plays since 1980 which has never been published. The reasons for this in the specific case of *Making Tracks* are not altogether clear. It was Alan's second full-length musical collaboration with the composer Paul Todd, following their work together on *Suburban Strains* and is directly inspired by Alan Ayckbourn's experiences working as a radio drama producer for the BBC.

His experiences at the BBC inspired the central conceit of the play which is set in a recording studio and who and what characters can hear is controlled by whether the microphones are on or not. It can broadly be seen as a development and refinement of an idea used by Alan in the *Between Mouthfuls* section of *Confusions*.

Stan: If Wolfie does arrive, for God's sake don't let him see or hear that song. At least let him think we've got a hit.

Rog: He's going to hear it sooner or later.

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<sup>109</sup> Extract from *Love Undertaken*

Stan: Well, later then, later. If we can get enough tracks down before the main vocal, backing tracks, counter melodies, wah-wah choruses, echo, phrase distortion, you name it, maybe we won't hear her at all. Be like whatsisname. That Tamla man. Phil.

Rog: Phil Spector.

Stan: He used to do that. Never could hear a word on any of his records. He sold millions.<sup>110</sup>

The play opened just 11 weeks after the world premiere of *Way Upstream* and possibly suffered as a result of this. *Way Upstream*, although not universally acclaimed, was seen as a definite progression for the playwright tackling wider moral and social issues. *Making Tracks*, on the other hand, was a light entertainment intended for a Christmas audience with little real depth or comment.

“Paul and I were looking for a second theme, and I suddenly had the idea that I wanted to incorporate the music on the stage. Then I decided to use my experience in the recording studios of Leeds, and it came to me that it might be quite fun to set it all in this place, with the glass between studio and control room as another device, so that you could use the silence of the sound-proofing between the two sections. I had actually had an experience with a singer, whom I booked while rather drunk one night in a club, and when we'd got her into the studio, she couldn't sing at all!”<sup>111</sup>

*Making Tracks* opened for Christmas 1981 and was phenomenally successful at the Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round, Scarborough, despite a lukewarm critical response. It was revived at the theatre in 1982 with some minor changes to the songs and did equally good business before it transferred to the Greenwich Theatre, London. There the critics, by and large, mauled the piece. The audience, however, adored it and it reportedly played to an extraordinary 97% capacity audience during its run. This was, to all intents and purposes, the end of the play. It has not been produced since, has never been published and it marked the final full-length musical collaboration between Paul Todd and Alan Ayckbourn.

## Meeting Like This

*Description: Concept*

*Meeting Like This* was the name of a proposed play that was intended to take the place of *Henceforward...* when Alan Ayckbourn apparently destroyed the original manuscript for the latter. Late in the writing process, Alan felt *Henceforward...* was too dark and apparently the Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round was notified he would instead be producing a play called *Meeting Like This*; unfortunately no other details of the proposed play exist. It is not known whether Alan even began writing the alternative play as he subsequently rewrote *Henceforward...*, which was swiftly reinserted into the schedule.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Extract from *Making Tracks*

<sup>111</sup> Watson, pp.130

<sup>112</sup> Watson, pp.143

## Meet My Father

*Description: Variant*

*Relatively Speaking* is the play which launched Alan Ayckbourn into the wider public eye and made him one of the country's most successful playwrights. However, the play did not begin with the triumphant 1967 West End production, but two years earlier at Scarborough's Library Theatre with a different play and a substantially different text.

In 1965, less than a year after joining the BBC following the critical roasting given to his first West End production, *Mr Whatnot*, Alan wrote the play *Meet My Father* for Scarborough's Library Theatre. Stephen had suggested Alan write a well-made play in the aftermath of *Mr Whatnot* for the summer season at Scarborough. Stephen was to direct the play and Alan submitted the script to him, not entirely satisfied with his play. The first Alan saw of the play, being based in Leeds, was the first night and it greatly differed from what he had submitted. Stephen habitually made drastic cuts to plays he felt over-ran or needed some editorial trimming; in the case of *Meet My Father*, there were some deep cuts.

“When he [Stephen Joseph] found it was over-running, characteristically he just tore the middle pages out at random. Despite this, it seemed to work.”<sup>113</sup>

As no actual script had survived in archive of this production, the true extent of the cuts was unknown. When a copy of Stephen's edit was found in 2007, Alan's statement actually appeared to be conservative as page after page has been scored out with thick marker pen and the play is at least a third shorter than was originally written. As Alan noted though, the play – although lacking some finesse – obviously worked as when the London producer Peter Bridges came to see the play, he immediately optioned it for the West End.

What he received though was not what he saw in Scarborough; Alan gave him the original unedited manuscript and ignored most of Stephen's alterations to the play. Although the script would undergo a number of substantive revisions between 1965 and its West End premiere in 1967, these were the result of Alan's editing, rather than Stephen's. One of the final and most far-reaching edits was the play's famous twist ending involving the disputed ownership of 'Philip's' slippers, which did not appear until the play was on its pre West End run and came about as a suggestion from Tom Erhardt, who was then working for Peter Bridge and is now Alan's agent.

## Meet My Father

*Description: Title - Alternative*

As seen in the previous entry, *Relatively Speaking* was originally produced under the title of *Meet My Father* in Scarborough in 1965. The decision to change it appears to be entirely at the behest of the London producer Peter Bridge, who wanted something a little more eye-catching

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<sup>113</sup> Ayckbourn at 50

for the West End. As a result, the play went through several title alterations before arriving at *Relatively Speaking*.

"Peter Bridge said: 'that title's very vulgar and seaside, darling, really not suitable for the West End.' So we went round and round and round until we came across a Noel Coward title that he hadn't written!"<sup>114</sup>

## Meet My Mother

*Description: Title - Discarded*

*Relatively Speaking* was first produced under the title *Meet My Father*. However, the play was originally going to be called *Meet My Mother* and traditionally Alan has always said he thought of this title, which was then altered several days later to *Meet My Father* by the director Stephen Joseph as he felt it more catchy. However, in a programme note from 1969, Alan attributes *Mother* to Stephen and *Father* to himself.

"In May the pre-publicity posters were due and Stephen by now sensing that a helping push was required suggested that he bill the play *Meet My Mother* a new comedy by.... That night I sat up till 4 a.m. trying to think of a play which might possibly suit that title and finally decided it wasn't very inspiring. I 'phoned back the next morning and, on impulse rather than anything else, asked if the proof copy of the poster could be amended to read *Meet My Father*."<sup>115</sup>

## Me Times Me

See *Me Times Me Time Me*

## Me Times Me Times Me

*Description: Title - Alternative*

In 1970, Alan premiered *The Story So Far...* at the Library Theatre, Scarborough. The play was picked up by the producer Eddie Kulukundis the following year for a tour which was planned to go into the West End. Unhappy with the play, Alan revised it and gave it a new title *Me Times Me Times Me*. The tour began at the Phoenix Theatre, Leicester, in 1971 but by the time it opened at its next venue at the Lyceum Theatre, Edinburgh, the title had again been altered to the shorter *Me Times Me*. Presumably, this late alteration had a knock-on effect on both the budget and the marketing as all the publicity would have had to be reprinted. Whatever the case, the play did not transfer to the West End at the culmination of its tour.

A year later and the producer Michael Codron picked up the play and again it was toured as a prelude to a possible West End transfer. It was produced as *Me Times Me* and starred Celia

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<sup>114</sup> Alan Ayckbourn, *Tea For Two* platform, Stephen Joseph Theatre, 24 July 2008

<sup>115</sup> *Relatively Speaking* programme, 1968

Johnson. Unfortunately, this production only played two venues, ending its life in Brighton. The play would be revised again in the early 1970s and renamed *Family Circles*, which has since been successfully revived and produced, although Alan has admitted he will never be totally happy with the piece.

“I should have left it alone.”<sup>116</sup>

## Millennium character sketches

*Description: Ephemera*

In May 1993, a major tourist attraction opened in Alan Ayckbourn’s adopted home town called the *Scarborough Millennium*. Created to mark the town’s 1,000 year anniversary, it featured recreations of places and scenes from throughout Scarborough’s history, each of which was manned by a character from the period. Alan Ayckbourn was asked to contribute to the attraction and wrote a short script for each of these actors, which formed the basis of their semi-improvised interaction with the public. Each character had approximately a page of dialogue for a short scene, offering an informative guide to Scarborough in that period, which could then be used as a basis for improvisation. The characters were a young Viking woman, a servant at Scarborough Castle at the time of King Richard the Lionheart’s reign, a man at St Mary’s Church during the Civil War and a Victorian Lady clad in wet undergarments at Scarborough Spa.

Servant: Every single morning the Queen has to be sewn into her clothes and every evening she has to be unsewn. What about that, then? Did you ever hear anything like it? When I was a lad we never had any of that.

Twice a year, that’s all. My mum used to sew us in come October and unstitch us in April. Never did us any harm.<sup>117</sup>

## Millie’s Wonderful Day

*See Winnie’s Wonderful Day*

## Mind Over Murder

*Description: Screenplay*

*Mind Over Murder* is a very rare example of Alan Ayckbourn writing a play and a screenplay of the same material, as well as marking his first attempt at a thriller.

The piece exists as two manuscripts, both with the same title and both attributed to Roland Allen (Alan’s writing pseudonym between 1959 and 1961). The first manuscript is an incomplete playtext – the final pages are missing but given the existence of the second manuscript, the implication is the pages were lost rather than not completed. The second manuscript is a

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<sup>116</sup> Ayckbourn At 50

<sup>117</sup> Extract from *Millennium* sketches

complete and detailed screenplay, but which is probably the play-text adapted for television as the actual dialogue is identical.

Although not dated, the use of the name Roland Allen and the existence of the screenplay allows it to be placed between late 1959 and mid 1960; after the success of writing his first play *The Square Cat*, Alan noted in an interview he and his wife Christine Roland intended to write several screenplays in the hope of receiving a commission for television. It is probably given Alan has rarely shown any other interest in writing screenplays, that *Mind Over Murder* was one of these ideas.

*Mind Over Murder* has a cast of six and takes place over four days with a policeman investigating the apparent suspicious death of a professor's sister. The professor who has an improbable knack for Sherlock Holmes style deduction solves the mystery of who murdered his sister and for what purpose, whilst the police inspector doubles as the professor's Watson. Notably, the plot jumps about over the four days revealing previous events as the murder is unraveled.<sup>118</sup>

Professor: (*calling softly*) Michael!... Michael!

*Inspector Michael Roberts steps suddenly from out of the shadows bedside him.*

Michael: Right beside you Edward.

Professor: (*Startled*) Oh my dear fellow, must you skulk in the shadows like that or is it part of your police training?

Michael: I was observing the moonlight on the roof, it managed to bring out the beauty of those Victorian Twiddle [sic] bits. This house must be amazingly ugly by daylight.

Professor: My sister was fascinated by the hideous. Just wait until you see the inside.<sup>119</sup>

While *Mind Over Murder* was neither produced as a play or screenplay, it is of interest if purely for being Alan attempting to write a thriller so early on in his career, given his later attempts to successfully crack the genre. His first acknowledged attempt was the announced but unwritten *Sight Unseen* in 1980 which formed the basis of his random murderer thriller *It Could Be Any One Of Us* in 1982. Unhappy with this (and the fact there was no actual murder), he revised the play in 1996. Although other plays such as *The Revengers' Comedies* in 1989 have elements of the thriller genre in them, his most successful attempt at writing in the genre was his 2002 play *Snake In The Grass*.

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<sup>118</sup> *Mind Over Murder* manuscript, Alan Ayckbourn's personal archive

<sup>119</sup> Extract from *Mind Over Murder* screenplay

## Modern Love

*Description: Ephemera*

*Modern Love* is a two-page sketch held in private archive of which no details are known other than it is an early piece of writing by Alan Ayckbourn, probably written during the early 1960s.<sup>120</sup>

## The Musical Jigsaw Play

*Description: Withdrawn*

*The Musical Jigsaw Play* is probably the least well-known of Alan Ayckbourn's plays for families, largely due to it only ever having had one production and having never been published.

It began its life not – as usual - at the Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round, Scarborough, but at the Royal Exchange in Manchester, who contacted Alan in 1992 regarding the possibility of him writing a children's play for spring 1994. Alan suggested the concept of *The Musical Jigsaw Play*, which he would write with the Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round's musical director John Pattison. Unfortunately the Exchange was unable to find sponsorship for the play and for this and various other reasons, the deal fell through and the play was never produced in Manchester.<sup>121</sup>

Alan and John had completed the play though and it was decided the play would be suitable for Christmas 1994 in Scarborough.

It was written specifically for the round and saw the stage transformed into a jigsaw puzzle, which the cast with the aid of the audience first assembled and then utilised to create a song. There was a high degree of interactivity in the show, a challenging sound and lighting plot and lots of participatory singing.

*The Musical Jigsaw Play* opened in December 1994 and proved to be a hit with its young audience. The first performance was excessively long though and fairly major cuts were made to parts of the puzzle-solving. This apparently did not harm the show as the children latched onto the concept of what was going on very quickly, which allowed Alan to make cuts to move the plot forward whilst not damaging the integrity of the piece.

Reviews were extremely mixed with several critics likening it more to a game show than a play and most having difficulty with the amount of time spent in the first act creating the puzzle; although most critics agreed the children enjoyed the interactivity and the singing.

The play has never been produced again, largely one suspects because of the need to perform it in the round and its technical demands. It has also never been published.

The final song, which propels the pop-group Why Not? back into the music charts, has survived though....

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<sup>120</sup> *Modern Love* playscript held in private archive

<sup>121</sup> Various correspondence, 1992-1993, held in Alan Ayckbourn's personal archive

It's true to say both day and night  
Our tune can change plain black or white.  
Good sweet chords can paint rainbow hues  
With green, brown, yellow, reds and blues.  
To help guide us from dark to light  
We must make sure our song sounds right.  
Sing all through life. Make that our choice.  
And join together with one voice.

It's good to sing  
True to say sweet chords can help  
Guide us all through life both day and night,  
Paint rainbow hues from dark to light.  
Make that our choice.  
Our tune can change plain black or white  
With green, brown, yellow, reds and blues.  
We must make sure our song sounds right  
And join together with one voice.

It's true to say both day and night  
Our tune can change plain black or white.  
Good sweet chords can paint rainbow hues  
With green, brown, yellow, reds and blues.  
To help guide us from dark to light  
We must make sure our song sounds right.  
Sing all through life. Make that our choice.  
And join together with one voice.<sup>122</sup>

## **The Norman Conquests**

*Description: Ephemera*

*The Norman Conquests* are among Alan Ayckbourn's best known and most successful plays. The trilogy consists of *Living Together*, *Table Manners* and *Round And Round The Garden* and

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<sup>122</sup> Extract from *The Musical Jigsaw Play*

was originally produced at the Library Theatre, Scarborough, in 1973. What is not generally known is they were not called *The Norman Conquests* at this stage; they were not even marketed as a trilogy. The fear being that Scarborough's tourists would be put off visiting the theatre if they felt they had to visit three separate times during their stay.

“People come here [Scarborough] for a holiday week. They're not going to go to the theatre three times in one week, so I wanted them to enjoy the play on the one night they went.”<sup>123</sup>

The title of *The Norman Conquests* was created for the plays' premiere in London at the Greenwich Theatre, which would later transfer to the Globe Theatre. The earliest recorded use of the title is the 4 April 1974 edition of *The Stage*.

“Tom Courtenay is to star in three new full-length Alan Ayckbourn plays, which open at the Greenwich Theatre on May 9 under the general title *“The Norman Conquests.”*”<sup>124</sup>

Although the original production of the trilogy did not use the now famous title, there was a hint of what was to come as each play had a subtitle in the world premiere programmes:

“A weekend view of the Norman Conquest”<sup>125</sup>

## **Now Being Served**

*Description: Title - Discarded*

The original proposed title for Alan Ayckbourn's only produced screenplay. The playwright was commissioned by the BBC in 1973 to write a half-hour screenplay for the educational television series *Masquerade*. The play was originally given the title of *Now Being Served* before being altered to *Service Not Included* during the production process.

## **Pageant play**

*Description: Concept*

An ambitious concept for two plays which would have marked the playwright's 65th birthday in 2004. The concept for the 'Pageant' play consisted of two connected plays; one of which would have taken place at the Stephen Joseph Theatre, whilst a second would have been performed in the grounds of Scarborough Castle. Negotiations with English Heritage were initiated and the theatre's box office and front of house had begun to consider the logistics of running the piece, before the ambitious idea was eventually abandoned.

In the aftermath of this and for a brief time, it was also apparently considered running *A Chorus Of Disapproval* in repertory with John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* (the latter being the

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<sup>123</sup> Evening Standard, 6 June 1974

<sup>124</sup> The Stage, 4 April 1974

<sup>125</sup> *Round And Round The Garden* programme, 1973

musical produced during the course of the Ayckbourn play). As it was, only *A Chorus Of Disapproval* was revived during the theatre's 2004 summer season.

## **The Party Game**

*Description: Unproduced*

Found in a loft in Scarborough in 2007, *The Party Game* is a unique piece of Ayckbourn writing which offers a fascinating insight into how the young playwright was experimenting with form and structure prior to his first professional commission. The one-act play survives in a single manuscript which has the author, Roland Allen, handwritten on the title page (all plays attributed to Roland Allen and definitely written under that pseudonym are featured typed in the original manuscripts), suggesting the play was written prior to Alan marrying Christine Roland in 1959. From a historical point of view, the manuscript is intriguing as it is unlike any of Alan's other early writing being replete with stage directions and poor grammar; neither of which can be applied to any of Alan's professionally produced manuscripts - even the earliest. It is now considered the play was probably written around 1958, when the playwright was 19 years old.

