



ST. MARTIN'S PLAYERS



present

BEYOND A JOKE

a comedy by Derek Benfield
directed by Steve Morley

Fri. 25 September 2026 7:30pm

Sat. 26 September 2026 2:30pm, 7:30pm

at the Huxtable Hall, St Martin's Church,
Erith Road, Bexleyheath

PROGRAMME

£1

THE DIRECTOR WELCOMES YOU



Welcome to our 99th production – only one year late! We had hoped to present *Beyond A Joke* last September but as the performance licence had been suspended for this script, we were unable to proceed. Now our paperwork is in order, we are able to present a rather funny play: like many of Derek Benfield's works, the comedy comes from misunderstandings and characters not knowing the full story. Having taken charge of earlier productions such as *Jekyll And Hyde* and *Frankenstein* (and with *Dracula* being considered for the future), I have always preferred directing thrillers with lots of tension and visual effects, so changing to the comedy genre is a new experience for me.

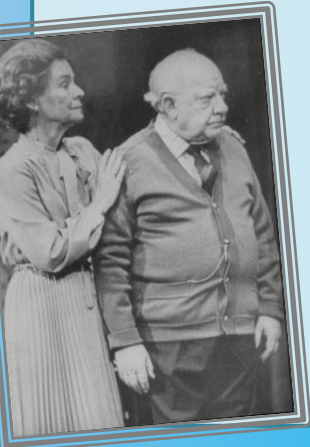
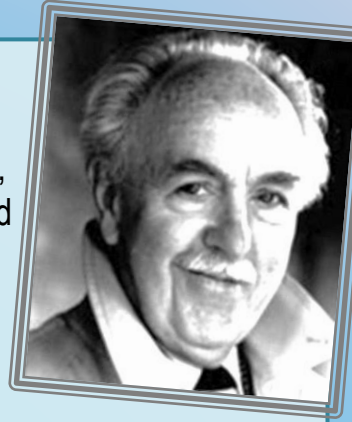
Having cast the play last year, we first had to check that everyone was still able to take part: we knew that Maxine, our original 'Jane' was not available to perform this year (though she continued to stand in for various cast members at rehearsals), but finding someone to fill the largest female role was a challenge: various members considered the role but also could not manage this year's dates, so we were extremely pleased that Christine was able to step up to a larger role, although quite some time had passed before Marion offered to take over Christine's original role as 'Audrey'.

Constructing the set would have been a challenge, however we partly built the set last year so knew what to do when we started again this year. While not as complex as when I directed the Agatha Christie trio a few years ago, we still needed to split stage with an unsupported dividing wall strong enough to take the weight of a ladder and enough room to move a wheelbarrow around. Given that our previous director has a penchant for very expensive wallpaper, I wanted to keep costs as low as possible: I have had an enjoyable summer travelling the UK in a van finding free or inexpensive second-hand items on eBay and Gumtree. By the way, if anyone reading this needs some new fence panels, a garden arch, some outdoor seating, carpet or astroturf, please get in touch!

So much hard work has gone into producing a play which provided far more challenges than we expected, so I offer my deepest gratitude to everyone who has helped, no matter how small their contribution. I hope you enjoy the show and we look forward to seeing you again at our pantomime early next year.

THE WRITER AND THE PLAY

Derek Benfield (1926-2009) is a playwright whose works have often been performed by our group, including *Post Horn Gallop* (1994), *Running Riot* (2002), *Over My Dead Body* (2010), *Panic Stations* (2012) and most recently, *Fish Out Of Water* (2024). In addition to writing over thirty comedies, Benfield was a regular face making one-off appearances in a wide range of TV shows from the fifties to the nineties: those who spend their idle moments watching repeats on U&Gold may have spotted him as a disgruntled camper at Maplin's, or as the registrar who wed Rodney and Cassandra.



