

The first London production for over 100 years

THE TRUTH ABOUT BLAYDS

by A. A. Milne

Directed by David Gilmore.

Designed by Alex Marker. Costume Design by Carla Joy Evans. Lighting Design by Jonathan Simpson.

Casting by Esther Knowles. Assistant Directors Jillian Feuerstein and Fiona Winning.

Cast: Karen Archer. Oliver Beamish. Catherine Cusack. William Gaunt. Lucy Jamieson. George Rowlands. Rupert Wickham.

A West End and Broadway hit from one of England's most loved writers, **A. A. Milne**, now receives its first London production for over 100 years – ***The Truth About Blayds*** opens at the multi-award-winning Finborough Theatre for a four week limited season on Tuesday, 9 September 2025 (**Press Night: Wednesday, 10 September 2025 at 7.30pm**).

London, 1921.

England's most loved poet and national treasure, Oliver Blayds, celebrates his 90th birthday, surrounded by his loyal family who have devoted their lives to fulfilling his every wish.

But when a devastating secret about Oliver's fabulously successful literary career emerges, everyone is forced to confront the truth about Blayds and the consequences of having sacrificed their lives for a lie...

Thought-provoking and wickedly funny, this rediscovered modern classic from 1921 is a compelling examination of the cult of celebrity, betrayal, and the cost of telling the truth.

Dorothy Parker called it 'a fine and merciless and honest play', and this rediscovery – directed by West End legend **David Gilmore** – restores to the theatre one of the most acclaimed playwrights of the era.

Acting legend **William Gaunt** (*Gates of Gold* at the Finborough Theatre and its subsequent transfer to Trafalgar Studios, National Theatre, Shakespeare's Globe, and countless television credits including *No Place Like Home* and *The Champions*) plays the title role, leading a superlative cast including **Karen Archer** (National Theatre, Royal Shakespeare Company); **Oliver Beamish** (National Theatre); **Catherine Cusack** (Chichester Festival Theatre, Almeida Theatre, National Theatre of Scotland), **Lucy Jamieson** (Donmar Warehouse); **George Rowlands** (National Theatre), and **Rupert Wickham** (National Theatre, Chichester Festival Theatre).

Playwright **A[lan] A[lexander] Milne** (1882-1956) is now best known for his writing for children – *Winnie the Pooh* (1926), *When We Were Very Young* (1924), *Now We Are Six* (1927) and *The House at Pooh Corner* (1928). But before his success as a children's author, he was also one of the most acclaimed playwrights of the period, often compared to J. M. Barrie, Arthur Wing Pinero and Oscar Wilde. He wrote eighteen plays including *Mr Pim Passes By* (1920) and *The Dover Road* (1922) which were huge hits in both the West End and Broadway, and his hugely popular and much revived adaptation of *The Wind in the Willows*, *Toad of Toad Hall* (1929). He often had several plays running simultaneously in London, New York and other countries with the leading actors of the day: John Gielgud, Gerald Du Maurier, Flora Robson, Irene Vanbrugh, and Leslie Howard.. *The Observer* noted in 1922 that Milne was 'steadily monopolizing the theatres of the habited globe for the performances of his plays.' He was also an Assistant Editor of *Punch*, and a novelist, much acclaimed for his detective novel, *The Red House Mystery* (1936) which is still in print. In the 1930s, Milne became a very public defender of pacifism – his *Peace with Honour* (1934) was one of the best-selling books of the year, and anticipated George Orwell in attacking the evils of totalitarianism. Yet despite the acclaim, A.A.

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.

Registered Charity no. 1071304. Registered address: 118 Finborough Road, London SW10 9ED. A member of the Independent Theatre Council.

PRESS INFORMATION

Milne's theatrical success came to be overshadowed by Winnie the Pooh, much to his annoyance. A.A. Milne died at the age of 74 in 1956, having become estranged from the son he had made famous, Christopher Robin.

