

# RadioTimes Contents

17-23 AUGUST 2002



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The stars of *Stretford Wives* celebrate the strong roles for working women in their new comedy drama



## 26 You dirty old man!

The off-screen tensions and tragedies of *Steptoe and Son's* Harry H Corbett and Wilfrid Brambell

Aquired from

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## Channel 4

Frasier (Kelsey Grammer) has to deal with an unwanted guest at his exclusive beach-house dinner party  
**Frasier 11.05pm**



The B  
Mar  
gave  
the up  
The E  
Civil  
8.00

**6.00 Hollyoaks**

PM Norman fails his exams, but Bombhead passes everything. Scott is refused entry to the Loft. (S) (W) 579  
**6.30** Beth decides to protect herself and sacks her barrister, and Les oversteps the mark again with Sally. (S) (W) 371  
Cast on Monday Rptd Wednesday and Thursday at 7.30pm on E4

**7.00 Channel 4 News**

With Alex Thomson and Bridgid Nzekwu. **Weather** (S) 483933

**7.55 Losing the Plots**

*Andy's Yard.* The second short film about London's allotments features Andy, an 82-year-old Jamaican who uses magic spells on his plot in Harlesden. (S) 953846

**8.00 River Cottage Forever**

It's high summer and Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall decides to try for the local Vegetable Challenge Cup. He also plans to raise some cash by selling ice lollies to tourists.

Director Garry John Hughes; Series producer Richard Ellingham (S) 1865

**8.30 A Place in France**

Nigel Farrell and Nippi Singh find their plans to convert an old French farmhouse are once again in jeopardy when they get into an argument with their neighbours.

Producer Nigel Farrell; Executive producer Paul Sommers (S) 7152

**9.00 When Steptoe Met Son**

CHOICE

When hit television show *Steptoe and Son* came to an end, the stars Wilfrid Brambell and Harry H Corbett were eager to go their separate ways. Then, three years later, they reunited for what became a disastrous stage tour of Australia. Brambell drank heavily and Corbett was full of regrets for his lost theatre days. This documentary follows the tragic deterioration of a brilliant comedy partnership.

Director/Producer David Barrie (S) 4049

Rag-and-bone rivals: p26

**10.00 Teenage Wicks**

*Teenage Dwarf.* Three 18-year-old boys discuss what it's like to have reached adulthood and still be less than four feet tall. They travel to Birmingham for the Dwarf Athletic Games, where one of them competes while the others...

Director/Producer Jamie O'Leary (S) 6214533

**11.05 Frasier**

*The Seal Who Came to Dinner.* Frasier and Niles host a dinner party at a seaside retreat, but have to dispose of the beached corpse of a rotting seal. (R) (S) 607339

**11.35 Oz**

Gritty US prison drama. *Cuts Like a Knife.* Tidd tries to summon up the courage to kill Said, and Schillinger goes in search of Beecher when his son Hank is found dead. Repeated on E4 on Friday at 10pm (S) 929056

**12.45 Indian Summer**

The season continues. Ends 2.30am  
**AM Filmi Fundas** Introducing a season of diverse films from young Asian film-makers. (S) 8735266

**12.50 American Desi ★★★**

Romantic comedy starring Deep Katdare. Krishna Reddy is desperate to leave traditional family life to become an all-American student. But escaping his roots isn't easy. **Review page 44.**

Director Piyush Dinker Pandya (2001, 12) (S) 219808

**2.30 A Very British Revolution 60 Days.**

Continuing the documentary which follows a group of militant dairy farmers. Shown on Saturday at 7.55pm (S) 16599

**4.00 High Anxiety in China**

An edition of *The Other Side* that follows French climber "Spiderman" on his mission to scale China's tallest building. (R) (S) 31150

**4.30 World Rally**

Shown Saturday at 11am (S) 64742570

**4.55 GT on 4**

Shown Saturday at 7am (S) 64761605

**5.20-5.50 AM The British Rally Championship**

Shown on Saturday at 11.30am (S) 6685711



# COMEDY

When *Steptoe Met Son* Tuesday C4

As bickering rag-and-bone men, *Steptoe and Son* were adored by the public, but as **Brian Viner** discovers, the actors' off-screen relationship was just as spiteful

# Like father, Like

# Son

[www.albertandharold.co.uk](http://www.albertandharold.co.uk)



One of life's pleasures is sitting down to lunch with legendary comedy writers Ray Galton and Alan Simpson, bon viveurs both, and encouraging them to blather about the era that established them as sitcom giants, the era of *Hancock's Half Hour* and *Steptoe and Son*.

