

## Alan Ayckbourn: 20 Facts

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## Alan Ayckbourn: 20 Facts

1. Alan Ayckbourn was born on 12 April, 1939 to Irene Maud Worley (better known as 'Lolly' and who also wrote under the pen-name of Mary James) and Horace Ayckbourn in Hampstead.
2. Alan attended school at Wisborough Lodge and then Haileybury.
3. Alan's professional career began as an acting stage manager (a stage manager who also acted) with Donald Wolfitt's company for a three week engagement at the Edinburgh Festival in 1956.
4. Alan's early career saw him work as an acting stage manager at the Connaught Theatre (Worthing), the Leatherhead Theatre Club, the Oxford Playhouse and Theatre in the Round at the Library Theatre (Scarborough). He joined the latter in 1957.
5. Alan's professional acting career ran from 1956 to 1964 and encompassed approximately 70 different roles - the majority performed in-the-round. During 2020, he briefly returned to acting as he and his wife, Heather Stoney, played all the roles in the online world premiere of his play, *Anno Domino*.
6. Alan's professional playwriting career began in 1959 with *The Square Cat* (having confronted Stephen Joseph about the perceived quality of his role in David Campton's *Ring Of Roses*). As of 2024, Alan has written 90 full-length produced plays.
7. Alan married his first wife Christine Roland in 1959; together they had two sons Steven and Philip. Alan's second marriage was to Heather Stoney in 1997.
8. Alan's first production as a professional director was *Gaslight* at Theatre in the Round at the Library Theatre, Scarborough, in 1961. Since then he has directed more than 350 productions in the UK and abroad, including the London premieres of 32 of his plays in the West End or at the National Theatre.
9. In 1962, Alan moved with the Studio Theatre Company to the Victoria Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent. He both directed and acted there, as well as premiering two new plays, before leaving the company in 1964.
10. From 1965 to 1970, Alan worked as a Radio Drama Producer for the BBC, based in Leeds.
11. Alan's first major West End success was *Relatively Speaking* in 1967; as of 2024, 39 of his plays have been produced in London (not including fringe venues).
12. Alan Ayckbourn became the Artistic Director of Theatre in the Round at the Library Theatre, Scarborough, in 1972. He stepped down from the position (of what is now the

Stephen Joseph Theatre) on March 31 2009. He was appointed Director Emeritus of the theatre in 2018.

13. In 1975, Alan held the record for having the most plays running simultaneously in the West End with *Living Together*, *Table Manners*, *Round And Round The Garden*, *Absurd Person Singular* and *Absent Friends*. Only Andrew Lloyd Webber since has had more productions running concurrently.

14. The Variety Club named Alan 'Playwright of the Year' in 1974; between 1973 and 2016, Alan has received more than 35 major theatre awards including an Olivier Special Award in 2009 and the Special Tony Award for Lifetime Achievement In Theatre in 2010.

15. In 1975 Alan wrote his first play intended for end-stage performance (*Bedroom Farce*); although he is primarily associated with the Round, he has written six plays intended for the end-stage: *Bedroom Farce*, *A Small Family Business*, *Haunting Julia*, *Things We Do For Love*, *Virtual Reality* and *All Lies* (For the record *Jeeves* and *House* were also first performed in the end-stage, but were not specifically written for end-stage performance).

16. In 1976, Alan and the Theatre in the Round at the Library Theatre company moved to the Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round (based at Scarborough's former Westwood County Modern School). In 1996, he would again move the company to the Stephen Joseph Theatre (based at Scarborough's former Odeon cinema).

17. From 1986 to 1988, Alan was invited by Sir Peter Hall to form his own company at the National Theatre. He directed *A Small Family Business*, *A View From The Bridge*, *Tons Of Money* and *'Tis Pity She's A Whore*.

18. In 1992, Alan was appointed Cameron Macintosh Visiting Professor of Contemporary Theatre, at the University of Oxford.

19. Alan was awarded a CBE (Companion of the Order of the British Empire) in 1987. Ten years later to the day, he was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II 'for services to the theatre.'

20. Fatuous fact: It has been reported that Alan Ayckbourn is one of the most performed living playwrights in the world. There is actually no plausible way to prove this statement. But he is undoubtedly very, very popular....

*These facts have been compiled by Alan Ayckbourn's Archivist Simon Murgatroyd with the help of Sir Alan and Lady Ayckbourn. They are correct at the time of publication.*

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