Very little is known about *The Party Game* except it was offered to Scarborough Theatre Guild to perform – of which Scarborough Library Theatre's manager Ken Boden and his wife Margaret were leading members. Apparently Margaret turned down the play and Alan has no recollection of it ever being performed; backed up by the fact there is no record of a performance license being issued by the Lord Chamberlain's Office. A large cast of 10 and the one act nature of the piece suggest it may have been written with an amateur production in mind; at the time the Library Theatre rarely had such large professional casts.

The play is predominantly set in the living room of 45 year old Phyllis during a cocktail party and is essentially dialogue rather than event driven. The dialogue centres on the banalities of small conversation and the frequently acerbic relationships between the characters. Over all this is the spectre of an appearance by Matthew Llewellyn, a noted film critic, who is a clearly painted off-stage character never appearing at the party despite the anticipation of his arrival dominating the evening. It is a fairly bleak character piece and unlike anything Alan was writing at the time. Perhaps of most interest is the fact an off-stage character is so strongly drawn (a device which the playwright would later develop) alongside a strong theme of unsatisfactory and fractious relationships. A good example of this is a striking conversation between Carol and the bohemian artist Julian, which also expresses a viewpoint against marrying young which Alan himself has frequently expressed in similar terms in interviews since.

Carol: Yes I remember you telling me you thought that marriage was wrong on principle but I thought you'd grown up a bit since then.

Julian: Oh, Carol, don't start getting motherly, please.

Carol: I'm sorry darling but you make me feel it sometimes. Or maybe I'm just old fashioned.

Julian: Look at it this way... when two people get married, they make a hell of a lot of promises, to each other, to God... and they've no right to make them. I mean, how do they know how what they'll feel like in twenty years or even five years. Nobody can be that certain. The chances are

they'll both either get bored to tears with each other, stick it grimly to the end and both die miserably or else get a divorce and break a promise they shouldn't have made in the first place.

Carol: People can be happy for a lifetime together. I agree with you up to a point, nobody's ever perfect for each other and they probably wouldn't recognise the perfect mate if they saw him... but if you get two people who are prepared to give and take a bit, to compromise...

Julian: What do you mean by compromise? Toning down your own individuality till you're as dead and lifeless as most of the so-called happily married couples you see about?

Carol: No, I don't mean that at all....<sup>126</sup>

Although the majority of the characters are little more than ciphers, the relationships can be seen to foreshadow themes and ideas which Alan will become very much associated with later in his career. This is particularly seen in the tense relationship between 20 year old Michael and his mother, Jean, as well as the presence at the party of a married man, Harold, alongside his neurotic wife, Evelyn, and his former mistress, Caroline, who despite initial confident appearances practically breaks down during the course of the evening.

Carol: Phyllis. She says you've got to talk to Evelyn before you have a row.

Harry: Everyone's suddenly very concerned about us...

Carol: No we're not. We're not interested in the least. We just don't want to get involved in one of your squabbles.

Harry: This is an entirely personal matter...

Carol: Oh no it isn't Harry. You're trying to drag other people into it, me for one and it just isn't fair...

Harry: The Swiss air seems to have brought out all your hidden morality.

Carol: It's cleared my head, that's all. You're not my boss any longer and I'm not your secretary. When I met it was all part of the job: boss flirts with secretary, secretary flutters her eyelashes and listens to him telling her what a monster his wife is... a six days a week, 9.30 to 5 romance and thank God I had the sense to get out while it was still that. Now it's all gone – finished. New secretary, new boss.

*HARRY just looks at her and shakes his head.*

Carol: I'm sorry, Harry, one of us had to say it. I know it sounds callous and cold blooded but it's true isn't it. Listen, Harry you don't love me, you don't really give me a damn about me. I'm just someone that isn't Evelyn... some girl, any girl... I want more than that...

Harry: It appears you want a hell of a lot. (*he suddenly takes her arm*).  
Caroline...

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<sup>126</sup> Extract from *The Party Game*

Carol: No, please... don't make a fool of yourself...<sup>127</sup>

Technically, the play is also unusual in the use of spots in the opening and final scenes to reveal characters in their home locations, quickly cross-cutting between them. It is a technique rarely used by Alan and only in *Private Fears In Public Places* (2004) is it fully realised. The final scene in *The Party Game* sees spots focus on each of the characters briefly in their homes, in silence, showing the mundanity of their lives; strikingly similar to the final of scene of *Private Fears In Public Places*, where each of the characters are also highlighted in turn in silence, alone in their lives.

The only existing copy of *The Party Game* is held in a private collection and has never been published nor is it available to produce. However, it was finally given a first public hearing when on 10 October 2010, it had a read-through at the Concert Room at Scarborough's Public Library – the room where the Library Theatre was based – at a special Ayckbourn event. It is unlikely permission will be given for it to be performed again.

## **'Pirandello' Play**

*Description: Unproduced*

Prior to his first professional playwriting commission, *The Square Cat*, Alan Ayckbourn has frequently noted he had written approximately nine plays. Stephen Joseph apparently saw many of these plays, which presumably gave him the confidence to commission Alan to write *The Square Cat*. Most of these early plays have not survived, but Alan has noted previously that one of the plays was his version of a Pirandello play (the likelihood being it was inspired by the playwright's most famous text *Six Characters In Search Of An Actor*).

“He'd seen my Pirandello play, which was the one that everyone writes, about the group of actors with a director, and they all take on the characters - and he said: 'Yes, that's a Pirandello play!' I said: 'Yes it is.'”<sup>128</sup>

## **Plays And Players**

*Description: Title – Discarded*

One of several proposed titles for *Time And Time Again* which Alan Ayckbourn had written on his early notes for the play.

## **Play For Today**

*Description: Screenplay*

In 1974, Alan Ayckbourn agreed to write a 75 minute play for the BBC television series *Play For Today*. Although no details are held in archive about the initial discussions about this, it

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<sup>127</sup> Extract from *The Party Game*

<sup>128</sup> Watson, pp.52

seems likely given the time frame and the people involved, it developed out of Alan writing the screenplay *Service Not Included* for the BBC series *Masquerade* earlier in the year.

The director of the proposed play was Herbert Wise, who had also directed *Service Not Included* and who appears to have been Alan's main liaison with the BBC. When the initial deadline passed in April 1975 with Alan having not written a script, a new open-ended contract was offered with the hope Alan might still be able to write a play for the series. Unfortunately, his many commitments meant a screenplay was never written and the opportunity for Alan to write his first full-length play for television passed.<sup>129</sup>

## Private Fears In Public Places

*Description: Concept*

*Private Fears In Public Places* is a rare instance of an Ayckbourn play being announced and officially advertised before being replaced by a piece with an entirely different title and plot.

"Basically, I had two ideas bouncing around my head. So the final piece could have emerged from either one of them. And the play I absolutely thought I would write is a rather gruelling piece set in an airport departure lounge - so that is the one which went in to the brochure. When I actually started to write the advertised play, *Private Fears In Public Places*, it all rather alarmingly began coming to pieces in my hands. It wasn't ready to be written. Certain parts were intact, but it was like crafting a piece of furniture without legs."<sup>130</sup>

The proposed play, which Alan has described as being "pretty bleak"<sup>131</sup>, was advertised in the spring 1994 Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round brochure and bookings were being taken for it. Rather ironically in a memo to the theatre's press officer containing the advertising copy for the play, Alan had written beneath: "By the time I get round to writing it, it'll probably be about eight obstetricians trapped in a lift."<sup>132</sup> Having tempted fate, Alan went on holiday to write the play and had to call the theatre to announce *Private Fears In Public Places* had fallen through; unfortunately the press and marketing department had sent the theatre's brochure to print the day before and it was not possible to stop the print run which would feature *Private Fears In Public Places*.

Although very little is known about the original concept for *Private Fears In Public Places*, it was to be set in an airport and there seems to be the possibility the play might have featured an escalator.

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<sup>129</sup> Correspondence between Ben Travers, BBC Assistant Head Of Copyright, and Margaret Ramsay, 2 June 1975 and other personal correspondence, 31 July 1974

<sup>130</sup> Yorkshire Post, 1 February 1994

<sup>131</sup> Yorkshire Post, 1 February 1994

<sup>132</sup> Correspondence between Alan Ayckbourn and Jeannie Swales, 20 June 1993

“At the airport, Jessica waves a fond farewell to her husband. Then a chance encounter changes her life. How well does she know, how far she can trust herself?”<sup>133</sup>

## Relatively Speaking

*Description: Screenplay*

*Relatively Speaking* was Alan Ayckbourn’s break-out play proving to be a critical and commercial hit in London in 1967. Inevitably there was a lot of interest in the play as a result of this, including producers interested in adapting it for the screen. Attempts to move a film forward though were stymied by the prolonged and ultimately unsuccessful attempts to transfer the play to Broadway; Alan’s agent was unwilling to sell the screen rights until it had transferred to Broadway, when their value would have obviously soared.

Although all initial attempts to make a film fell by the wayside, there was still interest in adapting it (as witnessed by two subsequent television adaptations of the play in 1969 and 1989) and in the early 1970s, Alan drafted his own screenplay for the producer Clive Donner. The script greatly expands the action, adding scenes before the play between Ginny and her older lover Philip as well as showing Ginny’s first meeting with Greg, who she is in a relationship with at the beginning of the play. These additions mean it is actually forty pages in before the familiar play begins.<sup>134</sup>

Ginny: (*Aggressively tipsy, hardly pausing for breath*) Old maid be damned! All I say is – if a man does that to a woman’s life – if for the sake of a few highly dubious, so called pleasures, I have to give up my whole life for him - I’d sooner do without him or without him or his bloody fringe benefits... marriage, co-habitation, the lot –

Man: Just because one man -

Ginny: It’s not just because one man. It’s any man. Living with any of you – it’s exactly the same result – perdition and possibly pregnancy. Well, I say to hell with your manhood. To hell with your fast cars, your fancy restaurants, you smooth chat and your dirty washing. I’ve had you and I’ve had it.

*She turns away rather dramatically and cannons into Greg behind her.*

Ginny: Whoops-!

*Greg rises politely. In his cramped position this requires literally slithering his body the length of Ginny’s until they are nose to nose.*

Greg: (*nervous*) Hallo...<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Brochure copy from the Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round winter 1993/94 brochure

<sup>134</sup> *Relatively Speaking* screenplay, held in private collection

<sup>135</sup> Extract from *Relatively Speaking* screenplay

The unresolved plotline from the play of what happened to Ginny's love letters to Philip is also addressed with a scene in Phillip's loft showing the pair arguing whilst searching for the incriminating notes. Having retrieved the letters, they are then lost as they fall out of Ginny's bag as she and Greg hastily leave The Willows; later seen being eaten by a cow. At present, it is known three versions of this screenplay are held in various private collections

“He's [Alan] just completed a film script of *Relatively Speaking*, but he's not mad about the cinema and he's convinced he's no good for TV.”<sup>136</sup>

That the script never went any further was probably for the best as a decade after writing the script, Alan offered an honest appraisal of his lack of knowledge of writing for film and his thoughts on the screenplay for *Relatively Speaking*.

“[I] felt on reflection that that particular version of the play merely inflated it without adding anything much except a few extraneous visual gags. For any future film thoughts I feel I should return to the stage text and start again.”<sup>137</sup>

## Relative Values

*Description: Unproduced*

*Relative Values* is an early unproduced and unpublished one-act comedy by Alan Ayckbourn and credited to his pseudonym Roland Allen; the play probably being written in 1960. The action takes place in a house in a village and centres on the Spragg family as they prepare for a visit from their recently bereaved and abrasive aunt from America. Her blunt interference in the family's life leads everyone to re-evaluate their own relationships and lives for the better.

Harold: What's happened to your face?

Molly: I've got make-up on.

Harold: Looks like you've forgotten to wash it.<sup>138</sup>

## The Revengers' Comedies

*Description: Ephemera*

Less a concept than an interesting footnote of what might have been. When plans were first mooted to produce Alan Ayckbourn's epic two-part play *The Revengers' Comedies* in London, the first person to express interest was Richard Eyre, Artistic Director of the National Theatre. Unwilling to produce them as they stood, Eyre suggested alterations to the existing five hour production.

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<sup>136</sup> Sunday Times, 3 June 1973

<sup>137</sup> Correspondence with John Cleese, 25 October 1984

<sup>138</sup> Extract from *Relative Values*

“He [Richard Eyre] felt they should be one play and not two.”<sup>139</sup>

Eyre’s suggestion was not quite that simple: he believed the plays would not work over two separate evenings at the National Theatre and suggested the solution to this was to abridge the plays to fit into one evening. In theory, this would have meant starting the plays in the early evening with a supper break at the end of part one, before continuing onto part two. It was estimated that Alan would have needed to cut approximately 20 to 30 minutes from each play to reduce the overall five hour running time to approximately four hours. Alan, however, was unconvinced by the idea.

“I defy anyone to make them one play. The thing is, they are what they are: four rather jolly, long acts for two evenings. I’m rather defensive about my plays these days and don’t make many changes in rehearsals. In the early 1970s, I was similarly pressured to not make *The Norman Conquests* three separate plays. But I stuck out.”<sup>140</sup>

Alan’s decision to retain the plays as he originally intended led to Eyre declining to produce them at the National Theatre, but Alan’s regular West End producer Michael Codron decided to take a risk with the plays. The two plays were presented as intended over two evenings at the Strand theatre, but unfortunately weren’t terribly successful and ran for less than one hundred performances.

## The Roland Allen plays

*Description: Ephemera*

Between 1959 and 1962, Alan Ayckbourn wrote under the pseudonym of Roland Allen and generally the use of this name on manuscripts allows the plays to be placed into a specific period of his writing career. Alan stopped using the pseudonym when the literary agent Margaret ‘Peggy’ Ramsay took him on in March 1962,<sup>141</sup> coinciding with him becoming an Associate Director at the Victoria Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent. The pseudonym is a combination of his first wife’s name, Christine Roland, and his own name.

Initially, this pseudonym was used because Christine assisted Alan with suggestions and advice on his first two plays, *The Square Cat* and *Love After All*. Its continued use after that was probably due to the fact that the Scarborough audiences were familiar with the name and Alan was also acting under his own name.

The plays attributed to Roland Allen are *The Square Cat* (canon), *Love After All* (canon), *Dad’s Tale* (canon), *Standing Room Only* (canon), *Love Undertaken* (Grey play), *Follow The Lover* (Grey play), *Double Hitch* (Grey play), *Mind Over Murder* (screenplay), *The Party Game* (unproduced and likely written prior to 1959) and *Relative Values* (unproduced).

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<sup>139</sup> Correspondence between Alan Ayckbourn and Margaret Ramsay, 2 April 1989

<sup>140</sup> Unknown publication, 1991

<sup>141</sup> Peggy: The Life Of Margaret Ramsay Literary Agent, Colin Chambers, pp.143 (Nick Hearn Books, 1997, ISBN 978-0413728005)

*Standing Room Only* is usually the final play attributed to Roland Allen; although strictly speaking this is also considered the first Alan Ayckbourn play as when he revived the play at the Victoria Theatre in 1963, it was attributed to Alan Ayckbourn.

It is also worth noting that although *The Square Cat* was attributed to Roland Allen in press releases and contracts, a spelling mistake in the original programme gave the name as Roland Allan. What is also often forgotten is the true identity of the Roland Allen was no great secret as the programme for the original production of *Love After All* in 1959 demonstrates.

“So we are delighted to have this opportunity of presenting a new farce by Roland Allen - a pen name that conceals the identity of Alan Ayckbourn, who has acted with us for several seasons.”<sup>142</sup>

## **Ron And Julie**

*Description: Ephemera*

In 1991, Alan Ayckbourn wrote a short one act play for the National Theatre highlighting the work of its technical departments. *Ron & Julie: A Love Story* is essentially a showcase for lighting, sound and special effects within a love triangle between lighting technician Julie, who is the object of desire for sound technician Ron and the special effects technician Raymond.

The surreal plot sees Ron and Raymond fighting for Julie’s attentions through the increasingly extravagant use of their individual technical skills. It culminates in Julie slipping from a tallscope ladder and having to be rescued by Ron, leading to a loud, spectacular and bloody denouement between the three characters.

Existing notes indicate the piece was probably written for a student open day to showcase the work of different departments within the National Theatre.

## **Schooldaze**

*Description: Concept*

In 1994 the Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round advertised Alan Ayckbourn’s new play *Private Fears In Public Places*. Although advertised, Alan did not write the play and instead produced *Communicating Doors*. When initially considering ideas for his 46th play though, one of the ideas prior to *Private Fears In Public Places* was apparently called *Schooldaze*, although it never went any further than being a concept.

According to the recollections of a former Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round employee, the play was intended for an all-female cast and concerned a school reunion for a class from an all-girls’ school. During the course of the weekend, the women regressed back into their childhoods creating what appears to be a female *Lord Of The Flies* scenario. Unfortunately, the promising concept was dropped for *Private Fears In Public Places* which was then dropped for *Communicating Doors*.

