

The Insider

Volume 2, Issue 2

Your Connection to the BBC Sales Company

November 2000

Editor's Note

Welcome to another edition of *The Insider*. I spent time in the UK this summer getting caught up on the latest happenings so sit down, grab a beverage, and get comfortable because I have a lot to share with you.

I've visited Britain a number of times and must admit I find the ever-increasing Americanization worrisome and annoying. London seems to have morphed into a wholly owned subsidiary of Starbucks and The Gap, with Borders Bookstore also making inroads.

Now my friends would say the above statement is *very* fine talk indeed coming from me, a caffeine guzzling bookaholic who spends a lot of time in jeans from The Gap. I should be the last person to complain, but my fear is that as technology gives us easy access to information about any far-flung corner of the globe, cultures will become too homogenous. In the rush to a smaller world the uniqueness that makes this planet so wonderful may be lost. We love British television because of its distinctive flavor, so it would be a shame for it to lose that individuality and become a clone of American TV.

Luckily, though, the one thing I found unchanged on my trip was the creativity and vitality that has given this small island an enormous reputation in all areas of the arts. Read on and you'll see what I mean. With that I'll get off my soapbox.

Michelle Street, Editor

Ian McShane

Lovejoy Unmasked

Imagine this classified ad:

WANTED: Experienced comic actor for West End musical. Requirements include spellbinding sexy charm and, having a large number of songs to sing, the panache of a Broadway musical star.



Those were the qualities producer Cameron Mackintosh went looking for when he cast the lead in his West End adaptation of *The Witches of Eastwick*.

So, who did he turn to for the needed sexy charm, panache, and the ability to make audiences forget that this role had already been played to the hilt by Jack Nicholson in the film version? Why none other than Ian McShane, better known as that roguish antiques dealer Lovejoy.

The role of the devilish Daryl Van Horne in *Witches* was tailor-made for McShane. After all, the musical just lets him do the same thing he's been doing for ages - setting the hearts of women aflutter.

McShane was born September 29th, 1942 and raised in the north of England, where his father, Harry, played soccer for Manchester United. His interest in acting was the result of being cast in a few school plays, so he turned his career ambition to drama and went south to train at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts in London.

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The Insider Mailbox



In The News



EMMA CHAMBERS

I got a copy of *The Insider* (June 2000) yesterday and have a question for you. Can you tell me anything about the life and career of Emma Chambers, who plays Alice Tinker on *The Vicar of Dibley*?

Donald Hammarstrom, CO

EDITOR REPLIES: Your wish is my command, Mr. Hammarstrom. Look forward to information about Emma in an upcoming edition of *The Insider*. In the meantime, check out the article about Season 3 of *The Vicar of Dibley* in this issue.

ONE FOOT IN THE GRAVE THEME MUSIC

I thoroughly enjoy British comedy on PBS. I'm particularly intrigued with *One Foot in the Grave*. As a member in a Seniors Barbershop Quartet, I admire the theme song and words, as they relate to "old" age. How can I get the words and music to the *One Foot in the Grave* theme song? As the 1998 International Seniors Quartet Champions, I think we could do justice to the song and enjoy the lyrics even more.

Victor W. Neilsen, Tenor, Jurassic Larks Quartet, IA

EDITOR REPLIES: I heartily agree that the theme to *One Foot in the Grave* is a great one - bouncy and catchy. I can tell you it was written and performed by the most musical of the Monty Python troupe, Eric Idle. I'm afraid I can't help you out as far as where to get the sheet music, but if any of our readers know, please pop me a note and I'll get back to you!

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The Insider welcomes all correspondence. Send letters via e-mail to editor Michelle Street at bcdigest@soltec.com or by snail mail to: *The Insider*, c/o Greg Parsons, BBC Worldwide Americas, 747 3rd Avenue, New York, NY. 10017 - 2803. Include your full name and location. All letters are assumed to be for publication unless marked otherwise. **The Insider** reserves the right to edit letters for reasons of space or clarity. Let us know what you think!

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Brittas Empire and *Red Dwarf* star **Chris Barrie** has been cast in the upcoming movie based on the video game *Tomb Raider*. Barrie will play Lara Croft's butler Hillary. (Lara Croft is being played by Angelina Jolie, so I'll pause for a moment to let the male population drool and envy Chris.)

Chris's *Red Dwarf* shipmate **Robert Llewellyn** also reports that the *Dwarf* movie slated to begin filming in May 2001 with a tentative release date of Easter 2002. The crew also got together recently to attend the wedding of **Chloe Annett**, who plays Kochanski. (I'll pause just a moment to let the male population mourn.) Her new husband, Alex, is the manager of the rock band Oasis.

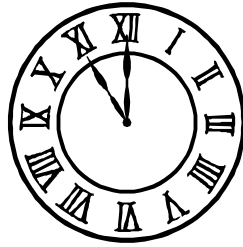
Vicar of Dibley star **Dawn French** has taken off her clerical robes for a few months and is currently touring the UK with her partner **Jennifer Saunders**. The duo began their tour in Manchester during October and end up in Dawn's hometown of Plymouth on 17 December. The tour includes an extended stint in London at the Hammersmith Apollo.

On stage beginning in December is Mr. Humphries himself, **John Inman**, who will be playing "Dame Wanda Twankey" in a pantomime version of *Aladdin* at the Theater Royal in Plymouth.

We know that America has stolen "ideas" from British television and vice-versa. India has now gotten into the Britcomedy translation business by producing their own version of the classic *Yes, Minister*. Apparently Sir Humphrey's "bureaucrattpeak" and the general administrative machinations shown in *Yes, Minister* are so similar to what happens in India that the original scripts are being left almost unchanged. The series will be cast with Indian actors and is set to air next year. It is the most expensive sitcom in Indian history.

John Cleese is a very busy man. He is set to star in the upcoming film based on the very popular *Harry Potter* books and has also signed to star in *Rat Race*, a movie directed by *Naked Gun* creator Jerry Zucker. Cleese's co-star in the movie will be **Rowan Atkinson**.

Let's Do The Time Warp Again



The Blackadder cast reunites to go *Back and Forth*

The entertainment began well before the main feature. A long line of people waiting to enter the Skyscape Theatre laughed hysterically at the antics of two “coppers” (one very obviously a female with a fake moustache) trying to keep the crowd under control.

One person they couldn't handle was yours truly. They approached and instructed me not to laugh. However, being the right-on anarchist that I am, I drew my 105-pound frame up to its full height of 4'11" and crossed my arms.

“No, I will *not* quit laughing” I said, attempting my very best “You want a piece of this?” tough broad scowl. Then I hit them with a line from *The Young Ones*. “Besides, if pigs could fly, Scotland Yard would be London's third airport.”

While I was being taken into custody (just kidding), two “tour guides” unsuccessfully tried to find the group they had misplaced. A young woman was also pursuing a man she called “Popsie,” but unfortunately, the love of her life was doing everything he could to avoid her. In the end, however, she got her man, tackling him on the stage and throwing him down for a passionate kiss to the approving roar of the crowd.

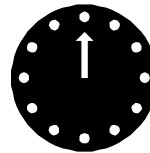
When everyone was seated the “coppers” made their final sweep and the lights dimmed. The crowd cheered as a familiar theme tune wafted through the theater:

The sound of hoof beats 'cross the glade...

This was what we had come for – *Blackadder Back and Forth*, a thirty minute feature film made exclusively for use as an attraction at London's Millennium Dome.

Sadly, it must be said that the film is the *only* good thing about the Dome. Overall, it's a disappointing excuse for a few bland displays plus an endless parade of gift shops and restaurants. They should've just named it the Millennium Mall and been done with it. However, the entrance fee was a

small price to pay to see Edmund, Baldrick, and the rest of the gang together again.