Director **David Gilmore** has directed many West End productions including the original award-winning productions of *Daisy Pulls It Off*, *Lend Me a Tenor*, and *The Hired Man*, all produced by Andrew Lloyd Webber. His production of *Grease* (Dominion, Cambridge and Victoria Palace Theatres) completed an almost unbroken UK run of 25 years, and has also played internationally. Other West End productions include *Beyond Reasonable Doubt*, starring Frank Finlay; *Radio Times* starring Tony Slattery; *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* starring Griff Rhys Jones; Neil Simon's *Chapter Two* starring Tom Conti and Sharon Gless; *Rick's Bar Casablanca*; *Annie Get Your Gun*; the Cole Porter revue *A Swell Party*; *Out of the Blue*; *Fatal Attraction* starring Susannah York; *All The Fun Of The Fair*; *Sinatra* at the London Palladium; and *Defending the Caveman* which won an Olivier Award for Best Entertainment. At the Finborough Theatre, he directed the first London production for over 75 years of St John Ervine's *Jane Clegg* which won an OffWestEnd OnComm Award during lockdown. His countless other productions include *Crimes of the Heart* and *Mandragola* (National Theatre), Sir Anthony Quayle in *Dandy Dick*, Michael Frayn's *Noises Off* and *Steel Magnolias* (National Tours) and Noël Coward's *Cavalcade* (Chichester Festival Theatre) with a cast of over two hundred. He has worked frequently worldwide including productions in Australia, Europe, China, the USA and Canada. David was Artistic Director of the Nuffield Southampton Theatres, the Watermill Theatre Newbury and the inaugural Artistic Director of the St. James Theatre (now The Other Palace).

The cast is:

Karen Archer | Marion Blayds-Conway

Productions at the Finborough Theatre include *The Goodnight Bird* and *Generous*.

Theatre includes *The Other Place* (Park Theatre), *All's Well that End's Well*, *As You Like It*, *Hamlet*, *The Gods Weep* (Royal Shakespeare Company), *Mourning Becomes Electra* (National Theatre), *An Inspector Calls* (National Theatre Tour), *The Mousetrap* (St Martin's Theatre), *Happy Ending* (Arcola Theatre), *Insufficiency* (Riverside Studios), *She Stoops to Conquer* (Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith), *Four Days in Hong Kong* (Orange Tree Theatre), *Noises Off* (Center Stage Theatre, Seattle), *The Memory of Water and Life After George* (Vienna's English Theatre), *Misery* (Harrogate Theatre) and *Ghosts* (Library Theatre, Manchester).

Film includes *Giro City*, *Forever Young* and *The Mouse and the Woman*.

Television includes *The Gold*, *Law and Order*, *New Tricks*, *Without You*, *Hustle*,

Elizabeth I, *Holby City*, four seasons of *The Chief*, *Casualty*, *The Ruth Rendell Mysteries* and *The Secret Garden*.

Radio includes numerous productions as a member of the BBC Radio Drama Company.

Oliver Beamish | William Blayds-Conway

Productions at the Finborough Theatre include *The Roar of the Greasepaint*, *The Smell of the Crowd*.

Theatre includes *Billy Bishop Goes to War* (Southwark Playhouse), *War Horse*, *Ghetto*, *Fuente Ovejuna* (National Theatre), *Kean* (Apollo Theatre), *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Henry IV Part I*, *Camelot* (Open Air Theatre, Regent's Park), *Buddy* (Strand Theatre), *Jolson* (Victoria Palace Theatre and Toronto), *Dusty: The Musical* (Charing Cross Theatre), *Blood Brothers* (Lyric Theatre), *Roll Over Beethoven* (Belgrade Theatre, Coventry), *Hay Fever*, *The Mummy's Tomb*, *Dick Barton – Special Agent*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Twelfth Night* (Queen's Theatre, Hornchurch), *Saint Joan* (Birmingham Rep), *Julius Caesar*, *The Threepenny Opera*, *All My Sons*, *Moll Flanders*, *The Secret Rapture* (New Vic Theatre, Stoke), *Candide* (Everyman Theatre, Liverpool), *Carousel*, *Twelfth Night* (Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester), *Henry IV Part I*, *Twelfth Night* (Orange Tree Theatre, Richmond), and *Sweeney Todd*, *Round The Horne...Revisited*, Victoria Wood's *Talent*, *The Night They Raided Minsky's* and *Dreamboats and Petticoats* (National Tours).

Television includes *Brookside*, *Poirot*, *Emmerdale*, *Stay Lucky*, *The Darling Buds of May*, *The Royal* and as Richard Willmore in *Coronation Street*.

Catherine Cusack | Isobel Blayds

Production at the Finborough Theatre include *The Gigli Concert* and *The Early Bird*.

