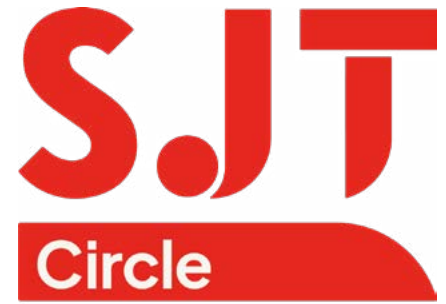


The Circular

July 2026



"August is the border between summer and autumn: it is the most beautiful month I know." **Tove Jansson**

By the time you read this, we'll have bid a very fond farewell to our fabulous *Calendar Girls**, and be in technical rehearsals for our next show, *Handbagged*. From the moment at the read through when Pandora Clifford and Alexandra Mathie (as the younger and older Mrs Thatcher), and Liz Garland and Meriel Scholfield (the younger and older Queen) opened their mouths and those voices came out, we've been loving watching this show develop. It's fascinating to see the viewpoints of these two iconic women on a very particular period of history – Mrs Thatcher's eleven-and-a-half-years long premiership, from May 1979 to November 1990. Find out more about this era-defining decade between 31 July and 29 August.

And in case you missed it – we've announced our brilliant cast for Alan Ayckbourn's *The Trial of Romeo Oscar*, and we're sure you'll find some favourites in there. They are: Elizabeth Boag, Frances Marshall, Russell Richardson, Richard Stacey, Leigh Symonds, Hayden Wood and Olivia Woolhouse. You can see the show, which cleverly melds a look at our maybe-closer-than-we-think future with a good old-fashioned courtroom drama, between 4 September and 3 October.



If you'd like to book for any of our shows, please visit our website: www.sjt.uk.com, call our box office on 01723 370541, or drop by – our box office is open from 10am until at least 7pm (closing time depends on the start time of that night's show/film) every day except Sunday.

*They've got a few months with the show yet, though! If you missed it here (or just want to see it

again, as many people have: we heard tell of one fan who had seen it no less than FOUR times in the first couple of weeks, and was planning a fifth visit!), you can catch it at Theatre by the Lake in Keswick (6 August to 5 September); at the New Wolsey in Ipswich (10 to 26 September), or at the Octagon Bolton (8 to 31 October).

Welcome to Pendon

The Ayckbourn fans amongst you will recognise the fictional town of Pendon as the setting for some of Alan's most popular shows.

It hosted a pageant in *Ten Times Table*; an amateur production of *The Beggar's Opera* in *A Chorus of Disapproval*; and, of course, all manner of watery shenanigans in *Way Upstream*.

Its most recent incarnation was as the home of the, to say the least, toxic Meizner family in 2023's *Welcome to the Family*, a show which Alan wrote for our friends at the Old Laundry Theatre (now the Victoria Wood Theatre).

That means it's never been seen in Scarborough, so we're thrilled to bring you it as the Sunday afternoon centrepiece of our September fundraising weekend, *Welcome to Pendon*. We've got our cast sorted now and it's five much-loved Ayckbourn actors – Eileen Battye, Terence Booth, Georgia Burnell, Bill Champion and Antony Eden!

Join us, too, for a fascinating evening on the Friday, when various people who have worked with Alan in non-acting roles – production staff, directors, etc – will spill some *Backstage Secrets*. They'll include Robin Herford, a much-loved Ayckbourn actor who first worked with



Alan in 1976 and, of course, directed the original *The Woman in Black* and still directs it to this day; Antony Eden, who first performed here on *A Brief History of Women* and *Taking Steps* in 2017, and is also Robin's right-hand man on *The Woman in Black*; choreographer Sheila Carter, who has worked with Alan many times including on *By Jeeves*; and our Company Stage Manager Fleur Beeley, who has worked on more Ayckbourn shows than she cares to remember!

They'll be joined after the interval by the rest of the *Welcome to the Family* cast – it should be an evening to remember.

All funds raised from this celebratory weekend will go towards our New Work Fund and help us to put new shows on our stages for you in 2027!

Welcome to Pendon takes place from Friday 18 to Sunday 20 September – for more information and details of different packages and prices, [do take a look here!](#)

New shows

Yes, it's that time of year again – we're looking ahead to 2027 and a whole load of exciting new shows for you. **And, as ever, as a valued Circle member, you have priority booking from 10am on Wednesday 29 July to 10am on Friday 31 July**, when general booking opens.

Our first batch of new shows for next year is below – keep an eye out on your Circular over the next few months for more!

This is Torture (14 April): Award-winning stand-up Seann Walsh brings a brand-new hour of side-splitting comedy to the SJT next spring. Don't miss his trademark high-energy exasperation and razor-sharp observations that leave audiences in stitches and on their feet all around the country.



The Turn of the Screw (5–8 May): We always look forward to welcoming Blackeyed Theatre – their past shows with us include various Sherlock Holmes adaptations, *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, and *Oh! What a Lovely War*. Now, they've teamed up with Arcola Theatre on an intriguing version of Henry James' seminal ghost story.



A young governess is hired to care for two seemingly angelic children in a remote country house in England. Yet there is something about the children the hints at a darker presence... *The Turn of the Screw* was an inspiration for Susan Hill when she was writing *The Woman in Black*. This brand-new adaptation by Olivier Award-winning playwright Morgan Lloyd Malcolm combines powerful performances, illusion and stylish theatricality.

