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Welcome to The Questors Theatre, one of London's best kept secrets, except to its 3,000 members. How do you know about the Questors? I am proud to have been their President for over 27 years. Founded in 1929, it has grown up into the largest community theatre in London with a reputation for the highest standards, not only in acting but in direction and design as well. With over 30 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 weekly Grapevine Bar (one of the many perks of membership) and the more and varied shows in our newly refurbished 1000 seater Playhouse Theatre and more intimate Studio Theatre.

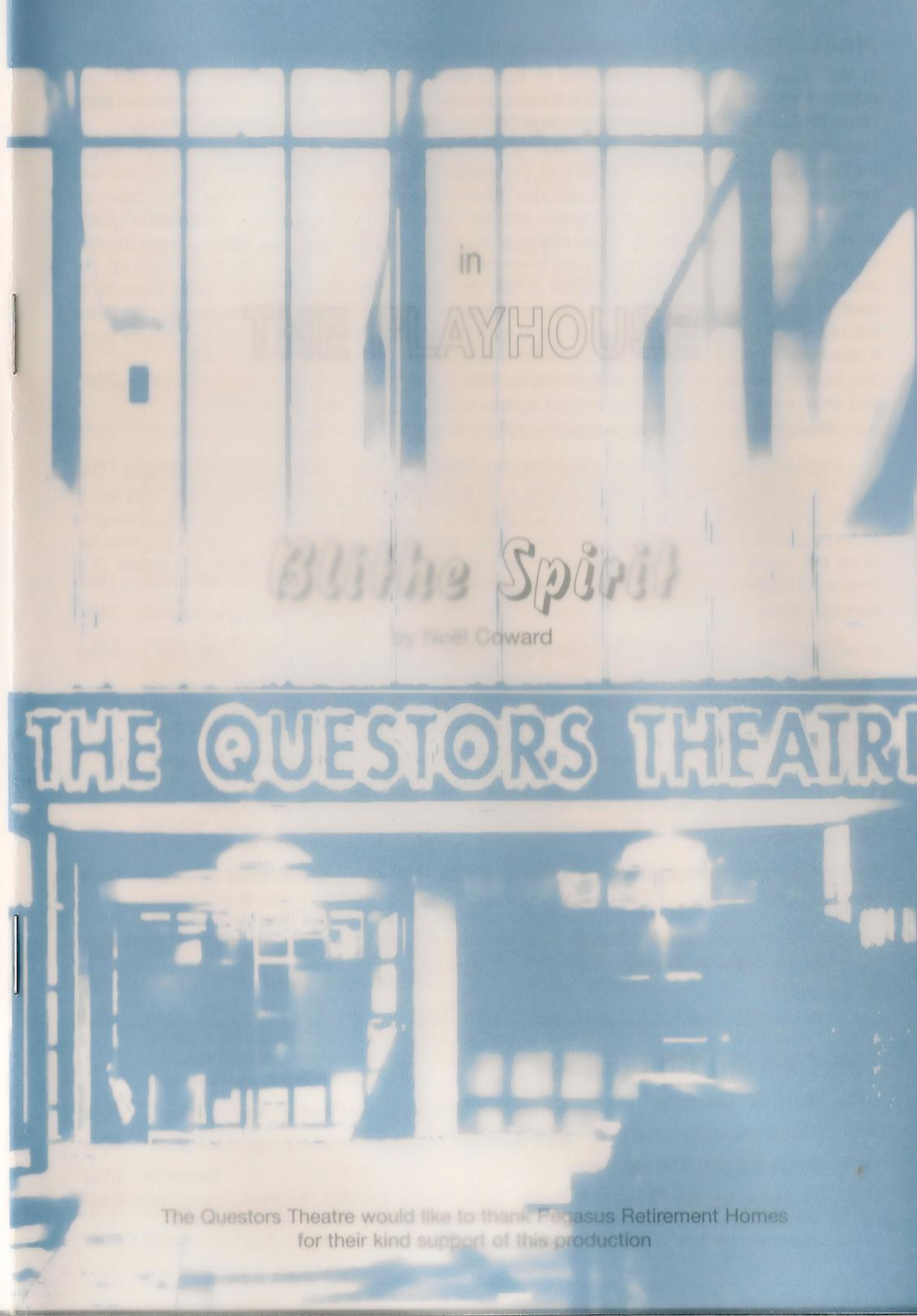
The Questors run a well recognised two-year acting course in conjunction with the Royal College. There are also acting courses for beginners, free backstage tours, visiting companies from home and abroad, regular art exhibitions, chess, tennis and clubs for young people. In short, there is something for everyone and annual membership costing as little as £23.50 (including up to £100 worth of goods) is 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!

