



## **IN BASILDON**

**By David Eldridge**



## **BACKGROUND PACK**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1. About The Production**
- 2. About The Writer**
- 3. Synopsis of In Basildon**
- 4. About The Design**
- 5. Research**
- 6. Interview with the Assistant Director**
- 7. Rehearsal Diary**
- 8. Classroom Activities**
- 9. About Royal Court Education**

## 1. ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

The Royal Court Theatre presents

### **In Basildon**

By David Eldridge

*In Basildon* was first performed at The Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Downstairs, Sloane Square, London on Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> February 2012

#### Cast

Doreen	Linda Bassett
Maureen	Ruth Sheen
Barry	Lee Ross
Pam	Wendy Nottingham
Ken	Peter Wright
Jackie	Debbie Chazen
Shelley	Jade Williams
Tom	Max Bennett
Reverend David Williams	Christian Dixon
Len	Phil Cornwell
Young Shelley	Tess Fontaine, Meg Reynolds

Director	Dominic Cooke
Designer	Ian MacNeil
Costume Designer	Nicky Gillibrand
Lighting Designer	Guy Hoare
Sound Designer	Paul Arditti
Casting Director	Amy Ball
Assistant Director	Caitlin McLeod
Production Manager	Paul Handley
Stage Manager	Nafeesah Butt
Deputy Stage Manager	Ruth Murfitt
Assistant Stage Manager	Katie Hutcheson
Dialect Coach	Penny Dyer
Fight Director	Bret Yount
Costume Supervisor	Jackie Orton
Set Builders	Miraculous Engineering
Set Painter	Catherine Goodley

## 2. ABOUT THE WRITER

# David Eldridge

### Previous plays for The Royal Court:

Incomplete and Random Acts of Violence, Under the Blue Sky (& Duke of York's)

### Other Theatre includes:

Something, Someone, Somewhere, M.A.D., Serving It Up (Bush); The Knot of the Heart (Almeida); Festen (Almeida/Lyric West End/Broadway)The Stock Da'wa, Falling (Hampstead); The Lady from the Sea (Royal Exchange); A Thousand Stars Explode in the Sky (with Robert Holman & Simon Stephens, Lyric Hammersmith); Babylone (Belgrade, Coventry); John Gabriel Borkman, The Wild Duck, Summer Begins (Donmar Warehouse); Market Boy (National); A Week with Tony, Fighting for Breath (Finborough); Thanks Mum (Red Room); Dirty (Stratford East); Cabbage for Tea, Tea, Tea! (Platform 4, Exeter)

### Television includes:

Killers, Our Hidden Lives

### Radio Includes:

Michael and Me: Stratford, Ilford, Romford and all Stations to Shenfield, Festen, The Picture Man, Like Minded People, The Secret Grief.

### Awards Include:

2001 Time Out Award for Best New Play in the West End for Under the Blue Sky, 2005 Theatregoers Choice Award for Best New play for Festen, 2008 Prix Europa Best European Radio Drama for The Picture Man, 2009 Theatregoers Choice Award for Best New Play for Under the Blue Sky.

In April 2012, The Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester, will premiere his new English version of Strindberg's Miss Julie.

## Interview with Playwright David Eldridge

# The Only Way Is Essex

By Mark Lawson, Monday 6 February 2012, The Guardian

With his plays about heroin addicts and barrow boys, David Eldridge has swung the wrecking ball at class bias in theatre. But his biggest conflict is with himself.



*'I don't want to write plays for the cognoscenti' ... David Eldridge. Photograph: Martin Godwin for the Guardian*

Over the last 15 years, David Eldridge has had plays staged at the National, Royal Court, Donmar Warehouse, Bush and Hampstead theatres. It's an impressive list, and one that might lead rivals to view the 38-year-old as a darling of artistic directors – but Eldridge has experienced spectacular knockbacks.

Last year's *The Stock Da'Wa*, a response to concerns about terrorism, was staged at Hampstead because the National, Eldridge says, "hated and rejected it", as did the Royal Court. The Court had staged his *Incomplete and Random Acts of Kindness* (2005), which explores the consequences of a murder, but only after having cancelled another production when the then artistic director, Ian Rickson, and the literary manager, Graham Whybrow, heard a reading and lost confidence in the script.

Theatrical gossip has suggested that the absence of another Eldridge play in the Royal Court schedules until now (outgoing artistic director Dominic Cooke will direct his new play, *In Basildon*) resulted from that on-off production, with a reconciliation possible only under a new artistic regime. The playwright, who considers each question with the fixed-eyed concentration of a tennis player receiving serve and a thoughtful pause before replying, says this rumour is untrue: "I was annoyed with the Court at the time. But I never fell out with

them. Ian Rickson's a great mate of mine. I was a bit peed off at first, but you just have to be sanguine about these things. The world is full of rejection for writers. They put the play on eventually." The staged text was scarcely changed from the one that had caused cold feet, and Eldridge insists there was no falling out. "I was asked to write another play for the Court but I was working on *Market Boy* for the National."

