



Banbury Cross Players

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Alan Bennett and his “Pretend England”

From the pen of Director, Ray Atkinson

[#BCPPeople](#)

Like many of my generation, I was first aware of Alan Bennett in the 1960s, through the record-breaking West End review "Beyond the Fringe", in which he starred with Peter Cook, Dudley More and Jonathan Miller. Much later, my interest in his writing was awakened by his TV plays “Talking Heads”, particularly “A Cream Cracker under the Settee” written for Dame Thora Hird. His more recent stage plays - "The Lady in the Van", "The History Boys" and "The Madness of King George" were all huge successes on stage and in the cinema.

None of these alone convinced me of the power of Bennett’s writing. Instead, it was a short story called "The Clothes They Stood Up In" (1996). In little more than 100 pages, Bennett manages to capture the humour and emotion of a married couple who have lost everything in a burglary. It is both funny and sad, and shines a light on his own views on life and society.

Alan Bennett is a Yorkshireman with strong views on many things - class, society and the variation in life’s chances and opportunities. Whether, it’s the care (or lack thereof) provided for Miss Shepherd (beautifully characterised by Maggie Smith in "The Lady in the Van") or the personal approach to education provided by Hector (Richard Griffiths) in "The History Boys", Bennett casts a light on England and how things have changed for people since the 1980s.

I experienced living and working in South Yorkshire for ten years and saw the destruction of the coal industry and its impact on the mining communities. This strikes a chord in "People". It was familiarity with the theme that encouraged me to direct the play. In the Pit villages surrounding Bessacarr - the “rather nice” suburb of Doncaster where I lived - as a Londoner, I witnessed at first hand the north/south divide.

In "People" this divide is expressed in another way. When The National Trust offer to take over Stacpole House as an example of “Real England”, Dorothy calls it “a pretend England” pointing to the real England as the mining community adjoining their land.

It is good to see that even in his mid-eighties, Alan Bennett, still has the energy, drive and humour to write great plays. They continue to be relevant to the challenges of 21st century England.

In "People", Bennett prompts us to think about valuing things that are measurable in ways other than just £££s. Let him shake your thinking in this hilarious, moving and risqué Banbury Cross Players’ production.

Check out this short film looking at "People" and the play's depiction of a changing Britain featuring Alan Bennett, writer Bill Bryson and Director Nicholas Hytner,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9KWCda353Hw>

BCP's production of "People" runs from 25th - 28th April 2018 at [The Mill Arts Centre](#).

Tickets are available from the Box Office on 01295 279002 or online at <https://www.themillartscentre.co.uk/Event/141154>



Alan Bennett's

*Hilarious ...
moving ...
and a little bit
naughty!*

PEOPLE

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