



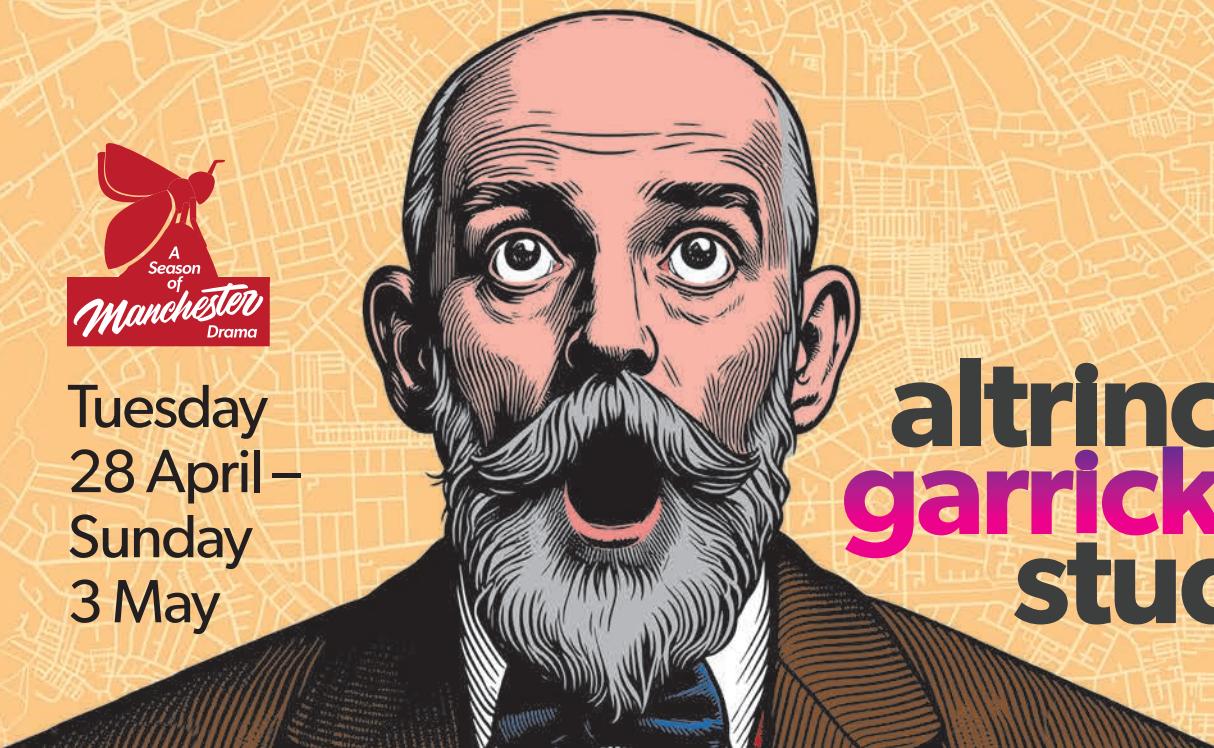
hobson's choice

by Harold Brighouse



Tuesday
28 April –
Sunday
3 May

altrincham
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Introduction

Welcome to the Altrincham Garrick Studio Theatre, and to the fifth production in our Season of Manchester Drama. It feels entirely fitting that part of this journey includes *Hobson's Choice* – a play rooted not only in the language and rhythms of Manchester life, but in its spirit: resilient, sharp-witted, and quietly revolutionary.

Altrincham Garrick Studio Theatre's Season of Manchester Drama celebrates voices that have emerged from, or been shaped by, this extraordinary city and its surrounding region. Manchester has long been a place of industry and innovation, but also of storytelling – of people negotiating identity, ambition, and community in the face of change. *Hobson's Choice* embodies that tradition. It reminds us that behind the great industrial narrative are individuals – families – struggling, striving, and, occasionally, triumphing.

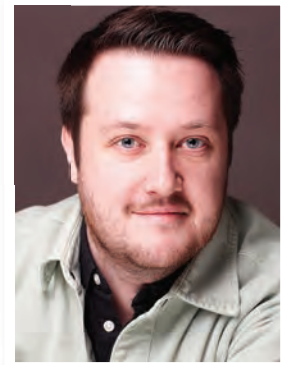
Writing in the early years of the twentieth century, Harold Brighouse captured a world on the cusp of change. The play is set in 1880s Salford, yet its concerns feel strikingly modern: questions of independence, gender roles, class, and the shifting balance of power within both family and business. At its heart is Maggie Hobson – a character who, with clear eyes and unwavering determination, refuses to accept the limitations placed upon her. In many ways, this is her story: not just of survival, but of self-definition.

