

The Good Life

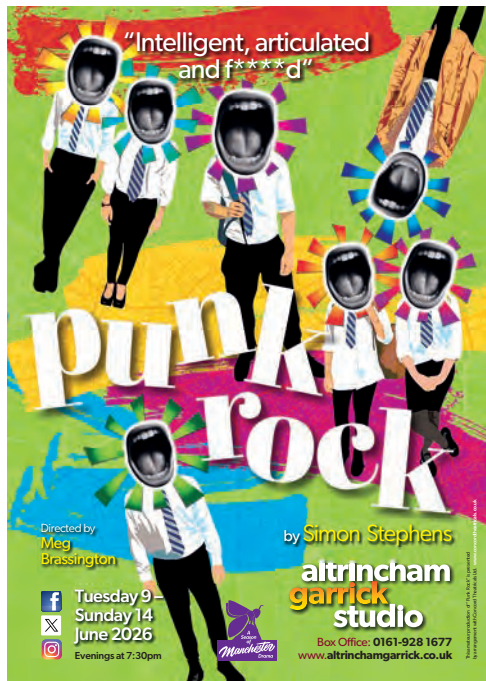


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Book and lyrics by Alan Jay Lerner Music by Frederick Loewe

Original production directed and staged by Moss Hart

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Musical Direction: Mark Giggins
Choreography: Louise Pettitt

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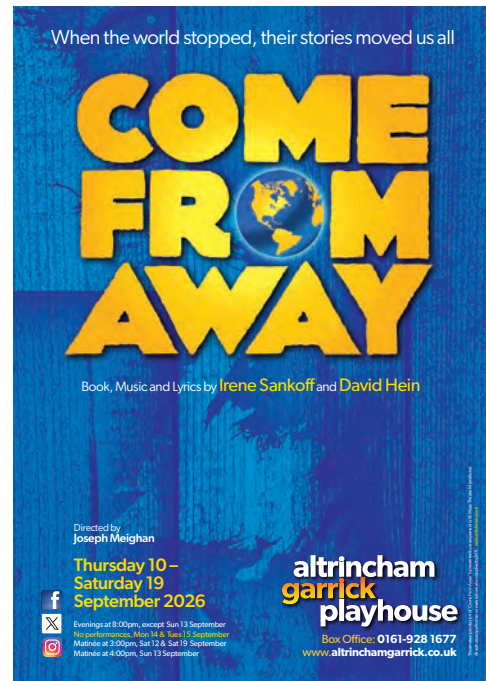
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Evenings at 7:30pm, except Sunday 28 June
Matinee at 2:30pm, Saturday 27 June
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When the world stopped, their stories moved us all



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Book, Music and Lyrics by Irene Sankoff and David Hein

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Thursday 10 – Saturday 19 September 2026

Evenings at 8:00pm, except Sun 13 September
No performances Mon 14 & Sun 15 September
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"What's bred in the bone will not go out of the flesh"



The Son

by Florian Zeller
Translated by Christopher Hampton

Directed by Jonathan Barker

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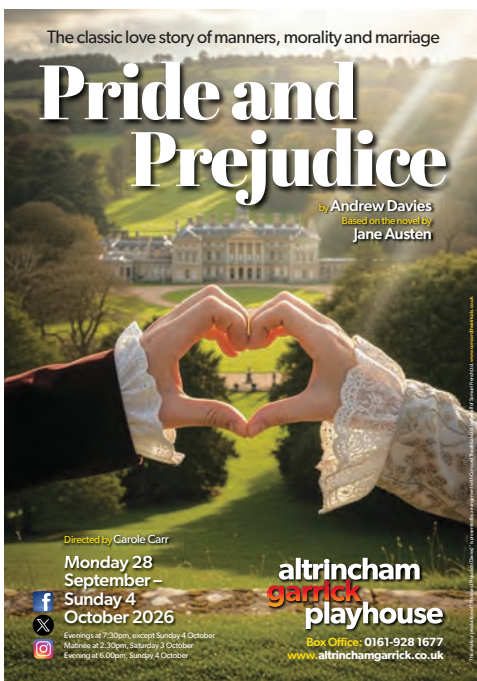
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Evenings at 7:30pm
Matinee 2:30pm, Sat 27 Sept

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The classic love story of manners, morality and marriage



Pride and Prejudice

by Andrew Davies
Based on the novel by Jane Austen

Directed by Carole Carr

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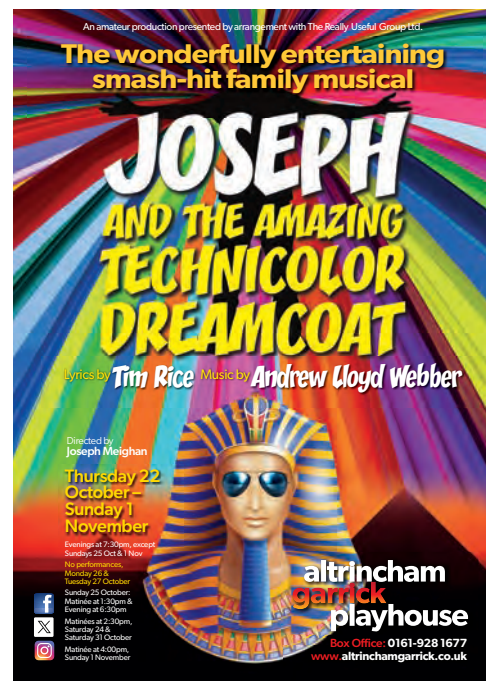
Monday 28 September – Sunday 4 October 2026

Evenings at 7:30pm, except Sunday 4 October
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Evening at 8:00pm, Sunday 4 October

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Evenings at 7:30pm, except Sunday 25 Oct & 1 Nov
No performances Monday 26 & Tuesday 27 October
Sunday 25 October: Matinee at 2:30pm & Evening at 8:30pm
Matinee at 2:30pm, Saturday 24 & Saturday 31 October
Matinee at 4:00pm, Sunday 1 November

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BLACKADDER GOES FORTH

A stage adaptation based on the original BBC Television series created by Richard Curtis, Rowan Atkinson, Ben Elton and John Lloyd

Directed by Charlie Tomlinson

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Monday 16 – Sunday 22 November 2026

Evenings at 7:30pm, except Sunday 22 Nov
Matinee at 2:30pm, Saturday 20 November
Evening at 8:00pm, Sunday 22 November

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A raw, touching and funny portrait of a 21st Century marriage



