

The Insider

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Your Connection to the BBC Sales Company

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Editor's Note

Welcome to the summer issue of *The Insider*. I hope I've included some good beach reading or, better yet, something appropriate for a long plane ride to somewhere like the UK.

Inside you'll learn more about the phenomenally talented Michael Crawford and Dame Thora Hird. Unfortunately the latter comes following the death of the beloved star at the age of 91. You'll also travel back to *Ballykissangel* for our exclusive look at the history of the series. Fans of *Last of the Summer Wine* will also get an exclusive look at a tribute that recently aired to mark thirty years of the popular sitcom.

As we end another year of publication I want to say thank you once again to all the stations that are offering *The Insider*. I was perusing amazon.com the other evening and was amazed (as well as a bit depressed) at the number of books about British comedy that are either no longer in print or extremely difficult to find. It is my hope that *The Insider* can somehow step in and fill the void for those fans who want to know more about British comedy.

Have a great summer and enjoy this issue.

Michelle Street, Editor

Michael Crawford

From the Master of Disaster to the Master of the Stage

Few celebrities have had careers as rich and varied as that of Michael Crawford. Who would have ever imagined that the same man who created the fey, bumbling comic icon Frank Spencer would later cause legions of women to swoon as the original Phantom of the Opera? Who would have ever imagined that the master of the pratfalls could melt hearts with an amazing singing voice?



We made him a study in physical (and mental) anarchy - hilariously accident-prone, the ultimate klutz and eternal underdog.
-Crawford on the character of Frank Spencer.

There are also few celebrities whose careers have had the same dramatic highs and lows. Crawford is a bit like John Travolta, who keeps coming back every time he appears to be down for the count.

Crawford was born Michael Patrick Dumble-Smith on January 19, 1942, in Salisbury, Wiltshire. He never knew his father, but grew up believing that it was Arthur Smith, a handsome WWII Spitfire pilot. Arthur had been married to Michael's mother, Doris, less than a year before he died when the plane he was piloting was shot down.

Years later Crawford learned that his father was actually another man with whom his mother had had a

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The Insider Mailbox



WHERE'S FELICITY?

Hi,

I am a long-time fan of Felicity Kendal. I haven't seen or heard much from her lately so I was just wondering if you can tell me what she's been up to.

Linda Holt, Indianapolis

EDITOR REPLIES: Felicity Kendal has done some stage work and a few television appearances. She also wrote her memoirs. The good news is that she will return to television soon in *Rosemary and Thyme*. Her co-star is Pam Ferris, who played Ma Larkin in *The Darling Buds of May*.

ONE FOOT IN THE GRAVE

I recently saw the episode of *One Foot in the Grave* in which the wonderful character of Victor Meldrew was killed off. Was this done because the actor who played him was sick or died?

John Robinson, AK

EDITOR REPLIES: I'm happy to report that Richard Wilson is alive, well, and will turn 67 this summer. He's probably still being bombarded with fans mouthing his catchphrase "I don't be-lieve it!"

The Insider welcomes all correspondence. Send letters via email to editor Michelle Street at bdigest@solecom 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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In The News



Prunella Scales, best known as that sharp-tongued Sybil Fawty, is to play Queen Victoria in a BBC drama-documentary. The two-part Victoria: An Intimate History, airing later this year, also features her husband Timothy West, her Fawty Towers co-star Andrew Sachs (as Disraeli) and Charles Dance.

Stephen Fry will co-star in an upcoming film biography of the late comic genius Peter Sellers. Fry will play Maurice Woodruff, the clairvoyant who became a close advisor to Sellers. The part of Sellers is being played by Australian actor Geoffrey Rush.

Tickets to be in the audience for the taping of the new season of Absolutely Fabulous were snapped up in just a few hours. The fifth season of the popular Britcom starring Jennifer Saunders will begin filming in June.

Johnny English, the new spy movie spoof starring Rowan Atkinson has opened to great box office in the UK, Europe and Asia. The film grossed \$50,000,000 in just two weeks. Americans will get a chance to see Atkinson in his latest guise when Johnny English opens here in July. This will, however, be the last time we see Atkinson for a while since he is taking a year off to indulge his passion for car racing. He's not off to a good start as he recently got into a wreck, but was not harmed.

Vicar of Dibley star Dawn French landed herself a role in the next Harry Potter film only weeks after she and her comedy partner Jennifer Saunders mercilessly spoofed the Potter movies during the Comic Relief Red Nose Day telethon. Dawn's character in the film will be a talking picture called The Fat Lady.

David Jason recently received the highest award in British television when he was given the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) fellowship.

The award was presented during the BAFTA ceremony on May 13th. Jason was honored for the outstanding body of work he has produced during his more than three decades on the small screen. These include starring roles in the classic sitcoms Only Fools and Horses and Open All Hours.

TRIBUTE: Dame Thora Hird 1911-2003

On March 15, one of Britain's most beloved actresses passed away following a stroke. Dame Thora Hird, 91, was best known to Americans as Edie Pegden on *Last of the Summer Wine*. We present this special biography as a tribute to an extraordinary lady.

Thora Hird was born on May 28, 1911 in Morecambe, Lancashire. She was the youngest of three children, though her sister died while still a child.

It was almost pre-destined that Thora would be in show business because it ran in her family. Her mother was an actress and her father, James Henry Hird, was stage manager, producer and director at the Royalty Theatre.

It was here that Thora made her debut when she was only eight weeks old. Her father, known for being a perfectionist, refused to allow a doll to be carried on stage during a scene that required a child. Instead, he had Thora's mother (who was starring in the play) carry their newborn daughter.

Thora attended The Misses Nelson's Prep School in Morecambe until the age of fourteen. She then held a number of jobs, including stints as an assistant in a music shop and in the local Co-op. While interacting with customers she would also study their mannerisms and speech patterns, all of which proved to be very beneficial when she became an actress and began creating characters.

Her professional acting career began in 1931 when she became a member of Morecambe Repertory. Nine years later she made her debut in London's West End and was eventually placed under contract to do films for Ealing Studios. Her first movie appearance was in 1941's *The Black Sheep of Whitehall*. This was followed in 1942 by *The Big Blockade* with Michael Redgrave, in

which she played a barmaid at a German railway station.

It took her a while to get what might be considered leading roles but Thora worked on a consistent basis in both theater and film, which gave her time to hone her craft.

By the 1960s she was a staple on British television, appearing on game shows, dramas, children's shows and in commercials. She was literally working seven days a week but loved every minute of it.

Always a very spiritual person, Thora was a natural to host *Praise Be!* This program, originally called *Your Songs of Praise Choice*, allowed viewers to call up and request hymns. The show ran for seventeen years, during which time Thora found herself often stopped in the street by people requesting hymns.

Age did not slow her down. In 1986 (when she was in her mid 70s) she began playing Edie in *Last of the Summer Wine*. The reason she blended in so well on the program was that she was the epitome of the down-to-earth, no-nonsense, working-class northern woman portrayed in the hit show.

The following year Thora gave a highly praised performance in an episode of Alan Bennett's *Talking Heads* entitled *A Cream Cracker Under*

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30 YEARS OF LAST OF THE SUMMER WINE



A BBC Special Celebrates the World's Longest-Running Sitcom

The death of Dame Thora Hird in March unfortunately came before an event that she should have been there to see: the BBC celebrating thirty years of Last of the Summer Wine.

Clips of Dame Thora as Edie Pegden were just one of the many highlights of this hour-long special. In that brief amount of time it would've been impossible to encapsulate everything from the world's longest-running sitcom, but with clips and interviews they managed to do the show and its cast justice.

