

# THE QUESTORS THEATRE

is based in West London where it has its own premises including a modern, flexible Playhouse, a Studio theatre, three rehearsal rooms, a workshop, an extensive wardrobe department and, of course, the Grapevine Bar, which is the hub of the theatre.

It has nearly 3,000 members, all of whom get involved in one way or another, either in the 20 plus productions that are staged each year, in the day to day running of the theatre, or as members of the audience.

As well as presenting a wide variety of plays, the Questors runs a two-year course for actors, plays host to visiting companies from home and abroad, mounts regular art exhibitions, runs workshops and clubs for young people and tours productions in this country and abroad.

In short, there is something for everyone at The Questors.

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## The Questors Theatre

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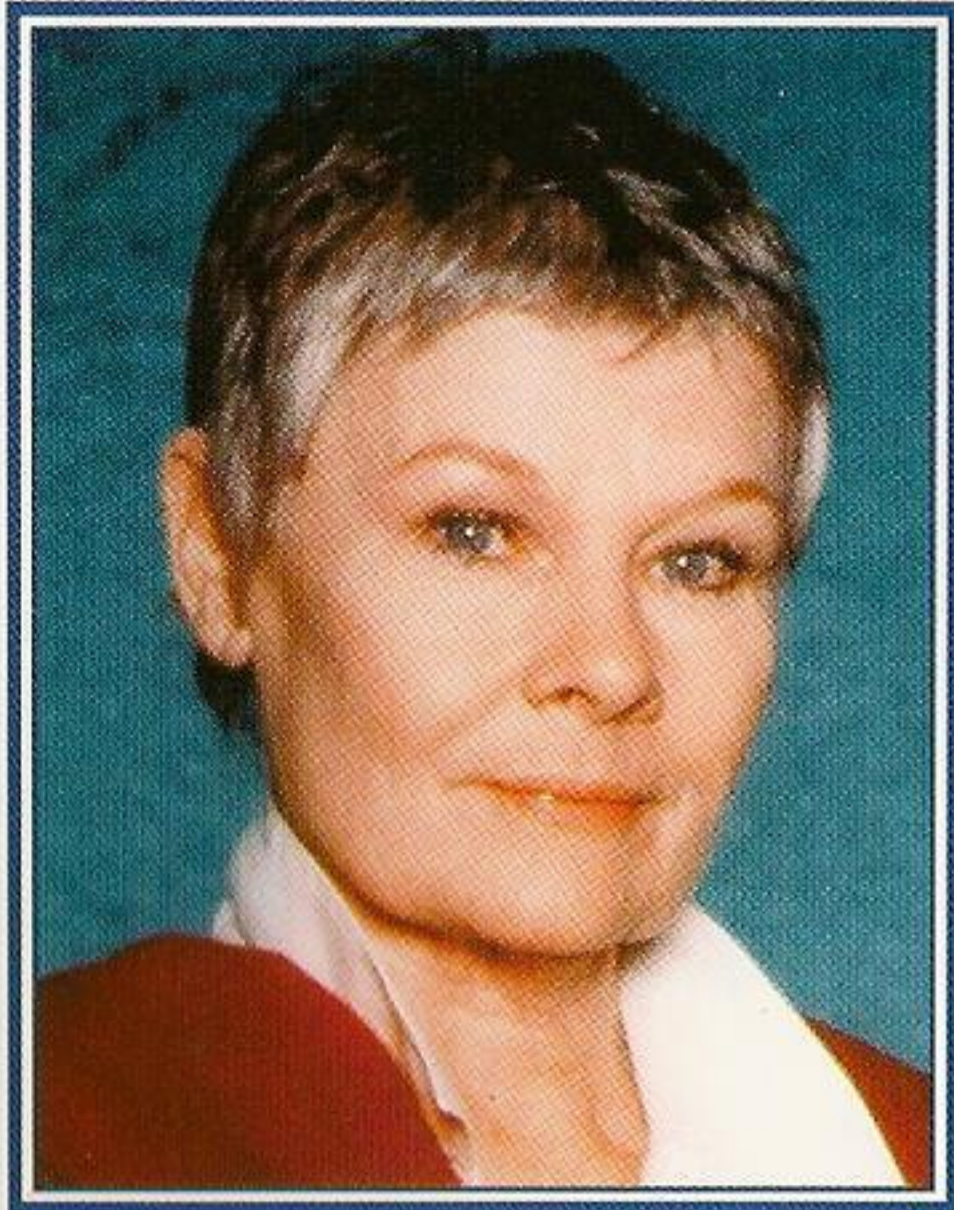
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ABSENT FRIENDS