Beyond A Joke was first performed in at the Shanklin Theatre on the Isle Of Wight, in July 1979 (we have made a few tiny changes to bring it up to date!) The original production starred Arthur Lowe (aka Captain Mainwaring) in the leading role of Andrew. After *Dad's Army* had ended, Lowe spent his final years performing in theatres around the UK, but only on the condition that there was a part for his wife, Joan Cooper, who played the role of Andrew's sister Sarah in the original production of this play. Lowe also had a clause in his contract stating that he would never remove his trousers when performing or have a bomb put down them – sorry for anyone who was expecting our 'Andrew' to do that!

"Jane and Andrew's pleasant country house might well be described as accident prone. Six people have already died there in unfortunate and embarrassing circumstances. But when Sally's young man, Geoff, arrives for the weekend he is unaware of the house's reputation and from conversational confusion he gets the idea that the deaths were due to something more sinister than 'accident'. When a body is discovered in a cupboard and a visiting vicar passes peacefully away in the garden, Jane and her sister-in-law, Sarah, persuade Andrew to keep up appearances when Geoff's parents arrive unexpectedly, by hiding the evidence, which entails much trundling around of bodies in wheelbarrows".

The action takes place in the lounge and garden of Andrew and Jane's house in the country.

Act One – Friday evening



There will be an interval after Act One, when refreshments will be available in the Small Hall.



Act Two – Saturday morning



There will be a second, shorter interval after Act Two, when the winning raffle numbers will be announced.



Act Three – After lunch, the same day

ST. MARTIN'S PLAYERS

BEYOND A JOKE

A QUICK NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR



Dear Guests,

This is just a quick message informing you of a last-minute change to the cast for this weekend's production:

Sadly, we learned very recently that James Riley, our leading actor, has had to pull out of the production due to personal reasons – we all wish him well. As they say, “the show must go on”, therefore I will be stepping into the role of Andrew myself for this weekend's performances.

Although I have appeared in many productions with the group over the last 30 years and know the play well, I'm sure you can appreciate that learning over 600 lines in a few days is an extremely difficult task, therefore I will be performing on stage with the script in my hand.

I do hope that this will not affect your enjoyment of the show too much, thank you for your support and hope that you enjoy the performance.

Best wishes,
Steve

THE CAST



JAMES RILEY as Andrew

Although no stranger to the stage, James is facing a new challenge in his largest role to date. He has appeared in three recent productions, featuring as the King in *Sleeping Beauty* (2025), then a police inspector in *The Diamond Necklace*. He played another King in our most recent pantomime, when Christine played his Queen: they are married once again, but now she is the kind character and he is oozing with sarcasm.

CHRISTINE BELSHAM as Jane

First appearing in *Jack And The Beanstalk* (2009), Christine has grown ever confident, taking on larger roles over the years – and had already learned the role of Audrey before stepping up to the largest female role of this production when no one else could be found. In this year's pantomime, Christine showed her evil side as the Wicked Queen, but she often shows that she can play a good character just as well.



HARRY OWEN as Geoff

Harry always seems to be cast in comedic roles where he over-reacts to the situation he is in, and this performance is no exception. Since his first appearance in *Rapunzel* (2018), he has featured regularly in our plays and pantomimes. Most recently, you would have seen Harry as one of the guardians of the Magic Mirror, then as Professor Plum.

LINDSEY CLAYTON as Sally

This is Lindsey's 20th appearance on our stage: she first appeared as Wishy-Washy in *Aladdin* (2016) and has appeared regularly in all sorts of plays and pantomimes in larger roles and in the background. Recent roles include the Sheriff's Deputy (*Who Shot The Sheriff?*), an undercover policewoman in a bikini (*Afternoon At The Seaside*) and Yvette the French maid (*Cluedo*).