The most interesting interview was with someone not normally seen – writer Roy Clarke. He explained that he couldn't work up any enthusiasm for a project about three older men until he hit upon the idea that they should be more like children with no responsibilities, wives or jobs. In Clarke's words, he approached these characters as "kids that just happened to have gotten a bit older."

The character of Compo came first. The lovable old scruff in wellies, who became arguably the show's most popular character, was a composite of many people Clarke knew who were able to live a carefree existence.

It made sense that another character should be Compo's opposite. At first this was the regimented, authoritarian Blamire, played by Michael Bates. Finally, to provide a balance, Clarke created the man in the middle – Clegg.

Clarke wrote the character of Clegg with Peter Sallis firmly in mind, but initially balked at casting Bill Owen as Compo. Then he saw Owen on film, realized what a great physical comedian he was, and any doubts were put to rest. Both Sallis and Owen knew from the time they read the script of the very first episode that they were on to a winner.

One problem was the title. Clarke wanted it to evoke that the lives of these men were still in summer as opposed to autumn. The BBC didn't exactly like the title

and it was briefly changed to The Library Mob since in the first episodes the aging miscreants spent a lot of time in the library. However, at the last minute it was changed back to Last of the Summer Wine.

The idea of shooting in Holmfirth came from BBC producer Barry Took, who had done a documentary on the beautiful town. Took recalled how the end of that documentary contained the prediction that in twenty years Holmfirth would be much the same as it was in the early 70s. Little did he know just how wrong he'd be.

Clarke and producer Jimmy Gilbert went to view the town and from the minute they stood on a hillside and looked down they knew they had their spot. Later in the program, however, Clarke admits that he sometimes feels very guilty about how the town has been changed by the tourism.

This location filming provided something of a breakthrough in the history of Britcoms because LOTSW was one of the first that was not confined to a studio. Holmfirth became almost as much of a character in the show as any of the actors and was important in its success.

The first major cast change occurred following the death of Michael "Blamire" Bates. This meant that someone would have to be brought in to fill the role of the "third man."

Brian Wilde, who had just played the milquetoast prison guard Mr. Barrowclough in the popular sitcom Pompidge, joined the cast as "Foggy" Dewhurst. For some fans, the classic period of LOTSW now began. Wilde eventually decided to leave the show, to be replaced by Michael Aldridge as Seymour Utterthwaite. Aldridge left the show for family reasons and Wilde returned. When Wilde's ill health caused him to leave again he suggested as his replacement Frank Thornton, who joined the cast as "Truly" Truelove.

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BALLYKISSANGEL: *The Whole Story (Part 2)*



When we last left Ballykissangel, the unconsummated love between a gorgeous pub owner and a handsome priest had come to a dramatic and tragic conclusion. Assumpta Fitzgerald was killed, and a devastated Father Peter Clifford, who had come to question his calling to the church, left the village he had grown to love. So, where do you go from there? Here's the rest of the story.

By the end of season three *Ballykissangel* had truly hit its stride. It received nominations for both best drama series and best actress (Dervla Kirwan) at the 1998 British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) awards.

Yet Dervla and Stephen Tompkinson decided it was time to leave. The loss of two main characters must have caused some sleepless nights among the show's writers, yet life in the small Irish village had to press on. Season four then introduced a number of new faces to liven up the scenario.

Don Wycherley as Father Aidan O'Connell. Like Father Peter, Father Aidan is a fish out of water, arriving in BallyK after ten years in a monastery. In contrast to the more explosive, passionate Father Clifford, Father Aidan is a gentler, more soft-spoken man.

Don Wycherley was born and raised with three brothers near the Irish town of Cork and was a teacher before he decided change to the acting profession. He had roles on stage (with both Lorcan Cranitch and Niall Tobin) before he went through an extensive audition procedure and was hired as Father Aidan.

When he got the job, Wycherley admitted that it would be difficult to fill Stephen Tompkinson's shoes. He did his homework by spending time at a Benedictine monastery. There, one of the monks, a 75-year old named Father Gabriel, gave him a blueprint for the

character of Father Aidan. Father Gabriel also blessed the rosary beads that Wycherley would use to calm himself during the tense early days on the set.

Wycherley is the brother-in-law of *BallyK* co-star Tina Kellegher, who plays Niamh.

Victoria Smurfit as Orla O'Connell. When BallyK got Father Aidan it also got his beautiful, willful sister Orla. While Father Aidan was spending time in a monastery his sister was traveling around the world. The questions are: is she ready for the quiet life in BallyK? And is BallyK ready for her?

Victoria Smurfit comes from one of Ireland's wealthiest and most prominent industrial families. This has proved to be both a blessing and a curse. Her family was initially worried about her becoming an actress, and she agreed to give up the thought if she was not accepted into drama school within a year. Luckily, she was able to beat the deadline and trained at the Bristol Old Vic. Prior to BallyK she had roles in *Ivanhoe* and *Berkley Square*. In her hands, Orla became a worthy successor to the tough, free-spirited Assumpta.

Lorcan Cranitch as Sean Dillon. Sean Dillon is *Bally K's* prodigal son, who returns to town after twenty years following the death of his wife.

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Dillon's return to his BallyK after does not please Brian Quigley, who still has hard feelings against Dillon's father, a legendary wheeler-dealer in his own right. Others in town also remember Dillon and his family with less than kindness. Hot on Sean's footsteps another Dillon arrives in town – his rebellious teenage daughter Emma, played by Kate McEnery.

Cranitch, the Dublin-born son of a civil servant, left Ireland to train at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts in London. His family wasn't exactly pleased with his choice of profession – they wanted something with more stability – and there were lean times when Cranitch almost gave up on the idea of being a professional actor. After working in such far-flung locales as Russia and Australia his career gained momentum with a role as a detective on the series *Cracker* with Robbie Coltrane. After years in England Cranitch then returned to his birthplace to play the mysterious and sexy Sean Dillon.

Colin (Col) Farrell as Danny Byrne. Sean Dillon isn't the only mysterious, moody man who arrives in BallyK during series four. There's also farmer Eamonn's great-nephew Danny, who arrives from Dublin astride a magnificent white horse.

Colin Farrell's father probably had hopes that his son would follow in his footsteps as a professional soccer player, but Colin caught the acting bug during his teens and studied briefly at Dublin's Gaiety school. He didn't finish the course, but his good looks and natural talent got him jobs early on, and he hasn't stopped working since his big break on *Ballykissangel*.

Season four's twelve episodes show these new residents settling into town with the patented BallyK mix of drama, comedy and whimsy.

As it starts, the future of Fitzgerald's is uncertain now that Assumpta is gone. A mysterious woman (played by Pauline McLynn of *Father Ted*) attempts to buy it and make it part of a chain, but Niamh and the other residents convince her that Fitzgerald's should remain locally owned. Niamh then takes over the bar, but this causes friction with her father and her husband. She finds a sympathetic ear in Sean Dillon who isn't finding much sympathy from the rest of the townspeople.

Dillon's daughter Emma arrives unexpectedly and gives her father plenty of grief by stealing Niamh's car. Brendan and Siobhan become the parents of a baby girl named Aisling (born in Quigley's Jacuzzi) and come close to getting married. But they decide at

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WRITING FOR *BALLYK*

By Barry Devlin

Barry Devlin is well known in Ireland as a musician and writer. Here he shares his experiences writing for *BallyK* exclusively for *The Insider*.

My involvement with *Ballykissangel* began in the mid 90's. I was working on a number of projects with Robert Cooper, the Head Of Drama for BBC Northern Ireland. He told me about the new series that Kieran Prendiville had written (which had not yet aired) and asked if I was interested in writing.