The film is set at Blackadder Hall on the Eve of the Millennium. Edmund's guests on this historic occasion are Bishop Melchett, Lieutenant George, Archdeacon Darling and Lady Elizabeth.

They are consuming a meal prepared by last minute replacement chef Baldrick, who normally works cleaning out Edmund's septic tank. You can imagine why Blackadder feels compelled to apologize for the food.

As they talk about the past and look to the future, Edmund makes a startling confession – he has built a time machine that is the most important “breakthrough in travel since Mr. Rodney Tricycle thought to himself, I'm bored with walking, I think I'll invent a machine with three wheels and a bell and name it after myself.”

His guests are skeptical so Blackadder takes up their challenge to prove the veracity of his machine by traveling back in time and collecting objects from history. If he does this, his guests will have to pay him the sum of 30,000 pounds.

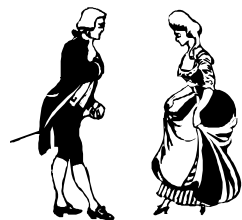
Into the machine go Baldrick and Edmund, who must return with a Roman centurion's helmet, the actual boots worn by the Duke of Wellington at the Battle of Waterloo, and a pair of 200-year-old underwear. (Ah come on. It wouldn't be *Blackadder* without a reference to stinky undies, now would it?)

The machine is actually meant to be a prank. Despite the fact that he can't read, Baldrick has built it to the exact specifications set down by Leonardo DaVinci, but the thing is not really supposed to go anywhere.

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It does work, though, depositing Edmund and Baldrick back to the time when dinosaurs ruled the world. A huge T Rex is ready to attack, but disaster is averted when Baldrick, yelling “sniff my skids” throws his underwear at the T Rex, causing the creature to collapse. Blackadder then realizes that one of history’s biggest mysteries has been solved – dinosaurs became extinct after a whiff of Baldrick’s underwear.

Since the machine wasn’t expected to work, Baldrick isn’t exactly sure how to program it to return to the modern age. He pulls some levers and voilà – he and Edmund are back in the court of Queen Elizabeth.



As per usual, the Queen becomes quickly bored with Edmund and feels that chopping his head off is the only solution. Our heroes are saved this time, though, by a packet of Polo mints Edmund gives her as a gift.

She becomes immediately addicted and sends them off for more. Edmund and Baldrick take this as their cue to exit stage left, so to speak.

On the way out, Edmund encounters a young William Shakespeare. After getting him to autograph the front page of *Macbeth*, Blackadder decks the playwright, for “every schoolboy and schoolgirl in the next four hundred years” as well as the “hours spent at school desks trying to find one joke in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. “ While the Bard is still down, Blackadder gives him a kick for “Ken Branagh’s endless uncut four-hour version of *Hamlet*.”

Another trip in the machine lands them in the forest during the time of Robin Hood, played with his usual zest and energy by Lord Flasheart himself, Rik Mayall. Robin is in the company of his Merry Men and the woof-inducing Maid Marian, played by supermodel Kate Moss. Blackadder gets the Merry Men (or as he calls them, “the band of merry morons”) to turn on Robin Hood and kill him, giving Edmund and Baldrick a chance to escape.

Back to the time machine. Next stop: Napoleonic France. The Duc de Darling brings Napoleon the news that the

British have reached Waterloo. Just as Wellington is about to reveal his plan to defeat Napoleon, he is crushed by a traveling time machine. Oooppsss! Well, at least Edmund is able to get the Wellington boots he needed.

Next on the trip, the lads visit Hadrian’s Wall, where they barely survive an attack by “a horde of ginger maniacs with wild goats nesting in their huge orange beards.” In other words, a gang of Scotsmen.

Finally, thanks to Baldrick’s “cunning plan” (which includes putting his head down the toilet), the duo is back home with everything Edmund needs to win his 30,000 pounds.

There’s one small flaw in this cunning plan, however. Edmund and Baldrick have changed the course of history. None of his guests know who Robin Hood is, and Shakespeare is now remembered as the guy who discovered the ballpoint pen. Napoleon wasn’t defeated at Waterloo, so England is under French control.

A chorus of the French national anthem sends Blackadder scurrying back to the machine and he quickly undoes everything he did. However, he decides history does need one small bit of tweaking. The final scene is newsreel footage of the team that will lead Britain into the new millennium – King Edmund III, Queen Marian of Sherwood (Kate Moss), andummmm...Prime Minister Baldrick.

The cast slips so comfortably back into their characters that you feel they’ve never been away Incredible to think that the last episode of *Blackadder Goes Forth* was shown in November of 1989, but none of the actors (with the possible exception of Tony Robinson) seems to have aged much, so that just adds to the time warp factor.

Sadly, the rest of the Dome is a disappointment, but if you’re lucky enough to visit London before the end of this year, put *Blackadder Back and Forth* on your list of things to see. Just don’t mouth off to the “coppers.” Trust me.

(STOP THE PRESSES: *The Insider* has learned that *BLACKADDER BACK AND FORTH* may be shown on PBS stations as early as next March. Stay tuned for more details.)

MORE BLACKADDER BARBS

Blackadder to Baldrick: God, you really are as thick as clotted cream that’s been left out by some clot until the clots are so clotted up couldn’t unclot them with an electric de-clotter, aren’t you, Baldrick?

Baldrick: As we approach the end, my lord, what do you think we’ve learnt on our great journey?

Blackadder: Good question, Baldrick. I suppose I’ve learnt that I must buy you a much stronger mouthwash for Christmas this year. How about you?



***The Insider* Salutes**

Richard Curtis



BRITCOMEDY HERO

You may not know his name, but chances are good that you know his work. Do you like Blackadder? Mr Bean? The Vicar of Dibley? Then you like the work of Richard Curtis. The Insider takes a look at the career of this highly successful comedy writer and guiding force behind the Comic Relief charity.

There are few writers who have contributed more to recent British comedy than Richard Curtis. Well, maybe his sometime colleague Ben Elton, but it's a close race. Quantity wise, Curtis's output has not been all that great, but in terms of quality he simply can't be beat.

Curtis, 44, has been a fixture on the Britcom scene since the late 70s when he was one of the many contributors to *Not The Nine O'Clock News*, a sketch comedy program starring, among others, Rowan Atkinson.

His association with Atkinson began when they were students at Oxford University. Curtis once told an interviewer that the first three times they met he thought Rowan was an "interestingly shaped cushion because he was so quiet."

Rowan eventually did prove capable of communication and the "interestingly shaped cushion" and the bespectacled comedy writer began a very fruitful collaboration. They broke into TV with *Not The Nine O'clock News* and then the classic *Blackadder*.

Curtis and Atkinson wrote the first season of *Blackadder* together, but when *Blackadder II* was commissioned, Atkinson opted out of his writing duties. Ben Elton was then brought in and Curtis began another longstanding collaboration. Together, Curtis and Elton would write three

more series of the adventures of Edmund Blackadder, Baldrick, and the others and then revive these characters for the new millennium in *Blackadder Back and Forth*.

It's often been conceded that *Blackadder* changed when Elton arrived as co-writer. No doubt Elton brought a bit of his trademark toilet gags to the proceedings, but this was kept well in check with Curtis's erudition.

Curtis and Elton had a good working relationship. They wrote separately, following a strict rule of writing without looking back. They would then swap computer disks and having a go at what each other had done.

After *Blackadder* Curtis then went on to do something that Elton is just now getting around to - writing for the big screen. In 1989, Mel Smith directed Curtis's script for *The Tall Guy* and the film became a sleeper hit.

The Tall Guy stars Jeff Goldblum as a lanky American actor in London who suffers humiliation almost nightly as the sidekick for "rubber-faced" comic Ron Anderson, played by Rowan Atkinson. (Typecasting, anyone?) The American ends up falling for the highly efficient, no-nonsense nurse Kate Lemon, played by Emma Thompson.

