

ECHOES OF THE PAST - WIMBORNE COMMUNITY THEATRE 2019

Scene 1 INTRODUCTION

- Audience enter building, show tickets and are given colour coded sticker to determine which group they follow.
- They are then directed into shop space at front of museum.
- They see and hear 4 Zoetropes showing images – cat chasing invisible mouse; hand hammering; shop sign changing.
- * During the soundscape VOICES OF THE HOUSE, HILDA COLES as a 30 something adult in duffel coat enters from one corner and HILDA as an 11 year-old girl enters from another; they meet in the centre and circle each other, in a kind of dance. Then slowly they move together towards their next scene (i.e. YOUNG HILDA to stairs. ELDER HILDA to door by garden, awaiting entry to GARDEN scene)

FX Start 4 Zoetropes rolling just before audience enter, approx. 15 minutes before show start time.

FX Stop all 4 Zoetropes on cue from Tony (once all audience are gathered) and show time arrived.

SFX Simultaneously, start playing Soundscape 1 (over speakers)

SOUNDSCAPE 1

ALL: Welcome

STEWART:

Welcome, people, welcome!
I am very pleased to see you.
Things haven't been quite as usual
of late. Some days chatter, and bangings,
some days, silence, and grumblings.

GILL:

All life's upheavals starting again
as they always have since I was built
and rebuilt, and refurbished, and restyled
through the past, into the present,
through the present into the future
and on into memory. And on into history.

DAVE:

Stone and flint, wood and brick.
I've been a hall, a home, a store, a shop -
and a museum. But I've never been
a Priest's House!
I remember John Bowdidge, gentleman.
John Mitchell, Christopher King,
Elizabeth and William.

**(ACTION: SLOW ENTRY THROUGH AUDIENCE OF JOHN LOW, HILDA COLES'S,
HANNAH AND RALPH)**

BARBARA:

Sometimes I see the Lowes
and Hannah Bartlett,
and the Coles and Ralph Lowle,
watch them pass through one door
and out another, from one life
into the next, and passing on
into the next they leave behind.

IAN:

things we always want to find
some small trace of something
sometimes in a room or on the stairs
of the days and nights,
the men and women, rich and poor,
in sitting rooms, studies, halls,
all their deals and promises,
lies and prayers, secrets,
music and books, recipes and menus.

SUE:

in the office, bedroom, stairs,
in the kitchen, dining hall, shop,
always something fallen or
something left behind. . .

TUPPY:

Under the floor boards, a cobbled floor,
behind the skirting boards, dust,
in the fireplace, ash,
under the floorboards, glass, shells, pottery
Behind the wall – a clay pipe, a cat,
under the step – a ditch, a coin, seeds . . .

ALL: *whispering improvisation . . .*

You never can know
all there is to know
about a house.

TONY:

Let us begin, and see what you will find.
Please take these keys, pass through the doors,
Through times strange
To-ing and fro-ing.
See what air you sense
what sense you feel,
what sounds you hear,
what feelings all around
in the air, of what I have in store.

TONY *speaks last part live:*

See what air you sense,
what sense you feel,
what sounds you hear,
what feelings all around
in the air, of what I have in store.

(GILL, CHRIS AND TONY hold up keys)

Green Group 1 over here on this side,
For Gill will be your Guide.
Red Group 2 go to that side,
For Chris will be your Guide.
Yellow Group 3, please come to me,
For I shall be your Guide, you see.

Audience is divided into 3 groups.

A Guide takes each group on journey to watch/experience 5 scenes.

Each route is in a clockwise direction, but begins in a different location.

GREEN GROUP (GILL) Sequence of Scene Visits (SETS OFF FIRST)

1. Garden (go through from Scene 1 through Staircase scene and out through main garden door; line audience up behind hedge of first garden with pond)
2. Kitchen (place audience along wall adjacent to garden)
3. Staircase (place audience along wall, facing stairs; leave space for Charlie and Clare by door from shop)
4. Stationer's Shop (via Main Shop; audience can stand anywhere)
5. Parlour (place audience at rear of room, with backs to curtain joining Stationer's)
6. Finale – (return to Main Shop, via Stairway, once Red Group has left there, for final scene)

RED GROUP (CHRIS) Sequence of Scene Visits

1. Stationer's Shop (via curtain straight from Main Shop)
2. Parlour (via curtain on other side of room; audience at rear facing window and chairs)
3. Garden (via door and turn left to garden door; audience on first section of path behind hedge)
4. Kitchen (via main door – ramp available for wheelchair users; seat audience at rear, facing fire)
5. Staircase (via internal door to 17th century hall and on through door; place anywhere facing stairs, leaving space by other door for Charlie to enter in wheel-chair)
6. Finale – (return to Main Shop as at start for final scene)

BLUE GROUP (TONY) Sequence of Scene Visits

1. Staircase
2. Stationer's Shop (via Main Shop)
3. Parlour
4. Garden
5. Kitchen
6. Finale – (through door to Staircase area, after they have returned to shop as at start for final scene)

Scene 2 GARDEN SCENE (WW2)

As audience emerge, they see **MRS BLANCHE COLES** DSL, weeding front bed, with hoe.