I said I was busy (I was) but by the next series my workload had lessened and the series had become a big hit on BBC. So when Robert asked me again I decided it might be fun to do. I wrote two episodes in the third season, including the Christmas special (with Dustin the turkey) and in the fourth series I wrote one about a golf club. A second episode in that fourth series didn't get made. Ceri Meyrick, who was script editor, didn't much like it. Too much theology, she said. Well, the series was about a priest after all. But maybe it was just a lousy script.

I knew lots of the actors in *Ballykissangel* before I started writing (Ireland is a bit of a village, especially Dublin). For that reason it was easy to write for their voices and for the same reason it was always fun to be around them. Joe Savino (Liam) had played in a band that toured with my band in the late seventies, so a certain amount of leg pulling and pranks went on around the set. Stanley Townsend (who played golf fanatic Mickey Keeler) had also played lead in the first film I ever made - *Lapsed Catholics* - and he was a really jolly man, great fun to be around as were Tina Kellegher and Owen Roe. Tina and Owen later became stalwarts in a BBC radio series called *Baldi*, which I created and is still running.

A young fella called Colin Farrell also appeared as a teenage tearaway during the last season I wrote for *BallyK*. I wonder whatever became of him?

COMIC RELIEF RED NOSE DAY 2003



Top Celebrities Come Out for a Good Cause

Had you been in the UK on March 14th, chances are you would've seen lots of people walking around wearing silly red noses. You would also have seen some great comedy as the Comic Relief Red Nose Day telethon took over BBC1 for an evening of great television. Or as Chef! star Lenny Henry said when he kicked off the proceedings, "For anyone who's tuning in expecting an entire evening of sophisticated TV about culture or the arts I say, 'Sorry, specy, you're in the wrong place, because this is BBC1 live and direct inviting you to an all night party of brilliant comedy and fantastic music...'"

Comic Relief was started in the mid-80s to provide funding for charity projects in both Africa and the UK. Since then the biannual telethon has provided viewers with laughs courtesy of the best in current British comedy and raised millions of pounds in the process.

This year's event, dubbed The Big Hair-Do, was no exception. Hosted by Lenny Henry, Graham Norton, popular UK presenter Jonathan Ross and the comedy team of Ant and Dec, it included appearances by Billy Connolly, Rowan Atkinson, Dawn French, Jennifer Saunders and many others.

The telethon was broadcast live, but the main highlights were the prerecorded pieces. Dawn French and Jennifer Saunders provided a wonderful spoof of the Harry Potter movies called Harry Potter and the Secret Chamberpot of Azerbaijan. Just imagine a bespectacled Dawn as Hogwarts's most famous student (somehow she made it work, but then again they did have Harry discover that he's a woman) and Jennifer – in a reddish wig – as Ron Weasley. (Saunders also did a dead-on impersonation of Potter author J.K. Rowling). Miranda Richardson rounded out the trio as that smart girl Hermione.

The spoof got most of its laughs by trading the real Potter's state-of-the-art special effects for truly bad ones and some fake backstage interviews with the actors. There was also a funny cameo by Jeremy Irons as Snapes.

The Potter film was a triumph of costuming and make-up, as was the evening's other highlight. In a wonderful segment, Lenny Henry was magically transformed into Michael Jackson and did a perfect send up of the King of Pop. Rowan Atkinson also provided a spot-on impersonation of journalist Martin Bashir and together they recreated Jackson's recent controversial interview.

Among the other great bits was Celebrity Driving Academy, in which some popular UK entertainment figures were filmed – warts and all – taking driving lessons. They then went to take their driving tests and the results were given on the night of the telethon. None of them passed, and after seeing the film of the lessons it was apparent why.

Celebrity Fame Academy, on the other hand, gave performers not normally known for their ability to dance and sing a chance to prove that they could do just that. They lived together in a house, where they were coached, and then had a chance to show off a tune. One by one they were voted out of the house and the winner was Will Mellor from the drama Casualty.

Entertainment-wise the evening was a great success. More important, however, it raised over 35,000,000 pounds, which will no doubt make a big difference in the lives of a lot of people. Planning has already started for Red Nose Day 2005 and top comedy stars are no doubt already making plans to be there.

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REBORN IN THE COUNTRY



The Story of *Are You Being Served?* Again!

Once again you see them in an elevator. An elevator that doesn't work. As its doors finally open, the faces are older but the voices and mannerisms are unmistakable. They've been gone for seven years, but it's like they never left. Hello there, Captain Peacock. You're looking dapper as always. And Mrs. Slocombe! Is that you even though your hair actually resembles a normal color? Well, Mr. Humphries, I'm glad to see your sense of style has remained intact. And Miss Brahms, those legs are as shapely as ever. And as for you, Mr. Rumbold – with those ears I'd have known you anywhere. Welcome back, everyone. Good to see you.



The feeling among viewers might have been something like the above when the employees of Grace Brothers reappeared on British screens in 1992. Audiences had spent ten seasons with these characters and seeing them again must have felt like a bit of a family reunion.

*But how do you follow a legend? That question must have weighed heavily on the minds of Jeremy Lloyd and David Croft when they decided to do a follow-up to their classic *Are You Being Served?**

The end of AYBS? came in 1985 with Mr. Spooner going off to become a pop star. (Aby backed by Mr. Humphries, Mrs. Slocombe, Captain Peacock, Miss Brahms and Mr. Rumbold, of course.) The filming of that episode had been extremely emotional – Wendy Richard and Mollie Sugden had to keep getting their eyelashes glued back on a number of times because the tears were flowing. Not from sadness, but from laughter.

The cast then scattered to do various projects. Most prominent were Wendy Richard and Mollie Sugden. Richard won praise for a role completely different from

*Pauline Fowler in the popular soap opera *EastEnders*. Mollie Sugden did a final season of the popular sitcom *That's My Boy*, in which she played Ida Willis, a woman who unknowingly ends up working for the son she gave up for adoption.*

*Little did the cast know that Croft and Lloyd weren't done with them yet. Much to their surprise, five of them Nicholas Smith, Mollie Sugden, Wendy Richard, John Inman and Frank Thornton – received a call in 1992 asking them to reprise their most famous creations. They didn't hesitate to say yes, even though Wendy Richard had to be temporarily written out of *EastEnders* to enable her to join the others.*

The department store scenario had run its course, so Croft and Lloyd plonked the characters down in the lovely English countryside to live in a place called Millstone Manor. So the questions became: how do you set up a plot device to reunite the former employees of Grace Brothers? How do you still keep the pecking order that provided much of the structure and humor in AYBS?

The first question is cleverly taken care of in the opening episode. The staff learns that Young Mr. Grace has left most of his money to a charity for fallen women and that their retirement fund has been used to buy the somewhat dilapidated manor house in the village of Great Tender. A manor house now being run as a hotel by one Mr. Cuthbert Rumbold.

Thanks to Mr. Rumbold's managerial style, most of the staff at Millstone Manor has left. There are however, a couple who stayed.

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First is Maurice Moulterd, played by West Country comic Billy Burden. A native of Dorset, Burden had spent much of his career playing country bumpkins so he was a perfect match for the role of the odiferous farmer Maurice.

The other staff member who hadn't left was his daughter Mavis, played with winning charm by Fleur Bennett. Fleur hails from St. Ives, Cornwall, and grew up watching the original series. She attended the Guildhall Drama School in London and hadn't even been out of school a year when she was offered the role of Mavis Moulterd. Her fresh-faced naiveté and good-heartedness were a welcome addition to the show.

The other new character in this series is Miss Jessica Lovelock, played by Joanne Heywood. Miss Lovelock was Young Mr. Grace's companion at the time of his death and indeed hastened said death when her bikini top accidentally came off as they were scuba-diving in the "Carabino." Miss Lovelock was spoiled by Young Mr. Grace and also provides Miss Brahms with some competition in the sexpot category.