Middle

by David Eldridge

Directed by Lou Kershaw

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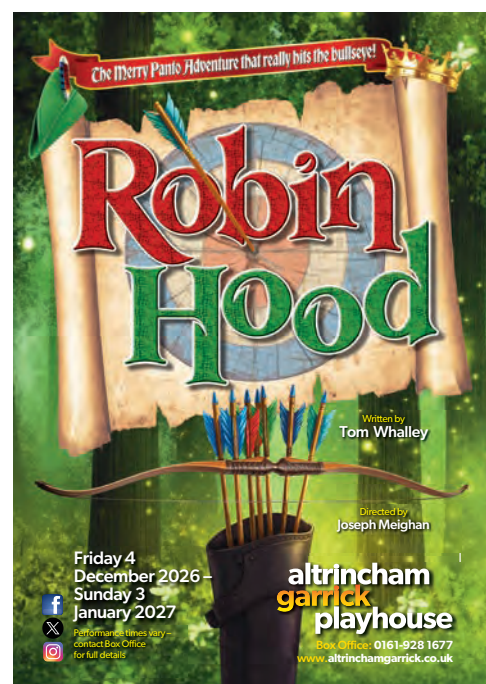
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Tuesday 24 – Sunday 29 November 2026

Evenings at 7:30pm
Matinee 2:30pm, Sat 28 Nov

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The Merry Panto Adventure that really hits the bulls-eye!



Robin Hood

Written by Tom Whalley

Directed by Joseph Meighan

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Friday 4 December 2026 – Sunday 3 January 2027

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Hello & Welcome!

More than fifty years after *The Good Life* first appeared on British television screens, Jeremy Sams has brought John Esmonde and Bob Larbey's much-loved suburban comedy to the stage with warmth, affection and a keen understanding of why the original series still resonates today. Sams' adaptation is neither a radical reinvention nor a museum-piece recreation. Instead, it occupies an appealing middle ground: faithful to the spirit and character dynamics of the original sitcom while reshaping its episodic television structure into a cohesive theatrical comedy for modern audiences.

The original television series, first broadcast by the BBC between 1975 and 1978, centred on Tom and Barbara Good, a middle-class suburban couple living in Surbiton. On his fortieth birthday, Tom experiences a crisis of purpose and abandons his secure job designing plastic novelties in favour of a self-sufficient lifestyle. Together with Barbara, he transforms their tidy suburban home into a miniature smallholding, complete with vegetable plots, livestock, homemade clothing and even methane-powered electricity. Their unconventional new existence horrifies – and fascinates – their next-door neighbours, the socially aspirational Margo and Jerry Leadbetter.

In an age increasingly concerned with sustainability, environmental responsibility, rising living costs and dissatisfaction with corporate culture, Tom and Barbara's rejection of the "rat race" suddenly feels less eccentric than prophetic, and incredibly relevant. The story now "resonates more than ever," highlighting themes of self-sufficiency and ecological awareness that modern audiences immediately recognise.

Yet Sams does not simply transplant old scripts onto the stage. Instead, he creates what has been described as a "reimagining" of the original sitcom, combining familiar material with newly invented incidents and theatrical sequences. The play reunites the iconic characters audiences remember so fondly, but places them within a broader comic narrative designed for live performance rather than episodic television. Scenes flow together more organically, and the theatrical structure allows for larger ensemble moments, physical comedy and more sustained comic escalation.

One of Sams' greatest strengths lies in how carefully he preserves the personalities of the four principal characters. Tom remains idealistic, impulsive and slightly obsessive, driven by a genuine desire to escape the emptiness of consumer society. Barbara, meanwhile,

retains her warmth, patience and emotional intelligence; she grounds Tom's wilder ambitions and gives the story much of its heart. Their marriage still feels believable because Sams understands that the humour emerges not from mockery, but from affection. The Goods may be eccentric, but they are deeply human.

Equally important are Margo and Jerry Leadbetter, perhaps among the finest comic neighbours ever created in British sitcom. Margo remains gloriously status-conscious, obsessively organised and socially ambitious, desperately attempting to preserve suburban respectability in the face of the chaos next door. Jerry, as ever, is gentler, more tolerant and quietly amused by the absurdity surrounding him. Sams has resisted the temptation to modernise them beyond recognition. Instead, he allows their values and anxieties to reveal how much – and how little – British middle-class life has changed since the 1970s.

In many respects, *The Good Life* remains proudly rooted in the 1970s: the setting, social manners and suburban attitudes are unmistakably of their time. There is a comforting nostalgia in the play's world of dinner parties, garden fences and polite middle-class anxieties. But rather than becoming a dusty period-piece, this nostalgia becomes part of the production's charm. Modern audiences can simultaneously laugh at the social conventions of the era while recognising contemporary parallels in debates about work-life balance, sustainability and personal fulfilment.

Indeed, the continued popularity of *The Good Life* suggests that Esmonde and Larbey's original creation was always about more than sitcom eccentricity. Beneath the jokes lies a serious question: what actually constitutes a fulfilling life? Jeremy Sams' adaptation understands this perfectly. His version celebrates the humour, warmth and eccentricity that audiences remember, while gently reminding us that Tom and Barbara's search for a simpler, more meaningful existence may be even more relevant now than it was in 1975.



Joe

Joseph Meighan

Artistic Director, Altrincham Garrick Playhouse.

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The Good Life

Suburban Dreams, sitcom gold and a national treasure

Few television comedies have so perfectly captured the spirit of their time while remaining enduringly relevant as *The Good Life*. Broadcast on BBC1 between 1975 and 1978, the programme ran for four series and 30 episodes, quickly becoming one of the most beloved sitcoms in British television history. Created and written by the prolific duo John Esmonde and Bob Larbey, it blended gentle satire, social observation and character-driven humour into something that resonated deeply with audiences across the UK – and far beyond.

Origins: From Midlife Reflection to Sitcom Concept

The origins of *The Good Life* are rooted in a deceptively simple idea: what happens when an ordinary suburban couple decides to reject modern consumerism and become self-sufficient?

Esmonde and Larbey were already an established writing partnership by the early 1970s, having found success with ITV sitcoms such as *Please Sir!* and its follow-up, *The Fenn Street Gang*. Their work often combined relatable situations with strong character interplay, and this approach would become central to *The Good Life*.

The spark for the show reportedly came from Larbey's own reflections on turning 40 – a milestone that prompted thoughts about life direction and purpose. Rather than presenting a conventional midlife crisis, they imagined a radical alternative: a man who abandons his job and attempts to "drop out" of the rat race without leaving suburbia.