LYN/ASHLEY – SFX on over hidden speakers of WW2 - Air raid sirens then Narration

TONY:

In 1940, iron ploughshares and railings,
hammers and spades
were needed for weapons of war –
the ironmonger's lot
was not an easy one.
But in the midst of conflict,
green-fingered Blanche Coles
still tends her blooms,
weeds out chaos,
creates order in this garden.
Whilst her daughter Hilda,
like the budgerigars she used
to breed, hemmed in
by borders and ready to fly.

LIVE ACTION

Hilda appears from back door, wearing duffle-coat. She's holding **an official letter**. Crosses to USR, calls out excitedly DOWNSTAGE to her mother.

HILDA: Mother!

MRS COLES: Goodness!

HILDA: Mother!

MRS COLES: Hilda, please . . . there is no need to shout quite so loudly.

HILDA: I've had good news! I passed! They've accepted me as a truck driver. *(Holds out letter)*

MRS COLES: *(Stops hoeing; walks UPSTAGE to look at letter, holding hoe)* Why must you wear that dreadful coat?

HILDA: Because it's comfy - and warm.

MRS COLES: But not very lady-like – is it, Hilda?

HILDA: As if that matters, now there's a war on! Or hadn't you heard?

MRS COLES: No need to adopt that tone, dear. Most unbecoming. *(Hands back letter, returns to DSL position hoeing again, not looking at HILDA)* How are you ever going to find a

husband?

HILDA: I don't want one (*rather rhetorical, declamatory*) I want to do my bit for the war effort.

MRS COLES: Driving is men's work, dear.

HILDA (*moving downstage to stand by mother at DSL*): But the men are away fighting! And, as you know, women all over the country are volunteering to do work the men were doing before the war.

MRS COLES: Not from Wimborne, Hilda. (*Moves across to start hoeing the other bed DSR*)

HILDA (*following her*): Yes! Even in Wimborne! Mary Abley, for example! (*points to house in front*) She's joined up already- and she's younger than me.

MRS COLES (*looking up and out at Mary's house*): Can't imagine little Mary in uniform.

HILDA (*in closer to mother*): And anyway, mother, in the last war, you did your bit, with Lady Hanham's bandage-rollers at Church House.

MRS COLES (*slight pause as she thinks of an excuse. Carries on hoeing*): That was different. Caring for the sick and wounded is acceptable.

HILDA (*exasperated*): That's exactly what I'll be doing. (*Change of mood – calming herself down*) Look, mother, I don't want to argue with you over this.

MRS COLES (*hoeing*): Then don't, dear. It doesn't become you.

HILDA (*cross again, pointing towards shop at SR*): Oh, but working in the shop's acceptable?

MRS COLES: With the young men away, we have to make compromises.

HILDA (*over to Mum*): But you don't set foot in there!

MRS COLES (*stops to confront HILDA, hoe between them*): I have other jobs to do - Hilda! Stop this!

MR COLES (*voice off from a distance*): What the Dickens is going on down there?

MR COLES appears at SL, crossing the grass, entering USL

MRS COLES: Your daughter is! (*She returns to gardening, tugs out weeds rather roughly*)

HILDA (*moving upstage to side of TOM COLES and showing him letter*): Father! I've been accepted by the WRENS. As a Driver!

MR COLES: Oh! (*looks at letter, short pause, as he reads*) Where will you be based, dear? Will you still be able to help out in the shop?

HILDA: That would be rather difficult, father.

MRS COLES (*looking at HILDA now*): Why?

HILDA: Because I’m to be based in Invergordon.

MR COLES: Where’s that?

HILDA: Scotland. The Highlands.

MRS COLES (moves upstage to USL – stands on left of TOM): Heaven help us! Tell the child, Tom!

HILDA (*to right of TOM, speaking across him*): I am not a child, mother, I am **33** years old!

MR COLES: Well, I . . .

HILDA: And you know I’ve been driving for years!

MRS COLES (to TOM): It’s that friend of yours fault!

MR COLES: What? Who?

MRS COLES: Your history friend - the doctor!