Staging *Hobson's Choice* in a 50-seat Studio Theatre invites us into an especially intimate relationship with that story. This is

not a grand, sweeping production; instead, it is one that leans into proximity and detail. You are not observing the world of the play from a distance – you are sitting inside Hobson's shop, hearing the creak of the floorboards, catching the unspoken tensions that pass between characters. In such a space, the comedy becomes sharper, but so too does the humanity. Every glance, every hesitation, every small act of defiance carries weight.

In approaching this production, we have been particularly interested in the balance between comedy and truth. The play is, undeniably, very funny. Hobson himself is a figure of bluster and contradiction, often ridiculous, sometimes infuriating. Yet Harold Brighouse never allows us to dismiss him entirely. Likewise, Maggie's strength is not without cost. By grounding the humour in recognisable human behaviour, we hope to reveal the deeper emotional currents that run beneath the play's sparkling surface.

There is also something wonderfully theatrical about the world of *Hobson's Choice*: the ritual of the shop, the rhythms of work, the choreography of domestic life. In this production, we have sought to



keep the staging simple and fluid, allowing the actors and the language to do the heavy lifting. In a studio setting, imagination becomes a shared act between performer and audience – a collaboration that feels especially appropriate for a play that asks us to look again at familiar roles and assumptions.

Ultimately, *Hobson's Choice* is a play about change – personal, social, and economic. It asks who gets to make choices, and at what cost. More than a century after it was written, those questions still resonate.

Thank you for joining us, and for being part of this season. We hope you enjoy your time in Hobson's world, and that you'll choose to return for (at least) one of the forthcoming productions featured on the back page of this programme, not forgetting our "Open Day" in July.

Joe
Joseph Meighan
Artistic Director, Altrincham Garrick Playhouse

altrincham garrick playhouse

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Thankyou for helping to keep the theatre thriving!

Boots, Shoes and “Cottonopolis”: Craft and Industry in Manchester

In staging *Hobson’s Choice*, a play rooted in the lives of working people and the dignity of skilled labour, it is fitting to look at the world of boot and shoe making in Manchester – a trade that, while often overshadowed by cotton, formed an essential part of the city’s industrial and social fabric.

From Craft to Commerce

Before the Industrial Revolution, shoemaking across Britain was a highly skilled, localised craft. Shoes were made to measure by cordwainers, often working alone or within small workshops, producing footwear tailored to individual customers, while cobblers used their skills to repair boots, giving them a longer life for the wearer.

Manchester, still a modest market town in the eighteenth century, would certainly have supported such craftsmen: independent artisans whose work combined practicality with pride. These shoemakers were part of a wider pre-industrial economy based on skill, reputation, and personal relationships. Footwear was repaired as often as it was replaced, and the shoemaker occupied a respected position within the community.

However, this world was already beginning to change. By the mid-eighteenth century, shoemaking had begun to expand into a “putting-out” system, where central manufacturers coordinated work done by many dispersed labourers. This marked the first step away from individual craftsmanship toward organised production – a shift that would accelerate dramatically in the nineteenth century.



Above: An artist’s impression of a bootmaker’s workshop at the turn of the 20th Century.

Manchester and the Industrial Revolution

Manchester’s transformation during the Industrial Revolution is well known. From the late eighteenth century onwards, it grew rapidly into the world’s first industrial city, fuelled primarily by cotton manufacturing and supported by engineering, transport, and commerce.

Although not a primary centre of shoe manufacture like Northampton or Leicester, Manchester’s explosive growth created a vast demand for goods of all kinds – including footwear. Its swelling population of mill workers, labourers, and clerks required affordable, durable boots and shoes. As a result, the city became an important market and distribution centre for footwear, as well as home to numerous small-scale makers, repairers, and retailers.

Shoemaking in Manchester therefore occupied a hybrid position: not the dominant industry, but an indispensable supporting trade woven into the daily life of the industrial city.

The Rise of Mass Production

The nineteenth century brought sweeping technological change to the boot and shoe industry. Innovations such as mechanised stitching, riveting, and cutting transformed production methods. Machines developed from the early 1800s onwards allowed soles to be fixed rapidly and uppers stitched with unprecedented speed.

