

PEOPLE BY ALAN BENNETT

Riverhouse Barn 8 April – 15 April 2018
(Performance dates 11 – 14 April 2018)



First performed at the National Theatre in October 2012, this touching and funny play had a star-studded cast headed by Frances de la Tour, Nicholas le Prevost, Peter Egan and Linda Bassett. It received widespread acclaim but was not without controversy as some misconstrued Alan Bennett's intention regarding references within the play about the National Trust and "a pretend England".

This play has many similarities to his earlier work 'Enjoy' (performed by RDG in 2014) but this time we find ourselves at the opposite end of the social strata as we follow impoverished aristocrat Lady Dorothy Stacpoole and her sister June's attempts to save their crumbling stately home in the coalfields of South Yorkshire.

With the cellar flooded, a bath on the billiard table and a cupboard full of ancient wee, exactly how far should Lady Dorothy go to save family home and heritage? Should she gift the property to the National Trust, sell to the mysterious organization who want to relocate 'Stacpole House' (pronounced Stacpool) somewhere more southerly like Dorset or consider selling off a few choice knick-knacks, like the cat's bowl or the lost rosary of Henry VIII to make ends meet. Perhaps she should continue to hire the old four poster bed to a dubious film crew, which after-all would only add further 'character' to the property? Should she do anything at all? After all decay is a kind of progress and the only reason the house and contents have lasted this long is because no one cared. These are just some of the many options considered in this touching and funny comedy exploring the pros and cons and the real cost, both financial and personal, of preserving the past.

By setting this play 'in the round' and fully drawing on Riverhouse Barn's magnificent baronial hall setting we, like the National Trust representative in the play, hope to draw in and fully engage with our audiences to share the joy and fun of this delightfully funny play.

The main parts are undertaken by Lady Dorothy, Iris, June and Theodore, but there is an interesting array of decent sized cameo characters, including a flamboyant 'blue' film crew, which enter Lady Dorothy's decaying world making a total of 13 speaking parts plus additional ensemble non-speaking parts across a variety of age ranges.

CHARACTERS

Age ranges stated are only a guide and can be flexible. Dorothy and June will require moderately upper class accents and Iris should probably have a noticeably Yorkshire 'northern' accent. Unless otherwise stated with modern social and economic mobility the accents and vocal intonations can be flexible across the remainder of the cast.

Lady Dorothy Stacpoole (aka Lofty) 60-70+

Impoverished aristocrat and ex-model the eccentric Lady Dorothy is the current incumbent and custodian of crumbling Stacpole House. Nick-named 'Lofty', this could be reflective of her willowy stature, social standing or haughty nature, she has obviously had a flamboyant jetting past which appears to have come to an abrupt end following a miscarriage. Although not antisocial, she rarely, if ever ventures out and longs for hot water and central heating. Clothed in an old fur coat and gym shoes she reflects the decaying nature of her surroundings. She has an unintentional acerbic wit which she delivers with great aplomb.

June Stacpoole 50-60ish

Dorothy's brusque gay younger sister and Archdeacon of Huddersfield; a position she describes as being "the accountants of the church". June is very practical and concerned about the future upkeep and maintenance of the estate. She is pro National Trust and believes gifting the property to the nation will somehow help make amends for the transgressions of her family's past – fortunes made through sugar, slaves and coal. It is unclear whether this is true or, as implied by Iris, she is jealous Dorothy inherited the family estate following the death of their wayward brother. She isn't really a people person and thinks men, including the Archbishop are useless.

Iris 60-70+

With her disarming childlike honesty at first glance the shabby and downtrodden Iris comes across as not being quite the full ticket but in reality she is quite astute. Introduced as Dorothy's long suffering companion they share a comfortable closeness. Revelations later reveal that Iris is actually Dorothy and June's older illegitimate half-sister and that she has always been a big part of their lives. Consequently Iris knows a great deal about the house and family's colourful history something which she likes to indiscreetly share with amusing effect. With some excellent one-liners, in the old-fashion sense, Iris is a real character.

Theodore 50-60+

Suave and charismatic Theodore is a blast from Dorothy's more colourful past. After a not so illustrious career he is now a dodgy location scout and adult film producer. Lacking in funds he breaks into the house looking to use it as a backdrop for his latest epic. As ex-lovers the oily yet earnest Theodore and Dorothy have an immediate rapport reminiscing about the past and what could have been. This flirty dialogue conceals their shared unspoken understanding of past and present events along with their acceptance of what the future holds.

Bevan 30+

Clad in a camel hair coat this nice young man comes from one of the top UK auction houses to assess and value the contents of Stacpole House. He is a smooth, perfumed salesman with many irons in the fire. Ambitious and always on the lookout for the next deal he floats the idea of selling the house to a mysterious organisation called 'The Concern' who want to preserve the past but keep people out. So more for private enjoyment by the elite rather than the masses.

Ralph Lumsden 50-60+

The enthusiastic man from the National Trust. Thrilled by his discoveries the torch carrying and business like Mr Lumsden wants to preserve the house, warts and all, for the enjoyment of the general public. Passionate about his work he fervently explains about the other projects under consideration and that he is looking for any unusual selling points which would give Stacpole House the edge. In an interesting turn of events Dorothy's efforts to sully the reputation of the house ultimately only add to its appeal much to Mr Lumsden's delight as he seals the deal.

Bishop – elderly

Earlier in the play we are lead to believe Mervyn the Bishop "is not unfrisky and the vestry has seen several awkward moments." When he does eventually makes his appearance he is being dragged around the darkened house by June eventually happening on the film crew. This important little gem of a role adds a farcical 'carry-on' quality to the play.

Bruce 30–50's

As the film crew's grip Bruce is the ultimate Mr fix-it and loves to clean. He fixes the heating, hot water and front door and much to the annoyance of the National Trust burns the archived newspapers and throws away the ancient wee. He is highly organised, butch yet camp and instantly likable with an eye for haute couture.

Louise 20-40's

Caring wardrobe mistress Louise develops a fondness for Dorothy and Iris. She cleans them up and with the help of some vintage haute couture she transforms the delighted Dorothy into her former model self. Her concern does not go un-noticed by Dorothy who in an act of motherly affection gives her the priceless rosary beads as a parting gift.

Colin 30ish

English adult film actor and vegan Colin is having severe performance problems which is holding up filming. He is eventually encouraged to take performance enhancing drugs and acquires some new 'reading material' which eventually does the trick.

Brit 25ish

Latvian adult film actress. Brit is sweet natured but finds it hard to conceal her disappointment at Colin's lack of performance and natural raw talent. She is a consummate professional who gets on with the job of playing a soon to be deflowered virgin. Between film takes she knits tights for her Grandmother back home in the cold climate of Riga.

Nigel 30-50's

As assistant director Nigel is definitely in charge of the filming on the production of 'Reach for the Thigh'. Though gritted teeth, and some swearing, he manages the cast and crew as they set up to film the bedroom scene. He eventually gives Colin one of his 'organic pills' to get things moving.

Les 30-50's

Having once briefly worked with David Lean, Les is now the cameraman on 'Reach for the Thigh'. He professionally directs some of the action to try and get the best possible angles and positions for capturing on film. However, as he points out at one stage he "can't shoot what's not there".

Ensemble

Non-speaking across all age ranges. Additional members of the film crew. National Trust volunteers and visitors. These cast members are crucial to the action helping to conceal the film action, providing additional visual interest and also clearing and resetting the set.

Audition date – 7.30pm 12th December 2017 at the RDG Studio

Rehearsal Nights –Monday/Tuesday from January 2018

Further information available from Michelle Blake

michelleblake56@btinternet.com