*Also appearing is Michael Bilton as the elderly "Young" Mr. Thorpe the solicitor. Bilton might look familiar to Britcom fans as he played Ned in *To The Manor Born* and Basil in *Waiting for God*.*

The new setting inspired the writers to come up with great physical gags as these former city folk had to adapt to country ways. The most fun was had showing the staff trying to deal with animals. Mrs. Slocombe proved surprisingly adept at milking a cow, everyone tried their hand at rounding up the hens, and when they went on a secret mission to set some sheep free, well...the less said, the better.

The new setting (the show was actually filmed at Chavenge House in Gloucestershire) also allowed Croft and Lloyd to give an entirely new dimension to these characters. At the store they had always given the impression of being something of a family – sharing tales of nights out and helping each other when needed – but seeing them have breakfast together and finding out that Captain Peacock does Jane Fonda aerobics lends a fresh perspective to these characters. It was as if you get to know some old friends even better.

Croft and Lloyd not only gave the show a new setting but also decided on a new script structure. They wrote the series with episodes overlapping rather than having each one wrapped up tidily at the end of end of thirty minutes.

*Finally, in a rather odd move, the show was given a different title – *Grace and Favour*. This is a reference to*

residences that the sovereign offers rent-free to those whom he or she wishes to repay for outstanding service. AYBS? Again! is definitely a case of the more things change, the more they stay the same. Mr. Humphries is still free, Mr. Rumbold's incompetence and haughty attitude remain an irritant to the others, and – as mentioned – the elevator still doesn't work.

The double-entendres are also in full force as Mrs. Slocombe continues to go on about her pussy. In fact, the famous Tiddles is actually seen for the first time. In one hysterical scene, Miss Brahms screams when a mouse has been bold enough to show itself. Mrs. Slocombe reply is "Well, it won't be as confident once it's seen my pussy."

And not surprisingly, Captain Peacock still has an eye for the ladies. His flirtation with Miss Lovelock causes more than one caustic remark from Miss Brahms and Mrs. Slocombe.

*There are also some of the dance numbers that had worked so well in *Are You Being Served?* In one episode they are forced to do a "Harvest Dance" for a group of visiting Americans and in another they present a display of British culture (including dance and poetry) for a party of tourists from Mongolia.*

One of the controversies that had plagued the original series was the "Is Mr. Humphries gay?" question. It didn't matter in the first place, but Croft and Lloyd usually maintained that he wasn't gay, just a mama's boy.

So what a brilliant stroke to have the lovely Mavis develop a sweet crush on Mr. Humphries and actually end up sharing his bed. (Very innocently, of course, but this being AYBS? the question was left open.) This event changes Mr. Humphries temporarily as he begins smoking a pipe and taking exercise, but Mavis likes him just as he is.

There's also an introduction to the infamous Mr. Slocombe. His name is Cecil and we find out that he walked out on Betty over forty years ago saying that he was going to Sainsburys for some lightly-salted butter. He's done well for himself since then and Mrs. Slocombe has to disguise herself as a local yokel in order to avoid detection. Mrs. Slocombe also had to deflect the attentions of Maurice, who "knew" her during the war when she was a land girl. Back then she was called Rachel Yiddel.

Grace and Favour lasted for only two seasons. Given the success of the original, this seems like an awfully short run. The scripts were in some respects superior to those of the original and the characters seemed reinvigorated. The situations were lots of fun, the production values high, and the cast got back into character without a problem.

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So it was a real disappointment to all when the show was cancelled after just twelve episodes.

*You can point to a number of reasons for this. Some blame the change of name, feeling that audiences may have thought it was a completely different show rather than a follow-up to a beloved classic. (This is why the title was changed to *Are You Being Served? Again!* when shown in the States.) It also wasn't given a lot of time or reruns to build an audience. The original *AYBS?* didn't really find its audience until after the third season.*

Those were definitely factors but it also had a lot to do with timing. In the intervening years, comedy had moved

*away from the double entendres of *AYBS?* to the politically correct "alternative" comedy. There were also more sophisticated comedies like *One Foot in the Grave*. The pendulum often swings like this and the "grin, grin, wink, wink" style of *AYBS?* had simply gone out of style.*

*Maybe for some, but not for all. What Croft and Lloyd created in *AYBS?* and *AYBS? Again!* is timeless and will always have an audience. If you haven't checked it out lately, give *Are You Being Served? Again!* another watch. It won't take you long to feel that you're among dear old friends, if not family.*

AYBS? AGAIN! EPISODE GUIDE

Season One (1992)

- *Episode One – Young Mr. Grace passes on - the site of Jessica Lovelock 's bikini top popping off is just too much for him. The only things he has bequeathed to his former employees are a small pension fund and Millstone Manor, an old house now being run as a hotel managed by none other than Mr. Rumbold. Their retirement is not enough for them to live on, so they decide to stay at the manor.*
- *Episode Two – Life in the country isn't working out too well for Mrs. Slocombe, who is arrested for stealing a gypsy's cart and horse. Captain Peacock also finds himself in legal trouble when he is caught speeding. On the other hand, Mr. Humphries is finding a new lease on life as the object of Mavis Moulter's affection. Can his mother actually stop worrying now? And just what secret is Mrs. Slocombe dying to tell?*
- *Episode Three – Mrs. Slocombe is the woman in black as she goes to court to face the charge of theft. There is no other way to get to the court except for Mr. Moulter's pig cart, although Jessica offers Captain Peacock a ride on her motorcycle. Miss Lovelock is quite the daredevil, however, so he decides to join the others. In court, Mr. Rumbold is mistaken for one of those "Hells Angels" types. Huh?*
- *Episode Four – The hotel's first major booking is close at hand and staff is needed. Interviews don't yield any quality candidates so everyone must pull together to get Millstone Manor presentable for the guests.*
- *Episode Five – A new brochure is needed to publicize Millstone Manor so the staff is forced to don ill-fitting garb and line up to say cheese. Mr. Humphries becomes a barman, Captain Peacock suffers indignity by becoming a waiter in a suit that doesn't even fit. Mrs. Slocombe and Miss Brahms become chambermaids, though Jessica thinks Mrs. Slocombe is way too old for the short uniform.*
- *Episode Six – The Americans arrive and the staff is overwhelmed trying to get things done, especially when those things include getting an expensive set of dentures away from the goat. They then have to scramble to provide the guests with two things they'd been promised – a church service and a Harvest Thanksgiving Dance.*

Season 2 (1993)

- *Episode One – The Americans are gone but their chewing gum remains. Captain Peacock finds himself once again in trouble with the law when he is mistaken for a criminal with a loaded pistol.*

(continued on page 17, column 1)

Get to Know: Alastair Mackenzie



Best known as: *Archie MacDonald, the reluctant Laird of Glenbogle, on the hit drama Monarch of the Glen.*

Previous occupations: *Before becoming an actor he worked in a bar and also as a cook, a cleaner and a landscape gardener.*

First showbiz experiences: *He joined the Glasgow-based Citizens' Theatre before moving to London to pursue his acting career. Prior to getting the role of Archie he did guest appearances on such shows as Game On!, Hamish Macbeth and Lovejoy. His big breakthrough was a role as a psychiatrist in the drama Psychos.*

How he's like Archie MacDonald: *For one, they come from the same place. Alastair was born in the Scottish town of Perth, only 20 miles from where he would later film Monarch of the Glen. His father was an admiral in the Navy, and the family moved to the UK (Chichester) when Alastair was a baby. They returned to Scotland when he was a teenager, so he knows the Highlands well.*

Like Archie, Alastair left home at an early age for the bright lights and big city of London. Returning to Scotland to film *Monarch* has made him realize just how much the country means to him.

