



ON THE  
MANTLE PIECE

THE  
"WOLF HALL"  
PRODUCTION JOURNAL



NICHOLAS DAY







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MANTEL PIECE



# ON THE MANTEL PIECE

The “WOLF HALL” Production Journal

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Second Edition 2015

*To  
Hilary,  
Jeremy, Mike, Georgia, Matt  
and my family of fellow cast members*



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Stratford upon Avon

London

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Stratford upon Avon



## **GETTING THE KEYS**

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October 8th 2013

Wolfing up the Bodies? Day one. The three Clapham rehearsal rooms are like a rich layer cake filled with the cream of theatrical endeavour.

We are the heavy top layer, *Antony and Cleopatra* in the basement are the bottom layer, and in-between *Richard II* is squishing its readied cast out into the stairs and corridors. They are preparing for their final run-thrus before setting off to Stratford.

In the top room our cast assemble round the chocolate biscuits in various states of apprehension while the assorted great and good from various departments gather to introduce themselves. Hands are shaken, cheeks kissed, backs slapped. It's exactly a year since



I was last at the RSC, so many faces are familiar and I feel welcome and warm.

The icing on the cake is Hilary Mantel herself, who with kind grace and sharp intelligence begins to unlock a succession of doors into the Tudor world; rooms of state and privy chambers are opened in our minds, and our protagonists' thinking is laid bare. Alongside Hilary, as we start our table work on the plays, are David Packer and Mark Wallis from Hampton Court who have an encyclopaedic knowledge of this world.

Together these fascinating people take us into Cromwell's universe, which – while the customs and habits may be unfamiliar – is clearly inhabited by people whose needs and anxieties are very recognisable to us today. We need to grasp the scale of things, I guess. One idea, one whim, one decision could instantly and irreversibly change the world in which they lived. And died.

And then, of course, there is Mike Poulton, who has worked with Hilary through nine drafts of his adaptations, brilliantly distilling her rich novels into two stunningly potent plays. He adds to the pool of invaluable knowledge.

#### **Day four**

We are bussed to Stratford for a bit of orientation. We already feel like friends and can laugh comfortably with, and at, each other. We explore the Swan stage, a most satisfying playing space for actors and audience alike.

Some of us get the keys to peek inside the accommodation we will be taking on. We get measured for the intricate and elaborate costumes that we will also be inhabiting.

**Day five**

Already it's Friday. We set off by river from the site of York Place, which Henry VIII took from Wolsey – I think because he saw it had finer furnishings!

David Packer gives us a privileged tour of Hampton Court – another of Wolsey's homes that was to become a bling-filled palace for Henry. More sense of scale: the time it took to journey upstream along the Thames, the vast size of the palace kitchens, the expense of the tapestries and decorations.



Hampton Court was just one of Henry's 60-odd homes and it is an extravagant statement of power and ambition. We briefly inhabit the halls and courts in which our characters dreamed and schemed.

And all week I've been getting back to the Menier Chocolate Factory for an evening show. It's a good job I'm in a hospital bed for *The Lyons* (by Nicky Silver) because, as we play Sundays, I think my next day off will be 17 November!

## **ENTRANCES AND EXITS**

October 15<sup>th</sup> 2013

So we're into the second week of rehearsals for *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up The Bodies*, and we started by continuing our work around the table. It is becoming more evident that not a line is wasted in these plays.

The art of it is that sometimes things sound incidental but therein is planted an idea, a detail, an idiosyncrasy that adds important depth and texture to the story. And without which the narrative would lose its richness.



The execution site in the Tower.  
St Peter ad Vincula, where Anne Boleyn is buried  
is in the background.

### **To the Tower**

On Tuesday we had another away day. This time to the Tower of London, where we had a chance to look for more resonances and

reminders that help us understand the world we will be creating on stage.

We were very lucky to gain privileged entrance to the Bell Tower, where Thomas More was held before his execution and which is not open to the public. John Ramm, who plays More, confessed to being very affected by the experience.



The Bell Tower

We saw a suit of jousting armour, made for Henry VIII when he was a young man, and a stunning later one made in the Greenwich Armouries for a man of entirely different build. The contrast brought home the fact that, after his serious accident in the Greenwich tilt yard, Henry's waistline continued to expand by three inches for every year of his life.

Some of us went up to see the site on Tower Hill where George Boleyn, Francis Weston, William Brereton, Henry Norris and Mark Smeaton were dispatched one by one. It must have been merciful to have been the first to step up onto the scaffold.

### **A first look at costume designs**

On Wednesday we saw the designs for our costumes, which are going to be magnificent. The brilliant RSC costume department is going to be severely stretched. These are fabrics and designs one cannot skimp on. They are a superb team, though, and I can't wait to see what they come up with.

Tudor clothes are all about showing off; the costumes, that we men will be wearing, flatter important masculine features like the broadness of shoulders and the size of . . . well, you



Nick Boulton always wanted to be a spear-carrier at the RSC!

know what I mean.

### **Farewell to David Packer**

And we finished our script scrutiny and discussion around the table. Oh, and exit David Packer. He has provided a fund of information

for us, and his knowledge seems to genuinely have no limits.

He promised to visit us again - if only to retrieve the beautifully illustrated books he has loaned us. There is a growing library of reference material on the table at the back of the room.

My character doesn't enter for quite a while in *Wolf Hall* so I was blessed with two days off at the end of the week which, as I have performances every evening, were very welcome. I was able to put a bit of effort into things which I haven't had time to attend to for weeks. Like my accounts and my golf swing.

I just have to die of cancer at The Menier Chocolate Factory three times this weekend and then next week the Duke of Norfolk will hopefully be on his feet.

## **GETTING THE THRUST**

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October 23<sup>rd</sup> 2013

We're learning how to move the play around the thrust stage of the Swan Theatre. Any furniture we might use in the fast moving scenes would have to be carried on and then taken off, so it's best avoided wherever possible. Also, as you probably know, we have to keep the actors moving on a stage that is open on three sides so that they all have the best chance of being seen and heard.

We are finding a convention and a stage language for the plays so that sometimes when we enter a room, for instance, we don't always have to enter with the naturalistic formal court protocol that would have prevailed at the time, but can enter the stage in a sort of theatrical cut of place and time. It makes things fast and fluid so that the thrust of the narrative is clear.

### **Getting the feel**

I always like to rehearse in clothes that approximate the feel of what will be my costume. If it's a jacket and tie role, then I have to rehearse in a jacket and tie. The shoes are important, too; they say that Olivier always maintained he started with the shoes. Clearly, shoes dictate how you stand and move, so they are a first thing for me as well.

We've been sent a whole load of rehearsal costumes through which we can all pick to find something that feels right.

**Relishing relics**

For my character, the Duke of Norfolk, there are frequent references in the book and script to the holy relics he wears about his person, so I've been looking online for some relic and mourning locket that I can use in rehearsals.

Perhaps holy relics are a depressed market nowadays because they appear to be remarkably cheap. I could have bought a piece of the true cross last night for less than thirty pounds.

It's a bit like the souvenirs apparently carved from the wood of Shakespeare's mulberry tree that were so popular in the nineteenth century. More wood than a wood would supply!

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## **COVERAGE**

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October 30th 2013

Up betimes and by Thameslink to Hendon. There met with Christopher Oram (Designer), Stephanie (Costume Supervisor), Sarah (RSC Costume Dept.) and Reshpal (Costumier) who are waiting in a fitting room by a rack groaning with Tudor costumes.

It's a vast store crammed with layer upon layer of amazing costumes where paupers are pressed against princes, where — somewhere on those eight miles of rail - you will find a spaceman, a Spartan and a spook. Here a label, 'Cumberbatch'; there a label, 'Blanchett'.

The detail and workmanship on some of the costumes, in these days of high definition cameras, can be stunning.



**Coverage of the body**

Stripped to the pants, I turn away from the wall-sized mirror because it's distressing to see that my waist line seems to be expanding as fast as Henry VIII's. The first costume wouldn't even do up - which was good, because it didn't speak to me like the next one did.

The second costume felt and looked great even before I'd done up the buttons (actually achieved with some difficulty, but they will be able to let it out a tidge). The material is a lovely burgundy satin which will take the light wonderfully. The top coat thing has masses of heavy material which swishes around very effectively with the merest turn of my body.

I'm totally sold on it, and everybody approves - which is a good job because I have to be in Clapham for rehearsal in an hour.

I've received my first eBay religious reliquary in the post, with which I want to decorate my costume. Hilary Mantel often refers to the clinking clanking relics upon which the Duke of Norfolk seems to depend.

This little locket contains a piece of material that once belonged to Saint Bernadette of Lourdes - apparently. It's a great deal smaller than I thought and would be barely visible from the front row, but I'm pleased to have it, and will have something to cling onto in rehearsal.

**Emergency coverage**

Of course all the parts in any production must be understudied, lest any illness or accident

(I'm clinging to my relic) mean an actor goes 'off'. We had a briefing this week about the RSC cover policy and process.

The spirit of ensemble work finds its perfect expression in the public understudy runs that take place soon after the plays open. The theatre is always full for these performances and every member of the cast tends to get involved, even if they don't have a specific understudy obligation.

Some of us will be playing our principle role and some of us will be carrying on a tray of goblets and standing humbly in the background.

### **. . . and coverage on telly**

The BBC came in to shoot a bit of rehearsal on Friday for a story about the plaque that Hilary Mantel is unveiling in Putney where Thomas Cromwell used to live.

We have a few big scenes still to block, so we're going to come in on Saturday morning to finish things off. I have two shows on Saturdays, so that will make it quite a long day. I have a matinée on Sunday, and then . . . rabbit stew! A butcher has been showing Ben Miles how Cromwell should skin a rabbit. Well, it would be a pity to waste it.

## ANOTHER DAY ANOTHER PLAY

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November 7th 2013

After a weekend that allowed all the work we've done on *Wolf Hall* to gently cook we serve it all up on Monday in what we call a 'stumble-through'.

There were no major crashes and it all seemed to stand up rather well. I imagine it will have given Jeremy a good idea of where to focus some forensic attention when we return to it.

And then we started on *Bring up the Bodies*. We seem to be moving around the thrust stage with more felicity now and the style of these complex flowing scenes is becoming a common language.

Jeremy Herrin, our lovely director, has us



Workin' on the chain gang

we're thinking of doing and then just makes it easier, better and safer.

### **Assembling the relic**

I've collected together half a dozen 'reliquaries' to wear round my neck in rehearsal, and they actually do clank now - but perhaps only audibly from the front row. But it's fun to have a choice of saints to support Norfolk's vulnerable moments.

One of them is a bit of wood I picked up outside the rehearsal rooms that I've mounted in a locket I bought online. I'm tempted to label it as part of an arrow stained with the blood of St. Sebastian.

I've also made myself an Earl Marshall's baton like the one in the picture I have of the third Duke. We'll see what the designer and props department think of that! It's odd that in Henry VIII's bling-filled world this symbol of immense importance seems, in the illustration, to have been a mere length of wooden dowel, whereas one I have seen from two hundred years later is absolutely covered in jewels and worked gold.

### **A bit of an old relic myself**

You may have heard from my fellow blogger, Joey Batey - who is as young as I am old - that we have some dancing to do. Mercifully, for actors and audience alike, the Duke of Norfolk is too old and too self-important to do much dancing.

I still remember doing *The Boy Friend* a hundred years ago in rep when Louise Jameson, who had to partner me and upon whose toes

I regularly trod, would helpfully sing 'sur le ... LIFTer!' when it was time to grab her waist and hoist her into the air. I imagine Louise's scars have healed, but the memories have not.

### **The business of blogging**

It's an odd business, keeping this journal; the work we do in rehearsal is really in preparation for something that is presented for scrutiny only when it is ready (well, that's the theory!), and here I am laying bare to all you lovely and interested Toms, Dicks and Harrys the secret machinations of a rehearsal room protected from the public gaze. Sometimes I feel like a magician betraying my pledge to the Magic Circle. But there is so much more to our business of putting on a play than a bunch of actors talking loudly in fancy dress. I hope you enjoy hearing about it.

## **GIVING THE DUKE SOME STICK**

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November 14th 2013

In the pictures I have found of the 3rd Duke of Norfolk, he is holding two sticks: one is the Earl Marshall's baton, and the other one is the Lord Treasurer's staff. I knew that, my character being full of his own self-importance, I should definitely have the baton and — as I have told you — made one for rehearsals from a bit of dowel.

Earl Marshall is a very important role — he is sort of Vice-King, if you like, and would take on the monarch's responsibilities in an emergency. In fact the Earl Marshall is, I think, one of only two people who can walk in front of the monarch at a coronation. But they both also have to walk backwards!

In the Holbein painting of the Duke of Norfolk, the baton in his right hand really does look like a simple piece of wooden dowel. The baton I have already made for myself is a bit too thick and I had got a piece of black leather which Maddy — our brilliantly helpful assistant stage manager — stuck around one end for me.

I understand now that the baton was described as gold, with black enamel at one end. So I've got another length of dowel of more appropriate gauge from B&Q and some black enamel paint that will, by Monday morning, look a little more authentic. And it will be gleaming gold, of course.



I've been in touch with the archivist at Arundel Castle, ancient seat of the Dukes of Norfolk, in order to source a more helpful description or illustration. Rebecca, the archivist, thinks this a most interesting quest so I look forward to the possibility of more information from her. We may be looking at the Earl Marshall's baton Mark III soon!

I like to have all these things in rehearsal so that, when we get given "the actuals" once we get to Stratford, I am familiar with how they feel and what to do with them. Who knows, my baton might look so good they let me use it.

**And to cap it all . . .**

I also have a simple black Tudor 'cap' from Mike the Hat on the internet, with which I can practice doffing every time the king comes in (we learned early on that 'doff' comes from

the original phrase to 'do off' one's cap. Similarly, 'don' for 'do on').

Charlie, from the wigs department, came down to try some wigs on us. I really like the one she has chosen for the Norfolk. Just like the one she made me for Toby Belch, it will take years off me!

Which is good because I'm starting to feel my age on account of performing still at the Menier Chocolate Factory from Tuesday to Sunday. *The Lyons* is now booked out to the end of the run which in just one week's time will leave me free to concentrate on *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* without fear of falling over!

## **KEEPY-UPPY COMEDY**

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November 21<sup>st</sup> 2013

The run of *The Lyons* at the Menier Chocolate Factory comes to an end this week. I'm rather relieved, because I have only had one day off since the beginning of October and am now falling-over tired. I mean, literally.

But it's been a great gig with a great cast. The script is one of the best I have worked on, ever. The audiences have been terrific. While I have certainly been tired in the evenings, I have looked forward to the performance every night because playing comedy to a good house is like a sport; and a sport for which you have to be fit and on your toes.



### **Don't drop the ball**

Every day in rehearsals for the RSC we warm up with a game of keepy-uppy. For those who

don't know, it's a simple game of keeping a ball in the air wherein no one person can hit the ball consecutively. It needs quick reaction combined with cool control.