And there are currently more reasons than usual to recall *Steptoe and Son*. Not only is it 40 summers since the first series was transmitted, but the two leads, Wilfrid Brambell and Harry H Corbett, are the subjects of a Channel 4 documentary, *When Steptoe Met Son*.

It is, in truth, a sad and dispiriting programme, its content decidedly unpalatable for those of us who still revere the show. By the final series, and during a subsequent cabaret tour of Australia, relations

between Brambell (Albert) and Corbett (Harold) had deteriorated to the point that they could hardly bear to be in each other's company. Corbett refused even to return from Australia on the same plane as his on-screen partner of 15 years.

Moreover, both men endured private torment throughout the success of *Steptoe and Son*. In Brambell's case, the problem was his sexuality. He was gay, but covertly so. However, his particular predilections received widespread publicity in 1962, when he was convicted for "importuning for immoral purposes" in a gents' lavatory in Shepherd's Bush, west London. (The programme rather cruelly interviews the arresting officer.)

This indignity, which Brambell felt keenly, occurred close to the fictional setting of the Steptoes' junkyard: Mews Cottage, Oil Drum Lane, Shepherd's Bush. The irony was that Brambell generally took pains to keep his screen persona and private life as far apart as possible. "He was a dandy,

more your Savile Row than your Burtons," explains Galton.

"Before the show," adds Simpson, "he'd have two days' growth

and put in a rendered-down, blackened set of teeth. Then as soon as Duncan Wood, the producer/director, said it was in the can, he'd go into his dressing room and emerge half an hour later like a butterfly. Clean-shaven, with his proper teeth, a Homburg hat, immaculately pressed trousers, a walking stick, almost a cloak over his shoulders, he used to walk straight past the audience waiting for autographs. They didn't recognise him, and of course he sounded quite different. He had a very proper accent."

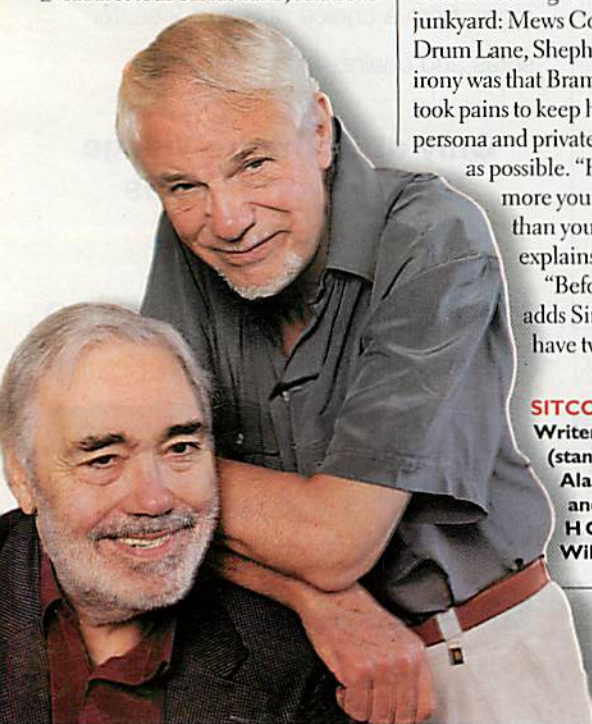
Neither Galton nor Simpson knew that he was homosexual at the time. "I suppose," says Galton, "that if you were perceptive about these things, and wondered if he was or wasn't, you'd say he probably was." They were vaguely aware that he had once been married; however, the documentary digs further and finds a man who used to lodge with Brambell and his wife and had an affair with Mrs Brambell, who promptly conceived his child. The Brambells' marriage duly failed. Later, the documentary reveals, Brambell met a young Malaysian on one of his frequent holidays in Hong Kong, who returned with him to London to become his "valet".

