

## Editor's Chin-wag

Greetings all – could it be any hotter? I wanted to take a moment and thank all of you who wrote in with answers to a reader's question about Madge in *As Time Goes By*. I converted them to an editorial response in the In the Post section of this newsletter – so you will see your handy work there. Just great to know that people are reading this section and responding.

As the Monty Python stage production of *Spamalot* makes the rounds here in the US, there is greatly renewed interest in the Python team's work. For you local Britcom lovers and PBS promotions managers, our contributing writer, Sheela Kadam, covers this renewed interest in Python in her column and shares some creative approaches they employed to promote British comedies in their local market. Well worth the read.

I am leaving the contest up for contributed articles, they are very welcome and could net you a teacup and saucer of Hyacinth Bucket's "Royal Doulton with hand-painted periwinkles." Would love to have some publishable submissions – so get cracking peeps, you know you want to. Happy reading all.

*N. Scott Jones, Editor*

## Two Point Four Children Anything But Average

On the surface, the Porters are a normal family - indeed, even the series' title *2 Point 4 Children*, the fabled average family size, alludes to their normality (as well as the fact that the husband/father is still a bit of a child himself). Yet, though the individual members - central-heating engineer Ben; his wife, catering worker Bill; and their teenage children David and Jenny - are unexceptional, the situations in which the family find themselves are anything but. Bad luck, strange occurrences and poor judgment all conspire to turn the Porters' world topsy-turvy.

Sitcom-wise, the shape of the series itself is also different from the norm, because, from the earliest episodes, it has centered not on the husband, Ben, but on his wife, Bill. (The author, Andrew Marshall, claims that Bill is merely a diminution of his original Wilhelmina, not of his making, but the Bill and Ben scenario is nonetheless neatly suggestive of *The Flowerpot Men*.) Even with the focus on Bill, the series still avoids the traditional woman-as-wife-and-mother theme of other series, instead portraying her as a fully-rounded person in her own right, unconfined by her family.



*Cast of 2.4 Children*

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## *Mr. Bean Sequel Tops UK Box Office*

Comedy *Mr. Bean's Holiday* has gone to the top of the UK and Irish box office chart in its first week in cinemas.

Rowan Atkinson stars in the film, which sees the bumbling Mr. Bean on a break in the south of France, where he stumbles into the Cannes Film Festival.

It took £4.5m between Friday and Sunday, with a further £1.9m added from preview screenings on 24 and 25 March.

Epic war movie *300*, starring Gerard Butler, dropped to number two, taking £2.3m over the weekend.

Other new entries included horror film *The Hills Have Eyes II* at three and Disney's *Meet The Robinsons* at four.

Rowan Atkinson has said the inspiration for the film is classic French comedy *Mr. Hulot's Holiday*, which starred Jacques Tati.

The movie is a sequel to 1997's *Bean*, which made \$251m (£125m) worldwide.

Hopefully, an American release of the film is anticipated – stay tuned. **BBC News**



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*The Insider welcomes all correspondence, story ideas and requests for contributed articles. Send letters via e-mail to Editor N. Scott Jones at [scott@bbcinsider.net](mailto:scott@bbcinsider.net) or by snail mail to: The Insider, c/o Kate Livo, BBC Worldwide Americas, Sixth Floor 747 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue, New York, NY. 10017 - 2803. All letters are assumed to be for publication unless marked otherwise. **The Insider** reserves the right to edit letters for reasons of space or clarity. Let us know what you think!*

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## *News, Trivia & Naughty Bits*



### *Fawlty Towers Characters Resurrected*

The picture below shows Basil Fawlty and Manuel back at each other's throats after 28 years.

Sadly John Cleese, 67, and Andrew Sachs, 77, are not reuniting for a new series of the classic sitcom. The picture shows the *Fawlty Towers* stars in a new corporate video for Norway oil company Statoil.

In the six new training videos, the rude hotelier is running a restaurant called Basil's Brasserie.

Sachs explained to *The Sun*: "Basil is creating havoc in a restaurant where the manager is even more incompetent than him. I [Manuel] walk by and spot Señor Fawlty. He vaguely remembers me. It turns out I own a Michelin-starred restaurant in London. Basil is green with envy."

Cleese has said in the past that he will never write any more *Fawlty Towers* episodes, thus ensuring the classic sitcom, which was filmed in 1975 and 1979, remains an all-time favorite.

John Cleese co-founded the comedy-training-video company Video Arts in 1972. The company has gone on to make millions producing corporate videos starring comedians like Dawn French, Hugh Laurie, Ricky Gervais, and of course Cleese himself. Video Arts was sold in May for £2.4 million.