Alastair also once admitted that he would have the same problem as Archie and wouldn't be able to choose between Katrina and Lexie either.

How he dealt with life while filming in such an isolated spot: *The location used for Monarch is an hour's drive from the nearest town so the cast became something of a family or, as Richard Briers described it, a "repertory company." Alistair and Briers, who played his father on the series, bonded quickly despite their age difference. The two would go for evenings out of drinking and "acting irresponsibly." Life was also made easier because his girlfriend also stayed in Edinburgh so he didn't have a long way to travel to see her.*

Personal life: *Mackenzie is a doting father to his daughter Martha, whose mother is Scottish actress Susan Vidler.*

In real life he's most like: *The self-sufficient, rugged Golly.*

Proof that he's a really good sport: *Appeared as Archie when French and Saunders spoofed Monarch of the Glen in their 2002 Christmas special.*

Current projects: *He recently co-wrote and starred in his first feature film, The Last Great Wilderness. His brother, David, directed the movie. He also appeared with Richard Coyle (Jeff from the sitcom Coupling) in the horror/mystery series Strange. And oh yes, he'll return to the Highlands for a fifth season of Monarch.*





SPOTTED ON THE INTERNET

Reviews by David Darryl Bibb

Krista's Michael Crawford Website

<http://w3.one.net/~erikog/mc/>

<http://members.nuvox.net/~zt.erikog/>

One of the best things about writing these reviews is that I have an excuse to locate Web sites that are absolute gems but easily missed. One such site is, "Krista's Michael Crawford Website." The author does an excellent job of listing the productions that Mr. Crawford has performed in and adds detailed information on a few. The content is put together in a simple and useful format. I have enjoyed Mr. Crawford's work for many years but, somehow, had never realized for how long. On this site I discovered that he portrayed "Hero" in the 1966 version of *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, which is one of my favorite movies. .

Rating: 5 out of 5 mouse clicks

Dance of the Vampires

<http://www.danceofthevampires.com>

A chance to find out more about one of Michael Crawford's less-than-successful ventures. This Broadway show starred Crawford as a Vampire named Count Von Krolock. It closed January 25, 2003 and lost some \$12 Million during its 56 -show run. One review described it as "Michael Jackson's Thriller as done by the Lawrence Welk Orchestra." Ouch. The show's music, written by Jim Steinman, is rather enjoyable and can be downloaded from the site.

I don't know how long the Web site will remain up because, although the Broadway show has closed, there are two troops performing the show in Europe. The Web site is rather fun, in an over-the-top way.

Rating: 4 mouse clicks

Ballykissangel

<http://www.geocities.com/TelevisionCity/7492/>

A well constructed Web site with a lot of good information. I think the strongest features are the well-written episode descriptions. The guides have the sort of detail that viewers want the most. None of the ones I examined in detail had any errors, something I have noticed on a number of Web sites. Sometimes I wonder if the people ever watched the shows. Anyone who is a fan of this show can find something on the site they will like. In addition to the guides the site features an excellent description of the relationship between Peter and Assumpta, a cast list, and an introduction.

Rating: 3 ½ mouse clicks

Red Nose Day – Comic Relief

<http://www.rednoseday.com/>

The official Web site for Red Nose Day offers a very busy but interesting interface. Aside from telling the user how to donate to the cause the site offers drop-down menus on how to get involved, what's on, fun stuff, an on-line shop, and lots of other information. The games section is fun and the cause is certainly worthwhile.

Rating: 3 ½ mouse clicks.

Also Recommended

To purchase videos: <http://www.bbproducts.com>

General information: <http://www.phill.co.uk>

David Bibb is a Missouri-based British comedy addict.



Michael Crawford (cont'd. from page 1)

brief relationship. His mother tried to contact Michael's biological father when she learned about the pregnancy, but saw him with another woman and decided to keep it a secret. To avoid local scandal, Doris left her hometown to have the child and did not return until after the end of WWII.

Michael was then left to be raised by his mother and his maternal grandmother, Edith, to whom he was very close until she passed away at the age of 99. Doris married an Army man who later became a grocer when Michael was still very young, but this was less for love than ensuring that her son had a stable upbringing in a proper family. Crawford had always carried romantic notions about his father the pilot, so it is perhaps not surprising that he didn't always get along with his stepfather.

Crawford must have taken after his mother. He described her as "innately elegant, yet a little madcap, full of life and, as the family says, 'just naturally funny.'" She did impersonations and kept the household full of laughter.

As a child Michael found sanctuary in his vivid imagination and in the arts. He would often go to the Saturday matinees and then afterwards:

...get on my imaginary horse, which I'd left tied up in the car park, and begin to run a crazy zig-zag course down the crowded high street, making believe that 'Tonto' was breaking in a very tricky young stallion. ...People would see me coming and step into doorways, (thinking) "That poor woman. He must be quite a handful!"

School was not a pleasant time for Michael since he was hyperactive by nature and unable to sit still. His size also made him a target of bullies. Once again he found solace in sport, plays and the arts. One of his most memorable early performances was in a production of Benjamin Britten's *Let's Make An Opera*. After several successful performances at the school, the musical was then presented at the Town Hall in Brixton.

Crawford played Sammy, a young chimney sweep who is saved from that wretched life and brought to live in a loving home. At one point in the play, Sammy has his shirt and trousers ripped off and is pushed towards a chimney to do a job he clearly loathes.

Michael was so nervous on the night that when his ragged trousers were finally ripped off it was revealed that he had forgotten to put on anything beneath them. An audience full of local dignitaries, family and friends

then got an eyeful of young Mr. Crawford and chaos ensued, including an immediate beating from his mother.

All worked out well in the end as Michael soon played the same role in a touring production of this musical. Returning to his dreaded school after the tour depressed him, but he began to work steadily as an actor and realized that this was what he wanted to do. To avoid confusion with another actor who had the same name, he changed his to Michael Crawford – the last name taken from a brand of cookies.

His early years were spent going between a number of different media. He worked in radio and in repertory theater – an experience during which he remembers once being "soundly cuffed" by Richard Briers for being a smart aleck.

Crawford then made a very memorable television debut. It was a small role that called for him to lie in a hospital bed, heavily bandaged after a motorcycle accident. He had only one line.

The production was telecast live, so to be on the safe side he wrote down his line and placed it under his sheet. When it was time for him to speak, his worst fear came to pass. He froze and forgot what he was supposed to say. Quickly remembering that he had hidden his line, he lifted up the sheet, looked down, and blurted out:

"Nurse, have you seen this?"

Despite this faux pas, Crawford continued to work and soon landed a major film role alongside Steve McQueen in *The War Lover*. He became proficient with an American accent during that filming and it led him to a part on stage in a West End production of the Neil Simon comedy, *Come Blow Your Horn*.

The play was very well received but Crawford's first flush of success was dampened by the death of his mother from acute pancreatitis at the age of 44. His grandmother, who had given birth to eight children, was inconsolable at the loss of her youngest.

Work became scarce and pay was low, so Crawford lived a starving artist type of existence in the mod, Beatles-obsessed "swinging London" of the early '60s. Things got so bad that he and a roommate even took to living surreptitiously in the theater where they were performing. They were eventually discovered when they started a fire while using one of the theater's stoves.

His career began to move forward again when he met American-born director Richard Lester, who was fresh off of his success directing *The Beatles* in *A Hard Day's*

(continued on next page)

Night. He cast Michael as an innocent young man who desperately wants to learn how to woo women. The film was called *The Knack...and How to Get It*, and Michael played a role that would come to serve him well – that of an endearing bumbler.