Eldridge has travelled from Lancashire, where he now lives, to rehearsals in south London, though he and his latest play – which turns on tensions between three generations of a working-class family over two decades – strongly retain the accent of Romford in Essex, where he grew up; these are his roots. Several times he says: "I don't want to write plays for the cognoscenti."

Eldridge expands on this in the preface to *Plays 2*, an anthology of his recent work published this week. (Edward Bond was an early literary hero, and the playwrights share a fondness for combative book introductions.) Eldridge's new collection includes *Market Boy*, a panorama of the Thatcher era set around Romford market in the 80s, which Nicholas Hytner commissioned and directed for the National's Olivier stage (its largest) in 2006. In his introduction, the playwright explains that he wanted to write "an anti-National theatre play ... to swing a wrecking ball into the pre-existing and complacent notions of what made an Olivier play or a state-of-the-nation play at that time." He set out to write the opposite of that sort of drama, "most likely written by David Hare", with its "soothing Guardian editorial-style moral message to the liberal theatregoing cognoscenti".

Did he admit this mission to Hytner? "Yes, I pretty much did tell him." And did he admit that it was an anti-David Hare play? "Oh, no, no. It wasn't. I was just giving him as an example of the state-of-nation plays that had gone before. I have no problem with David at all." Yet, despite this diplomatic gloss, there seems to me a clear and fierce argument, in his comments about Hare and elsewhere, with the class bias of English theatre.

"Yes," Eldridge accepts. "I do have an argument with that. It was really, really important to me to hear people speaking like me on the Olivier stage. If you're saying a theatre is a national theatre, you need to make it as national as you possibly can. The point about *Market Boy* – and, to an extent, *In Basildon* as well – is that these kind of people had always been under-represented on the stage." He was pleased when research revealed that 30% of *Market Boy*'s audience were NT first-timers and, from the postcodes given by online bookers, that "there were a large number from Basildon".

Rather more than a third of Eldridge's own literary sensibility comes from Romford. *In Basildon* takes Chekhovian elements – the sale of a house, the consequences of a will, an aspiring playwright in the family – and replants them amid the soil and voices of Essex. The West Ham anthem *I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles* is sung at a crucial point; the 1992 Tory victory in Basildon, which signalled John Major's unexpected election victory, is also significant. Property, and the possibilities of social mobility it brings, is the binding theme.

"On the one hand, I'm the only Guardian reader in the family," Eldridge explains. "And I can often feel ambivalent about the politics and part of the world I come from. But, on the other hand, it's where I come from, and I love those people and I want to protect and celebrate them, too. Because of my education and my work in the theatre, there's always going to be that contradiction in my life. But I think it's great for a play to come from an unresolved question. In one way, the play is asking: why am I still so knotted up about this after all these years?"

The class radar that pings and blips through Eldridge's writing is complicated by the fact that he was technically a public schoolboy. With the help of a scholarship, he attended the 500-year-old Brentwood School in Essex, where, as he notes, he followed "Jack Straw, Noel Edmonds and Frank Lampard". Was class an issue there? "It was for me. I felt I stuck out. I realised recently that I've always disliked cricket because, although I got my school uniform for free, my mum and dad had to pay for sports kit. And that wasn't too bad in the winter terms: Michaelmas and Lent. But, in the summer, cricket takes so much kit. Even at the age of 12, I could feel the arguments about money on my back. And I've never been able to shake off my hatred of the game."

At Brentwood, he took GCSE Drama "because, frankly, I thought it would be a bit of a doss", but was enthused by a sixth-form trip to John Wood's King Lear at the Barbican. "To be honest, I was dreading it, thinking: fucking Shakespeare. And we'd read it was an uncut production, so, four hours. But just before the lights went down, a bloke whispered to me, 'Someone gets his eyes pulled out in this.' I surfaced later and couldn't believe what I'd seen. There's a thing in John Osborne about wanting to give the audience a 'lesson in feeling'. I had a lesson in feeling that night, and that's what I suppose I really aspire to: that really big emotional experience."

Eldridge believes – and most critics would agree – that he fulfilled that ambition last year, with *The Knot of the Heart*, in which Lisa Dillon played a middle-class heroin addict whose mother, desperate not to lose her, pays for and sources the drug. (The play won the Offie, or Off West End Theatre award, for best play last Sunday.) A graphic drug-taking scene left some theatre-goers reeling. "Every other night, for the whole run, someone fainted – and they didn't even see her inject."

Eldridge had begun to stand out from the crowd of younger dramatists with *Under the Blue Sky* (2005), which, unusually for a play of such recent vintage, has already been revived, including a 2008 West End run starring Catherine Tate. It established what has become his signature style of gripping story told through daring form: each of the three acts is set in a different location and year, and features two separate characters who are all teachers but apparently unconnected. Even this play, though, was part of Eldridge's impressive record of rejections. "Mike Bradwell, at the Bush, absolutely hated it. I put it in a drawer, didn't do anything to it. Nine months later, the Royal Court read it and accepted it."

