

The first London production for over 30 years

THE OLD LADIES

by Rodney Ackland.

Based on the novel by Hugh Walpole.

Directed by Brigid Larmour.

Designed by Juliette Demoulin.

Presented by Andrew Maunder and Neil McPherson for the Finborough Theatre.

A hit in the West End and on Broadway when it premiered in 1935, ***The Old Ladies***, a classic drama from acclaimed playwright **Rodney Ackland** in its first London production for over 30 years opens at the multi-award-winning Finborough Theatre for a four week limited season on Tuesday, 24 March 2026 (**Press Nights: Thursday, 26 March 2026 and Friday, 27 March 2026 at 7.30pm**).

A Cathedral city in England, 1935.

Three elderly women live in uneasy proximity in a gloomy house eking out their days on their limited savings.

Their fragile lives seem uneventful, but beneath the surface, malice, greed and obsession fester...

Adapted from Hugh Walpole's classic 1924 novel by Rodney Ackland, writer of *Absolute Hell*, *The Old Ladies* is a devastating dark psychological drama: a powerful study of fear and isolation amongst those society has forgotten.

Fresh from her critically acclaimed production of *The Merchant of Venice* 1936, former Artistic Director of Watford Palace Theatre and the Contact Theatre, Manchester, **Brigid Larmour** directs, with Set Design by **Juliette Demoulin**, recently nominated for Best Designer in *The Stage Debut Awards*.

Playwright **Rodney Ackland** (1908-1991) returns to the Finborough Theatre where the rediscovery of *After October* was a sell-out success in 2016. Rodney Ackland was just 21 when his first play *Improper People* was produced at the Arts Theatre Club in 1929. He became a leading West End playwright just three years later when John Gielgud transferred *Strange Orchestra* to the West End. He went onto many other West End successes, but his work fell into virtual obscurity for three decades until *The Dark River* (1943) was revived at the Orange Tree Theatre, Richmond, in 1984. *The Spectator* called it 'perhaps the one indisputably great play of the past half-century in English.' Other revivals followed, most notably *Absolute Hell* (1952) which ran to huge critical acclaim at the National Theatre and on BBC TV starring Judi Dench. His other plays include *Smithereens* (1934), *Before the Party* (1949) and *A Dead Secret* (1957). His screenplays include *Bank Holiday* (1938), *49th Parallel* (1941) for which he was nominated for an Oscar, *Thursday's Child* (1943) and *The Queen of Spades* (1949).

Novelist **Hugh Walpole** (1884-1941), a keen theatre-goer, approved whole-heartedly of Rodney Ackland's adaptation of *The Old Ladies*. Born in New Zealand and brought up in the UK, Walpole was one of the best-selling authors of the 1920s and 1930s, knighted in 1937 for 'services to literature', and one of the most productive writers of the day, publishing thirty six novels, at least one book a year, between his first – *The Wooden Horse* (1909) – and his last, *Mr Huffman, and Other Stories* (1948). His most famous novels were *Rogue Herries* (1930), *Judith Paris* (1931), *The Fortress* (1932), *Vanessa* (1933), *Mr. Perrin and Mr. Traill* (1911), *Jeremy* (1919), *The Cathedral* (1922) and *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair* (1925). Walpole was invited to Hollywood where he wrote the screenplay for (and appeared in) George Cukor's 1935 film of *David Copperfield*, and was viciously satirised by former friend Somerset Maugham as Alroy Kear in the novel *Cakes and Ale*. Walpole's life as a gay man, marked by the need for secrecy at a time when

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homosexuality was illegal, has been noted by critics as an integral part of his novels and stories. Celebrating his work, the Hugh Walpole Society was launched in 2020 <https://hughwalpole.org>