I have been struck by how it so clearly it reflects our need to keep the ball in the air when playing the hard and fast comedy at the Chocolate Factory. Our director there, Mark Brokaw, was continually reminding us to come in hard on cue, to obey the writer's punctuation, and to act on the line, not off it. 'Forward, forward, forward', he would cry.

It can be tricky; sometimes a good line might not quite get the laugh we are accustomed to — we often have to give the audience (and the actor!) the chance of the laugh but come in smartly, and not let the ball hit the floor, if the laugh doesn't come.

That keeps the story clear and buoyant, so the audience is always clear where the focus is, so the narrative has primacy.

### **Story is king**

'Narrative' is a word we hear often in rehearsal with Jeremy Herrin – the director of *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*. He frequently highlights a moment where a vital step in the story must 'ping' with the audience. He encourages us to act on the line rather than off it or around it.

*The Lyons* is a daily lesson on how acting off the line can let the ball drop and it feels like the synapses in my brain are leaping around in the same way that my feet are in keepy-uppy. I actually make a bit of a big deal about this

acting off the line stuff in my book *On Bard Duty* (available from Amazon, of course!) :

*The big question is: does the actor need the pause or does the story need it? If you really want to pause, have a thought about how your pause will help the whole-picture story. Try to assess its value outside your own character's story or journey and ask yourself if the story will be the poorer without it. If you can honestly answer yes, keep it in. But ration yourself. Severely. And when it comes to the length of the pause at the moment of its delivery you will then have to speak at the moment most effective for the audience, and not the moment your personal emotional journey might dictate. That's a tough call, because it often means that when your character is undergoing its most emotional and involved moments, you have to be schizophrenically sitting outside yourself gauging that unquantifiable, unmeasurable thing that is the dramatic interchange between actors and audience.*

Basically, to keep the ball in the air our characters on stage often have to think much faster than we might imagine they would in real life.

## **SHARING THE LOAD**

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November 28<sup>th</sup> 2013

I'm somewhat fortunate in having just the one part to worry about in these plays. Most of the cast have two, three or even four roles to learn and play. Some of them will become all too familiar with the quick change rooms backstage where they will be regularly set upon by the RSC's expert and speedy dressers and 'wiggies'.

And, of course, most of the cast have one or more roles to understudy. As the Duke of Norfolk appears, at the moment, to have as much time in the dressing room as on stage in *Bring up the Bodies*, I felt I should offer to take on an understudy role in order to spread some load.

I suggested it to Joe Murphy, our assistant director, and we agreed that if I took on the cover of Sir John Seymour, it would greatly ease the burden on the actor originally slated to do it.

### **Go Joe!**

The assistant directors' briefs are very wide at the RSC and they bear great responsibility. Their input is naturally dependant on the trust invested in them by the directors.

Jeremy Herrin and Joe Murphy are already a team, and Joe commands the trust and respect of the whole company — not least because his suggestions have proved most apposite and helpful.

Perhaps Joe's most demanding task is to be entirely responsible for the understudies. He must run the understudy rehearsals, mostly in the available time during main rehearsals, and bring the understudies to a state of full readiness by the opening night. A very complex 'what if' chart has to be drawn up to cover all possible eventualities of absence. The knock-on effect from any one actor being 'off' can be alarmingly complex.

### **Imbued with the spirit**

So I look forward to working under Joe's direction and am sure that being a part of the spirited understudy company will be ample reward for the extra work to which I've committed myself.

I think back to 2011 when I got a bit overtaken by company spirit and offered to do an ensemble role on *Marat Sade* to keep company with my now established chums who were wilting under the work load. My precipitantly expressed lack of inhibition when asked about onstage nudity was to have dramatic results and I found myself front page news!

It was certainly a difficult time but, on balance, I could not regret being part of a scene which so graphically showed what can happen when a pack of otherwise sentient beings happen upon a vulnerable individual. It certainly showed what can happen when an otherwise sentient actor volunteers to share the suffering! I'm usually in drama that moves or amuses and this was a rare foray into theatre that sets out to shock.



Joe Murphy and Jeremy Herrin

I hope covering old John Seymour will be some way further towards the amusing end of the dramatic spectrum.

## **CLAPHAM JUNCTION**

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December 6<sup>th</sup> 2013

Dep. Clapham Nov 29<sup>th</sup> 17.55; Arr. Stratford upon Avon Dec 1<sup>st</sup> 16.00. We have completed the first leg of our journey and are embarking on the second. We're all off to Bardsville where the hard work really begins.

In our final week at the RSC Clapham rehearsal rooms we built up to a run-through of each play in front of all the people who will be enabling our production in the Swan Theatre. The plays are looking remarkably good and we are itching, now, to get into the space and find out how it all works.

On Monday we will be in the beautiful timbered Ashcroft Room, the restored roof space of the old nineteenth century Shakespeare Memorial Theatre.

On Saturday we will start the technical rehearsal - which is bound to be demanding for all concerned; there is a myriad of scene changes and lighting transitions which will need to run smoothly and deftly so that the narrative can maintain its vital momentum. Exits and entrances will have to be precisely timed so that nothing interrupts the forward flow of the show.

### **Erm . . . where do I go next?**

We all carry bits of paper (or pdf files on our smartphones!) which detail where we come on next, and, in most cases, who we actually come on as.

This weekend I will be checking through my personal stage directions to save myself more embarrassment like in the last run: we had altered a position up stage left to a downstage vom in a recent rehearsal and, suddenly recalling that change in the middle of a scene, I flustered and blustered my way downstage, muttering pathetic apologies . . . only to discover when I looked at my crib sheet that this week we'd actually changed it back again to up stage left.

Oh dear, no wonder I got those pitying looks.



### **Under Garrick's gaze**

Eighteenth century actor David Garrick turned Stratford into a place of pilgrimage by organising the first Shakespeare Festival in the town of the Bard's birth. Astonishingly no Shakespeare play was actually performed at that festival, but I think we can credit Garrick with planting the seed for what was to be-

come the magnificent and globally famous theatre to which our company is now bound.

It was particularly fitting, then, that in our last week in London we had a celebratory evening at the club that bears his name. I am a fortunate member of the Garrick and was able to organise what turned out to be a terrific private dinner in the Milne Room, named after the creator of utterly endearing Pooh Bear and his companions, whose legacy to the club has enabled it to remain one of the most desirable and fascinating private members clubs in the world.



A commemorative medal for the Garrick  
Shakespeare Jubilee

It was very satisfying to see our younger actors' wide-eyed wonder at the wall-to-wall array of portraits of performers who have gone before them — we have inherited that precious mantle.

There is a very strict dress code at the Garrick and I advised our men that they would need to wear a suit, little realising that nowadays a suit is not such an essential part of a young man's wardrobe. How times have changed.

When I first worked in repertory theatre, forty odd years ago, we were contractually obliged to supply one lounge suit and one dinner suit for potential costume. Those were the days when we carried grease paint around in a cigar box!

## **MIND THE GAPS**

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December 12<sup>th</sup> 2013

The final push towards tech week. Perhaps the most important task for us now is to pick up the pace, closing up all the gaps between speeches and ensuring we blend from scene to scene with minimal fuss.

It's good to be in Stratford now because, while those of us with families will miss them and our familiar firesides, it's good to have just the show on which to concentrate without distractions.

We have much work to do over the Christmas period to get these plays sleek and fit for our opening night in January. The costumes are large, complex and beautiful; the lighting plot is large, complex and beautiful . . . the soundscape is . . . the music . . . the running water . . . the burning flames . . .

### **Lunch with the bunch**

On Tuesday we had a buffet lunch with a chance to meet the people who work in the engine room of the RSC at the Chapel Lane offices.

I talked to Christine, who runs the IT system that is the conduit for the world to interact with what we do here. The ticketing system runs 24 hours a day, and when they have a big surge in demand (Richard II sold out almost immediately tickets were released onto the system, for instance) it is Christine who ensures that the servers don't melt down.

She gets emails on her phone all day and night, sent automatically, to update her with how things are going. Data must be secure, safely backed up, and instantly accessible. She can't improvise and bluff her way out of disasters like we can. She seemed remarkably calm about it.

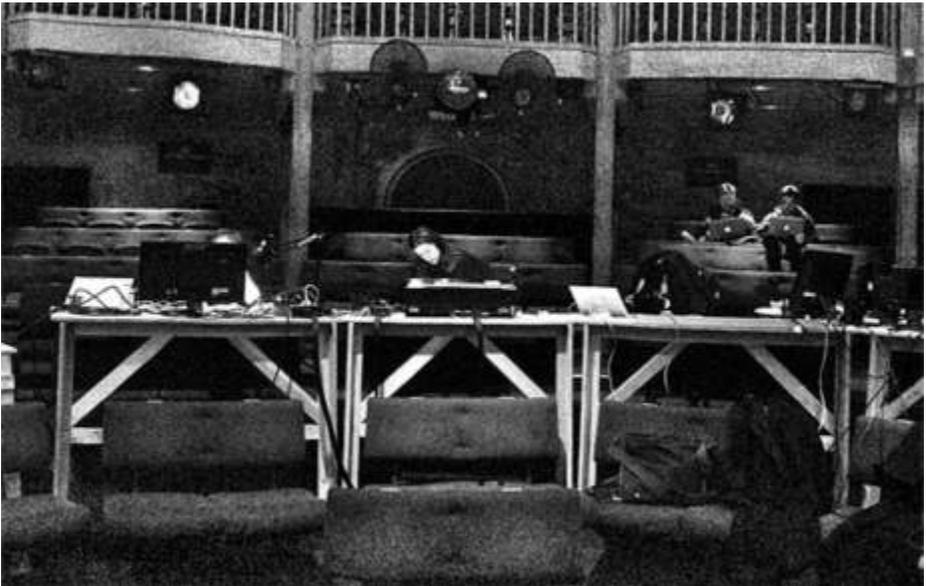
### **The final final run**

So on Friday we had the last run of *Wolf Hall* in the Ashcroft Room. It must be the finest rehearsal space anywhere; the views down the Avon to Holy Trinity Church can be breathtaking in the autumn mists. The run was slicker and snappier, and we do feel fit to move on now.

On Saturday we started the first of eight technical rehearsal sessions in the Swan Theatre itself. Progress is slow, but exciting, because there is so much to add that will



enhance and enable the work we've been doing over the last ten weeks.



The tech desks set up in the Swan auditorium

## **BASECAMP AND BEYOND**

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December 19<sup>th</sup> 2013

An arduous week. Technical and dress rehearsals, then four preview performances with daily rehearsals. Getting to the first public performance is like getting to basecamp. If we get there properly equipped, we can safely explore the heights of actual performance, returning each day to tweak and tune, take notes, re-block, re-plot, re-write, refresh, reconsider.

We discover so much from playing to an audience, it's a bit like adding a whole new character to the piece that we must include and acknowledge.

I spend a lot of time sitting backstage in a permanent state of fear that I will enter in the wrong place at the right time or the right place at the wrong time. It's a bit like sitting in a dimly lit Tudor backstreet, the prop shelves looking like pedlars carts.

### **Actors all dry on stage**

The water isn't running properly yet, so the stage will remain dry until we start the tech for *Bring Up the Bodies* on Monday. The flames look fantastic. Paule Constable's lighting is ravishing and gets even better each day. The costumes are stunning, and under Paule's beautifully specific lighting, they look ravishing too.

We certainly have more hills to climb to get these shows ever sleeker and fitter, but I get

a real sense that we are improving with each preview.

The performance is long but, being so close to the audience, we can tell that they are rapt and attentive to the end. There is nevertheless a lot of work going on to cut the text down just a bit and, combined with slicker playing, we're confident we will shave off the necessary minutes.

It's tough, though, when cuts are made this late in the process. Actors are sensitive souls and, notwithstanding the driving imperative to take time off the show, sometimes a cut can feel like a judgement on one's performance. Hopefully we will have a trimmer script for *Bring Up the Bodies* before we get to actually performing it.

### **Pleasing the gods**

Mike Poulton (the writer of the play scripts) is really pleased with the show, and Hilary's giving smile as we work and rework scenes every day makes it evident that she is loving the whole thing. Hilary has been most helpful to me, discussing the nuances of Norfolk's character as I portray it, and helping me achieve the specificity that I fear I lack.

Greg Doran came to see us as soon as he got back from seeing *Richard II* into the Barbican, and was generous in his praise the next day.

### **Privileged peeking**

This period and the story we're telling has an extraordinary attraction for people today. I wonder if there is a very interesting house

that you regularly pass, that inspires fascination as to what lies behind those doors. Well, if you get my metaphor, it's as if Hilary is taking us inside a house that has always been a part of our lives, and revealing to us what actually goes on in its various rooms.

Our audience can eavesdrop on the most dramatic and personal moments in the lives of the people who live behind that familiar façade.

## **JUGGLING PLAYS**

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December 30<sup>th</sup> 2013

So hardly had we begun to feel the nightly steps forward in *Wolf Hall* bringing us ever nearer the telling of our story in as slick and compelling a way as possible, when we were back into tech rehearsals for the second of our two plays: *Bring Up the Bodies*.

The lighting and the soundscape have a big part to play in locating and differentiating our scenes because we use very little furniture. On an open thrust stage, like that of the Swan, there isn't much scenery that can help an audience understand in which one of a multiplicity of locations we are.

Stephen Warbeck's music helps enormously. Such a big story, told luxuriantly in Hilary's books, is necessarily translated to the stage in sparing dialogue, and the music — along with the superbly detailed lighting plot — helps set the mood with tremendous efficiency.

As with a lot of great film music, I suspect our audience might not be so precisely aware of Stephen's brilliant work, but they will certainly be more affected by the drama that his music underscores.

### **Rain on our parade**

The water – which is an important part of the play design - remained a work in progress until we had time to address the technical difficulties. But now it doesn't rain just outside the theatre, but on stage as well. What with the beautifully effective snow, and some flick-

ering flames all over the place, it's all looking pretty good. We are still rehearsing and tweaking every day during previews.

During one rehearsal I sat behind the row of tech desks to eavesdrop on the hugely demanding cueing that goes on. Jenny Grand, our supremely competent Deputy Stage Manager, has to deal with 300 lighting cues, about 60 sound cues and — currently — 35 music cues. Every actor's entrance also has to be cued with a green light because, mostly, we cannot hear the dialogue clearly from where we are entering.

You can imagine the pressure on Jenny, especially when lines on which she delivers her cues are being cut or adjusted on a daily basis. Respect!

### **Back on our heads**

Christmas snuck up on us here because, working the long hours that we are, we've had little time for shopping. Ordinarily, by the time the actual day comes I've already had three or four turkey dinners 'with all the trimmings', but this year all the celebrating was crammed into one day sandwiched between quick dashes to and from London. The family Christmas get-together, as always, involved the indulgent consumption of some thousands of calories, a good proportion of which were burned up with day-long laughter.

By the time we came back to *Wolf Hall* after Christmas we hadn't done it for two whole weeks, so just as I'm beginning to relax with the confidence of where my next entrance is in *Bodies*, I'm back to feverish backstage scroll-

ing through the crib sheet on my iPad as we go back to our other play.