Beyond Essex, the other key location in Eldridge's career so far has been Scandinavia: he has adapted Ibsen's plays *The Wild Duck*, *John Gabriel Borkman* and *The Lady and the Sea*; this spring, the Royal Exchange theatre in Manchester will stage his reworking of Strindberg's *Miss Julie*. Just as *The Knot of the Heart* was written specifically for Lisa Dillon, his *Miss Julie* has been inspired by the actor playing the Swedish hot-blood, Maxine Peake. "We knew Maxine was doing it; that was a great help, thinking of Maxine's sensuality: she's got a great neck, great shoulders. And, once I was able to think of *Miss Julie* in that way, I kind of was off."

Tom Stoppard recently commented that he "doesn't have a Twitter machine". Eldridge has; he recently using it to reveal the birth of his first child, Bertie. Would he use it to engage with theatre-goers about a play? "No. It's a part of modern discourse. I've had arguments on Twitter and blogs about other people's work, or the culture in general. But I think you're on a hiding to nothing getting involved in a fight on Twitter with some random stranger who hasn't liked your play. So I'd avoid it."

The playwright's biggest arguments are with himself – class, the past, the place from which he comes. In Basildon should leave theatre-goers hoping, in the nicest possible way, that David Eldridge never fully resolves them.

### 3. SYNOPSIS OF *IN BASILDON*

#### ACT 1

Len has prostate cancer and is on his death bed. Len's sister Doreen, nephew Barry and best friend Ken have been gathered around his bed for three days. Maureen, Len's younger sister, enters the house, having only been told of Len's imminent end that day. There is clear tension between the two sisters who refuse to talk directly to one another. Ken jokes around, trying to keep the mood light by telling funny stories and memories about Len. Barry is half annoyed and frustrated by Ken whilst also enjoying his banter and often gets riled up by Ken's teasing. Ken reveals that Len had asked, in his End of Life Plan, that he didn't want the family arguing at the end of his life and that he wants them to sing over him when he dies. "Pam next door" pops and out in with offers of tea and brandy. Len's state degenerates and the family gather as he passes away. They are all devastated though the sisters refuse to hold hands whilst they sing Len's favourite football anthem "Bubbles" over his body as a goodbye. Doreen and Maureen lay out the body after death. We discover that there is contention about who Len has left the house to. Doreen claims Len made a new will five years ago and has left the house to Barry. Maureen refuses to believe her.

#### ACT 2

Barry and Jackie are eating sandwiches in the house. Jackie badgers Barry about the fact that, although they are trying for a baby, they have not had sex for days and the window, in which she could get pregnant this month, is quickly closing. Barry is irritated by her half-hearted attempts to seduce him and he refuses to engage with her on the subject. Jackie is upset and they argue. We hear that the couple also believe they will soon be living in this house and that Jackie has plans for their new life there. Jackie mentions some 'letters from customs' that Barry has been ignoring. Barry promises that Ken's accountant is sorting them. Ken and Pam enter expecting the Reverend David Williams to be there. Barry explains that he is upstairs with Doreen and Len's body. Pam explains her reason for being in the house – Doreen has asked her to do the spread for the wake. Barry suspects that Pam and Len might have been having an affair. Shelly, Barry's cousin, and her boyfriend Tom enter. They are 'a pretty cool looking couple', teachers, living in London. Embarrassment and awkwardness ensues as Tom is introduced to the family, half-jokingly threatened by Barry, and exposed as a public-school educated, budding playwright. The Reverend and Doreen enter and the family all try to influence what information goes into the service and eulogy about Len. Ken keeps piping up with "what Len wanted and didn't want" and it is revealed that Len has given him written instructions for how he wanted the funeral and the wake. Doreen discovers that Len has also asked Ken to read 'a letter about his will'. We discover that Lenny changed his will 12 months ago and Ken is to collect a letter on the day of the funeral to read to the family.

### ACT 3

Tom and Pam have not attended the funeral and they wait with the spread for the family to arrive. Tom, slightly tipsy from drinking wine all morning, explains to Pam that he wants to write theatre for, and about, working class people who he believes need to be given a voice. Pam reveals that she and Len had been having an affair for years. The family arrive back home. Ken intimates to Maureen that he'd like to take her out sometime. Doreen enters and is scathing about her sister "slagging around". It becomes clear that Ken liked Doreen for years but Doreen only "turned her nose up". Doreen confesses that she's always loved Ken but was too afraid to admit it. He is unconvinced and refuses her. Barry appeals to Shelly that, come what may with Len's will, they will not fall out over money. The family reassemble and eat from the spread. The tension is thick whilst they wait for Ken to reveal the contents of the new will. An argument builds between Tom and the family over their conservative politics and the emphasis on money. Tom ends up insulting the family. Ken reads Len's will to reveal that the house is to be sold, Shelly and Barry will each have £25,000, Ken will have £10,000 and Pam will have £5000. Everyone realises that Len and Pam must have been having an affair. The remainder of the money is to be divided between two cancer charities. Doreen is distraught, this has been her home for almost 30 years. Fights follow between Doreen and Pam over the affair and between Jackie and Barry over Barry's tax avoidance. Ken has had enough and leaves. Shelly insists that she doesn't want her money and instead, she wants Barry to take it. He refuses and the situation escalates with Jackie telling Shelly exactly what she thinks of her. Shelly attacks Jackie and in the struggle, Barry accidentally hits Shelly and knocks her unconscious. Maureen says that Barry is going to go to prison.