Horrible Henrys (12 June): We all know Henry VIII, but wait till you meet the horrid Henrys that came before him in this new show from the Horrible Histories team! Why was Henry VI bludgeoned to death? What made Henry II eat a mattress? Henry I's daughter tried to kill him and Henry III became king aged nine! Why did Henry IV insist his knights take a bath? What made Henry V burn a tailor alive? And why on earth did Henry VII make the most important man in the country check his poo?



Spotlight on... Handbagged's brilliant wig expert, Félicité Gillham

From running the RSC's Wig Room to being held hostage in Moscow, wig expert extraordinaire Félicité Gillham – who is looking after the iconic coiffeurs of the Queen and Mrs Thatcher in *Handbagged* – has had a remarkable life. We sat down with her during a break in rehearsals.

How did you get into this career, Félicité?

I went to St Martin's School of Art, and then to the Sorbonne to read history of art and French. I loved Paris, but of course I had no money, so I walked everywhere. I got to know Paris like the back of my hand – I still feel like I know it better than anywhere else.

When I came back, I went to the theatre a lot. It cost about 1/9d to go to the theatre in those days. And someone said to me, you like theatre, why don't you go and get a job there? So I went to the stage door at the RSC, because my parents were living in Stratford-upon-Avon at the time, and asked if I could have a job as a stage manager. They said, what qualifications have you got? And I said, oh, it'll be ok, I can do it. They said, well, we had about 50 qualified applicants for our last stage management job – and I didn't even know what a stage manager did!

But they said, never mind, we'll give you a job as a dresser. So that's where I started. I think everyone should start as a dresser. You get to know how to deal with actors – when to keep out of the way! I was dressing people like Paul Schofield, Janet Suzman, Penny Keith, Donald Sinden. A lot of the dressers had day jobs, so couldn't do the matinees, but I didn't, so I was put with the senior actors because they liked to have the same dresser. And I sort of learned the trade from them. The actresses would say, now listen dear, I've got a big nose, so my hair needs to balance it at the back. They used to tell me how to put a wig on, what was right, and what was wrong – I learned on the job!

After a few jobs, the person running the Wig Room left, and they put me in there, and I learned how to dress wigs. The next year, they gave me the job of running the Wig Room. Then I was in charge of the Aldwych as well. They hired the wigs at that time, and I said, this a huge amount of money, we could make them ourselves. So I advertised and employed wig makers, and we made them in-house. It was so much cheaper and better.

In 1970, I went to live in London and all these actors I'd become friendly with would say, I want her to do my wig. That introduced me to all these big theatre companies like the National, and within six months, I had a roaring business – I called it Facades. I've been freelance ever since.

At one time, I had 15 shows running in the West End using my wigs. I did shows for Alan Ayckbourn down at Westwood, and By Jeeves here in 1996. I did every new show that Alan wrote for about 16 years.

Wig work can take you so many places – I've been to Brazil, Los Angeles, Hollywood, Japan, all over Europe. I've done a lot of touring, which I loved – I've been round Australia seven times! I've been to Russia, to Leningrad and Moscow. I was actually taken hostage by the Russians. There was a Russian company touring the UK, and the authorities were afraid they wouldn't come back. This was 1965, and the Russians had a habit of not wanting to be in Russia at that time. So they said they'd keep a couple of us until the company came back – they

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took my passport away and I had a minder – probably for about a month. It didn't bother me – when you're young, you tend to take things in your stride. We had dinner at the British Embassy in Moscow, which was the most beautiful building.

Let's talk about **Handbagged** – those hairstyles are so familiar, aren't they?

That's the trouble! Nothing to play with – you just have to keep looking at the pictures.

I've met the Queen three times. Once, I was in a line with Frankie de la Tour on my left, and Helen Mirren on my right. And you curtsy to the Queen – before we went, I held curtsy classes, because I was taught to do it at school. Helen Mirren said, oh, I'm not coming to your curtsy classes – I've got something special for Her Majesty. And the Queen said hello to Frankie and then to me, and then when she got to Helen, she wasn't there! A look of panic went across the Queen's face, and then we realised Helen was on the floor, with her arms spread out, and she said: 'Your Majesty's humble servant!' And the Queen just waited patiently for her to get up. Helen does her own thing.

In the show, we've got Mrs Thatcher and the Queen in 1979, and then much later.

Yes, the Queen has a white wig when she's older. Thatcher was very blonde when she was younger, and still a lighter colour when she was older – obviously dyed. And why not?

I'm usually given a design and I just follow the picture – for this, I'm following photographs.

Circle Cafés

Members enjoyed an extremely lively July Circle Café as members of the Calendar Girls the Musical, including three of our Young Company, held the floor.

Circle Cafés are getting busier by the month, so it really helps us if you can book your tickets in advance of the day. That way, we arrive first thing that morning

knowing how many people to expect, how many chairs to lay out, how much coffee to make, how much cake we need – all the important stuff! Thanks for your help.

Thursday 6 August: Meet the company of *Handbagged*, our third SJT production this year, and find out what it's like to play two of the 20th century's most iconic women – the Queen and Margaret Thatcher.



Thursday 10 September: It's Alan Ayckbourn's 92nd play – the Trial of Romeo Oscar company cast features many familiar and much-loved faces (see above!).



Thursday 22 October: Meet the cast of Alison Carr's intriguing new play, *All at Sea*.



Thursday 12 November: Meet our Marketing and Sales Department team and find out what they do.

Thursday 10 December: Meet the sparkling *Puss in Boots* company (please note that this will be an afternoon Circle Café at 1pm as the company will be on stage performing at our usual time).

