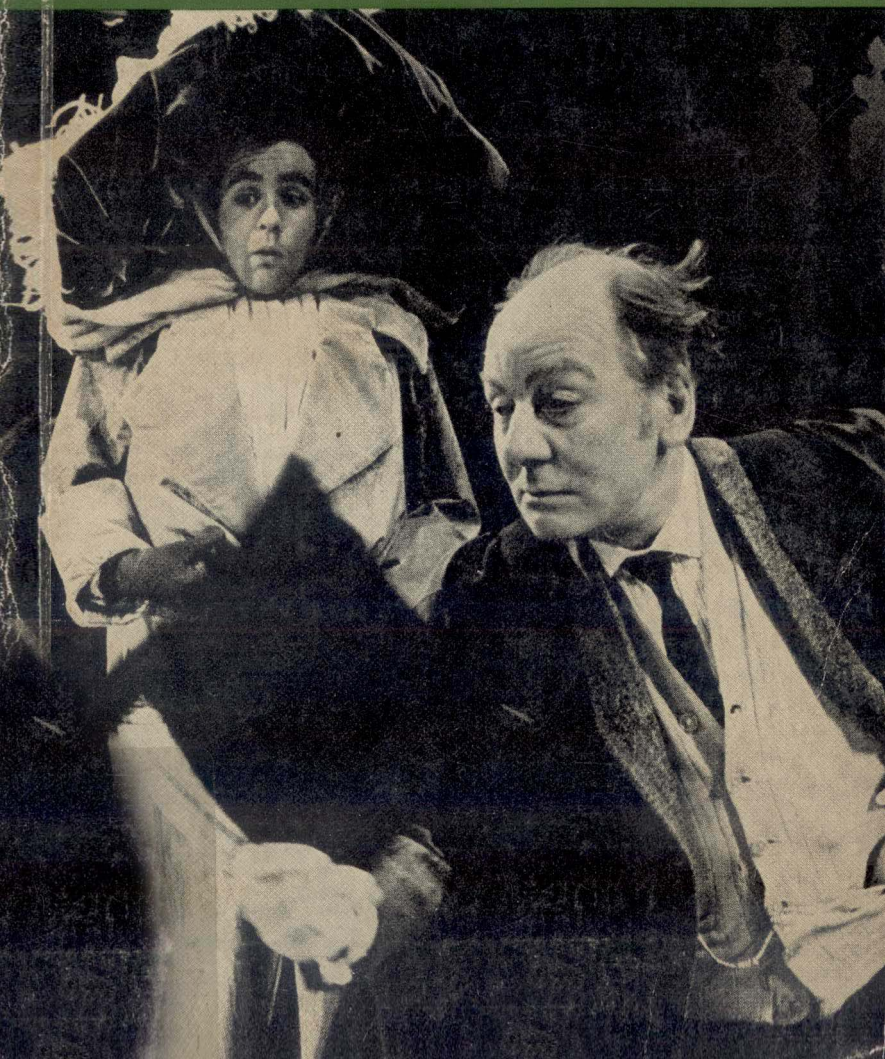


# Forty Years On

## ALAN BENNETT



**FORTY YEARS ON**



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by

ALAN BENNETT

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**TO  
MY MOTHER AND  
FATHER**



## AUTHOR'S NOTE

The text here printed differs in some small details from that first performed on the stage at the Apollo Theatre. In performance certain sections of the play were thinned down and odd lines cut in order to reduce the playing time. In the printed version these sections have been restored.

I would like to thank Collins and Co. for permission to quote from Sir Harold Nicolson's *Diaries and Letters 1930-39*, Sir Osbert Sitwell for the quotation from *Great Morning* and Mr. Leonard Woolf for the quotation from *Downhill All The Way*.