### ACT 4

We are now in 1992 and Len is playing hide-and-seek with his niece Shelly who is 7. Maureen has and Len wait for Doreen to bring fish and chips. Maureen tells Len she has something to discuss with them. Maureen and Len talk about Ken pursuing Doreen (who is not interested in his affections), Barry (who has yet to find a job, only sat three GCSE's and is taking drugs) and how Len has to pick up the tab for them living full-time with him. Len deflects Maureen's concern that he is on his own and only confined to this life. Doreen arrives with the dinner and the three eat. Maureen reveals that her husband Martin has recently lost his job and that's why she hasn't visited for months. Although they used to be very well off, they have no money left and are forced to sell their house and possessions. She appeals to her siblings to make good on Len's promise, after their mother left him the house, that they would sell it and split it three ways if any of them needed the money. Len and Doreen initially agree. In the relief over finding a solution to Maureen's troubles, Len reveals that he has also been thinking of taking a job in Belgium because Fords have a new plant opening there. He expresses his wish to travel, especially somewhere like New York. Doreen is distraught at the idea of him leaving. She asks him not to leave her. Maureen asks again if they will sell the

house, Doreen snaps at her that she “had everything she wanted, and more”. Maureen's final line is to Doreen; “I'll wait to hear from you and Lenny then?” and the play ends.

#### 4. THE SET DESIGN

For the set design of *In Basildon*, the main auditorium of the Royal Court has been completely transformed. The stage has been altered from its usual proscenium arch set-up and changed into a theatre-in-the-round. This was achieved by taking out the seats in the stalls and placing the stage in the middle of the auditorium itself. Now the seats surround the stage, but not only on one level but two! In addition to the seating at ground level, a new balcony was built opposite the existing one on the other side of the stage. This encircling device encourages the audience members to peer into the play's action and examine the characters' lives as though under a microscope.



#### ***Beyond the Fourth Wall***

It is interesting to note that the design for *In Basildon* moves beyond the tradition of the Fourth Wall, even though the structure of the play follows quite a traditional format. David Eldridge, having been inspired by playwrights such as Ibsen and Chekhov, uses the well-made play's convention of telling the story of 'In Basildon' in four acts, for example. His realistic tone and exploration of ideas such as inheritance and family legacy also reflect these

great writers' plays. When originally staged, the sets for plays like *The Cherry Orchard* and *The Wild Duck* honoured the notion of the fourth wall, the idea that an imaginary barrier existed between the audience and the stage, making up the fourth wall of a proscenium box set. From the audience's point of view, it was as though the wall had suddenly become transparent and they were looking into the characters' living rooms. In contrast, this production breaks away from the idea of a strict division between audience and stage. Instead, it presents a realistic set of the characters' home but in an arena setting.



#### DESIGN ACTIVITY

If you were designing 'In Basildon', would you opt for a traditional proscenium arch box set or would you re-configure the space in the round?

Given the play's conventional structure, why might the director and designer of *In Basildon* have wanted to break away from a traditional set?

What effect would you like your design for the play to have on the audience?

How would you design the set if the play were to be presented in a small black box studio space rather than a large auditorium?

## 5. RESEARCH

The location of *In Basildon* is absolutely central to the play's action. To begin to inhabit the world of the characters, the actors needed understand the many references to the town of Basildon and gain a sense of the area. What better way than to take a road trip? In the first week of rehearsals, the cast and creative team all visited Basildon together, stopping at places like the Festival Leisure Centre and Tesco's, which are talked about in the play. The Assistant Director also created a Basildon information pack for the cast. This gave the actors useful background material for developing their characters. Here are some excerpts from that pack:

### ABOUT BASILDON



The first historical reference to Basildon is in records from 1086. It is mentioned in the Domesday Book as 'Belesduna.' The name 'Basildon' is derived from the Anglo-Saxon personal name 'Boerthal' and the Anglo-Saxon word 'dun', meaning hill. The name had various forms over the centuries, including Berdlesdon, Batlesdon and Belesduna.

- ❖ Railway service started in the nineteenth century to Pitsea (1856) and Laindon (1888) but it was only later that service were to the New Town of Basildon, shelved for many years because of concerns that it would simply become a commuter suburb of London.
- ❖ Designated as a 'New Town' after World War II to accommodate the London population overspill into four small villages, namely Pitsea, Laindon, Basildon and Vange (the new town took the name Basildon as it was the most central of the four villages).

- ❖ By the beginning of the 1900s, Basildon had evolved. Much of the land was sold in small plots during a period of land speculation and development taking place haphazardly with building by plot-owners ranging from shelters created from recycled materials to brick-built homes. Amenities such as water, gas, electricity and hard-surfaced roads were lacking.
- ❖ In March 2010 Basildon erected their own version of the famous Hollywood sign; one-tenth the height of the original. This was part of a rejuvenation plan "to bring the town into the 21st Century and to attract more visitors". Many citizens have raised questions about the effectiveness of the spending when the town is affected by many more urgent social problems.