HILDA: I make up my own mind, mother!

MR COLES: EK?

MRS COLES: Coming round here with his swanky cars¹

MR COLES (*turns to BLANCHE*): Why do you have to bring EK into this? Anyway, you need to show some respect – now he’s ‘Sir’ EK Le Fleming!

MRS COLES: Because he encourages her! Always has – letting her try out his blessed . . . bone-shakers!

MR COLES: Well, my dear, we should be pleased she’s off to do her bit. She’s an example to everyone else in the town – as usual! I’m proud of you, Hilda.

HILDA (*pleased*): Thank you, father. (*moves right*)

MR COLES: Only thing is – (*moves over stage right to HILDA*) who can I get to help fetching and carrying stock, now that Ralph’s signed up? The old ’uns are fine for shop work but . . . But . . . we’ll buckle up and make do, I suppose. (*turns back to BLANCHE*) Perhaps you’ll help out a bit more, my dear?

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MRS COLES: Excuse me, I've just remembered, I have to go and pay a social visit.
(Crosses in front of TOM and HILDA, then stops before house, turns and is tearful, a little OTT) Goodbye, Hilda. (She leaves)

HILDA: Goodbye, mother. (Pause. Sighs. To MR COLES) I'll sort out the new batch of oil lamps, father. Then I'll pack.

(MR COLES goes to HILDA and leads her DOWNSTAGE – perhaps a little stage whispery, in case BLANCHE hears. Slightly secretive atmosphere for next exchange)

MR COLES (at front of garden): She'll come round, Hilda. She always does. Remember when you put those live rabbits amongst all the moss in the shop front, as part of the shooting season display?

HILDA: And they escaped out and ate her pansies?

MR COLES (laughing): We thought we'd never hear the end of it!

HILDA (more rhetorical): I still think it was a jolly good idea!

MR COLES (tap HILDA before speaking; this is a ritual saying): If I had a pound for every pellet I had to sweep up . . . I'd . . .

BOTH: Be a rich man! (They both laugh)

HILDA: I'll miss you, Dad.

(They hug, then step away)

MR COLES: Away with you now!

HILDA: Yes, Silly old me!

Scene 3 VICTORIAN KITCHEN

SFX Speakers

In the 20th century – RALPH LOWLE for the COLES

In the 19th century – HANNAH BARTLETT for their grandparents, the LOW family, WILLIAM Sr, WILLIAM Jr, JOHN and EDMUND

MUSIC – Track 1 (Intro): who cues this?

SHAINÉ's voice/RECORDED (ticking of clock):

Now here in my old kitchen

What shall we find?

A cosy nook? - a chilly aside?

So many layers of history

locked in this kitchen –

Hooks for a roasting spit

never quite removed

before the range was put in.

One century to the next,

from one family to another,

the Lows to the Coles.

And below stairs, away from the roses,

Servants and shop staff would come here

to make up fires, cook, wash, sweep

And if they were lucky, and it was quiet,

To sleep.

SFX Clock chimes – 13

FEMALES – AMY in front as HANNAH BARTLETT, carrying candle, followed by ROSIE, NINA & PIPPA from OLD SCHOOL END; MALES - ALAN in front, as RALPH LOWLE, carrying lamp, followed by SHAINÉ, then LUKE, enter from HOUSE END DOOR – leave door slightly ajar for quick exit

RALPH LOWLE (*steps forward to centre stage*):

My name's Ralph Lowle. Shop assistant here at Coles the ironmongers from 1926. I was sixteen. I worked here for nearly 40 years, apart from when I went off to fight in the war. The working hours were terrible ...8.30 start every morning and we didn't stop until 6 every night. On Fridays closing time was later – 7 o'clock – and on Saturdays, 8. Sometimes it was 8.30 by the time we shut up shop.

HANNAH BARTLETT (*steps forward, all other women mime working as she speaks*):

Half past eight? And you're grumbling? Huh! I start work at dawn and I am on my feet all day, from morning till bed-time at nine o'clock with little time to rest. (*Introducing herself*) Hannah Bartlett. I've been servant to the Low Family here for almost as many years as you to the ...Moles?

RALPH: Coles.

HANNAH: I have four gentlemen to look after, including Mr William and his three sons, William, John and Edmund. As there is no lady of the house, it falls to me to keep order.

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RALPH (*steps forward*): When I started in November, I was just a lackey, running about. My first job was to keep an eye on the boys who popped in to the shop to look at the fireworks – and make sure they don’t pinch them!