This idea was developed specifically as a vehicle for Richard Briers, already a respected comic actor. The writers crafted the central character, *Tom Good*, with Briers in mind, shaping the tone and humour around his natural warmth and slightly manic energy.

The Premise: A Quiet Revolution

The premise of *The Good Life* is deceptively simple. On his 40th birthday, Tom Good quits his job designing plastic toys and resolves to become "as self-sufficient as possible". Alongside his supportive wife Barbara, he transforms their suburban home into a smallholding – complete with vegetable patches, livestock, and even attempts at generating electricity.

Next door live Jeremy ('Jerry') and Margaret ('Margo') Leadbetter: socially aspirational, conservative, and deeply invested in maintaining appearances. The resulting contrast between the two households provides the show's central comic tension.

Yet the brilliance of the writing lies in its refusal to caricature either side. Margo, for all her snobbery, is not a villain; Tom, for all his idealism, is not always sensible. The comedy arises from the friction – and affection – between neighbours whose values differ but whose friendship endures.

Commissioning and Creative Leadership

The series was commissioned by the BBC during a fertile period for British sitcom. At the helm was producer John Howard Davies, who also served as the BBC's Head of Comedy at the time. Davies played a crucial role in shaping the show's tone, encouraging a balance between realism and comedy.

Davies had a keen eye for casting and reportedly saw immediate potential in the script. He also personally endorsed key casting choices. Peter Bowles was originally cast to play Jerry but was unavailable. (He later starred opposite Penelope Keith in *To the Manor Born*.) Hannah Gordon was considered for the role of Barbara but was ruled out, having recently played a similar role in the BBC sitcom *My Wife Next Door*. Esmonde and Larbey chose Felicity Kendal and Penelope Keith after seeing them on stage together in Alan Ayckbourn's trilogy *The Norman Conquests*.

Directorial duties were shared across the series, but Davies' influence remained central in maintaining the show's distinctive style – grounded, character-led, and rooted in believable domestic situations. The production design reinforced the contrast between the Goods' increasingly rustic home and the Leadbetters' aspirational suburban interior. This visual contrast became an essential storytelling device.

Setting and Filming: Surbiton Meets Northwood

Although the series is set in Surbiton, a leafy suburb of southwest London, filming took place elsewhere. Exterior scenes were filmed in Northwood, north-west London, particularly around Kewferry Road, while interior scenes were recorded at BBC Television Centre in White City, typically in front of a live studio audience. This combination allowed the show to retain both authenticity and the immediacy of studio comedy. The Northwood house used for the Goods' home became iconic, embodying the clash between suburban conformity and alternative living. The grounds of the Goods' house were returned to their original state after the filming of each series' inserts, and all livestock removed at the end of each day's filming.

Why It Captured the Nation

The 1970s in Britain were marked by economic uncertainty, industrial unrest, and a growing questioning of consumer culture. Against this backdrop, the Goods' attempt to "opt out" of conventional society struck a chord.

The idea of self-sufficiency – growing one's own food, reducing reliance on industry – was both radical and oddly comforting. Viewers could fantasise about escaping the pressures of modern life while remaining in familiar surroundings.

As commentators have noted, the show's enduring success lies not in its premise but in its characters. The relationships between Tom and Barbara, and between the Goods and the Leadbetters, felt authentic and emotionally grounded.



Above: Felicity Kendal ("Barbara"), Richard Briers ("Tom"), Penelope Keith ("Margo") and Paul Eddington ("Jerry") in an early BBC promotional photo for *The Good Life*.

The chemistry among the four leads was widely regarded as exceptional. Critics and viewers alike noted that the roles seemed inseparable from the actors who played them. This chemistry extended beyond performance. The cast reportedly enjoyed working together, and this camaraderie translated directly onto the screen.

In addition to the four main characters, several others featured in the series, including "Andy", or "Sir", the former boss of Tom at JJM, and his wife Felicity, who is one of the few characters to support the Goods and finds their attempt at self-sufficiency exciting. Her best line was *"I wanted to do something exciting when I was young, and then I met Andrew and that was the end of that."* Other characters never appeared, yet were cemented in the viewing public's imagination, including Miss Dolly Mountshaft, dictatorial leading light of the Music Society; The overweight Mrs Dooms-Paterson, an equally dictatorial acquaintance and a fellow member of the Pony Club; and Mr and Mrs Pearson, the Leadbetters' gardener and housekeeper.

While Esmonde and Larbey's writing was grounded in realism, there was always a balance of comedy and reality in their scripts. They believed that comedy should emerge from believable situations, not artificial setups. As Larbey once put it, audiences should genuinely care whether Tom's crops succeed or fail. This emotional investment from the viewers elevated the show beyond simple sitcom fare.

A Royal Command Performance

The Good Life aired for four series and two specials from 4 April 1975 to 10 June 1978. The final one-off episode, *"When I'm Sixty-Five"*, was a Royal Command Performance in front of Queen Elizabeth II, Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh and senior BBC management. The cast and crew were presented to the Queen and Prince Philip after the recording. The episode was

originally broadcast in a 45-minute slot with footage either side of the 30-minute episode showing the royal party entering and exiting. The performance came about after the BBC invited the Queen to attend a recording of a television programme for the first time to mark her Silver Jubilee and to this end, the royal household was asked to confirm her favourite entertainment show. Reputedly, this was *The Good Life*, but this was problematic as the series had ended before it was possible to facilitate the Queen's attendance. Thus a 'Christmas Special' episode was commissioned, but it proved impossible for the Queen's schedule to accommodate the recording and a further subsequent episode was commissioned, although this was not recorded until 1978, after the jubilee year.

After The Good Life

After the success of *The Good Life*, the four main cast members were given their own vehicles, commissioned by the then head of comedy (and producer of *The Good Life*), John Howard Davies. Immediately after the series ended, Bob Larbey and John Esmonde created *The Other One* for Richard Briers, co-starring Michael Gambon. It was a seven-part sitcom that aired on BBC1 in the autumn of 1977, running concurrently with *The Good Life Christmas Special*. A second series of six episodes aired in early 1979. Keith starred alongside Peter Bowles in *To the Manor Born*, which began in September 1979. Eddington joined Nigel Hawthorne and Derek Fowlds in *Yes Minister* and its sequel *Yes Prime Minister*. Kendal, who had become something of a sex symbol, went on to join Elspet Gray in *Solo*, Jane Asher in *The Mistress* and Pam Ferris in *Rosemary & Thyme*. Briers later starred alongside Penelope Wilton and Peter Egan in the sitcom *Ever Decreasing Circles*, again written by Larbey and Esmonde, in which Briers' character was the polar opposite of Tom Good. In 1992, Kendal and Eddington reunited in the Channel Four adaptation of Mary Wesley's *The Camomile Lawn*.