- ❖ The constituency of Basildon was considered a barometer of public opinion in general elections. The results of the constituency elections have been the same as the overall result of general elections since 1974. Basildon was said to epitomize the working class conversion to Thatcherism during the 1980s. "Basildon Man" or "Essex Man" was coined to describe an aspirational working class Conservative voter. The current MP is Tory politician John Baron.
- ❖ Basildon has been heavily influenced by London and its people in contrast to Native Essexmen. Thus many of the families in Basildon originate from the London areas, hence being more influenced by the City culture. However, during the past few years (2000-2010) many migrant families have moved from London boroughs such as Hackney and Peckham, and settled in Basildon, thus adding to Basildon's growing rate in multi-cultural families and communities. These Communities (only major

Communities) range from Polish, Albanian, Romanian, Nigerian, Ghanaian, Jamaican, Indian, Bengali, and more. It is because of these factors that the citizens and people of Basildon speak with a more London influenced accent in opposed to an Essex accent found in other Essex Towns.

- ❖ The Festival Leisure Park, includes several restaurants, a bowling and arcade centre, two hotels, a Sixteen screen cinema and two health clubs as well as the third largest nightclub complex in the UK. The Festival Leisure Park is colloquially known as "Bas Vegas", and is a well known trouble spot, especially on Friday and Saturday nights. This name which was adopted by the organization in charge of the new casino development, who used the slogan on signs welcoming people into Basildon by road.



### **Oxford, Edinburgh, York ... and Basildon? New town paves way for heritage trail: An article from The Guardian, 2008**

Brooke House in Basildon was given Grade 11 listed building status by English Heritage.

It may not be everyone's idea of a day out. To the many, varied heritage trails that snake around some of the UK's most historic and beautiful cities, another is to be added this year, with lottery funding.

But even people living in Basildon were struggling to find reasons to feel proud of their 1960s new town, which will soon have £100,000 worth of signposts, maps and information panels to help visitors navigate around an area that usually troubles the national consciousness only when politicians woo its voters.

"The nicest thing I can say about it is, it's shit," said Terry Watts, a 20-year-old fork lift truck driver, perching on railings on the edge of Town Square. His friend, Rikki Scott, a barman, agreed. "It's just grotty, isn't it? It's not a pretty place. The clubs are alright, but apart from that there's nothing to do." A hundred yards away, in his little cabin on the edge of the market, shoemaker John Hickson shook his head. "I don't think Basildon has any history really - it's too new. It's not a very nice place."

The cynicism of some locals has not deterred Vin Harrop, the leader of the project, who is pacing the 10-kilometre trail around the town and into the surrounding countryside, making the final decisions on what to include from a mass of local history research covering every pebble and furrow back to prehistoric times.

"If you stand with your back to Toys'R'Us and look back along that straight line of shops towards the Town Square and Brooke House, that to me is the classic view of Basildon," said Harrop, a retired theatre director. "I think it's a magnificent sight. That's Basildon, that's '60s architecture. There's a view of Basildon as people running around in Ford Escorts and women in high heels - it's not that at all."

The high point, literally, of Harrop's tour is Brooke House, a Grade II listed 14 storey tower of flats, designed in 1962 by Sir Basil Spence, architect of Coventry cathedral. The artist Gerald Scarfe described it as "a triumph of design", adding "dignity and grace" to the town centre.



Sitting in its shade, Sam Greenwood and Charlotte Lacy couldn't see it. Lacy was able to confirm one piece of

local folklore: that the tower sways in every wind, as she used to live there. "It was quite scary actually - you could see the light bulbs swinging. The flat was lovely when you were inside, big windows, but it was an awful place, really dingy and dirty, all drug addicts and that. The lifts were never working, and people were always setting off the fire alarms."

"And then that woman was killed in the flat near you, wasn't she?" her friend prompted. "And then when you moved another woman was killed just near where you're living now!"

Harrop is sad, but not surprised at the town's reaction to his efforts. When he got schoolchildren involved, sending them out with cheap cameras to photograph local landmarks, they were baffled: what was there to photograph?

Harrop got them to look up, and to their surprise they saw mosaics and tile decoration, sculptures on the sides of buildings, fountains and clocks that had survived later town planners. The steel and glass belfry was only built for the millennium, beside the 1960s church, but it holds bells dating back to the middle ages, including one dated 1441 which is the first recorded bell cast by a woman, Joanne Hill.

An exhibition of the childrens' photographs in the town library was a big success. "That's what I want people to do," Harrop said, "not just to drive into a car park and head for the shops; to get out and walk; to look at what they've got."

The research the trail is based on includes oral accounts of the lost farms, the "Plotlands" like Russian dachas where Londoners grew vegetables and camped out in wooden huts, the white boarded house surrounded by apple trees which once stood where Marks & Spencer now looms, and the medieval moated manor house under the ring road.

Even the bored young women agree with Harrop that Gloucester Park (pictured), threaded with streams, fishing ponds and boating lakes, is the town's glory - though the real reason for the rolling acres' survival is that the land was too soggy to build on.