## **ALWAYS SOME WAY TO GO**

January 9<sup>th</sup> 2014

We opened the shows this week with a double first night followed by a highly enjoyable pie and mash bash in the Scott Bar of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre.

As I'm sure you've gathered from these blogs, the process of getting these shows on has been pretty relentless, but we have made evident progress in this last push over the hill.

Actually, I remember that in my last blog series for the RSC I likened the process of getting a play on, and creating a performance, to a long hill climb. Have you often thought you had the summit of a hill you are climbing in sight only to discover, when you get there, that it was simply yet another rise you had to climb, and that the next apparent summit still lay ahead of you?

Well I find this business is always a bit like that. The shows may be open now, but there is always going to be some way to go. Cues can still be tighter, we can open scenes with more energy and drive, we can still pass the ball more effectively on stage.

I'm sure none of us would doubt that, with a long and complex narrative like the one in these two plays, the efficiency of our team work and the momentum we bring to each scene are both absolutely vital.

### **In the spotlight**

While we've been sitting in the auditorium waiting our turn in the seemingly endless

rehearsals, I've been learning a bit about all the other stuff that goes on around us.

I've already told you how much I admire the lighting plot because it is so varied and specific. Well, those virtues might not be so achievable without the state-of-the-art lighting equipment available to us. Many of our lanterns are capable of doing many different things during the course of the play because the power cable running to each of them is accompanied by a data cable that can make them do amazing things.



It can point in any direction, it can move a light beam across the stage, it can be a wide flood or a tight spot, it can be any one of millions of colours. Each of these lanterns has moveable cyan, yellow and magenta gates, different percentages of which can reproduce any colour we need.

I remember the days when half the coloured gels in the lanterns were steel and half were straw. Well, now we can have light straw, dark straw, medium dark straw, pastoral straw, pastoral-comedy straw or whatever straw you could ever wish for or perceive.

You can beam any pattern onto the stage by inserting moveable cut-out filters, called gobos, into the lanterns.

All this means that the same lantern can flood the stage with a flamey-red pattern one minute and then direct a brilliant white spotlight through the haze onto a single character the next. Amazing.

### **Multiple-purpose actors**

We do a similar thing with the actors. One minute the actor playing George Boleyn exits down left and the next minute he enters up right as Edward Seymour. Backstage there is a permanent blur of actors running to and from the quick change area yelling "scuse me – quick change!" at the top of their whisper as hazardous furniture and fittings are whisked out of their paths.

Yvonne, a long-established dresser here at the RSC, told me that she has seventy quick changes during the course of the two shows. Many of them are simultaneous as two or three actresses change character at the same time.

It sounds like mayhem, but mistakes can be disastrous for the play so the seemingly impossible is achieved. I remember the head of Swan Running Wardrobe, Amy, telling me a

couple of years ago that I needn't worry about a necessary complete change of costume (including wig and beard) because I had a whole ninety seconds – she'd timed it in rehearsal!

## **THE STRESS TO IMPRESS THE PRESS**

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January 16<sup>th</sup> 2104

Of course we all want good reviews for our shows, but this time the reviews could be a big factor in decisions affecting our afterlife. These plays were commissioned by Playful Productions in partnership with the RSC, and as they are a commercial management in London there has been much talk of a possible West End transfer. Clearly, decisions in that regard will be driven by the kind of reviews we get. Hence the pressure.

The RSC have developed their own protocol in an attempt to take the stress off press nights. Our 'opening night', to which friends and family are invited — and after which we have a bit of a knees-up — is a on a different night. It is intended that this opening night should be the celebratory one when we give out the cards and imaginative gee-gaws we have bought and made for each other.

It never really works out, though. It's always very apparent that we are driving towards the ultimately demanding marketing exercise before persons of influence from the press. It is to the press night that our agents are invited; it's a great sales pitch showcase for them to bring along the great and good of casting directors.

### **The game's the same**

So the immediate prelude to our press night was the usual febrile and feverishly excited affair that we are generally used to elsewhere.

We are proud, very proud, to show what we have created together under Jeremy's spirited leadership. Some months ago I thought that getting this immensely rich narrative on to the stage looked like a task that would defeat all but the most courageous. I feared, somewhat, that if anybody had made up their minds that it was impossible or inadvisable to do this before they saw it, then they might be hard to please. I had never been sure what the critics would make of it.

I should have taken Hilary's utterly charmed faith, encouragement and enthusiasm for what we are doing as a sign that nobody could doubt it.

### **Stars in our eyes**

As it turns out the reviews have been amazing. Four and five stars. We had nearly half the front page of *The Times*, for goodness sake! We are thrilled.

The relentless schedule has paid off. The changes, implemented right up to the last minute, gradually made our staging simpler and sleeker. Jeremy was always fixing things so that the acting is what does it. Everything that fought or competed with the acting was amended and simplified.

I'm really pleased that critics have praised the staging simplicity that allows our audience to exercise their imaginations on the stage just as they did on the books. Everything that is added to the show complements the wonderful committed performances that are happening all around me. Now we just have to keep the ball in the air.

## **RUNNING FOR COVER**

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January 23<sup>rd</sup> 2014

As well as doing our eight shows a week, we are still in rehearsal. That's how it has to be for another couple of weeks until all the understudies are rehearsed into their roles.

Most of the cast are understudying more than one part. So the cover plan for the absence of any one actor can — as you can imagine — be fearfully complicated, with all sorts of knock-on effects.

The RSC have a laudable policy of mounting full, ticketed, understudy performances. With shows like these, that is a daunting task wherein some actors can be playing more than one part in any one scene.

Nick Boulton covers my own role — the Duke of Norfolk — and also King Henry, so I found myself having to play Norfolk in the public understudy run. It was such a privilege to be part of it.

### **Rock and role**

Members of the company had learned and rehearsed, in some cases more than one role, in a fraction of the time afforded to the actors they were covering. The quick changes were just mental. In what we call the 'baby shower' scene, Dan Fraser was swapping cloak and hat with split second timing as he leapt from role to role, George to Gregory and back to George — much to the audience's delight.

One hell of a buzz was felt around the theatre and it all went unbelievably smoothly. Both cast and audience clearly had a good time.

The whole exercise seems to have had a most interesting effect on the production. The public understudy run seems to be just so daunting and demanding that actors throw caution to the wind and act in the moment. Thinking ahead is deadly; worrying about something that has just happened can be disastrous.

So I think there is a freedom and spontaneity in the performances which allows interesting discoveries to be made.

Furthermore, some actors are now in the audience watching their own roles being played by someone else. While it may be a bit like finding someone sleeping in your bed, there may be an idea worth pinching.

And then when we come back to the play proper that night there's a sort of energised repossession process . . . a sort of unconscious assertion of rights. The odd spark lights a new flame.

It makes the whole arduous exercise very worthwhile and strangely productive.

## **BODIES, BEERS AND BURNS**

January 31<sup>st</sup> 2014

So we continue rehearsing understudy roles for *Bring Up the Bodies* now. This is where I volunteered to take on the cover of Sir John Seymour. It turns out that I would be playing my own role of Norfolk in the public understudy run, so it hasn't really involved me in too much extra time commitment. It's a privilege to work with this company, most of whom seem to be working much harder than I am, and all with smiles and spirit.

Sunday turned out to be a great day off with roast beef at The Fleece Inn with an old friend of forty years who lives nearby. The Fleece is simply the best pub in the world. They always have some beers I've never heard of, and any of which I'm happy to try confident that they are all terrific.

We began lunch in a somewhat melancholy mood having read the notice on the door of the village shop announcing closure because it was no longer economically viable. It resonated somewhat profoundly with us as we sat on ancient chairs in an ancient pub that could even have played host to the third Duke of Norfolk had he been passing by.

A vital piece of traditional English culture had struggled for life and its death throes were painfully written up on its forever closed door. We whipped ourselves for not supporting our own local traders and mourned the slow extinction of so much that we valued.

After lunch we walked around the church and found the notice of a share issue for a new community shop that is planning to open its doors later this year. It was viscerally uplifting as we drank in a new spirit of vitality. I even bought some shares, there and then. I have a stake in the future of Bretforten!

### **Heaps of neeps**

In the evening Nick Boulton (Duke of Suffolk) hosted a marvellous Burns night. Entry was by a bottle of whisky and a Scottish poem. There was haggis, of course, with neeps and tatties, wonderful whisky sauce and cheerful company.

Mat Pigeon treated us to a wonderful reading of Tam O'Shanter. I wore a kilt and sporran I had bought on Ebay. Loved it.

I didn't give you a picture with my last entry and don't have a particularly relevant one this week, so as we have just started a company Camera Club. I give you a photo of Holy Trinity Church I took during one of our sessions. I hope you like it.



## **A BIT OF A KNEE TREMBLER**

February 7<sup>th</sup> 2014

Maybe it was because I had volunteered to do it and it was a bit like putting my head on the block. Maybe it was because the actor that I am covering was in the audience. Maybe it was because some of the things I have to say expect a bit of a laugh (do get more than a bit of a laugh when Paul says them) and so timing them around an audience at my very first attempt would be a bit of a test.

But I haven't been so nervous for years. My pulse was racing and my left knee actually trembled as I waited in the wings.

And I had two small scenes to play in the public understudy run. Maddy Hyland was playing three different parts, Giles Taylor and Nick Boulton were playing the absolutely key roles of Wolsey and Henry, and Oscar Pearce barely left the stage in two and a half hours!

So it was a rather humbling experience for me. But I'm so glad I did it. There's nothing like conquering fear — and being close to the edge without falling off — to get the blood running. It's as close as I'll ever get to dangerous sport, that's for sure.

### **A bit of time off**

So the second public understudy run is done and now we don't have to rehearse every day any more. After a most pleasant Sunday drive to Chipping Camden, where the low golden sun was 'lending its blessing' to the honey coloured stone, and lunch of beautifully rare

roast beef at the Lygon Arms, I plan to read,  
relax and play some golf in the coming week.  
Marvellous.

## **ALL THE OTHER STUFF**

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February 20<sup>th</sup> 2014

What I find utterly fulfilling about being a member of the Royal Shakespeare Company isn't just the dressing up and strutting around on stage speaking loudly without fear of interruption, it's all the other stuff that one can get involved in.

### **Readin'**

Maddy Hyland organised a reading of *The Winter's Tale* in her room — fondly dubbed The Jazz Cabinet — on Sunday. It was a great chance to explore a remarkable play in which I found Laertes' speeches surprisingly tricky to deliver.

Shakespeare is much more free with his versification by now, with the sense of what characters say running clear through the line breaks (enjambment). There's a new trick he also employs with demanding frequency whereby the syntax is continually broken as the speech branches off to qualify or expand the argument. This rhetorical device, called aposiopesis, drives the action with a demented impetus at times, but it's a nightmare to sight-read.

I saw the same technique in the speeches from Sir Thomas More that I was asked to read in a benefit recital at The Shakespeare Institute. This was the key material that our masterful bard was contributed to a collaborative text that was, sadly, never actually performed by the King's Men — probably

because Shakespeare's bits were a bit too politically hot to handle.

It was fascinating to be in the Institute building where the celebrated Marie Corelli (vide Part One of my book *On Bard Duty*) made her home and lived her somewhat sensational life.

### **Eatin'**

Olivia Darnley, of our spirited company, decided to organise a quasi-Come-Dine-with-Me thing. Turns out that organising the twelve actors who signed up to take part was more like herding ten times as many cats but, imbued with enthusiasm, I hosted what I hoped would turn out to be the first of a series of plenary prandials.

I cooked curries (for that is how I made my reputation on *This Morning* a hundred years ago) served on the local Poundshop's entire stock of one pound thalis. Great night in great company. I'm still drinking the left-over beer.

So you see, there's no way one need be bored serving one's sentence here. You may have already gathered that I think the quality and variety of the many excellent pubs around here make the weekends pretty special, too.

### **And still to come . . .**

In the coming week Giles Taylor will be delivering a workshop on finding clues in Shakespeare's verse. And then at the beginning of March another recital. And then, and then . . .

. . . we will be going to London with our remarkable shows. I can't say when and I can't

say where just at the moment . . . but we  
WILL be going. That's official. How exciting!

## **AND THE STUFF GOES ON**

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February 28<sup>th</sup> 2014

Life can be so rich working here if you sign up to the stuff that goes on. Last week Giles Taylor, of our company, ran an excellent workshop on Shakespeare's verse.

It's interesting that the only (supposed) piece of dramatic writing in our bard's own hand happens to be the manuscript for the speech in *Sir Thomas More* that I delivered at the Shakespeare Institute last week.

It must be one of the most valuable documents on the planet. There are very few crossings out and alterations and it looks as though Shakespeare wrote his expressive and economical verse quickly and with amazing facility. The iambic pentameter seems to have flowed from his pen as if he could hear his characters' voices in his head and feel their heartbeats in his soul.

### **Unpacking the text**

Giles concentrated his workshop on that five foot 'dee-dum' rhythm so common in dramatic writing of that time with illustrations of how, when a foot in the pentameter changes from the customary 'dee-dum' to a 'dum dee' (a trochee), it is to deliberate and great effect.

I suffered from irregular heartbeat for some years and I think it's very relevant that I was never conscious of my regular resting heartbeat at all until an extra beat suddenly made me aware of it.

It's exactly the same with the heartbeat rhythm of Shakespeare's verse. Giles had several excellent examples. Here's another one that springs to mind:

*Now is the winter of our discontent  
Made glorious summer by this sun of York;  
And all the clouds that lour'd upon our house  
In the deep bosom of the ocean buried.*

That very first 'Now' (the first strong beat of a trochee) starts things off with a bold bang, and then in the fourth line another break in the rhythm along with the alliteration of 'bosom' and 'buried' — lends extra emphasis to the powerful, and now powered, metaphor.

### **Unwrapping the plays**

On Saturday morning I was privileged to deliver the *Unwrapped* session in The Swan. These ticketed events explore how we mount our plays through rehearsal into performance.

I think the session went rather well. I invited a woman onto the stage to feel the weight of my two stone surcoat and she visibly buckled! Norfolk's eBay reliquaries were a source of great interest and some amusement.

We have had a session this week with Professor Gary Watt, of Warwick University, where Shakespeare's easy familiarity with the subtleties of rhetorical argument was examined through the brilliantly contrasting speeches of Brutus and Antony over Caesar's corpse.

Then in the afternoon we were excited to hear some of our cast reading *Middletown*, a new play by American playwright Will Eno,

that Jeremy Herrin wants to do under auspices of Headlong, the touring company whose helm he took over last June. It was a funny and moving piece that explores the oddness, charm and frustration of human existence by looking at small lives in a small town.

Headlong specialises in new writing and re-considered classics, and have Anya Reiss's exciting version of *Spring Awakening* making waves at the West Yorkshire Playhouse.

Next week we have two day-long workshops on our plays with groups of young people from local schools. They get Jeremy Herrin, Hilary Mantel, a bunch of actors, all kinds of stuff, and tickets for the evening. All for £35. What a bargain!