By the second half of the century, these developments led to the emergence of factory-based production. Tasks that had once required years of training were broken down into smaller, specialised operations. A single shoe might pass through dozens of hands, each worker responsible for just one stage of the process.

This mechanisation had profound consequences. Traditional shoemakers – especially those who stitched and assembled uppers by hand – found their skills increasingly redundant. Studies of the period show significant displacement of workers as machines took over key tasks, with entire categories of labour disappearing or transforming into new roles such as sewing machinists.

For a city like Manchester, already shaped by factory production in textiles, this shift would have felt both familiar and inevitable. The rhythms of industrial labour – long hours, division of labour, and the relentless drive for efficiency – extended into the world of footwear.

Shops, Workshops, and Family Businesses

Despite industrialisation, the traditional shoemaker did not vanish entirely. In cities such as Manchester, small workshops and family-run businesses continued to thrive alongside larger manufacturers. These enterprises often combined making, repairing, and selling footwear, serving local communities in ways that factories could not.

One notable example is the firm that would become Timpson, founded in Manchester in 1865 by William Timpson. Beginning as a

shoe shop, it reflects the enduring importance of retail and repair within the trade.

Such businesses highlight a key truth: even as production became industrialised, the relationship between shoemaker and customer remained vital. Boots needed mending; shoes needed fitting; and the personal touch retained its value.

This dual economy – factory production alongside local craftsmanship – echoes the world depicted in *Hobson’s Choice*, where the boot shop is both a place of labour and a stage for human relationships, ambition, and conflict.

Labour, Identity, and Resistance

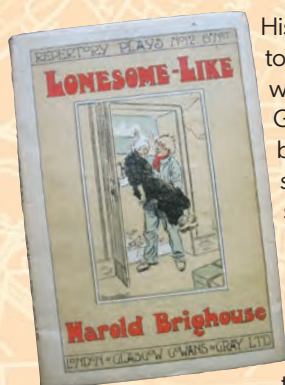
The transformation of the boot and shoe trade also reshaped the lives of its workers. Shoemakers, once independent artisans, increasingly became wage labourers. This shift brought both opportunity and hardship.

The Playwright

The eldest child of John Southworth Brighthouse, a manager in a cotton-spinning firm, and Charlotte Amelia Brighthouse née Harrison, a headmistress, **Harold Brighthouse** was born in Eccles, Salford on 26 July 1882. Harold went to a local school, and then won a scholarship to Manchester Grammar School. He left school aged 17 and started work as a textile buyer in a shipping merchant's office.



In 1902 he went to London to set up an office for his firm. There he met Emily Lynes and married her in Lillington, Leamington Spa in 1907. He was promoted at work and returned to Manchester, but in 1908 he became a full time writer.



His first play was '*Lonesome Like*', but the first to be produced was '*The Doorway*', which was performed in 1909 at Annie Horniman's Gaiety Theatre in Manchester and produced by Ben Iden Payne. Horniman and Payne gave strong support to Brighthouse in the early stages of his career.

Having been declared unfit for combat in WWI, he joined what later became the Royal Air Force, and was seconded to the Air Ministry Intelligence Staff. During his spare time in the position he continued to write, and came up with what would prove to be his most successful play. *Hobson's Choice* premièred in 1915 in New York, where Payne was working. It was first produced in England in 1916 at the Apollo Theatre, London, where it ran for 246 performances.



The play was made into a film three times: the first one was a silent movie in 1920, the second one was in 1931, and the third (the most famous) was in 1954, starring Charles Laughton, John Mills and Salford's own Brenda de Banzie.

Many of his plays were one-act pieces; three of these ('*The Northerners*', '*Zack*' and '*The Game*') were published together as '*Three Lancashire Plays*' in 1920 – by which time Harold had moved back down south and had set up home in Hampstead, London. All

of these plays were set in Lancashire, but Brighthouse also wrote plays of a different type, such as '*The Oak Settle*' and '*Maid of France*'.

Aside from plays, Harold also wrote multiple novels, including '*Hepplestalls*', concerning a Lancashire mill-owning family in the 19th century, and numerous articles and reviews for the Manchester Guardian.

He was a member of the Dramatists' Club and in 1930-31 was Chairman of the Society of Authors' Dramatic Committee. After 1931 he wrote no more full-length plays. His autobiography *What I Have Had* was published in 1953.

On 24 July 1958, two days before his seventy-sixth birthday, Brighthouse collapsed while walking in The Strand in London. He died the following day at Charing Cross Hospital.