John Esmonde & Bob Larbey

John Esmonde and Bob Larbey were both born and raised in south London - Esmonde came from Battersea - and been schoolboy mates at Henry Thornton Grammar School in Clapham. They became friends on a school trip in Switzerland, where they discovered that they were both "loonies with lots in common, including a crass schoolboy humour".



John Esmonde (left) and Bob Larbey pictured at the outdoor location of *The Good Life*.

Though Esmonde was the younger by two years, the pair remained firm friends and, on leaving school, found jobs in the same firm of printing block-makers. Esmonde did his national service in the RAF, worked in the offices of a paint company and made a start in trade journalism, without much success. Larbey, on leaving the printing block-makers, Larbey worked in an insurance office in Soho, and did his national service with the education corps in Germany.

The pair would frequently meet for lunch, idling away the time bemoaning their jobs and wishing they could do something else with their lives. Eventually, they did just that, deciding to try their luck as professional writers over egg and chips at a Wimpy restaurant in London. And it wasn't long before they sold their first piece of comedy writing, marking the birth of glittering

careers comprising over 16 hit TV shows.

Three years of after-hours writing yielded

a BBC joint fee of two guineas in 1965. Sketches for the comedian Dick Emery led to their first radio sitcom, *Spare a Copper*, starring Kenneth Connor (of *Carry On* films fame) as a hopeless policeman. Other series followed, including *Just Perfick* (1969), from the Larkins stories by H E Bates, which would not reach the TV screen as *The Darling Buds of May* for

another 22 years, and then not written by Esmonde and Larbey. They made their television debut in 1967 with *Room at the Bottom* (for the BBC), a cheery low-life series about a crew of maintenance workers at a manufacturing company, starring Kenneth Connor and Deryck Guyler. The title was a playful twist on John Braine's hugely popular novel and movie, *Room at the Top*.

Having tasted success, the next move was to find a proper office rather than continue writing from a boxroom in John Esmonde's home. Bob Larbey's move to the Sussex coast was another factor in the need for a new office. They found a tiny room in Dorking, overlooking a car park, which was far from palatial but just the ticket for two writers wanting to free themselves of potential distractions... although they "quickly turned the place into a slum, as writers usually do," Larbey admitted later. "It wasn't long before there was fag ash, cups that hadn't been washed for days and bits of paper everywhere."

Esmonde and Larbey's first big hit was 1968's *Please, Sir!* This was certainly a diluted, commercial version of several theatrical plays at that time dealing with secondary schools in inner cities, but it touched a national nerve. The antics of Fenn Street Secondary Modern's Class 5C and their callow teacher Bernard Hedges (played by John Alderton) made good viewing. LWT's sitcom quickly became a success and 57 episodes were screened over a four-year period, and even spun off into a secondary series in 1971, *The Fenn Street Gang*, in which Alderton's feckless charges left school and faced the world, each other, unemployment and parental duties. Although it never hit the heights of *Please, Sir!*, 49 episodes were made.

The 1970s was a busy decade for Esmonde and Larbey and by 1975 they had two shows running in tandem. While *The Good Life* was entertaining viewers on BBC1, the writers were looking around



Above: A poster for the movie version of *Please, Sir!* featuring British comedy stalwarts Joan Sanderson (left) John Alderton (centre) and Deryck Guyler (right).



Right: *Look-In* - the Junior TV Times Magazine - featuring *The Fenn Street Gang*.

for a new idea for the independent stations, and called upon their personal experience again. "We asked ourselves whether there was anything else we knew about and suddenly thought of national service. We'd both done two years so it seemed an obvious choice," said Larbey.

Get Some In! (1975-78), a comedy set in the RAF during National Service, screened on ITV for 34 episodes, and made a coming star of Robert Lindsay as a teddy boy new recruit. Although Esmonde and Larbey were among the UK's most successful TV writers, not everything they touched turned to gold. In 1977, they were, once again, working with Richard Briers. This time, the London-born actor played habitual liar *Ralph Tanner* alongside Michael Gambon as *Brian Bryant*. Two series of *The Other One* were made but the sitcom left viewers and critics unimpressed, despite the writers ranking it among their favourite pieces of work.

They hit their stride again big-time in *Ever Decreasing Circles* (1984-89); Briers – supported by Penelope Wilton and Peter Egan – was an interfering suburban fusspot with a manic drive worthy of Molière's most ridiculous egotists.

Although the writers struggled to pinpoint the actual moment they conceived the idea for *Ever Decreasing Circles*, the Martin Bryce character was influenced partly by an amateur footballer they knew.

"Bob and I played old boys' football and had to attend regular meetings. This chap would arrive with a briefcase and give a dissertation on how to take penalties. Now, think of this happening in someone's living room. He was unbelievably English in his fairness but so frustrating. He was always very keen. I remember one week, we were playing a match but didn't have a referee so he decided to ref and play as well!"

Between these series, Larbey went solo on *A Fine Romance* for Judi Dench and her husband Michael Williams, a four-series saga (1981-84) of on/off social intimacy with ups and downs and looming elderly parents played by the unforgettable duo of Richard Pearson and Lally Bowers. And he rallied to the great actor again with *As Time Goes By* (1992-2002, with "reunion" specials in 2005) as Dench's Jean Hardcastle re-animated a long lost affair with Geoffrey Palmer's ex-army officer; her casual brilliance and comic timing in these Larbey scripts undoubtedly led to her Indian summer in British films and Hollywood.

Bob Larbey played an equally significant part in the career of Dench's great friend and

contemporary Maggie Smith, when in 1983 he adapted a William Trevor story, *Mrs Silly*, for ITV and the producer James Cellan Jones, and launched Smith on her gallery of women on the verge of a nervous breakdown. She was unexpectedly and disarmingly tragic, severe and angular like a Modigliani portrait, as a divorced vicar's wife disowned by her own son and humiliated by her ex-husband and his grandiose new wife at a parents' open day in a minor public school.

Larbey had no theatrical background, but his first stage play, *A Month of Sundays*, won the Evening Standard best comedy of the year award when it played at the Duchess theatre in the West End in 1986, starring George Cole. The play was set in a retirement home and won praise for its humour, delicacy and humane consideration of growing older.