Martin Curtis, son of an East End tailor who moved his family to the fresh air and space of Essex 30 years ago, loves it. He works shifts as a chemical engineer, which leaves him days to play with his £600 kite in the park: "Now I've got kiddies I don't go clubbing in Las Vegas any longer."



"I've got relatives in London who've never seen a fox. I only have to walk out my front door and there's six playing in the garden. It's good where I live, very quiet and private. We've got two drug dealers nearby, but one of them is what I'd call an old fashioned sort of dealer, keeps himself to himself, no trouble at

#### RESEARCH ACTIVITY

In a group of four, ask each person to choose one of the following characters from 'In Basildon': Ken, Doreen, Barry or Shelley. After reading through the research material above, have each underline any information s/he feels is particularly important for his/her character. Then ask them to discuss together their different choices. Following on from that, they can make a list of research questions they still have for their character and possible ways they might go about discovering the information they need.

all.

### 6. Interview with Assistant Director Caitlin McLeod

#### **When you began working on the play, what were the most important ideas the company explored?**

I think one of the main ones that goes through the whole play is inheritance, and what you inherit, both physically and economically, when someone passes away, or even when they are still here, what you give to each other and what is taken from each other; and how that effects us generation to generation. Inheritance was a main one. Power and territory as well, just because of the two sisters who are arguing about who possess what, both physically, the space of the house but also who was looking after Len, who was around for him... so territory was another big one. **So was Len considered territory?** Yes absolutely, especially with him dying, Doreen took an active role, she was there all the time, but also in her timeline we imagined, she had looked after her parents when they died, she was used to looking after people, and up until this point she had been with Len, through his decline and all the cancer treatment, whereas with Maureen this is the first time she's seen him in 20 years. So, she comes in and immediately tries to possess him but Doreen feels like, 'no, it's too late'.

#### **That moment she comes in, did you work on that as a moment of reconciliation or did you use that as a jumping-off point for the rest of the play?**

There is a moment for reconciliation or attempted reconciliation, when Maureen first comes in and is upset after seeing her brother. Doreen approaches her more in an entreating way, something could possibly happen in this moment of vulnerability, but then Maureen shuts it down by speaking to

Barry. Then when he dies; we talked a lot about death and its effect on a family, and how that can ease strains. Even Doreen speaks to Maureen and says 'let's not, not now'. The death forms a sort of truce between them for a while. And they have to be practical, they have to speak to each other and get on with it. But it never fully reconciles, because they always have the issue of 'you weren't here enough, so why should you have the house' etc. but it was a truce for a while. But the feud never completely heals.

**Could you tell us a bit about the research that you and the company did for the play?**

I looked a lot at Basildon, lots of pictures of the area, and accounts from people who live there as well and collated that all for the actors. And we all went to Basildon for a day, so we could all get a feel for it and see just what it was like, what the characters could look like. That was a really useful exercise, we could really get a feel for the world that we were working with, by going there and experiencing it; coming back and starting rehearsals from there was great. **Did the designers go with you?** Yes the costume designer did and then both the set and costume designers went back a few times. **Did it have quite an influence on the design?** Yes I think so, inside the house and the costume definitely was influenced by who we met and saw down in Basildon.

**Can you tell me a bit about the design, especially about the decision to have it staged in the round? It's quite unusual for the Theatre Downstairs to not be proscenium arch; can you tell me how that decision came about?**

It was a decision right from the start actually. If we were going to be looking at this culture that we don't always see on the stage, we didn't want to have the division between the audience and the actors that a proscenium arch gives. That would have left the audience just observing this different life and different family. In the round let's us feel either that we were part of the action and in the room with or that we were not too far detached, so we could still engage with what was happening on some level, so we are aware that it's not just this specific family that were are watching from afar but we are looking at own lives too.

**In rehearsals, did you discuss what the play was exploring politically?**

We had someone in to talk about Thatcher and that was really useful, and we discussed with the cast their experiences of Thatcher and what they felt about her etc. And we looked at the characters and how their politics work. You have Len who is actually enabling Barry to have this carefree life and not have to work yet he still subscribes to these Tory principles. Maureen who has made quite a lot of money in her life but still says things about the council house. So you have these differences between what the characters say their politics are and what they actually do. And then you have Tom. **So did you talk about his liberal view and how that affects the play?** Not that much actually, we likened it to this almost alien concept that didn't really fit with the

other characters views. In fact, a lot of what Tom says is almost empty rhetoric, in keeping with his character. We decided to just play that out and see how it unfolded, to see how the other members of the family react to him.

**David Eldridge has said the play was influenced by Chekov and Ibsen, how do you think the play reflects those writers, or what those writers were doing with their own plays?**

I think in all those plays there is an underlying desire for something different and also there is a tragedy to the plays, either the characters can't connect or they can't get the dream they are searching for. They have a desire to get out, and the tragedy is that they can't. There are connections between those playwrights and this play. For example, you have Ken and Doreen, he confesses his love for her and she goes, 'I know I've always loved you,' and he says, 'no I don't believe you'. The sad thing is if he did trust it I think it could work and they could have a nice relationship into their older years. But either pride or their past or circumstances mean that they don't get to try it out. **It is also similar in structure being a four act play, which is quite unusual today.** Yes, and it is very epic, something large happens in every act, you have this overwhelming emotion, be it the reveal of the new will or you see the cracks in the relationships.