## **GOOD KARMA FOR WOLF HALL**

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March 6<sup>th</sup> 2014

### **Good karma**

Our transfer to the Aldwych Theatre has been officially announced, and now we can unzip our lips and talk openly about it. It seems so right to be going to this theatre — for a range of reasons. The RSC had a heyday at the Aldwych in the '60s and '70s, and this beautiful theatre was later to house three phenomenally successful seasons of the company's iconic two-part production of *Nicholas Nickleby*.

So successful was that show that everybody associated with it received copies of an RSC headed press release saying that, owing to the success of the production, the Royal Shakespeare Company would henceforth be renamed the Royal Dickens Company. Perhaps it wasn't such a surprise when it was discovered that the mischievous hoax was perpetrated by the late great Ken Campell.

### **Moving on**

Jeremy Herrin might be particularly pleased about the Aldwych because his *This House* from the National Theatre very nearly went there, but was pipped at the post. It is sad, though, that our move into the theatre is only enabled by another show moving out and a bunch of our colleagues in the business being put out of work sooner than they would wish.

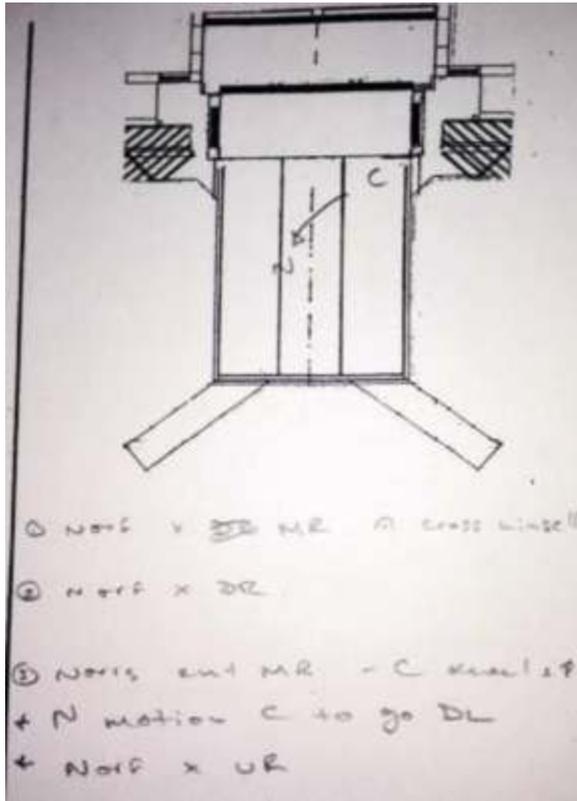
For several in our company this will be the first time in the brashness and brightness of London's West End, and the excitement is palpable.

### **Coming up**

From Whitehall to Waterside. Such is the intimacy of the Swan Theatre that David Cameron's presence in our audience was unlikely to go unnoticed; when Cromwell said that government should listen to the voice of the people the audience erupted with spontaneous applause. I'm assured our Prime Minister joined in. Afterwards he suggested to Nat Parker that our shows would work magnificently in Westminster Hall. Now there's an idea!

### **Reaching out**

This week some of us are joining in some schools workshops. Maddy Hyland, who was leading one of our sessions, suggested that we explore with the young people how to best use the open thrust stage of the Swan in expressing the given text. We examined a scene with them and then played it rather statically upstage, encouraging suggestions as to how the 'blocking' (the actors' moves) might be improved. Their suggestions were enthusiastic and apposite, and it was remarkable that by implementing their suggestions we arrived very effectively at the same sort of moves that we have developed through rehearsal and preview. HmMMM . . . direction by committee.



DSM Jenny Grand's blocking notation in the prompt book for the early part of Scene 11 in Wolf Hall .

## **RSC + SBT = OMG!**

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March 25<sup>th</sup> 2014

The RSC take artist development rather seriously and organise sessions for us designed to broaden our reach and enrich our work. Lyn Darnley, our head of Voice & Text, brought the lecture on rhetoric to us a couple of weeks ago, and last week organised a trip to the archive of Shakespeare's Birthplace Trust.

In 1964 the RSC's own archive was amalgamated with that of the trust and this astonishingly valuable and varied collection is looked after by Paul Taylor and Emily Millward. Together they had assembled a rich and fascinating collection of artefacts that they thought might be of relevant interest to the cast of *Wolf Hall*.

Most fascinating — and revealing — I thought, was the inventory of the land and property, in the Stratford area, that Thomas Cromwell owned just prior to his execution. By now he was Earl of Essex and an immensely rich and powerful man. I wondered if he had acquired much of this land through the dissolution of religious houses, and now it was to be redistributed to some of the paranoid king's new favourites.

There were all sorts of delights: the silver staff of office that would have been carried by Shakespeare's father; pieces of exquisitely embroidered Tudor clothing; a beautiful wax seal of Henry VIII. The care and thought that had gone into such an eclectic array of in-

tensely interesting bits and pieces was quite evident.

### **A bit of bardolatry**

We had the chance to hold and venerate an original Shakespeare *First Folio*. A bound copy of this remarkable book, published posthumously in 1623, would have cost one pound — which is exactly one twentieth of a Stratford schoolmaster's annual wage in Shakespeare's time. A First Folio was recently sold for six million pounds!



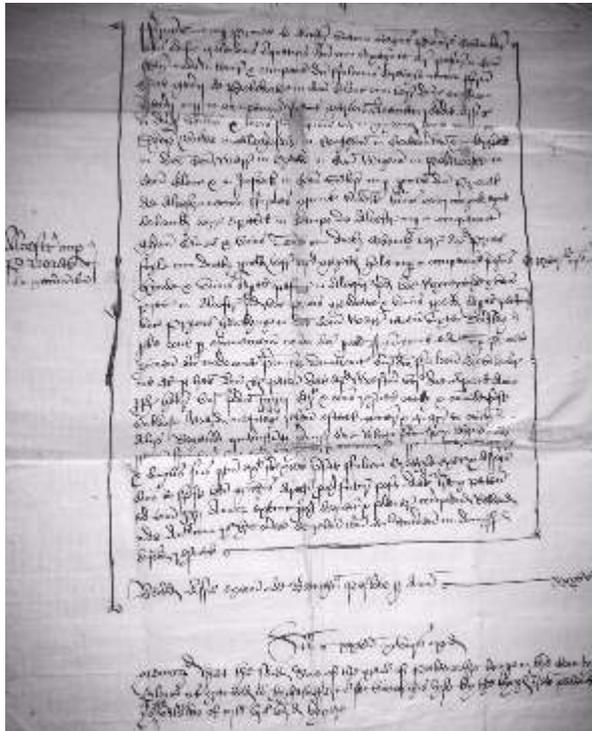
A chance to venerate the First Folio!

Of the 750-1000 copies originally printed, about 230 survive, and 80 of those are held in the American Folger library.

The SBT and the RSC own *First Folios* between them.

We were able to see the very faded parish register that records Shakespeare's birth and

death, the pages shiny with the grease of millions of curious fingers – just one of the 31 contemporary documents in the collection that mention Shakespeare by name. We also had the chance to turn the pages of an original *Holinshed's Chronicles* that was an important source for Shakespeare's history plays. These remarkable volumes were barely representative of the one million documents in this archive which nestle in the dark basement alongside 50,000 books and 11,000 Shakespeare or Stratford related objects.



Part of the inventory of Thomas Cromwell's property in Warwickshire

A wonderful selection of these artefacts has been incorporated into the new exhibition at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust which opened this week. I found the new display particularly interesting because I've been adding to my own collection of Shakespeariana while I've been here. I recently bought a plaque made of bois durci — that was a new one on me . . . a material invented in nineteenth century Paris, made from a mixture of powdered wood and blood!

## **CUT AND THRUST**

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March 28<sup>th</sup> 2014

We've got the Aldwych firmly in our sights now and some of our time must be spent in preparation for our London run. Last week we had two days of discussion over cuts and emendations to the scripts. We just have to trim the plays down a bit for a West End audience because some of them will have travelled a long way. The sound of the odd seat tipping up, and people shuffling along the rows to catch their trains, would somewhat compromise the drama.

Hilary and Mike have taken the opportunity to sharpen a few things up where the story might not have been immediately clear. We've all had a few lines cut in the drive to make these plays even fitter and leaner than they already are. I will have had 61 friends to see these productions by the time we leave Stratford, and so many of them say that this complex tale is told with such compelling efficiency.

Every cloud . . . I was due to go back to London at the weekend to chair an environment group meeting, but had an unfortunate fall in the foyer on Friday and ruptured a muscle in my right arm. That meant I couldn't drive to London, but that I could go to Nat Parker's house party on the Sunday, driven by my fellow duke, Nick Boulton.

So this really painful arm turned out to be majorly advantageous. Nat and his beautiful wife, Anna, have converted a set of Cotswold stone farm buildings into the most perfect

home. My favourite room was the "round room", beautifully furnished in a round-walled building that once housed the horse engine, where a poor pony would have endlessly walked round in a tight circle with a beam attached to its back turning some sort of essential farm machinery.



Anna had prepared the most magnificent lunch, and we played a most diverting game of post prandial pétanque on the Nat's private piste. I had to play left-handed, of course, and astonishingly managed to get my boule intimately kissing the cochonnet more than a few times. Giles Taylor turned out to be an expert bombeur and landed a few excellent high-arcing game changers.

Tomorrow we have a company outing to the Rollright Stones for a picnic. Apparently one is forbidden to bury metal within the circle. Plastic cutlery, then, to be on the solstice safe side?

**De-de-der-der, de-de-der-der, de-de-der-dee**

Mobile phones! If only everybody would turn off their phones in the theatre. Things are certainly better nowadays. I remember that at the Almeida in *The Iceman Cometh*, bleeping Blackberrys and noisy Nokias were a routine nightly occurrence. One night Kevin Spacey just stopped mid-sentence, stepped forward, and said "tell'em we're busy!" It takes a while for the audience's attention to re-focus on the play once a forgetful audience member has finally found the off switch and silenced the wretched thing.

This afternoon the same mobile phone rang six times. It turned out that its elderly owner didn't know how to turn it off! A kind member of our front of house staff gave him a bit of technical support in the interval. Oh, and there was another bit of a mishap today . . . I went up to the Juliet balcony to deliver the *Bring up the bodies* line and promptly tripped on a customer's coat that had fallen off the back of his seat. As my special spotlight opened up it revealed me flailing around on my back like an upturned beetle.

## **FAREWELL TO THE FORD**

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April 7<sup>th</sup> 2014

These unforgettable days in Stratford have flown by in a flash. As I was boxing up the extensive batterie de cuisine, that I insist bringing with me, it seemed such a short time ago that I'd piled the empty boxes in the utility room.

One of the great delights of working in Stratford is the opportunity to entertain friends on stage and at home. It's a bit like running a Bed & Breakfast in my spare time, but it's been wonderful to have so many people to stay; several dear friends from university, even some old school friends and good friends who lived in the flat above me in rep days, more than 40 years ago in Chester. *Wolf Hall* has been a magnet for people of taste!

### **Farewell to the food**

Shared food and shared pleasure. So many smiling nights through the kindly light of candles with friends with whom the only contact might otherwise be a Christmas card. The dinner table is the warm heart of a home, I think. So important it is, I even have to bring my own up with me, together with pans, knives and the culinary gee-gaws that I'm convinced I cannot do without. And the cooking is my relaxation after the show. How great that Fox's Spices is headquartered in Stratford! The masala dabba returns to London fully replenished.

Together with my man-with-a-van - my most generous brother-in-law, I wrenched myself



ay Just before we left Stratford I took Jenny Grand, our DSM, to Upton House to look at the paintings and play country house guests for an hour or two. We played a hand of cribbage and pocketed a few snooker balls before taking a turn around the beautiful picture gallery. I want to tell my friend, Philip Mould, that I have identified the subject in Hans Memling's Portrait of an Unknown Man - it is our own Nick Shaw!



ter one last Colazione Magnifica breakfast at Carluccios. It was made a more poignant farewell by being the most perfect sunlit dafodil-day. But this ending is the beginning of our great West End adventure.

It will be a rather different dynamic, a bit more of a "nine-to-five" thing I suppose with the cast spread all over London rather than living in a couple of streets like an extended family. The spirited farewell cabaret that the company put on in our last week reinforced the bonds of respect and admiration everybody holds for each other. I was awed by the phenomenal talents of my fellows.

### **Farewell to the fond**

As I turned onto the M40 I heard the news that my old friend Kate O'Mara had died. Many years ago dear Kate was the inspiration behind and light all over the British Actors Theatre Company. We did *The Taming of the Shrew* with no director; a Shakespeare company with no director, run by a cooperating cooperative of owner/manager actors . . . surely unprecedented . . . how could that possibly work? We did a No.1 tour and it was remarkably successful. There was a bit of shouting every now and then but I remember it as a vibrant and happy time.

**A LETTER FROM ITALIA**

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April 11<sup>th</sup> 2014

I have spent the two week break, before we start our advance on the West End, in the Tuscan sunshine. The verdant and fecund landscape we can see from the converted granary in which we are staying, would have been familiar to our man Cromwell. I suspect it hasn't changed much and I'm sure (Hilary . . . put me straight on the stream of idle conjecture that follows?) he would have watched and yearned with fascination as he embedded himself into the life here. He must, as we did, have visited Chianti country and seen how the miracle of fermentation transforms the Frescobaldi's deep purple Sangiovese grapes into the utterly quaffable wine that is lovingly produced in the same Val di Pesa today.

**The grace of good things**

As I sit here with my iPad on my lap I can stretch out and pick rosemary for our potatoes, thyme for our ragu and big fat juicy lemons (for our turbot?). This abundance of good things to eat, the rich Spring sunshine — and the patronage of Francesco Frescobaldi that enabled Thomas to enjoy it all — must have seemed like the grace of God after the hellish massacre at Gagliano the previous November. I learned today that the Frescobaldis supplied Henry VIII with Chianti wine — we can see how that came about!

Some of the streets of Florence have changed little since Cromwell was here — they are still antiquing statuary for the more discerning tourist! It is easy to imagine him opening his shutters in the Palazzo Frescobaldi and looking out on the bustling Ponte Vecchio as Francesco boasted of his own new bridge, named for the Holy Trinity, just below.

**When the going gets tough the tough get going**

I wonder whether some of Cromwell's survival instinct was cultured here in Florence, where competitive intrigue, and corruption born of self-interest, was rife. Could Cromwell foresee that the Frescobaldi's vast wealth was actually vulnerable to "any vagrant wind" — they went bankrupt for a second time in 1581.

**Bound homeward**

So now my thoughts, like Cromwell's, turn to a necessary return to England. I haven't brought the new scripts with me because this

was intended to be a real holiday way from all that. Also I prefer, I think, to regard the amended adaptations as a given, rather than apply the bias of a subjectivity born of six months of familiarity with what we have been doing so far. I say "I think", but have fingers crossed that I won't lose some favourite moments and relished lines!

## **GETTING CONVERTED**

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18<sup>th</sup> April 2013

During the most welcome two week break our surrogate family dispersed to the four corners: Florence, Venice, Paris, Aix, Mexico, St Lucia, Cornwall and Spain — five of our boys organised their own Barcelona beer festival. And now we are all in London, working through the shows in a Southwark rehearsal room. There is a small colony of rehearsal spaces around here, so more than a few working actors (an endangered species) can be spotted wandering the streets clutching a take-away latte in one hand and a dog-eared script in the other. I've had the satisfying experience of catching up with some old friends.