(ALAN moves downstage and looks into the audience peering, SHAINÉ and LUKE sneak forward, one behind the other, SHAINÉ in front, towards centre, to pinch fireworks; **SFX BELL RINGS** to cue ALAN to turn and look; SHAINÉ and LUKE retreat shuffling. LUKE steps in front of SHAINÉ. Same process, except LUKE leading. **SFX BELL RINGS**. They shuffle back. ALAN turns to front. Then SHAINÉ and LUKE come forward again and LUKE stretches to grab fireworks. **SFX BELL RINGS**. ALAN turns and sees him. Calls out “Oj, you!” LUKE and SHAINÉ retreat fast. LUKE lets off banger. They go through real door, but it remains open as they return shortly afterwards to make group fire).

HANNAH (*taking focus, to audience*): My first job is to build the fire so that the house stays warm. I lay cinders and large round coals on the grate so there won’t be smoke when the fire is lit.

Cue TRACK 2 – Music to play loud throughout, the fire being built. (ACTION ALL Physical theatre with music; MALES join in too; PIPPA and SHAINÉ make fireplace; ROSIE and NINA flames; LUKE makes fire-guard facing front; ALL make crackling SFX (ALAN and AMY are standing in front of the fire / fire is built, slowly fade the music so it is soft and quiet so AMY can move towards ALAN and say her line:

Then I put pieces of wood laid hollow, over which a few large cinders are laid loose. I need to sweep down the ‘sutt’ every morning as far as I can reach and wind up the grate in the evening after dinner.

Music grows louder again as ALL CAST move to next positions, on either side, ready for mime work. When cast are in position, fade music out slowly.

RALPH aka ALAN: For me, it was lifting heavy boxes and cast cannisters.
(*Actions by MEN to match words*)

SHAINÉ: Carrying them upstairs to the storeroom. (*lifts and passes box up to LUKE*)

LUKE: Or downstairs to the shop. (*takes box back down to floor in centre*)

ALAN: Later on, I was in charge of all the ironmongery -

SHAINÉ: Galvanised iron buckets and bowls

LUKE: Spades and trowels, nails and screws

SHAINÉ: Brooms and brushes, gunpowder, guns and cartridges,

ALAN/LUKE: Oil and oil lamps,

SHAINÉ: Nets and knives

ALAN et al: We sold the lot!

HANNAH aka AMY:

(*ALL WOMEN mime doing the actions*)

AMY: I do all the cooking, cleaning and bed-making

NINA (*hauling in water*): Haul in water to scrub the floors (*scrubbing*)

AMY: Dust and keep a tidy house. (*dusting, facing front*)

ROSIE: Mending clothes and stitching on buttons (*sewing*)

NINA: Starch collars. (*moves in front of ROSIE to stand in doorway to do ironing*)

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PIPPA (and AMY): Once a week is wash day (*flapping out sheet*)

AMY: And I'm busy with the mangle. (*ALL turn handle of mangle*)

AMY: My back aches at the end of each day. (*WOMEN groan with pain and stretch*)

NINA and ROSIE: and my hands are raw. (*WOMEN groan*)

PIPPA and AMY: But I take pride in my work. (*they pose*)

ALL: and the gentlemen look very fine indeed! (*look at men who pose; PIPPA goes “Aahh!”*)

RALPH (*in centre*): I was paid 10 shillings a week when I started. When Miss Coles closed the shop and made it a museum ...£5/10 shillings. I got another job at Willis's and they doubled my pay straight away to £10/10 shillings. So I did wrong by staying at Coles's so long. But,,they treated me pretty well – old Mr Coles was fine ...he used to say

SHAINE: Never stand around looking idle...always have a duster in your hand.

ALAN: And Mrs Coles was a lovely lady. So, I stayed.

HANNAH: They're kind people, my gentlemen, on the whole. But it's a lonely life all the same, particularly for a widow like me!

ALAN and AMY: ALL THOSE YEARS.

ALL CAST (*whispering as they exit*): All those years, all those years...!

Scene 4 STAIRCASE/HALL IN MUSEUM

We see 4 bubble-wrapped artefacts on different treads of stairs.

SFX VOICE OF THE STAIRS

Noise of footsteps on stairs, RHYTHMICAL TO MATCH VOICE OF STAIRCASE

BARBARA:

Welcome to the hub of the house, a place of passage and pause,
for merchants and servants, for volunteers and visitors,
upstairs and downstairs and roundabout stairs,
watching and waiting; fetching and carrying
food, bed pans, iron wares, clothes, axe-heads, toys.
Until the everyday becomes treasure in a museum where the future
meets the past in the present.

(DOOR OPENS – guides need to make sure no audience around it beforehand. SUSAN (Clare) and TOM (Charlie) enter with plastic box.