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<sup>142</sup> *Love After All* programme, The Library Theatre, Scarborough, 1959

## The Season

*Description: Unproduced*

*The Season* is the earliest example of Alan Ayckbourn's writing known to exist and was written no later than 1958. It is described as "a drama in four scenes"<sup>143</sup> and features two characters, The Girl and The Traveller. The only surviving script does not carry the name of the author, which strongly indicates this was one of Alan's early plays written before he received his first professional commission with *The Square Cat* and started using the pseudonym Roland Allen.

"I'd been writing before that, but they'd never had the test of production, and most of them, with a couple of exceptions which had been rather morose pieces, had been comic in tone."<sup>144</sup>

*The Season* falls into the morose rather than comic category; each scene is set in a different season beginning with spring and ending with winter with each season moving forward in time from medieval times to Edwardian England to a post-apocalyptic future. The play follows the relationship that develops between The Girl and The Traveller with the story continuing through each different time period. During the first act, the couple meet and during the second, they are together but leave each other in anger. The third scene, apparently 18 years on, sees The Traveller now meeting The Woman for the first time since he left her. She is close to death and the scene apparently ends with a nuclear explosion. The final scene is set in a winter some years after the attack when The Traveller meets The Girl but apparently for the first time, acquainting themselves in an outside world which no-one has seen since the attack. The play ends with the pair agreeing to explore the new world together.

Girl: Please don't talk like that. I am afraid. It would be like the winter – death would. I know it. Cold and white with no colours at all. Everything sharp and pointed – the trees spikey like the icicles that hang from the branches and the wind brushing over the snow and biting through your bones – eating you away.<sup>145</sup>

## Season's Greetings

*Category: Variant*

Although not substantially different to the definitive version, the original production of *Season's Greetings* at the Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round was a three act play, which ran considerably longer than the play as it stands today. This version also toured to The Round House in London, where *Season's Greetings* received its London premiere. The following year, Alan revived the play in Scarborough, altering the structure to two acts and shortening the play.

The major difference between the two plays is Harvey, the elderly uncle, is married and his wife, Shirley, is also at the house but remains unseen and unheard in an off-stage part of the

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<sup>143</sup> Note from *The Season*

<sup>144</sup> Watson, pp.52

<sup>145</sup> Extract from *The Season*

sitting room. The characters address Shirley and respond to her as if she has replied, but her own dialogue is unheard. When Alan revised the play, the main alteration was to remove all of the dialogue regarding Shirley and references to her.

“When I first wrote *Season’s Greetings*, I had an offstage woman (Uncle Harvey’s wife) whom we never saw but whom he spoke to quite a lot. The device didn’t work (it seemed he was completely mad as opposed to half mad).”<sup>146</sup>

This revised production, which ran at least half-an-hour shorter than the originally production, was staged at the Greenwich Theatre before transferring to the West End and is the published version of the script.

Harvey: Shirley’ll know. (*calling across the room*) Shirley, is this chap, the dark one, is he the one we were reading about who has a drink problem.

*He listens as Shirley replies.*

Harvey: Oh, was it? Somebody else. (*to Bernard*) Somebody else.

*They watch again, Harvey laughs.*

Harvey: Damn fine film though. Even if they are all dead.<sup>147</sup>

## Service Not Included

*Description: Screenplay*

*Service Not Included* is Alan Ayckbourn’s only screenplay which has been filmed and was commissioned by the BBC in 1973 for the educational series *Masquerade*.

Alan was approached in July 1973 on behalf of the director Herbert Wise, a well-respected director who had directed Alan’s play *Relatively Speaking* for television in 1969 and who in 1974 would go on to helm the acclaimed television adaptations of *The Norman Conquests*. The initial suggestion was Alan write a play set at “a masked fancy dress party, taking place now in a large nineteenth century country house.... The plays should have no more than four main speaking parts and not more than the same number of sets.”<sup>148</sup>

Alan completed the first draft of his first screenplay at the end of November 1973 with the provisional title *Now Being Served*. Set at a fancy dress party at the end of a business convention, the play follows in the footsteps of a waiter, experiencing only what he sees and hears. In a letter to his agent Margaret Ramsay, Alan noted the challenges of writing for a new medium.

“It seemed to me the only way to handle this minute medium – minute in the terms of scale it can tackle – was to understate furiously and concentrate on minutiae. Thus the dialogue is functional and the whole

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<sup>146</sup> Alan Ayckbourn personal correspondence, 25 February 1985

<sup>147</sup> Extract from *Season’s Greetings* original production manuscript

<sup>148</sup> Correspondence between Robert Buckler, script editor for the BBC, and Alan Ayckbourn, 11 July 1973

success of the thing will only work if we get the impression, when they translate it into pictures, that we're walking alongside this waiter and just gleaning such scraps as he would glean.”<sup>149</sup>

Although Alan felt the screenplay was “really very downbeat”, it was enthusiastically received by Wise and Alan was encouraged to take it further, particularly to edit down some of the many parts; a band was immediately removed alongside several minor walk-on roles.

By February 1974, a final draft had been completed and the play's title altered to *Service Not Included* – one of several alternative titles offered by Alan to the director. Filming took place between 25 and 29 March as an outside broadcast at an actual hotel with a substantial cast of 16. It was then broadcast on BBC 2 on 20 May 1974.

Of note is the fact it featured the playwright's now wife Heather Stoney in the cast and that the central conceit of the play – the waiter moving in and out of conversation and the ‘audience’ hearing only what he hears – was the inspiration for his one act play *Between Mouthfuls* which he wrote later in the same year as part of *Confusions*.

For many years, it was considered Alan had written two television screenplays: *Service Not Included* and *A Cut In The Rates*. Although *A Cut In The Rates* received its first performance on television, it was written specifically as a theatrical one-act play, leaving *Service Not Included* as the only televised Ayckbourn screenplay.

## **Service Not Included**

*Description: Title – Discarded*

When Alan Ayckbourn was first commissioned by the BBC to write a 30 minute screenplay for the educational series *Masquerade* in 1973 he initially gave it the title *Now Being Served*. However, the option of the final title he gave to the director Herbert Wise having made the following suggestions:

*The Waiter*

*Waiting Time*

*Wait And See*

*Not So You'd Notice*

*Waiter Service*

*Service Not Included*

*They Also Wait...*

*Waits And Measurements*

The final decision for the title was *Service Not Included*.

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<sup>149</sup> Correspondence between Alan Ayckbourn and Margaret Ramsay, 1 December 1973

## Sight Unseen

### *Description: Concept*

*Sight Unseen* was Alan Ayckbourn's first attempt to write a thriller for the stage. It is a rarity in being a play that was announced to the general public, but was never produced.

"I'm about to write play 25 and am pacing nervously. It's called, somewhat fittingly, *Sight Unseen*. Assuming I finish that, I shall have it rehearsed and into repertoire by the end of September."<sup>150</sup>

The play was announced as part of the Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round's 1980 winter season and was intended to be a thriller; the likelihood being that the play would feature a random murderer. Alan began writing it, but quickly found difficulties with both the concept and the characters. It was replaced in the schedule at the last minute by the hastily written *Season's Greetings*.

"Well, it's wrong to say I was actually into the dialogue stage. I was into the construction stage: I was putting up the fences. I then did a volte face and left myself with just two things from the thriller. One was that I set it in a hallway which I quite liked."<sup>151</sup>

Although the play was abandoned, Alan would return to the idea very quickly with *It Could Be Any One Of Us* which opened in 1983 at the Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round. Intriguingly, Alan had similar reservations about this play (and would later revise it in 1996) to those he had with *Sight Unseen*.

"I like thrillers, I really enjoy reading them, and I quite like whodunnit plays. But if you're going to write a good whodunnit, everyone's got to have done it, you see; and you then pull away about six motives and leave one there. And then you say: 'Ah yes, he's the one who did it, because he was the only one who had the front door key.' But the point is that I first of all had to write a cast of homicidal maniacs, because they all had to have killed Mr. X. And that was extremely boring. When you've got a couple of homicidal maniacs it's quite fun, but here they were all saying: 'I really hated him, I'd have killed him if I'd had the chance.' And I felt there were awful limits in having to prescribe your characters' behaviours. I'm very used to letting my characters roam around much more freely than that. To have to saddle them with a load of hatred and malice, or even sheer clumsiness, was very hard. And I didn't want to write a straight whodunnit where we just eliminated it down to one: I wanted to write a whodunnit where any one of them could have done it - to keep it absolutely open. And I came to the conclusion it was rather a boring thing to write."<sup>152</sup>

Prior to 2010, very little about *Sight Unseen* could be said with any certainty – not even whether it was actually an early attempt to write a thriller with random murderers. However,

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<sup>150</sup> Correspondence between Alan Ayckbourn and Christopher Morahan, 12 August 1980

<sup>151</sup> Watson, pp.169-70

<sup>152</sup> Watson, pp.169-70

amongst some archived hand-written manuscripts from the period, two pages of notes were found relating to *Sight Unseen*. The notes include the names of the characters (Neville, Belinda, Giles, Jocelyn, Bernard, Veronica, Eddie, Derek and Phyllis), many of which would be used in *Season's Greetings*, but most significantly there are structural ideas which offer definitive proof it was intended to be a random killer thriller with a list of the potential killers and their motives.

- > Belinda kills Nev to free her
- > Derek kills Nev to free her
- > Bernard kills Nev to avoid family break-up
- > Veronica kills Nev to avoid family break-up<sup>153</sup>

## The Silver Collection

*Description: Title - Alternative*

*The Silver Collection* was the original title for Alan Ayckbourn's eighth play, *The Sparrow*. It received limited advertising as *The Silver Collection* but the title was altered before the launch of the summer season at the Library Theatre, Scarborough. Apparently there was no change in the concept of the play, but Alan felt *The Sparrow* better suited the subject, although he was not completely happy even with this title....

“My latest play started life on the posters as *The Silver Collection* as I hadn't begun work on it when the publicity was due. It was later presented as *The Sparrow* but I'm not really happy with that title either. Please send your suggestions on postcards only please to....”<sup>154</sup>

## Sisterly Feelings

*Description: Title - Discarded*

According to a report in 1980 in the Scarborough Evening News, Alan Ayckbourn's 1979 play *Sisterly Feelings* had several changes of titles.

“Mr Ayckbourn is known to change titles as he works on a play. The title of *Sisterly Feelings* was changed four times.”<sup>155</sup>

What these titles were had not been recorded, nor had the playwright any recollection 30 years on what they might have been. However, in 2011, research into Alan's original notes for the play revealed several hand-written notes suggesting working titles for the play alongside the actual title. These titles being: *As A Sister*, *Like A Sister* and *Sisterly Touches* and which are presumably some of the titles mentioned in the original newspaper article.

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<sup>153</sup> Preliminary notes regarding *Sight Unseen* held in Alan Ayckbourn's personal archive

<sup>154</sup> *Relatively Speaking* programme, 1968

<sup>155</sup> Scarborough Evening News, 25 August 1980

## Sisterly Touches

*Description: Title – Discarded*

One of several proposed titles for *Sisterly Feelings* which Alan Ayckbourn had written on early notes for the play.

## Someone Watching

*Description: Screenplay*

Following the completion of *The Square Cat* and Alan's marriage to his first wife, Christine Roland, a newspaper article local to Christine's parents ran a piece about the couple. It noted they were writing a number of treatments for television shows and several synopsis for television dramas from this period have survived. None of these treatments were developed into scripts.

*Someone Watching* is described as 'a comedy with soft undertones'<sup>156</sup>, and concerns 'an average man' undergoing a mid-life crisis, unable to have any sort of meaningful relationship with anyone in his family. We see the routine of his average day which he later breaks by going to a pub where he gets into a conversation with a typist from the office. Although nothing happens, his guilt overwhelms him during his daily routine as he believes everyone thinks he is having an affair with the typist, leading him to accidentally step into the path of car. In the hospital, he awakes to his worst nightmare: his family and the typist at his bedside, the latter only having come to wish him well having seen the accident from the office window.

## The Sparrow

*Description: Withdrawn*

*The Sparrow* is the last of Alan Ayckbourn's early plays to be neither published nor performed again since its first production. Although Alan is not as dismissive of it as the very early plays, there is a sense it was a disappointing follow-up to its immediate predecessor *Relatively Speaking* and successor *How The Other Half Loves*.

The play was originally entitled *The Silver Collection* and this title featured in early discussions concerning the 1967 summer season at the Library Theatre, Scarborough, and in early advertising. However, Alan disliked the title and it was altered to *The Sparrow*; although Alan expressed dissatisfaction even with this title (see *The Silver Collection*).

*The Sparrow* was performed for just three weeks in repertory and has never been produced again. The Scarborough Evening News noted the producer Peter Bridge visited the show<sup>157</sup> and he did take an option on the play with the apparent intent of producing it in the West End. It did not transfer to London though and correspondence between Alan Ayckbourn and his agent

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<sup>156</sup> *Someone Watching* treatment

<sup>157</sup> Scarborough Evening News, July 1967

Margaret Ramsay indicates that Alan felt *Bridge* was not enthusiastic about producing *The Sparrow* in London as he wanted something similar to *Relatively Speaking*.<sup>158</sup>

Evie: (Suddenly) Hey. I know what's wrong with me. It's my eye-lashes....

Ed: What?

Evie: They've gone?

Ed: Where?

Evie: The rain must have washed them off.

Ed: Oh. Were they false ones then?

Evie: I hope they were. It was only rain out there, mate, not sulphuric acid.<sup>159</sup>

Although Alan has sometime expressed wonder at how the play would have performed in the West End, the play was arguably lost amongst the clamor surrounding *Relatively Speaking* which opened at approximately the same time in London. Alan's feelings about the play have also appeared ambivalent over the years.

"Since I was following up a winner [*Relatively Speaking*], there was more work in that play [*The Sparrow*], and I still think it was better than *Relatively Speaking*."<sup>160</sup>

"Obviously I don't believe, in retrospect, that it's as good a play [as *Relatively Speaking*], but it's only had three weeks in its life, those three weeks at Scarborough. It's probably worth a little more than that. At the time, the only reason it was suppressed was it was a bit like *The Knack*, somebody said. Since I hadn't seen *The Knack* [by Ann Jellicoe], I didn't realize. I've seen *The Knack* since. It is a bit like *The Knack* - it's got a girl in the lead, that's what it was. But then, so has *Antony and Cleopatra*, you know"<sup>161</sup>

That the play may have had potential though is intriguingly indicated by one of the rare reviews of the original production which made a clear comparison to one of Alan's contemporaries and influences.

"In his dialogue, especially for the spivvish tenant of the flat, his writing is worthy of Pinter at his funniest."<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Correspondence between Alan Ayckbourn and Margaret Ramsay, 1969 – 1970

<sup>159</sup> Extract from *The Sparrow*

<sup>160</sup> Scarborough Evening News, 13 August 1971

<sup>161</sup> Municipal Entertainment, May 1978

<sup>162</sup> Daily Telegraph, July 1967

## The Sporting Gnome

*Description: Title – Discarded*

One of several proposed titles for *Time And Time Again* which Alan Ayckbourn had written on his early notes for the play. The title is a reference to Bernard the garden gnome whom Leonard talks to during the play.

## The Square Cat

*Description: Withdrawn*

The Square Cat was Alan Ayckbourn's first professional play, commissioned by his mentor Stephen Joseph and premiered at the Library Theatre, Scarborough, on 30 July 1959.

The conception of the play has often been repeated in interviews over the years, but what should not be forgotten is Alan never had any grand intentions to be a playwright; at the time of his first commission he was just an actor at the Library Theatre, Scarborough.

“I have never made any decisions; they have always been made for me. I could look back on my life and say I planned it that way, but I didn't plan to be an actor, nor a director, nor a writer. They ran out of writers!”<sup>163</sup>

Alan had actually been interested in writing for many years and had been practicing, inspired by his favourite writers, producing a number of scripts he was confident enough to receive advice on. He had occasionally shown scripts to the founder of the Library Theatre, Stephen Joseph. This knowledge of Alan's nascent talent and enthusiasm for writing gave Stephen the perfect opportunity to encourage the young writer even further when Alan infamously complained about the roles he had been playing recently.

“Stephen had the complete, some would say lunatic, disregard in allowing me to write for him. The story goes that I came off stage one night and said that I could write much better than what I had just acted in and he told me to get on with it then.”<sup>164</sup>

The offending play was David Campton's *Ring Of Roses*, although for many years Alan mentioned it was John Van Druten's *Bell, Book And Candle*, as he did not want to upset Campton, a friend and contemporary at the Library Theatre.

Stephen was always keen to encourage new writers, although this also had other benefits for the company as Alan recalls there was funding to encourage new writing.

“The Arts Council gave us £300, more than I'd ever seen in one place before. I thought, this is money for old rope.”<sup>165</sup>

Stephen's challenge was made during the winter season at the Library Theatre in 1958, when Alan was also in rehearsals for the company's brief winter tour. The play he was rehearsing was

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<sup>163</sup> Plays And Players, September 1972

<sup>164</sup> Yorkshire Post, 02 March 2005

<sup>165</sup> The Independent, 24 August 2009

by and being directed by a relatively unknown writer who had just suffered his first West End flop. Harold Pinter had been invited to Scarborough to direct *The Birthday Party* following its critical mauling in London. This would only be the second time it had been professionally staged and featured Alan in the role of Stanley. The play may not have directly influenced *The Square Cat*, but its author certainly inspired Alan.

“I got fascinated by his use of dialogue, his use of words, the structure of sentences. You can see even now what’s actually rubbed off on me from him.”<sup>166</sup>

*The Square Cat* was written during the tour, but it was not a sole effort. Alan’s partner and soon to be wife, Christine Roland, worked together with him offering advice on the play.