THE QUESTORS THEATRE





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**Welcome** to The Questors Theatre, one of London's best kept secrets - except to its 3,000 members. How do I know about the Questors? I am proud to have been their President for over 16 years. Founded in 1929, it has since grown into the largest community theatre in Europe with a reputation for the highest standards, not only in acting but in direction and design as well. Luckily, with so many members, we have a wealth of talent to call on for all aspects of production and members are encouraged to be as actively involved as they would like. Alternatively, they simply enjoy the social side of the club, including the friendly Grapevine Bar (one of the many perks of membership) and the many and varied shows in our newly refurbished 350 seater Playhouse Theatre and more intimate Studio Theatre.

The Questors runs a professionally recognised two-year acting course in conjunction with Kingston College. There are also acting courses for beginners, free backstage training courses, visiting companies from home and abroad, regular art exhibitions, and workshops and clubs for young people. In short, there is something for everyone and with annual membership costing as little as £23.50 (including up to 10 free shows) it's great value for money as well.

But don't just take my word for it, the next time you're in West London call into The Grapevine Bar on any Wednesday evening at 8pm for a free tour of the theatre and a drink on us!

Worth looking into?

Definitely!

Dame Judi Dench  
 President of The Questors Theatre

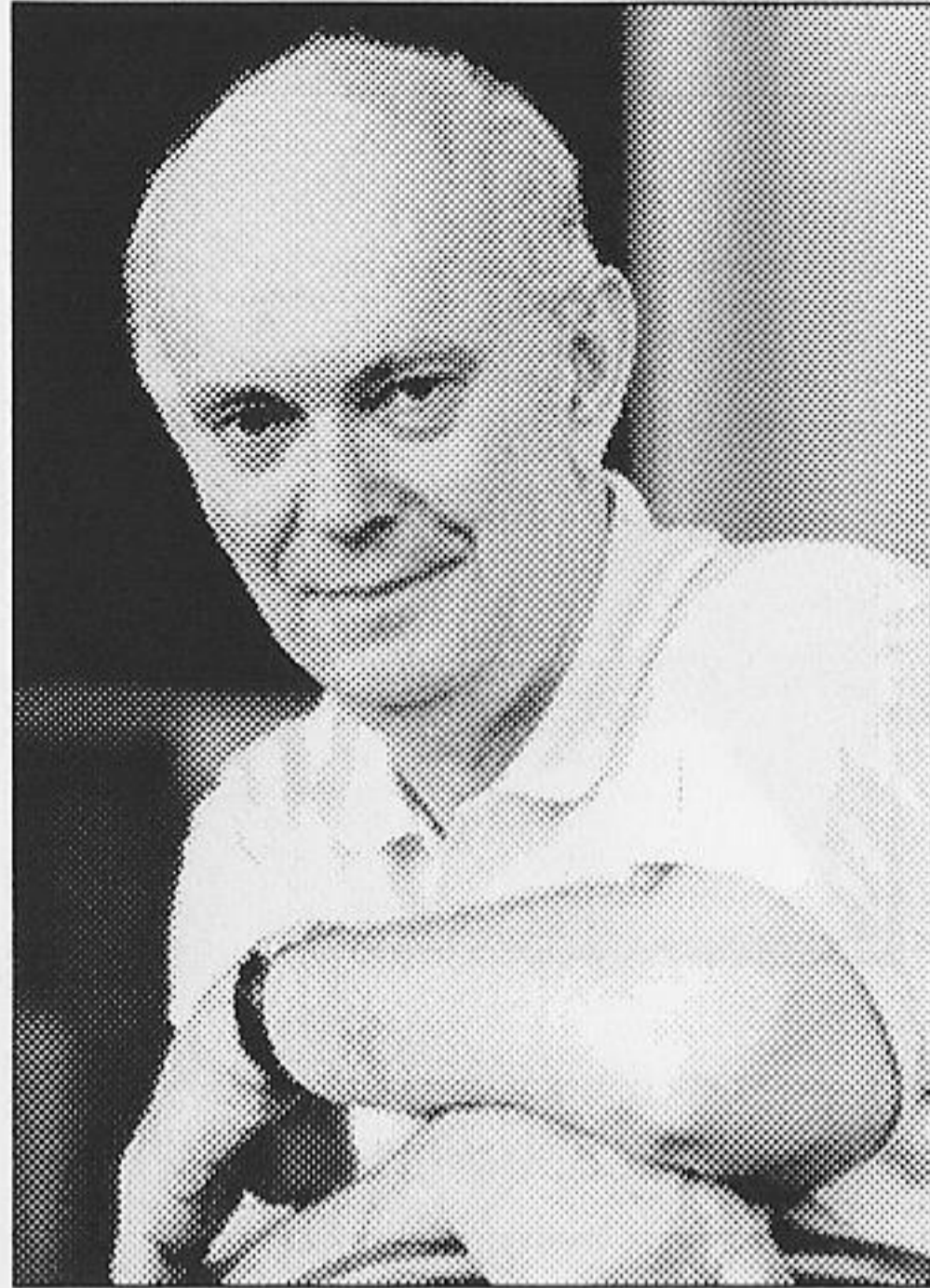


# ABSENT FRIENDS

by Alan Ayckbourn



## Alan Ayckbourn



Alan Ayckbourn was born in London in 1939, and had a love of the theatre from a very early age. Straight from school he joined Donald Wolfit's stage company as an assistant stage manager. From there, Alan Ayckbourn went round the repertory circuit in Worthing, Leatherhead, Scarborough and Oxford, graduating to stage manager and eventually actor. The decisive moment of Ayckbourn's young career came in 1957 when he became a permanent member of Stephen Joseph's Theatre-in-the-Round Company at Scarborough as an actor and stage manager. His writing career started when he objected to a role he was playing in *Bell Book and Candle*. Stephen Joseph is reported to have said, "If you want a better part, you'd better write one for yourself. Write a play. I'll do it. If its any good." Ayckbourn wrote *The Square Cat* and it was performed at Scarborough in the summer of 1959.

In 1964, Ayckbourn joined the BBC as a radio drama producer and remained there until 1970. Throughout this period he was still writing and directing for summer seasons at the Theatre-in-the-Round in Scarborough and in 1970 he took over as the Director of Productions. He is still the Artistic Director of the Stephen Joseph Theatre in Scarborough, and still firmly committed to theatre in the round. Almost all of the over 60 plays Alan Ayckbourn has written to date received their first performance in Scarborough and more than 25 have subsequently been produced in the West End, at the National Theatre or the RSC.

His plays have won numerous awards - including seven London Evening Standard Awards. They have been translated into over 30 languages and are performed on stage and television throughout the world. They have also been filmed in French and English. Four of his plays have been seen on Broadway attracting two Tony nominations.