# ***ViewerPoints: From and For Viewers Like YOU***

## ***Father Ted: Fecking Funny!***



*Father Ted* is a popular 1990s television situation comedy set around the lives of three priests on the extremely remote (and fictional) Craggy Island off the west coast of Ireland. It ran for three series, totaling 25 episodes, between 21 April 1995 and 1 May 1998 on the UK's Channel 4. *Father Ted* was written by Arthur Mathews and Graham Linehan, who also co-created *Big Train*. All of the interior scenes were shot at The London Studios, while all of the location footage was shot in Ireland.

Like Ardal O'Hanlon, the series was responsible for propelling a number of highly successful actors and comedians into the limelight, including Graham Norton, Tommy Tiernan, Patrick McDonnell, Don Wycherley and Joe Rooney. Other Irish comedians who featured included Jason Byrne who made a cameo appearance as a referee in one episode, Ed Byrne who played a teenage prankster in another, as well as Brendan Grace. Dermot Morgan, who played the title role, died from a heart attack the day after filming the final episode.

The show follows the exploits of three Roman Catholic priests who preside over a parish on Craggy Island, located off the west coast of Ireland. Father Ted Crilly, Father Dougal McGuire and the retired Father Jack Hackett live together in Craggy Island's parochial house, along with their housekeeper Mrs. Doyle, who "keeps Craggy Island Parochial House floating on a sea of tea" according to official synopses.

The three priests answer to the fierce, uncompromising Bishop Len Brennan, who makes frequent visits to the island, often to cast his disapproving eye over the trio and their backwater parish. He is apparently responsible for their exile to the less-than-desirable island parish - the reasons for the move are hinted at across the several series. They appear to stem from a mixture of incompetence and embarrassing conduct: Father McGuire due to his incompetence (with particular regard to "the Blackrock Incident", in which a large number of lives were irreparably damaged although they were "only nuns"); Father Hackett because of his alcoholism and implied womanizing, which caused severe embarrassment to the Catholic Church; and Father Crilly for alleged financial impropriety. Ted still insists he was innocent, regularly claiming that "*the money was just resting in my account*", and that it was "*a perfectly legitimate monetary transfer*".

The show also gave birth to many catchphrases that are well known in Ireland and Britain, most notably Mrs. Doyle's "*Go on, go on*" and Father Jack's cursing, with short words including (and usually limited to) "*Drink!*", "*Feck!*", "*Arse!*", "*Girls!*" and "*Gobshite*".

*(Continued on page 6)*

## *As Time Goes By: Moments in Pictures*



## **ViewerPoints** **In The Post**



In the last issue, Jim K. inquired about Madge and her disappearance from *As Time Goes By*. A number of fellow *Insider* readers weighed in and the selected response appears below. I have also included Jim's original question from the previous issue.

*In the "As Time Goes By" reunion special Rocky was going line dancing but there was no mention of his wife, the lovely Madge. I have seen the program at least three times so far and have never heard of a mention of Madge. What happened to her?*

**Jim K.**  
**Somewhere in America**

Scott,

In response to a recent "In The Post" question posed by Jim K., Joan Sims, who played Madge in *As Time Goes By*, passed away 28 June 2001. I attended the taping of one of the last *ATGB* episodes, in June 2002. At that time, we were told the writers elected to refer to her as being out of the country on an archeological "dig" rather than actually writing her out of the show.

Sims, who was trained at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, played her first leading role in *Sarah Simply* with Harry Corbett in the early 1950s. But, it her work in 24 *Carry On* films that she will be most remembered for. Spanning the years 1958 to 1978, she played such characters as Lady Ruff-Diamond, Emily Bung, Gloria Passworthy and Cora Flange, among others.

More recently, she performed in the much acclaimed television series *As Time Goes By*, cast as Rocky Hardcastle's wife, Madge. One of her costars, I can't remember who, said that at times they would have to simply stop filming because she would start giggling about something and just couldn't stop. Her last television film was, ironically, *The Last of the Blonde Bombshells*, with Dame Judi Dench. Joan Sims' autobiography is titled *High Spirits* and is available on Amazon.com.

**Christina W.**  
**Mentor, Ohio**

*Many thanks Christina, SJ*

## ***"And Now For Something Completely Different"***

By Sheela Kadam, Contributing Writer

### ***Ham, Jam & Spamalot***

#### ***Monty Python Fever***

I have been a Monty Python fan for as long as I can remember. Like many other Brits in my age group, I grew up watching it when it was first shown on the Beeb. Not that I was supposed to be watching it...but that just added to the fun. For me, experiencing "Monty Python's Flying Circus" involved surreptitiously sneaking downstairs from my bedroom late at night to watch it with my big brother.

In later life, I can attribute my warped sense of humor to this early exposure to Python. At a young and impressionable age, I really thought that there was a Ministry Of Silly Walks. And of course, it was the Vikings who had invented SPAM. And you could buy a dead parrot with lovely plumage at a pet shop in Bolton (or was that Notlob?). The cartoons weren't anything like Tom & Jerry. After watching Gilliam's surreal offerings, Looney Tunes just didn't seem, well, loony enough.