“I stomped off home and, with the help of my then wife, who was a very judicious editor, wrote a play under a joint pseudonym, Roland Allen. This was the time of skiffle and coffee bars and the play was an unashamed launch for my own acting career.”<sup>167</sup>

The pseudonym Roland Allen (Christine Roland / Alan Ayckbourn) was used by Alan for his first four plays, although Christine was only involved in helping *The Square Cat* and *Love After All*.

*The Square Cat* was an unashamed showcase for him both as a playwright and actor with Alan playing two roles; it has never really been emphasised Alan spent the play quick-changing between the rock ‘n’ roll star Jerry Wattis and the mild-mannered Arthur Brummage.

“I came on in act one and stayed on, with all the best lines, until the end, and I danced and sang and played the guitar - none of which I was very good at. It was an immensely practical way to start. I learned a great deal from seeing the same bits die every night.”<sup>168</sup>

It opened at the Library Theatre, Scarborough, on 30 July 1959 and was a big hit with the summer audiences. The surprise success and demand for tickets – apparently it was booked to capacity for all performances - led Stephen Joseph to cancel a week’s performance of David Campton’s adaptation of *Frankenstein* (which had not been well received) and scheduled a second week for *The Square Cat*’s second repertory run the following month; the first time a play in repertory had run for two consecutive weeks at the venue.

For Alan, the over-riding memory was the pay-cheque.

“It made me forty-seven quid, I remember, more than I earned in several weeks. It proved very popular because it was what it was - a farce, with no pretensions to anything else - and it did give people quite a laugh.”<sup>169</sup>

Conventional wisdom has it *The Square Cat* was never performed again, but it was produced once more during the company’s 1959 winter tour. Alan was unavailable to reprise his role, having received his National Service call-up (deftly avoided by being signed out after just three days) and Barry Boys took on the role for the play’s swansong.

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<sup>166</sup> www.time.com, 17 September 2009

<sup>167</sup> Sunday Times, 1 June 1986

<sup>168</sup> Sunday Times, 1 June 1986

<sup>169</sup> Watson, pp.36

It has never been performed since then and the script has never been published. Although Alan suggested for many years all copies had been destroyed, it is surprisingly profligate. Originals of the play are held by The University Of York, The University Of Manchester, the British Library and by the playwright himself.

The only other public glimpses of *The Square Cat* have been in 2005 when on the anniversary of the Stephen Joseph Theatre's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Alan agreed to let the first scene of the play be read as part of the theatre's celebration event *50 Years New*. He also agreed to a reading of this scene as part of the Royal And Derngate Theatre's *Ayckbourn At 70* celebration in 2009 and for an Ayckbourn themed weekend at the Stephen Joseph Theatre in 2010.

"We read *The Square Cat* [at *50 Years New*] and I would say to anyone that heard it: "Take heart, if you are writing plays it can only get better than this." They [the early plays] are not producible pieces, they are nothing more than my early jottings. My early plays are an object lesson in someone having confidence in someone – I was just delighted that someone would put my plays on."<sup>170</sup>

The play concerns a wife's infatuation with a rock star, Jerry Wattis, and a secret liaison to meet him at a friend's house. Her husband and son find out about the plan and also travel to the house to thwart her ambitions, confronting Jerry Wattis's alter-ego, mild-mannered Arthur Brummage.

Dad: Lots of people have unhappy childhoods, agreed. Mine was hell. But that doesn't make me allergic to husbands.<sup>171</sup>

Alternating between Jerry and Arthur, Jerry manages to extricate himself from the wife's crush – leading to him being chased by the husband with an axe – whilst, as Arthur, he falls for the couple's daughter and becomes engaged to her with her mother still clueless that Arthur's alter-ego is her former crush Jerry Wattis.

Dad: Adultery, thank God, even in this demoralised evolution has not yet been classified as an amusement.

Mum: 20 years. I've wasted 20 years of my life on a man like you.

Dad: What do you mean, wasted? I've always been completely fair by you, Alice.

Mum: Every morning I've sat and watched you grunt your way through your breakfast. I've out up with your moods and shocking behaviour.

Dad: I never lost my temper. I have always been completely calm even under the most catastrophic circumstances. And let me tell you, Alice, if I'd been half the man I am I'd have walked out on you a long, long time ago.

Mum: Go on then, I don't want you.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Yorkshire Post, 18 November 2005

<sup>171</sup> Extract from *The Square Cat*

<sup>172</sup> Extract from *The Square Cat*

## Standing Room Only

*Description: Withdrawn*

*Standing Room Only* is one of the most intriguing of Alan Ayckbourn's early plays and is notable for a number of reasons. Written as his fourth play in 1961, it is the last one to be credited to Alan's writing pseudonym Roland Allen, but it is now also regarded as the first play to be credited to Alan Ayckbourn. It is the only one of the early works not available to produce that was later revived professionally. It was also the first Ayckbourn play to be directed by the playwright himself and had the potential to be the first West End production of an Ayckbourn play.

And just to complicate matters, it also exists in numerous different drafts.

*Standing Room Only* originated with a suggestion from Alan's mentor Stephen Joseph that he write a play dealing with overpopulation.

*"Standing Room Only* was interesting.... I really don't like having ideas pushed at me. But Stephen did manage to push two at me; one was *Standing Room Only*. The original brief was to write a play about overpopulation. At the time, there was this great panic that by the year 1996 the world would be at a standstill, as the birth-rate would have quadrupled. Stephen suggested, in a rather bizarre way, that I set a play on Venus, where the population had exploded away from Earth and had now filled up Venus. That seemed to me sort of unlikely, even given that it was a fantasy; that we ought to concentrate on the Earth. I suddenly had this idea of a traffic jam in Shaftesbury Avenue, set on a bus. It was projected science-fiction. It said, by this age, children will be no longer smiled upon and there'd be very complicated exams in order to have them. The girl has an illegitimate baby on the bus, delivering the child on the top deck, and all that. It's pretty way out."<sup>173</sup>

The play was set in 2010 originally, but in subsequent revisions this was moved back to 1997, and is set on a double-decker bus in a grid-locked London under the control of an apparently totalitarian government which has implemented draconian measures to control the size of the population. At its core, it is actually a comedy about a family surviving despite the odds.

The production was premiered at the Library Theatre, Scarborough and attributed to Alan's pen name Roland Allen. It received an exceptionally good review from *The Stage* which ended with the infamous line: "Mr. Allen has imagined his bus in Shaftesbury Avenue: is there no management to drive it there?"<sup>174</sup> Considering this brought Alan to the attention of the London producer Peter Bridge, Alan could be said to owe a great deal to this critic – even if it was his stage manager, Joan Macalpine, who had submitted a review to *The Stage* without mentioning her connection to the production.

Nita: In the Government Multiple Stores. I kept going down there till I met someone I liked.

Pa: Is that how you met John?

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<sup>173</sup> Interview with Simon Murgatroyd, 2000

<sup>174</sup> *The Stage*, July 1961

Nita: Yep.

Pa: I was never told about this.

Nita: You never asked -

Pa: Well swipe me - let's get this straight. Am I to understand that you went round and round the Government Multiple Store with your polythene basket till you saw somebody you liked the look of and then asked him to marry you? Am I right?

Nita: More or Less.

Pa: Got a romantic nature, haven't you?

Nita: Oh, Pa, you're so antiquated. This is 1997. You ought to keep up.<sup>175</sup>

Peter Bridge optioned the play for London and so began numerous re-writes suited to whichever star name was interested in it. The scale of the play also increased, but the tortured writing process led nowhere and possibly launched Alan's increasing wariness of the West End.

"I kept rewriting till I was heartily sick of the thing. Needless to say it finished up a total mess. I've hated re-writing ever since."<sup>176</sup>

While the West End production never took place, Alan did successfully revive the play, having revised it, in 1963 after he had left Scarborough to become an Associate Director at the Victoria Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent. This was the first of his own plays he directed himself and it was credited to Alan Ayckbourn rather than Roland Allen. As a result, *Standing Room Only* is now regarded as the first play to be written under the name of Alan Ayckbourn.

## **Standing Room Only**

### *Description: Variants*

*Standing Room Only* is unique in the Ayckbourn canon in that a number of variations of the script exist in the Ayckbourn Archive. These include the original 1961 manuscript, the edited text for performance, the 1963 revised revival at the Victoria Theatre and several versions of the script for the proposed London transfer. Although the play remains essentially the same, the later drafts incorporate extra characters and become increasingly ambitious with the later London revisions seeing the play's double-decker bus setting being winched into the air by unseen helicopters at the climax!

"And I suppose over two years, I must have rewritten it again and again and again, till I had helicopters flying in.... That was the West End version, which was never done and never could have been done. They said, 'We want something a bit more spectacular!' And at that time, Peter [Bridge] was putting on *Come Spy With Me* with Danny La Rue, who was flown in in a helicopter, and he said this would make a good ending. And

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<sup>175</sup> Extract from *Standing Room Only*

<sup>176</sup> Ayckbourn At 50

obviously a boy of that experience and that age was open to suggestions from the office cleaner onwards!”<sup>177</sup>

## **Standing Room Only**

*Description: Screenplay*

Not only did *Standing Room Only* never make it into the West End, stalling somewhere between Scarborough and London, it also failed to make a planned transition to television. Little is known about the proposed television adaptation other than the rights to adapt and screen it had been bought by the producers of the popular drama series *Armchair Theatre* with the intent of broadcasting it in 1964. The play was never filmed and the only remaining evidence of the adaptation is a mention in Alan’s biography for the world premiere of *Mr Whatnot* at the Victoria Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, in 1963.

“The play is to be presented by ABC Television in their *Armchair Theatre* series next spring.”<sup>178</sup>

## **The Story So Far...**

*Description: Title - Alternative*

This was the original title for what would eventually become *Family Circles*. *The Story So Far...* was the play’s original title when produced at the Library Theatre, Scarborough, in 1970. The title was then altered to *Me Times Me Times Me* for a tour intended to lead to a London production in 1971, which was itself altered to *Me Times Me* during the tour and for a subsequent second attempt to take it into the West End in 1972. The title *Family Circles* was given to the play when it was again revised shortly after the second tour, although it would not be utilised until Alan gave Sam Walters permission to revive the piece at the Orange Tree Theatre, Richmond, in 1978.

## **Suburban Strains**

*Description: Abandoned*

Very little is known about the original concept for *Suburban Strains*, but it is known that Alan began writing the play in 1980 with one idea in his mind before abandoning it for another. It was Alan’s first collaboration with the composer Paul Todd and perfectly illustrates how the vagueness of Alan’s titles gives him the leeway to start over if a project is not working. All that is known is the pair began work on the first song of a vague plot, before Alan abandoned the idea and began working on what would become the actual plot of *Suburban Strains*; the title obviously being loose enough to cover a multitude of sins.

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<sup>177</sup> Watson, pp.46-47

<sup>178</sup> *Mr Whatnot* programme, Victoria Theatre, Stoke On Trent, 1963

"I had an idea for a musical, then Paul shot a tune at me and we wrote half a lyric. Then I told him the original idea wasn't on any more, which threw him into total confusion. I remained cussedly vague. I got the story sorted out, and we thought about what we needed for a song. Paul would go away with an idea: we need a song that says good-bye. He'd rattle away at an electric piano and return with a song."<sup>179</sup>

## **Suburban Strains**

*Description: Variant*

*Suburban Strains* was Alan Ayckbourn's first full-length collaboration with the composer Paul Todd. The musical premiered at the Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round in 1980 and was an early attempt by Alan to bypass the traditional route of his productions to London (these predominantly being transfers with largely new casts, several star names and performed in an end-space theatre) with an arrangement to take the Scarborough company to The Round House. Given this opportunity, Alan revived *Suburban Strains* at the Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round and made some extensive alterations to the book, tightening the play and introducing several new songs and cutting several others. This amended version of the script was then produced at The Round House and became the authorised version of the play, which was published and made available for production. The songs of each version are listed below:

### **Original Production**

#### **Act 1:**

On Our Own

Caroline's Questions

Joanna's Jingles

Let's Spread It About

Dear Mrs Hughes

Dorothy And Me

Two Can Play

Table Talk Part 1

Table Talk Part 1 (reprise)

#### **Act 2:**

Table Talk part 2

Table Talk part 2 (reprise)

Never For A Man

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<sup>179</sup> Scarborough Evening News, January 1980

What Do They Expect?

Goodbye

Risking

Little Lover

I'm An Individual

## **London Production**

### **Act 1**

All For Love

Caroline's Questions

Joanna's Jingles

Easy Come, Easy Go

Dear Mrs Hughes

Dorothy And Me

Two Can Play

Table Talk

### **Act 2**

Table Talk

Never For A Man \*

What Do They Expect?

Goodbye

Risking

I'm An Individual

Caroline's Answers

Caroline's Answers (reprise)

\* Never For A Man was present in the Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round revival, but subsequently dropped when it transferred to the Round House.

## **Take It Or Leave It**

*Description: Title – Discarded*

*Take It Or Leave It* was an alternative title for *A Small Family Business* that Alan used whilst writing the play in 1986 and in early contract negotiations. It seems likely this was only a

temporary title as correspondence indicates the National Theatre expected Alan to alter it.<sup>180</sup> When Alan signed the final contract for the play, an accompanying note added the play was “now definitely *A Small Family Business*. Alan feels he ought to start circulating that one before the other gets locked into everyone’s consciousness.”<sup>181</sup>

## Taken For Granted

*Description: Title - Discarded*

*Taken For Granted* was an alternative title for *Relatively Speaking* and was in use when Alan was negotiating the sale of the rights for its production in London. When the play was first produced at the Library Theatre, Scarborough, in 1965, it had the title *Meet My Father*. Alan was not happy with this (even though it had already been altered from *Meet My Mother*). The play was optioned almost immediately by the producer Peter Bridge and contracts note the play was now called *Taken For Granted*. It is not known how long this title was kept, but between August and February the following year, the title was changed again; first to *Father’s Day* and finally to *Relatively Speaking*.

“By the following February [1967] the play having been re-christened *Taken For Granted*, *Father’s Day* and finally *Relatively Speaking* was in rehearsal in London.”<sup>182</sup>

## Ten Times Table

*Description: Abandoned*

*Ten Times Table* is a rare example of Alan Ayckbourn writing a substantial amount of a play, before abandoning it and starting again. Like *Absurd Person Singular* before it, the idea and the plot remained largely the same, it was just the structure which needed to be altered.

“Last year, I broke down in the middle [of writing *Ten Times Table*]. I actually got to a point in the play when I had to admit “I simply can’t go on, I don’t know where we are.” 48 hours before we started reading it. And we turned back, to do my other trick. I was on page 46, or something, and I want back to page 23. That’s 23 pages thrown away, which is a hell of a lot of a play: it was a third or a quarter of the play.”<sup>183</sup>

The problem to Alan’s mind was originally the play had multiple locations set both in the Swan Hotel’s dining room as well as the committee members’ houses. A sketch of the set discovered in 2009 showed the original plan had a smaller committee table in the centre of the stage with other locations taking place in the four corners of the Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round stage.

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<sup>180</sup> Correspondence between Tom Erhardt and Alan Ayckbourn, 4 April 1986

<sup>181</sup> Correspondence between Heather Stoney and Tom Erhardt, 6 April 1996

<sup>182</sup> *Relatively Speaking* programme, 1968

<sup>183</sup> Municipal Entertainment, May 1978

“I once reached a giddy page 70 whilst writing *Ten Times Table*, before acknowledging I had become totally lost. My mistake, I discovered, had occurred on page seven, when I foolishly chose to leave the single location and take my characters out and about.”<sup>184</sup>

Alan began writing the play during Christmas week and actually decided to scrap the original material he was dissatisfied with on Christmas Eve, writing through most of Christmas Day in order to meet the deadline for rehearsals.

One of the unfortunate casualties of the editing was Alan’s partner, now wife, Heather Stoney, who prior to 1984 typed the scripts as Alan dictated them to her. Having realized there was a problem with the script, Alan worked on it alone before resuming dictating informing Heather that the problem went back to the first pages of the script and would involve the cutting of the character Charlotte, who Heather was contracted to play!<sup>185</sup>

## **Things That Go Bump**

*Description: Ephemera*

*Things That Go Bump* was the title given to the 2008 summer season at the Stephen Joseph Theatre, Scarborough. The season consisted of *Haunting Julia*, *Snake In The Grass* and *Life & Beth* and this was the first time this loose trilogy of Alan Ayckbourn’s supernatural plays had been performed together. Originally the season was to be called *Things That Go Bump In The Dark*, which was later shortened to *Things That Go Bump*.

It is important to note though *Things That Go Bump* is not regarded as an arc title for the three plays in the manner of his other trilogies *The Norman Conquests* of *Damsels In Distress*.

## **This Is Where We Came In**

*Description: Variant*

*This Is Where We Came In* originated as a Saturday morning matinee show at the Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round in 1990. Split into two parts, the circular nature of the plot meant the audience – intended to be families – could see either part 1 or part 2 in any order. The short six week run was extremely successful and the following year Alan Ayckbourn combined both parts to form a single full-length family show, which he went on to revive in 2001. The published edition of the play is the full-length version.