## His Plays

Ayckbourn's work was, for years, dismissed as being too slight for serious study, but then scholars began to view him as an important commentator on the lifestyles of the British suburban middle-class and as a stylistic innovator, experimenting with theatrical styles within the boundaries set by popular tastes. Critics have tended to see in his work a steady progression from lighter, frivolous work to darker, more serious plays. This could be summed up in this comment by Sidney Howard White commending Ayckbourn for his progress from a "nimble worker of farces to a Chekhovian writer of comedy". But the truth is probably less neat. Far from leaving farce behind in the 1970s, for example, Ayckbourn continued to employ its elements in plays such as *Man of the Moment* (1988) and *Revenger's Comedies* (1989), and he considers farce among the most sophisticated and difficult of theatrical styles in which to succeed. And serious, darker

themes reach back into Ayckbourn's career at least as far as 1972's *Time and Time Again*, in which the seeds of his theatrical commentary on domestic oppression are planted. Ayckbourn himself describes his work in terms of stylistic and thematic "phases" which have alternated over the years of his career, and which may be interrupted by new ideas. In addition to farces, "black farces" (Ayckbourn's term), comedies of wit and manner, and serious plays in comic form, he has also written musicals, revues, and children's plays, and has done so over the course of his career.

His early plays were influenced, not by a literary or experimental background, but from a need to fill a small theatre in a seaside resort town. As he has remained connected with Scarborough ever since, this has resulted in a kind of theatre that appears, to most, to be familiar and recognisable. He uses theatre forms that appeal to a mainstream audience, then manipulates them subtly in order to present his themes. He believes firmly in theatre as a pure art form, and not as a vehicle to make political points. As he himself said "I hate being told things." And part of this belief is an endless fascination with the technical possibilities of theatre: sets which interpenetrate each other to suggest the tangled lives of two couples; interlocking comedies which suggest offstage characters and action as vivid as the onstage action an audience can see; multiple plot outcomes which, taken together, illustrate the consequences of seemingly trivial decisions. Ayckbourn is not just Britain's most prolific playwright, he is also the most technically innovative. His energy and enthusiasm for pushing the boundaries of the possible are seemingly boundless. Many have had cause to dread the sentence beginning "I wonder if we could...". It would usually mean a lot of hard work, lateral thinking, and much confusion. But if anyone questioned that it was, indeed possible, Ayckbourn himself would step in to prove his point, often working late into the night, fiddling with unbalanced sound systems or recalcitrant props. During performances of "House and Garden" (1999); two plays designed to run simultaneously with the same cast, the cast moving between the House and the Garden; the backstage action was quite as frenzied as that seen by the audience. Exhausted actors ran up and down flights of backstage stairs and could often be heard crying "which bloody stage am I supposed to be on? I can't remember where I am?".