Theatre includes *Spring Awakening* (Almeida Theatre), *Super High Resolution* (Soho Theatre), *Passing* (Park Theatre), *Further Than The Furthest Thing* (Minack Theatre, Penzance), *The Shadow Factory* (Nuffield Theatre, Southampton), *Judith*, *Fragile*, *The Factory Girls* (Arcola Theatre), *Dancing At Lughnasa*, *The Crucible*, *How Many Miles To Babylon?* (Lyric Theatre, Belfast), *Ghosts* (New Victoria Theatre, Stoke), *All That Fall* (Jermyn Street Theatre and 59E59 New York), *The Seagull* (Headlong), *Bingo* (Chichester Festival Theatre and The Young Vic), *The Two Character Play* (Jermyn Street Theatre and Provincetown Theater, Massachusetts), *What Fatima Did*, *Bold Girls* (Hampstead Theatre), *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Tempest* (Storyhouse, Chester), *King Lear* (Second Age Theatre, Dublin), *Salt*

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.

Registered Charity no. 1071304. Registered address: 118 Finborough Road, London SW10 9ED. A member of the Independent Theatre Council.

PRESS INFORMATION

Meets Wound (Theatre503), *Uncle Vanya* (Wilton's Music Hall), *Mary Stuart* (National Theatre of Scotland), *Bronte*, *The Mill On The Floss* (Shared Experience), *Blood Red Saffron Yellow* (Drum, Plymouth), *Our Lady Of Sligo* (National Theatre), *Measure For Measure* (English Touring Theatre), *Prayers of Sherkin* (The Old Vic), *Phaedra's Love* (Gate Theatre), *Mrs Warren's Profession* (Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith), *The Glass Menagerie* (Octagon Theatre, Bolton) and *Moonlight, The Seagull, You Never Can Tell* (Gate Theatre, Dublin).

Film includes *Finding Neverland*, *Conspiracy of Silence*, *Boxed* and *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne*.

Television includes *EastEnders*, *Endeavour*, *The Last Days of Anne Boleyn*, *Doctors*, *Sophia and Constance*, *Jonathan Creek*, *Ballykissangel*, *Coronation Street*, *Cadfael* and *Doctor Who*.

William Gaunt | Oliver Blayds

Productions at the Finborough Theatre include *Gates of Gold* and its subsequent transfer to Trafalgar Studios.

Theatre includes *A Woman Of No Importance* (Vaudeville Theatre) *The Lady In The Van* and *Exit The King* (Theatre Royal Bath), *Strife*, *The Cherry Orchard* (Chichester Festival Theatre), *Richard II* (Shakespeare's Globe), *The Crucible* (The Old Vic), *The Resistible Rise Of Arturo Ui* (Duchess Theatre), *The Family Reunion*, *The Wild Duck* (Donmar Warehouse), *66 Books* (Bush Theatre), *Henry IV Parts I and II* for which he won the Clarence Derwent Award for Best Supporting Actor in 2011 (Shakespeare's Globe), *King Lear*, *The Seagull* (Royal Shakespeare Company National and International Tours), *An Inspector Calls*, *Look Back In Anger*, *Albert Speer*, *The Mysteries*, *The Cherry Orchard*, *Henry V* (National Theatre), *Humble Boy* (National Theatre and Gielgud Theatre) and *Macbeth* (Almeida Theatre).

Film includes *The Timber*, *Bridget Jones: The Edge Of Reason* and *La Femme Musketeeer*.

Television includes *EastEnders*, *Doctors*, *Midsomer Murders*, *Without You*, *Life of Riley*, *Cast Offs*, *Casualty*, *The Vice*, *Forty*, *Next of Kin*, *No Place Like Home* and *The Champions*.

Direction includes *Here's A Funny Thing* (Fortune Theatre), *One For The Road* (Lyric Theatre) and *Macbeth* (Open Air Theatre, Regents Park). William also spent two years as Artistic Director at the Liverpool Playhouse.

Lucy Jamieson | Septima Blayds-Conway

Trained at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art.

Productions include *Macbeth: Something Wicked* (Donmar Warehouse).

Film includes *Dunki*.

George Rowlands | Oliver Blayds-Conway

Trained at Rose Bruford College.

Productions include *An Inspector Calls* (National Theatre International Tour), *The Boy with the Bee Jar* (Hope Theatre, London), *Parliament Square* (Unicorn Theatre, London) and *Macbeth* (Churchill Theatre, Bromley)

Film includes *Operation Dynamo* and *Road to Hollywood*.

Rupert Wickham | A. L. Royce

Productions at the Finborough Theatre include *Anahera* and *Imaginationship*.

Trained at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama.