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Along with the sweet romance between Goldblum and Thompson, the script takes a terrific shot at Sir Andrew

Lloyd-Webber when Goldblum's character stars in a musical based on the life of the Elephant Man, simply called *Elephant!* The musical interludes, along with one of the most memorable sex scenes ever shown on screen, makes this a movie to search for if you haven't already seen it. (By the way, so is *Bernard and the Genie*, another Curtis scripted film starring Atkinson, *Chef!* star Lenny Henry, and Alan Cumming.)

The Tall Guy gave an early glimpse into Curtis's sweet, romantic (yet tinged with a bit of the cynical) nature. This would also come to the fore in his next screenplay.

Four Weddings and a Funeral starred a pre-scandal Hugh Grant as a confirmed bachelor who falls in love with a beautiful American woman. Finally, after the aforementioned weddings and funerals he finally gets the girl and they kiss in the rain.

The film owes much of its popularity to the performance that launched Hugh Grant's career and Rowan Atkinson received rave reviews for his cameo as the novice priest who can't seem to get the words of the wedding ceremony right.

However, Curtis's script also deserves a lot of the credit for the film's success. Who can forget the opening scene, which consisted mainly of Grant saying "f**k" almost a dozen times after waking up late for the first of the weddings? In fact, commenting on that scene, Curtis admitted that he tried to delay his mother's arrival at the premiere so she would miss the bad language.

The film earned an Academy Award nomination for Best Picture and Curtis was nominated for Best Screenplay Written Directly For The Screen and still remains one of the top grossing British movies of all time.

One reviewer claimed that *Four Weddings* "is always on the brink of being intolerably cute," but there were "doses of cynicism that kept it from falling off the preciousness ledge." That seems to be Curtis's specialty.

Yet it is the combination of Curtis and Rowan Atkinson that seems to work the best. Along with Edmund Blackadder's classic adventures through the ages, Curtis (and Ben Elton) helped write Atkinson's one-man show, which was released on video as *Not Just Another Pretty Face*. This show is truly Atkinson at his best: a combination of Blackadder-style sarcasm and his incomparable talent as a physical comedian. The physical shtick would serve Atkinson and Curtis well in their next collaboration, *Mr Bean*.

Since Mr. Bean is almost totally silent, it's fair to wonder why Curtis is even needed at all. He explained to an interviewer that the Bean scripts were written basically by him standing "in my room at home in front of a mirror. The only way to do it is to act it out. And then we take it in to Rowan and he makes it funny."

The fact that *Mr. Bean* was largely a silent character made it easily translatable to other cultures and it became a huge hit worldwide. In 1997 a full-length movie was released to mixed reviews, but that didn't keep it from becoming a box office smash.

"I'll say is that I was very glad to do *Bean* because I love silly films," he said in a 1999 interview, "and I could feel my capacity for writing that sort of film drifting away with middle age. I thought *Bean* would be my last opportunity to write a stupid funny film as opposed to a mature romance."

The "mature romance" he was referring to may have been the Julia Roberts/Hugh Grant movie *Notting Hill*, set in the London neighborhood where Curtis lives with script editor Emma Freud and their child. The 1998 film was a critical and box success, cementing Curtis's reputation as an undisputed master of the romantic comedy genre. Julia basically played herself – a famous actress – and Grant played his patented bumbling, stuttering charmer who gets the girl. Also included in the cast were Curtis cronies Tim McInnerny from *Blackadder* and Emma Chambers from *The Vicar of Dibley*.

As if this weren't enough, he also found time to create and write *The Vicar Of Dibley*, starring Dawn French as a female vicar who comes to a small village where people are just not used to such things. Fighting against the small-mindedness and politics, Geraldine finally wins the hearts and acceptance of all. Judging by the positive response on both sides of the Atlantic, Curtis succeeded in his attempt to revive the more genteel, traditional British sitcom after years of *Bottom*, *The Young Ones*, and other anarchic, loud pieces of work that invaded British television in the 80s.

Curtis is also one of the founders and main forces behind *Comic Relief*. This charity was established in 1985 to "tackle poverty and promote social justice in the UK and Africa." Thanks mainly to "Red Nose Day," which features a big telethon and the sale of silly-looking red noses, the charity has raised close to 200,000,000 pounds. The money goes to sponsor a number of projects that are related to education and helping people deal with drug problems and disability.

Currently, Curtis is credited as a scriptwriter on the upcoming film version of his former girlfriend Helen Fielding's best-selling book *Bridget Jones' Diary*. Hugh Grant will once again star and American Renee Zelleweger will try on the role of the very English Bridget. There is also talk of another Bean project and a script based on the life of his parents.

More important, in a ceremony to be held later this year Curtis will be inducted into the Television Hall of Fame. It's about time.



BRITISH COMEDY BESTS



The Insider Awards

Everyone loves awards and we here at *The Insider* are no exception. An executive decision was made, therefore, to hand out our own and have a bit of fun at the same time. The ballots have been counted (and recounted after John Cleese complained that he hadn't won enough) so without further ado, we present the prestigious, highly coveted "Innie" Awards for Lifetime Achievement in British comedy.

THE INNIES go to:

Best Silly Walk:

- ❖ **JOHN CLEESE** as the Minister of Silly Walks. (Are you happy now Mr. Cleese?)
- ❖ Honorable mention to **John Inman** for his mincing gait as Mr. Humphries on *Are You Being Served?*

Best Silly Foreign Accent:

- ❖ **ANDREW SACHS** as Manuel in *Fawlty Towers*.
- ❖ Honorable mention to **Arthur "Good Moaning" Bostrom**, who mangled the English language as Crabtree on *'Allo, 'Allo*.

Best Telephone Technique:

- ❖ **PATRICIA ROUTLEDGE** as Hyacinth Bucket on *Keeping Up Appearances*.
- ❖ Honorable mention to both **Prunella Scales** (*Fawlty Towers*) and **Mary Millar** from *Keeping Up Appearances*.

Best Superhero

- ❖ **CHRIS BARRIE** as Ace Rimmer on *Red Dwarf*.
- ❖ Honorable mention to **Michael Palin** as Bicycle Repairman in the Monty Python skit of the same name.

Best Portrayal of a Slob

- ❖ **GEOFFREY HUGHES** as Onslow on *Keeping Up Appearances*.
- ❖ Honorable mentions to **Craig Charles** as *Red Dwarf's* only human, Dave Lister, and **Mike Burns** as Colin, the unhygienic employee at Whitbury Leisure Centre on *The Brittas Empire*.

Best Portrayal of a Dimwit

- ❖ **HUGH LAURIE** in anything.
- ❖ Honorable mention to **Emma Chambers** as *The Vicar of Dibley's* loveable Alice Tinker-Horton.

Best Purveyor of Verbal Abuse:

- ❖ **JOHN CLEESE** for too many things to list here.
- ❖ Honorable mention to **Rowan Atkinson** as Edmund Blackadder.

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Best Catchphrase

- ❖ **I'M FREE!** courtesy of Mr. Humphries.
- ❖ Honorable mention to **And now for something completely different** from Monty Python.

Best Temptress

- ❖ **JOANNE HEYWOOD** as Jessica Lovelock on *Are You Being Served? Again!* A woman so seductive she caused the death of Young Mr. Grace.
- ❖ Honorable mentions to **Mary Millar** as Our Rose on *Keeping Up Appearances* and **Carol Cleveland** of Monty Python fame.

Worst Singer

- ❖ **CARMEN SILVERA**, who attempted to entertain the patrons of Café Rene as Edith Artois on 'Allo 'Allo.
- ❖ Honorable mention to **Patricia Routledge** as Hyacinth Bucket. To be fair, though, Routledge *can* really sing well.