SUSAN *(sees artefact on stairs)*: There they are!
(She climbs half way upstairs. Picks up first artefact, the highest up the stairs, then turns to speak to TOM): Are you OK to put them in the box if I pass them down to you?

TOM: Yes. Fine.

SUSAN *(as she brings him first artefact)*: We need to be very careful.

TOM: Of course.

SUSAN: *(Back upstairs to pick up second artefact, not looking at him)*: Have you done any volunteering like this before?

TOM *(Pause as he thinks about it)*: Not really.

(SUSAN responds with nod or "OK", hands him second artefact and turns to climb back upstairs for third artefact. TOM suddenly remembers and is more positive):

TOM: We came here from my school!

SUSAN *(stops and turns to face him, holding third artefact on stairs)*: Oh, yes?

TOM *(positive)*: I loved it *(Slowly looks around to audience)* Like *(pause as he thinks)* being back in time.

SUSAN *(Moment of stillness and togetherness. Enthusiastic. She looks to front at/over audience)*: Yes, I think that too. *(Gives him third artefact. Goes for final fourth artefact, low on stairs)* You're doing well.

TOM *(looks into plastic bag, laughs)*: Nothing broken so far!

SUSAN *(realizing she has brought down all the 4 artefacts)*: That's it! I'm just going to fetch some more from upstairs...*(Goes up. Turns to face TOM)*: Are you OK to wait down here?

TOM:... I'll come up with you! *(SUSAN awkward)* Only joking! I'll wait here. I'm used to it.

SUSAN (*awkward*): Next year ... we'll have the lift in. And you'll be able to...

TOM: Yay!

SUSAN: Be right back.

(SUSAN climbs the stairs and disappears upstairs. TOM waits alone. Maybe he notices photograph of HILDA COLES on wall and reads name aloud. Then from upstairs we hear sound of clock striking 13. Suddenly we hear YOUNG HILDA singing from upstairs 'The Grand Old Duke of York...')

YOUNG HILDA, a girl dressed as a soldier (cf HILDA in photo) comes marching halfway down the stairs. She stops and sits. Hums. Takes out a precious object she has found. An axe-head. Pauses. Then makes up a story about it.

HILDA: As the Rotten Romans clambered up the slopes of Badbury Rings, the brave Durotriges fought back with their stone axes. (*Action fighting*); Their faces were painted bright blue with woad and they were really scary. (*Stands, makes scary face and starts to run downstairs screaming. Stops. Sees TOM. Pause*): Oh, hello. What's your name?

TOM: Tom.

HILDA (*Stands with back to wall*): That's the same as two people I know – my father, Tom Coles. He's the Ironmonger! And Tom Stone. He was my father's helper. But he went off to fight on the Great War and ...

TOM: Yes?

HILDA: He died very bravely fighting for King and country. (*Pause*) And I miss him.

TOM: Sorry.

HILDA: Have you come to replace him?

TOM: Sort of.

HILDA: What does that mean?

TOM: Maybe. What's your name? Not ... Hetty by any chance?

HILDA: No. It's Hilda. Who's Hetty?

TOM: A girl in a book I read. A ghost story.

HILDA (*pretending to be brave*): I don't believe in ghosts. (*comes down closer*) Do you like my axe-head? My father found it near Badbury Rings.

TOM: I like it there.

HILDA: Me too. I have hundreds of fascinating old curios like this. Would you like to come upstairs and see my collection?

TOM: I can't. Not until next year.

HILDA: That's a **long** time to wait.

TOM: I've learnt to be patient.

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HILDA: Goodbye, then. *(She climbs upstairs again. Turns back; Laughs)* You’ve got very funny clothes on! *(Laughs. Climbs to top of stairs then off, left, singing ‘The Grand Old Duke of York...’ again. TOM sits looking puzzled)*

SUSAN *(from top of stairs right, returns carrying a few more bubble-wrapped artefacts):* There, that’s the lot. *(Comes downstairs and puts them in the box with TOM)*
You alright? Look like you’ve seen a ghost.

TOM: Funny you should say that. Think I have. A little girl?

SUSAN *(A moment. Thinks):* Maybe it was Hilda Coles – the woman who gave this house to be a museum. *(PAUSE)* When she was a little girl.

TOM: Maybe

SUSAN: Ready for a cup of tea?

TOM: Always.

(TOM holds the box. SUSAN opens the door – GUIDE MAY HELP IF NEEDED. As they exit, HILDA returns. Looks down.)

HILDA: He’s gone. Hmm. Maybe he **was** a ghost.?