Director **Brigid Larmour's** critically acclaimed production of *The Merchant of Venice 1936* (Watford Palace Theatre and HOME Manchester) enjoyed two sold out runs at the Royal Shakespeare Company and in the West End, and two successful national tours. She has received a Writers' Guild Award for developing and directing new writing. Premieres include Timberlake Wertenbaker's *Jefferson's Garden* and *Little Women* (Watford Palace Theatre, Pitlochry Festival Theatre, and HOME Manchester), *We That Are Left*, *Mrs Reynolds and the Ruffian*, *Perfect Match* by Gary Owen, *Equally Divided* by Ronald Harwood, *Our Father* by Charlotte Keatley, *Fourteen* by Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti, *Coming Up* by Neil d'Souza, an adaptation of *I Capture the Castle*, and Marks and Gran's *Von Ribbentrop's Watch* (Watford Palace Theatre and Oxford Playhouse). Her many revivals include *Much Ado About Nothing*, *As You Like It*, *Arms and the Man*, *Absent Friends*, *Time of My Life*, *Absurd Person Singular* and *Talking Heads* (Watford Palace Theatre). She was Artistic Director and Chief Executive of Watford Palace Theatre from 2006 to 2022. From 1989 to 1994, she was Artistic Director of Contact Theatre, Manchester, where she championed and directed Charlotte Keatley's *My Mother Said I Never Should* – originally rejected by all the major new writing theatres, it went on to make Keatley the most performed woman playwright after Agatha Christie. As Associate at Contact, she directed Mustapha Matura's *Playboy of the West Indies*, the first play with a full cast of black British actors produced outside London. Her 1980 Edinburgh production of *The Roaring Girl*, with Annabel Arden, Simon McBurney and Stephen Fry, brought this forgotten Jacobean comedy back into the repertoire: it has since been produced twice by the Royal Shakespeare Company – and once by the Finborough Theatre. She was also the founding Artistic Director of West End company Act Productions, adviser to the BBC Four Plays strand, and, from 1993 to 1998, created *Shakespeare Unplugged* for the National Theatre.

Producer **Andrew Maunder's** productions at the Finborough Theatre include the world premiere of Robert Graves' *But it Still Goes On*, the first London production since 1944 of St John Ervine's *Jane Clegg*, the first London productions since the 1920s of Kate O'Brien's *Distinguished Villa*, and a triple bill of one-act plays: Gertrude Robbins' *Makeshifts and Realities*, and H.M. Harwood's *Honour Thy Father*. His most recent productions were Sidney Howard's *The Silver Cord* (1927) and A.A. Milne's *The Truth About Blayds* (1921), both of which received their first London productions for almost a century in critically acclaimed sell-out runs in 2024 and 2025. *The Silver Cord* also won the London Pub Theatres Revival of the Year Award. Andrew also teaches at the University of Hertfordshire. He is the author of *British Theatre and the Great War 1914-1919* (2016), *R.C. Sherriff's Journey's End*, *A Guide* (2017) and *Enid Blyton. A Literary Life* (2021).

The press on *The Old Ladies*

'Original and absorbing... a remarkable feat.' *Daily Mail*.

'A macabre piece...one of the first great psychological thrillers of this period.' Sheridan Morley

'No one can afford to miss seeing this altogether unique play...Here is theatre at its highest and best'. *The Stage*

'Grips the imagination from the opening line to the last significant moment.' *The Play Pictorial*.

'A play of brooding horror, of delicate psychological, hair-raising dread.' *Billboard* (New York).

'Masterly...powerful dramatic tension.' *The New Statesman*.

'Undercurrents of feeling worthy of Ibsen.' *The Scotsman*.

'Magnificently entertaining and arresting.' *Country Life*.

'A play for all playgoers....brilliant.' *Daily Express*.

'May one day be regarded as a landmark in the development of modern British drama....A play of quality which every intelligent playgoer ought to see at once.' *Reynolds' Illustrated*.