Stupidest Sidekick

- ❖ **TONY ROBINSON** as Baldrick, numbskull extraordinaire on *Blackadder*.
- ❖ Honorable mention to **Andrew Sachs** as Manuel, the idiot from Barcelona, on *Fawlty Towers*.

Best Ladies Man

- ❖ Can I get a woof for **RIK MAYALL** as Lord Flasheart, who stole Edmund's fiancée Bob on *Blackadder*?
- ❖ Honorable mention to **Philip Bretherton** as the smooth, suave Alistair Deacon on *As Time Goes By*.

Best Stuck Up Snob

- ❖ This tough category ended up in a tie between **PENELOPE KEITH** in both *Good Neighbors* and *To The Manor Born* and **PATRICIA ROUTLEDGE** as Queen of social etiquette Hyacinth Bucket on *Keeping Up Appearances*.
- ❖ Honorable mention to **John Cleese** as rude hotelier Basil Fawlty.

Most Understanding Spouse

- ❖ **CLIVE SWIFT** as Richard Bucket on *Keeping Up Appearances*. Well, would *you* live with Hyacinth?
- ❖ Honorable mention to **Annette Crosbie** as Margaret Meldrew, who puts up with curmudgeonly hubby Victor on *One Foot in the Grave*.

Most Understanding Neighbors

- ❖ **PENELOPE KEITH AND PAUL EDDINGTON** as Margo and Jerry Leadbetter on *Good Neighbors*. They put up with pigs, chickens, and numerous other distractions in the middle of suburban London.
- ❖ Honorable mention to **Josephine Tewson and David Griffin** as Elizabeth and Emmet, who have the good fortune to live next door to the Bucket residence on *Keeping Up Appearances*.

Worst Hairstyle

- ❖ **ROWAN ATKINSON** and that horrible pudding bowl whatever it was from the first season of *Blackadder*.
- ❖ Honorable mention to **Mollie Sugden** and her ever-changing hair color as Mrs. Slocombe on *Are You Being Served?*

Best Cook

- ❖ **LIZ SMITH** as Letitia Cropley, who provided the Dibley Parish Council with interesting snacks on *The Vicar of Dibley*.
- ❖ Honorable mention to **Tony Robinson** as Baldrick, creator of rat au vin, on *Blackadder*.

Congratulations to all the winners! If you have any suggestions for your own "Innie," feel free to contact *The Insider* via e-mail at bcdigest@soltec.com or by snail mail to *The Insider*, c/o Greg Parsons, BBC Worldwide Americas, 747 3rd Avenue, New York, NY. 10017 - 2803.





The Experience

Where It's Been and Where It's Going

We all know the shows, but where did they come from? What kind of institution nurtured the creation of classics such as *Are You Being Served?*, *Blackadder*, *Keeping Up Appearances* and the other programs we love?

OK, the answer is obvious – they all come from the BBC. Duh. Still, how did the BBC develop and where is it headed?

A terrific answer to those questions is given during a tour called **The BBC Experience**. Visitors are now able to enter the hallowed realm of Broadcasting House and learn how it came to be and where it's going.

Broadcasting House sits in the heart of London and is considered the “flagship” building of the BBC. It consists of an inner shell of studios surrounded by an outer shell of offices and was the world's first broadcasting center. Today, however, much of the recording and technical work is done at Television Centre in White City.

Historically, the man we have to thank is Guglielmo Marconi, an Italian inventor who was the first to make use of “wireless waves.” He intended this technology to provide communication with ships at sea, but its impact became more widespread than he could ever have envisioned. After World War I, its focus changed to “the broadcasting of speech, music, etc.”

At first, the BBC meant radio only. It wasn't until 1936 that television service was launched and until 1949 it was available only in London. However, part of the reason for its slow distribution into the rest of the country might have had to do with the fact that television broadcasts were halted for the duration of World War II.

A major turning point came on June 2, 1953, when over 20,000,000 viewers saw the coronation of Queen Elizabeth. For the first time, more people watched an event on television rather than listened to it on the radio.

At that point, the BBC Television was showing only 38 hours of programming per week and it remained the only game in town until BBC 2 was launched in 1964, causing what had been known as BBC Television to be officially named BBC1. By the end of the 60s viewers were able to get their programming in color.

As far as programming goes, the 50s and 60s saw the creation of a number of programs that are still widely enjoyed today, including the long-running sci-fi cult favorite *Doctor Who* and the classic comedy of *Dad's Army* and *Steptoe and Son*, which would later become a hit on American television as *Sanford and Son*. The seminal children's show *Blue Peter* also dates back to 1958 and is still going today.

The 60s on television and radio were also full of political satire including *That Was the Week That Was* with David Frost and *Beyond the Fringe* starring the classic line-up of Dudley Moore, Peter Cook, Alan Bennett, and Jonathan Miller. The Beatles did the very first satellite transmission when they sang *All You Need Is Love* for a worldwide audience of over 350 million and in 1969, the first season of *Monty Python's Flying Circus* was shown.

The 70s was equally fertile, with the launch of *Are You Being Served?*, *The Good Life (Good Neighbors)*, *Fawlty Towers* and *Last of the Summer Wine*. The 70s also saw the beginnings of daytime television.

In 1982 the BBC saw its first serious bit of competition with the arrival of the independent Channel 4 and in 1997 another commercial channel, Channel 5, was launched.

On the other hand, there was a distinct lack of competition from a short-lived network called *Live TV!* This station had a everything from a flame-haired mystic named Zelde who read tarot cards to Rusty the dwarf who, I kid you not, gave the weather report while bouncing on a trampoline.

(continued on next page)

What sets the BBC apart from commercial networks like Channels 4 and 5 is the Beeb's lack of commercial sponsorship. In order to pay for programming, every household is charged a license fee. Without having to answer to and/or please advertisers, the BBC has always been able to maintain a certain degree of independence and room for experimentation.

This is in stark contrast to the American networks, which are increasingly willing to cancel shows almost immediately if they don't perform well straight out of the box. The BBC has the luxury of giving programs, writers, and performers time to grow and develop.

Another noticeable difference is that radio appears to be a much greater force in the UK than in the US. Serialized programs like *The Archers* draw large audiences and radio is still a great springboard for television shows. The award-winning *The Day Today* and *I'm Alan Partridge* are just two examples of shows that translated with great success from radio to television.

However, current BBC Director General Greg Dyke announced this past August that some sweeping changes may be in store, including the creation of two new channels: BBC3 and BBC4.

BBC3 will be geared to appeal to younger viewers who have deserted the Beeb in favor of independent and satellite channels. It will focus on light entertainment with music and comedy. BBC4, on the other hand, is expected to be a more highbrow channel bringing viewers programming on science, the arts, and politics.

This revamping of a national institution is already stirring up controversy. Dyke plans to pay for these new channels by streamlining the bureaucracy and cutting jobs. In July he announced the loss of 1100 positions and is considering halting production at BBC Birmingham. Perks such as chauffeur driven cars are now out as he looks to increase money spent on programming about 30%.

The effects of all this remain to be seen, but there is no doubt that in terms of content and technology (especially the development and distribution of digital television) the BBC will remain where it's always been - on the cutting edge.

The BBC Experience Tour is given several times per day at Broadcasting House, Portland Place, London. The nearest tube station is Oxford Circus. Admission price during the summer of 2000 was 7.50 British pounds per person or 19.95 for a family.

IMPORTANT DATES IN BEEB RADIO AND TV HISTORY

1924 - The chimes of Big Ben are heard on BBC Radio for the first time.

1927 - BBC Radio presents the first running commentary for a sporting event when it covers a rugby match between England and Wales.

1939 - Television shut down for the duration of World War 2.

1946 - Television returns with a Mickey Mouse cartoon.

1955 - The BBC gets its first taste of competition when ITV goes on the air.

1957 - The Queen's Christmas Message is televised for the first time.

1960 - BBC Television Centre opens.