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<sup>184</sup> The Crafty Art Of Playmaking, Alan Ayckbourn, pp.46 (Faber, 2004, ISBN 0571215106)

<sup>185</sup> Conversation with Heather Stoney, 13 July 2010

## **Time And Time Again**

*Description: Title – Discarded*

The process by which Alan arrives at his play titles has rarely been discussed and by and large there survives relatively few examples of titles considered and then discarded by Alan Ayckbourn for his plays. In the case of *Time And Time Again*, several early considerations for titles were found in 2011 amongst Alan's preliminary hand-written notes for the play. These titles included: *The Game's The Thing*; *Plays And Players*; *The Sporting Gnome* and *The Garden Pact*.

## **Todd on Ayckbourn On Song**

*Description: Ephemera*

*Todd On Ayckbourn On Song* is not actually an Ayckbourn play, but a forerunner to the composer Paul Todd's 1992 revue *Between The Lines*, which features songs composed by both men within a book written by Paul Todd.

*Todd On Ayckbourn On Song* – originally titled *Ayckbourn On Song* – was conceived as a small-scale touring show featuring some of the many songs written by Alan Ayckbourn and Paul Todd between 1978 and 1986. It was suggested to Paul Todd initially – with the idea he write the book for the musical – before Alan was approached about giving permission to use his lyrics.

The plot was inspired by Paul Todd's experiences of working with Alan over the years and would have featured actors playing both men; during the refinement process, Alan suggested it would be better if it concentrated on Paul's experiences and had Alan as an off-stage presence.

*Todd on Ayckbourn On Song* went through at least two drafts before falling through; a planned tour in 1989 did not take place possibly because of difficulties writing the book. In 1991 the concept was revived by Paul and heavily reworked into *Between The Lines*.

## **A Trip To Scarborough**

*Description: Variant*

*A Trip To Scarborough* was the first attempt by Alan Ayckbourn to adapt an existing play, in this case R B Sheridan's *A Trip To Scarborough* (which was itself an adaptation of John Vanbrugh's *The Relapse*, itself a sequel to Colley Cibber's *Love's Last Shift or The Fool In Fashion*).

It was premiered in 1982 and has three interwoven plotlines set in different time-periods featuring variations on Sheridan's characters. Elements and scenes from Sheridan's original play are kept alongside Ayckbourn's own plots set in the 1940s and the present day with all the action relocated to the foyer of the Royal Hotel, Scarborough.

When Alan Ayckbourn revived the play in 2007 at the Stephen Joseph Theatre, he chose to revise elements of the contemporary plot, ostensibly to introduce mobile phones, which were not common in 1982 but would hardly be credible not to be present in the hands of businessmen

in 2007. Small sections of dialogue were altered to allow for this and the 2007 version of the play is now considered the definitive version. Although neither version of the script has been published, the 2007 version is available for production with one further alteration, the hotel featured in the play is now no longer specifically the Royal Hotel, but a generic hotel in the town.

## **True Life Fiction**

*Description: Title – Discarded*

One of several titles Alan Ayckbourn considered for his 2005 play *Improbable Fiction*.

## **Untitled 1974 play**

*Description: Concept*

Very little is known about this proposed play from 1974, other than Alan had written notes regarding its characters and structures, but that he didn't progress to beginning a script for it.

In 1974, Alan wrote *Absent Friends*, a play regarded as a significant turning point for the writer and very different to *The Norman Conquests* which had preceded it. His desire to write an a small, contained chamber piece which was almost the polar opposite of *The Norman Conquests*.

Although there is not a context for this untitled idea, it's not hard to believe that the discarded concept was one of Alan's first attempts to write a much smaller scale play, but which was abandoned for a more promising idea. The untitled play features a cast of six and appears to have been conceived as a relationship centered drama on three men and three women. From the existing notes, what can definitely be ascertained is it has nothing in common with *Absent Friends* and was not an earlier version of this play.<sup>186</sup>

## **Untitled Farce**

*Description: Grey Play*

*Untitled Farce* is unique in Alan Ayckbourn's playwriting canon. It has received just one professional performance, directed by Alan Ayckbourn and featuring the Stephen Joseph Theatre company, and Alan has stated it will never be staged again.

The one act farce was presented at the conclusion of the week long celebration of the Stephen Joseph Theatre's 50th anniversary in 2005, *Fifty Years New*. Billed as the 'big surprise!'<sup>187</sup>, the play was presented on Saturday 13 August in the second half of the evening's entertainment and offered a unique end to the week's celebrations. It was written specifically for the event and performed from the book by Alan's resident company, having been rehearsed during the afternoon.

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<sup>186</sup> Notes from Alan Ayckbourn's personal archive marked *Untitled 1974 Play*.

<sup>187</sup> *50 Years New* flyer / programme, 13 August 2005

The farcical plot revolves around the recently married Sir Randolph who is preparing for an important dinner with a government minister. Matters are complicated by an incriminating letter, his wife dressed as a maid, the arrival of an old friend with problems of his own, a disastrously ill-conceived identity-change plan, the unexpected arrival of an old flame and a rather enthusiastic security officer.

Randolph: D-I-C – one or two of those?

Sage: One C, sir. L-O-U-S.

Randolph: Nyarr – Nyaarr. How's that look?

Sage: "Darling. Don't be so bloody ridiculous, Love Randy."

Randolph: Think that'll tweak her heartstrings?

Sage: Who can tell, sir?

Randolph: With women? Precisely. Off you go then.<sup>188</sup>

## Untitled television drama proposal

### *Description: Screenplay*

This is a synopsis held in the Ayckbourn Archive which has little to identify either when it was written nor for whom. There is a precedent of Alan writing treatments for television dramas from a 1959 press cutting, but this synopsis seems almost certain to have been written several years later, possibly when Alan was associate director at the Victoria Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent. The synopsis constantly refers to the year 1963 as a touchstone for the events and it seems a fair assumption this was due to it being the year the piece was written.

The untitled one hour programme proposal is set in the year 2025 in an overpopulated England where the percentage of over 65s has grown massively due to scientific advances; as a result, the young have given up caring for or about them. The action switches between an emergency body trying to deal with the elderly overpopulation and a church in the old folks' quarter of a county-sized city. The main characters are a group of elderly people, still dressed and acting as they did in the 1960s, and a vicar trying to keep his church alive in an increasingly secular society. The plot centres on a heli-coach trip to a local launch base with the elderly and explores how old age has affected the youth of the day: "The 1963 with it kid is the stick in the mud of tomorrow."<sup>189</sup>

When the group leaves the church for the trip, the emergency committee moves in to demolish the church. At the launch pad, the party find themselves aboard a rocket ship in what turns out to be an elaborate ruse to send the troublesome elderly into space. However the rocket fails to launch and the elderly abandon it and converge en masse towards the people trying to take away their livelihood: "the toothless mob, with vengeance in their eyes, bear down upon them, across the landing field."<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Extract from *Untitled Farce*

<sup>189</sup> Extract from untitled television synopsis

<sup>190</sup> Extract from untitled television synopsis

## Virtual Reality

*Description: Withdrawn*

If one considers Ayckbourn's lost plays to be plays that have neither been published nor are available to produce, then *Virtual Reality* stands as the most recent 'lost' play. Written in 2000, the playwright's first play of the new millennium tackled many familiar Ayckbourn theme and laid the foundations for much that was to follow.

Having returned to Scarborough from directing the National Theatre's production of his plays *House & Garden*, Alan decided his next play would be an intimate, relationship based piece that would be staged in the Stephen Joseph Theatre's small, end-stage space The McCarthy. It was inspired by Alan desire to investigate the devastating potential of relationships based on sexual attraction – a theme tackled previously in *Things We Do For Love* - and an incident Alan witnessed in a restaurant.

"There were two young couples sitting at the table next to us, and all four of them were on their mobile phones. You could hear them saying to someone 'I'm with Tom, he's here now' and I just thought 'it's a curious way to have a meal, why don't you talk to each other?'"<sup>191</sup>

A lack of communication between people has been a frequent theme of the playwright's writing and here he explores it in relation to our increasing reliance on communication technology and how, despite this, we actually communicate with each other less and less.

The play is set in London, which began a cycle of four plays set in the capital (the other three being the *Damsels In Distress* trilogy). In contemporary interviews, Alan felt this was due to the increased amount of time he had spent in the city during the past few years. The play also deals with generation gaps in relationships and the different expectations and experiences each person brings to the relationship.

The plot revolves around Alex, undergoing a mid-life crisis, who has invented the Viewdow – a virtual window. His unsatisfactory life is summed up by a birthday meal where his wife, Penny, spends the meal on the phone while his best friend Barney tries to control his drunken wife, Beth. Alone at the end of the night, Alex goes home with the waitress Cassie, where he falls asleep. They continue to meet though with devastating effect: Penny's life collapses and Beth leaves Barney, who blames Alex. His new relationship is strained by differing expectations and Cassie's new friend, Lec, an avant-garde director who intends to record their lives. Isolated again, Alex returns to the restaurant, which has bought a knock-off malfunctioning Viewdow, which Alex apparently steps into.

Alex: I used to find myself absolutely fascinating. I'd talk about me for hours on end, what I'd done, what I was doing, what I wanted to achieve. I used to sit at small tables in dark, smoky coffee bars and pubs, boring women senseless. Mostly women. Because at that time, I honestly believed every word I was saying, you see. Which at least made it sound vaguely interesting. Only, in the last few years... these days, I hear myself talking, saying much the same things I always have done, only now I no

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<sup>191</sup> Unknown publication, 28 January 2000

longer believe a word of it. Every time I speak I hear this little voice inside me saying, you bloody liar!<sup>192</sup>

Although the original production toured, the play was withdrawn from production afterwards and has never been published. Several of the ideas and themes in the play have been used to better effect in subsequent plays such as the *Damsels In Distress* trilogy, *Sugar Daddies* and *Private Fears In Public Places*. In an interview with Alan Ayckbourn in 2003, he makes it clear it is unlikely the play will see the light of day again.

“Like doctors who bury their mistakes, he [Ayckbourn] makes sure his don’t see the light of day either. *Virtual Reality*, for instance, will never be performed. “I own it and can stop people performing it.” .... When he was writing it, he didn’t know if it was good or bad, but at the end of the process he knew it was not “quite a full meal.”<sup>193</sup>

## The Westwoods

### *Description: Concept*

*The Westwoods* is a lunchtime revue written for the 1984 summer season at the Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round. Performed in two parts, *His Side* and *Her Side* it looks at a relationship from the perspective of both sides over four decades. It is not however what was initially advertised in the summer 1984 brochure:

“The trouble, it’s always seems to us, is that theatre has had to compete for far too long with these marathon, blockbusting, multi-million dollar TV series.

Here, at last, is the first live theatre has to offer in the way of major competition. The enthralling, heart-wrenching story of The Westwood Family (or rather three specially chosen episodes from the 900 written and rejected).

Described by the authors as a sort of musical *Thorn Birds* with just a dash of the *Walton Family*, it is designed to lure even the most hopelessly addicted from their TV sets.

Please note, though, the convenient choice of playing time thereby ensuring that you do not miss your favourite evening TV series.”<sup>194</sup>

The original concept, judging from the brochure, was a three-part satire on soap operas with individual ‘episodes’ (*Episode 36; Episode 12; Episode 105*). It is probable the earlier concept was also a musical, but there is no record of why the concept changed nor whether Alan actually began writing the revue that was originally advertised.

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<sup>192</sup> Extract from *Virtual Reality*

<sup>193</sup> Yorkshire Post, 14 June 2003

<sup>194</sup> Stephen Joseph Theatre summer brochure 1994

## What The Devil!

*Description: Grey Play*

*What The Devil!* is a revue, largely conceived by Bob Eaton and Janet Dale, to which Alan Ayckbourn contributed two pieces. Originally the show was developed as a three person revue touring pubs in the Scarborough area. After the tour finished, the show was expanded for a late night season at the Library Theatre. Alan contributed two pieces, the sketch *Dracula* and the song *The Ghost Of 'Enry Albert*. *Dracula* was specifically written for the expanded revue as it featured five actors, but it is not known whether the song was featured in the touring revue or whether it was written specifically for the expanded version. The revue has never been published and it does not appear to ever have been performed again.

## Who Do You Think?

*Description: Concept*

Another concept about which little is known nor whether Alan even began writing the play. *Who Do You Think?* is mentioned in correspondence to Sir Peter Hall in January 1984 as a light piece destined to be the next play at the Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round.

“I have no clear ideas about the piece yet, other than the title of *Who Do You Think?* But it will have a smallish cast and be of a fairly light nature. Mind you, this is me speaking in January. It is likely to turn out to be a 28 hander of searing gloom.”<sup>195</sup>

Ironically, the actual play he wrote that year turned out to be a massive undertaking in the form of *A Chorus Of Disapproval*, which featured the largest cast at that time to feature in an Ayckbourn play. This ambitious tale of rivalry amidst Pendon Amateur Light Operatic Society's production of *The Beggar's Opera* is patently not what Alan Ayckbourn had in mind when discussing *Who Do You Think?*.

## Winnie's Wonderful Day

*Description: Title - Discarded*

On 27 March 2009, an informal event took place at the Stephen Joseph Theatre, Scarborough, for members of the company to mark Alan Ayckbourn officially stepping down as Artistic Director of the theatre. During his leaving speech he confirmed he had completed the first draft of his latest play that day and it was called *Winnie's Wonderful Day*.

As this wasn't an official announcement, the title was not made public by the Stephen Joseph Theatre. This announcement would come in June as a result of the Royal & Derngate's Ayckbourn At 70 three-month long celebration. Alan gave approval for the theatre to make the first public mention of the title of his new play in the souvenir brochure for the event, followed by a confirmation of the title in an interview with Alan in Northampton's *Image* magazine

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<sup>195</sup> Correspondence between Alan Ayckbourn and Sir Peter Hall, 14 April 1984

“I’ve just finished play number 73, *Winnie’s Wonderful Day*, which I’m directing in the autumn for the Stephen Joseph Theatre.”<sup>196</sup>

Despite these announcements, by mid-June Alan had decided to alter the title – possibly as a result that *Winnie’s Wonderful Day* gave the impression of being one of his ‘family’ plays rather than an adult play. On 19 June it was confirmed by the Stephen Joseph Theatre the title had been altered to *My Wonderful Day*.

As an interesting side-note, shortly after the original title was privately announced at the Stephen Joseph Theatre’s company meeting, Alan’s biographer Paul Allen was interviewed on BBC World Service’s *The Strand*. There he inadvertently not only announced the title of the new play, but mistakenly called it *Millie’s Wonderful Day*.

## Withdrawn Plays

*Description: Ephemera*

There are currently considered to be eight plays which are part of the Ayckbourn canon (i.e. acknowledged full length plays), but which have withdrawn, having never been published and not being available to produce. The majority of the withdrawn plays are drawn from early in Alan’s writing career from a period he feels represent the very early steps of a writer and only reflect his inexperience at the time of their creation.

The withdrawn plays are currently considered to be: *The Square Cat* (1959); *Love After All* (1959); *Dad’s Tale* (1960); *Standing Room Only* (1961); *Christmas V Mastermind* (1962); *The Sparrow* (1967); *Jeeves* (1975); *Virtual Reality* (2000).

Plays which are currently unpublished, but which are available for production currently include *Making Tracks* (1981); *The Musical Jigsaw Play* (1994); *Miss Yesterday* (2004). It is expected his latest play as of writing, *Neighbourhood Watch*, will be published in 2013.

## The Wizard Of Oz

*Description: Concept*

This was an abandoned attempt to bring a live version of *The Wizard Of Oz* to the West End stage for Christmas 1969. The project involved Ray Cooney and Peter Mercier<sup>197</sup> and Alan was invited to write the script (it is not known whether this would have been a play or a musical, although logic dictates it was probably a play as at this stage in his career Alan had had no experience of writing for musicals). The production process appears to have been quite developed as a letter indicates Alan believed “Oz is definitely going on”<sup>198</sup> and after the project was abandoned Ray Cooney wrote to Alan that he hoped “all the effort of this year won’t be

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<sup>196</sup> Image Magazine, June 2009

<sup>197</sup> Correspondence between Ray Cooney and Alan Ayckbourn, 27 November 1969

<sup>198</sup> Correspondence between Alan Ayckbourn and Peter Mercier, 1 October 1969

wasted”<sup>199</sup> and that the project would be resurrected the following year. As surviving correspondence all comes from the September / October period of 1969, it would be fair to assume the production was quite advanced if it was to be staged for Christmas 1969 as Alan indicates.

It was not Alan’s first experience of Frank L Baum’s famous and popular fantasy tale as he did direct a family version of *The Wizard Of Oz*, written by Alfred Bradley, at York’s Theatre Royal in 1968 and he would also go on to write *Whenever* in 2000. This time-travelling musical, with music by Denis King, features many nods to *The Wizard Of Oz*.

## Woman In Mind

*Description: Concept*

The original concept for *Woman In Mind* was substantially different from play he eventually wrote, not least because it centered around a man! Although the play was still told from a subjective point of view even at the concept stage, the action would have been considerably different following a man and not based around the effects of a breakdown on them.

“Originally, I was going to write about a man who had a heart attack, could hear what was going on around him but who couldn’t communicate. We would witness the play from the mind’s eye. But then a woman experiencing a mental breakdown seemed so much more interesting that she gradually took over.”<sup>200</sup>

## A Word From Our Sponsor

*Description: Concept*

In 1994, Alan Ayckbourn’s new play *Private Fears In Public Places* was announced; famously he was unable to write it and instead wrote *Communicating Doors*. However, between these two plays lies a mystery.