'A triumph... a terrifying play.' *The Sketch*

The press on director Brigid Larmour

On *The Merchant of Venice 1936*

'For anyone who wonders how to stage Shakespeare in the 21st century, this really is it.' ★★★★★ *Metro*

'Absolutely phenomenal from beginning to end.' ★★★★★ *Northern Arts Review*

'Compelling piece of live theatre that will have you talking about it long after you've left.' ★★★★★ *Arts City Liverpool*

'A triumph.' ★★★★★ *The Reviews Hub*

'The most important Shakespeare production of the year.' ★★★★★ Dominic Cavendish, *The Telegraph*

On *Little Women*

'Larmour's staging is nuanced and poignant.' ★★★★★ Mark Brown, *The Daily Telegraph*

118 Finborough Road, London SW10 9ED Telephone 020 7244 7439

e-mail admin@finboroughtheatre.co.uk www.finboroughtheatre.co.uk Artistic Director Neil McPherson

Registered in England and Wales as a company limited by guarantee, no. 03448268.

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On *Jefferson's Garden*

'Brigid Larmour's stunning production.' Michael Billington, *The Guardian*

On *Mrs Reynolds And The Ruffian*

'Brigid Larmour's fine production.' Dominic Cavendish, *The Daily Telegraph*

The press on Andrew Maunder's previous productions at the Finborough Theatre

On *The Truth About Blayds*

'Very highly recommended!' ★★★★★ *LondonTheatre*

'Handsomely staged and strongly cast... a revelation.' ★★★★★ *ReviewsGate*

On *The Silver Cord*

'Wickedly entertaining.' ★★★★★ *The Stage*.

'The finest revival of any play all year.' *Fringe Review*.

On *Makeshifts and Realities*, and *Honour thy Father*

'Both plays, beautifully and subtly executed, linger in the mind.' ★★★★★ *London Pub Theatres Magazine*.

'Fine examples of the Finborough's continuing genius in finding forgotten plays, applying the highest of technical standards to the production.' ★★★★★ *The Arts' Desk*.

On *Distinguished Villa* –

'Quite superbly acted and directed... as good a play as you will currently find In London.' Michael Billington, *Country Life*.

'A dark and angry play, as cross as Osborne in its way...real emotional chaos and tragedy.' ★★★★★ Libby Purves, *Theatre Cat*

Presented in agreement with Concord Theatricals Ltd. on behalf of Samuel French Inc

PRESS NIGHTS: THURSDAY, 26 MARCH 2026 AND FRIDAY, 27 MARCH 2026 AT 7.30PM

PHOTOCALL: TUESDAY, 24 MARCH 2026 AT 1.00PM–1.30PM

Finborough Theatre, 118 Finborough Road, London SW10 9ED

Book online at www.finboroughtheatre.co.uk

Box Office 020 7244 7439

No booking fees

Tuesday, 24 March – Sunday, 19 April 2026

Tuesday to Saturday evenings at 7.30pm. Saturday and Sunday matinees at 3.00pm.

Prices until 28 March 2026 – Tickets £25, £23 concessions.

Previews (24 and 25 March) £18 all seats.

£10 tickets for Under 30s for performances from Tuesday to Sunday of the first week when booked online only.

£15 tickets for residents of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham on Saturday, 28 March 2026 at 7.30pm when booked online only.

Friends Evening on Wednesday, 1 April 2026 at 7.30pm

Prices from 31 March 2026 to 12 April 2026 – Tickets £29, £28 concessions, except Tuesday evenings £28 all seats.

Prices from 14 April 2026 to 19 April 2026 – Tickets £33, £32 concessions. No concessions on Friday or Saturday evenings.

Group Bookings for all performances – 1 free ticket in every 10 purchased.

Performance Length: Approximately two hours with one interval of fifteen minutes.

For more information, interviews and images, please contact

Finborough Theatre on e-mail press@finboroughtheatre.co.uk or 020 7244 7439

Download press releases and images at <https://finboroughtheatre.co.uk/press-resources/>

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