## FIRST PERFORMANCE

The first performance of *Forty Years On* was given at the Apollo Theatre, London, on 31st October 1968. It was presented by Stoll Productions Ltd and the cast was as follows:

Headmaster	JOHN GIELGUD
Franklin, a Housemaster	PAUL EDDINGTON
Tempest, a Junior Master	ALAN BENNETT
Matron	DOROTHY REYNOLDS
Miss Nisbitt, the Bursar's secretary	NORA NICHOLSON
The Lectern Reader	ROBERT SWANN
Organist	CARL DAVIS
Skinner	ANTHONY ANDREWS
Spooner (Horn)	ROGER BRAIN
Cartwright (Flute)	ANDREW BRANCH
Foster	WILLIAM BURLEIGH
Wimpenny	PHILIP CHAPPELL
Wigglesworth (Trumpet)	THOMAS COCKRELL
Tredgold (Guitar)	GEORGE FENTON
Charteris	FREDDIE FOOT
Leadbetter	PAUL GUESS
Gillings	DICKIE HARRIS
Dishforth	PETER KINLEY
Lord	ROBERT LANGLEY
Bottomley (Alto)	STEPHEN LEIGH
Salter	DENIS MCGRATH
Macilwaine	KEITH MCNALLY
Jarvis (Treble)	STEPHEN PRICE
Crabtree	COLIN REESE
Rumbold	MERLIN WARD
Moss (Violin)	NEVILLE WARE
Tupper	ALAN WARREN

The play was directed by PATRICK GARLAND and designed by JULIA TREVELYAN OMAN. Lighting was by ROBERT ORNBO. Music arranged and directed by CARL DAVIS.

## CHARACTERS

**THE HEADMASTER**

**FRANKLIN, a housemaster**

**TEMPEST, a junior master**

**MATRON**

**MISS NISBITT, the Bursar's Secretary**

**HEAD BOY and LECTERN READER**

**THE ORGANIST**

### *The Play Within the Play*

**FRANKLIN** plays **HUGH**

**MATRON** plays **MOGGIE**

**MISS NISBITT** plays **NURSIE**

**THE HEADMASTER and TEMPEST** play various parts

All other parts are played by the boys of Albion House School. These boys should be on the stage wherever possible. Even when they take no direct part in the action they should be ranged round the gallery as onlookers. Any scene shifting or stage setting should be done by them.

## ACT ONE

*The Assembly Hall of Albion House, a public school on the South Downs.*

*The Assembly Hall is a gloomy Victorian Gothic building, with later additions, a conglomeration of periods without architectural unity. It is dingy and dark and somewhat oppressive. A gallery runs round the hall, and on the gallery stage right is an organ. Staircases lead up to the gallery stage right and stage left. At the head of the staircase stage right is a lectern and below it a hymn board. To the rear of the stage is a War Memorial, with lists and lists of names which run the whole height of the set. This War Memorial consists of two sliding doors and behind these doors is a back-projection screen. Whenever a scene takes place in Albion House these doors remain closed as at the opening of the play. During the Claridge's scenes they are opened to reveal a photograph of the relevant period of the 2nd World War. During the memoirs (i.e. all scenes preceded by a reading from the lectern) the screen shows a photograph relevant to the subject of the memoir. It should be emphasized that the screen is used for decorative purposes rather than to provide information essential to the understanding of the play. I have not indicated where these doors are opened to reveal the screens or the photographs projected, except for the T. E. Lawrence Lantern Lecture and at the end of Acts One and Two.*

*When the curtain rises the stage is dark. We hear the sounds of school, a chapel bell, the sound of a cricket match and boys repeating by rote in class. An organ plays softly. A boy enters and switches on the lights.*

*Another boy enters with a hand-bell which he rings across the stage and off it, and as the sound fades away the boys of Albion*

*House School enter singing a processional hymn. They form up at the front of the stage, followed by FRANKLIN, MATRON, TEMPEST and MISS NISBITT. When they have all taken their places the HEADMASTER enters.*

HEADMASTER : Members of Albion House, past and present.

Parents and Old Boys. It does not seem so many years since I stood in this hall on November 11, 1918, to declare a half holiday on the occasion of the Armistice. That was my first term at Albion House as a schoolboy, and now I am headmaster and it is my last term. It is a sad occasion . . .