There continues to be a difference of opinion amongst critics regarding Ayckbourn's characterisations. Some see in his characters fully fleshed, three-dimensional characters, while others see them as emblems of middle class types. Certainly some of Ayckbourn's characters are fully rounded: his comedies portray a rich tableau of domestic relationships and he is skilled at exploring the complex and delicate balance between laughter and tears, the comic and the tragic. Many of his characters are trapped by social constraints which they seem incapable of challenging. In some plays, though, he does seem to sacrifice three-dimensional characterisation for flatter characters which illuminate middle-class types. In his memorable characterisations, however, he manages to combine a rich three-dimensionality and particularity with an emblematic quality which allows the characters both to represent a social context and to deal with personal, emotional issues. Peter Hall said "He (Ayckbourn) has an acute social sense of what it was like to live in England in the last half of the 20th century. And for that, as much as any dramatist, he is required reading."

**Kate Morton**

*(Marketing Officer and former assistant designer at the Stephen Joseph Theatre)*



# ABSENT FRIENDS

by Alan Ayckbourn

First performance of this production 28th September 2002

## CAST

Paul	James Goodden
Diana	Fiona Partington
John	Mark Redrup
Evelyn	Susan Cruse
Colin	Richard Brown
Marge	Lynn Scrivener

The play is set in the home of Paul and Diana

Time - The present

Act 1 lasts approximately 1 hour

Act 2 lasts approximately 45 minutes

*There will be an interval of 15 minutes between Acts 1 and 2*

## PRODUCTION

Director	John Turner
Set Designer	John Rolfe
Lighting Designer	Chris Newall
Lighting Operator	Chris Newall
Sound Designer	Colin Horne
Sound Operators	Helen Marler, Ahmed Sherif
Stage Manager	Martin Stoner
Deputy Stage Manager	Liz Averill
Assistant Stage Manager	Helen Bennett
Get-in supervisor	Roger Brace
Costumes	Sarah Andrews, Nichola Thomas, Jennie Yates
Prompt	Gordon Miller
Properties	Annabel Morris
Construction	John Rolfe

*With thanks to:*

Geoff Moore, Damien Lazell, Terry Mummery, Charlie Lucas, Jenny Richardson, Keith Parry, Karen Tollady, Sofie Cassimati, Nigel Worsley, Jim Craddock, Claudia Kees, Julia Cruttenden, Jenny Rawlings, Mark Hamilton and the Sofa Workshop, Ealing, The House Services Team, The Image Maker, Amersham, Bucks (*photographs*).



## Quotes from and about Ayckbourn

"The myth that you have to write simplistically for the masses is so patronising. Audiences love to be challenged."

Theatre is "giving people the impression that they (the audience) have arrived at just the right moment, in just the right seat, to see the right sequence of events."

"If you live with your mother after a succession of men have left her, you tend to be slightly biased. Men are pretty unreliable."

"I am not the best director of my plays, but I'm the best one I know. It cuts out the middle man."

Gerhard Stadelmaier, the German theatre critic called Ayckbourn "The Moliere of the middle classes."

In 1997 there was the celebrated "luvvies versus lavvies" dispute when the redoubtable philistinism of the British reared up in the form of a local councillor who said that the theatre's grant would mean that the town's 22 public lavatories would have to be closed down. The headline writers could hardly believe their luck. The local paper was full of inarticulate praise for the public conveniences as a major Scarborough attraction, and Ayckbourn lost his rag. "If you happen to be teetotal in this town, then God help you - because there is little else to do apart from get drunk and buy shoes," he wrote. The council later relented.

(The comment about buying shoes refers to the fact that Scarborough, for some unknown, though much commented-upon reason, has considerably more shoe shops than it would appear to need.)

Ayckbourn on the Questors

"it really is a theatre after my own heart."