Of course, Brambell's sexuality is an irrelevance, except that it contributed to his unhappiness, and probably to his drinking habit, which in turn undermined his relationship with Corbett.

"During rehearsals, Wilf would have a few drinks during the >

## SITCOM KINGS

Writers Ray Galton (standing) and Alan Simpson; and (right) Harry H Corbett with Wilfrid Brambell







Acquired from

[www.albertandharold.co.uk](http://www.albertandharold.co.uk)



< lunch hour, then come back and forget his lines, and Harry would say, 'Right, I might as well go home,' " Simpson recalls. "When we started, Harry used to come with us at lunch and have a few Guinnesses, but towards the end, he'd bring in his sandwiches in a little box, and say very pointedly, 'You go, I'm just going to stay here and look through the script.' Once the old man realised what was happening he'd say, 'Sod him, I was on the stage before he was out of his pram, I'll have an extra gin and tonic.'"

Brambell, though, had not distinguished the stage as Corbett had. Corbett, before Harold Steptoe became his alter ego, was a classical actor of some renown. But Steptoe soon saw to that.

"In a way it killed his career," says Simpson, "because everything he did after that sounded like Harold. We didn't realise it before, of course, but he must have been playing all those classical parts with those same vocal intonations, and people would say, 'What an interesting interpretation.' Afterwards, they'd say, 'Here, he's just Steptoe.' I remember seeing him in an American play, *Who Saved the Ploughboy?* He sounded just like Harold Steptoe putting on an American accent, and people started laughing. It was the same with Rupert Davies making the original *Maigrets*. He never worked again."

All of which was a distant prospect indeed on the day in 1961 when Galton and Simpson agonised over episode four of their *Comedy Playhouse* series of ten short plays. Eventually they decided to write about two rag-and-bone men, then that the pair should be father and son. "Then," says Galton, "we asked Duncan Wood to see if Harry and Wilfrid, whose work we admired, were available. If they weren't, we were going to give it to Ronnie Fraser and JG Devlin [who went on to play Father Dooley in *Bread*]."

But they were, and a legend was born. However, the legend needed a name. "We always placed great reliance on names," says Simpson. "Names are very important. Dickens was a genius at it. Uriah Heep, what a name! Anyway, there was a shop in Richmond, an old photographer's shop, called *Steptoe and Figge*. I suppose we must have considered *Figge and Son*,

but Steptoe had two syllables, which is always better."

Despite the recent lament about the scarcity of decent sitcoms, Galton and Simpson do not subscribe to the widely held view that theirs was a golden age of TV comedy. "There's always been good stuff, and there's always been crap," says Galton. "I think *The Office* is very good," adds Simpson. "And I think that writers are respected more now. They know now that without a writer you haven't got a show, whereas Lew Grade once said that he could get a script for a fiver. He said, 'All I have to do is open a window and shout out, and I've got a script.'"

Nonetheless, ten years before *Steptoe*, Galton and Simpson were already earning £100 a week, a handsome sum 50 years ago. And the repeat fees continue to plop through their letterboxes. "The BBC are very good," says Simpson. "They take full account of inflation."

*Steptoe* interest will be further fuelled in October with the publication of Galton and Simpson's book.

And if they were to recast *Steptoe* now, who would they choose? "Kathy Burke," says Galton. "We'd make it *Steptoe and Daughter*."

"With Pete Postlethwaite as the father," adds Simpson.

"Oh yes, he'd be wonderful," Galton enthuses. "Or even Michael Gambon, he'd be good." □

Brian Viner writes for *The Independent*

**Links** Find out more at [www.boolie.freemove.co.uk/steptoe.html](http://www.boolie.freemove.co.uk/steptoe.html)

## RT SHOP

The new BBC DVD, *The Very Best of Steptoe and Son Volume 2*, to be released on 30 September 2002, is available for only £10.99 (normally £12.99), including P&P. To order your copy in advance, send a cheque, payable to RT Shop, to: RT Steptoe and Son Offer, PO Box 326, Sittingbourne, ME9 8FA or call 0870 770 7979 (national rate). Your DVD will be dispatched after the release date.