*(A jet aircraft roars overhead temporarily drowning his words, and he waits.)*

. . . it is a sad occasion, but it is a proud occasion too. I can see now some of the faces of my school-fellows on that never-to-be-forgotten November morning, many of them the sons of old boys who, proud young trees for the felling, fell in that war. And in many a quiet English village there stands today a cenotaph carved with their names, squire's son rubbing shoulders with blacksmith's boy in the magnificent equality of death. Scarce twenty summers sufficed to weather those names before England must needs take up arms in a Second World War.

*(Another aircraft passes.)*

*(FRANKLIN is visibly impatient during this speech.*

*Occasionally he blows his nose, or stares at the ceiling.)*

And now that too has passed into history. None of you boys are old enough to remember that Second War, nor even some of you masters. Yet I remember them both. I can still see myself standing at that window one summer day in 1918 and listening to the rumble of the guns in Flanders.

*(FRANKLIN blows his nose loudly.)*

I stood at that window again in June 1940 to see a lone Spitfire tackle a squadron of the Luftwaffe. Those times left their mark on Albion House. Some of the older ones among you will remember Bombardier Tiffin, our Corps Commandant and Gym Instructor, lately retired. The more observant ones among you will have noticed that one

of Bombardier Tiffin's legs was not his own. The other one, God bless him, was lost in the Great War. Some people lost other things, less tangible perhaps than legs but no less worthwhile—they lost illusions, they lost hope, they lost faith. That is why . . . chewing, Charteris. That is why the twenties and thirties were such a muddled and grubby time, for lack of all the hopes and ideals that perished on the fields of France. And don't put it in your handkerchief. Hopes and ideals which, in this school, and in schools like it all over the country we have always striven to keep alive in order to be worthy of those who died. It was Baden-Powell I think,—

(FRANKLIN *clears his throat.*)

—I think it was Baden-Powell who said that a Public Schoolboy must be acceptable at a dance, and invaluable in a shipwreck. But I don't think you'd be much use in either, Skinner, if you were playing with the hair of the boy in front. See me afterwards. A silent prayer.

(FRANKLIN *does not close his eyes during the prayer.*)

O God, look down upon our bodies which are made in Thine own image. Let us delight in our boy bodies that they may grow day by day into man bodies that our boy thoughts may become man thoughts and on that glorious day when manhood dawns upon us it may dawn upon us as on the clean dewy grass with birds singing in our hearts and innocence looking from our eyes. . . .

CARTWRIGHT: Amen.

HEADMASTER: I haven't finished. I haven't finished. As I was praying . . . so that day by day as our bodies grow more beautiful so too our soul life may grow more beautiful as the soul is the mirror of the body and the body the mirror of the soul.

ALL: Amen.

HEADMASTER: This school, this Albion House, this little huddle of buildings in a fold of the downs, home of a long line of English gentlemen, symbol of all that is most enduring in our hopes and traditions. Thirty years ago today, Tupper, the Germans marched into Poland and you're picking your

nose. See me afterwards. We aren't a rich school, we aren't a powerful school, not any more. We don't set much store by cleverness at Albion House so we don't run away with all the prizes. We used to do, of course, in the old days and we must not forget those old days, but what we must remember is that we bequeathed our traditions to other schools, and if now they lead where we follow it is because of that. My successor is well-known to you all, in the person of Mr. Franklin. . . .

(WIGGLESWORTH *cheers feebly.*)

When the Governors want your approval of their appointments, Wigglesworth, I'm sure they will ask for it. Mr. Franklin has long been my senior housemaster. Now he is promoted to pride of place. Doubtless the future will see many changes. Well, perhaps that is what the future is for. We cannot stand still, even at the best of times.

And now, as has always been the custom on this the last day of Term, staff and boys have come together to put on the Play.