At the same time television beckoned and Michael joined the cast of the BBC television series, *Not So Much a Programme, More a Way of Life*. He played the part of motorcyclist punk named Byron who delivered monologues analyzing current events in a Liverpudlian accent.

Thanks to these performances the Variety Club named Crawford 1965's "Most Promising Newcomer". (He lost the same award at the BAFTAs that year to a young lady by the name of Judi Dench.)

The success of *The Knack* got Michael the role of Hero in Lester's film adaptation of Stephen Sondheim's *A Funny Thing Happened On the Way to the Forum*. This was followed by yet another Lester film, *How I Won the War*, in which he played opposite none other than John Lennon. Crawford shared a villa with John and his wife Cynthia during much of the filming and watched in amazement as the former Beatle began to compose what would become *Strawberry Fields Forever*.

Also at the villa was Crawford's wife Gabrielle. He'd fallen in love when he first saw her across a smoke-filled room in a Soho club – when the couple married Lester was Michael's best man. Before long they added two daughters, Emma and Lucy, to the family.

After working steadily in the UK it was time for this enormous talent to be introduced to American audiences. In 1967 Crawford made his Broadway debut in two plays, *White Lies* and *Black Comedy*. The first play showcased his flair for physical comedy and attracted the attention of legendary film and dance star Gene Kelly. At the time Kelly was casting the big screen version of *Hello, Dolly* (which he also directed) and gave Michael the chance of a lifetime to star alongside Barbra Streisand and Walter Matthau in the big budget production. Michael played the role of Cornelius Hackl.

The shoot was an enjoyable one, though Crawford did have a run-in (which he claims was done in good humor) with La Streisand. The argument concerned where Michael was to stand during a scene. Cognizant of the fact that Streisand was only arguing because she didn't want to be filmed from a certain angle Crawford told her, "I don't know what you're worried about. You're just as ugly on the other side."

Amazingly, he lived to tell the tale.

Despite the high-powered talent, the movie was unsuccessful. This started a down period for Crawford. His next two movies also bombed and he found himself in financial trouble after losing of a lot of money in a bad investment.

He rebounded professionally about a year later when he starred in an acclaimed West End production of the farce *No Sex Please, We're British*. However, his personal life then went into disarray when overwork and infidelity eventually led to a painful divorce.

In the midst of all this upheaval a present arrived in the form of a script for a new series called *Some Mothers Do 'Ave 'Em*. The main character was a disaster-prone innocent in a trench coat and beret named Frank Spencer. The role called for equal measures physical prowess and an endearing nerdishness. Who better for the role than Crawford?

Some Mothers was a success from the start and Frank Spencer became one of the most beloved – and frequently imitated – creations in British comedy history. The nasally, childish voice, the bad clothes, the malaprops and the engaging innocence almost make the character a throwback to old-time comics such as Buster Keaton. Spencer's ability to create a disaster out of the smallest thing also make the character something of a precursor to Rowan Atkinson's Mr. Bean.

Each episode of *Some Mothers* has plots that are on the thin side, but that's because it's basically a showcase for Crawford's amazing dexterity. He literally puts life and limb in jeopardy every episode doing pratfalls and stunts that are nothing short of astonishing. Over the course of the show's twenty-two episodes he roller-skates underneath a truck, bounces down a staircase in a wardrobe, gets his head stuck down a toilet, dangles from the edge of a cliff holding on to his car's exhaust pipe and other things that, well, most normal human beings don't do.

Every jaw-dropping stunt you see is performed by Crawford himself and along for the ride is the very definition of long-suffering: Spencer's wife Betty, played by Michele Dotrice.

Frank Spencer was ostensibly created by *Some Mothers* writer Raymond Allen, but two stories that Crawford recounts in his autobiography make you think that this is a role he had been training for from a very early age. This first occurred when he was a child living in a flat above his stepfather Den's shop:

(continued on next page)

An iron staircase twisted its way up from the back of the shop to the flat above. I never went up those stairs other than three-at-a-time, and I fell down them far more often than I walked. Once I missed the steps completely and plummeted straight through the railings, landing on the thirty-foot-long aviary underneath, that Den had lovingly built to house his budgies. After the accident it was difficult to say who was more apoplectic – Den or the hundred and twenty-two budgerigars.

Later, while attending a choir school and practicing for an Easter pageant:

I was very slow in learning to read music, so in the beginning, the choir master thought the best way to make use of my very special 'gifts' was to let me carry the cross. I liked to think of myself, with those aforementioned freckles and fair hair, as every inch an innocent cherub, straight out of central casting. I walked in front of the processional line, loving the limelight – until that horrid day when I lost control of the top-heavy cross, and it crashed onto the Archdeacon's head at St. Paul's Cathedral. After that, it was suggested that I try harder to speed up my efforts to read music.

Some Mothers ran from 1973-1978 and made Crawford a household name. He was voted the Funniest Man on Television by readers of *TV Times*, and also named Television Actor of the Year by the Sun newspaper.

It was then back to theater for a role in the musical *Billy*. Always the perfectionist, Crawford spent countless hours learning to dance and perfecting his vocal technique. The reviews were great, but one naysayer was his grandmother. She attended a matinee and loudly chastised her grandson when the script called for him to use the phrase "Piss off..."

"Michael," she yelled out mid-performance, "I've never heard you use language like that before!"

After a brief foray back into drama as the mentally challenged Charley in a stage production of *Flowers for Algernon* he returned to musicals playing the legendary P.T. Barnum in the hugely successful *Barnum*.

Crawford spent several months training for the role with the Big Apple Circus School. He learned to walk the high wire and perfected something called "the web," which ended Act One. For this stunt he would hang from a rope by one arm and swing around with such force that he was lifted horizontally to the ground.

This dazzling combination of Crawford's musical talent and physical daring ran to packed houses and won Crawford his first Olivier Award, which is roughly the British equivalent of Broadway's Tony Awards.

The role was physically demanding and years of performances finally took its toll on Michael. He left the show and was about ready to return to television as the host of a British version of *The Price is Right* when he backed out at the last minute. He felt somehow that it just wouldn't be right for his career.

His instinct was more on target than he could have ever imagined. Had he become the British Bob Barker he might never have taken on the role that would make him a stage legend.

The Phantom of the Opera was written by Sir Andrew Webber and directed by the renowned Hal Prince. Michael was hired to play the lead and immersed himself in the project with his normal strong work ethic. He took voice lessons for five and six hours per day and spent countless hours in the make-up chair helping to create the memorable look that would become synonymous with the character.

Crawford's intense, passionate performance ensured that the presence of the Phantom would be felt even during those times when he was not on stage. Through body language and romantic showstoppers such as *Music of the Night* Crawford beautifully captured the emotions felt by the disfigured Phantom for the beautiful Christine.

Fans and critics swooned. Before long Michael had earned his second Olivier Award and was awarded an OBE (Order of the British Empire) by the Queen herself. His performance met with similar accolades when he played the role on Broadway (for which he won the Tony Award) and Los Angeles.

His final appearance as The Phantom was in April of 1990. He then recorded successful albums, did concert appearances, and in 1995 began appearing in the Las Vegas extravaganza "EFX." He stayed with the show until years of abusing his body forced him to have hip-replacement surgery.

In late 2002 Crawford was lured out of semi-retirement to star in the Broadway musical *The Dance of the Vampires*, which closed after only 56 performances and disastrous reviews. The production will now go down as one of the most expensive flops in Broadway history.

But no worries. If nothing else, Crawford's career has been the living embodiment of "What goes up must come down." Next time he'll probably hit another out of the ballpark and then – Frank Spencer to the end – take a hysterical fall as he rounds the bases.