Watching Python was a completely different experience from peeking at "Dr Who" from behind-the-sofa-in-case-the-Daleks-attacked. Who cares about being exterminated - it was Hell's Grannies who posed the real threat outside the local shops up the road. And really, who needs a Time Lord when Bicycle Repair Man could save the universe?

Much has been written about the widely-acclaimed Python team - and rightly so. Python was cutting edge, surreal and completely ahead of it's time. It's classic humor that's still funny today - even if nobody knows who Alan Whicker is. Let's face it - if it still makes youngsters laugh today, it's passed the test of time. I get such a kick out of watching Python with my two sons - they think Mr Gumby is hilarious and do impersonations all the time, and even have their own silly walks.

John Cleese, Graham Chapman, Michael Palin, Eric Idle, Terry Jones and Terry Gilliam were the 'dream team' of comedy - pure genius. Unlike other comedies at the time (except perhaps Spike Milligan's "Q" series), Flying Circus used a 'stream of consciousness' format of sketches flowing into each other. Their unique brand of humor coupled with intelligent writing

and brilliant acting inspired countless subsequent comedians - and the show's format influenced later Britcoms.

Since those early, heady days of Python, comedy fans in Britain have always been utterly spoilt by the wealth of talent on BBC television and radio. Seen in that context, it's easy when you're living in the UK to become blasé about Python - "oh yeah, that vintage stuff from the 70's, cheese shop and all that" is a common reaction among most of my British pals still living over there.

Having grown up with it, I've seen that many Brits here in the U.S have the same attitude - although Python has a special place in their hearts and they remember all the classic sketches, most just don't get excited about it. When I heard that SPAMALOT was coming to Dallas, Texas, I thought it would be fun to have a Python celebration at our British store in Grapevine the weekend before the show opens - but I did wonder what the turnout would be like. I needn't have worried. As the event 'snowballed', I was delighted to discover that there are legions of American Python fans here who embrace all things Python-esque wholeheartedly - and I've made lots of new friends! For them, this class-based, subversive comedy was so refreshing, so different from American humor.

We true diehards Python fans live it, sleep it (yes, I've had Gilliam animation-style dreams), enjoy it, celebrate it and can rattle off "The Parrot Sketch" or some other favorite skit at the drop of a Viking Helmet (I have 4. I've also got a killer rabbit, coconut shells, a dead parrot, 2 live budgies and numerous other props & costumes). We've started a "Monty Python Appreciation Society" here in Grapevine - there's no formal club membership or dues - that would be far too normal for folks like us. We don't have a website, but we're easy to find. There are no funny handshakes, but we have been known to have very silly conversations. Try talking to one of us and we'll generally latch onto some sort of Python reference or the other in the conversation and things will soon veer off onto a surreal tangent. We'll pepper what we say with one-liners such as "nobody expects the Spanish Inquisition", or "I'm not dead yet!" It'll amuse us no end to complain about dirty forks in restaurants, we'll moan about not liking SPAM. And don't even get us started on Philosophy or we'll break into THAT song.

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### **The Central Characters**

**Father Ted Crilly** (Dermot Morgan) is the most normal of the priests on the island. He is a *bon vivant*, exiled to Craggy Island for something referred to only as "that Lourdes thing." This apparently involved his misappropriating church funds intended to be used to send a poor child to Lourdes in order to go on a gambling spree to Las Vegas. Ted has frequently claimed that the money was "just resting in my account." Ted was previously in Wexford, which happens to be the home town of the series producer, Declan Lowney. His greatest desire is to escape Craggy Island and to find a wealthy parish in Las Vegas and a life free of embarrassment although he is also shown to be as easily seduced by fame as by money. Ted is the devious schemer of the piece and most of the plots are driven by some plan or other that Ted, a fantastic liar, has hatched to either extricate himself from a bad situation or escape Craggy Island for fame and fortune. Often the pursuit of these schemes will necessitate Ted hiding from or separating himself from the company of Mrs. Doyle, Father Dougal or some other character on a flimsy pretext along the lines of: *"I think actually I'll just stay here and have a quiet prayer."*

Indeed the more devious Ted is being, the more likely he is to say something about prayer or wanting to pray. He frequently justifies his intended sins and schemes to Father Dougal. For example saying that by committing a small sin they are preventing a big sin. Ted is probably the most complex of all the characters and despite his cynicism he often seems to be genuinely disturbed when Father Dougal makes innocent, frequent and sometimes fairly philosophically damning statements or observations about the faith. Ted also keeps a framed picture of Ireland's 1990 and 1994 World Cup manager, Jack Charlton, on the mantelpiece just beside a picture of The Sacred Heart.