At the end of our first day back we had a warmly personal welcome from our producer, Matt Byam Shaw over some splendid Rioja and re-connected with our old friends from the RSC. The mood is buoyant and positive as we address the challenge of converting from a thrust to an end-on stage. It means we can cut down on the restless movement that was necessary to continually free up the sightlines in the Swan Theatre. Our new home in the Aldwych, while it is a delightful playhouse space, does not have quite the cosy closeness that we have been used to in Stratford — where one can see nearly every face in the audience from the stage. Some vocal adjustment will clearly be called for. In the workshop at the theatre, led by Stephen Kemble,

we discovered the extra effort involved in carrying our thoughts to the back of the stalls.

### **Joshing around**

We have lost a valued member of our cast to another job. Josh James will be playing the lead in *Fathers and Sons* at the Donmar, so we have welcomed another Josh into the family. New Josh is, extraordinarily — and by real coincidence — old Josh's flatmate and has come to us straight from Mike Poulton's brilliantly reviewed *Tale of Two Cities* at Northampton. We also have two very personable young men — Mat Foster and Rob Macpherson — joining us for the West End run. They already feel like family.

### **Tweaks and turns**

Hilary and Mike have, in addition to cutting down our playing time, taken the opportunity to tweak the script here and there to refine the narrative. This may result in slight redefinition of intention, and even character. For the actor this might be a help or, in some cases, a hindrance. Until the next forum to discuss the script changes it's a probably a case of sucking it to see.

## **SECOND STAGE CONVERSION**

25<sup>th</sup> April 2104

In this second week of London rehearsals we've been subjecting our production of *Bring up the Bodies* to the conversion process. In the Swan Theatre the choices of where to enter and exit were relatively intuitive but here with so many people to organise on stage, and a choice of eight entrances, we've been trying the options every which way. There were a few occasions in the "stagger-thru" late in the week when an actor would suddenly freeze on stage with a tharn look in their eyes and plead for help as to where to go.

We transferred our rehearsal into the Ballet Rambert building on the South Bank just behind the National Theatre. They only moved in at the end of last year, so it's been a bit of privilege to see their new home — so wonderfully fit for purpose. We haven't been allowed food or drink in their pristine studios so we all troop off to the Nash in the breaks. It's been interesting to see what's going on there, too, with The Shed and the newly extended coffee bar — all looking delightfully grungy and un-stuffy. The bookshop has had a bit of a transformation as well; it's more welcoming and broader in its embrace than it used to be. They had a stack of my books last year, but I didn't see it anywhere today. Praps everybody should go in and ask if they stock it!

**Notes on notes**

Jeremy doesn't really do plenary note sessions. I wonder if it's his normal *modus operandi* or whether it's just that the pressure of getting these plays fit and fair in the time available has dictated a new model. Michael Boyd's note sessions were legendarily long and detailed and could be up to four hours long. We don't have the luxury of time on our shows so the familiar mass scraping of chair legs as everyone gathers around the director after a run-thru is a sound that has been strangely absent. We do get notes – and good ones — but they tend to come by email. At least we are spared painful protracted public duologues with the director I've endured in the past that start off with a defensive, "Well, what I am trying to do there is ...".

I have my own notes policy nowadays: write them down; nod and grunt gratefully; don't argue; just try it out with good grace. I often find that, even if I don't immediately agree, a little rethink might produce a good unplanned result. ("Is this Nick Day talking?" I hear Patrick Marber exclaiming.)

If you try it and it doesn't work you are in a stronger position to argue.

If you *really* don't agree I guess the thing is to diligently write the note in your special little note-book (absolutely required good protocol for *all* notes I think) and *then* just ignore it! I hope I don't do that too often but I have often seen the triumph of actors' recalcitrance when directors eventually tire of crying into the wind!

So on Monday we start the tech rehearsal in the Aldwych. I'm sure a lot will change of necessity. There is a 20cm step across the width of the stage, for instance, and we will discover how that will affect a lot of long moves we have sketched in. I look forward, especially, to seeing how the lighting evolves. You've probably noticed the fashion for low level cross lighting in theatre that, I think, began with Rick Fisher's plot for *An Inspector Calls*. It may blind the actors but it creates fabulous sculptural depth on stage. It is, of course, impossible on a thrust where audiences are sitting on both sides.

Jenny, our DSM, took the evocative backstage photo as the set was being assembled.



**STEADY . . . READY? GO!**

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May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2014

We're in. We're open.

Our producer's finger had to hover nervously over the green for "go" button until it was absolutely certain that the Aldwych Theatre would be available for our shows. So much serious commitment depended on that decisive digit, and when the button could at last be confidently pressed there was a mere four weeks before we were into the building. We have a big new set with snow and rain together with complex fire and drainage traps. Unfortunately every scenic workshop seemed to be already working to capacity. I understand our Production Manager is a miracle worker, for he managed to persuade a host of firms to take on different bits of our set. For four weeks he was beetling about the country coordinating the whole thing and ensuring — for such is the art of project management — it came in on time, in budget, with no surprises. A succession of trucks — the furthest workshop was in Cardiff — trundled up to the dock doors in Drury Lane just four days before it all needed to be ready for us.

**Perfect partnership**

And it looks fantastic. The set is both simple and monumental at the same time — perfectly partnered by Paule Constable's sculptural lighting. Of course, that whole lighting rig has to be hired and brought in for the show, and it's enormous. I'm astonished that the hundreds of lanterns needed for our immensely

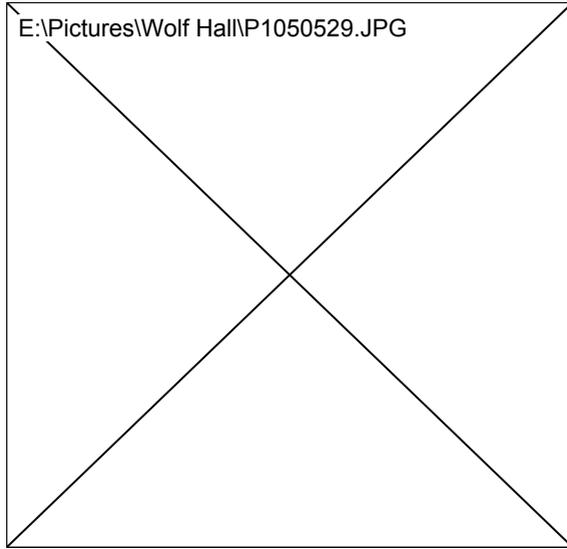
complex plot was actually in stock and available from White Light, the firm in Clapham that seem to light everything — except, maybe, the Sam Wanamaker Theatre!

### **The preview process**

This last week we've been teching *Wolf Hall* and had the luxury of two dress rehearsals before our first preview. George Osborne was there — David Cameron must have marked his card about the "Government should always listen to voice of the people" line, because he clearly loved the moment. Now, during previews, we will be rehearsing every day to get the staging absolutely right. Jeremy so knows what he's doing with moving a large number of people on this stage to get the most elegant and efficient narrative flow. It's not like a play with sofas and French windows where, for an audience, it's mostly a question of acting it right. Here, the sheer look of the thing is of enormous importance. And there's an interesting difference from Stratford: I think, at *The Swan*, the audience somehow "come to the play" because they are so much a part of the playing space, while here we have to "take the play out to the audience". Some of them are a long way away from the stage and we don't want them to feel they are peeping at someone else's party.

Keeping the ball in the air takes more energy and effort in a theatre like this, but word after first preview was that we are managing to do that. Over the coming days Jeremy will be applying his forensic eye, looking for weaknesses in the precisely assembled narrative

structure to ensure it will sustain our audience from beginning to end.



## **BRINGING ON BODIES**

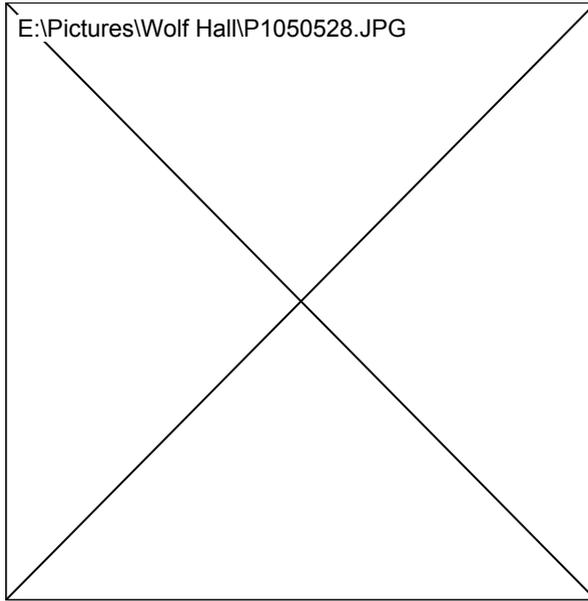
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April 18<sup>th</sup> 2014

So last week was all about getting *Bring up the Bodies* through tech, dress and first previews. "Teching" — rhyming with "trekking" — is a word that doesn't seem to exist in any dictionary but has wide currency in showbusiness. In this case we had just two days of teching to fit all the lighting, sound, fire, and music cues into the play. Much has changed since Stratford: the lighting, for instance, can be much more defined with the addition of side lighting that is impossible on a thrust stage. In some scenes our exits and entrances have been tried every which way in order to get the best look and flow to the story. I've started to carry a little notebook and pencil in my costume in which >> USRxUSC is replaced by >>UUSLxUCL is replaced by >>MSLxMLtoDL and such like, in several scenes. But eventually, after several permutations, suddenly it all clicks into place and a scene feels very right.

### **The captain of the hip**

Although there isn't a great deal of dance in our plays, what there is must be precise and disciplined. A lot of the choreographed movement has had to be adjusted and rehearsed in these tech weeks. In musicals there is always a 'dance captain', who is a member of the company with the extra task of maintaining the standard and discipline of all the movement. We have one in our show because there is a quite lot of organised movement. Giles Taylor is our Dance Captain, and we are



lucky to have him because he's damned good at it. He is responsible for carrying Sian Thomas's choreography through the run of the show. That can be especially tricky with so many complex understudy arrangements. He wasn't originally engaged to do so, but just sort of floated to the surface, two weeks into original rehearsals, as the best man for the job. He did once run his own dance company and continues to teach all kinds of dramatic disciplines alongside his career as an actor. So we can be confident that what we are doing is under Giles' capably watchful eye while he is giving his Cranmer or his Boleyn or madly changing costumes and beards in between.

### **A visit from Polly Paranoia**

I'm suffering a crisis of confidence at the moment. You'd think I'd have this sorted after more than sixty performances, wouldn't you?

But I feel like I'm getting a note on every line, mostly about pace on the line itself, and I have real insecurity about how much to go for clarity in response to what I think are the demands of this theatre while trying to avoid yet another note on pace. I have always thought that apparent good acting has a lot to do with the unquantifiable quality of comfort an actor projects on stage. Well, by that standard, last week I must have been pretty bad. I suppose if this job was easy I wouldn't want to do it so much — I am a pensioner after all!

## **TWEAKING THE TURNS**

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April 25<sup>th</sup> 2014

I'm getting the feeling that this is one of the most special weeks of my life. Every now and then I've had the good fortune to be part of a remarkable theatrical enterprise. There was the David Hare Trilogy at the National Theatre, and then there was the Almeida's *The Iceman Cometh* with Kevin Spacey, and — most personally special, perhaps — *Dealer's Choice*. I remember standing outside a restaurant looking out on the Atlanta cityscape, when "Dealers" was about to open the Cultural Olympics, and thinking that there was, at that moment, nowhere else on Earth I'd rather be. I thought the same thing this morning taking lunch with my delightful daughter on the pavement outside the Delaunay Gran Café, looking across the



street at the Theatre, feeling a real thrill that I am actually a part of all this.

This week we are still fine-tuning the shows ready for our double opening on Saturday. Some of us have had some small cuts which help drive the play along a bit more effectively. One of mine, I actually volunteered — you can just sense when something isn't quite working.

I'm getting "actor's dreams" again. The night before last I was playing some sort of brigand in a play and entered stage left into an inn scene but, when I opened my mouth, realised I hadn't actually any idea what to say — in all the excitement of playing this romantic pirate fella I'd forgotten to learn the lines. The dream seemed so real, the sweat — when I woke up — *was* real!

**PHEW!**

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May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2014

It was a bit of a monster week. Rehearsals and previews every day, culminating in a Saturday "press night" double bill before a packed and enthusiastic audience. I came into work early because we'd been notified there were a few transport issues, and there was already a substantial queue at the box office. It's great to see that a number of 'day seats' will be available every day for the keen and determined theatregoer. There's something rather exciting about joining a bunch of intrepid theatre-philes lined up at the box office; I've done it several times - once in sub-zero temperatures for David Tennant's *Hamlet* — there's a camaraderie amongst the faithful that sometimes even produces a volunteer to go and get some coffees.

The shows went well. Many friends have remarked on the speed and fluency of the action that carries the story — and the audience — forward. This is a bit of our history about which everybody seems to know at least something, so Jeremy has always impressed on us how vital it is to never let the audience get ahead.

The lighting has been much praised. It most certainly isn't just us actors that have brought these productions to such excellence. I sincerely believe that we have an assembly and synthesis of talent — the soundscape, the musical score, the set, the costumes (not forgetting the extraordinary diligence in their making), our phenomenal technical and stage-

management team — that is of world beating brilliance. If you think this sounds like hubris, come and see the shows and you will see what I mean.

We all went off to the party at the Horseguards Hotel afterwards, the boys suited and scrubbed, and the girls all dressed to die for. The mood was ebullient and optimistic and we have everything crossed for good reviews. I've already seen two of the national broadsheets online and both are very good indeed. My agent, who came to the press night, firmly believes that these shows are a major theatrical event. She txted me in the interval: "OMG this is sensational". So that's alright, then.



## SCORING A HIT

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May 7<sup>th</sup> 2014



I've been somewhat in thrall to Stephen Warbeck's score since I first heard how his music helps impel and influence the narrative, way back in Clapham rehearsals. As we have been rehearsing through previews over the last couple of weeks I have seen the deft way he moulds the musicians to his will. He is such a gentle man . . . well, essentially, a *gentleman*, so I thought a genteel tea together at my new goto café over the road would be a chance to ask him how his so sympathetic score came about.

We both studied Drama at Bristol University, but he some seven years later than me, and it was in the newly built Glyn Wickham Theatre there that his colleagues first spotted a genius

for writing the right music for the right play. Not only that, it turned out that he could play all the necessary instruments . . . and a few more besides. He was eventually weened off being an actor to apply a more quantifiable and rarer talent to being a brilliant and successful composer. I first met him when did the music for *Boy Gets Girl* at the Royal Court. By then he had already won his Oscar for *Shakespeare in Love*. Apparently they wouldn't let him into the award ceremony because he looked nothing like an Oscar nominee and more like someone who begged for dimes on Sunset and Vine! He's done so many movies now he can barely remember them all: *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, *Charlotte Gray*, *Billy Elliot*, *Mrs Brown* . . . each distinctively styled. How did he reach the style at which he had arrived for *Wolf Hall*?