### THE QUESTORS THEATRE

has over 2500 members, all of whom get involved in one way or another, either in the 17 plus productions that are staged each year, in the day to day running of the theatre, or as members of the audience. As well as presenting a wide variety of plays, the Questors runs a two-year course for actors, plays host to visiting companies from home and abroad, mounts regular art exhibitions, runs workshops and clubs for young people and tours productions in this country and abroad.

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Or pick up a leaflet from the foyer.

# COMING SOON

## **LOOK BACK IN ANGER** by John Osborne

In **The Studio**, 5<sup>th</sup> - 19<sup>th</sup> October

John Osborne's notorious 1956 debut provided a mouthpiece for a generation and class hitherto unheard in British theatre. In a claustrophobic flat on a dreary Sunday, educated, working-class Jimmy Porter raised his voice in bitterness and rage against his wife, his friend, his whole hopeless world and began a vicious tantrum that continues to echo on stage nearly 50 years later.

## **HAMLET** by William Shakespeare

In **The Playhouse**, 19<sup>th</sup> - 26<sup>th</sup> October

Of all of his plays, Shakespeare's tale of the melancholy Dane seems the most modern. For Hamlet, as for us, the world assumes the shape of a question mark. He asks more, and more varied, questions than any other character in Shakespeare, and has learnt that truth is elusive, and that appearances deceive. In his acute awareness of ambiguity and his perplexity about where to begin looking for the truth, we can see ourselves.

*The Questors Theatre presents Sheila Steafel in:*

## **STEAFEL Re-QUESTED**

In **The Studio**, 29<sup>th</sup> October - 2<sup>nd</sup> November

Following a sell-out run at the Questors three years ago, Sheila Steafel returns with a brand new show specially written for the Questors. Polished and witty as always and packed with stories, sketches, songs and soliloquies, there is sure to be something for everyone. So if you saw her last time, then come again, and if you didn't, then this is your chance to see what you missed!

## **THE BEAUTY QUEEN OF LEENANE** by Martin McDonagh

In **The Playhouse**, 9<sup>th</sup> - 16<sup>th</sup> November

Set in the mountains of Connemara, County Galway, this gutsy play tells the darkly comic tale of Maureen Folan, a plain, lonely woman in her early forties, and Mag, her manipulative, ageing mother, whose interference in Maureen's first, and possibly final chance of a loving relationship sets in motion a train of events that leads inexorably towards the play's terrifying dénouement. Deceptions, secrets and betrayals are interspersed with just the right amount of twists and surprises, and things are, of course, not always what they seem.