**Father Dougal McGuire** (Ardal O'Hanlon) is a very simple-minded soul, in exile for a mysterious incident in Blackrock involving a group of nuns and a Sealink Ferry, presumably caused by his stupidity. His inability to grasp the simplest of everyday concepts provides much of the humor in the show. Dougal also regularly expresses doubts about the validity of Catholic Orthodoxy (indeed, he appears to have no religious belief whatsoever, even questioning the existence of God in front of a visiting Bishop, who eventually gives up the faith and becomes a hippy) and

has trouble distinguishing dreams from reality. He also has an addiction to rollerblading, which proves his downfall when he tries to give it up for Lent. (*"Cigarettes and Alcohol and Rollerblading"*)

The sun is always shining in his world and he often doesn't understand what Ted means. He also called himself *"cynical"* in the episode *"Speed 3"*. His ideas are always shot down by Ted but in the episode *"Are You Right There, Father Ted?"*, he comes up with a really good idea and Ted asks him to describe it in detail. Dougal then says: *"I never knew you had to follow up a good idea with loads of really good small ideas"*. He then apologizes before leaving to sleep in the spare room. Seemingly he can come up with a good idea if he doesn't put much thought into it.

**Father Jack Hackett** (Frank Kelly) is an alcoholic, lecherous, violent and foul-mouthed elderly priest, who is basically incapable of functioning normally as a human being, let alone as a priest.

He is on Craggy Island for all of the above, although one episode mentions the cause of Father Jack's exile as being a wedding he performed in Athlone. No details are given but a shot of his face shows a lecherous expression, suggesting he may have acted in a manner sexually inappropriate for a priest, or perhaps been carried away by his own alcoholism.

Although he can usually be found drinking alcoholic beverages, Father Jack is also known to drink other household liquids including, but not limited to: floor polish (which gave him death-like symptoms such as decomposition), brake fluid, motor oil, castor oil and Toilet Duck (which causes him to embark on a hallucinogenic trip of sorts). In one episode he also drank a whole bottle of sleeping medicine (Dreamy-Sleepy-Nightie-Snoozy-Snooze) and subsequently fell asleep for two weeks. In his younger days he was a fire and brimstone preacher and is said to have been the first priest to denounce The Beatles (*"He could see what they were up to"*).

According to one of Graham Linehan's former peers at Catholic University School (C.U.S.), Fr. Hackett was apparently based on one of the priests resident at his former secondary school. During the episode (*"Cigarettes and Alcohol and Rollerblading"*) Jack gave up alcohol and Ted remarked that he had been drunk for so long that sobriety must be like a strange, hallucinogenic drug to him. In this rare lucid period Jack cried out in anguish "Oh, my god! Don't tell me I'm still on that fecking island!"

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**Mrs. Doyle** (Pauline McLynn) is the priests' manic housekeeper. Apart from being "Mrs." rather than "Miss" Doyle, the only reference to her marriage is her remark in the episode *"Night of the Nearly Dead"*: *"This reminds me of the time my husband [..pause..] I've said too much."*

Hospitality, especially serving tea (*"Ah, go on! - Go on, go on, go on, go on, go on, go on..."*) is Mrs. Doyle's mission in life; other items served include a mountain of sandwiches which are discarded when she discovers they are not to her own taste, an array of cakes which after much persuading she eventually withdraws from offer in spite of much protest, the lettuce and water she brings for Dougal's pet rabbit Sampras in *"The Plague"* and the cake jumper she bakes for her idol Eoin McLove in *"Night of the Nearly Dead"*. She spends a significant amount of time trying to clean the large window in the living room, a task which usually sees her plummet to the ground upon trying to get back down from the sill. She also has the occasional tendency to fall from the roof of the parochial house.

Her first name is never mentioned in the series. The third series episode, *"The Mainland"*, maintains the secret in a scene where her name was spoken twice but on both occasions is blocked out by a loud noise, preventing the audience from hearing what was said. Despite her name never being mentioned on air, there were references to the name "Joan" in the scripts. It is thought that her full name was "Mrs. Joan Doyle".

Her name is however given in the script for the episode *"Competition Time"*; Linehan and Matthews describe it in their footnote as "a very good example of the kind of information one carelessly flings about in the early days of writing a sitcom, without realizing that it has the potential to be a lovely dark secret for years and years."