### **A spare and sympathetic score**

He has worked with Jeremy Herrin several times before and I noticed, during rehearsals, they tend to communicate with each other by gesture and grimace. The thing was, Stephen said, that — like Christopher Oram's brilliant set — there should be no distracting detail in what his work brought to the drama. His music must be "sewn into the fabric of the play". He chose his instruments to create a unique palette from which to work. We have a cimbalom, which is a bit like a stripped down piano, played like a hammered dulcimer. The precise tuning of this instrument creates a slightly odd sound, and he has combined this with bowed guitar and bowed vibes to create the sensitive and sympathetic underscore that

lends some scenes a most significant extra poignancy.

There is a lot of percussion, too — this was an early idea that he said will provide a pulse to help impel the narrative. Sometimes the drums are like two interlocking voices, just as interlocking dialogue drives so much of the drama.

Once we're open, Stephen can spend a bit more time with his goats — well, when he's not commuting backwards and forwards to Paris where he is working on his next film.

## COVER STORY

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May 9<sup>th</sup> 2014

Most actors in our plays are doubling up — in some cases *trebling* up — and every part needs to be covered because, of course, the show must always go on. This multiple understudying, and the domino effect that can result from it, means that much careful planning and thorough rehearsal is necessary to get every actor into a state of readiness for the roles they cover. So, just as soon as Press Night was behind us, the company embarked on yet another batch of rehearsals.

If you read my RSC blog, you'll know that I volunteered to understudy John Seymour way back in early rehearsals because, in playing only one role, I seemed to have a much lighter load than most. I still look with empathetic respect at the hours and effort that my colleagues are committing to "covers" much more substantial than the one I took on.

It's a testament to the stamina and commitment of this company that, although the schedule has been quite punishing, nobody has yet been "off" through illness. I'm tempting fate by just saying so, I know, but the readiness is all.

### **For one night only**

Well, *afternoon*, really. The company have been given the opportunity to perform the full understudy version to an invited audience and have chosen to do *Bring up the Bodies*. So my Sir John will get an airing . . . and I'll probably be very nervous. I'll have a speedy change into

Norfolk because some of us will also be lending our normal roles to the undertaking — otherwise there would be more than a few instances where people talk to themselves!

Mat Foster and Rob Macpherson joined us in April because we needed more understudies for the West End. They work incredibly hard, and most spiritedly, throughout eight shows a week, supporting every single scene in one way or another. It's great that they will have a chance to actually play some wonderful parts for real, if only for one nerve-wracking (well, in *my* case!) performance. I look forward to the privilege — in this one-off event — of working alongside them, and also to seeing again the diligent inventiveness that comes out of everyone's damned hard work.

## **NO SECRETS**

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May 16<sup>th</sup> 2014

This week's entry is in the modern spirit of openness. We all need to know about everything now, what with the Freedom of Information Act and Duty of Candour policies - I even saw a TV programme recently revealing the secrets of the great Illusionists. So I shall be telling the truth about my nose.

The older actors in this company, Paul Jesson and myself, have seen tremendous changes in our industry over the course of our careers. It seems unthinkable, now, that when we first started in this business an actor was precluded from taking a West End contract before having completed forty weeks performing in the provinces.

Actors of our age know what is meant by "5 & 9". We would proudly carry our make-up kits from job to job (mine was a fishing tackle box), setting out our sticks of greasepaint in a neat row on the dressing room table. Brick red: Leichner number 9; Ivory: Leichner number 9; Lake and Brown liners for the creases and wrinkles; Carmine II for a bit of cheek colour; a tin of blending powder and a light blue pot of Crowe's Cremine.

The picture here is of one of my dearest possessions: a Leichner blending powder tin that I bought in 1966 when I was in the Drama department of Bristol University. I am still using it. It was traditional to use the lid as an ashtray; that was really cool and professional. Actors often kept these vital tools of their



trade in an old cigar box. There is a rather poignant old joke about two actors meeting in the Strand. One has a cigar box tucked under his arm. "Dear boy," exclaims his friend, "I see you are in work!"

"No, No," replies his friend, "Just moving house."

### **Nose secrets**

There is a well known Holbein portrait of the Duke O Norfolk - the one I used as a model for the sticks I love waving around. Thomas Howard appears to be tall and lean, and I'm rather more toward the short and stout end of things. I was determined to look more like the Howard of history and Holbein so, to that end, crafted a false nose which I ran by the director and designer in early rehearsals. I've had two or three false noses over the years and have found plasticene the ideal medium for them. I'm not sure that anyone else has

tried it but, with colours carefully mixed and smoothed down with baby oil, plasticene did very well for Howard's hooter. I was particularly thrilled when Amanda Howard, descending as she does from the duke himself, pronounced me a dead ringer.



That was in Stratford. I'm sorry to reveal the nose didn't last long in London. This is a much hotter theatre, in which we seem to sweat pints in our heavy costumes, and by the time we got to the Thomas More oath scene in which I do more than my usual fulminating, there were a couple of nights that - when my head stopped shaking, my nose didn't. Rather than having to extemporise a line about my syphilitic nose, I took the rueful decision to confine it to history along with its noble original. The audience here don't get so much

chance to enjoy my fearsome nose-craft at such close quarters, so maybe it's not such a loss.

In this journal, since last October, I've avoided confessing the secret of the schnozzle; I sort of hoped people would think the extraordinary character was created entirely by extraordinary acting. Well, know you know. It was just plasticene.

**FORMING ORDERLY CUES**

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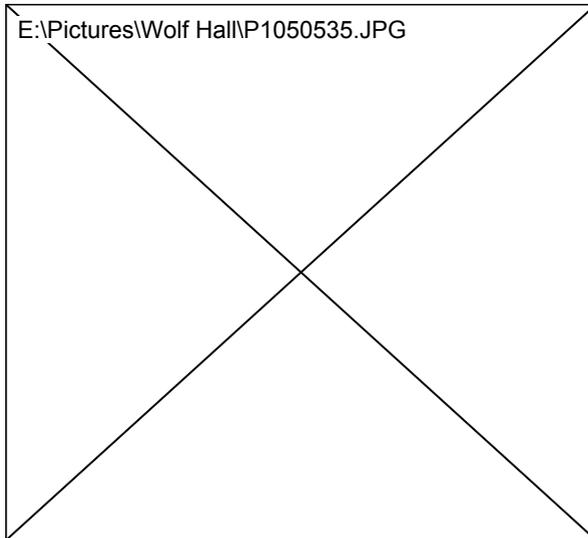
May 23<sup>rd</sup> 2014

Viennese Tea at the Delaunay Counter with a woman whose every command I am bound to obey. Jenny Grand is our Deputy Stage Manager, and I thought she might spill all her secrets for an almond tart . . . well, a chocolate cake, actually.

I've worked with Jenny several times at the RSC and have long been in awe of the care and diligence she gives to the shows she works on. She is part of a superb stage management team comprising Robbie (Company and Stage Manager) and our two ASMs Maddie and Tom. Jenny has what I think must be one of the most demanding jobs in our business because her concentration and attention is needed throughout every rehearsal and every show.

During rehearsals she and her team are first to arrive and last to leave. They set up the rehearsal room and then, once rehearsal begins, she is behind her table doing a multitude of tasks. In the early days she is making notes of the moves (in light pencil, she tells me, because they are bound to change!) She is also taking notes on all kinds of matters that need to be sorted by the designer, lighting designer, production manager etc which will be typed up and emailed by the ASMs. Once the actors start to be "off book" she adds another task to her list which will need careful judgement. Some actors like an immediate prompt, some like to struggle a bit, some get very tetchy if they are interrupted by a

prompt they don't need. Textual accuracy — especially in Shakespeare — is very important, and the DSM makes a note of the dodgy bits to be gone over with the actor when convenient. Sometimes a long discussion will ensue between director and actors and I've never seen Jenny caught out when someone suddenly turns to her with a question. Given the various (and frankly tricky) temperaments of some of the people Jenny has to deal with I wonder at the tactful neutrality she maintains under pressure.



### **Brain strain**

The stress of the technical rehearsal would fray every nerve in my body and short every synapse in my brain. Techs go on for days and Jenny deals with the relentless pressure of everybody talking into her headset while she prepares a prompt script that nowadays has fearsome complexity. When it comes to running the show there will be an array of red

and green buttons in front of her that will send cues to the lighting operator, the sound operator, the fire operator, the rain operator and seven various positions around the stage to cue the actors' entrances. Then there are tannoy calls to be made to fetch the actors from their dressing rooms in time for their scenes. In *Wolf Hall* there are around three hundred lighting cues and sixty sound cues, so you can see that running the show can be a head-busting business.

I was hoping to get a bit of salacious detail in return for my chocolate cake but when I asked a leading question she gave me one of those looks and referred me back to the tactful neutrality bit.

## **JESU! A GIRL!**

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May 30<sup>th</sup> 2014



This week we are celebrating an addition to the *Wolf Hall* family . . . well, the Shaw family, actually. Nick and his beautiful wife, Michelle, have brought Sophie Alice Mary Shaw into the world. We are almost as thrilled as they are. Anticipation of the the World Cup was easily equalled by the feverish anticipation and wild predictions of the delivery day.

I was sure it would be a girl . . . only because, actually, my own daughter has been such a source of joy to me over thirty two wonderful years. Parenthood was such a thrilling privilege to me that, together with Jessica Turner — an actress friend similarly entranced by the whole thing — an entertainment called *Flesh & Blood* was conceived and delivered at a few venues up and down the country. It was an anthology of parenting stuff from many different sources that was intend-

ed to be both moving and amusing. I copied a few of my favourite extracts to Nick and Michelle. One piece from it that has had the profoundest effect on me, I can still quote by heart:

*Your children are not your children.  
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing  
for itself.  
They come through you but not from you,  
And though they are with you, yet they belong  
not to you.  
You may give them your love but not your  
thoughts.  
For they have their own thoughts.  
You may house their bodies but not their souls,  
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,  
which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.  
You may strive to be like them, but seek not to  
make them like you.  
For life goes not backward nor tarries with yes-  
terday.*

**Kahil Gibran, *The Prophet***

### **Blissfully nappy**

So Nick now has the two weeks paternity leave for which we have been diligently preparing with extra rehearsals. Ben Hastings will take on his role — which is a very pleasing thing to us all, because Ben has been such a loyal and hard-working member of our family. He so deserves this break. We will miss Nick, for sure, but wish him a joyous couple of weeks — so well deserved for him, too — with his delightful wife and a special little baby already looking rather beautiful.

We've had a £1 a week 'baby tax' levy since we came to London so have gathered a tidy little sum for Sophie. Now we're all debating what to do with it. Should we buy her Premium Bonds?

Daddy Shaw returned to our bosom this week, and such a lovely man is he that it's great to have him back. Ben Hastings covered his roles brilliantly and we hope some people who can influence his future career will have seen his Percy — if you know what I mean. Sophie Alice Mary will be coming in to meet us next week and we can present her with her baby tax.

The sun is shining and I'm sitting in my cafe of choice next to a couple talking excitedly about the double bill they are about to see over the road. The gods are smiling.

## **I WOULD BE INTERESTED TO KNOW . . .**

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June 27<sup>th</sup> 2014

There's us —the actors, the stage management, the technicians, and then there are the 'creatives'. That's a term I heard for the first time quite far on in my career — I think at the RSC. The 'creative team' is comprised of the writers, directors and designers and, while the rest of us are engaged in a cycle of groundhog days — passing the same people at the same point at the same time in wings and corridors — the creatives are all off and away working on new projects. To keep them a little more in the frame I thought I'd blog answers from them all to a range of what I hope are some interesting questions. So, in order of response, here goes:

### **CREATIVE SPARK I: PAULE CONSTABLE, Lighting Designer**

**How did you get here? (ie what was the route to doing *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies*?)**

I often ask myself that question! On my Brompton having taken an early train from Brighton – through the stage door and there I am! Seriously – I did *This House* with Jeremy – we had a ball – he asked me back. And I loved the books when I read them . . . The idea of trying to wrestle with how to stage them was too delicious a thought not to.



**Where are you now, and what are you doing?**

I designed the National Theatre production of *A Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night* – we moved it into the West End last year but the run at the Apollo was cut short by the fateful ceiling collapse just before Christmas. We are now redoing the show in the Gielgud. It's amazing to be doing the show again – but it makes me think of so many things. Mostly relief that no one was killed that night – the gods were smiling on us! Really – it was so lucky. I go to Melbourne on Sunday where we are doing another production of *Les Mis* which I redesigned for Cameron Mackintosh to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the show. I then head off to the Metropolitan Opera in New York. My work life is pretty varied . . .

**If you had to be judged by one thing you've done (aside from *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies*), what would you like that to be?**

I think many people know my work because of *Warhorse*. What would I like to be judged by – we are all of us judged by our last piece of work aren't we? So that would be blooming *Benvenuto Cellini*, the Berlioz opera which Terry Gilliam directed at ENO – really not my finest hour but difficult to do good work in that situation . . . My favourite show? Too many to pick one.

**Who are the four (living) people you would invite to your most interesting dinner party ever?**

Living? David Byrne, Simon Stephens, Decca Aitkenhead and Hilary Clinton.

*David Byrne* is a Scottish-born musician permanently residing in the United States, a founding member and principal songwriter of the American new wave band Talking Heads, active between 1975 and 1991.

*Simon Stephens* (is an English playwright. Having taught on the Young Writers' Programme at the Royal Court Theatre for many years, he is now an Artistic Associate at the Lyric Hammersmith. His writing is characterised as part of the in-ye-face generation and is widely performed not only in the UK but also throughout Europe, with several of his plays being premiered abroad.

*Decca Aitkenhead* wrote for *The Independent* from 1995 before joining *The Guardian* in 1997, but left the paper in 1999 to write her book, *The Promised Land: Travels in search of the perfect E*. Geraldine Bedell in *The Observer* described it as an "intelligent and absorbing book". She currently contributes interviews for *The Guardian* G2 section. In 2009 she won the Interviewer of the Year at the British Press Awards. She had "particularly

impressed the judges with her remarkable encounter in August with Chancellor Alistair Darling". She is also a contributor to radio and television programmes. In May this year her partner, charity worker Tony Wilkinson, drowned in Jamaica when attempting to rescue one of the couple's two sons.

*Hilary Clinton*, as First Lady, played a leading role in advocating the creation of the State Children's Health Insurance Program, the Adoption and Safe Families Act, and the Foster Care Independence Act. She was nominated by President Obama to be Secretary of State in 2009. She visited more countries than any other Secretary of State. She viewed "smart power" as the strategy for asserting U.S. leadership and values, by combining military power with diplomacy and American capabilities in economics, technology, and other areas. She encouraged empowerment of women everywhere, and used social media to communicate the US message abroad.

**You can go there now, for just half an hour. Where would that be?**

Sennen Cove, Cornwall.