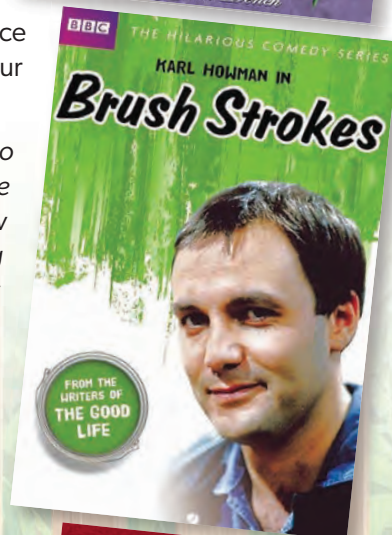
The BBC ran two series, between 1986 and 1993, *Brush Strokes* and *Mulberry*, which attempted (and nearly succeeded) in projecting cheeky boy-next-door Karl Howman into the Briers league of telestardom. In the first, Howman played Jacko, a womanising painter and decorator in Motspur Park whose sexual fantasies usually evaporated in a wine bar run by a coarse-grained and very funny Howard Lew Lewis.

As well as *The Other One*, *Just Liz* – starring Sandra Payne and Rodney Bewes – a football sitcom, *Feet First*, finished after just one series. The last sitcom the pair penned together was the ill-fated *Down To Earth*, again starring Richard Briers. They tried to make his character of an expat readjusting to life in Britain after many years in South America interesting, and failed; it evaporated after seven episodes, after which they called it day as a writing team.

Though Larbey never repeated the success of *A Month of Sundays*, his theatre output continued and is often revived in repertory theatres and amateur companies around the world: *A Small Affair* (1990) charts the romantic perils of TV rehearsal rooms; *Building Blocks* (1992) was written from the heart about family traumas during a domestic building extension; and *Sand Castles* (2001) is a seaside comedy of beach-hut politics.

With his wife Gina, who he had married in 1960, Esmonde retired to La Herradura, on the southern Spanish coast, with the intention of writing novels. He died on August 10th 2008, aged 71.

Bob Larbey was married to Trish Marshall, whom he had met at LWT where she was working as a script reader, until her death in 2006. Bob Larbey died on 31st March 2014.



Jeremy Sams

Adaptor



Jeremy Sams (born 12 January 1957) is a British theatre director, composer, and lyricist. He read Music, French, and German at Magdalene College, Cambridge and studied piano at Guildhall School of Music. Early on, he worked as a freelance pianist and coach, giving frequent recitals and tours and doing stints as a répétiteur at opera houses.

Sams directed a revival of Michael Frayn's farce **Noises Off**, which he mounted in London's Royal National Theatre in 2000.

Among his other directing credits are the West End musicals **Spend Spend Spend** (1999), and a stage adaptation of the film **Chitty Chitty Bang Bang** (2002) for both of which he received Laurence Olivier Award nominations; the 2002 Broadway production **Amour**, which he translated from the original French libretto by Didier Van Cauwelaert. His efforts earned him two Tony Award and two Drama Desk Award nominations.

His directing credits also include **The Water Babies** at the Chichester Festival Theatre in 2003, and the Jason Robert Brown Broadway musical **13**. He has also written and directed the stage adaptation of **The Good Life**, and in 2022 he directed a stage adaptation of **The Lavender Hill Mob** which toured the U.K.

Sams' composing credits include the BBC film of Jane Austen's **Persuasion**, for which he won a BAFTA award for Best Music. Other scores include **The Mother** (2003) and **Enduring Love** (2004).

Sams has written, arranged, and directed music for some 50 theatre productions, including **The Wind in the Willows** and **Arcadia** (Royal National Theatre) and **The Merry Wives of Windsor** (RSC).

The Good

The Cast

Tom Good

Robert Crumpton

Barbara Good

Helen Swain

Margo Leadbetter

Laura Aremia

Jerry Leadbetter

Adam Green



Life

*"Sir" (Andrew Ferguson) /
Harry the Pigman /
Policeman / Dr Joe*

Graham Simmonds

*Felicity Ferguson / Milkwoman /
Margaret / Mary the Receptionist*

Beverley Stuart-Cole



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		Paul Simpson
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Assistant Stage Managers		Helen Sallabank
	Gillian Eyley	Dave Jones
	Elfin Hackl Berry	Alastair Duffy
Lighting		Geoff Scullard
Sound		Daniel Ellis
		Geoff Scullard
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		Claire Eddleston Rose
		Evie Tinsley
'Geraldine' created by		Charlotte Leigh
Rehearsal Prompt		Hugh Wolfson
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	Helen Phillips	Sarah Steer
	Noel Watson	Jen McEvoy
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Assisted by		Trevor McKie
Scenic Artist		Mandy Cooke
Assisted by	Barry Purves	Rob Robinson
	Jane Milner	Charlotte Leigh
	Holly Cooper	Ruth Hetherington
		Elfin Hackl Berry
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	Barry Borgen	Alan Jones
	Nick McKie	Mark McEwan
	John Murphy	Andy McHugh
	Dave Bailey	Cliff Mills
	Steve Cox	Bob Green
	Alistair Duffy	Drew Lightfoot
		Elfin Hackl Berry
Rehearsal & Show Photography		Martin Ogden
Publicity & Programme Design		Nick Sample

*The details above were believed to be correct at the time of going to print,
but could have been subject to change...*

The Company



Robert Crumpton

Tom Good

Robert is delighted to be returning to perform at the Garrick again. In 2025, Robert played Pozzo in *Waiting for Godot* in the Garrick Studio in January, several roles in *Vardy v Rooney: The Wagatha Christie Trial* in May, and *Sir Philip Bin* in *Bleak Expectations* in October. Robert's most recent appearance with the Garrick was in *Kindertransport* in the Studio in January. Robert

trained as an actor at Webber Douglas Academy of Dramatic Art in London.

Robert's theatre credits include: *Henry V* (Oxford Playhouse), *Mr Kolpert* (Greenwich Playhouse), *Romeo and Juliet* (Nottingham Playhouse), *The Emperor Jones* (The Gate, Notting Hill); five national/international summer tours with the open-air British Shakespeare Company; leads in *Rope* and *Everyman* (The Madrid Players); *Betrayal*, *Crave*, *Miss Julie*, Benedick in *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *Present Laughter*, and the title roles in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* (English Theatre Madrid).

Television: *El Ministerio del Tiempo* (HBO/La 1), *In From the Cold* (Netflix), and the Spanish soap opera *Serviry Proteger* (La 1). Film: *The Vault*, *Cracking the Shakespeare Code*.