## ***BritQuotient Trivia Questions***

### ***The Thin Blue Line***

**In *The Thin Blue Line*, what is the actor's name who played a junior CID officer and went on to star in the US sitcom *Still Standing*?**

**In a number of episodes, DI Grim is always on about his wife – what is her name?**

**Insp. Fowler has a creed that describes the perfect police officer, including being regular of what?**

**In one episode, Insp. Fowler's son comes to stay for a fortnight – what is his son's name?**

**James Dreyfus, the actor who played the hapless Constable Goody, went on to replace Ardal O'Hanlon in what currently running Britcom?**

**Name the town in which the police station in the series is located.**

**Name the character in which Insp. Fowler had a high school crush on, and still goes goofy when she appears.**

*E-Mail your answers to [scott@bbcinsider.net](mailto:scott@bbcinsider.net) for a special prize drawing from responses answered 100% correct. Answers will appear in the Fall issue.*

# *Series Profile*

## *May to December*



The seemingly thin premise of *May To December* proved remarkably durable, with 39 episodes sprung from its theme of a generation-gap romance. It garnered reasonable ratings too, even reaching the Top 20 on occasions, although the episodes tended to warm viewers rather than cause them to guffaw.

Middle-aged solicitor Alec Callender - a partner in Semple, Callender and Henty - is a suburbanite dreamer, pining for Perry Mason-style cases but rarely working on anything more exciting than simple house conveyance. In the course of his work he meets Zoe Angell, a 26-year-old PE teacher befuddled by her impending divorce; although neither is looking for romance there is an unmistakable spark and soon they embark on the rocky road of a 'spring and autumn' romance. Every variation and pitfall of such a relationship was explored over the course of six series, with the central romance overcoming every obstacle. Alec gets on unexpectedly well with Zoe's parents because, being of virtually the same age, they have much in common. Zoe and Alec themselves share an affection for old musicals and detective stories, their love doing the rest, and after living together for a year they marry and produce a baby daughter, Fleur. At work, Alec's colleagues include his son Jamie and the prim Miss Flood (who then marries and becomes Mrs. Tipple).

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The creator/writer Paul A. Mendelson did not write the series specifically for Anton Rodgers but, coincidentally, there were many parallels with the actor's real life, not least the fact that he was in a second marriage to a much younger woman.

The prolific Mendelson scored a notable double during the fourth series when, an hour after *May To December*, his next sitcom *So Haunt Me* was scheduled on the same channel.



## ***Call For Contributed Articles***

Yes, I am at it again! Once again I am asking all you suppressed writers and lovers of British comedies to submit a contributed article on your favorite British comedy. What's in it for you, you ask ??? Well once again I have obtained an actual cup and saucer from England in the notorious Hyacinth Bucket's "Royal Doulton with hand-painted periwinkles."

You have seen it, heard about it and you know you love it from the British comedy hit *Keeping Up Appearances*. This cup and saucer, along with a small tin of Earl Grey will go to the writer whose submission is selected to run in the next issue of *The Insider*.

So don't be shy. 500-700 words on your fave comedy could get you in the social strata of the Bucket residence! Deadline for submission is October 15, 2007.



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# Actor Profile In Depth

## Dame Judi Dench: A True Great



Dame Judith Olivia Dench, (born 9 December 1934), usually known as Dame Judi Dench, is an Academy Award, Golden Globe, Tony, three-time BAFTA, and six-time Laurence Olivier Award-winning English actress.

In Britain, Dench has developed a reputation as one of the greatest actresses of the post-war period, primarily through her work in theatre, which has been her main forte throughout her career. She has more than once been named number one in polls for Britain's best actress. Furthermore, she gained worldwide popular fame through taking over the role of M in the *James Bond* film series in 1995, and subsequently through many acclaimed film appearances.

Judi Dench was born in York, North Yorkshire to Olave (nee Jones) and Reginald Arthur Dench and was raised a Quaker. She also lived in Tyldesley, Greater Manchester. Her notable relatives include Emma Dench, eminent Roman historian previously at Birkbeck, University of London, and currently at Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. When Dench was thirteen, she entered The Mount School, York.

Before starting her professional career, Judi Dench was involved in the first three productions of the modern revival of the York Mystery Plays the 1950s. Most famously, she played the role of the Virgin Mary in the 1957 production, performed on a fixed stage in the Museum Gardens.

She received her dramatic training at the Central School of Speech and Drama in London and made her professional debut as Ophelia in *Hamlet* in Liverpool in 1957. She subsequently spent several seasons in repertory in Oxford and Nottingham. In 1961, she joined the Royal Shakespeare Company and made numerous appearances with the company in Stratford and London over the next two decades, winning several best actress awards. Among her roles with the RSC, she was the Duchess in John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* in 1971.

In 1971 Judi Dench married British actor Michael Williams and they had their only child, Tara Cressida Williams (aka "Finty Williams"), on 24 September, 1972. Their daughter later became an actress like her parents. Dame Judi starred with her husband in the 1980s British sitcom, *A Fine Romance*. Michael Williams died of lung cancer, at age 65, in 2001.

Dench has also made numerous appearances in the West End and with the National Theatre in London. She is a multiple winner of the main awards for performances on the London stage, including a record six Laurence Olivier Awards. She has also appeared with success on Broadway in *Amy's View*, and has occasionally directed plays.