1963 - Doctor Who premieres.

1964 - The long-running music show Top of the Pops premieres.

1967 - Radio 1 launched. One of the DJs is future television talk show legend Terry Wogan.

1972 - The long-running quiz show *Mastermind* premieres.

1978 - *Antiques Roadshow* premieres.

1981 - The nation and the world is glued to the television when Prince Charles marries Lady Diana Spencer on July 29th.

1984 - BBC correspondent Michael Buerke reports on the horrible effects of the famine in the African nation of Ethiopia. This reports inspires Bob Geldof to organize *Live Aid*, one of the largest charity concerts in history.

1996 - The BBC's *Only Fools and Horses* Christmas special garners the highest rating of any program ever shown on British television.

1998 - The BBC begins offering programs in digital widescreen.



The Vicar of Dibley Season 3



The further adventures of God's most bodacious babe

SPOILER ALERT: DON'T READ IF YOU DON'T WANT TO KNOW THE PLOTS!

I'M SERIOUS...DON'T GO ANY FURTHER IF YOU WANT TO BE SURPRISED!

CONTINUE AT YOUR OWN RISK!

DON'T SAY I HAVEN'T WARNED YOU!

Dawn French told The Insider back in May that the third season of The Vicar of Dibley was "fab" and the "best fun to film." Was she telling the truth or just doing some judicious PR work? Here's the straight scoop.

The hectic schedules of star Dawn French and co-writer Richard Curtis made a return trip to the village of Dibley a bit long in the coming, but fans were recently treated to a new series of adventures involving Vicar Geraldine Granger and the rest of the lovable eccentrics in the town of Dibley.

There are only four episodes (each specially extended) in Season 3, but Curtis and co-writer Paul Mayhew-Archer came up with the great idea of looking at a year in the life of Dibley with each episode reflecting one of the four seasons.

We last left Geraldine and the townspeople of Dibley celebrating that union made in twit heaven - the marriage of Alice and Hugo. As the new episodes begin with *Autumn*, the happy couple has just returned from their honeymoon with lots of interesting photos and Alice's complaint that she's been gaining weight and feeling a bit sick in the mornings. Could she be pregnant? Well, the results of the "hamster test" (the details of which you really don't want to know - trust me) came up negative, the joyous news indeed is that Alice is expecting.

Meanwhile, Geraldine's own personal life also takes a turn for the interesting with the reappearance of her ex-

flame Simon, who just happens to be Parish council president David Horton's brother. They plan a date for the following Saturday night, though Geraldine tells David that she'll be working on her sermon.

"Oh, what's the text?" David asks.

"The Sermon on the Mount," the Vicar replies.

Simon and Geraldine want to be alone but are interrupted by a steady stream of guests. The relationship eventually blossoms, but Simon later confesses that there is another woman.

This sends Geraldine into a tailspin and she attempts to console herself with a freezer full of ice cream and a cabinet full of chocolate bars. Her despondency leads her to question how she can give sermons and teach right and wrong when she's done wrong herself.

She tenders her resignation to the Parish Council, which decides not to accept it. Their Vicar has messed up, but they still love her. Or were they just terribly traumatized by Jim's marathon sermon when he served as temporary lay preacher?

In the next episode, *Winter*, Geraldine is back full force and deeply involved in planning the final Dibley Christmas celebration of the Millennium.

(continued on next page)

Her subcommittee (Jim, Hugo, and Frank) has been unable to come up with any plan for a special celebration, and it is Alice (now visibly pregnant) who comes to the rescue. She suggests a traveling nativity with spectators moving from one spot to another as the action unfolds.

Geraldine loves the idea and quickly moves into director mode. The task of casting is more than a bit frustrating, however. Owen wants to be one of the Kings, so decides to audition as Elvis. Frank wants to be a Wise Man, so he reads the script using the voice of a man he considers wise – celebrated physicist Stephen Hawking. Alice and Hugo display a heretofore-unknown ability to speak Hebrew when they beg for the roles of Joseph and Mary. David seems perfectly cast as the villainous Herod, but wants to show Herod's "nice side."

Finally it's show time for *The Greatest Story Ever Told*. An unexpected dash of realism is added, however, when Alice and Hugo's baby chooses the manger scene to be born. They name her Geraldine.

The birth causes the Vicar and David both to reflect on their lives. In the next episode, *Spring*, David comes to the realization that perhaps it was he, and not his brother Simon, who should have wooed Geraldine. He confesses that he thinks she's an extraordinary woman.

Geraldine is flattered by David's declaration of love, but cautions him that they are very different people and she doesn't think it will work. After all, David is older, a Tory, and "mean." On the other hand, he is worth over five million pounds.

David won't take no for an answer, and woos the Vicar in earnest during a "very special" parish council meeting. Geraldine is swept off her feet and says yes.

Before the ceremony can take place, Geraldine has a dream in which her love god, actor Sean Bean, rescues her from the clutches of matrimony. She wakes up to the fact that perhaps she and David are becoming involved for the wrong reason. The wedding is called off and David reluctantly accepts that they are destined to stay just friends.

Perhaps the funniest sequence of this episode, however, is the Vicar's attempt to watch over baby Geraldine while Alice makes a quick run to the post box to mail off her request for a *Blue Peter* badge.

The Vicar proves to be an incredibly inept caregiver, letting the baby fall off the kitchen cabinet that is temporarily being used as a baby changing station. The doorbell rings and a wet, feces-covered Geraldine lets in a stranger who turns out to be the lady there to verify the Vicar's suitability to run a crèche (nursery) for the parish. Luckily, it's the inspector's first day, so she's not very critical.

Summer arrives in Dibley and as temperatures get hotter so do tempers. A water shortage has everyone irritable and stinky, but the problem of how Dibley will commemorate the millennium is on everyone's mind. A statue for the village green seems to be the best bet, but no one is sure who or what should be honored.

The water shortage continues, causing authorities to decide that Dibley should be "washed out" in order to make room for a new reservoir as well as the growth of surrounding communities

The entire town springs into action to protest this action. Well, at least most of the town. Hugo reveals that David has been offered over 4 million pounds compensation for his property. Owen is especially flabbergasted that David would betray them, but changes his tune (specifically to *Oh, Happy Day*) when he discovers how much he will profit himself. Greed reigns.

Geraldine and Alice voice concern over how they would lose each other. This has a domino effect and soon everyone else is expressing regret over the loss of community and valuable friendships.

The future of Dibley is in jeopardy and drastic measures are needed. Geraldine decides to chain herself to the church until the decision is rescinded. The others join in and victory is eventually theirs.

One crisis is averted, but what about the other? Who should be honored with a statue on the Dibley village green? The decision is made to pay tribute to Geraldine. The Vicar glams up for the unveiling only to discover that the statue is of Geraldine the baby and not her.

All in all, this season is a high-quality follow up to an already top-flight show. The cast is in especially fine form, with the terrific Emma Chambers reaching new heights of ditziness as Alice. Gary Waldhorn is also very effective, bringing a new depth and softness to the usually villainous David. The rest of the supporting cast is given a lot more to do than in previous seasons and uniformly rise to the occasion.

The unveiling of the statue to honor baby Geraldine ends this season with an appropriate nod to the future.

Fingers crossed that the future includes more episodes of *The Vicar of Dibley*.



The Insider Review

As Time Goes By Season 8

Americans who enjoy British television have become used to the fact that many of their favorite shows don't last long. There were only twelve episodes of *Fawlty Towers*, four seasons of *Blackadder*, and the list goes on.

As mentioned elsewhere in this issue, a license fee finances the BBC, so they do not have to kowtow to corporations and advertisers. This means that programs are not kept going past their prime simply because they bring in advertising revenue. Therefore, the creative element of the industry has often had the freedom to walk away from a popular program to pursue different projects.