On one hand, factory production created employment for large numbers of people, including women, who entered the workforce in new roles such as machinists. On the other, it reduced autonomy and often led to precarious working conditions.

The nineteenth century saw the rise of trade unions representing boot and shoe workers, such as the *Amalgamated Society of Boot and Shoe Makers*, founded in 1861. These organisations sought to protect wages, improve conditions, and preserve elements of traditional skill in an increasingly mechanised industry.

Resistance to new technology was also common. Across Britain, shoemakers protested against the introduction of machines they believed would undermine their livelihoods. Yet, as with so many industries, the tide of mechanisation proved unstoppable.

Manchester's Place in the National Story

While the great centres of shoemaking lay elsewhere, Manchester's role was nonetheless significant. Its importance as a commercial hub meant that footwear flowed through the city in vast quantities, supplying both local needs and wider markets.

Moreover, Manchester's identity as "Cottonopolis" shaped the character of all its trades. The culture of industry, entrepreneurship, and innovation permeated every aspect of economic life. Shoemakers, like textile workers, were part of a broader story: the rise of industrial capitalism and the transformation of everyday life.

By the late nineteenth century, Manchester had become a city defined by movement – of goods, people, and ideas. The boot and shoe trade, though less celebrated than cotton, was integral to this dynamic system.



Legacy and Resonance

Today, much of Britain's large-scale shoe manufacturing has declined, with production shifting overseas during the late twentieth century. Yet the legacy of the trade endures – in surviving manufacturers, in repair shops, and in the cultural memory of craftsmanship.

In Manchester, that legacy is also embedded in its history as a city of work: a place where industries rose and fell, but where the dignity of labour remained central.

It is precisely this dignity that lies at the heart of *Hobson's Choice*. The play celebrates skill, independence, and the quiet determination of those who make things with their hands. Maggie's insistence on quality and self-respect echoes generations of shoemakers who took pride in their craft, whether in a small workshop or a bustling factory.

To understand the world of the play is to understand this history: a story of change and continuity, of loss and adaptation, and of the enduring value of honest work.

hobson's choice

The Cast

Henry Hobson	Richard Sails
Maggie Hobson	Laura Crow
Alice Hobson	Faye Alexandra
Vickey Hobson	Alexandra Hulston
Willie Mossop	Tim Cooper
Tubby Wadlow	Howard Yaffe
Albert Prosser	Aidan Burgess
Fred Beenstock	Harrison Swann
Jim Heeler	Mark Watkins
Ada Figgins /	
Mrs Hepworth	Di Boyer
Dr MacFarlane	Gareth Smith

The Production Team

Director & Designer	Ros Greenwood
Rehearsal Prompt	Rosemary Smalley
Lighting & Sound	Isaac Williams
Props	Christine Chrystal
Costumes	Mike Shaw & Team
Set Construction	Steve Cox
.....	Trevor McKie
Set Decoration	Mandy Cooke
Rob Robinson	Ros Greenwood
Workshop	Steve Cox & Team
Poster & Programme	Nick Sample

Information believed to be correct at time of going to press...

Without our incredibly dedicated, enthusiastic team of **Volunteers and Staff**, whose sheer hard work often goes unnoticed, Altrincham Garrick Playhouse would simply be unable to continue providing such a range of top-quality productions for everyone enjoy.

Thank You!

With their continuous commitment to excellence, we owe them all a huge debt of gratitude. Thank You!

Director's Notes

"Do It On The Radio!"

If I had a shilling for every time someone asked me how I was going to stage *Hobson's Choice* in the studio, I'd have a lot of shillings! "But it's a huge set!", "How are you going to do the cellar", "You'll never fit all those people in there!" came the cries, and I could hear Julie Walters in my head retorting "Do it on the radio" when, as Willie Russell's Rita, she was asked "Suggest how you would resolve the staging difficulties inherent in a production of Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*?".

A long, long time ago in 1997 I played Alice in the Garrick's *Hobson's Choice* on the main stage which was set in the traditional way as described in the script with each of the three locations set behind the one in use and reset with the curtains closed whilst interlude music played to keep the audience in their seats. I recall one evening one of the sets behind the one we were acting on collapsed sending piles of shoe boxes everywhere, and the interval had to be extended much to the merriment of the audience!