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As she enters her seventies, Dame Judi remains probably the biggest draw on the London stage. She is often compared and contrasted with Dame Maggie Smith, another British actress of the same generation, with whom she has appeared in several movies, including the 2004 *Ladies in Lavender*, and on stage in David Hare's two-hander *Breath of Life*. She returned to the West End stage in April 2006 in *Hay Fever* alongside Peter Bowles, Belinda Lang and Kim Medcalf.

She has finished off a busy 2006 with the role of "Mistress Quickly" in the RSC's new musical version of "The Merry Wives," at Stratford-upon-Avon. Her many television appearances include lead roles in the series *As Time Goes By* and *A Fine Romance*.

Dame Judi Dench has frequently appeared with her close friend Geoffrey Palmer in the series *As Time Goes By* and in the films *Mrs. Brown and Tomorrow Never Dies*, both filmed in 1997. At the opening of *As Time Goes By*, the couple first shown in the photographs is in fact Judi's real-life daughter, Tara, and Geoffrey's real-life son.

Dench won the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress for playing Elizabeth I in the film *Shakespeare in Love*. Dench's win was notable as her performance lasted for about eight minutes.

Dench's late-life film career has been remarkably successful. Until 1997, she had made relatively few film appearances, especially in comparison to the number she has made since then. She has racked up six Oscar nominations in nine years for *Mrs. Brown* in 1997, her Oscar-winning turn in *Shakespeare in Love* in 1998, for *Chocolat* in 2000, for the lead role of writer Iris Murdoch in *Iris* in 2001 (with Kate Winslet playing her as a younger woman), for *Mrs. Henderson Presents* in 2005, and for *Notes on a Scandal* in 2006.

In 2006, Dench received critical acclaim, including Golden Globe, Screen Actors Guild and Academy Award nominations, for her fierce performance in *Notes on a Scandal*.

She is currently filming the BBC One mini-series *The Cranford Chronicles*, based on the Cranford books by Elizabeth Gaskell. The series co-stars Francesca Annis, Michael Gambon and Imelda Staunton. The program will air this Fall in the UK.



## Series At-a-Glance

*Management Gone Amuck: Brittas-style*

### *Brittas Empire*



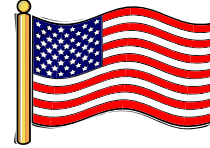
When God was handing out the gifts of management and diplomacy, Gordon Brittas (played by Chris Barrie) was definitely last in line--behind Attila the Hun! The trouble is, although he means well, he just cannot resist the temptation to meddle, time and time again reducing everyone he meets to gibbering nervous wrecks.

So it comes as no surprise to his long-suffering wife, Helen (played by Pippa Haywood), that within half an hour of his taking up an appointment as manager of the new Whitbury New Town Leisure Centre, at least half the staff have walked out on strike! The rest think he's misguided, maladjusted and very probably mad.

As for Brittas himself, he doesn't realize that he is really the problem. He's too busy empire-building, Nero-style, fiddling away merrily while Rome burns. **BBC**



## New DVD/Video Releases



### **All Creatures Great and Small: The Complete Collection**

**Release Date: 8/14/2007**

The droll vets of Darrowby are now available in a complete set!

Experience the phenomenally successful series, *All Creatures Great and Small*, based on the best-selling books by James Herriot. Set in the fictional Yorkshire Dales town of Darrowby, the series offers comforting reflections of a much gentler time when life moved at a somewhat slower pace. This collection features every episode, tracing the endearing career of this country veterinarian, from the 1930's through World War II and the hopeful 1950s. It's a joyful journey that will warm the hearts of fans everywhere.

Includes all episodes from Series 1-7 and the Specials.

### **Only Fools and Horses: The Complete Collection**

**Release Date: 10/9/2007**

Now together in one collection, every episode of Britain's best-loved comedy series! Crafty cockney con man Derek Trotter (David Jason) dreams of making a fortune, but each dodgy deal and shady scheme always seems to end in disaster. And then there's his family to look after: lovable but hapless kid brother, Rodney; doddery old Grandad; and ex-seafaring Uncle Albert. This hilarious, life-affirming series is one of the most popular on British television, and the annual *Only Fools and Horses* Christmas Specials became as fundamental a British holiday tradition as Christmas crackers and the Queen's Address to the Commonwealth. *Only Fools and Horses* boasts 13 top comedy awards including two Best Comedy BAFTAs, and the series finale, "Sleepless in Peckham" was viewed by 2 out of 3 British households on Christmas Day, 2003. As Del-boy himself would say, "Lovely jubbly!"