As a director, Robert's credits include: Racine's *Phèdre* (Old Fire Station Theatre, Oxford); *An Inspector Calls* (The Madrid Players); *Romeo and Juliet*, Jim Cartwright's *Two*, and an adaptation of Carol Ann Duffy's *The World's Wife* (English Theatre Madrid).



Helen Swain

Barbara Good

After a very long and busy break away from the theatre, Helen revived her passion for acting by giving her debut performance at the Garrick Playhouse in 2022 in the production of *Calendar Girls - The Musical*, playing the role of Cora.

Helen has since performed in six more productions at the Garrick, playing the roles of

Baroness Schroeder in *The Sound of Music*, The Bakers Wife in *Into The Woods*, Alice Tinker in *The Vicar of Dibley*, K.T in *Merrily We Roll Along* and then back again to Dibley to once again to embrace the iconic role of Alice Horton (nee Tinker!) in *The Vicar of Dibley Christmas: The Second Coming!* Most recently, Helen was incredibly excited to play Sheila Bryant in our unforgettable production of *A Chorus Line*.

Helen is delighted to be working with such a great company in *The Good Life*, and she would also like to thank her gorgeous little family for their constant love, support and encouragement.



Laura Aremia

Margo Leadbetter

Laura has been a regular on the Garrick stage for many years, one of her favourite and most treasured times was appearing alongside her late dad Terry Chandler in *La Cage Aux Folles*.

Laura has had the pleasure of playing some real characters on the Garrick stage. These include Mrs Lovett in *Sweeney Todd*, Miss Hannigan in *Annie*, Gussie in *Merrily We Roll Along* and most

recently as Mrs Teavee in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*.

Laura is thrilled to be back with the society that she grew up with and has loved every minute of rehearsals.



Adam Green

Jerry Leadbetter

Adam is making his 2nd appearance on the Garrick stage. His first production was seven 7 years ago... a slightly controversial play called *People* by Alan Bennett, where he performed the role of Bevan, a rather mysterious Auctioneer/Valuer.

Since then, he has appeared in some 15 productions across the Greater Manchester region including leading roles in *Cat on A Hot Tin*

Roof by Tennessee Williams, *Home I'm Darling* by Laura Wade (twice!), Alan Ayckbourn's *Neighbourhood Watch* and Agatha Christie's *The Unexpected Guest*.

The Good Life is a particularly special show for Adam since it takes him down memory lane, having grown up very close to where the TV show was set in Surbiton, Surrey with lots of places name checked that he frequented.



Graham Simmonds

"Sir" (Andrew Ferguson) /
Harry the Pig Man /
Policeman / Dr. Joe

Graham has been a member of the Garrick Playhouse company since 1994. In that time he has had the pleasure of taking on many different and varied roles, including *Archbishop Cranmer* in *Catherine Howard*, *Norman* in *The Norman*

Conquests, *Manuel* in *Fawlty Towers*, and *René* in 'Allo 'Allo.

More recently, Graham played Akela in *The Jungle Book*, a *Prison Inmate* in *The Shawshank Redemption* and *Pirate Grey* in *Treasure Island*. His most recent appearance was in the Garrick Studio last June, as *Jimmy Jack Casey* in *Translations*... where he had to learn Latin.

In *The Good Life* Graham takes on 4 roles in one play. He can't wait!



Beverley Stuart-Cole

Felicity Ferguson /
Milkwoman / Margaret /
Mary the Receptionist

Beverley has been a member of the Garrick for 40 years, and has enjoyed a wide variety of roles in that time. Favourites include *Dotty Otley* in *Noises Off*, *Elsie Tanner* and *Bet Lynch* in *Corrie!*, *Alice* in *Closer*, *The Girl* in *Veronica's Room*, *Mrs*

Birling in *An Inspector Calls*, *Lily St Regis* in *Annie*, *Mrs Robinson* in *The Graduate*, *Viola* in *Twelfth Night*, *Helena* in *A Midsummer Nights' Dream*, *Viv* in *Jumpers for Goalposts*, *The Stage Manager* in *Our Town*, *Anne* in *The Father*, *Mrs Fairfax* in *Jane Eyre* and *Violet Bick* in *It's A Wonderful Life*. Most recently, Beverley appeared in our Easter production of *The Railway Children*, playing multiple roles.

Studio credits include *Deborah* in *A Kind of Alaska*, *The Blonde* in *Hitchcock Blonde*, *Sylvia* in *The Thrill of Love*, *Truvy* in *Steel Magnolias* and *Bette Davis* in *Bette and Joan*.

Beverley has also appeared in many of our fabulous pantomimes as the *Fairy*, and is now somewhat addicted to glitter. She is delighted to be playing a varied selection of characters in *The Good Life*, and hopes you enjoy this stage adaptation of a much loved TV classic!

The Directors



Daniel Ellis Director

Daniel studied drama at Liverpool John Moores University and has continued to act and direct since graduating in 2011. He has previously performed with Altrincham Garrick in *Queers*, *The History Boys*, *Peter Pan*, *Jumpers for Goalposts*, *Shakespeare in Love*, as Idle Jack in our 2022 panto *Dick Whittington* and as *Chester the Jester* in 2023's *Sleeping Beauty*

– both of which he also directed! In 2024, Daniel played *Silly Simon* in the Garrick's *Jack and the Beanstalk*, and clearly he's cornered the market in 'Silly' characters as, last year, he played *Silly Billy* in the Garrick's *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*.

Daniel has also appeared with the Garrick as *Hugo Horton* in the sell-out stagings of *The Vicar of Dibley* and *A Vicar of Dibley Christmas – The Second Coming*, and most recently for the Garrick he directed *Vardy v Rooney: The Wagatha Christie Trial*. He's absolutely delighted to be directing *The Good Life*, which is one of his favourite ever sitcoms.

Daniel is the Co-Artistic Director of Green Carnation Company, a theatre company specialising in LGBTQ+ productions which he co-founded in 2018. Through Green Carnation, Daniel has co-directed *Vincent River*, a tour of *My Night With Reg*, *The Pride* and a number of short films created during lockdown and released online.

Elsewhere he has also directed *The 39 Steps*, *Whipping It Up*, *The Weekend* and *The Complete Works of Shakespeare (Abridged)*.



Helen Horridge Assistant Director

Helen trained at LAMDA and has worked in TV and theatre for many years including roles in *Where The Heart Is*, *Harold Shipman: Doctor Death*, *Always and Everyone*, *Little Bird* and *Dalziel and Pascoe*. Theatre roles include *The Baker's Wife* in *Into The Woods*, *Lynda* in *Blood Brothers*, *Helene* in *Sweet Charity*, *Mistress Quickly* in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and *Miranda* in *The Tempest*.