## Danny Kelly

Aquired from day ITV / ON THE NEW SEASON

"Football's financial alarm bells have been ringing, unattended, for years"

**MAG AND BONE MEN**  
Steptoe and Son were RT cover stars five times, including these occasions in 1965 and 1970, when RT cost a shilling. Collectors now value a set of five at around £150

For the first time in living memory, a football season approaches that cannot be greeted with the usual extended fanfare of trumpets. The mainstream TV and radio stations and the football authorities will continue to market the game as though everything is tickety-boo. But that is just whistling in the enveloping gloom, a trick to fool us. And themselves.

It's a bit like the end of *The Wizard of Oz*. Even when the "Great and Powerful" Oz is revealed to be no more than a frail pensioner who keeps power by a mixture of smoke and mirrors, he cannot help but try to keep up the pretence. By the end of this season, the people who have to sell us the illusion of a perfect football world may well feel a bit like the old Wiz...

The first problem for the game's bigwigs is the post-World Cup blues. During the event it was repeatedly said that the best Premiership teams would beat the likes of Germany, Italy, Argentina and even eventual winners Brazil. That may be true, but what the World Cup demonstrated is that tournaments are not rendered memorable by footballing quality alone. You also need drama. The prospect of another nine-month head-on clash between Manchester United and Arsenal, with everyone else there to make up the numbers, should fill all but the most devoted Reds with dread.

But football's financial alarm bells have been ringing, unattended, for years. With the collapse of the Carlton/Granada deal, the building is ablaze. During the close season, hundreds of Football League players lost their jobs. The Premiership will soon get a similar dose of reality. When the current TV contract comes up for renewal, the only viable bidder will now be Sky. No one is expecting them to be generous, and Premiership clubs are already planning for this cold new world.

The madness at the heart of football's boom years was best illustrated by the recent nonsense surrounding the leader of the players' union, Gordon Taylor. Following a summer where his members were losing their jobs in droves, the Professional Footballers' Association awarded Mr Taylor a 30 per cent pay rise. Fair enough, you might say, he's probably extra-busy just now. OK, but the increase was from a paltry annual stipend, including bonuses, of £458,370... to £623,227! Crisis? What crisis?

The actual matches will still be great to watch and listen to – that's just the way it is with the world's most popular sport – but the real story of the season will be how football, at every level, deals with the gathering economic apocalypse. Will that struggle be reflected by Des, Gary, Trevor, Gabby and Ally? I doubt it.

Ex-editor of *Q*, broadcaster and sport expert Danny Kelly joins RT this week



## Today's Choices



Hostile, bitter and spiteful – Harry H Corbett and Wilfrid Brambell's relationship was no better off the screen than it was on it

### COMEDY

#### When Steptoe Met Son

9.00pm C4

At its height, *Steptoe and Son* was the most successful television comedy show ever. Yet it was predicated on the oddest of situations – father and son rag-and-bone men trapped in a stifling relationship that was kept alive by their own coruscating, vividly expressed loathing for one another.

It's hardly surprising to learn here that this relationship was mirrored in real life. Wilfrid Brambell and Harry H Corbett – Steptoe and Son – couldn't stand one another. Before television made him a household face, Corbett was a radical young actor, described by Alan Simpson, half of the writing duo that created *Steptoe and Son*, as "England's Marlon

Brando". And he took himself very, very seriously. Brambell, though he famously played a dirty old man, was a dapper dandy who lived in a tiny, antique-filled flat in Pimlico. He drank too much, had a cut-glass English accent (though he was Irish) and a secret life as a homosexual. When *Steptoe Met Son* makes much of Brambell's sexuality, to the point where it smacks of prurience, or just sheer nosiness.