Theatre includes *Stalin's Favourite* (National Tour), *Private Lives* (Nottingham Playhouse), *Defying Hitler* (National Tour and 59E59 Theaters, New York City), *Quartermaine's Terms* (Salisbury Playhouse), *Journey's End* (Comedy Theatre), *Henry V* (National Theatre), *The Winslow Boy* (Chichester Festival Theatre and National Tour), *Not About Heroes* (National Tour), *Death and the Maiden* (King's Head Theatre), *Othello* (National Tour), *Hamlet* (Greenwich Theatre), *King Lear* (Ludlow Festival), *Romeo and Juliet* (Open Air Theatre, Regent's Park) and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester).

Film includes *Faraway Home*, *Journey's End*, *Woman in Gold*, *Mission Impossible 5*, *Stand Off* and *The Bourne Identity*.

Television includes *Riviera 2*, *Nazi Megastructures*, *Almost Unmarried*, *X Company*, *Silk*, *The Spacerace*, *Waking the Dead*, *Blackbeard*, *A Dance to the Music of Time* and *Band of Brothers*.

Radio includes *The Reader*, *How to Rebuild a City*, *Luther in Real Time*, *Talk to Me Ayn Rand*, *Betsie and the Emperor* and *Poetry Please*.

Video Games include *Nightbeast* and *Assassin's Creed*.

The press on *The Truth About Blayds*

'A play that everyone must see, and which at once places its author conspicuous among the most successful dramatists now writing for the English-speaking stage.' *Theatre Magazine*

'A work of art.' *The Times*.

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.

Registered Charity no. 1071304. Registered address: 118 Finborough Road, London SW10 9ED. A member of the Independent Theatre Council.

PRESS INFORMATION

'Brilliant satire... far and away the best thing Mr. Milne has done, and I found it quite the most interesting piece of new and original English work on our stage.' *Pall Mall Gazette*.

'A first-rate play...brilliant satirical drama.' *The Sketch*.

'Sharp and powerful...really interesting....brilliant.' *The Manchester Guardian*.

'Wittily written and well-observed.' *Theatre Arts Monthly*.

'It is excellent. It is so good.' *Evening News*.

'A droll examination of humorous rationalization and self-preservation.' *Back Stage*.

'A.A. Milne's comedy, has everything – humour, tragedy, suspense, romance, and unsurpassed delineation of character....This is a play to see'. *Western Daily Mail*.

'A very interesting theme excellently worked out.' *The Daily Telegraph*.

'The best thing Mr. Milne has done.' *Civil and Military Gazette*.

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 production was Sidney Howard's *The Silver Cord* (1927) which received its first London production since 1927 in a critically acclaimed sell-out run at the Finborough Theatre in 2024. He 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 Andrew Maunder's previous productions at the Finborough Theatre

On *The Silver Cord*

'Rare revival of Sidney Howard's acidic portrayal of toxic family relationships is wickedly entertaining.' ★★★★★ *The Stage*.

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

'Magnificent mothering melodrama.' ★★★★★ *London Pub Theatres*.

'Beautifully written, well-structured, totally engrossing, shocking, amusing.' ★★★★★ *London Theatre*.

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*.

'Carefully paced, finely detailed and beautifully acted.' ★★★★★ *Reviews Hub*.

On *Distinguished Villa* –

'A thumping good play 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*

'Superbly acted and directed...a play not to be missed.' ★★★★★ *London Theatre*.

'This sparkling revival at the Finborough...a tremendous piece of writing.' ★★★★★ *Reviews Hub*.

On *Jane Clegg*, also directed by David Gilmore –

'David Gilmore's production is gripping and carefully controlled, suggesting Ervine's intriguing drama has earned a place among the great writers of his day.' ★★★★★ *Reviews Hub*.

PRESS NIGHT WEDNESDAY, 10 SEPTEMBER 2025 AT 7.30PM

PHOTOCALL: TUESDAY, 9 SEPTEMBER 2025 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, 9 September – Saturday, 4 October 2025

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

Prices for Week One – Tickets £25, £23 concessions.

Preview (9 September) £15 all seats.

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.

Registered Charity no. 1071304. Registered address: 118 Finborough Road, London SW10 9ED. A member of the Independent Theatre Council.

PRESS INFORMATION

£10 tickets for Under 30s/Universal Credit 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, 13 September 2025 at 7.30pm when booked online only.

Prices for Week Two— Tickets £27, £25 concessions, except Tuesday evenings £20 all seats.

Prices for Weeks Three and Four – Tickets £30, £28 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/>