Helen is the founder and principal of The Helen Donohue School of Speech and Drama which she established 27yrs ago here in Manchester.

Helen has been directing both children and adults for the past 27 years. She has also trained many professionals in public speaking and presentation work including nurses, doctors and head teachers.

Helen previously has directed in the Garrick Studio, *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* and *Di, Viv and Rose*. Helen was also assistant director on last year's panto *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* alongside Joe Meighan at the Garrick.

She has thoroughly enjoyed assisting Dan Ellis on this joyous, fun filled production with this wonderful cast.

Geraldine the Goat *as herself*



Throughout her career, Geraldine the Goat has garnered a reputation for bringing chaos, dignity and occasional shrubbery-related destruction to many productions. Born somewhere in the foothills of the Austrian Alps, Geraldine's early roles included a singing part in 'The Lonely Goatherd' musical number in *The Sound of Music*. Geraldine can also be glimpsed in the distance behind Julie Andrews, spinning around on an Austrian hilltop in the opening number, while Geraldine steals the scene by prancing around and munching on Edelweiss.

Though colleagues have described her as "difficult", "method", and "prone to chewing scenery both figuratively and literally", Geraldine is much sought after for cameo appearances in numerous dramas. A recent role in Amazon Prime's latest series of *Clarkson's Farm* cemented her reputation as the Oliver Reed of livestock,

when she was reported to be in a much-lubricated state while waiting for her call to the set, after which she led the mass breakout from the poorly-constructed Goat Pen.

Geraldine comes from a long line of acting animal royalty, after her grandparents enjoyed brief International fame with their short but intense appearances alongside George Clooney and Brad Pitt in *The Men Who Stare at Goats*. Behavioural issues also run in the family, as the grandparents reportedly resisted psychic manipulation by simply head-butting a producer or two.

Geraldine's recent dramatic role in *The Goat, or Who Is Sylvia?* was described as "deeply moving", though Geraldine herself maintained she never understood the plot.

Geraldine hopes to be appearing at Altrincham Garrick Playhouse again in the Autumn, as she's auditioning to be cast in a significant role in *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamgoat*. (Only kidding!).

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*Thank
You!*

The Golden Age of British Sitcoms

From the mid-1960s through to the 1980s, British television sitcom entered what many still regard as its golden age. In an era before panel shows dominated schedules and before streaming fractured audiences into countless niches, the sitcom was a national institution. Entire families gathered around a single television set to watch the latest exploits of Captain Mainwaring, Norman Stanley Fletcher, Tom Good or Terry and Bob. Writers became as important to the success of these programmes as the actors themselves, and a remarkable number of the greatest comedies were created not by lone geniuses, but by enduring writing partnerships.

The period produced several legendary duos whose work defined British humour: David Croft and Jimmy Perry, Ray Galton and Alan Simpson, Dick Clement and Ian La Frenais, and John Esmonde and Bob Larbey. Together they shaped the tone, structure and identity of the British sitcom for more than two decades.

What united these writers was an understanding that comedy works best when rooted in character. Their sitcoms were rarely about gag delivery alone; instead, they explored class, aspiration, disappointment, friendship and social change through recognisably British lives.

The pioneers of modern British sitcom were undoubtedly Galton and Simpson. Their work on *Hancock's Half Hour* and later *Stephoe and Son* established the blueprint for situation comedy in Britain.

The pair met while recovering from tuberculosis in a sanatorium in the late 1940s, and their outsider perspective deeply influenced their writing. Rather than creating glamorous fantasy worlds, they wrote about frustration, failure and thwarted ambition. Tony Hancock's character was pompous, self-important and painfully aware that life had not delivered the greatness he believed he deserved. Harold Steptoe was similarly trapped, yearning for sophistication while chained emotionally and financially to his father and the family rag-and-bone business.

This darker strain of comedy became a defining feature of British sitcom. Unlike many American sitcoms, where problems are tidily resolved, Galton and Simpson often left their characters defeated by circumstance. Their humour came from awkwardness, disappointment and class anxiety. In many ways, they reflected post-war Britain itself: austere, ambitious and emotionally restrained.

Their scripts were extraordinarily precise. Every line advanced character or situation. Episodes such as "*The Blood Donor*" or "*The Radio Ham*" from Hancock's Half Hour



Top: Ray Galton and Alan Simpson.
Centre: Jimmy Perry and David Croft.
Bottom: Dick Clement and Ian La Frenais.

remain masterclasses in comic escalation. Later writers borrowed heavily from their approach, whether consciously or otherwise. Even modern sitcoms such as *The Office* owe a considerable debt to Hancock's blend of self-delusion and social embarrassment.

If Galton and Simpson invented the emotional grammar of the British sitcom, Croft and Perry perfected the ensemble format. Together they created some of the most enduring popular comedies in British television history, including *Dad's Army*, *It Ain't Half Hot Mum* and *Hi-de-Hi!*. The prolific Croft also created '*Allo 'Allo* and '*Are You Being Served?*' in partnership with Jeremy Lloyd.

Jimmy Perry often drew on his own experiences. *Dad's Army* emerged from his memories of serving in the Home Guard during the Second World War. Perry supplied authenticity and anecdotal inspiration, while David Croft brought structural discipline and production expertise. Their partnership was unusually complementary: Perry generated characters and stories from lived experience, while Croft shaped them into polished television scripts.

Croft and Perry specialised in affectionate nostalgia. Their sitcoms presented highly structured comic worlds populated by instantly recognisable archetypes: the pompous leader, the cowardly subordinate, the overenthusiastic fool, the worldly cynic. Captain Mainwaring, Sergeant Wilson, Corporal Jones and Privates Walker, Fraser, Godfrey and Pike became part of the national vocabulary.

Yet beneath the warmth of *Dad's Army* lay a subtle satire of British institutions and class structures. Mainwaring desperately clings to authority; Wilson's effortless upper-middle-class confidence quietly undermines him. The show celebrated collective resilience while gently mocking British bureaucracy and amateurism.

Unlike the bitterness sometimes found in Galton and Simpson, Croft and Perry's work was fundamentally comforting. Even their conflicts ended in camaraderie. Audiences returned not merely for laughs but for the reassurance of familiar characters and moral order.

Dick Clement and Ian La Frenais brought another dimension entirely: realism and regional authenticity. Their breakthrough series, *The Likely Lads* and its sequel *Whatever Happened to the Likely Lads?*, captured the social mobility and uncertainty of post-war northern England.