(She skips off)

Scene 5 THE PARLOUR (Elizabeth King's Room)

Audience stand at rear facing window

USC A small table, with lace tablecloth centre stage, in front of window

A small glass decanter with brandy in, and 2 small glasses

Two wooden chairs – one either side of table – facing front

USR, a lectern, dressed in cloth, with a large ledger in it, Quill pen: Inkwell

USL & USR Silken wares installation

DSL Theatre candles on mantelpiece, glowing

Fire has twinkling lights and red paper

SFX Grandfather clock ticking.

SFX (on SPEAKER) Rocking chair; Clock-ticking; scratching pen; clink of money; cutting of silk, cloth. DAVE S (Bass): "Refrain from Sin"

VOICE OF PARLOUR

GILL:

Come into my parlour as the spider once said.

No flies here now – just an empty web of mystery.

Imagine, a Mercer's widow running a store

for silks and satin, shipped into Poole

by fair winds from the east, then coached on

to Wimborne. Resplendent materials

like flags flying

like lights illuminating

the town's prosperity.

For here lived Kings

in name and aspiration.

They aggrandized me,

They extended me.

As for 'refraining from Sin'

You may be the judge.

Look! Here comes a candle –

The widow Elizabeth approaches.

Ssssh! She is not alone in this room.

(DSL. Door opens at rear. ELIZABETH enters slowly with candle, stops by door for a moment. Raises candle to survey room. Slowly walks to DSC. Looks. Stays standing).

ELIZABETH: Christopher King? *(Pause)* Is that you?

ELIZABETH *(She moves to USR, puts down candle. Picks up quill pen. Reads ledger, counting in her head. Defiant, points to ledger):*

I've exceeded your expectations, Husband. You thought I would not be capable of growing our business – 'A mere woman', you once said. But I have proved you wrong.

The business is thriving. Our sales of silk and wool have increased significantly. *(To front)* Soon, William will take over. But until then, I shall continue to make it thrive. *(Taps ledger again)* It's all noted down carefully here. Every sale, every purchase entered accurately and dated. Just as you always liked.

(Sits and pours herself a drink from decanter) I'm surprised you found your way here, Christopher – I've been making such changes to the house. Restoration work. You'd hardly recognize it. All the plumbing in the building has been properly renovated and I have had a new kitchen installed – thanks to a very charming plumber, John Mitchell, Esquire. Well, he is more of a gentleman than a tradesman, at least in my perception. By the way, I now own three parts of the property. What do you think of that, my dear?

(We hear footsteps outside. ELIZABETH puts down glass, stands, picks up candle, points it at 'ghost')

What do you want from me? Why have you come back here? To haunt me? If so, you have failed. I am very content. Did you think – hope, perhaps – that one of your cronies would come and buy me out, as you did to the poor Widow Barnes here before us? No, I am made of sterner stuff, Christopher King. And I have made new friends. Friends with influence. What's that? Oh, the panel. *(She turns to face window and inscription)* 'Refrain from Sin'. *(She chuckles)* But I am a lady, my dear husband.

(Gentle knock)

Ah! There is my night-time visitor.

(Another knock)

ELIZABETH: Come in! *(Picks up candle to peer better)*

(MRS GULLIVER appears through door)

MRS GULLIVER: Good evening, dear Mrs King.

ELIZABETH *(going downstage to welcome her in)*: Ah! Good evening to you, dear Mrs Gulliver. Do come in. Please ...sit.

(They both sit and arrange themselves)

MRS GULLIVER: Thank you, Ma'am.

ELIZABETH: And your dear husband – Mr Gulliver?

MRS GULLIVER: Not able to join us, alas ... Business ... of the outdoor variety.

ELIZABETH: Ah, yes, of course! A clear night for it. *(Picks up decanter)* May I pour you a little tippie?

MRS GULLIVER: No, thank you. Most kind.

ELIZABETH: And you do not object if I ...?

MRS GULLIVER: Of course not, Mrs King. You are your own ... mistress now!

ELIZABETH: Indeed! *(Tops up her glass)*

MRS GULLIVER *(Leans in)*: I shall not take up too much of your valuable time.

ELIZABETH *(Leans in conspiratorially)*: Please proceed, Mrs Gulliver.

MRS GULLIVER: Very well, then. Mr G and I were very pleased with the quantity of silk you were so gracious as to purchase off us of last month.

ELIZABETH: It was of an exceptionally high quality. And has proved popular with our regular customers.