Thora Hird (continued from page 3)

the Settee, which won her a British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) Award.

During the 1990s Dame Thora also made cameos in such shows as *Heartbeat* and *Dinnerladies*. She starred in another Alan Bennett play, *Waiting for the Telegram*, and also played an elderly stroke victim in the drama *Lost for Words*. These roles won her more BAFTA and Emmy Awards. Her substantial contribution to drama was further rewarded when she was made Dame Thora Hird in 1993.

Apart from her work, Thora enjoyed gardening and travel. She did not let age stop her from the latter passion either. During the 1990s her strong religious beliefs led her to go on pilgrimages to the Holy Land and Jordan.

Thora was also a family woman. She married her manager, James Scott, in 1937 and they remained a highly devoted, inseparable couple until he died following a stroke in 1994. They had one child, Janette, who is the ex-wife of singer Mel Torme.

Her positive attitude and warmth made Dame Thora an inspiration to everyone – especially the elderly and the infirm, with whom she could empathize. She spent many years herself in ill health but her strong faith helped her deal with arthritis, angina and three hip operations. In fact, she did some of her best work while suffering with these problems and was beloved by her co-workers for her professionalism and generosity of spirit.

However, her appeal can perhaps best be summarized by a journalist who interviewed her:

We had not met before, yet here was someone I felt I had known all my life. She was all my aunts who came to tea, and such people are never at their very best until they are at least 60.

Very true words indeed about an extraordinary lady. May she rest in peace.



Last of the Summer Wine (continued from page 4)

But what of those LOTSW women? The show contained interviews with Kathy Staff, who may be best known as Nora Batty but has done a lot of other terrific work. Jane Freeman (Ivy) was shown in the café, which is actually built on a set. Jean Alexander also told how Auntie Wainwright turned from a character seen in a couple of Christmas specials into a regular.

The special also included interesting backstage tidbits. Composer Ronnie Hazlehurst recalled how the BBC did not like the theme music at first because sitcom music was only supposed to be used as a signal that something was funny. Hazlehurst's simple, wistful melody didn't exactly fit that bill, but it is now impossible to think of LOTSW without the music that so beautifully evokes a time and place.

It is also interesting to note that canned laughter is never used in the show. It is now done entirely on film and once the episode is finished an audience is invited in to watch the episode and their laughter is recorded.

*There was then a look at the changes that have occurred since the death of Bill Owen from pancreatic cancer in 1999. It is sad to see the real-life Bill Owen in archived interviews – so articulate, intelligent, animated and theatrical – and then realize that he's gone. The loss of such an integral character should have by all rights signaled the end of the series. However, Peter Sallis recounts with a certain amount of awe how Roy Clarke in the course of three weeks wrote a trio of brilliant episodes dealing with Compo's death. Called *Elegy for Fallen Wellies*, this trilogy caused the BBC to receive an enormous amount of mail from viewers saying how touched they were.*

The special ended with a look at what the future holds. The addition of Bill Owen's son, Tom, as Compo's lost-long son was another smart move as it gave viewers a reminder of Compo.

*The show has been renewed for another season and Clarke comments at the end that as long as he's able to keep up the quality and people want it, he's happy to continue writing *Last of the Summer Wine*.*

For LOTSW devotees this is very good news. It is also a fitting way to end a tribute to a show whose gentle, old-fashioned humor may not be trendy, but has still captured the hearts and minds of the British – and American – viewers for three decades.



AYBS? Again! (continued from page 10)

Episode 2 – *The employees at Millstone Manor are challenged to a cricket match and Mr. Humphries turns out to be the hero of the day.*

Episode 3 – *A blast from the past – her ex-husband – sends Mrs. Slocombe into a tizzy and a disguise as she tries to avoid him.*

Episode 4 – *Captain Peacock and Miss Lovelock find the remains of an ancient pussy – and no, it has nothing to do with Mrs. Slocombe! They want to donate it to the local museum and don't heed Mr. Moulterd's warning not to bother it. Strange things start happening until the pussy is returned to the proper place.*

Episode 5 – *Captain Peacock and Mr. Rumbold get into it over who's in charge when the staff of Millstone Manor is challenged to a game of darts at a local pub. One of the competitors, though, is a guy who has a crush on Mavis and is very jealous of Mr. Humphries.*

Episode 6 – *A group of Mongolians comes to stay and the promised display of British culture includes Mrs. Slocombe and Captain Peacock performing a selection from an operetta while Mr. Humphries and Miss Lovelock are Romeo and Juliet.*

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Following the end of the series the old friends scattered again. **Wendy Richard** returned to work on *EastEnders* and recently went through another cancer operation when she discovered a lump in her neck. **Mollie Sugden**, the subject of last year's PBS tribute *Celebrating Mollie Sugden*, is now in her 80s and living the quiet life in Surrey. **John Inman** still performs in pantomime and theater. **Frank Thornton** appeared in the Academy Award winning film *Gosford Park* and is a regular on the long-running sitcom *Last of the Summer Wine*. **Nicholas Smith**, now 70, last appeared in a 1998 film called *What Rats Won't Do*. **Michael Bilton** passed away from cancer in November of 1993. **Billy Burden** passed away in 1994 after suffering a heart attack. **Fleur Bennett** still does occasional television guest spots, including appearances on *Casualty* and *Midsomer Murders*. **Joanne Heywood** has also made many guest appearances on television and still does theater work around her hometown of York.

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*Ballykissangel (cont'd. from page 6)*

the end to stay as they are. Quigley's latest pie in the sky venture is a golf course, and he enlists the aid of Liam and Donal to ensure that a potential investor – a lotto winner who is persona non grata at most golf courses in Dublin - has a good game.

Padraig's fancy has definitely been captured by the beautiful Orla but he finds out, to his regret, that his feelings are not reciprocated. Orla's brief flirtation with Sean Dillon (who tells her he prefers his own company) sends Padraig into a drunken, jealous rage.

The season ends with old hatchets being buried, and Sean Dillon is made welcome in the village again. His dance with Niamh (seen from a distance by Ambrose) is a foreshadowing of unsettling events to come.

**SEASON FIVE**

Unfortunately, season five started out with the sad passing in May, 1999 of Birdy Sweeney, who played the eccentric farmer Eamonn. His last performance was in the second episode of this season.

Birdy's actual name was Edmund. He got his nickname because he was known for doing bird impressions. He had suffered from diabetes and heart problems and collapsed one morning while on the way to the set. He left behind a wife and eight children.

Sweeney's passing certainly left a hole in BallyK but new faces were there to fill the bar at Fitzgerald's.

**Owen Roe as Paul Dooley.** Dooley is another person Quigley does not want to see return to BallyK. Dooley had taken on Quigley in the first couple of seasons when he was a Councillor but was sent away for tax crimes. In season five Dooley returns to face his old nemesis once again.

Owen Roe started out in the 1980s as a stand-up comic and says that early in his career he modeled himself on Steve Martin in the "wild and crazy guy" era with a little political satire thrown in. Along with being a well-known actor Roe is also an accomplished writer.

**Marion O'Dwyer as Oonagh Dooley.** Being married to someone like Paul who's always getting into trouble has to be hard for a woman, but Oonagh Dooley is tough and can handle it. In fact, she's a bit like Sybil Fawltly to Paul's Basil – she always knows when her husband is up to something suspicious. The Dooleys

*(continued on next page)*

also bring two children, Grainne and Dermot, to BallyK.

O'Dwyer's father worked in radio, so show business came naturally for her. She spent time at the Gaiety Theatre and did cameo appearances on television before getting her big break as the strong-willed Oonagh.