Revisiting the play 30 years on as director and designer and setting it in the studio space has been a challenge, but a most enjoyable one. In reality, the shop and cellar rooms of the Hobsons and the Mossops would have been very small and cramped so I took the opportunity to veer from the traditional and shrink the set as much as the space would allow.

With a very talented and receptive cast who have brought many ideas and creativity to the rehearsal room we have had much enjoyment rehearsing this piece.

The play is of its time but so well crafted, funny and poignant and remains hugely popular and resonates with the audience who love to root for the downtrodden Willie Mossop. The show sold out before rehearsals even commenced which has given us all a tremendous sense of pride and excitement!

Yes, we could "do it on the radio" but we'd rather "do it in the studio" for you all.

With thanks to everyone involved in the process of putting this production together."

Right: An artist's impression of Henry Hobson's Shop in Salford.



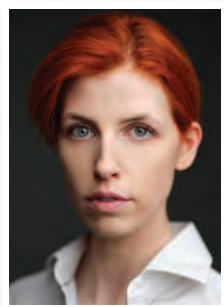
The Company



Richard Sails Henry Hobson

Richard joined the Garrick back in 1980 when he first moved up North. Favourite productions include *Funny Peculiar*, *Blithe Spirit*, 'Allo 'Allo (all directed by Diana Harker; funny, that!), *A Man for All Seasons*, *Hobson's Choice*, *Educating Rita*, *Jeffrey Bernard is Unwell*, *Return to the Forbidden Planet*, *Noises Off* and *The History Boys*. He has also immensely enjoyed playing in the Garrick Studio over the years, including *Gregory Solomon* in *The Price* and two Terry Johnson

plays – *Hysteria*, playing *Sigmund Freud*, and *Insignificance*, playing *Einstein* (unnamed but unmistakable!) The Garrick's change of emphasis has prompted him to spread his net and he has recently much enjoyed, inter alia, *Shadowlands* at CHADS and *The Messiah* at Wilmslow Green Room. Last season he played *Vladimir* in *Waiting for Godot*, and he's thrilled to return to the Garrick Studio for this wonderful classic.



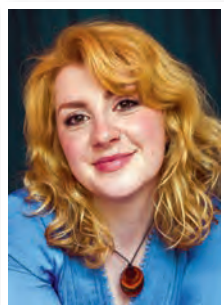
Laura Crow Maggie Hobson

Laura is an award-winning actor, writer and theatre-maker. She is artistic director of *Time & Again Theatre Company*, who create work exploring disability, mental health and LGBTQIA+ identity within a bold historical setting. Their work has toured UK wide, at festivals, off West End and on the main stage of Oldham Coliseum. As a deaf and disabled artist, Laura advocates for accessibility and equity in the arts, having completed the Embedding Inclusion and

Access programme with New Wolsey Theatre and Writing Inclusively with Nickie Miles-Wildin at the Royal Exchange.

Recent acting credits include: *VILE* (53two), *Chicken Licken* (Derby Theatre, Polka Theatre) and *Earwig* (The Lowry, Assembly at Edinburgh Festival Fringe) which won the 2022 Offie Award for Best Show of Edinburgh Fringe and the Birds of Paradise Emerging Talent Award.

Previous credits at the Garrick: *Jerusalem*, *Around the World in 80 Days*, *Shakers* *Re-stirred*, *Vincent in Brixton*.



Faye Alexandra Alice Hobson

Faye Alexandra is an actor and singer originally from Bury St Edmunds, now living in Manchester. She trained on the BA Acting course at East 15 Acting School. Faye has since appeared in Harlan Coben's "Missing You" on Netflix, has additional credits in theatre, short films and advertisements as well as writing, recording and releasing her own music.

As co-director of theatre company Stoyhaus productions, she wrote and directed "Mrs Smith" and

played "Nellie"; in 2026 she played *Lady Macbeth* in "Macbeth" as well as designing the set and costumes. In October 2026, she will be directing "The Modern Prometheus", a modern adaptation of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* for which she has also written the script.

Hobson's Choice is her third show at the Garrick, having played "Kitty" in *Oppenheimer* and "Marilyn Ward" in *Beautiful – The Carole King Musical*. Faye will also be back in the Garrick Studio in June, playing "Cissy" in *Punk Rock*.



Di Boyer Ada Figgins / Mrs Hepworth

Di originally joined Stage 2 at the Garrick in 1987 and has been involved in numerous productions of plays, musicals and pantomimes since then. Some of her favourites are *Grease*, *La Cage Aux Folles*, *Chicago*, *Guys & Dolls*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Brassed Off*, *Equus* & *Hobson's Choice* (mid 90's).