So it's a rare program that lasts as long as *As Time Goes By*, which has now completed its eighth season. The popularity of this gentle sitcom is easy to understand. The fabulous Dame Judi Dench and Geoffrey Palmer provide a master class in the art of comedy acting while scriptwriter Bob Larbey provides a similar service for aspiring sitcom writers.

The first several seasons of this show were all about the reunion of two former flames, Jean and Lionel, after almost 40 years of silence between them thanks to letters that went undelivered. The question was: would these two get back together again?

This conflict was resolved during Season 4 when Jean and Lionel married. Many shows with a similar storyline have deteriorated completely once the "will they or won't they get together?" question is answered (think *Moonlighting*), so it is a major tribute to the talent of writer Larbey that he hasn't let that happen.

ATGB is still as strong as it's ever been, thanks in part to the fact that over the past couple of seasons Larbey has taken it in an interesting direction. Like *One Foot in the Grave* and *Waiting for God*, he has turned it into something of a treatise on aging, though with a gentler touch than either one of those two programs.

Season 7 ended with Jean providing her daughter Judith and Sandy with a shoulder to cry on as the girls poured

out their romantic problems. Judith had decided that she couldn't accept a proposal of marriage from the

smarmy, self-centered Alistair, while Sandy realized that her boyfriend Harry loved rugby a lot more than he loved her.

In Season 8, Alistair turns on his "hey hey" charm in an attempt to woo Sandy, who, after her relationship with Harry, is ready for a bit of glitz, glamour, and pampering. As the romantic lives of Judy and Sandy become more complicated, Jean and Lionel deal with somewhat more mundane things. The computer drives Lionel crazy, but Jean is determined to learn how to surf the Web, how to e-mail, and in general, how to keep up with the youngsters. Lionel becomes preoccupied by his finances when Penny and Stephen show up talking about how they're going to retire to Spain on an enormous estate with a pool and servants. He doesn't have a pension plan and doesn't feel right about his lack of contribution to his and Jean's financial future.

Even Alistair faces his own financial crisis and – gasp! – suffers a lack of confidence, but it's only temporary and the old Alistair zing returns.

Season 8 continues the impeccable craftsmanship and quality shown in previous seasons. I do have a couple of qualms, though. The whole subplot dealing with the romance between Alistair and Sandy should have either been left out or better yet explored more in depth. Judith's "I don't care" reaction to this relationship is a bit hard to believe.

Also, the energy and exuberance of Rocky and Madge are missing. Frank Middlemass appears only once as Rocky (in an episode during which Lionel decides to sell his father's house) and Joan Sims as Madge is nowhere to be found. This is more than likely due to her recent health problems. She had hip replacement and also injured herself on the set of the movie she did with Dame Judi called *The Last of the Blonde Bombshells*. Their



decreased presence results in increased visibility for the other supporting characters, especially Jenny Funnell, who brings a great charm to the role of

Sandy.

Negotiations are under way for Season 9 of *ATGB* and Larbey has left himself some interesting openings. The

actors don't appear to have tired of their characters and neither will viewers as long as the quality remains this high.



Ballykissangel Reinvented



Despite Cast Changes, the Show Goes On

In the first episode of *Ballykissangel*, Father Peter Clifford, the new curate in town, says to his congregation “I don’t have to tell you how beautiful this place is.”

I certainly knew what he meant when the town I’d become so accustomed to on the television screen came into view.

I was luckier than Father Clifford - the bus I was on finished its trip without a near collision involving an out of control confessional. We crossed the bridge and there was the familiar sight of Fitzgerald’s Pub. Following that we caught our first glimpse of the church and the square.

I glanced down at my hand to make sure I wasn’t holding the remote and watching television. Nope, this was all real. I was in BallyK.

Actually, I was in Avoca, the town used as the setting for this popular series. Avoca is located in County Wicklow, about an hour’s drive from Dublin.

What a drive it was. The bad news about Ireland is that it rains a lot. The good news is that the rain leaves the countryside painted in lush, verdant shades of green that have to be seen to be believed. Our route had taken us on winding roads through beautiful, misty hills and valleys into the Avoca Vale. The bus driver, possessed of the stereotypically nimble Irish tongue, had kept us vastly entertained on the way there with a steady stream of jokes and stories.

This is the kind of landscape that inspires poetry and indeed, before *BallyK* came along, Avoca’s main claim to fame was as the setting of Thomas Moore’s 1807 poem, *Meeting of the Waters*. The title came from the fact that this is where two rivers – the Avonbeg and the Avonmore – come together to form the River Avoca. The spot is marked by a pub called The Meetings.

The area was also known as the home of Avoca Handweavers, the oldest surviving business in Ireland. It has been in existence since 1723 and is still a thriving enterprise, with a restaurant and gift shop selling handwoven throws, sweaters, and other souvenirs.

A few scars remain from the copper mining that took place until the 1980s, but the natural beauty found here is undeniable. Series creator Kieran Prendiville claims that Avoca was not the inspiration for *BallyK*. Instead, he drew on his memories of the town in County Kerry where his father was from and where his family vacationed when he was a child.

An influx of almost 70,000 tourists a year has irrevocably changed the town, which actually has less than 500 residents. Yes, Fitzgerald’s is there, but a second, fake exterior was built nearby so that the real pub can function normally when the series is filming. (All interior shots are filmed on a studio set nearby.)

Even the tiny library has gotten into the act, doubling as a tourist center to handle visitors anxious to trace the footsteps of Peter, Assumpta, Niamh, Ambrose, and the others.

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Like Avoca itself, *Ballykissangel* has gone through a number of changes. In his poem, Thomas Moore wrote:

***Sweet vale of Avoca! how calm could I rest  
In the bosom of shade, with the friends I love best,***

*(continued on next page)*

***Where the storms that we feel in this cold world  
should cease,  
And our hearts, like thy waters, be mingled in peace.***

Those words could easily describe the underlying tone of life in the fictional BallyK. It's about faith, family, and friends who watch out for each other, but there's also a heavy dose of whimsy and magic.

*Ballykissangel* is also about the mingling of hearts, though not always in peace. Seasons 1-3 featured the rocky path to the altar of Niamh Quigley and Ambrose Egan. There was also the thorny relationship between Father Peter and Assumpta Fitzgerald, whose love was destined to take a totally different path.

Plus, let's not forget the mingling of Siobhan and Brendan, whose drunken night of passion resulted in Siobhan's pregnancy.

The storms normally came courtesy of Brian Quigley and his underlings/henchmen, Liam and Donal. Quigley is all about the bucks and in the name of (mainly his own) prosperity is attempting to drag the town into the present day.

The character of Quigley can actually be considered representative of a lot of what is happening in Ireland today as this historically poor nation finds itself in an economic boom.

The cast remained consistent until the end of Season 3, which concluded with the death of Assumpta and the departure of Father Peter. With two lead characters out of the picture, the job of the writers was to keep up the level of romantic and platonic entanglement.

They did that in the form of Sean Dillon, who returned to BallyK with his rebellious daughter Emma to complicate matters by capturing Niamh's heart.

The recently completed fifth season also brought about a number of changes. In an incredibly moving episode, Ambrose was laid to rest after he died trying to rescue some vacationers stuck on the side of a cliff. Tina Kellegher's performance as Niamh has always been powerful, but she is nothing short of brilliant in this episode. She shows both Niamh's grief as well as her intense guilt that Ambrose died just as she was going to tell him she was leaving him for Sean.

The tragedy with Niamh and Ambrose also brought out a whole different side in the character of Brian Quigley, who had been strong for his daughter and grandson. Brian was not the only one there for his daughter, however. Niamh has the support of the whole town, bringing back to mind Thomas Moore's poem.