MRS GULLIVER: Excellent. Well, more good news – (*Takes out lace from bag. Keeps it hidden for dramatic effect. Leans in. Stage whisper*) Mr G has managed to secure a small quantity of what the Flems call “La Belle Dentelle” ... fine Lace to you and me. (*Reveals lace*)

ELIZABETH (*handles lace*): Terribly expensive to import ... with taxes so high.

MRS GULLIVER: Exact-a-mont, Madame King. But such fine craftsmanship. Magic hands, those Flems.

ELIZABETH: Oh, my dear, you speak the ‘Français’?

MRS GULLIVER: Un purr. Might you be interested in purchasing a petit morcelle?

ELIZABETH: Mais oui, oui. The usual arrangement?

MRS GULLIVER: If they suited you last time, Mrs K?

ELIZABETH: Indeed, they did.

MRS GULLIVER: And some more of that ivory silk to go with the order?

ELIZABETH (*noticing carafe is nearly empty*): Yes – and perhaps ... a small bouteille de ... cognac.

MRS GULLIVER: Certainly. Will that be all, Mrs K?

ELIZABETH: I think so.

(*MRS GULLIVER harumphs subtly*)

(*ELIZABETH remembers and takes out a small bag of chinking coins. MRS GULLIVER feels them*)

MRS GULLIVER: Beg pardon, Mrs King – but ... an extra shilling ... for the cognac.

ELIZABETH: Bien sure! (*Hands her silver coin*)

MRS GULLIVER (*Puts it all away. Stands to leave*): Pleasure doing business with you as usual, Mrs King. Good evening to you.

ELIZABETH: And to you, Mrs Gulliver.

MRS GULLIVER: Please don’t get up. I can find my own way out. Goodnight.

(*MRS GULLIVER leaves through door. Left alone, MRS KING sits and resumes her monologue*)

ELIZABETH: Une petite bouteille – (*Laughs*) No one to stop me enjoying a tippie *de temps en temps*, Mr King ... so, you see, my dear, I am managing very well in your absence and most grateful for your legacy. (*Toasts him*) Your good health!

(*She picks up candle and leaves through the door, swaying a little drunkenly*)

Scene 7 FINALE – HILDA'S BEHEST

SFX on SPEAKERS

CHARACTERS

HILDA COLES, in middle age (BARBARA B)

HILDA COLES, as a child (EVA)

MRS BLANCHE COLES, as an older woman (SUE)

MR GEORGE WATSON, Chairman of the Wimborne Historical Society (JEFF)

WIMBORNE RESIDENTS (THE CAST)

Zoetropes still in position

Monitors on and playing St Michael's Middle School Animations, as audiences arrive back in 3 groups

Chair for BLANCHE COLES, set with back to window, towards Stationer's Shop

Block for HILDA to stand on set next to chair

Wooden ladder set up TIC end of room for YOUNG HILDA

- *3 trays of sherry with 10 glasses on each, set at Stationer's Shop end*
- *Small box placed centrally, near doors, for HILDA to stand to make speech*
- *Whirring sounds of Zoetropes going again as all 3 groups gather together again in the shop*
- *During the following recorded dialogue, YOUNG HILDA (EVA) enters from staircase end, with some curios in a bag; she looks carefully at the Zoetropes*

7.1 SFX VOICES OF THE PUNTERS commenting about the Museum

GILL: What is a museum? And which story will it tell?

ALL: The stories of the different rooms, the atmospheres.

GILL: What is that sense of heritage?

ALL: It's in the trees.

STEWART: In the archaeology

SUE B: the bricks

TUPPY: the quaintness

DAVE: the wonkiness;

ALL: all higgledy piggledy.

TONY: It shows how additions and alterations have been done over the building's long life.

ALL: Imagine losing all this.

IAN: The building has a personality.

GILL: You want to come back again and again.

SUE: To see the old doors, the nooks and crannies

TUPPY: Floor boards and the flagstone floors

BARBARA: A place that was lived in.

STEWART: Like going back hundreds of years. In each room hundreds of years back.

SUE: Time has stood still.

TUPPY: Oh dear, there are mice in the potting shed.

GILL: And cobwebs!

STEWART: Well, that's authentic!

DAVE: And I love the smell of the smithy!

GILL: The garden's a secret haven in the middle of the town.