In 1992 Di was involved in the first Garrick *Playathon* production, *The Boyfriend*, which involved members meeting on a Friday evening, rehearsing all weekend

and performing on Sunday evening! Di is very much looking forward to playing 2 roles in this production of *Hobson's Choice*.



Alexandra Hulston Vickey Hobson

Alexandra recently made her debut at the Altrincham Garrick Playhouse, a venue she has long admired, having watched many previous productions, as *Lola Brewster* in *The Mirror Crack'd* in February, and she's delighted to be returning so soon afterwards.

Alexandra trained at East 15 Acting School and has since written and performed in her own solo show, *The Tale of Little Blue Girl* at the Clifftown Theatre, and the dark comedy *The Funeral Parlour* at the Royal Exchange, Manchester. She has also taken part in various projects for Manchester International Festival, notably the award-winning film *Curing Albrecht*, created in association with the English National Ballet.



Tim Cooper Willie Mossop

Tim is a voice over artist and actor based in Manchester. He is one of the creative leads of the multi award-winning *Time & Again Theatre Company* and has toured around the UK with a variety of shows. *Time & Again* focus on accessible theatre and exploring themes of disability and mental health in a vibrant historical setting. Outside of acting Tim is a keen long-distance runner and swimmer.

Previous credits include: *VILE*, *Present Laughter*, *EAR-WIG*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *CLOUDS*, *Jerusalem*, *The Winter's Tale*, *GREYHOUNDS*, *Around the World in 80 Days*, *Handbagged*, *Tommy Boy* and *Bleak Expectations* on the main stage last October.



Howard Yaffe Tubby Wadlow

Howard is a relative latecomer to the stage, starting at the tender age of 42! Since then, making up for lost time and being bitten by the performing bug, he has played lead, character, comedy and chorus roles in numerous plays, musicals and reviews, such as *Sweet Charity*, *Oliver!* *An Inspector Calls*, *The Producers*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Joseph*, *Hobson's Choice*, *Bar Mitzvah Boy*, *Dear Brutus*, *The Farnedale Murder Mystery*, *Sister Act*, *California Suite* and *Fiddler On*

The Roof. Also some emotive and powerful roles in Holocaust related productions, *Ghetto*, *Conversations* and as *Otto Frank* in *The Diary of Anne Frank*. He has appeared for The Jewish Theatre Company and PADOS in North Manchester, and at Stage 80.

This is Howard's second appearance at the Garrick (and first outing in the Studio), having played *The Queen's Equerry* in *The Audience* in 2024. Having played the part of *Willie Mossop* 15 years ago, he now plays Willie's foreman and Hobson's cantankerous, loyal and doting shoe hand.



Aidan Burgess Albert Prossor

Mancunian born and bred, Aidan is an Actor, Director & Writer who trained at Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts and East 15 Acting School. Aidan graduated from East 15 in July 2024 and is represented by Beccy Kilgariff at VSA.

Credits whilst in training include *Barry* in *Motor Town*, *Frank* in *All My Sons*, *Firs* in *The Cherry Orchard*, *Leonato* in *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Barry* in *Saved* and *Timothy West* in the première production of *O'-*

Toole's Macbeth.

Aidan first began his time at the Garrick back in 2014 as a member of the cast in *Oh, What A Lovely War!* Other credits at the Garrick include: *Philip* in *Orphans* (2017), *Beadle Bamford* in *Sweeney Todd* (2016), *Abram* in *Romeo and Juliet* (2016), *The Secret Garden* (2017) and *Joseph Buquet* in *The Phantom of the Opera* (2014) and, more recently, *Bob Serber* in *Oppenheimer* (2025), *Whit* in *Of Mice And Men* (2025) and *Barry Mann* in *Beautiful – The Carole King Musical* (2025). Following *Hobson's Choice*, Aidan will be back in the Studio in June, playing *Bennett* in *Punk Rock*.

Aidan is also the Artistic Director of StoryHaus Productions with which he directed/produced & played *Macbeth*. He is currently producing their next production, the UK premiere of *The Modern Prometheus*, a modern re-telling of *Frankenstein*, which he will also be playing the role of *Victor Frank*.