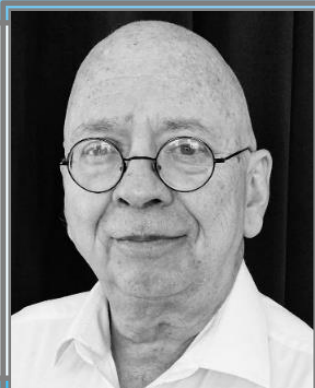


VAL COATES as Sarah

Another play, another confused old woman – a role that Val always seems to excel in (but as she is superb at learning lines, we know that she is still acting!) Most recently appearing as the snooty screaming Mrs Peacock, this is Val's 25th appearance since her debut in *Murder In Play* (2008), with so many memorable roles including Widow Twankey (2016), an Ugly Sister (2012) and Grouchy the Dwarf (sorry, Forest Guardian!) this year.

CLIVE MADEL as The TV Repair Man

A veteran of several local stages, Clive joins us for his third St Martin's production. In our radio play, *The Diamond Necklace*, he provided the voices for four very different characters, then narrated our 100th production at the start of this year. On this occasion, his voice is not required but his physical skills will be tested in his two brief appearances in this play – blink and you'll miss him!

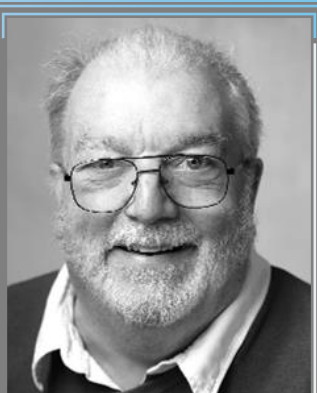


RICHARD DRUMMOND as The Vicar

This was the first play that Richard has been cast in, but this is his third appearance due to *Beyond A Joke* being postponed. Since joining us last year, he played the passing motorist smacked over the head by Colonel Mustard's spanner in *Cluedo* – he dies once again this time, but will it be another murder? So far, the only production he survived was our last pantomime, when he played the front half of Daisy The Cow.

MARION BIRAM as Audrey

Joining at the same time as Val in 2008, Marion has been noted for several roles in panto and plays, from leading ladies to the back of the chorus, and always lending a hand with the props. With appearances as Mole in *Toad Of Toad Hall* and Karen in *Crazy Capers Dodgy Deals* (for which she won an award), her versatility shines through, and we are very pleased that she was able to step into the role of Audrey just weeks ago.



DAVE BARNETT as Edgar

Dave has appeared in over seventy productions with our group and directed quite a few of the others, so it is incredibly rare that this man is not involved – even if he was only able to provide a voice recording and fix some architrave in *Cluedo*. He directed our last pantomime, and last appeared in the leading role of last year's radio play, but as our Treasurer, he always has an important role each time – counting the takings.

THE CREW

Prompt	WENDY BARNETT
Stage Manager	MARK BELSHAM
assisted by	GINO EXELL
Properties	MARION BIRAM
Wardrobe	MONICA CANE, JULIE EXELL
Make-Up	RAE CALNAN
Set Building	DAVE BARNETT, DAVID BATCHELOR, JAMES BELSHAM, MARK BELSHAM, BARRY GAVIN, STEVE MORLEY, CHRIS SUGGITT
Light & Sound	DAVID BATCHELOR, CHRIS SUGGITT
Box Office	SUE ADAMS
Front Of House	SUE ADAMS, DARYL O'SULLIVAN, RICHARD PERCIVAL, MARTIN STONE, STEWART BULL, MONICA CANE, WAYNE OSBOURNE
Refreshments	2ND BARNEHURST GUIDES
Programme	STEVE MORLEY
with Special	WENDY BARNETT
Thanks to	for providing all the lovely refreshments
	RAE CALNAN
	for facilitating online rehearsals
	MAXINE DOYLE
	for standing in for various roles at rehearsals



If you would like to take advantage of our hearing induction loop system, please adjust your hearing aid to the 'T' setting.