Perhaps here I might say a word about Mr. Fairbrother, whose jealously guarded province the play has always been. I recall with particular pleasure that first trail-blazing production of *Dear Octopus*, and last year's brave stab at *Samson Agonistes*. We shall miss him and his Delilah of that production, Miss Glenys Budd who has contrived to delight us on innumerable occasions. Now of course she is Mrs. Fairbrother. Long may they flourish amid the fleshpots of Torquay. Ave atque vale.

O God, bless all those who leave and take their ways into the high places of the earth that the end of leaving may be the beginning of loving, as the beginning of loving is the end of life, so that at the last seekers may become finders and finders keepers for Thy Name's Sake. Amen.

Mr. Franklin has put together this term's production . . . a short fling before he is crippled with the burden of administration. He has recruited a veritable galaxy of talent. Connoisseurs of the drama, could they but spare the time from rummaging in the contents of their neighbours'

ears, Jarvis, may be interested to note that I myself am to play some part in this year's proceedings. On the distaff side no expense has been spared in procuring the services of Matron (*cheers*), Miss Nisbitt (*groans*), and of course Mr. Tempest (*wolf whistles*). Now if I could just see those boys I had occasion to admonish we will sing the school song together and the play will begin shortly. Skinner, Tupper.

ALL: Forty years on, when afar and asunder  
Parted are those who are singing today  
When you look back and forgetfully wonder  
What you were like in your work and your play.  
Then it may be that there will often come o'er you  
Glimpses of notes, like the catch of a song;  
Visions of boyhood shall float then before you,  
Echoes of dreamland shall bear them along.

*Chorus;*

Follow up, follow up,  
Follow up, follow up, follow up  
Till the field rings again and again  
With the tramp of the twenty-two men  
Follow up, follow up.

Forty years on, growing older and older  
Shorter in wind as in memory long  
Feeble of foot and rheumatic of shoulder  
What will it help you that once you were strong?  
God give us bases to guard or beleaguer,  
Games to play out whether earnest or fun;  
Fights for the fearless and goals for the eager,  
Twenty and thirty and forty years on!

Follow up, follow up *etc.*

*(Chorus as above.)*

*(The boys now set the stage for the school play. Everyone should have something definite to do, with the exception of the HEADMASTER. FRANKLIN is at the centre of the activity, organizing, interfering, setting matters to rights. The main*



*section to be set up is the chairs, etc., at stage left to represent the basement of Claridge's. This should not be a literal representation, nor a gloomy air-raid shelter. It is only specifically referred to as Claridge's basement twice during the play and should not be tied down too definitely to that, but rather be simply the setting for HUGH, MOGGIE and NURSIE during the years 1939-45. They obviously would not have been in Claridge's basement every minute of the war. The props should be simple, stylish and capable of being made by the boys themselves.*

*The boys who play instruments tune them up during this section.)*

**FRANKLIN:** I want everyone not connected with the play off the stage right away.

**HEADMASTER:** I thought it best to say much as I've always said at the end of term. Like it or not, Franklin, boys are conservative creatures. The tug of ritual, the hold of habit. They like it.

**FRANKLIN:** They love it. *(To a boy carrying something.)* You're going the right way about getting a rupture. Get under it, you silly child, get under it.

Where's Miss Nisbitt? Has anybody seen Miss Nisbitt?  
*(The HEADMASTER is wandering about, getting in everybody's way and looking a bit lost.)*

I want everyone not in the opening scene off the stage now. Headmaster, you're not in the opening scene, are you?

**HEADMASTER:** No. *(But makes no attempt to go.)*

**TEMPEST:** Skinner, Tupper. I don't want you two sitting together. No, Tupper. You stay there. That's the whole object of the exercise. And you, young man, you want to be round here.

*(TEMPEST takes CHARTERIS, who is to act as prompter, by the scruff of his neck and puts him below stairs stage right, where he remains for the duration of the play.)*

**MATRON (to FRANKLIN):** Oh Bill, I won't be a tick. I've got to minister to one of my small charges who's been sick. It's the excitement coming on top of that mince. I'll just assess the damage and be back in a jiff. All hands to the pumps!