**Who, living or dead, would you most like to have met and spent some time with?**

Jean Rosenthal – the mother of lighting design.

**You can go there now, for just half an hour. Where would that be?**

Sennen Cove [Cornwall]– on a sunny with day with a small swell.

**You can have any material object for a day. What would that be?**

Can I do the opposite and take something away? From everyone? That would be bottled water. Take it away from everyone for a day – make them realise how immoral and stupid it is.

**If someone asked you for a random piece of advice, what would you tell them?**

Always have a pashmina in your bag.

**What question (not including these) would you least like to answer?**

What is my favourite colour – I'm a lighting designer for goodness sake and it is all relative!

**What question do you wish I had asked? What would your answer be?**

What makes me most unhappy? Our throw away society where objects, ideas and people are so undervalued.

**THE MIRROR AND THE LIGHTS!**July 4<sup>th</sup> 2014

Sitting in my dressing room, I have often wondered who would have looked into my mirror before me, staring at the person they were about to become.

I am just behind the stage, right next door to Dressing Room No.1 which is effectively two dressing rooms knocked into one with quite a lot of decorative plasterwork — which I don't havsomewhat humbler accommodation. It's safe to assume that the dressing room next door, then, was occupied by the great actor-manager, Seymour Hicks who part funded the Aldwych Theatre and for whom it was built in 1905. This building is a twin to the Novello Theatre at the other end of the Waldorf Hotel complex. Perhaps Diaghilev

installed himself in No.1 dressing room, using it as an office when his company came to the theatre to rehearse their *Rite of Spring*. I remember seeing Nijinsky's costume at the V&A, and its tantalising to think that it may have once hung on the rail in my room. We can imagine Vivien Leigh, surrounded by flowers, sitting next door getting nightly notes from her husband and director, Laurence Olivier.

### **Echoing laughter**

In the twenties this theatre lent its name to a seminal series of comedies, written by Ben Travers, known forever as the Aldwych Farces, the most famous of which are probably *Rookery Nook*. I've been in that one myself, at the lamented Chester Gateway Theatre where, having no understudies, I was thrown on stage — unrehearsed — to play the part of Putz when an actor had some sort of accident. It didn't involve much, just storming around, poking a Prussian finger at one of the juve leads who had stolen the pretty young ingenue who was my ward. It was one of my early fulminations. So it could have been Robertson Hare or Tom Walls, perhaps, who sat here making up with a tin of Leichner blending powder before them exactly like the treasured one I told you about recently.

In 1960 the RSC began its twenty year sojourn at the Aldwych. I met Clifford Rose this week at the Actors' Benevolent Fund AGM, and he told me he remembers Eric Porter, Ian Richardson and Janet Suzman being in this room at different times. We could dream that

our own names will ring down the generations with the same resonance.

**Mirror, mirror on the wall . . .**

Clifford was in Peter Brook's *Marat/Sade* here, too, and thought it was in this very mirror that Glenda Jackson might have judged whether her beautiful body was ready for full display in a production famous for its risqué nudity.

There is a long list of notable productions here: Vivien Leigh's *Streetcar Named Desire*, the epic *Nicholas Nickleby*, Pinter's *The Homecoming*, the National Theatre's game-changing *An Inspector Calls*. How marvellous to be part of the continuing history of this beautiful building in the heart of the capital of world theatre.

## **WAITING IN THE WINGS**

July 11<sup>th</sup> 2014

On Thursday afternoon we had the Understudy Run of *Bring up the Bodies* before an invited audience of three hundred people. Some of our cast who support these productions assiduously, but speak little in them, have waited a while for this opportunity to show their talent and mettle in key parts. Rob Macpherson and Mathew Foster, who joined us for the London run, have been carrying things on and off stage for ten weeks without sharing the merest negative thought. With minimal rehearsal they did brilliantly on Thursday. In fact, everybody did extraordinarily well. Oscar Pearce (Cromwell) kept going like an unstoppable train — had that been me I would have been de-railed many times. Bravo Oscar! Maddy Hyland played three roles simultaneously — amazingly. Nicholas Day did his best to get value out of his few lines, came off thinking he'd made a shambles of it, and rather enjoyed the adrenaline and danger of performing scenes he had barely rehearsed.

So now, barring the (touching wood) temporary loss of an actor through accident or illness, we will need no more rehearsals in this run. Well, there will be the weekly dance call, but that is necessary to keep things tight and fit in a now rather tired company that will have had only two weeks off from their six-day week in a whole year.

The success of this show is phenomenal. Every night at the curtain call we look out on a jam-packed auditorium. Nearly one hundred

thousand people have seen these plays since  
we brought them to London.

## **PLAYING TWO THEATRES IN ONE WEEK**

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July 18<sup>th</sup> 2014



If you have ever suffered from carpal tunnel syndrome, you will know that it can be very painful —particularly at night. It can also lead to a loss of feeling in the fingers and, when I kept dropping coins on the floor counting up the baby tax, I knew it was time to book myself into another kind of theatre at the Lister Hospital.

I've had the right side done so I knew what to expect and that I would have my dressed hand in a sling for a couple of performances. Increasingly disturbed sleep was the driver here and fortunately it was agreed that it was now a priority. So on Friday I was helped into my paper costume while watching the golf in my

most commodious hospital room. Fortunately my wife pointed out that the elasticated hat I was about to put on my head was in fact a pair of pants.

**The kind of block you want to have in a theatre**

The operation is performed under local anaesthetic, and I found it all rather fascinating because they rigged up a monitor so that I could watch. Mr Compson, the nimble fingered surgeon, described what he was doing as he dug around my hand with a variety of odd shaped instruments. My favourite was a Macdonald — a sort of long flat spoon that protected my nerves, apparently. An hour later I was recovering those nerves next door to the operating theatre, listening to my happy heart beep, and chatting to the nurses about their forthcoming picnic in Battersea Park.

So the Duke of Norfolk has a rather swish colour toned sling. They'd made the sling for me in Stratford, in fact, when I'd ruptured a biceps tendon rather badly, but I was able to slip my arm out of it on stage then. While Norfolk's heavily bandaged hand might look like a suitable weapon to wave about, in the circs it's necessary to keep it raised and out of harm's way. I do still want to wave my sticks around, though, and I also have assorted documents to handle, so a bit of forward planning was necessary to adapt to single-handed working.

Two friends, who came to see *Bring up the Bodies* on Friday night, thought it was a char-

acter choice; so that's alright then. Hilary said it didn't diminish my violence. I think she's rather fond of the fulminating hysteric that she has created in Norfolk. Certainly I am. There's an 'armless joke lurking here somewhere but it's far too corny for this sophisticated blog.

## **CREATIVE SPARK II**

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July 25<sup>th</sup> 2014

### **DAME HILARY MANTEL**



#### **How did you get here?**

It took me 30 years to get to *Wolf Hall*. When I first started writing, I thought, one day I'll do a Thomas Cromwell novel. It seemed such a good idea that I expected someone else to do it, while I was busy in other centuries. In 2005 I realised that the 500th anniversary of Henry's accession was looming, and that 2009 would be a year of countrywide commemorations. It looked like now or never. So I took to the road.

**Where are you now, and what are you doing?**

At the Tower of London interrogating a Plantagenet. I'm just going to light this candle, and if he doesn't start talking by the time it's burned down, he's in trouble. In deference to his ancient blood, it's a beeswax candle, so the room is fragrant.

**If you had to be judged by one thing you've done (aside from *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies*), what would you like that to be?**

The next book, perhaps? It would be worrying if I said anything else.

**Who are the four (living) people you would invite to your most interesting dinner party ever?**

I use to be a professional expatriate in lands where dinner parties were a grim duty. I'm done with them, however interesting the guests.

**Who, living or dead, would you most like to have met and spent some time with?**

I'd prefer the dead. Henry and his court can come to the fantasy dinner party. They travelled with their own cooks and sometimes their own ingredients, so it wouldn't be too much trouble. Though perhaps they shouldn't all arrive at once.

**You can go there now, for just half an hour. Where would that be?**

House no 582, Lobatse, Botswana. No road name, as there's only one road. I want to walk around my old house. I see from aerial photographs it's no longer there. But as we're teleporting, rebuilding a house shouldn't be a problem. I would like the jacaranda trees to be in blossom and my white cat Toby to be sitting on the cattle gate.

**You can have any material object for a day. What would that be?**

In the Musée Carnavalet in Paris there's a battered document case on which are the very faint initials 'MR.' It belonged to Maximilien Robespierre. I want to fill it with papers, walk around with it, drag it home, throw it in the corner, go to my desk...and see how that feels.

**If someone asked you for a random piece of advice, what would you tell them?**

Nothing. Even if they paid me. The most chilling words in the English language are, 'I have taken your advice.'

**What question (not including these) would you least like to answer?**

The other day I saw a wooden desk plaque in a shop (I haunt motto shops) that said, 'What are you waiting for?' It filled me with dismay.

**What question do you wish I had asked? What would your answer be?**

'What are you waiting for?' I don't have an answer now but I think I ought to work on it.

## **OFF AND ON**

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August 1<sup>st</sup> 2014

When an actor fails to make an entrance it's known as being "off". Fortunately it's a rare occurrence but, when it does happen, it can be somewhat unnerving for those on stage. One of our stalwart team was off this week, and for what seemed such a long time I was convinced it must be the consequence of a fall down the stone staircase or something.

I improvised a few lines, hoping we could just start the scene anyway but everything I said sounded frightfully hollow and empty. Instead of wandering round like a loon uttering inanities, maybe I should just re-instated a spare blaspheme that was cut in April and yelled, "By the thrice cracked skull of Thomas Becket, do something, Cromwell!" That would have neatly passed the buck . . . and cost me a few drinks, I think.

I suspect the audience were unaware of the secret drama.

### **Past offs**

The worst incident of being "off" that I can recall was at the Connaught Theatre, Worthing. Our daughter, Mary Rose, has mysteriously disappeared for decades and towards the end of the play a man comes to our house to explain the extraordinary truth of what has happened to her – a major dramatic denouement for which the play is famous. I speak the cue for his knock on the door, and there is silence. No sound whatever from the wings. I exit stage left because "I think I heard some-

one outside”. The wing is absolutely deserted. I come back on, “Erm . . . Cameron is at the gate . . . erm . . . he has news of Mary Rose . . . he says . . .”. Silence in the wing . . . so I deliver his entire narrative as reported speech — this Cameron fella must have miraculously blurted out his whole story in just a few moments over the garden gate. As I reached the end of the narrative I heard the actor’s panicked footsteps all the way down the stairs and along the corridor behind the stage. He burst in, panting for breath, and started to gasp out his story. Under my breath I had to tell him rather forcefully we’d actually done the whole scene without him, and then we cut to the end with the sweet taste of adrenalin in our mouths. He had fallen asleep in his dressing room at the top of the building, oblivious to the panicky calls over the tannoy.

### **Mea Culpa**

I have been off a few times myself. Once in *The Norman Conquests* I unknowingly missed my cue and sat in the wings happily listening to an intriguing debate about my character that was unfamiliar from rehearsal. When a wide-eyed, tight-lipped Jan Harvey ran off stage saying “I’ll go and find him”, I realised they’d actually been expertly improvising to cover my absence.

Then there was my lightning fast descent from the fly floor at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in 2012. I left the stage and climbed the long spiral staircase for my scene at the top of the *Twelfth Night* lift shaft. As I reached the top of it, I took the knife out of my pocket to hand to the ASM for safe-keeping. Out of my

*On the Mantel Piece*

POCKET! I should have been holding it! I looked at it in horror, realising that I hadn't actually used it yet and was a whole scene ahead of myself. I turned back with a sickening emptiness in my belly just as I heard my cue to enter, brandishing said knife, thirty feet below. I yelled my entrance line at the top of my voice as I ran/stumbled/fell down the spiral staircase — I don't think I could have come down a fireman's pole any quicker — and raced on from the wrong entrance just in time to deliver my next line.



## CREATIVE SPARK III

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August 8<sup>th</sup> 2014

### MIKE POULTON



#### **How did you get here?**

I suppose, having adapted *The York Mysteries*, *Canterbury Tales*, and *Morte d'Arthur* for Greg Doran, and *Don Carlos*, and *Kabale und Liebe* for Michael Grandage, I have gained a reputation for putting epic works into a stageable form. Matt Byam Shaw at Playful Productions asked me if it might be possible to turn *Wolf Hall* into a play. I said give me a week to re-read it. I could see four or five possible routes through, without damaging the integrity of the original. I knew that if I were to make a successful adaptation I'd need Hilary's support, so we'd have to get on. We do. The

only difficulty was that *Wolf Hall* has a great ending for a novel, but one which wouldn't really work on stage. I needed to get to the execution of Anne Boleyn so that I'd have a perfect dramatic structure: her rise and fall. Hilary obliged by writing another Booker Prize winning novel. It soon became obvious that we'd need two plays rather than one, and the resources and support of the RSC. So we appealed to Greg Doran, and that's why we are where we are.

**Where are you now, and what are you doing?**

I'm back at my desk in Norfolk working on a play for Michael Grandage, and another play about the rise and fall of Adolf Hitler – both epics. Hitler was a monster as we know, but the people behind him – those who influenced him were, in some cases, worse.

**If you had to be judged by one thing you've done (aside from *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies*), what would you like that to be?**

I think the most memorable and successful thing I've done is inventing and publishing The Oxford Reading Tree. Most children in Britain, and now all over the world, learn to read using a method I invented, commissioned and published at Oxford University Press. And those children enjoy the process – there are a lot of laughs in it. It took me, together with Rod Hunt the author, and Alex Brychta the artist, about ten years to get off the ground. It has made a lasting impact. What used to be

a dull and mechanical process for children is now a lot of fun.

**Who are the four (living) people you would invite to your most interesting dinner party ever?**

Hilary Mantel, Robert Mugabe, Her Majesty The Queen, and Kim Jong-un. Certainly that would be my most interesting dinner party ever – and it ought to be a lot of fun.

**Who, living or dead, would you most like to have met and spent some time with?**

Well it has to be William Shakespeare, doesn't it? He started the whole thing. He's the reason we're all here today. It's such a shame more directors don't spend more time with him, and listen to what he has to tell them, rather than imposing their own silly little concepts on his overarching and sublime understanding of everything.

**You can go there now, for just half an hour. Where would that be?**

Hell. To see what the others are in for.

**You can have any material object for a day. What would that be?**

A Lockheed SR -71 Blackbird.

**If someone asked you for a random piece of advice, what would you tell them?**

Never put a gift horse in your mouth.

**What question (not including these) would you least like to answer?**

Who is the best director or actor you've ever worked with? Tricky.

**What question do you wish I had asked?  
What would your answer be?**

I wish you'd asked what I most dislike about theatre. My answer would be: A director with a concept, and a play on stage that could just as easily be on the radio.