OUR NEXT PRODUCTION

Our Annual Pantomime

'PETER PAN'

Directed by Barry and Debra Gavin



29 – 30 January 2027

5 – 6 February 2027

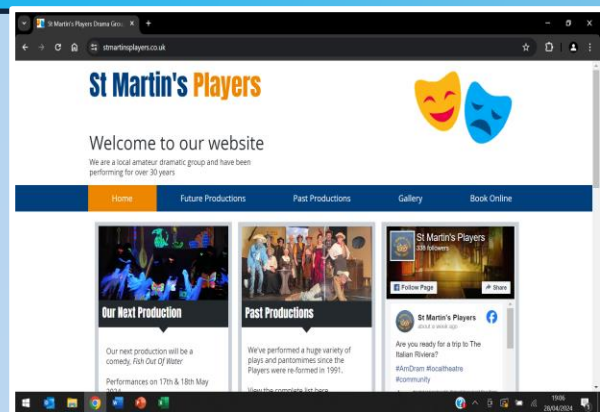
**Readings and auditions for adult roles will take place
on Wednesday 7 October and Friday 9 October,
at 8:00pm in the Small Hall.**

Childrens auditions to be announced – please check our Facebook page.

Why not visit our website...

www.stmartinsplayers.co.uk

**...to learn more about us, with our archive
of programmes and photos from past
performances; find out what's coming up
and even book your seats online.**



You can also follow us on social media:



stmartinsplayers



stmartinsplayer



st.martinsplayers

Don't forget to like us and leave a five-star review!

THE 'USUAL' SMALL PRINT... Please note that smoking is not permitted anywhere in the building. As a courtesy to those on stage and in the audience, please turn off your mobile 'phone and refrain from using flash photography. Fire exits are located at either side of the stage and at the rear of the hall; in the unlikely event of an emergency, please leave the hall by the nearest safe exit and assemble in the car park. Thank you.

PLEASE SUPPORT OUR RAFFLE



As usual, we will hold a raffle for charity at each performance. Tickets will be on sale before the performance and during the interval; the draw will take place during final act, and the winning numbers will be announced at the end of the performance.

We are pleased to support **Bexley Women's Aid** in this production – a charity we have supported on several occasions in the past.

For over 50 years, BWA have supported women and their children by providing refuge from domestic abuse.

In addition, they work with local schools and organisations to promote healthy relationships and educate others on the signs and consequences of domestic abuse.

BWA are not funded by the government or local council: donations they receive are used to ensure those in need have a comfortable place to stay, and activities their families can enjoy can be arranged occasionally.

Donations of consumable items used by women and children in the refuge are always welcome: please read on to find out how you can support St Martin's collection this year.

Bexley Women's Aid
Safe homes. Secure relationships.

www.bexleywomensaid.org.uk

Registered Charity No. 1063427



COME AND JOIN US

Did you know that over 300 people, young and old, have appeared on our stage throughout our 35-year history, plus even more behind the scenes. From the children dancing in a panto or two, to those wanting a new challenge for a few years or those who have been involved for decades, we have a great range of skills, experience and talent.

We always welcome new members (over 18s, with opportunities for young people to join our pantomime chorus): whether you want to tread the boards or help backstage, we'd love to hear from you. Just come along to one of our rehearsals (Friday evenings in the Church Hall) or contact us online – we look forward to hearing from you!

Why not start out with just a small role to see if you enjoy it? You could also try working on props or costumes, being prompt or even directing or producing. You could work alongside our experienced members, learning a new skill before trying something else for the next production.



NEWS FROM OUR COMMUNITY

Harvest Time at St Martin's

Each year, the Church support Bexley Women's Aid with donations of items much appreciated by families in their care, such as:

- Non-perishable foods
- Washing / cleaning products
- Toiletries and baby items

Please help St Martin's to collect as many items of possible to donate to BWA. You are welcome to bring items to the Harvest service on Sunday 11 October, or to any Tuesday Coffee Morning (10am-12pm), or leave them in the church or church hall kitchen before then).

Thank you in anticipation of your support.



YOUR SCOUT GROUP NEEDS YOU!