Harrison Swann

Fred Beenstock

Harrison is a 19 year old current student at The University of Salford. He started his acting career at the age of 16 at Bolton Octagon Theatre where he played his first show, *'The Nutcracker'* in 2022. This led to a 3-year course at Pendleton School of Theatre from 2023-2025 where he studied level 3 Acting. During this time Harrison's shows included *'Lord of the Flies'* (2025) and *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* (2025) at The Lowry Theatre. Harrison is currently a student

at The University of Salford where he is studying Media and Performance. Harrison is excited to make his debut with Altrincham Garrick Playhouse in *'Hobson's Choice'*, and hopes that everyone enjoys the show as much as he has enjoyed being a part of it.



Mark Watkins

Jim Heeler

A lifelong passion for music led to Mark's musical theatre debut in *The Pirates of Penzance* in the late 90s. Over the next few years he enjoyed being in a number of shows with societies in the North West and made his Altrincham Garrick Playhouse debut in 2004 playing *Little John* in *Babes in the Wood*. His next time on the main stage was as *Lord Savage* in *Jekyll and Hyde* in 2006. After a 13 year hiatus he returned to the stage as *Caiaphas* in *Jesus Christ*

Superstar and, having caught the bug again, he appeared in the 2021/2022 Garrick productions of *Curtain Up!* and *Calendar Girls - The Musical*. More recently he has appeared in *The Sound of Music*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *The Shawshank Redemption*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Beautiful - The Carole King Musical* and, most recently, as *Mr Salt* in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*.



Gareth Smith

Dr MacFarlane

Gareth trained at The Central School of Speech and Drama in 1994 and worked professionally in a number of productions, including a national tour of *Joseph and his Technicolour Dreamcoat*, *The Mikado* at Bolton Octagon, *Kes 'the musical'* at York Theatre Royal and *A Little Night Music* at The Royal National Theatre. Having retrained in nursing 2004, Gareth is more at home nowadays answering blood donation queries.

Since returning to amateur theatre Gareth has performed as *Count Carl Magnus* in *A Little Night Music* (SMAOS) *Cogsworth* in UMT's production of *Beauty and the Beast* and *Frollo* in the award winning BLOS production of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. *Hobson's Choice* marks Gareth's debut at Altrincham Garrick Playhouse.

The Director

Ros Greenwood

Ros has been involved in many Garrick productions both onstage and behind the scenes. Favourite roles over the seasons have been *Pattie* in *Brimstone and Treacle*, *Amanda* in *Private Lives*, *Maggie* in *Outside Edge*, *Monica* in *Daisy Pulls it Off*, *Belinda* in *Noises Off*, *Gail* in *Teechers*, *Elizabeth Law* in *When the Rain Stops Falling*, *Queen Belladonna* in *Snow White*, *Miss 'Tea' Wilson* in *Calendar Girls - The Musical*, *Queen Elizabeth II* in Mike Shaw's glorious production of *The Audience* in 2024, and multiple roles in *Jane Eyre*. Last October Ros appeared as *Agnes Bin & Flora Dies-Early* in *Bleak Expectations*, and most recently she played *Dolly Bantroy* in *The Mirror Crack'd*.

Garrick Studio credits include *Fay* in *Iron*, *Katurian* in *The Pillowman*, *Joan Crawford* in *Bette and Joan* and *Kitty* in *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*.

Ros has directed and designed our productions of *And Then There Were None*, *Gaslight* and *The Jungle Book*, designed *The Phantom of the Opera*, and designed and co-directed *The Accrington Pals* (Lauriston Studio).

In her spare time Ros is also a member of the *Altrincham Garrick Show Choir*.



Below: An image of Simon Russell Beale in the title role of *King Lear* at the National Theatre. Reproduced by kind permission.

Fathers, Daughters and Foolish Pride

At first glance, *Hobson's Choice* and *King Lear* seem worlds apart: one a Northern comedy set in a Salford boot shop, the other a vast Shakespearean tragedy. Yet both plays explore strikingly similar themes – particularly pride, authority, and the transformative power of humility.

At the centre of each story stands a domineering father. Henry Hobson rules his household with bluster and self-importance, just as King Lear demands obedience and flattery from his daughters. Both men mistake authority for strength, masking insecurity beneath rigid control. Their downfall begins when they misjudge those closest to them.

In each play, a daughter emerges as the moral centre. Maggie Hobson, practical and determined, sees through her father's weaknesses and takes control of her own future. Cordelia, in contrast, is quiet but resolute, refusing to flatter Lear dishonestly. Both challenge patriarchal authority through integrity rather than rebellion.