“Basically, I had two ideas bouncing around my head. So the final piece could have emerged from either one of them.... When I actually started to write the advertised play, *Private Fears In Public Places*, it all rather alarmingly began coming to pieces in my hands. It wasn't ready to be written.... So I turned to my second idea - which to my absolute horror suddenly began to look like another non-starter as well.”<sup>201</sup>

At which point, fortunately, Alan had another idea which became *Communicating Doors*. Of the second idea, nothing is known and Alan has never specifically spoken about the play. However, it is possible this is either *Schooldaze* or an earlier version of his musical *A Word From Our Sponsor*. Although this is far from certain, the intriguing possibility is raised by Alan

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<sup>199</sup> Correspondence between Ray Cooney and Alan Ayckbourn, 27 November 1969

<sup>200</sup> Alan Ayckbourn personal correspondence, 22 February 1984

<sup>201</sup> Yorkshire Post, 1 February 1994

Ayckbourn's programme note for *Communicating Doors* in which he mentions two titles in the same breath - bearing in mind that while *Private Fears In Public Places* had already been publically announced, there had never been a previous public mention of a play called *A Word From Our Sponsor*.

"Thus I proudly unveil my 46th play entitled *A Word From Our Sponsor* - sorry - *Private Fears In Public Places* - no - *Communicating Doors*. That's the one. Well, it does have doors..."<sup>202</sup>

It does not seem implausible to suggest the second lost idea was *A Word From Our Sponsor*, particularly in light of an interview with the playwright about the background to the actual play which was premiered in 1995.

"I had the idea for *Sponsor* about two years ago and I played around with it for a long time. I couldn't quite make it live because it has these exotic elements. It suddenly occurred to me it was a musical idea, by putting it to music, you could make it more credible and meet its exoticism."<sup>203</sup>

This timeline broadly correlates which could mean the second abandoned idea was a non-musical version of *A Word From Our Sponsor*. This was not to say the original concept was entirely the same as the final product, minus music. In an interview in December 1992, Alan spoke about his gestating idea for a play which patently is the basis for *A Word From Our Sponsor*, despite differing in scope from the musical he would actually write three years later.

"The play I'm working on at the moment - it's still very embryonic - is as close to good and evil as I can get. It's about a man who, for the best intentions, chooses the wrong way. I originally wanted to write a play about sponsorship of the arts, but it's wider than that. It's really about how we get into bed with the most extraordinary people. It's set in the middle of a recession, when the spirits are down, and concerns an enthusiastic vicar who decides to revive the mystery plays, to stage them on a huge scale. He's halfway through it when the sponsors drop out. This dark man turns up and offers him some sponsorship - he knows very well who it is! And the man starts altering the script, until you've got Arnold Schwarzenegger slicing people in half, because that's what would appeal to the young.

"That's a familiar theme of mine - that the wrong decision is almost right. Very rarely are we confronted with black-and-white choices; usually they're very difficult and demand a lot of thought. But I think in the end there is a way, and if we think about it for a minute we know which way we should go. The danger is that some part of our brain is always there telling us, 'Don't worry, it'll be all right, just this once. Take the £10 note, they're very rich people.' That's the real devil."<sup>204</sup>

That the idea had been gestating for some time is given extra credence by correspondence in March 1995 in which Alan's wife writes:

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<sup>202</sup> *Communicating Doors* programme, Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round, 1994

<sup>203</sup> Interview with Simon Murgatroyd, 1995

<sup>204</sup> *Six Contemporary Dramatists*, Duncan Wu, pp.154 (St Martin's Press, 1996, ISBN 0312165676)

“Alan has at last written *A Word From Our Sponsor* as a musical.”<sup>205</sup>

Patently the idea was sound but it needed something extra which Alan found the solution to in 1995 when he premiered *A Word From Our Sponsor* at the Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round with music by John Pattison, his final play to receive its premiere at this venue.

## **Work & Play**

*Category: Concept*

*Work & Play* is little more than a title and handful of notes written by Alan Ayckbourn for an unwritten pair of plays, probably dating from 1994 judging from the other notes to which it is attached.

It is nonetheless an intriguing if slightly mind-bending concept for two plays set in two different auditoria – and could well be a precedent for *House & Garden*. According to the brief handwritten notes, *Work* is set in an office and *Play* in a flat with both plays sharing the same cast. Whereas *House & Garden* was two plays running simultaneously in two spaces with the same cast, *Work & Play*'s conceit is the first act of *Work* is the second act of *Play* and the first act of *Play* is the second act of *Work*; this would necessitate audiences having to see both plays to comprehend the full picture. Quite how – or even whether – this would have worked in practice is unknown as the plays were not taken any further than the notes.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Heather Stoney personal correspondence, 5 March 1995

<sup>206</sup> Notes from *Work & Play* held in Alan Ayckbourn's personal archive

# Behind The Scene Of Jeeves

## The perspective from the Ayckbourn Archive

Theatre history records *Jeeves* as one of the most notorious flops to have been staged in London's West End. Uniting the talents of the playwright Alan Ayckbourn and the composer Andrew Lloyd Webber, it proved to be a disastrous attempt to bring the characters of P G Wodehouse to the stage. The story behind the musical is worth a book in its own right, yet despite its notoriety its history has rarely been touched upon in any depth. The Ayckbourn Archive holds a considerable amount of correspondence and material relating to *Jeeves*, which although incomplete and predominantly containing material directly related to Alan's involvement in the play, does offer at least some insight into how one of the West End's most anticipated shows became one of its biggest failures.

*Jeeves* does not begin with Alan Ayckbourn, but with Lloyd Webber and the lyricist Tim Rice who conceived a musical based around *Jeeves* at least two years prior to Alan's involvement. Both men were fans of Wodehouse novels and felt the stories of Bertie Wooster and his manservant Jeeves were prime material for transfer to the stage.

"I have to take the blame for having thought of the whole idea in the first place. I've always found P.G. Wodehouse books terribly funny and thought there was something to be done with them in musical theatre. *Jeeves* was to be the follow-up to *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Joseph [and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat]*. I was going to do it with Tim Rice, and we thought it would be great fun."<sup>207</sup>

*Andrew Lloyd Webber*

Together they produced a rough draft of the musical, but Rice was unhappy with his own contribution and realised he would have difficulty doing justice to the much-loved characters.

"It wasn't very good, particularly the lyrics. The tunes were good, probably better than those in almost any other British musical, but the words were dire, they were mine, and the plot wasn't working out. So I abandoned it."<sup>208</sup>

*Tim Rice*

The lyricist's precise involvement in *Jeeves* from this point onwards is not clear as interviews with the key players contradict each other. Lloyd Webber was determined to continue despite Rice's reticence and had even visited Wodehouse in New York to get the author's blessing; he also began searching for someone to join them on the book, apparently in the hope that Rice would then be inspired to stay on board the project.

Enter Alan Ayckbourn.

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<sup>207</sup> Daily Mail, 1 July 1986

<sup>208</sup> Plays & Players, June 1978

Encouraged by his agent Margaret ‘Peggy’ Ramsay to give serious consideration to writing the book for the musical in November 1973<sup>209</sup>, Alan arranged to meet Lloyd Webber and Rice to discuss working together.

“We had a private meal between Tim Rice and myself and Andrew... and we talked about what a great idea it would be. Tim would write the lyrics and I’d do the book, which would be merely structuring them a storyline. And I said: “Well, I think I can hack one out for you.” And Andrew had already got some music sketches.”<sup>210</sup>

*Alan Ayckbourn*

Alan, also a Wodehouse fan, agreed to write the book, but Rice was still uncertain about his involvement and by March 1974 had decided to step away to concentrate on writing *Evita*. Alan and Lloyd Webber began discussing alternative plans – although at no point was it suggested Alan would write the lyrics.

“We’ll have, as they say, to hold ‘a most promising lyrics writer’ competition! Obviously the most important thing, finally, is to get someone who sparks you [Lloyd Webber] off and vice versa.”<sup>211</sup>

*Alan Ayckbourn*

Despite the lyricist issues, the musical already had financial backing in the shape of the Australian producer Robert Stigwood. Based in Los Angeles with interests in music, television, film and theatre – but ironically apparently no interest in Wodehouse’s work according to Lloyd Webber - his diverse career had recently seen him produce the movie of Lloyd Webber and Rice’s *Jesus Christ Superstar*. Despite providing the finances, his presence was rarely felt and Alan recalls only meeting him twice and apparently only after *Jeeves* had opened in London. In his stead, Bob Swash was appointed to act as the executive producer and go-between for Stigwood.

The musical also lacked a director and for this, Alan suggested Eric Thompson. He had successfully directed Alan’s plays *Time And Time Again* and *Absurd Person Singular* in the West End and shared a great rapport with Alan; he was also directing *The Norman Conquests* for Greenwich Theatre and due to transfer *Absurd Person Singular* to Broadway later in the year. Alan argued that not only was Thompson on his “wavelength” but also that “if we’re going to catch the Wodehouse flavour, it needs to be the essence of comic timing – both musically and verbally”<sup>212</sup>; although it later transpired Thompson had no experience at all of Wodehouse’s writing. The central creative team was now assembled for *Jeeves*. None of them had ever worked on a West End musical before.

Meanwhile, discussions had perhaps inevitably turned towards Alan contributing the lyrics: “Andrew said I could do the lyrics because that’s a piece of cake. It’s taken me 20 years to come to terms with that! They were the very first lyrics written by me.”<sup>213</sup> So having agreed to now

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<sup>209</sup> Correspondence from Margaret Ramsay to Alan Ayckbourn, 23 November 1973

<sup>210</sup> Unpublished interview notes between Alan Ayckbourn and Ian Watson

<sup>211</sup> Correspondence from Alan Ayckbourn to Andrew Lloyd Webber, 4 March 1974

<sup>212</sup> Correspondence from Alan Ayckbourn to Andrew Lloyd Webber, 4 March 1974

<sup>213</sup> Unpublished extract from interview with Alan Ayckbourn by Simon Murgatroyd, 6 March 1996

provide both the book and lyrics, Alan's submitted his first attempt at the songs – "for better for worse"<sup>214</sup> - to Lloyd Webber on 2 May. Alan's uncertainty highlighted when he wrote: "Writing them is like having chicken pox – almost impossible to stop picking at them – and that doesn't necessarily make them any better."<sup>215</sup> He also added that if Lloyd Webber was not happy, he could always turn to an unspecified Plan B.

The situation seems to have been fluid though as by mid-May, Bob Swash confirmed to Margaret Ramsay that Alan would write the lyrics jointly with Thompson; although Thompson did make some initial contribution, it has never been clarified what his exact contribution was, which led to contractual disagreements between him and Stigwood later.

The apparently haphazard approach to the musical shifted up a gear on the weekend of 4 July 1974, when Alan, Lloyd Webber and Thompson came together for the first time to begin, as a spokesman for the Library Theatre in Scarborough phrased it: "hammering out tunes, lyrics and ideas for three days."<sup>216</sup> The trio were based in a bedsit in Scarborough complete with a piano and a six week old kitten owned by the theatre's scenic designer Helga Wood – who had also provided the piano. At the end of the weekend, the basic shape and plot of *Jeeves* had been agreed, lyrics had been approved, altered and drafted (with Thompson convinced he had positively contributed towards them) and an agreement made for a first draft to be completed by September, when the trio would meet again in America. The events of the weekend were chronicled several days later in the Scarborough Evening News, in which Lloyd Webber spoke about Alan's involvement in the collaboration.

"I saw *Absurd Person Singular* at London's Criterion Theatre last year and decided that I must write to Alan and try to persuade him to join me in *Jeeves*. Alan is, without doubt, the best English comedy writer around today, and Eric Thompson is a director with an extraordinary talent for seeing humour in any given situation. I couldn't have found a better team to work with... if it works."<sup>217</sup>

*Andrew Lloyd Webber*

Alan meanwhile offered an insight into his thoughts on adapting Wodehouse for the stage: "The treatment we shall give *Jeeves* will have a contemporary slant. It won't be a museum piece. The books are so dramatic in terms of theatre that one has to be fairly drastic."<sup>218</sup>

By 14 July, Alan had supplied a second longer draft which Lloyd Webber worked on for the New York meeting, now scheduled for the first week of October. The most obvious problem at this stage – and one which would haunt *Jeeves* – was Alan admitted his inexperience with musicals meant the script was far too long.

"The script was heavily over-length, because the other thing, of course, I wasn't used to was incorporating the songs: and as I'd written the lyrics

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<sup>214</sup> Correspondence from Alan Ayckbourn to Andrew Lloyd Webber, 2 May 1974

<sup>215</sup> Correspondence from Alan Ayckbourn to Andrew Lloyd Webber, 2 May 1974

<sup>216</sup> Scarborough Evening News, 3 July 1974

<sup>217</sup> Scarborough Evening News, week commencing 7 July 1974

<sup>218</sup> Scarborough Evening News, week commencing 7 July 1974

I'd been pacing myself on a play, so we had something about one-and-a-half times too long.”<sup>219</sup>

*Alan Ayckbourn*

That Alan and Lloyd Webber were not in full control of the project was made clear in September when Swash told Lloyd Webber he was anxious for casting to start by October at the latest as he had theatres lined up for March; it is a sobering thought that casting did not actually begin until January, yet the show was still lined up to open in Bristol in March. Clearly, the producers were dictating the pace of the show and had fixed ideas about how long the process should take. Alan's response to this was sage, but perhaps prophetic: "I hope Bob Swash's urgency won't panic us into a rush job."<sup>220</sup>

At the start of October, Alan travelled to New York for the opening of *Absurd Person Singular* on Broadway and met Lloyd Webber and Thompson as arranged with a complete draft of the musical. Stigwood had also arranged for them to visit Wodehouse at his Long Island home to hear the musical for the first time, although as Alan noted Wodehouse "was very, very deaf."<sup>221</sup> The group was taken to the home of an experimental composer who possessed a piano and, much to Lloyd Webber's horror, it transpired he had invited friends along to hear the music too. What was intended as a private audience for Wodehouse had become an impromptu performance with Lloyd Webber playing the piano and singing. At the afternoon's end, Wodehouse declared he was happy<sup>222</sup> with what he may or may not have heard and was shuffled off home by his wife Ethel.

With Thompson now free to concentrate all his energies on *Jeeves*, the first major doubts about the scale of the musical began to emerge. Alan had incorporated some elaborate staging including the exterior and interior set of Totleigh Towers on a revolve, the idea being that over the course of the play, Bertie and his antics wreak havoc on the stately home as these stage directions illustrate.

A pleasant looking country house frontage, complete with balconies, trellis work with climbing plants etc.

Jeeves and Bertie pull up at the front door and dismount. Jeeves packs away the car. They are admitted by the butler. They enter.

The house revolves through 180 degrees so we now look into it from the back, like a cross section of a open doll's house.<sup>223</sup>

This then leads at the end of the play to:

The house revolves. We see the front for the first time since the beginning. It is now a complete wreck. All the downstairs windows are broken. Shutters are torn off. Creeper pulled away. Balcony's wrecked.<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Unpublished interview notes between Alan Ayckbourn and Ian Watson

<sup>220</sup> Correspondence from Alan Ayckbourn to Andrew Lloyd Webber, 9 September 1974

<sup>221</sup> Ian Watson, pp.104

<sup>222</sup> Evening Standard, 15 October 1974

<sup>223</sup> Extract from *Jeeves* first draft

<sup>224</sup> Extract from *Jeeves* first draft

However, Thompson was worried about what could realistically be achieved, although this would soon prove to be moot with the appointment of Voytek, an avant-garde and apparently very strong-minded designer, who had very clear ideas of what *Jeeves* needed, which tallied with Thompson but not Alan.

Unfortunately Voytek and Thompson both happened to be in Holland, while Alan and Lloyd Webber were in England unaware of what was happening. When Alan realised a significant part of the script didn't work – specifically the use of Bertie's Drones as a chorus – he decided he should cut them. Unfortunately, Thompson and Voytek had decided the exact opposite and made the Drones an integral part of the staging which had replaced Alan's physical set with a series of abstract silk backcloths, the constant flying of which would noticeably slow down the pace of the musical.

The New Year broke with the good news that Wodehouse had been knighted and that auditions would take place in January at London's Palace Theatre. Given the growing buzz behind the musical and the involvement of two such major West End talents (*The Norman Conquests* having now transferred to the West End and been a hit of unimagined scale for Alan), the demand for roles was high with a great deal of noteworthy talent auditioning for the coveted roles of Wooster and Jeeves. Given this, it was perhaps all the more surprising when the Evening Standard printed an exclusive report in mid-January.

“When the casting is announced probably next week, it is certain that film star David Hemmings and actor Michael Aldridge will be named for the star parts. Hemmings, making his West End debut, will play Wooster and Michael Aldridge will play Jeeves. The announcement of the casting will come as a disappointment to a number of London's top stage stars who had eagerly sought the roles. A spokesman for producer Robert Stigwood said: ‘No contracts have been signed for these roles yet and I cannot confirm or deny anything until they have.’”<sup>225</sup>

The news was unexpected and would not be confirmed for another month; Hemmings was a bona fide star having made his name in the film *Blowup* in 1966, but had no experience of the West End stage and apparently his singing abilities were not strong. Lloyd Webber was not convinced by his leading man, who it appears may have been pushed onto *Jeeves* by the producers: “[He] was an extraordinary individual, quite self-destructive. He would never go to bed, and during the previews you'd find him at three in the morning in the hotel bar, even though he'd have rehearsal early next day.”<sup>226</sup>

Even Hemmings seems surprised to have landed the role and had given little thought as to what it would require of him.