Judi Dench

Dame Judi Dench
 President of The Questors Theatre



in

THE PLAYHOUSE

Blithe Spirit

by Noël Coward

THE QUESTORS THEATRE

The Questors Theatre would like to thank Pegasus Retirement Homes for their kind support of this production

Noël Coward

In Noël Coward's plays, the influence of Wilde and Shaw can be clearly seen (he himself has admitted almost too close a correspondence between Shaw's *You Never Can Tell* and his own early play, *The Young Idea*) and so back through Sheridan and Congreve to Restoration Comedy.

Coward's technique is twofold. He writes "good dialogue" and he writes "well-made" plays. Since the dialogue of a play is for the most part the expression of its action, one might ask how the two can be separated. But in fact "good dialogue" gives pleasure in itself. It has qualities of wit, balance, encapsulation: it is a pleasure to speak and hear. One can think of many "well-made" plays (Rattigan: Priestley) which lack "good dialogue" and plays of "good dialogue" (Wilde, except for *The Importance of Being Ernest*) which are nevertheless ill-made. Bad "good dialogue" holds up the action of the play, and eventually ceases to give pleasure. Good "good dialogue" gives pleasure in itself, and advances the action. "Is there anything exciting in The Times this morning?" "Don't be ridiculous" (*Blithe Spirit*) is not only funny in itself because it encapsulates The Times' house style: it also helps to set a comic tension between Charles Condomine and his second wife.

The loudest, longest laughter in comedy is caused by the complications of character and situation, and when wit is built into this and not set against it, the finest comedy is created.

John Bowen - Contemporary Dramatists: 1973

I have heard him accused of having enervated English comedy by making it languid and blasé. The truth, of course, is the opposite: Coward took sophistication out of the refrigerator and set it bubbling on the hob. To be with him for any length of time is exhausting and invigorating in roughly equal proportions. He is perfectly well aware that he possesses 'star quality', which is the lodestar of his life. In his case, it might be defined as the ability to project, without effort, the outline of a unique personality, which had never existed before him in print or paint.

Kenneth Tynan

Coward was his own invention, his contribution to the twentieth century - To be your own enduring invention seems to me to be heroic and essential.

John Osborne

The Congreve of our time.

Arnold Bennett

Coward is like Mozart - graceful, decorative, logical, witty, and above all a craftsman.

John Bowen

Given an audience, he seldom entered a room; he almost always made an entry.

Peter Quennell

I write at high speed because boredom is bad for my health. It upsets my stomach more than anything else. I also avoid green vegetables. They're greatly over-rated.

Noël Coward

The Coward Chronology

- 1899 Born 16th December
- 1911 First stage appearance in *The Goldfish*, London
- 1918 Wrote first play, *The Rat Trap*.
- 1920 Starred in his play *I'll Leave It To You*, New Theatre, London. "Mr Noël Coward who is not yet twenty-one, is almost too successful in making the younger nephew a most objectionable boy" Daily Mail review