- *MR WATSON goes to ledge near Stationer's Shop to pick up trays of sherry (orange squash?) and take them round audience, welcoming people for special occasion.*
- *YOUNG HILDA climbs the wooden ladder (near TIC end of room) to look at her treasures.*
- *From Stationer's door, an older HILDA COLES (BARBARA B) enters with her mother, BLANCHE, speaking to the audience. She gets BLANCHE (SUE) to sit on a chair.*
- *Then HILDA goes around, chatting to audience.*
- *When all assembled, VOICE OF THE HOUSE speaks. As the VOICE introduces the characters, they step into position. All unnamed actors join the crowd listening to the speeches and occasionally commenting to the audience, sotto voce.*

7.2 SFX RECORDED VOICE OF THE HOUSE (on SPEAKERS)

September 1960

Fellows of the Wimborne Historical Society hold an important meeting

(ACTORS form image; BLANCHE seated, HILDA standing, JEFF close by)

Present are Mrs Blanche Coles *(BLANCHE sits)*

now a venerable older lady;

Miss Hilda Coles, known to friends as Mick. *(HILDA stands next to BLANCHE)*

She returned to me after the war ended

and remained in Wimborne, playing an active role

in the fields of hockey and amateur dramatics,
but especially in matters historical.
Mr George Watson, Chairman
of the WHS, begins the proceedings.

WATSON:

Thank you all for coming. Do make sure you have a glass of sherry, generously provided by Mrs and Miss Coles for the occasion. (*The COLES smile*) Please don't drink it all at once – you will need some for an important toast soon to come. (*Looks around him*) Now I am sure that we would all agree that this old house, the Priest's House, is one of the most excellent and interesting in Wimborne and from a business point of view is worth at least £10,000. (*Pause during which some actors go “Oooh!”*) which makes the forthcoming announcement even more generous. Some of you may have already read an article in the Bournemouth Evening Echo, (*holds up cutting from Echo, 1960*). ‘SECRETS OF MUSEUM OFFER REVEALED’. But tonight, we shall be hearing from the horse's mouth, so to speak. Please give a warm round of applause for Miss Hilda Coles. But don't spill your sherry.

(*He ushers HILDA to the lectern*)

HILDA: Thank you, Mr Watson – especially for comparing me to a horse. Much as I love animals, I must say I have long preferred horse ‘power’ to the four legged variety.

WATSON: Apologies, Miss Coles. A figure of speech.

BLANCHE COLES: What do you mean, dear?

HILDA: I was referring to my love of motor vehicles, mother.

BLANCHE: Ah! Indeed! (*Awkward pause*) Well, go on, dear.

HILDA: Thank you, mother. (*Back to audience*)

As you know, my late father was passionate about local history – those of you of a certain age may even have seen or heard him and the eminent Wimborne doctor, Sir EK Le Fleming, Chairman of the British Medical Association, on the Green discussing the glories of the Minster, or earlier settlements, each clutching some ancient treasure found by their own hands – a Roman coin, a piece of Celtic pottery, or this Bronze Age axe-head. (*She takes axe-head out of pocket and holds it high. YOUNG HILDA reacts*)

Now, although they entrusted most of their treasures, including the Valentine Cards Collection my father discovered locked away, to the Dorset County Museum in Dorchester, they long desired for Wimborne to have a museum of its own. To this end, my mother and I have decided to close the Ironmonger's Shop, a family business for over a hundred years, and bequeath the downstairs section of the building to become a public museum under the auspices of the Minster Governors.

(*Applause. ACTORS stage whisper*)

TUPPY: Apparently, she never even told the shop employees ‘till the other week.

BARBARA: Yes – poor old Ralph Lowle got a shock.

STEWART: It’s more shops Wimborne needs – not dusty old museums!

HILDA (*angry*): There is no question of our museum being dedicated merely to hoarding relics from the past! It will be, in the best sense of the word, a “live” museum – a centre of education and culture, continually changing its displays and appealing to children, as well as adults.

YOUNG HILDA (*from ladder*): And brave Hilda got her own way! Hurray!

(YOUNG HILDA climbs down ladder and moves to OLDER HILDA. They mirror each other for a moment. Then YOUNG HILDA skips off)

HILDA: So, here is to the past, present and to the future of this building, in all its new incarnations – may it take root and grow for many years – into the Twenty First Century!

MR WATSON: Please raise your glasses – to the Priest’s House Museum!

MRS COLES: And garden!

ALL: To the Priest’s House Museum and Garden!

*(ALL WCT form up next to COLESES for bow.
ALL move back as far as possible.
Acknowledge Millstream.
Millstream enter for their bow.
Both casts bow again and acknowledge backstage crew)*

SFX 7.3 VOICE OF BUILDING

(creaky door)

STEWART: Goodbye,
I will see you in a year from now.
Revived,
Ready for the new.

(SFX Door slams)

(YOUNG HILDA goes to find EMMA and gives her the key)

CODA: Emma invites audience to come and witness the temporary closure of the doors.

BY DOORS. HILDA hands EMMA the keys.

Audience is ushered through double doors.