# ART EXHIBITIONS

September 28<sup>th</sup> - October 12<sup>th</sup>

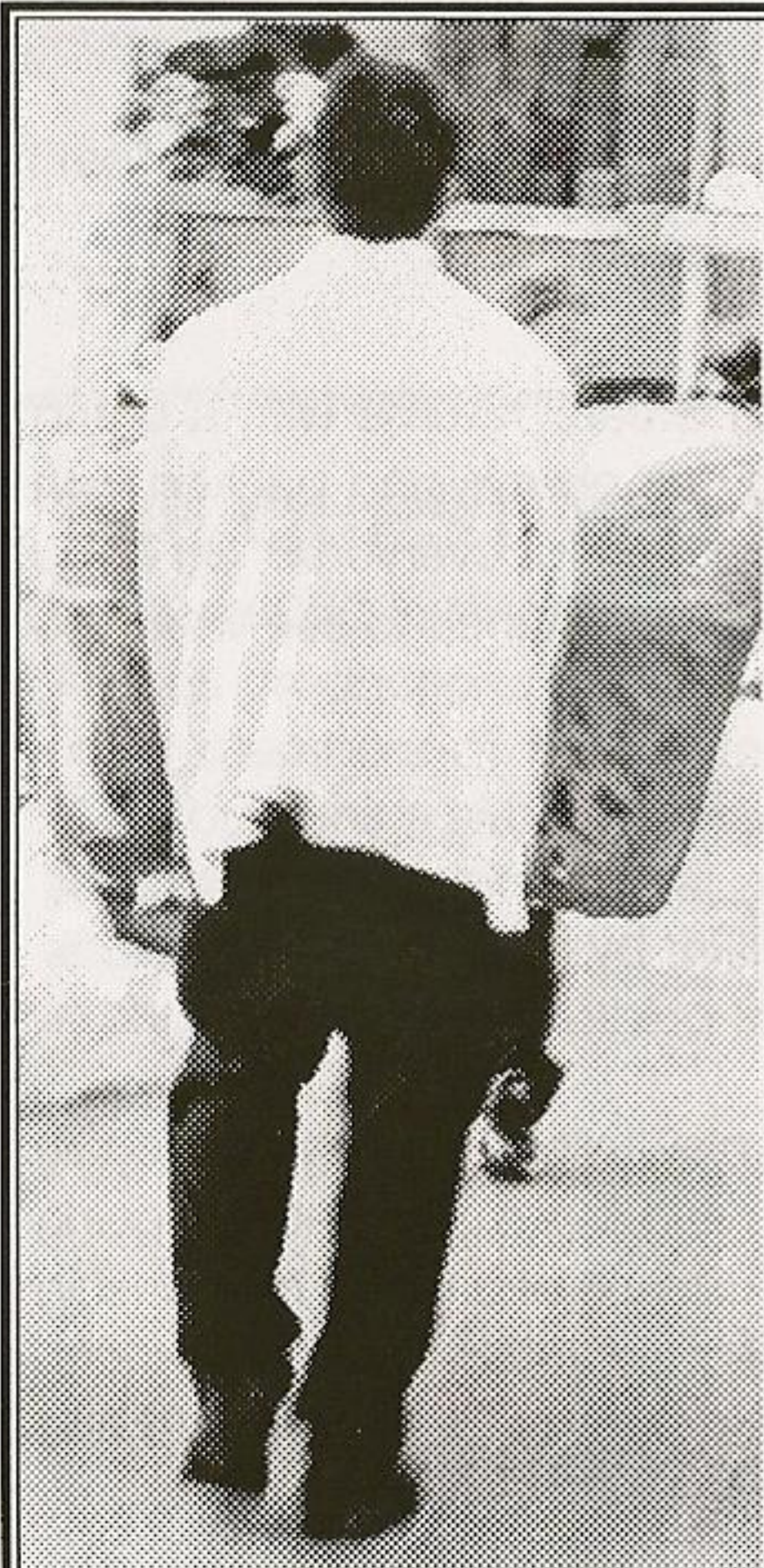
We are delighted to be holding these two contrasting exhibitions:

## *In the Upper Foyer - "Enigma" by Lesley Chitty*

Born in Ealing and now living in the heart of Sussex, Lesley has acquired a love of travel that has taken her from Cornwall and Wales to Malta, Italy and now, more recently, to France and Australia. Her travels have given her an ability to view, capture and to portray in her own distinctive - often mystical - manner, the elemental nature of a diverse world. The title of this, her latest exhibition, reflects the mysticism of much of her work.

## *In the Grapevine - Tim Robinson*

Tim Robinson is holding an exhibition of colour photographs of local churches and pubs in Ealing and Fulham, night photography, and the Ealing Summer Festival. All photographs are for sale and some have recently been published.



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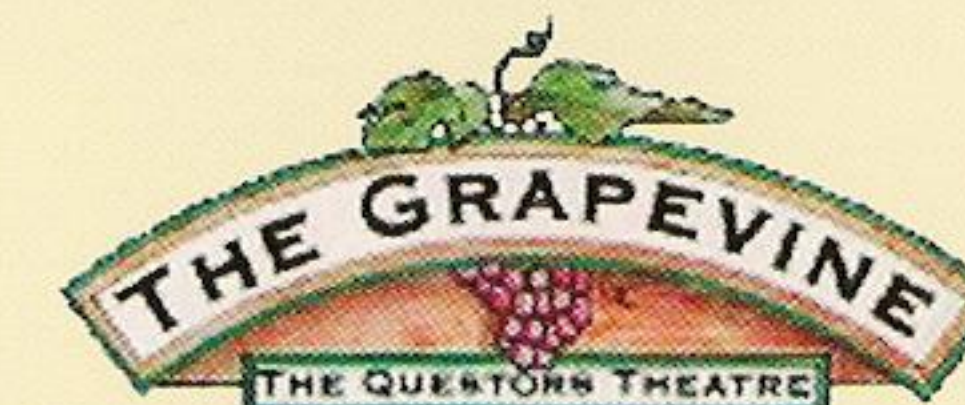
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## WORTH CROSSING EALING FOR!

For your interval or after show drinks visit the friendly and comfortable Grapevine Bar. It's open seven nights a week and Sunday lunchtimes. We pride ourselves on the quality of our cask ales, which usually include Fuller's London Pride, Fuller's Chiswick Bitter and a guest ale. We also provide a range of draft lagers and ciders as well as wines and spirits - all at very reasonable prices.  
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