The 4th Barnehurst Scout Group has occupied the hall and field next door and been supported by the church since 1938 and has thrived for many years: thousands of young people have developed their practical and social skills, enjoyed the outdoor world and experienced new adventures and had lots of fun. However, if we are not careful, this could all come to an end very soon.

The Beaver Colony, for our younger members, closed recently as the leaders had to step away due to work commitments, so our highest priority is reopening it as this will impact on the survival of the Cub Packs and Scout Troop as time passes. While more leaders throughout the Group would be most welcome, there are some volunteers of advancing years who need someone to settle in, ready to take over when the time is right. Assistance is also needed behind the scenes, including trustees to help manage the Group and assistance in maintaining the hall and field.

All volunteers will be supported fully by the existing experienced members, and training appropriate to your role will be available once DBS checks are completed. If you are able to help, please contact 07950 650401 or seeoneecubs@hotmail.com: no matter how small your contribution, it will be most valued and appreciated (never assume that someone else will come forward – they might not!) We thank you for reading this note and look forward to hearing from you.

OUR PAST PRODUCTIONS



- 1991** Sleeping Beauty, See How They Run!
- 1992** Snow White And The Seven Large Dwarves, Virtue Triumphant
- 1993** Cinderella, Continental Quilt, Surprise Package
- 1994** Aladdin, Laugh! I Nearly Went To Miami, Post Horn Gallop
- 1995** Babes In The Wood With Robin Hood,
Keeping Down With The Joneses, Play On!
- 1996** Dick Whittington, When We Are Married,
The Roses Of Eym
- 1997** Jack And The Beanstalk, Pardon Me! Prime Minister,
Murder In Company
- 1998** Puss In Boots, Pull The Other One, Blithe Spirit
- 1999** Mother Goose, Bedroom Farce, Pride And Joy,
Last Tango In Barnehurst
- 2000** Peter Pan, See How They Run!, My Friend Miss Flint
- 2001** Treasure Island, Shock Tactics, Outside Edge
- 2002** Cinderella, The Murder Room, Running Riot
- 2003** King Arthur, Party Piece, No Time For Fig Leaves
- 2004** The Sleeping Beauty, Kindly Keep It Covered,
The End Of The Pier Show
- 2005** Bluebeard, A Murder Is Announced
- 2006** Aladdin, How The Other Half Loves, Noah's Animals
- 2007** The Three Musketeers, Murder Weekend, Out Of Focus
- 2008** Little Red Riding Hood, Murder In Play,
Toad Of Toad Hall

OUR PAST PRODUCTIONS



2009	Jack And The Beanstalk, The Day God Died, Barbecues 'R' Murder, Lady Lollipop, Jekyll And Hyde
2010	Dick Whittington, And Then There Were None, Over My Dead Body
2011	Snow White, Alice In Wonderland, Murder At The New Vicarage
2012	Cinderella, Panic Stations
2013	Robin Hood, Crazy Capers, Dodgy Deals, The Ghost Train
2014	Mother Goose, Henry The Tudor Dude, Murder Backstage
2015	Sleeping Beauty, The Wizard Of Oz, See How They Run!
2016	Aladdin, Key For Two, Hound Of The Baskervilles
2017	Beauty And The Beast, I'll Get My Man, It's Never Too Late
2018	Rapunzel, Free And Easy, Love Begins At Fifty
2019	Treasure Island, Agatha Crusty And The Murder Mystery Dinner, Frankenstein
2020	Jack And The Beanstalk
2022	Cinderella, Cash On Delivery, Who Shot The Sheriff?
2023	Puss In Boots, Move Over Mrs Markham, The Rule Of Three (Afternoon At The Seaside, The Rats, The Patient)
2024	Aladdin, Fish Out Of Water, Ten Times Table
2025	The Sleeping Beauty, The Diamond Necklace
2026	Snow White And The Seven Guardians Of The Forest, Cluedo