Blindness – especially the failure to recognise truth – is central to both narratives. Lear disastrously misjudges his daughters, while Hobson underestimates Maggie and Willie Mossop. Each man must be brought low before he can see clearly.

Here, however, comedy and tragedy diverge. Lear's journey leads to devastation, his insight arriving too late to prevent loss. Hobson's fall,

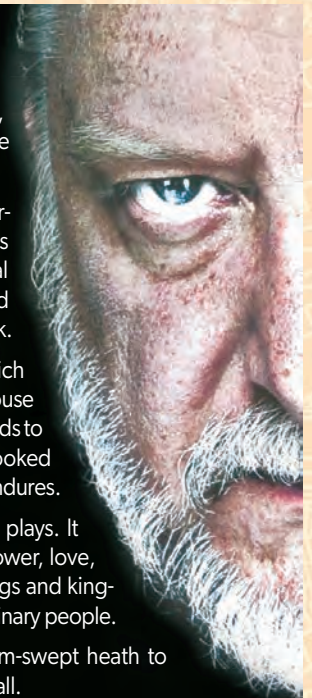
though humiliating, allows for renewal. He learns, adapts, and ultimately accepts the strength of those he once dismissed.

Seen in this light, *Hobson's Choice* can be understood as a kind of comic echo of *King Lear*. It takes similar themes – family conflict, generational change, the collapse of patriarchal authority – and reimagines them within a more hopeful framework.

Where Shakespeare shows a world in which recognition comes at the cost of life itself, Brighouse offers a vision in which change, though painful, leads to renewal. The tyrant becomes human; the overlooked become valued; and the family, though altered, endures.

For an audience, this connection enriches both plays. It reminds us that the great themes of theatre – power, love, pride, and redemption – are not confined to kings and kingdoms, but are present in the everyday lives of ordinary people.

And in that sense, the journey from Lear's storm-swept heath to Hobson's bustling boot shop is not so great after all.



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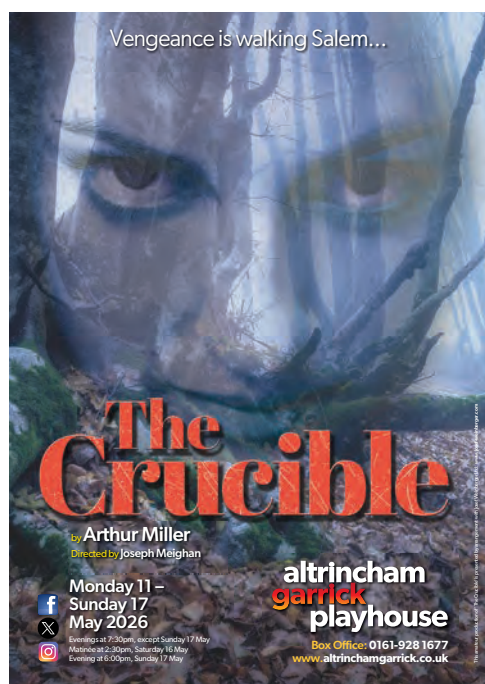
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WARNING: This production contains contains strong and offensive language, and discussions of self-harm, sexual abuse, racism, homophobia, ableism, body shaming, gun violence, murder, and mental health issues.

15

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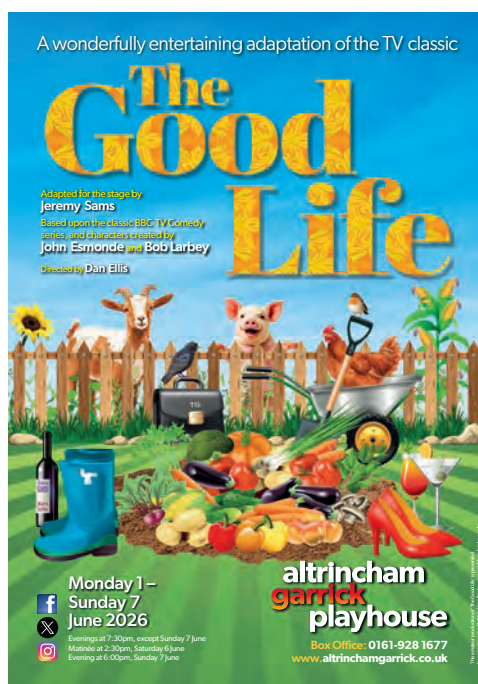
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