**It's interesting that the first three acts go along in a chronological order then we jump back in time in the fourth act. Why do you think David chose to do that at the end of the play?**

I mean it's incredible to see the two sisters have this big rift and not know why. I know when I was reading it for the first time, I started thinking 'oh I wonder if this has happened between them' and wondering what had gone on, and it comes up a little throughout, but then in the fourth act, you finally see what happened, or at least when the rift started. I know David started out with the idea, he wanted this act at the end. It leaves us wondering but it's also a choice about the characters, this changes the position of the characters and leaving that at the end makes it clearer.

**Whose story do you think is driving *In Basildon*?**

I think it's Len's story. But, it's interesting, I've spoken to people and they all have different views. Some say it's the relationship between the sisters, others say it's Shelly and Barry's story. I think it's their story in so much as the responsibility and the inheritance and what goes on after the play is between them. But it's Doreen's story because she is the driving force and everything revolves around her. She's like the queen and the others the courtiers and we wait and see who will be dismissed. Overall it's Len's story, although he's not physically present, his presence is felt throughout the whole thing, especially with the trust of the inheritance going to those that it does. It shows Len saying 'yes I know you and I will trust you with this money'. And it's quite manipulative what he does with the wills and the money, he changes that so often. We also see at the end that he could have gone to New York and set up a new life and started a family but he was crippled by his own fears and

insecurities, or his love, which is a hard thing not to be crippled by, and his sisters and his relationship with them. So I think, overall, it is definitely Len's story.

### **What would you hope the audience might take away with them?**

For me, the important part of the play is the question about economics, what does it mean to own property and to have money? And the play raises those questions about what is important in life and who do we give that to after we have gone. If you waste it, what are the repercussions of that? An appreciation of the very different way of life that I personally have never experienced, the ethics that are different to my own and really stand out in the play. David said from the beginning this isn't a 'look at these people' kind of play but an appreciation or an understanding, even if not an agreement, with what they do. And it's a look back at the Thatcher era and how those politics have prevailed.



## **7. Assistant Director's Rehearsal Diary**

This section of my rehearsal diary is taken from the first week of rehearsal. As a company, we read through the script with a fine-toothed comb and made sure that all events, details and information about the characters and their lives were noted. To discover the context and situation for each scene, the director Dominic Cooke encouraged the company to ask questions about the

characters and their surroundings. (i.e where a character has been before they enter the scene) We then noted down any information to support an answer from the text itself or the actors created their own back stories. We titled each 'scene' which was usually marked by a character entering or exiting. Here are examples of the notes and questions we made for the beginning of Act One.

Line additions:

(p103)

Maureen: "Your Uncle Len always said you'd end up in prison, and that's exactly where you're going."

(p130)

Doreen: "She had everything she wanted Len, and more."

Maureen: "Let's not fall out over money Dor."

Scene A "DOREEN, BARRY AND KEN WAIT"

What day of the week is it?

- Shelly not there so it must be during the week.
- Lenny last spoke on Sunday, been in coma for a few days
- WEDNESDAY

What time of day is it? (\*NOTE to self: research the WAGES of each character. Who is earning the most and who is earning the least. TESCO's, ASDA's, plumber, teacher, care worker)

- Maureen comes after work?
- Early evening
- 5pm

Where is the Palliative Care Nurse? (\*NOTE to self: call Debbie and Sharon from Palliative Care home in Basildon to change time of their meeting on Thursday) with the cast to 4.30pm

How long has Ken been there?

- Has he been sleeping in the room?
- Barry "For three days you've been in that chair..."

How long has Len been at home?

- 2 WEEKS

When was the will changed?

What was Len's attitude to Jackie?

- Did he approve of the marriage?
- Did he feel like Shelly did towards Jackie?
-

(\*NOTE to self: add to TIMELINE about Barry and Jackie's relationship --- 7 years together, married for 5 years, trying for a baby for 3)

Who let's Maureen into the house?

- Barry called her to tell her Len was near the end
- The door is on the latch as people keep coming in and out

Scene B "MAUREEN TRIES TO POSSESS LEN"

When did Maureen and Len last see each other?

- Shelly's graduation, they didn't speak the whole time

How did the feud first begin?

- Letters? Communication after the final scene.

FORMALITY ---- BATTLES (what is appropriate, rules, pride) Emphasis on who should be there as Len is dying. Only family allowed? Is Ken part of the family? Sometimes... How does Maureen feel about Pam and Ken? Barry and Doreen also rely on Ken for support.

TOM: An exotic bird entering the pigeon coup!!!