- 1923 Starred in his play *The Young Idea*, Savoy Theatre, London. Starred in *London Calling* a collection of songs and sketches, Duke of York's Theatre, London.
- 1924 Directed and appeared in *The Vortex*, Hampstead Everyman and Royalty, London. Coward's understudy was John Gielgud. "I have four criticisms to offer. The caricature of the well-known novelist is offensive, and should be deleted. The third act is too long, there is too much piano playing in the second, and ladies do not exhale cigarette smoke through the nose." James Agate, The Sunday Times
- 1927 *The Vortex* and *Easy Virtue* made into films.
- 1930 Starred in *Private Lives*, Phoenix Theatre, London.
- 1931 *Private Lives* filmed. *Cavalcade* produced at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane.
- 1932 *Cavalcade* made into a film.
- 1933 Starred in American production of *Design for Living*. *Design for Living* filmed.
- 1936 *Tonight at 8.30* produced at Phoenix Theatre, London; nine one-act plays arranged into groups of three.
- 1939 Rehearsals for *Present Laughter* and *This Happy Breed* stopped because of the war.
- 1941 Wrote *Blithe Spirit* in five days and within five weeks the play premièred in Manchester then played the Piccadilly Theatre, London. "Probably sincere spiritualists will be annoyed or even exasperated by Noël Coward's *Blithe Spirit* at the Piccadilly Theatre. And any man whose first wife is dead and whose companion in the stalls, or elsewhere, is his second wife will be embarrassed to the point of hasty departure."
- 1941 Wrote the screenplay for *In Which We Serve*.
- 1942 Starred in *In Which We Serve*, directed by David Lean.
- 1943 *Blithe Spirit* made into a film starring Rex Harrison as Charles Condomine, Constance Cummings as Ruth Condomine, Kay Hammond as Elvira and Margaret Rutherford as Madame Arcati. "I will draw a light, spangled veil over *Blithe Spirit*, which they (David Lean and Ronald Neame) made while I was away in South Africa. It wasn't entirely bad, but it was a great deal less good than it should have been."
- 1946 *Blithe Spirit* ends its 5½ year run at the Piccadilly Theatre.
- 1947 *Peace in Our Time* at the Lyric Theatre, London.
- 1951 *Relative Values* at the Savoy Theatre, London. Presented his own cabaret show at the Café de Paris with a collection of his songs.
- 1956 Appeared as Charles Condomine in an American television production of *Blithe Spirit*. Lauren Bacall played Elvira and Claudette Colbert played Ruth. Became a tax exile in Bermuda.
- 1959 Moved to Les Avants in Switzerland.
- 1960 *Waiting in the Wings* opened in London to appalling reviews.
- 1961 Wrote a Sunday Times article condemning the New Wave of English dramatists breaking out from the Royal Court Theatre. "What neither the critics nor the contemporary pioneers take into consideration is that political or social propaganda in the theatre, as a general rule, is a cracking bore."
- 1964 Directed revival of *Hay Fever* at the National Theatre.
- 1966 Made last stage appearance in *Suite for Three Keys*.
- 1970 Knighted.
- 1972 *Cowardy Custard*, an anthology of Coward's songs, enjoyed a successful London run.
- 1973 Died at his Firefly House in Jamaica.

Blithe Spirit

by Noël Coward

First performance of this production Saturday November 8, 2003

CAST

RUTH	Monyene Kane
EDITH	Mari King
CHARLES	Tony Barber
DR BRADMAN	Robert Staines
MRS BRADMAN	Dorothy Boyd Taylor
MADAM ARCATI	Suzanne Gregerson
ELVIRA	Lisa Day

The action of the play passes in the living-room of Charles Condomine's house in Kent.

Act One

Scene I	Before dinner on a summer evening
Scene II	After dinner

Act Two

Scene I	The next morning
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INTERVAL

Scene II	Late the following afternoon
Scene III	Early evening. A few days later

Act Three

Scene I	After dinner. A few days later
Scene II	Several hours later

The performance lasts approximately 2½ hours including one interval of 15 minutes.

PRODUCTION

Director	Tony Rushforth
Set Designer	Alex Marker
Costume Designer	Raymond Childe
Lighting and Sound Designer	Alan N. Smith
Stage Manager	Adrienne Talbot
Deputy Stage Manager	Jennifer Reid
Properties	Peter Salvietto, Janeth Kempston
Constructor	Richard Williams
Wardrobe	Jean Derby with Sue Peckitt, Helen Taylor, Pam Smith, Bridgett Strevens, Jenny Yates, Tim Heywood
Assistant Stage Managers	Deborah Carey, Marie Esperanca, Penny Letham, Lakin Mors, Lauren Nayler, Zoë Parkinson, Eve Rowland, Richard Wright, Emily Wijnberg, Salomé Azizi, Janine Evans-Pollard
Lighting Operator	Philippa Forster
Lighting Assistant	Perri Blakelock
Sound Operator	Sue Crowson
Prompter	Dorothy Wood
Hair and Make-up	Louise Cooper-Hall, Andrew Seston
Set Dressing	Jenny Richardson
Design Assistants	Cathy Kelleher, John Rantell
Thanks to	Anne Beckenham, Mike Caddy, Peter Collins, Anne Gilmour, Tim Hayward, Mike Hagan, Colin Horne, Monyene Kane, Don Kincaid, Doug King, Sinead Lawler, Eric Lister, Jo Perse, Mary and Jonathan Rushforth, St.Mary's College Drama Dept. and Diageo Archives for period labels.