Where Croft and Perry often worked in heightened comic worlds, Clement and La Frenais grounded their stories in everyday life. Bob Ferris wants middle-class respectability; Terry Collier remains suspicious of change and nostalgia-ridden about the past. Their friendship became a lens through which Britain's shifting social landscape could be examined.

This attention to realism carried into *Porridge*, widely regarded as one of the finest sitcoms ever written. Set in prison, it could easily have become broad farce, but Clement and La Frenais treated the inmates as believable people. Ronnie Barker's Fletcher is cynical, manipulative and deeply humane. The prison itself becomes a metaphor for social entrapment, much like the scrapyard in *Steptoe and Son*.

Their dialogue was among the sharpest in British comedy. They had an ear for regional speech and conversational rhythm that made their characters feel authentic. They also understood male friendship particularly well: much of their comedy rests on affection disguised as antagonism.

John Esmonde and Bob Larbey perhaps best represented suburban Britain. Their masterpiece, *The Good Life*, explored middle-class aspiration and dissatisfaction through the story of Tom and Barbara Good abandoning consumerism to pursue self-sufficiency in Surbiton.

Unlike Galton and Simpson's bleakness or Croft and Perry's nostalgia, Esmonde and Larbey specialised in warmth and emotional intelligence. Their comedy emerged from personality clashes and social observation rather than punchlines. Tom and Barbara's idealism collides hilariously with the conventional ambitions of their neighbours Margo and Jerry Leadbetter.

Esmonde and Larbey were fascinated by ordinary anxieties: embarrassment, neighbourliness, routine and social obligation. Later works such as *Ever Decreasing Circles* deepened this approach. Richard Briers' Martin Bryce is both comic and tragic – a man so desperate to maintain control and social respectability that he becomes imprisoned by his own compulsions.

Their writing was gentler than some contemporaries, but no less perceptive. They recognised the comedy in suburban aspiration and emotional insecurity without ridiculing their characters cruelly. In many ways, they represented the mature phase of British sitcom writing: character-led, emotionally nuanced and quietly observational.

Alongside these partnerships stood other towering comedy figures. Ronnie Barker was not only one of Britain's greatest performers but an accomplished writer himself, often contributing scripts under pseudonyms. His work on *Open All Hours* and *Porridge* demonstrated extraordinary verbal precision and timing.

Meanwhile, Monty Python revolutionised television comedy through surrealism and anti-establishment absurdity. John Cleese and Connie Booth later distilled some of Python's manic energy into *Fawlty Towers*, perhaps the most perfectly constructed sitcom Britain has produced. Every episode functions almost like a comic farce, escalating misunderstanding into catastrophe with clockwork precision.

Continued overleaf...

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Other important writers of the era included John Sullivan, creator of *Only Fools and Horses*; Roy Clarke, responsible for *Last of the Summer Wine* and *Keeping Up Appearances*; and Carla Lane, whose work brought a distinctive female perspective to sitcom writing in series including *The Liver Birds*, *Butterflies* and *Bread*.

By the late 1980s and 1990s, however, British sitcoms began to change. Audience tastes shifted, television became more fragmented, and the traditional studio sitcom with a live audience started to disappear. The rise of alternative comedy also rejected the perceived cosiness of older sitcoms. Comic performers such as Ben Elton, Rik Mayall and Adrian Edmondson embraced aggression, satire and anarchic energy.

Some critics argue that sitcom quality declined after the golden era, but this is perhaps unfair. Instead, the form evolved. Programmes such as *Blackadder*, *The Royle Family*, *Peep Show* and *The Office* re-invented sitcom language for modern audiences. Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant drew directly from the tradition of social embarrassment pioneered by Hancock and Steptoe, while Caroline Aherne's *The Royle Family* revived the observational warmth of Esmonde and Larbey.

More recently, sitcoms such as *Detectorists*, *Ghosts* and *Derry Girls* have demonstrated that British comedy remains capable of excellence. *Detectorists*, in particular, captures something of the humane gentleness associated with *The Good Life*, while *Derry Girls* combines rapid-fire dialogue with emotional truth in ways reminiscent of the best ensemble comedies of earlier decades.

Yet there remains a widespread feeling that the classic sitcom era represented something unique. Partly this is because audiences were united around shared viewing experiences in a way no longer

possible. A Christmas special of *Only Fools and Horses* or *Dad's Army* could attract tens of millions of viewers, becoming a collective national event.

The great sitcom partnerships also benefited from time. Writers were often allowed to develop programmes slowly, refining characters over years rather than chasing instant ratings success. Modern television's commercial pressures and shortened attention spans make such gradual development harder.

Most importantly, the classic writers understood that sitcom is fundamentally about people. Whether it was Harold Steptoe yearning for escape, Captain Mainwaring clinging to dignity, Fletcher surviving prison life, or Tom Good rejecting suburban conformity, the comedy always grew from human truth.

That is why these programmes endure. Their settings may now seem period pieces, but their emotional concerns remain timeless. Britain has changed enormously since the 1960s and 1970s, yet the frustrations, aspirations and absurdities captured by these writers still feel recognisable today.

The golden age of British sitcom was not simply a triumph of comedy; it was a triumph of observation, craftsmanship and character writing. The partnerships of Galton and Simpson, Croft and Perry, Clement and La Frenais, and Esmonde and Larbey created a body of work that continues to influence television around the world. Modern sitcoms may approach comedy differently, but the very best still follow the principles these writers established: believable characters, sharply observed situations, and humour rooted in the complexities of ordinary life.

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The Houses

When it came to searching for the perfect houses to use as the outdoor shooting locations for *The Good Life*, the producers searched extensively for a suitable pair of houses, and eventually settled upon two adjacent houses in Kewferry Road, Northwood, North London – although the series was theoretically set in Surbiton, Surrey – classic “commuter belt” territory.

The grounds of the Goods’ house were returned to their original state after the filming of each series’ inserts, and all livestock removed at the end of each day’s filming. Interior scenes were filmed at BBC Television Centre in front of a live audience.

For a while, the houses became a draw for fans of the series wanting to see where the Goods and Leadbetters lived, and maybe even to catch a glimpse of them. Now, fifty years on from the first series, the houses would have been good investments – other, similar properties in the area were recently valued in the region of £3.5 million. And you could have quite a good life with that!



Above: The Good’s Kitchen set in the BBC Studios at White City.

Below left: Tom and Barbara’s house at 55 Kewferry Road, Northwood, as seen on Google’s Street Map. Below: Jerry and Margo Leadbetter’s house next door.



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