### **Only Fools and Horses: The Specials 1991-2003**

**Release Date: 10/9/2007**

Britain's best-loved comedy series returns to DVD in this incredible collection of specials! Next to the Queen's Address to the Commonwealth, nothing signifies the holidays in Britain quite so much as an *Only Fools and Horses* Christmas Special on the telly. This collection brings together all ten specials that ran between 1991 and 2003 including the 2-part "Miami Twice," "Mother Nature's Son," "Heroes and Villains," "If They Could See Us Now," the classic *Only Fools and Horses* series finale, "Sleepless in Peckham" and more! Del-boy and Rodney are up to all their usual tricks in over 11 hours of programming that will leave you in stitches! Complete your *Only Fools and Horses* Collection with *The Specials 1991-2003*.

### **The Vicar of Dibley: The Immaculate Collection**

**Release Date: 10/9/2007**

The winner of an International Emmy® Award for Best Comedy Program, *The Vicar of Dibley* is one of the most popular series ever produced by the BBC. It boasts the brilliant comic writing of Richard Curtis (*Love Actually*, *Bridget Jones's Diary*) and a gifted ensemble cast led by Dawn French of the hilarious comedy duo, *French and Saunders*.

The sleepy village of Dibley was blindsided back in 1994 by the arrival of its new vicar who had the audacity to be a woman! Over the twelve ensuing years—with the help of a sharp wit, a double dose of double entendre and a healthy supply of chocolate—she gradually won the hearts of even the crustiest of the town's eccentric inhabitants. This collection contains every episode ever created of this brilliant comedy series, and it promises to warm your heart also, while keeping you in fits of hysteria along the way!



## ***BritCom LaughLinks***

### **The Unofficial Chronology of Dame Judi Dench** <http://www.djdchronology.com>

Want to keep up with current projects and happenings with one of our favorite ladies? This site is worth a look. Past projects, current projects and scheduled appearances can be found on this site. Layout and functionality is basic, but a nice resource for information on one our favorite actors.

**Rating: 3 out of 5 mouse clicks**

### **Fawlty Site.Net** <http://www.fawltysite.net>

A nice indie site I just discovered with a great presentation of information on the classic Britcom, *Fawlty Towers*. Articles, trivia, episode guides and more can be found on the site.

Parts of it look like material from the Beeb, but the site boasts it is not affiliated but the Beeb likes it....you be the judge. Definitely worth a look.

**Rating: 4 out of 5 mouse clicks**

### **The Official Monty Python Web Site** <http://www.pythonline.com>

Pyrhoneites visit to your heart's delights. This is the official site for all things *Monty Python* and the *Flying Circus*. It is colorful, catchy and chocked full of information.

From a Spam Club to shopping to show information archives, this site is a must for any Python fan.

**Rating: 5 out of 5 mouse clicks**

### **Shop BBC America** <http://www.bbcamerica.com/shop>

A great stop to find the latest DVDs, Britcom collectibles and other information on favorite shows. While it may be self-promoting to list it here, it is definitely worth checking out for upcoming releases and pre-orders. Great information on your favorite BBC programs.

**Rating: 5 out of 5 mouse clicks**



*Ham, Jam & Spamalot (cont'd. from page 5)*

Reminiscing about your childhood with fellow fans? It'll soon dissolve into "Four Yorkshiremen" style exaggerated comparisons with everyone trying to outdo each other. "You were lucky", "we used to live in a cardboard box", "luxury" etc.

#### WHAT TOOK THEM SO LONG?

The arrival of SPAMALOT to Dallas this summer was fitting. Did you know that Monty Python was first introduced to America at PBS Station KERA-Dallas by forward-thinking Program Director Ron Devillier back in the 70's? KERA was the first PBS station in the nation to broadcast Monty Python's Flying Circus, and was the Pythons' first stop in the US after the premier of "Monty Python and the Holy Grail" in Los Angeles in 1975.

When told that SPAMALOT was coming to Dallas, Mr. Devillier's reaction was "what took Python so long to come back to Dallas? That's where SPAMALOT should have opened!" He was even more amused to learn that we were holding a PythonFest in Grapevine, Texas of all places. "I'm still amused that the introduction of Python in America started in Dallas - its first home. Dallas of all places! You would have thought that it would have been somewhere like New York or Boston. I have a sense of pride that it all started at KERA, which back then was just a tiny studio which the Pythons visited," Devillier said.

"We made an announcement that they were coming to Dallas for a pledge drive and asked if any of the public would care to meet them. We ended up being mobbed by Python fans. There was a flood of people at the event. The Pythons were so impressed, and they were very warm to everyone that came," he added.

Devillier has particularly fond memories of the late Graham Chapman, who he remembered carrying a stuffed armadillo to the studio all the way from the airport: "Graham was the quietest one. At the event he didn't say a word for about 45 minutes, then he stood up, commanded the audience's attention and apologized profusely for performing so poorly. Then he sat down and didn't say another word for the rest of the evening!"