COMING SOON

Goodnight Children Everywhere

 by Richard Nelson

In **The Studio**, Thursday 20 - 29 November

It's 1945, and seventeen-year-old Peter returns from his evacuation in Alberta to the family flat in Clapham where his slightly older sisters still live. They haven't seen him since he was eleven and find it difficult to come to terms with his hybrid accent, the new version of his name, 'Petey', and the fact that he is now a man. But under the surface, things are even more complicated. Betty, who works as a nurse, continues to harbour a not-so-secret Freudian crush on him and Anne finds her sisterly feelings complicated by her own unsatisfactory marriage. Nelson's title is a grimly sardonic comment on the tangled mix of childhood and adulthood in which the central quartet are ensnared.

The Witches

 by Roald Dahl, adapted by David Wood

In **The Playhouse**, 13 December - 3 January

'This is not a fairy tale, this is a story about real witches.'

But real witches don't look like witches, they look like ordinary women, so how can you tell when you meet one? Luckily, grandmother is wise to their ways and warns her grandson all about them. Despite the warnings, however, the witches turn the boy into a mouse and he discovers their evil plans to destroy all the children in the world. This wonderful adaptation is full of dazzling illusions, slapstick humour and magic that carry you along on a glorious journey of fiendish fantasy. Perfect family entertainment - chilling but thrilling! (Ages 7 upwards)

The Princess and the Pea

 by Bernice Wolfenden

In **The Studio**, 20 December - 11 January

Magic is needed to find a real princess for Prince Nigel. There are princesses aplenty, but before he finds the real one he has to dance with a lot of unsuitable girls. Join him in his search in this enchanting retelling of a traditional fairy tale with songs, dancing, comedy and, of course, a pea! (age 2 - 7, 45mins.)

Bouncers

 by John Godber

In **The Studio**, 20 December - 10 January

This is one of Godber's most popular plays, a fast moving comedy set in the world of a nightclub. Four actors portray a cast of over forty characters, young and old, comic and tragic and, of course, both male and female. Meet the smooth talking DJ, the lager swilling lads looking for a lay and the lipsticked, lacquered girls gyrating to the pulse of the dance floor. Whilst outside in the freezing cold, skulk the ever watchful, ever ready, ever observant Lucky Eric, Judd, Les and Ralph. And so begins the journey into the secrets of a Friday night.

Mike Green Presents

Coarse Acting Rides Again

 - January 22, 23, 24 at 7.45pm

Yes, folks, there's no hiding place. The dreaded Coarse Acting strikes once more in January as the first of our special events celebrating The Questors' 75th anniversary year. This time, we are presenting four of the best plays from the Coarse Acting competitions over the years. First is *Streuth*, winner of the original contest in 1972, followed by *A Collier's Tuesday Tea* (both were in the triumphant Edinburgh Fringe tour of 1977). They are followed by two more recent winners: *A Fish In Her Kettle* and John Davey's hilarious Tennessee William's take-off *The Glass Ménage à Trois*.

PHOTOGRAPHIC EXHIBITIONS

8-29 November

In the Upper Foyer

LIVING IN LONDON—*Interpreted by three photographers*

Tim Robinson, Margaret Smith, John Ullens

Tim has included people in his photographs relating to events supported by the Mayor of London: faith, bars, night shots and sport.

Margaret has interpreted the theme to include pictures of people from all ages and backgrounds amidst the leafier aspects of healthy London.

John's digital images show some of his feelings about 'London full of life'—including images of people taken in Soho, at the Notting Hill Carnival, and near the Millennium bridge, of runners with movement and blur, and portraits.

In the Grapevine

BARBARA DORRELL

Barbara Dorrell started taking photographs seriously nearly three years ago and got hooked immediately. One year later she joined the Ealing and Hampshire House Photographic Society. She has found that mixing with other photographers and taking part in competitions has helped to develop her skills and has increased her enthusiasm. This is Barbara's first exhibition. Photography helps her to see something special in the commonplace - people, streets, markets and architecture - in England and abroad. Barbara was born and educated in Poland but now lives in Ealing with her husband.

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