## **FOOTIE FRONT AND BACK**

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August 15<sup>th</sup> 2014

Ten months into this job, and having had only a two week break, it seems that some of our younger players members still have verve and energy to spare. I'm amazed and impressed. We are fielding our own five-a-side football team, dubbed "Henry's Hounds", costumed in the splendid team kit which Nick Shaw has pimped with an appropriate wolf's head on the left breast. This week the brave boys from our side of the curtain took on the established team from the other. No less than twenty five goals were scored in fifty minutes, but unfortunately front-of-house scored three more than back-of-house. Jay Taylor was our top scorer, but the word is that all our boys done good. It looks like there will be a return match next week when the hounds will be honed and ready.

### **Critical condition**

This week a friend of mine sent me a *Wolf Hall* review he had seen. As an exercise in schadenfreude it takes some beating: while the productions themselves were customarily lauded, my own performance gets a serious pasting — by some margin the worst notice I have ever had! I have to confess I was a bit shocked. I certainly don't read all reviews of shows I'm in but, before this, the unkindest cut I remember was delivered by Nicholas de Jongh, in the *Evening Standard*, who called my performance "bland". The very thought keeps me awake at night.

Then there was Michael Billington pointing out that in the wedding scene of Marianne Elliott's *Much Ado* my emotional outburst was "generalised". That brought on a bit of a re-think. Leonato's anger and grief is almost Lear-like in that scene, in which he determines his beloved daughter should die for her sin. The anguish I was playing was mixed with anger and upset — making a sort of mish-mash of emotions, I suppose. I realised I should follow my own rule: that you can only play one thing at a time. I often quote the example of laughter at funerals which is, for its moment, full-on and unadulterated. In playing the feeling there it would be confusing to try and "tinge" it with sadness. If it's sandwiched by sadness, *there* you have drama. So I decided to focus the outburst with a simpler anger that would occasion such vengefulness. I thought it was much improved and actually wrote a note to Michael Billington, thinking he might be pleased to know that his critical remarks can occasionally be helpful. I also thought it would assure me a good review next time. He clearly saw through that.

If we are going to read our reviews, I guess we have to do it on one condition: we must remember that this is just *one* person's view from an audience of hundreds. Someone out there is bound to like what one does, and *someone* is bound not to. Its just they don't all get the chance to put their opinions into print. So while the frightfully negative remarks in the clipping sent by my chum were a bit of a blow, I have to remember to take them just as lightly as I really *must* take the glowing ones.

“Tomorrow’s chip-paper” shrugs Lydia Leonard.

**CREATIVE SPARK IV**

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August 22<sup>nd</sup> 2014**JEREMY HERRIN****How did you get here?**

I guess that there had been conversations between Playful producers Matt and Georgia and the RSC as they knew my work. We had done *South Downs* together, and that had worked out happily. Starting out, I worked at the National and The Royal Court and had never been at the RSC despite it being the first theatre company I was ever aware of. As a child I lived in rural Northumberland and throughout the seventies my mum and I travelled to Newcastle to see the RSC in their Newcastle seasons. I'd read *Wolf Hall* and loved it, so I agreed to it optimistically as the

adaptations were understandably very long and needed to go on a journey.

**Where are you now, and what are you doing?**

At Gatwick Airport whilst waiting for a delayed flight to Italy. I've just directed Jennifer Haley's new play *The Nether* for my company Headlong in a co-production at the Royal Court. It's a very surprising play that considers the effect that virtual reality has on our morality. It imagines a future where most interaction can be realistically rendered and delivered online, supposedly without moral consequence. It takes this idea and runs with it in, I hope, a provocative and challenging way. It's quite hardcore and certainly not for the squeamish. Technology is developing at an exponentially fast rate and it feels to me that as a society we're behind in our public conversations about these issues. One of the things I want to do with Headlong is to engage with life as it is, and working in my favourite theatre at the Royal Court is a good way to start.

**If you had to be judged by one thing you've done (aside from *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies*), what would you like that to be?**

The show that I've got closest to what I wanted to achieve was *This House* by James Graham. It was a very communicative collaboration with James, and I had a good time with cast and creative team and the play was a strong idea that inspired us all. I worked some of the *Wolf Hall* team: the top multi-awarded

talents of Paule Constable on lights, Stephen Warbeck as composer joined us. And Matthew Pidgeon and Giles Taylor were in it too. But I have to say I'm proud of our achievements on *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies* - lots of challenges and difficult moments to overcome.

**Who are the four (living) people you would invite to your most interesting dinner party ever?**

I don't massively like dinner parties but I'd be interested to meet Tom Waits, Meryl Streep, Noam Chomsky and Kate Bush. Weird combination. Where would it be? At my house? Would I have to cook? Oh god, I'm stressing out about whether Meryl would find her way from Brockley station. Must remember to get some Bourbon in for Tom. Is Kate a veggie? Surely Noam would have more pressing business than to cope with one of my espresso martinis?

**Who, living or dead, would you most like to have met and spent some time with?**

Chekhov.

**You can go there, this minute, for just half an hour. Where would that be?**

Home. Or Macchu Picchu. Or Tudor Monastery Farm.

**You can have any material object for a day. What would that be?**

The thrice beshitten shroud of Lazarus.

**If someone asked you for a random piece of advice, what would you tell them?**

Get on your bike. And not in the Norman Tebbit sense. It's exhilarating and stops you feeling victimised by city living. It also goes some way to explain my remarkable physique. The world would be a better place if everyone rode bikes. I used some of my *Wolf Hall* fee to buy a second hand Brompton and I love it. There are a few Bromptons tucked away in various corners of The Aldwych - I think they might be breeding.

**What question (not including these) would you least like to answer?**

"Are we working on Saturday?"

**What question do you wish I had asked?  
What would your answer be?**

"Do you want to take these shows to America?" "Yes, please. "

## ON THE HOUSE

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August 22<sup>nd</sup> 2014



It's as if, every night, a new character is drafted into the play. Sometimes a jolly one, out for a good

time, sometimes a quieter and more thoughtful one. A famous actor once suggested that audiences arrange to meet somewhere secretly, before the show, in order to decide just what sort of house they are going to be: "Now listen up, everyone, lets give 'em a bit of a hard time tonight. If you find something funny, **TRY NOT TO LAUGH!**", or sometimes: "Listen, that fella there, in the loud jacket, feel free to laugh very loudly, but **NEVER** when anyone else. OK?"

Our plays concern some pretty serious, high stakes stuff, but much of it is leavened with odd amusing absurdities of human character

and behaviour. There are a few litmus test lines that give us a clue as to how things are likely to play each night. It's what makes playing to a live audience such enjoyable sport, because how the ball goes back and forth is dependent on the unique quality of each audience. Their own unfamiliarity with the way the narrative will progress, and their fresh responses, enable us to better maintain the illusion that the unfolding plot is just as unfamiliar to us, so that we can be equally fresh. We have to be split ourselves in two, one part listening and responding to what is happening on stage, and one part listening to — and feeling — our audience to ensure they do not miss a trick.

I used to think that different nights of the week would produce an audience of distinct character. Fridays always seemed the best, with an audience celebrating the end of the week with us. Saturdays are notoriously tricky, Mondays are a bit unwilling. With our consistently full houses, things are less predictable.

I always listen to the show relay in the dressing room before I go on, judging what sort of time I'm going to have out there. I remember one night, many years ago, listening to a cracking house in the opening scene of *Scapino*. I had quite a funny part and couldn't wait to get on and help the audience split their sides. I ran downstairs so I could enjoy the waves of laughter from the wings, ready to surf my way on stage to this singularly buoyant house. As I stepped on stage I realised I had left rings, keys and letters — all absolutely

vital to the complex plot that I would now initiate — in my dressing room. I edged over to the prompt corner and whispered that all my props were still upstairs. Just moments later, the DSM's helpful hand was passing each item to my in-stretched hand, as I leaned against the pros, just when I needed to pass it on — in perfect order.

Fortunately, personal props, delivered to the dressing room, seem to be a thing of the past and I pick up my dispensation, arrest warrant and court judgement from a rack of vital documents at the back of the stage.

## **A PAIN IN THE ARTS**

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August 29<sup>th</sup> 2014

Anybody who has seen our plays recently might wonder why the Duke of Norfolk seems to have special dispensation to only half kneel whenever the king appears. Well, the truth is that his Grace was being overtaken by a mysterious debilitation causing pain all over the body. Visits to the GP and even to A&E one morning when he was simply rigid with pain, brought some pretty powerful painkillers and recommendations to see a specialist.

It was fortunate that, as my condition seemed to be worsening day by day, the company manager and producers stepped in to accelerate the remedial process. I was seen by a top rheumatologist and diagnosed with Polymyalgia Rheumatica and Giant Cell Arteritis (!), which I guess is Greek for "pain all over the body". I was put on an immediate course of steroids and in the meantime just had to take two days off from the shows. It was a really heart-breaking decision, but I had been juggling consideration for myself with consideration for the show, and we had clearly reached a point where both would suffer if I carried on. It's a huge credit to the company, and its management, that the understudy process kicked in immediately and seamlessly. It's tough for an actor to discover that things can carry on perfectly well without him!

So all credit to Nick Boulton, Ben Hastings and Matthew Foster who have maintained a state of readiness for just this eventuality for nearly a year — and, together with most of

the company, for many other permutations of understudy emergency.

So now I'm back with the family and looking forward to gradual improvement under my magic drugs. I even manage a full kneel now and then.

There is no apposite picture I could give you this week so, now we're on the home straight I offer you a historic photo from the very first week our family was formed.

**EXIT, PURSUED BY A BEAR**

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September 5<sup>th</sup> 2014

I wonder how Donald Sinden might have felt, had he known that his final exit was to be quickly upstaged by that of another silver-haired barn-stormer – though not quite so mellifluously voiced — Ian Paisley. I suppose that, especially in the painful and protracted illness that was unfairly visited upon him, he might not have cared too much — for while Donald was the most enormous personality, he cared deeply and fondly for all those he came across in his decades at the forefront of our profession.

I first met him when I had my first job in rep at Chester back in the 70s. He used to travel round the country visiting regional theatres offering guidance and encouragement (and, of course, his wealth of anecdotes) to those of us just hacking our way into this jungle. He left us in the bar feeling like old friends, privileged to feel his touch and bask in his praise. Twenty odd years later I had the delicious pleasure of working with him in *Never the Twain* — scenes that still make me smile when

I think of them. And the Garrick, where he freely shared his ebullience and enthusiasm with us all, is suffused all over with essence of Sinden.

He did much celebrated work with the RSC, notably in the Hall/Barton collaboration *Wars of the Roses*, and he had a huge success here at the Aldwych Theatre in the somewhat more frivolous *There's a Girl in My Soup*.

He was a most wonderful Malvolio, finding the tragedy of the character that lay under the comedy, — to which his approach was almost forensic. He wrote a whole essay on the *Twelfth Night* Malvolio letter scene in which he scored the laughs 1-10. I watched him reprise that scene in the theatrical pot-pourri that marked the end of the old proscenium-arched Royal Shakespeare Theatre. I've often watched that scene performed by actors first recognising the "c" of his lady's hand where no such letter is actually in the address. Donald pressed the sides of the unopened letter so he could first peep inside, recognised his lady's hand-writing and then fancied in the shape he had just made of the folded document, something that made him brim with lascivious delight. The comedy was stronger because he based it on a logical truth.

I remember something similar at the beginning of Ayckbourn's *Just Between Ourselves*. The play opens with Dennis fiddling about with the wiring of an electric kettle. The script has a long random monologue like, "if this goes in here, and that goes over there, then this must join up here" etc and I was determined to get hold of a kettle for early rehearsal so that I knew exactly which bit I was talking about when. I think the director thought I was being somewhat over-fastidious — "Oh, don't worry about that. Nobody will see."

But that wasn't the point; I was determined that the comedy would have to be founded on the logical truth of what I was doing. Donald had a genius for that, which is why he could

be gut-achingly funny and intensely moving. I  
work in his shadow.

**TOUCHING HANDS**

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September 19<sup>th</sup> 2014

Mike Poullton brought Terry Hands to see our shows this week. I had never met him before and was honoured to shake his hand. Terry had twenty five seminal years at the RSC, having been originally recruited by Peter Hall. His *Theatreground* was the founding force for The Other Place which, thank goodness, will have a new life in the form of the studio theatre in the Stratford Courtyard under Erica Whyman.

In my book, *On Bard Duty*, I credit Terry with one of the most important pieces of advice one could give to an actor — in real life people always have enough breath for what they want to say. Control of the breath is a fundamental skill for an actor. It is the source

of our energy. Breathing more efficiently and less often is the key to making clear sense and maintaining an impelling pace. Terry was asking his actors to hear how people do not pause for breath when speaking something they really need to say. Taking breaths too frequently is the simplest way to undermine the veracity of a performance because it will make it too apparent that we don't really mean what we are saying, and are not sufficiently driven to say it. Jeremy Herrin is constantly exhorting us to keep up the pace and lead the narrative — there's a big danger that our audience can slip their own thoughts into any tiny gaps we leave and fatally leap ahead of us. That's why breathing in the wrong place can totally scupper a funny line.

Our own Cis Berry is continually telling us that in order to convincingly make our argument we must head for that all important word at the end of a sentence. Peter Wood, who directed the first show I was in at the National was continually barking out his favourite mantra: "Go to the end of the line".

When we took *The Beaux Strategem* on tour to Coventry, one of our actors had digs about a twenty minute train ride away and fell asleep on the way to a matinée. He woke up in Exeter — taking Peter's advice somewhat too literally.

**NEW YORK! NEW YORK!**

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September 26<sup>th</sup> 2014

Well, it seems everyone has known for a while, but a whole raft of contracts and agreements had to be negotiated and confirmed before any official announcement could be made. And now it's official, real, tangible . . . and very exciting. I wasn't able to go to Broadway with the Almeida landmark production of *The Iceman Cometh* because there was no justification for an Englishman going there to play a South African. I wept real tears when I was told and read about their success there with some anguished disappointment, so the chance to go there now, nearly twenty years later, means a great deal.

It looks like the Big Apple will be fair crawling with Brits next year. I hear we will be playing alongside *Skylight*, *The Audience*, *King Charles III*,

and the three James plays from the National. A Britfest on Broadway. In between shows today we met three people who will be instrumental in moving us across the pond: Michael Passaro - Stage Manager, Ben Heller - Production Manager, and James Triner - General Manager. They seem as excited as we are and we will be meeting them again in February when we start rehearsals anew on some slightly adapted bespoke Broadway scripts.

Meanwhile our own crew are busy making lists ready for the shipping manifest and to ensure that once we move into the Winter Garden theatre everything will run smoothly and everyone will know what goes where and what to do when.

It was great to hear Sky, my wonderful dresser, tell me that the "bible" that the wardrobe here was sent from Amy Gillot, the RSC Costume Supervisor in Stratford, was the most helpful, detailed and thorough set of documents she had ever seen. Sky and her colleagues have been taking photographs and making notes for some days now to ensure that the wardrobe department in New York are similarly enabled.

Christopher Oram, the designer popped in today as well to discuss what might work on our larger American stage. It will be projected a little way out into the auditorium, allowing the stalls (what they call the "orchestra" or "orchestra stalls" in the US) to somewhat embrace the stage, and — hopefully — us to embrace our audience.

This is the last entry. I have enjoyed sharing