“How did the role come up? I was feeling a bit restless at the time and I was shown Alan Ayckbourn's script, which I found hilarious. Then I went to Andrew Lloyd Webber's home to listen to the music. Many people were being considered it. I went for an audition at the Palace Theatre and sang *Code Of The Woosters*, from the show, just like that. It was a very frightening moment. Then the producers asked me.”<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> Evening Standard, 14 January 1975

<sup>226</sup> Daily Mail, 1 July 1996

<sup>227</sup> Evening Standard, 4 April 1975

*David Hemmings*

By the time the choreographer Christopher Bruce (who would go on to become one of the UK's most pre-eminent choreographers) was appointed in February, it was a company of firsts: Neither Alan, Lloyd Webber, Thompson, Hemmings, Bruce or Voytek had had experience of West End musicals.

“It was the blind leading the blind. Though we were all experienced in our own fields, neither myself, the director, the leading actor, the choreographer nor Andrew had worked on a live theatre musical before. You can only afford so many firsts in a show.”<sup>228</sup>

*Alan Ayckbourn*

On 12 February 1975, *Jeeves* was officially announced to the public with a press conference featuring Hemmings, Aldridge and the actress Gabrielle Drake – again not known for her musical experience. The noted actress Betty Marsden was also announced to play Aunt Dahlia in the £100,000 musical which would open at Her Majesty's Theatre on 22 April.

Judging by the headlines though, the announcement of a major West End show was secondary to Hemmings' private life. His divorce from Gayle Hunnicutt was raised during the press call and his forthright thoughts on the subject led to some sensationalist stories and lurid headlines.

*David Hemmings accuses ex-wife Gayle*<sup>229</sup>

*Gayle and me – by David Hemmings*<sup>230</sup>

*Aristocrats? It's better than being married to a bum actor says David Hemmings*<sup>231</sup>

Not the most auspicious start. To make matters worse, three days later the musical made headlines again for the wrong reasons when it was announced Wodehouse had died at his home in New York on 14 February at the age of 93.

Rehearsals for *Jeeves* began in the last week of February, just four weeks before the production opened for a two week pre-West run at the Bristol Hippodrome. The musical had gone through at least two more drafts. The first was 202 pages long and featured 18 songs, which become 158 pages and 19 songs for the original rehearsal draft. It is this draft which opened the show on 22 March at Bristol, running at 4½ hours and accompanied by a notorious incident with the orchestra.

“[We] had this disastrous experience in Bristol: on the first night, the band stopped playing 15 minutes before the end because the producers wouldn't pay overtime. So these poor, non-singer actors were left completely adrift, without musical accompaniment. I remember walking

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<sup>228</sup> Sunday Telegraph, 19 April 1981

<sup>229</sup> Daily Mail, 13 February 1975

<sup>230</sup> Daily Mirror, 13 February 1975

<sup>231</sup> Daily Express, 13 February 1975

back to the hotel with my son, who was then very young, and he broke a long silence by saying 'I'm sure it'll get better'. But it didn't."<sup>232</sup>

*Alan Ayckbourn*

The critics in Bristol were not kind, but offered little indication of the bloodbath that was soon to follow. It was also patently obvious to both Alan and Lloyd Webber that there were major problems: with the latter noting *Jeeves* had opened in Bristol "taking water at every level."<sup>233</sup> Neither had sufficient influence though to bring the production to a halt, they were at the mercy of the producers and the momentum of a major West End bound musical. In a candid contemporary interview, Lloyd Webber noted: "There is still a lot of work to be done on *Jeeves*. It will have to be reduced in length, and there are one or two bits I'm not happy with."<sup>234</sup>

Alan's agent had seen the first night too and enjoyed it, even though she questioned whether it was possible "to snip a little bit here and there throughout all the scenes?"<sup>235</sup> She was confident enough to be suggesting to Lloyd Webber's agent they needed to clarify foreign and other rights though: "There is no doubt that the moment the London press carry the notices we shall be inundated with inquiries."<sup>236</sup>

Performances continued in Bristol, but with the running time still over four hours the first of several drastic decisions was taken. A frequent criticism of the amount of sub-plots led to the role of Aunt Dahlia being completely cut; Alan's description of her reaction memorably recorded by Paul Allen in Alan's biography.

Betty: Hello darlings!

Eric: Erm, Betty...

Betty: Don't tell me, you've cut the whole fucking role!

Eric: Yes.

Betty: I don't believe it. I do not believe it. I do not f---

Eric: Well, you see –

Betty: Well, that's it. 'Bye!<sup>237</sup>

The play transferred to London for previews from 11 April, without Marsden and with a reduced running time of 3½ hours, and Robert Stigwood finally appeared to appraise his investment. Less than happy he made his presence felt immediately by removing Thompson as director on 18 April.

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<sup>232</sup> The Guardian, 24 June 1996

<sup>233</sup> Daily Mail, 1 July 1996

<sup>234</sup> Bristol Evening Post, 22 March 1975

<sup>235</sup> Correspondence from Margaret Ramsay to Alan Ayckbourn, 21 March 1975

<sup>236</sup> Correspondence from Margaret Ramsay to David Land, 24 March 1975

<sup>237</sup> Allen, pp.148

Alan agreed to take his place as director, more to protect what had been achieved than a desire to take charge of the sinking ship. When later asked why Thompson had been fired, Alan replied: "They felt they had to sack someone."<sup>238</sup>

*Jeeves* opened on 22 April as planned at Her Majesty's Theatre and by this point had, thanks to the work of Alan and Thompson prior to being fired, been reduced to a running time of 2¾ hours. A substantial pruning from the day it opened but still not short by anyone's standards. The running time was the least of the problems though as the critics arrived and left little unbloodied. Barely anyone came out well with Hemmings foremost amongst the many victims for being out of his depth closely followed by Lloyd Webber and Alan, who succinctly summed up the experience: "It was one of the least successful West End musicals and probably distinguished Andrew's career as the biggest failure he's had. It really did get a critical drubbing the first time."<sup>239</sup>

Worryingly, it wasn't just the critics who were dissatisfied as Lloyd Webber reported: "there was booing on the opening night."<sup>240</sup> Just three days after it opened, Bob Swash wrote asking the creative talent to waive their percentages to give the show a chance of a run; the producers having already waived the management fee and negotiated a rent reduction with the theatre. But there was little hope for *Jeeves*. The reviews had had an immediate and devastating effect on the box office. During previews, the show had been generating an average of £1726 per performance; that figure dropped to an average of £960 for the five performances after the reviews were published.

The waivers were agreed and the next day Alan wrote to Stigwood: "Sorry we weren't able to get off in a bigger blaze of glory. I think we were within a hair's breadth of slightly kinder reviews but, alas, once critics decide they don't like something, they really do go too far."<sup>241</sup>

*Jeeves* limped on to decreasing box office as furious cuts and amendments continued during the next two weeks. But nothing could halt the slide as week by week the average take per performance dropped from £738 to £617 to £523. On 12 May, Stigwood threw the towel in and it was announced *Jeeves* would close on 24 May after just 38 performances since opening.

Despite all the time, effort and money that had gone into the production, it's only lasting legacy was to be forever remembered as one of the greatest flops to have been staged in the West End.

Ironically, the effect of the closure was far less traumatic for Alan than might have been expected. Granted, there was a certain inevitability to the early closure and the reception of the play, but even so, Alan was sanguine about the whole experience: "*Jeeves* left me very unaffected. Well, it took a lot of energy out of me – but the whole episode was so ridiculous and remote in a way, that any sadness I felt was for Andrew (whose career it was at stake) and not for me."<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> Allen, pp.148

<sup>239</sup> The Sentinel, July 2001

<sup>240</sup> Daily Mail, 1 July 1996

<sup>241</sup> Correspondence from Alan Ayckbourn to Robert Stigwood, 26 April 1976

<sup>242</sup> Correspondence from Alan Ayckbourn to Margaret Ramsay, 29 June 1975

The experience was also tempered somewhat by the fact that as far as Alan was concerned, it was old news. He had finished writing his new play – the soon to be tremendous hit *Bedroom Farce* – on the very day *Jeeves* closed in London.

With the production over and Alan and Lloyd Webber adamant that *Jeeves* had no future in its current form, there was nothing left but to chalk it up to experience and reminisce about the experience.

“I don’t think I could ever collaborate with another writer, but I did find collaborating with a musician very stimulating. The book, however, was eventually running for four hours. I could have cut it in about a day in Scarborough circumstances. But with a vehicle like that, by the time one got round to cutting, it was like treading on eggs. Actors all had their favourite bits, and so on. The producer of *Jeeves* I met twice as he spent most of his time in Los Angeles. We were all left to our own devices, which would have been alright if any of us had done this sort of show before. We badly needed Hal Prince, or someone like him. I did, however, develop a close working relationship with Lloyd Webber, which I hope might lead to something else, something conducted on our own terms.”<sup>243</sup>

*Alan Ayckbourn*

“Frankly, *Jeeves* should never had made it to London. No one on the team had a clue what they were doing, Stigwood never saw the show out of town and I really only had practical experience of musical theatre via *Joseph* and *Jesus Christ Superstar*, both of which had been heard on record before.

“We came into London to a deserved critical bloodbath. Alan and I couldn’t even watch the second act on opening night, we just buried our heads in far too much wine at the old Petit Club Francois.

“[We] were shattered but we knew we had it coming. We felt in our bones that we had done some good things and we still felt a musical on the *Jeeves* stories could work. We also knew we’d created an outsized turkey. But two things happened during the fiasco. First, I think I learned as much the hard way about musicals in eight weeks as I’ve done in the past two decades. Secondly, Alan and I became close friends.”<sup>244</sup>

*Andrew Lloyd Webber*

Aside from a single heavily abridged student production at Dulwich College in 1981 to mark P G Wodehouse’s centennial, *Jeeves* was never again seen in the form it took in the West End. It was never forgotten though and over the next two decades both Alan and Lloyd Webber would talk about revising and reviving it. Convinced there was a good musical in there, they would eventually get the chance to prove it on the 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary of *Jeeves* when *By Jeeves* was chosen to open the Stephen Joseph Theatre, Scarborough, in 1996.

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<sup>243</sup> Plays and Players, September 1975

<sup>244</sup> Sunday Telegraph, 25 June 1996

The result? Everything *Jeeves* wasn't. Not least a hit. Almost unrecognisable from the original musical, Alan and Lloyd Webber's clever and small scale reinvention of the musical proved *Jeeves* always had potential, it just needed to be approached in the right way.

# Alan Ayckbourn In Conversation

This is a transcript of highlights of an In Conversation With Alan Ayckbourn arranged for the 2010 Ayckbourn Weekend held in Scarborough. The weekend focused on the early writing of Alan Ayckbourn and here the playwright discusses some of his earliest plays.

## Writing Plays

The writers among you will know that there is nothing worse than writing for a vacuum. If you sit down and write a play with no idea of where it will go or who will do it, it's very hard to finish it – unless it's a really burning idea. But once someone says: 'I would like to do a play of yours', you set to with a passion. The deadline is never a bad thing. Some people look down on deadlines slightly - Alan Plater called them amateur writers, as professional writers like deadlines. They curse deadlines at the time, but they're the only way you actually stop and make the work finite. So not a single play of mine has ever been written without a deadline in mind and Stephen Joseph started that noble habit.

The first thing people often ask is what comes first when writing; is it the plot or the dialogue? Neither! Always the deadline and above all the title. In the early days this was because the title needed to be in the brochure, so a lot of my plays were brochure led. This explains why most of the titles have absolutely no bearing on the play. It's a known fact my first successful play was called *Relatively Speaking*, but long before that it was called *Meet My Father* which was actually a quotation from the play. *Relatively Speaking* has no bearing on the play at all. *How The Other Half Loves* possibly has some bearing. By the time you get to plays like *Absurd Person Singular*, that was a hand-me down title I had written on the back of an envelope long before I wrote the play. To my horror I once received a thesis from a student in America, who'd written a whole thesis on why *Absurd Person Singular* was called that. I wanted to write back and tell him that I can't tell you the real reason, as I don't want to ruin your thesis!

I have no time for writing schools; people have that innate skill in them already and they develop it. They may develop it through a teacher but you really develop by actually writing things to order.

When you start writing, you can't read or watch enough. All you can teach is theory and I remember David Edgar invited me to Birmingham to talk about playwriting, which I did for an hour and at the end of it there was a long pause and this woman looked at me and said: "You make it sound extremely difficult." I said "Well, it is." She said: "Well, you're making it sound more difficult than it really is, I'm sure." And I said: "Probably. I don't want to encourage you too much!"

I think everyone has a play in them. But writing is difficult. It's easy enough to write, it's more difficult to write successfully.

## The Square Cat

I think one of the reasons Stephen Joseph first asked me to write was I let slip early on that I'd written at school. In fact, I'd written my first play before the age of 12 and it was an adaptation of an Anthony Buckeridge book *Jennings at School*; which I wrote and never got to

see because I was ill in the sanatorium. I wrote sketches and little bits and pieces once I was at Haileybury, my public school, where the arts scene was covert and undercover and which was all very exciting; like being in the French resistance!

So I was writing and writing and eventually I got to Stephen's company and I was overheard to complain about the play I was in one night, the way actors do. I didn't have a very good part in it and Stephen threw down the gauntlet: "If you think you can write a better play, do so." I said, "I can write better than this – I can write a play tomorrow that's better than this." And he said, "OK, do so smarty. There's just one thing, if you write it, be prepared to play the lead in it." Which he thought would queer my pitch actually as obviously I'm not going to be lunatic enough or suicidal enough to write myself an unplayable role in a play I didn't have any confidence in. But I was so swollen with confidence and possibly a slight stupidity of youth, that I wrote a play in which I gave myself this starring role. The freedom was amazing and the actor in me was urging the author in me onward and onward, so the role was a rock 'n' roll singer playing a guitar, singing and dancing; it was an amazing role – Michael Crawford would have died for it! But I couldn't sing, I couldn't dance and I certainly couldn't play the guitar!

It occurred to me in the first two or three weeks of rehearsals that I ought to remedy this quite quickly, so I went for some guitar lessons. I didn't even have a guitar and this boy looked at me in amazement and said: "How long have you got?" I said: "Well, about two weeks." He said: "You can't play the guitar in two weeks! I can teach you a couple of chords." I said: "Yeah, OK, that'll do. So can we find a song to go with a couple of chords?" and he said: "Well, there's a very boring song with two chords in it!" which I finished up playing.

*The Square Cat* was a farce because that was how it turned out. Everyone tells you - don't write farces, they're for old men. Farces are technically very, very difficult to write unless you're a natural farceur, you have to know exactly all the wheels and nuts of play-building. Long before that, you're supposed to write a very serious play about how your mother didn't understand you and how your father was unkind to you. Write something rather introverted and gloomy and all about you – which is what 80% of all first plays written are; they come soaring out of a person's unhappy childhood and if they've had a happy childhood, they invent an unhappy one. But I started with a silly play about a woman who fell in love with a pop singer and he arranges to go on holiday with her, to her family's horror, who then turn up and try to stop her. The rest of the play is about pop singers running in and out of doors.

Farce is the most difficult sort of theatre to write, as I realised. Years later I still have only written a handful of farces – if you can call them that. *Taking Steps* was significantly my next farce which was 20 years later. That took me ages and ages to write; it was most difficult.

Because *The Square Cat* was light and had a few laughs in it, it made money because we were still doing, in those days, largely plays written by young people who were writing about their "unhappy childhoods" and this was a silly play about no childhood at all. The audience, who were on holiday in Scarborough trying to avoid the rain, ran in gratefully and saw my play, which made the theatre money. It made me more money in one lump than I'd ever earned in my life! £33, it was a fantastic amount! I went completely berserk and bought myself some records!

Stephen Joseph realised he'd actually, like some freak accident of lightning striking, found himself an embryonic commercial writer and he encouraged me to write more. I, wanting to see more £33s coming in because by then I had a family and one child with another on the way, started to write comedies for Stephen and the first three or four all included exciting parts for me! And then as they went on I began to realise that possibly the one weak link in them was this

bloke playing all the leads. So I recast them for another actor – to the eternal gratitude of the rest of the company, who were fed up with supporting me.

## **Development as a writer**

My early writing was very plot-driven: “and then they do this and then so-so comes in and then this happens and then ....” I was getting very tired and it was only around the time of *The Norman Conquests*, when I was jumping higher than I’d ever jumped before by trying to write three plays simultaneously happening in three different locations, that even my youthful inventively as far as plots went began to run out. A small black hole of no action appeared in the middle of *Living Together*, when the family sit down and because things were happening all around in the other rooms, they had nothing whatever to do. I thought: “Oh my God! I’ve hit a brick wall here.” I began to panic and then I thought, well why don’t they talk about their family for a couple of pages. They talked about themselves and it became one of my favourite scenes because out of the madness of the games and the dinner party seating and the rolling around on the terrace and the tangle of the lecherous Norman chasing three women simultaneously, there came this moment of calm which was actually the beacon which led to further plays.

You don’t have to have everything happening on stage providing the chat is interesting enough. So then I swayed towards - Chekhov came to mind - which is very dangerous for a writer. I started to write plays with less and less happening in them until nothing happened in them at all! By the time we got to plays like *Absent Friends*, people were just sitting, having tea and talking. Anything that happened had happened before the play started and the most dramatic action was a woman pouring a jug of cream over a guy’s head and that was it.

I then tried to blend the plays a little bit more. I went back to the farceur and realised that even the great Chekhov had moments when people took pot-shots at each other with guns that didn’t go off. He had his farce moments, so if he could, then I could.