-Caitlin McLeod  
Assistant Director

#### DIRECTING ACTIVITY

In pairs, read the stage directions below from Act One, describing Maureen and Doreen's act of laying out their brother who has just died. Discuss your ideas for how you would stage this section. What would you like the audience to understand about the sisters' relationship at this point? How could the blocking help bring your idea across and how would you ask the actors to use the action to convey their feelings towards each other and their brother?

**The sisters begin by pulling away the sheet, duvet and blanket from Len's body. Maureen is slightly aghast as Doreen removes Len's urinary convene from his penis in a swift movement and puts it in to a bowl by the bed. They arrange Len's pajamas and then lay out his body flat and straight. The sisters work well together folding the under sheet underneath Len's arms and turning it over crisply.**

## 8. CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Here are some exercises from *In Basildon* rehearsals that you can try in the classroom. They explore the play's key ideas of feuds, alliances, and values within families.

### I. Warm-up

#### **Friend or Foe**

Ask everyone in the group to find their own space in the room and then begin walking, ensuring that no area of the room is ever left empty. While they are walking, ask them to secretly choose one other person in the group as their 'friend'. They must then try to walk as near to that person as possible without revealing their selection. After a few minutes, ask everyone to continue walking as close as possible to their 'friend' but, at the same time, they silently choose a second person to be their 'foe'. They must then try to walk as far away from their 'foe' as they can while simultaneously staying as close as possible to their 'friend'. Try varying the exercise by asking the whole group to speed up, slow down, or freeze their positions. Discuss any discoveries they made while doing the warm-up.

### II. Exercise

#### **Sliding Scale**

Ahead of the exercise, number ten sheets of A4 from 1 to 10. Lay the sheets in numeric order on the floor across the length of the room to create a giant scale. Explain that, for this exercise, you will be making some statements and they will need to decide to what extent they personally agree or disagree with each idea on a scale of 1 to 10. Ten means strongly agree and one means strongly disagree. To show their decision, they need to physically move along to the number position on the scale that best represents the strength their own feelings.

Statements:

FAMILY COMES BEFORE FRIENDS.

EVERYONE SHOULD THEIR OWN HOME.

YOU CAN'T GET ANYWHERE IN LIFE WITHOUT A GOOD EDUCATION.

IT'S A CHILD'S RESPONSIBILITY TO LOOK AFTER THEIR PARENTS IN THEIR OLD AGE.

MONEY IS EVERYTHING.

MONEY IS THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL.

Once they have decided for themselves, ask each group member to select a character from *In Basildon*. They then repeat the exercise, imagining where their characters would place themselves along the scale in response to each statement. After the exercise, it is helpful for the group to discuss the

similarities and differences they found between their own values and their characters’.

### III. Scene Study

#### **Family Feud**

Ask the students, in pairs, to read the following scene from the end of Act One between Maureen and Doreen. Once they’ve read it through, ask them to decide the following for each sister:

1. What is each character’s objective in the scene?
2. What is preventing her from achieving this objective?
3. Does she overcome the obstacle/s and if so, what tactics does she use to do so?

#### ***In Basildon – Extract From Act One***

*DOREEN*  
*He asked for you.*

*MAUREEN*  
*Did he?*

*DOREEN*  
*Yes.*

*Maureen starts hitting herself with the open palm of her right hand across her forehead. She stills herself. Silence.*

*MAUREEN*  
*You didn't tell me.*

*DOREEN*  
*No.*

*MAUREEN*  
*I would have come.*

*DOREEN*  
*You shouldn't have needed asking.*

*MAUREEN*  
*Why didn't you tell me?*

*DOREEN*  
*Barry wanted you here. I didn't. Because I hate you. I hate your guts. I wish you nothing but the pain I feel inside. There.*

*Maureen is stunned. Silence.*

**MAUREEN**  
*Hate?*

**DOREEN**  
*Yes that's right darling, hate.*

*Silence.*

**MAUREEN**  
*There's going to be a reckoning before too long in this house darling.*

**DOREEN**  
*Yes there will darling.*

**MAUREEN**  
*We're going to sort things out once and for all.*

**DOREEN**  
*You know Len's left the house to my Barry.*

*Silence.*

**DOREEN**  
*He hated him living on that Estate. I'm sure there's something for you and Shelley. A keepsake.*

**MAUREEN**  
*I don't believe you. He wouldn't do that. Not after everything that's happened.*

**DOREEN**  
*He made a will about five year ago. We both did.*

*Silence.*

**MAUREEN**  
*Len wouldn't.*

**DOREEN**  
*You're not getting a tanner out of this house Maureen. And that's the end of it.*

*Silence.*

**MAUREEN**  
*So you say.*

**DOREEN**  
*So I do say. Now don't you ever breath a word in my direction again.*

*Silence.*

*Doreen kisses Len gently on his forehead. So does Maureen. The sisters look at each other. Silence.*



## 8. EDUCATION AT THE ROYAL COURT

The Royal Court is a centre for excellence and innovation in theatre-making, and the Education Department aims to stimulate and inspire students of all ages, encouraging learning and participation in every aspect of the theatre's work, from the process of writing plays to pioneering rehearsal room techniques.

We offer a wide-ranging programme of work designed to open up and demystify the craft of making theatre. Royal Court Education activities include:

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