The real interest lies in the relationship between the two stars, and this is thoroughly examined. The pair never particularly got on, but their relationship broke down irretrievably after they undertook a stage tour of Australia.

Of course, there's a lot to be said for just remembering Corbett and Brambell as one of the greatest British TV comedy partnerships ever. **Alison Graham**  
*Rag-and-bone rivals: page 26*

### DRAMA

#### Holby City 8.00pm BBC1

It's high time Danny (Jeremy Edwards), along with a significant proportion of his *Holby City* colleagues, wore one of those "Nil by Mouth" signs around his neck. Of course, in his case it would mean "this person should shut up and mind his own business". Tonight Danny takes it upon himself to go against the wishes of a dying man (the estimable Tom Georgeson) when he blabs to the man's daughter, on her wedding day, that her dad is dying.

There's an awful lot else to occupy us in *Holby City* tonight (and as a bonus the next episode will be screened tomorrow evening), not least two significant departures. It's the day of reckoning for the sublime Anton Meyer (George

Irving), when the hospital trust board of managers decides his fate. Poor Anton has been branded a child killer by some tatty newspapers, and he is quite shamefully prevented from doing what he does best, when smarmy Alistair is told to take over in the operating theatre. Such a dreadful snub leads Meyer to consider his future.

And Alex Adams (Jeremy Sheffield) lands everyone in the soup when he is forced to take control after a critically ill child goes into a dangerous decline.

**Alison Graham**

*Infant extras: page 13*

*How realistic is Holby?: page 16*

### HISTORY

#### The Ship 9.00pm BBC2

Television loves an excuse for historical re-creation, and on the face of it this sounds perfect – 41 volunteers join 15 professional crew members to re-create Captain James Cook's epic voyage of discovery on board a fabulous replica of his ship, *Endeavour*.

Award-winning documentary filmmaker Chris Terrill is on hand with his camera, and we are all set for a six-week voyage full of hardship and human dramas in *Survivor* meets *Frontier House*.

First episodes are notoriously difficult, as an awful lot has to be established very quickly, thus time hangs a little heavy in these first 50 minutes. But the potential is there for some good human dramas among the disparate crew members. Everyone is jolly at first, but one Royal Navy man murmurs darkly that things will start going awry once everyone gets sick of living so closely together and taking orders. There are problems with the rudimentary toilet arrangements, and there are mutinous mutterings from one of the academic historians, who is aggrieved about his washing. Let's hope things get a bit more exciting as the weeks and the waves roll on. **Alison Graham**  
*In Captain Cook's wake: page 30*

### ● IF YOU LIKE CLASSIC FRASIER...

**Frasier 11.05pm C4**... you'll adore this repeat of the Crane brothers' run-in with a dead seal and some nosey police officers.

### Pick of the films



#### My Favorite Brunette ★★★

**3.55pm C5** Amusing gangster spoof, with Bob Hope exploiting his mistaken identity to help out Dorothy Lamour.

#### American Desi ★★★

**12.50am C4** Piyush Dinker Pandya's feature debut is a lively campus comedy of second-generation Indian-Americans.

Tycoon's daughter Faye Dunaway plays a dangerous game with private eye Jack Nicholson in *Chinatown*

#### SATELLITE/CABLE/DIGITAL

#### Pygmalion ★★★★★

**7.00pm Carlton Cinema** Leslie Howard was never better than as Henry Higgins in this superb 1938 rendering of George Bernard Shaw's play.

#### A Streetcar Named Desire ★★★★★

**9.10pm TCM** Classic melodrama with Marlon Brando at the peak of his powers.

#### Quills ★★★★★

**11.00pm Sky Movies Premier 3** Geoffrey Rush is perfect as the Marquis de Sade,

confined to a mental institution and smuggling his "smut" to a publisher care of laundry maid Kate Winslet.

#### Chinatown ★★★★★

**11.35pm Sky Movies Cinema** In Roman Polanski's masterpiece thriller set in thirties Los Angeles, the water supply leads to both death and profit.

#### Memento ★★★★★

**11.40pm Sky Movies Premier** Dazzling, highly original anti-thriller, starring Guy Pearce.