Hang on, though. Life in BallyK is not all romantic entanglements and tragedy. There's plenty of gentle humor and whimsy (remember the confessional with its own fax machine?) as well as the misadventures of Liam and Donal, Bally K's own version of Laurel and Hardy. The fine messes they've gotten themselves into (including stealing caviar from a couple of thugs resembling Monty Python's Piranha Brothers) always manage to amuse.

Series 6 has now finished filming and is in post-production. The good news is that series creator Kieran Prendiville is returning once again to guide his "child." If anyone can ensure that the show remains true to itself, it's him. So what can fans expect?

The future direction of the show has been impacted by sad deaths. Birdy Sweeney, who played the eccentric but loveable farmer Eamonn, succumbed to a heart attack in 1999 at the age of 68, leaving behind eight children.

Then there was the sudden, untimely death last January of Tony Doyle, who played Brian Quigley. Doyle was only 58 when he also died as a result of a heart attack, leaving behind six children.

With such an important piece of the puzzle missing, it will be very interesting to see how the void left by Doyle's death is filled. A poll was taken as to whether viewers wanted the character of Quigley to be recast or simply written out of the series and a majority chose the latter option.

New characters are promised, including an Australian priest to replace Father Aidan as well as Edso, who runs the garage, and Louis, who is described as a "mountainy man" and may take over where the eccentric Eamonn left off.

Tony Doyle's presence will live on in the form of his daughter Susannah, who has joined the series, much like when Tom Owen joined the cast of *Last of the Summer Wine* after his father, Bill, who had played Compo for many years, passed away.

The changes are not necessarily a bad omen. Even a behemoth like *ER* has been able to continue and thrive despite the defection of such stalwarts as Sherry Stringfield, George Clooney and Juliana Margulies.

So far, the writers of BallyK have been able to integrate new characters easily and there's no reason to think this trend won't continue. The characters may change, but the premise and setting are sufficiently strong so that the series should be able to weather any upheavals.

Even if Season 6 proves to be the last, visitors will no doubt continue to flock to Avoca to see the town that is as lyrical and beautiful as the show filmed there.

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Our driver once again kept us vastly entertained as we made our way back to Dublin, but my head and heart were still in the magical Vale of Avoca. The spirit of my trip to BallyK

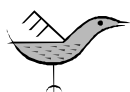
was so strong that it continued to follow me even after I left. I picked up two Beanie Babies at the airport to give friends as souvenirs and during the flight I had to laugh because I discovered their names were Liam and Donal.



The Insider Episode Guide

The Good Life/ Good Neighbors

The Good Life//Good Neighbors first debuted over 20 years ago, but its message of simplicity and self-sufficiency remains equally relevant today. Here's a guide to all four seasons of this classic Britcom. .



Season One

Episode 1: Plough Your Own Furrow. It's Tom Good's 40th birthday and how does he celebrate it? By deciding to ditch the job he hates and becoming totally self-sufficient in the heart of suburban London. Bring on the goats and the wrath of his snooty neighbor Margo.

Episode 2: Say Little Hen. As the Goods begin their quest for the "good life" in earnest, their neighbors become concerned about their mental state as well as the state of their house, which is becoming an eyesore on the avenue. Will Jerry's arranged dinner with the boss help Tom see the folly of his ways?

Episode 3: The Weaker Sex? Barbara's task of cleaning a dirty range gives her plenty of time to wonder whether self-sufficiency is worth the sacrifice. Luckily, Tom's continued enthusiasm finally wins the day.

Episode 4: Pig's Lib. The Goods introduce the avenue to two new members of their family – Pinky and Perky the pigs. Margo especially is not amused, but the pigs extract their own sort of revenge by trashing the Leadbetter's lawn.

Episode 5: The Thing in the Cellar. Tom's goal is to keep the power going without having to rely on the

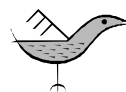
electric company, but despite his ingenuity in rigging up a generator, this is much easier said than done.

Episode 6: The Pagan Rite. Tom and Barbara get some extra cash from Tom's secret freelance work and treat themselves to a bit of pampering in a posh suite. (Note: Moyra Fraser, who plays the wife of Tom's former boss, may look familiar to you. She plays Judi Dench's sister-in-law, Penny, on *As Time Goes By*.)

The Good Life regular cast members:

Tom Good...Richard Briers
Barbara Good...Felicity Kendal
Jerry Leadbetter...Paul Eddington
Margo Leadbetter...Penelope Keith
Pinky, Perky, and Geraldine...Themselves

Episode 7: Backs to the Wall. Now it's Tom's turn to question whether self-sufficiency is the answer. He throws his back out and since no one else will help, Barbara must get the harvest in or it'll be ruined.



Season Two

Episode 1: Just My Bill. The harvest was saved, but Tom finds it very difficult to sell the produce in time to pay the tax rates. A restaurant deal falls through, but as usual, the Goods find a last minute solution.

Episode 2: The Guru of Surbiton. Two students come to work for Tom and Barbara in return for lodgings. The Goods become role models for the young people, who in their enthusiasm take the whole concept just a bit too far.

Episode 3: Mr. Fix-It. Tom and Barbara are all ready for their fifteen minutes of fame via a newspaper article, but Margo complicates things when she decides

to ride on their coattails for her own piece of the action.

Episode 4: The Day Peace Broke Out. Tom springs into action when a thief begins taking his leeks. However, Tom's beliefs and patience are tested when he catches the culprit.

Episode 5: Mutiny. Jerry is caught between a rock (Margo) and a hard place (his boss) when both place heavy demands on him at the same time. Will he host a Dutch visitor for his boss or will he support Margo as she makes her theatrical debut in *The Sound of Music*?

(continued on next page)

Episode 6: Home, Sweet Home. Margo has a tantrum when she discovers that Pinky the pig is going to be impregnated. The Goods briefly consider a move, but decide that their house in Surbiton just holds too many memories.

Episode 7: Going to Pot? Tom and Barbara once again come close to normalcy when Tom's homemade goblets threaten to become all the rage. Once again, they return to their principles before it's too late.



Season 3

Episode 1: The Early Birds. Tom and Barbara decide to change their daily routine to use their time more wisely, but find that going to bed early and rising at the crack of dawn doesn't exactly agree with them...or their neighbors.

Episode 2: The Happy Event. Pinky the pig decides to give birth in the middle of the night and Tom faces the wrath of Barbara when he thinks the sickly runt of the litter should be left to die. Everyone – including the Leadbetters – rallies to save the newborn.

Episode 3: A Tug of the Forelock. In desperate need of transportation, Barbara and Tom try to earn money by taking over while the Leadbetter's gardener and housekeeper are on vacation. Will they survive being ordered around by Margo?

Episode 4: I Talk to the Trees. Tom and Barbara test Mr. Wakeling's theory about how plants will grow better if they're talked to nicely. However, testing out a theory about the effect of music on plant growth interferes with an important meeting of Margo's musical society.

Episode 5: The Windbreak War. A simple misunderstanding about where Margo's windbreak should be positioned escalates into almost all-out war between Margo and the Goods, both of whom are trying to do the right thing.

Episode 6: Whose Fleas are These? While Margo worries about becoming politically active, Tom and Barbara worry that they may have infested the Leadbetter's home with fleas. The culprit, however, turns out to be a dog belonging to one of Margo's hoity-toity friends.

Episode 7: The Last Posh Frock. Barbara worries that she's losing her femininity and Tom's ogling of another woman doesn't exactly help the situation.



Season 4

Episode 1: Away from It All. Barbara and Tom's harvest earns them barely enough to survive, so to revive their spirits Jerry arranges for a free stay in a posh Mayfair flat. They can't relax, however, because they worry about the animals.

Episode 2: The Green Door. Is Margo having an affair? The Goods become suspicious when trips she claims are to the pony club turn out to be trips to somewhere else completely.