**Owen Teale as Conor Devlin.** Conor is the fisherman who arrives in BallyK and becomes quite infatuated with the strong-willed Orla. She, on the other hand, is unsure of how to deal with him.

Owen Teale came to BallyK after winning a Tony Award for his performance in *A Doll's House*. Not bad for someone who hadn't planned to be an actor but signed up for Guildhall Drama School just because that's where his girlfriend was going.

Teale is originally from Wales and had never been to Ireland before he went there to film *BallyK*.

**Catherine Cusack as Frankie Sullivan.** Despite what is normally a masculine name, Frankie Sullivan is a woman who arrives in BallyK to be the new garda. Being both an outsider and a woman makes the job doubly tough.

Catherine Cusack is from a very distinguished acting family as her father was the great stage and screen actor Cyril Cusack. Before moving to Avoca to work on *BallyK*, Cusack was best known as a star of the long-running soap opera *Coronation Street*. To prepare for the role of Frankie, Cusack spent time with a female garda at a station in County Wicklow.

All these new faces are on hand for some stunning and heartbreaking developments in season five.

Niamh decides that her marriage is over, but before she has the chance to tell Ambrose he is killed trying to help a couple trapped on the side of a cliff. Niamh's guilt causes problems with Sean, and she needs time alone to deal with Ambrose's death.

She decides she has to leave BallyK and sell Fitzgerald's. When the sale falls through, it is rented to Oonagh Dooley, the wife of Quigley's old rival Paul Dooley.

Meanwhile, Orla moves into a cottage owned by Conor, and the two have a memorable first date racing

quad bikes. Orla continues to have doubts about starting a relationship with him, and Conor eventually leaves.

The town rallies around Brendan when it appears that he is going to be passed over for the job of headmaster.

Sean and Niamh finally reconcile, and as the season ends they are married. Father Aidan, who is helping Frankie, almost doesn't make it to the church in time to marry them.

### Season Six

The marriage of Niamh and Sean was seen by over 9.2 million viewers (a huge audience by UK measurement), and *BallyK* was renewed for a sixth season. Kieran Prendiville, who had turned the writing of the show over to others, came back to take charge of his "baby."

Season six saw a major shake-up in the cast including, tragically, the loss of Tony Doyle (Quigley). Doyle died from an apparent heart attack in January of 2000. He left behind six children, one of whom joined the cast.

The death of Doyle was an immeasurable loss. His roguish charm made Brian the schemer you couldn't help but love, and Quigley's antics had provided some of the show's best plotlines.

In a wonderful move on the part of series producer Kieran Prendiville, Quigley isn't killed off. Instead, consumed by debt, he "vanishes" to Brazil. Niamh receives an e-mail with a picture of him waving goodbye.

Also leaving the cast were Colin Farrell (Danny) and Don Wycherly, who played Father Aidan. Father Aidan begins to feel that he isn't making enough of a difference in the village so he leaves. His sister Orla goes along with him. Sean, Niamh and Emma move to London. Danny follows them to be with Emma.

However, a new group of regulars have moved into town and reinvigorated the series.

**Robert Taylor as Father Vincent Sheahan.** As always, the new priest in BallyK needs to be

*(continued on next page)*

something of a fish out of water, and Father Vincent fits the bill as he just happens to be Australian. He also happens to have a skeleton in his closet – a drinking problem.

Father Vincent is something of a throwback to Father Peter in that he is more of a thorn in Father Mac's side and prone to challenge the elder man's authority.

Robert Taylor was on the popular Australian soap opera *Home and Away* but then left to work outside his native country. He came to *BallyK* straight from appearances in two Hollywood blockbusters - *Vertical Limit* and *The Matrix*.

With those successes under his belt he saw his future more in feature films. Yet he decided to join the cast of *BallyK* because he knew it was a quality production.

**Susannah Doyle as Avril Burke.** Avril Burke is an attractive 30ish horse trainer who bonds with Father Vincent because of their mutual love of horses and past problems with alcohol.

Susannah is the daughter of Tony Doyle, and her appearance on the show provided a link to the late actor. Before joining the cast of *BallyK* she was on the popular sitcom *Drop the Dead Donkey*.

Other new characters included garage mechanic Edso Dowling (played by Paul Ronan) and farmer Louis Dargan (played by Mick Lally.)

Prendiville's influence is definitely seen in season six. Taking over from Quigley as the town's main wheeler-dealer, Paul Dooley attempts many memorable get-rich schemes, including an Internet site that allows people to have their sins forgiven for a fee.

In other episodes Father Vincent is picked up for drinking and driving. Avril has her own problems with alcohol when she falls off the wagon after finding out that her ex-husband's new girlfriend is her sister. Avril goes to an AA meeting and is surprised to see that one of the people there is Father Vincent.

Also, Liam and Donal have to pull a *Godfather* stunt, putting a horse's saddle in Dooley's bed to get him to repay a debt he owes them.

In the final episode, the priest's house has been sold and, finding himself homeless, Father Vincent moves

in with Avril. Could they be treading on dangerous ground?

Following that episode *Ballykissangel* was cancelled. This came because it had been gradually slipping in terms of ratings and – some might say – quality.

It can be argued that the quality had become erratic, but there were high spots, especially in season five when Niamh had to come to grips with her guilt over the death of Ambrose just as she was going to leave him for Sean Dillon. These were some of the most emotionally wrenching and effective episodes of the whole series, and Tina Kellegher did some outstanding, powerful work as Niamh. In fact, Kellegher said that she received a lot of mail after that season, much from women who chastised her for leaving Ambrose.

Part of the reason for the perceived decline in quality may have been the old cliché that too many cooks spoil the broth. The program was the vision of one man – Kieran Prendiville – and over the first few seasons there were a relatively small number of writers who contributed episodes to the show. As the seasons wore on, however, the number of writers increased – as did the number of episodes - so it was hard to keep a consistency.

The numerous cast changes may also have effected the quality. Viewers got used to characters like Orla but then she was gone. However, once Prendiville was involved again the show got back on track.

It's a shame that *BallyK* was cancelled just as it seemed to be regaining momentum. Father Vincent was a strong character and his relationship with Avril was worth more exploration.

Nevertheless, the series succeeded beautifully in doing what Prendiville wanted to do. His purpose was to show the changing face of rural Ireland without resorting to stereotypes. Over six wonderful seasons, the warm, endearing people of *BallyK* showed that yes, Ireland is now a country where "Rupert Murdoch speaks to as many people as the Pope," but it is also a place where the old-fashioned virtues of family, friends and community are still strong.



An insider is a member of any group of people of limited number and generally restricted access. The term is used in the context of secret, privileged, hidden or otherwise esoteric information or knowledge: an insider is a "member of the gang" hence knows things outsiders don't, including insider jargon. In our complicated and information-rich world, the concept of insider knowledge is popular and pervasive, as a source of direct and useful guidance. In a given situation, an insider is contrasted with Insider rounds up the hints you may have missed on this season of AMC's zombie series that hinted at Sunday night's big reveal. Military & Defense 2019-11-18T01:35:10Z. 13 photos show Hong Kong protesters launching molotov cocktails and police firing tear gas and blue dye as violence erupts on a university campus. On Monday morning, police stormed the campus of Hong Kong Polytechnic University to confront protesters who had barricaded themselves inside. News 2019-11-17T22:38:38Z. Discover Insider, the world's first integrated Growth Management Platform, fueling growth across the sales funnel for digital marketers across the globe. By requesting our demo, we will use the information you give us to contact you about our Growth Management Platform and understand more about your business and interest in our products. You can see in details how we use this information in our Privacy Policy. Yes, I'd like to receive updates from Insider's awesome content. 1. New. Inbound-Website. Demo Request.