Today, you can still see part of the appearance thanks to a *YouTube* subscriber. Go here for the rarely seen footage: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=6mhcs6CNqI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6mhcs6CNqI)



## *'Allo 'Allo due for screen return*

*French wartime sitcom 'Allo 'Allo is returning for a one-off special, the BBC has confirmed*

The new episode, which will reunite the original cast, was being recorded in Manchester on 22 March and is was due to be screened later in the spring.

Gorden Kaye, who played hapless cafe owner Rene Artois in the comedy, will reprise his role.

The series, which made light of the Nazi occupation of France, ran on BBC One from 1982 to 1992.

The new show was recorded at the Granada Studios in front of a live studio audience who were asked to wear fancy dress for the occasion.

The long-running comedy, written by David Croft and Jeremy Lloyd, became famous for the Germans' pursuit of an elusive painting called The Fallen Madonna With The Big Boobies.

The show also gave rise to catchphrases such as "listen very carefully; I shall say this only once" from a sultry Resistance fighter, while a British agent who spoke poor French regularly used the greeting "good moaning".

Actor Kaye, whose character was regularly seen trying to grab a few amorous moments with the waitresses in his cafe, was seriously injured in an accident in 1990, returning to the role after his recovery.

His on-screen wife, Edith, was played by Carmen Silvera, who died in 2002 at the age of 80. Richard Marnier, who played Colonel Von Strohm, died in 2004.

The television series spawned a successful stage tour from 1986, which also featured most of the sitcom's cast. **BBC**

*(Two Point Four Children continued from Page 1)*

At the start of the series Bill worked in a bakery with her best friend and neighbor, the man-hungry Rona. By the second she had lost the job and had to cope with a mind-numbing period of unemployment before launching a catering business with Rona. Although competent and level-headed, Bill was aware that she may have missed out on a certain, wilder side of life; in the first series this dissatisfaction was manifested by her crush on a handsome biker, Angelo. His death in a road accident robbed her of the real thing but he continued to haunt her dreams, even appearing as an angel when her son David was seriously ill with tetanus.

Ben is a man of simple tastes and pleasures; besides when he's trying out some childish prank, he seems to desire a simple life and probably has fewer aspirations than his wife, although in later episodes, when suffering a mid-life crisis, he began to question his existence in much the same way that Bill had been doing. Both David and his older sister Jenny are stereotypically drawn teenagers, although they seem even more acutely embarrassed by their parents than is normal - understandable, perhaps, given the situations into which the adults descend.

Another individual quality of the series was the fact that the family relationship was totally believable. Unlike most sitcom families, the Porters didn't have a fixed take on one another - they had wild mood swings and vacillated between love and a grudging tolerance. The production also employed a buccaneering style that allowed it to play with the genre, sometimes spoofing other shows or stretching its own perceived reality - the Christmas specials, for instance, have featured the cast in a glitzy song and dance number, not the sort of thing one saw in *Not In Front Of The Children*.

The public took to *2 Point 4 Children* immediately and by the third series it was attracting ratings of more than 13 million, the sort of figure also being enjoyed by Andrew Marshall's former writing partner David Renwick with his sitcom *One Foot In The Grave*. There were certain similarities between the two series - both had larger-than-life plots involving seemingly ordinary people, both were unafraid to use pathos or black comedy, and both knew the humor value of outlandish props. Also, both featured an array of memorable second-string characters that could be called upon when the plot demanded. In *2 Point 4*

*Children* these included Roger Lloyd Pack as Ben's *Star Trek*-fanatic rival-plumber Jake The Klingon, Sandra Dickinson as Ben's rich sister Tina and the wonderful Liz Smith as both Bill's chain-smoking mother Bette and her Aunt Belle (Bette's sister).

Gary Olsen's tragically premature death from cancer on 13 September 2000, aged just 42, ensured that the special millennium episode screened nine months earlier would be the last. **BBC**



### ***Postscripts***

Well, another issue gone and I hope you enjoy learning more and more about your favorite British comedy.

I know I say this ad nauseum in each issue, but I once again urge you to write in with your story ideas and things you would like to see covered in *The Insider*. You can always reach me at [scott@bbcinsider.net](mailto:scott@bbcinsider.net). As I wind up my third year of editorship of this newsletter, I remain as committed today as I was at the outset, that it focuses on you, the reader, and things you would like to know more about.

Supporting your local *PBS* stations and their broadcast of British comedies is a great way to get involved in this genre we all love. It would be great to hear from you which shows are broadcast in your market. Are there some I have missed covering in the newsletter? Let me know and I will insure they show up here.

In any event, I wish you a happy balance of the summer and will be completing our final issue for the year in late-October, early-November. Until then, all the best.

***N. Scott Jones, Editor***