Episode 3: Our Speaker Today. Barbara is a hit when she fills in at the last minute as a guest lecturer. Soon the speaking offers come flooding in, but Barbara realizes that this is taking too much time away from home.

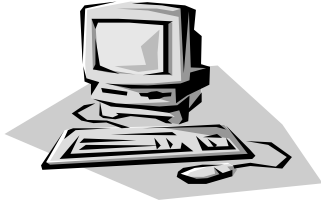
Episode 4: The Weaver's Tale. Tom turns from frugal to extravagant when he spends 10 pounds on a spinning loom. Barbara is furious that he bought something she considers wasteful. Margo and Jerry, in the meantime, are also arguing about money.

Episode 5: Suit Yourself. "Sir" is getting ready to retire as Managing Director of JJM, Ltd. Jerry desperately wants the position, but during a dinner meeting he realizes he's forgotten some important documents at home. Tom and Barbara save the day, but also cause Jerry some embarrassment

Episode 6: Sweet and Sour Charity. Everything hits the skids. Margo's on the outs with her music society and Jerry faces stiff competition for the promotion he wants. The Goods, however, have a hit a skid of another sort – an oil leak that has ruined their garden.

Episode 7: Anniversary. The 2nd anniversary of Tom and Barbara's self-sufficiency is *not* a good one. Their financial situation is worse than ever and, to add insult to injury, their house is burgled and vandalized. It's tempting to give up, but in the end they resolve to forge on in their pursuit of the good life.

(NOTE: The cast also did a 1977 Christmas special and in 1978 taped a special Royal Command performance with the Queen in attendance.)



SPOTTED ON THE INTERNET

Web Reviews by David Darryl Bibb

The Vicar of Dibley

<http://www.angelfire.com/md/bessiemaemoocow/>

This site states up front that it hasn't been updated in "forever." In fact, they explain that they haven't seen season three yet, so that may be part of the problem. On the other hand, they do provide nice tidbits of information such as the fact that the theme song is on a CD called *Howard Goodall Choir Works*.

The main page uses a light blue background with pink and yellow lettering that is hard on the eyes and nearly impossible for some printers to handle. The best feature is the quotes section (which has black letters against a tan background) offering such gems as, "Well, here's to love and marriage, which go together like a horse and carriage, according to Cole Porter, who should know, cos he was gay."

The site also has an episode guide for the first two seasons and specials. It is not as full of information as some sites and the color scheme needs some work, but the overall result is worth checking out if only for the quotes and the nice jokes page.

Rating: 2 mouse clicks

The Unofficial Chris Barrie Fan Site

<http://www.clay.co.uk/barrie/>

A labor of love devoted to the man who has made a good living being a smeghead. Featuring professional level flash animation, and a drop down menu, this site claims to be "...maybe the largest Chris Barrie resource on the Internet." The informational aspect of the site is certainly well done and has information on all of the series Barrie has been a part of and offers the standard episode guides, cast information, quiz, jigsaw and a crossword plus many more

items. However, the white letters on the black background get on one's nerves and cause some printers to fail.

Rating: 4 ½ mouse clicks

Rowan Atkinson Information Gateway

<http://www.rowanatkinson.org/>

As the webmistress of this site says, "There are many other very well done fan pages on the web devoted to Mr. Atkinson's person, roles and shows, so I see no reason to reinvent the wheel here. What I hope to provide is a comprehensive and organized collection of links to information that already exists out there in the ether."

She is as good as her word. The site is searchable and provides links to news, articles, roles, a biography, a fan forum, Q & A section, and, best of all an ethics section on what is included. "I draw that line at consensual publicity. In an effort to keep Mr. Atkinson's personal life as private as he wishes it to be, I pledge to only include officially released and published information on these pages." What more could a celebrity ask for?

Rating: 4 ½ mouse clicks

Also Recommended

To purchase videos:

<http://www.bbcproducts.com>

Disclaimer: Please remember that the World Wide Web is an ever-changing place. The sites reviewed and recommended in this issue are operational at the date of publication. The Insider regrets any inconvenience caused by sites that move or close.

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Ian McShane (cont'd. from page 1)

His education at RADA included a whole lot more than voice projection and how to make a proper stage entrance. He shared a flat with John Hurt (who would later go on to play John Merrick in David Lynch's film *The Elephant Man*) and the two became well versed in the art of power drinking and raising hell.

Fortunately, McShane's extracurricular activities didn't interfere with his professional life. He began working as an actor before he left RADA and hasn't quit since.

His career during the early 60s consisted mainly of stage work. He appeared in the original production of *Loot* by Joe Orton, a flamboyant playwright who was later murdered by his lover. The two became drinking partners and McShane was also tutored in the finer points of acting and boozing by the maestro himself, Richard Burton.

He was at the height of his drinking powers in 1970. We were pissed by lunchtime; I would take my bacon sandwich over and we would start on the vodka and grapefruit juice.

McShane on Richard Burton

McShane worked steadily, however, and the extraordinary range of his ability soon became evident as he held his own with Dame Judi Dench and Ian McKellen in the *The Promise* on the West End. This later transferred to Broadway.

His first starring role in a film was alongside Hayley Mills in the 1966 movie *Gypsy Girl* and then in 1969 he appeared in one comic film (*If It's Tuesday, This Must Be Belgium*) and a war film, *The Battle of Britain*.)

During the 70s and 80s he again displayed his versatility, playing everything from Heathcliff to Judas to Sue Ellen Ewing's lover on *Dallas*. He also did other guest spots on popular American shows like *Miami Vice* and *Magnum P.I.*

He also found time to begin a family. Following a brief marriage during the 60s, he married Ruth Post and the couple had two children (Morgan and Kate) before divorcing in 1976. McShane has been married to his third wife, American actress Gwen Humble, for over twenty years now. (So sorry, girls; he's taken.)

In the early 80s a fortuitous event occurred when McShane became acquainted (through the recommendation of a fan) with a series of novels by author Jonathan Gash chronicling the adventures of antiques dealer Lovejoy. He instinctively knew that he was on to something good.

His hard-living past behind him, McShane decided to take a more active role in this project and became a co-producer along with Tracey Ullman's husband Allan McKeown. To develop the scripts they called on the talented Ian LaFrenais, whose previous credits included co-writing the classics *Porridge* and *The Likely Lads* with his partner Dick Clement. The first season of *Lovejoy* premiered in 1986.

It is a program that defies categorization. Perhaps the best description of it is as an "antiques rogue show." Part mystery, part comedy, part drama, and a look at the world of antiques and shady dealers, *Lovejoy* needed a strong, likeable, charismatic charmer in the lead role.

McShane is all that and more, effortlessly pulling off a role that is not as easy as it looks. It's even more impressive when you realize that in real life he has no such interest in antiques. "The oldest thing I have is my body," he once joked.

However, *Lovejoy* doesn't exactly fit into that world either. He dresses in leather and jeans and loves the women, but *Lovejoy's* relationship with the opposite sex is not the main priority of his life or of the show. In 1993 McShane told an interviewer that there wasn't a true concentration on the romantic side of *Lovejoy's* life because "the show is actually about one guy and his love for antiques."

Lovejoy lasted for 6 seasons and McShane made noises that he might want to bring the character back for another series. However, before that could happen he beat out *Phantom of the Opera* star Michael Crawford out for the role of Daryl Van Horne in *The Witches of Eastwick*.

I love this job. it's hard work, but it's not like being at the coalface (down in the mines.) You don't stop acting. Actors don't retire, they just lose their scripts.

McShane on his profession.

McShane is currently about half way through his one-year obligation to the show, which has received mixed reviews. *Witches* is a special effects laden extravaganza, including characters flying out over the audience. His co-stars include Lucie Arnaz, daughter of Desi Arnaz and Lucille Ball.

One paper called the production "sexy, spectacular and an awful lot of fun." At the age of 58, that sums up Ian McShane very well.

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