## **Directing**

Stephen Joseph gradually encouraged a second career in order to put a spoke in the wheels of my acting career. He encouraged me to direct and that is the poisoned chalice for an actor; if they really get the taste for directing, they slowly tire of acting because directing, of course, is global and you have a view of the entire production. Whereas acting you’re in charge of one section of the play - unless you’re one of those actors who gives other actors notes!

The two careers - writer and director - developed separately. I didn’t begin with the idea of directing my own plays; at the time people said writers should not direct their own plays. It wasn’t done, although there were notable exceptions including Noel Coward and a few others, but really you weren’t supposed to do that. And then I was allowed slowly to direct my plays in Scarborough, but never in London.

I think the experience of acting in the plays was so mind-blowing that I initially had no thought of directing at all. But as my directing career developed, it encouraged me towards a director’s eye and so the last few plays I was in as an actor, I spent the time checking the lighting, checking the set, checking the pace of the scene and was really a bore as an actor. I would have fired myself! I became more and more objective to what was happening as a director and a less objective actor. I was a waste of space as an actor by the end of it.

It was only a year or so before the two careers joined up and one or two of my writing contemporaries at the time saw this and said “This is good, you can direct your own show” and many a writer tried to follow me, but they didn’t have, of course, independent directing experience. They were going into a rehearsal room with their own play for the first time as a director – it’s difficult enough going in as a director full-stop, but going in as a writer-director unless you’re really experienced is incredibly difficult. I was reasonably experienced by the time I got to direct my own first play, I was at least able to understand the procedures, the geography of directing and I was able to do the plays.

I’m able now to step away from the writer and become the Mr Hyde or the Doctor Jekyll side of myself. I think of Mr Hyde as the writer and Dr Jekyll as the director. I’m slightly more benign as a director than I am as a writer.

## **Meet My Father / Relatively Speaking**

Writing *Relatively Speaking* was an extraordinary experience because I’d just written *Mr Whatnot*, which had gone into the West End and sunk without trace; this play was the old experimental me trying to find a new way to go forward. *Mr Whatnot* was a silent film of a play with very little dialogue. Visually it was based on every Buster Keaton film I’d ever seen with a bit of Chaplin and everything else thrown in. And that hit a brick wall and as I say, sank without a trace at least for the time being. Stephen Joseph then said to me: why don’t you go back and write me a well-made play? Which was like telling an experimental composer to write a Venetian waltz. It didn’t seem very exciting but I reluctantly agreed.

So I tried to write a well-made play and I wrote it over two or three nights in a cottage out at Collingham which I’d rented, as I was working at the BBC in Leeds at the time. I remember a strange cat used to come through the French windows in the middle of the night from next door and sit on my lap and I’d write on its fur and it seemed to like people writing on it in the middle of the night. My notepad was all over the place! With this cat called Pamela – an extraordinary name for a cat - we finished the play together and I sent it to Stephen who didn’t say anything. I’d already had a deadline which had passed. I’d also been forced the title of *Meet My Father*, which I was very pleased to have worked into the curtain line of the second scene.

Stephen started directing it and because I was working at the BBC, I didn’t get to Scarborough for the first read-through or indeed any of the rehearsals. About the second or third week of rehearsals I met Stephen by chance in Manchester– he was supposed to be directing a play in Scarborough and there he was in Manchester shopping! So I asked how’s the play going? He said: “It’s fine. I’ve done a bit of cutting.” I said “I bet you did.... Is it working alright? Are you sure?” It was a load of rubbish as far as I could see. Stephen said: “No, it’s alright. It’ll do.” So I thought that’s encouraging... It’ll do and the director’s in Manchester when he should be in Scarborough! So I reluctantly went through to see it, not to the first night but the second or third night. Stephen had taken whole loads of pages out, so it seemed to have jump cuts; like a film where a bit had been lost! It seemed to still work though. So after that I did some work on it, smoothing out the jumps but it was actually fine, it worked very well and the audiences seemed to be enjoying it.

I’m still a little suspicious of the play because there was such an unpromising start to it. It was then picked up by the producer Peter Bridge, who had produced *Mr Whatnot* before it and therefore I didn’t have a lot of confidence it would do anything else but run for three weeks in London. But he began to assemble an extremely good cast including Celia Johnson, Michael

Hordern, a very young Richard Briers and Jennifer Hilary. All four of whom were pedigree actors and then he got a pedigree director, the very irascible Nigel Patrick. So I did more work on it and then it went out on tour and we did some more work, niggling at the ending and it was, like all early plays, a team effort – although I think it still remained mine, just about!

Both it and my second West End play *How The Other Half Loves* went through these strange team transformations. Sometimes it was quite hard really, because the trouble with being a young writer – and the trouble with being a young director – is your youth. People suspect young people of not knowing what they're doing; which is generally true, but sometimes not. When you're a young writer brimming with ideas, everybody down to the office cleaner has a good idea to add to it. Now nobody even suggests they sort my play out, so I'm really working away in a sort of vacuum, which is maybe self-imposed.

## **The Sparrow**

*The Sparrow* was a four hander with a leading girl, which was quite unusual in those days; a young woman who was supported by two other blokes and there was fourth woman who popped in. So it was a one girl show really and unfortunately – or fortunately for her – Ann Jellicoe's *The Knack* had opened around the same time, which I hadn't seen, with the same idea of this leading girl. And the London producers said, oh it's a bit like *The Knack*. I thought it's not like *The Knack*, I don't even know *The Knack*. But its format was the same and they got nervous - despite the fact *The Sparrow* was quite successful and went very well in Scarborough.

Peter Bridge, who had produced *Relatively Speaking* in London, couldn't find any star parts in it as it was quite a young cast, so it got lost. I think it was because there was no part for Robert Morley or Celia Johnson or Michael Holdern in *The Sparrow*, there was no part for anyone.

Rita Tushingham had made her name in *The Knack*, but that had started at the Royal Court, and I was now set on a commercial track following the success of *Relatively Speaking*. So Peter Bridge cast round in vain to think of anyone who could play it and they couldn't think of anyone - as from the original cast, Robert Powell had yet to do *Doomwatch*, let alone *Jesus Of Nazareth* and John Nettles was in his very first play, his very first role straight from drama school, and had yet to do his extraordinarily successful television career playing detectives here, there and everywhere with his forays into the Royal Shakespeare Company inbetween. So we were four unknown actors and a vaguely unknown playwright.

It was also never going to be a follow-up to *Relatively Speaking*, no mistaken identities in this – it had a man trying to build a boat in his bedroom! My instinct after the success of *Relatively Speaking* was to move on. So it was me deviating but the trouble is when you're a young writer you have to start writing only slightly differently, so people say: "Oh, it's this chap." And eventually you move further away. But if you're not careful you only move on a fraction and you just go round and round like Feydeau and I wasn't interested in that.

# Appendix I

## Alan Ayckbourn: Definitive Play List (1959 – 2011)

### Full Lengths Plays (The Canon)

- |                     |                                      |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1959                | The Square Cat                       |
| 1959                | Love After All                       |
| 1960                | Dad's Tale                           |
| 1961                | Standing Room Only                   |
| 1962                | Christmas V Mastermind               |
| 1963                | Mr Whatnot                           |
| 1965                | Relatively Speaking                  |
| 1967                | The Sparrow                          |
| 1969                | How The Other Half Loves             |
| 1970                | Family Circles                       |
| 1971                | Time And Time Again                  |
| 1972                | Absurd Person Singular               |
| 1973                | The Norman Conquests                 |
| <i>comprising</i>   |                                      |
| 1973                | <i>Table Manners</i>                 |
| 1973                | <i>Living Together</i>               |
| 1973                | <i>Round And Round The Garden</i>    |
| 1974                | Absent Friends                       |
| 1974                | Confusions                           |
| 1975                | Jeeves (with Andrew Lloyd Webber)    |
| <i>subsequently</i> |                                      |
| 1996                | By Jeeves (with Andrew Lloyd Webber) |
| 1975                | Bedroom Farce                        |
| 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*

- 1982 *Events On A Hotel Terrace*  
1982 *Affairs In A Tent*  
1982 *Love In The Mist*  
1982 *A Cricket Match*  
1982 *A Game Of Golf*  
1982 *A Pageant*  
1982 *A Garden Fete*  
1982 *A One Man Protest*  
1983 It Could Be Any One Of Us  
1984 A Chorus Of Disapproval  
1985 Woman In Mind  
1987 A Small Family Business  
1987 Henceforward...  
1988 Man Of The Moment  
1988 Mr. A's Amazing Maze Plays  
1989 The Revengers' Comedies  
1989 Invisible Friends  
1990 Body Language  
1990 This Is Where We Came In  
1990 Callisto 5

*subsequently*

- 1999 Callisto#7  
1991 Wildest Dreams  
1991 My Very Own Story  
1992 Time Of My Life  
1992 Dreams From A Summer House (with John Pattison)  
1994 Communicating Doors  
1994 Haunting Julia

1994 The Musical Jigsaw Play (with John Pattison)  
1995 A Word From Our Sponsor (with John Pattison)  
1996 The Champion Of Paribanou  
1997 Things We Do For Love  
1998 Comic Potential  
1998 The Boy Who Fell Into A Book  
1999 House &  
1999 Garden  
2000 Virtual Reality  
2000 Whenever (with Denis King)  
2001 Damsels In Distress  
*comprising*  
2001 *GamePlan*  
2001 *FlatSpin*  
2011 *RolePlay*  
2002 Snake In The Grass  
2002 The Jollies  
2003 Sugar Daddies  
2003 Orvin: Champion Of Champions (with Denis King)  
2003 My Sister Sadie  
2004 Drowning On Dry Land  
2004 Private Fears In Public Places  
2004 Miss Yesterday  
2005 Improbable Fiction  
2006 If I Were You  
2008 Life And Beth  
2008 Awaking Beauty (with Denis King)  
2009 My Wonderful Day  
2010 Life Of Riley  
2011 Neighbourhood Watch

### **Revues and Musical Entertainments**

1978 Men On Women On Men (with Paul Todd)  
1980 First Course (with Paul Todd)

- 1980      Second Helping (with Paul Todd)
- 1981      Me, Myself & I (with Paul Todd)
- 1983      Incidental Music (with Paul Todd)
- 1984      The 7 Deadly Virtues (with Paul Todd)
- 1984      The Westwoods (with Paul Todd)
- 1985      Boy Meets Girl (with Paul Todd)
- 1985      Girl Meets Boy (with Paul Todd)
- 1986      Mere Soup Songs (with Paul Todd)
- 1998      Cheap And Cheerful (with Denis King)

### **One Act Plays**

- 1962      Countdown
- 1984      A Cut In The Rates

### **Plays For Children And Young People**

- 1969      Ernie's Incredible Illucinations
- 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  
(Original: *A Trip To Scarborough* by R. B. Sheridan)
- 1985      Tons Of Money  
(Original: *Tons Of Money* by Will Evans & Valentine)
- 1989      Wolf At The Door  
(Original: *Les Corbeaux* by Henry Becque)
- 1999      The Forest  
(Original: *The Forest* by Ostrovsky; translation by Vera Liber)
- 2011      Dear Uncle  
(Original: *Uncle Vanya* by Anton Chekhov; translation by 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

1977      The Jubilee Show

1983      Backnumbers (with Paul Todd)

1987      An Evening With PALOS

1992      Between The Lines (lyrics by Alan Ayckbourn)

2005      Untitled Farce

# Appendix II

## People & Places

A guide to some of the people and locations mentioned in *Unseen Ayckbourn*.

**Paul Allen:** Alan Ayckbourn's biographer.

**Roland Allen:** Alan Ayckbourn's writing pseudonym between 1959 and 1961. The name is a combination of his own name and his first wife, Christine Roland.

**The Bob Watson Archive:** The Stephen Joseph Theatre's Archive which contains cuttings and material on all of Alan Ayckbourn's productions in Scarborough.

**Ken Boden:** Amateur theatrical closely involved with the Library Theatre, Scarborough, from its opening. Ken was largely responsible for keeping the venue running after Stephen Joseph's death in 1967 until Alan Ayckbourn became the Artistic Director in 1972.

**Peter Bridge:** Alan Ayckbourn's first London producer who was responsible for producing *Mr Whatnot*, *Relatively Speaking* and *How The Other Half Loves* in the West End.

**Michael Codron:** Producer who was responsible for producing the majority of Alan Ayckbourn's plays in London's West End between 1971 and 2002.

**British Library:** The British Library holds one of the world's largest collection of Alan Ayckbourn's plays in the world. It holds manuscripts for every professionally produced play and other notable Ayckbourn ephemera.

**Tom Erhardt:** Alan Ayckbourn's agent.

**Richard Eyre:** Former Artistic Director of the National Theatre from 1988 to 1997, who was responsible for bring Alan Ayckbourn's early family plays to the venue.

**Grey Plays:** A number of acknowledged plays by Alan Ayckbourn which have been produced but have not been published, are no longer available for production and are not considered part of the official Ayckbourn play canon.

**Sir Peter Hall:** Former Artistic Director of the National Theatre from 1973 to 1988, who commissioned Alan's first play for the venue (*Bedroom Farce*) and who was instrumental in persuading Alan to take a two year sabbatical from Scarborough to work at the National Theatre between 1986 and 1988.

**Robin Herford:** Prolific Ayckbourn actor and director who was also the Artistic Director (alongside Alan Ayckbourn) of the Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round, when Alan took his sabbatical at the National Theatre between 1986 and 1988.

**Stephen Joseph:** Alan Ayckbourn's mentor and founder of both the first professional theatre in the round company (Scarborough) and theatre (Stoke-on-Trent) in the UK. Stephen was a passionate advocate of supporting new writing and new theatre forms. He encouraged Alan to both write and direct and was a major influence in Alan's life until his death in 1967.

**Denis King:** Composer and musical collaborator with Alan Ayckbourn.

**The Library Theatre:** The home of England's first professional theatre-in-the-round company, founded by Stephen Joseph. It was based on the first floor of Scarborough's public

library between 1955 and 1976 and the original home of the Scarborough company of which Alan Ayckbourn would be Artistic Director between 1972 and 2009.

**Lord Chamberlain's Collection:** Until 1968, every play produced in the UK had to be officially approved and licensed by the Lord Chamberlain's office. This procedure ceased in 1968 and the extensive collection of plays was given to the British Library. As a result, the British Library has copies of all of Alan Ayckbourn's plays between 1959 and 1968 including the only existing copy of his second play *Love After All* as well as 'Grey Plays' such as *Double Hitch* and *Love Undertaken*.

**The McCarthy:** The end-stage space at the Stephen Joseph Theatre, Scarborough. Alan Ayckbourn premiered *Things We Do For Love*, *House* and *Virtual Reality* in this space as well as revivals of *Haunting Julia* and *Bedroom Farce*.

**National Theatre:** The National Theatre on London's South Bank has staged many of Alan Ayckbourn's plays including the world premiere of *A Small Family Business*. It has also staged *Bedroom Farce*, *Sisterly Feelings*, *Way Upstream*, *A Chorus Of Disapproval*, *Invisible Friends*, *Mr A's Amazing Maze Plays*, *House & Garden* and *Season's Greetings*. Between 1986 and 1988, Alan Ayckbourn was a company director at the National, having taken a sabbatical from the Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round.

**John Pattison:** Composer and musical collaborator with Alan Ayckbourn.

**Peggy:** See Margaret Ramsay

**Margaret Ramsay:** Noted literary agent and Alan Ayckbourn's first agent who took him on in 1964 and represented him until her death in 1992.

**Alain Resnais:** Noted and award-winning French film director who has adapted Alan Ayckbourn's plays *Intimate Exchanges* and *Private Fears In Public Places* into the films *Smoking / No Smoking* and *Coeurs*.

**Stephen Joseph Theatre:** The present home of the Scarborough company since 1996. A former Odeon cinema converted to a state-of-the-art venue with an in-the-round space (The Round) and end-stage space (The McCarthy).

**Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round:** The Scarborough company's second home on the ground floor of a converted boys' high school. The company was based there between 1976 and 1996.

**Christine Roland:** Alan Ayckbourn's first wife.

**The Round:** The auditorium at the Stephen Joseph Theatre, Scarborough, where Alan Ayckbourn premieres the vast majority of his plays.

**Heather Stoney:** Alan Ayckbourn's second wife and personal assistant.

**Eric Thompson:** Director who was responsible for the West End premieres of *Time And Time Again*, *Absurd Person Singular*, *The Norman Conquests*, *Jeeves* and *Absent Friends*. Also directed *Absurd Person Singular* and *The Norman Conquests* on Broadway.

**Paul Todd:** Composer and musical collaborator with Alan Ayckbourn.

**University Of Manchester:** University which holds the papers of Alan Ayckbourn's mentor Stephen Joseph – including one of the few extant copies of Alan Ayckbourn's first play *The Square Cat*.

**University Of York:** University which has held the Ayckbourn Archive (Alan Ayckbourn's personal archive and the single largest physical Ayckbourn resource in existence) since 2011.

**Victoria Theatre:** The first professional theatre in the round venue in the United Kingdom (the Library Theatre, Scarborough, was the first professional round company). Founded in 1962, the theatre survives to this day as the New Vic Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent.

**Lord Andrew Lloyd-Webber:** One of the world's most successful living composers, who collaborated with Alan Ayckbourn on the flop musical *Jeeves* and its successful revision *By Jeeves*.

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Simon Murgatroyd, October 2011