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## AUTHOR HELEN FORRESTER TO BE HONOURED WITH BLUE PLAQUE

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**Helen Forrester**, the author who spawned a genre of gritty, working-class memoir with her book, **Twopence To Cross The Mersey**, is to be honoured with a **blue plaque** as part of her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations. **The unveiling will take place on Friday 21<sup>st</sup> February** at her childhood home in **Hoylake on the Wirral Peninsula**.

Forrester wrote a further three volumes of best-selling autobiography, **Liverpool Miss, By The Waters Of Liverpool** and **Lime Street At Two**. Her writing was characterised by a lack of self pity and an unsettling honesty as she portrayed her life during the Great Depression of the 1930s. During her family's estranged years suffering in the slums of Liverpool, across the River Mersey, in the affluent Wirral suburbs, lived her well-heeled grandmother. She had fallen out with her son after he had borrowed heavily from family members and was unable to repay his debts. Condemning him as a worthless spendthrift, Helen's grandmother would have no more to do with him. Despite this, Helen was convinced that if she could muster up the tuppence required for a ferry boat ticket, she could visit her grandmother, explain what was happening to the family, and she would come to their rescue. Although this never came to pass, it did provide the title of her first book, **Twopence To Cross The Mersey**. *"For the first six months of my life I lived at Grandma's house in Hoylake with my mother; my father was overseas fighting in Russia. In subsequent years, until the age of eleven, I spent all my school holidays there. They were the happiest days of my childhood."*

**Kate Bradley, Senior Commissioning Editor, HarperFiction** said, *"I'm delighted that Helen's contribution to Liverpool's rich cultural history is being honoured on what would have been her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. Helen's books were gut-wrenchingly honest about her experience growing up in Liverpool, but it's her humanity and passion for life that always shines through and it's this tenderness and understanding that have made the books enduringly popular with readers."*

**Born June Huband on 6 June 1919 in Hoylake**, she was the eldest of seven children of inept, socialite, middle-class parents who lived on credit. When her father was made bankrupt during the Great Depression, the family was thrown into poverty. Evicted from their comfortable home in England's gentler South West, with nothing more than the clothes they stood up in, the large family took the train to Liverpool where they hoped to rebuild their lives. While Forrester's father searched unsuccessfully for work, the family were forced to live together in a bug-infested single room. As the eldest child, the 12-year-old Helen was kept away from school to look after her six younger brothers and sisters. For the next few years the family had to rely on meagre hand-outs from the parish and the kindness of strangers. At the age of fourteen, Forrester rebelled against her life of drudgery and her parents agreed to allow her to attend evening classes to make up for her missed years of education. Throughout her teenage years, Forrester worked for a charitable organisation in Liverpool and it was this period in her life that provided the background for many of her books, including **By The Waters Of Liverpool**, which has recently been turned into a brand new stage play. The show opens at the **Floral Pavilion Theatre in New Brighton on 3 March**, just a few miles from her birthplace, and will then embark on a **17-theatre national UK tour**.

**Playwright and friend of Helen, Rob Fennah, explains:** *"My background is in pop music and during the late-80s I was given a book called Twopence To Cross The Mersey to read while I was waiting to go into a radio session. In the book Helen referred to her father as a 'butterfly in the rain', a beautiful image that inspired me to write a song of the same title for an album I was working on. Helen got to hear the track, really liked it, and asked if she could use it when promoting her books around the world. There was a picture taken on the day we met which Helen and I jokingly referred to it as, 'when leather met tweed'. It's a lovely photograph and says everything about the friendship that was to follow. Once we'd got to know each other, I asked if I could adapt Twopence To Cross The Mersey into a stage play. I'd dabbled in theatre before with some moderate success. Helen agreed, but on the strict understanding she had final approval. 'After all Rob', she reminded me, 'this is my life!' Helen flew from her Canada home to attend the première at the Empire Theatre in Liverpool and it went on to become hugely successful. Although Helen is no longer with us, she is always in my thoughts. While I was adapting By The Waters Of Liverpool, I imagined her looking over my shoulder, checking that all the little details were correct and in order. It's a real privilege to be entrusted with her most famous works, but also a huge responsibility."*

After surviving the Blitzing of Liverpool and losing two consecutive fiancés to the Second World War she met and, in 1950, married **Dr. Avadh Bhatia**. The couple travelled widely, eventually settling in Edmonton, Canada, in 1955, where Dr. Bhatia became the director of the Theoretical Physics Institute at the University of Alberta. Helen was awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Liverpool in 1988 and by the University of Alberta in 1993. She died aged 92 on 24 November 2011 in Edmonton, Alberta. Her writing continues to inspire readers around the world.

**Fennah continued:** *"This adaptation of By The Waters also features sizeable chunks from her earlier book, Liverpool Miss, together with flashbacks to Twopence To Cross The Mersey. I've even weaved in a storyline from Lime Street At Two. That way, those unfamiliar with Helen's work will get a complete picture of her life".*

**Helen's son, Robert Bhatia, concluded:** *"My family and I will be flying over from our home in Canada to be at the unveiling of the blue plaque and to attend the opening of By The Waters Of Liverpool. The partnership between playwright Rob Fennah and my mother Helen, and her legacy, has been outstanding".*

Actors, **Sian Reeves** and **Mark Moraghan**, who play Helen's Mother and Father in the new stage production, will unveil the blue plaque at **5 Warren Road in Hoylake on Friday 21<sup>st</sup> February at 12pm**, a place featured heavily in Helen's work.

Further information on the UK tour of **By The Waters Of Liverpool** can be found at [www.bythewatersofliverpool.com](http://www.bythewatersofliverpool.com)

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For more information, interviews or images please contact Bill Elms at Bill Elms Associates on 0151 7085158 or [bill@billelms.com](mailto:bill@billelms.com)

#### **NATIONAL TOUR PRESS NIGHT**

A National Press Night will take place at the Floral Pavilion Theatre in New Brighton, Wirral, on Thursday 5 March 2020. The performance starts at 7.30pm. Please contact Erica Dillon on [erica@billelms.com](mailto:erica@billelms.com) to request review tickets.

#### **INTERVIEWS:**

Cast are available for interview.

#### **IMAGES:**

Additional production images from the 2018 production are available. Please credit Anthony Robling

#### **TOUR INFORMATION BOOKLET:**

By The Waters Of Liverpool tour information booklet is available to download by visiting:

<http://www.bythewatersofliverpool.com/News.html>

#### **LISTING INFORMATION**

##### **HELEN FORRESTER'S BY THE WATERS OF LIVERPOOL**

##### **FLORAL PAVILION**

**Tuesday 3 March – Sunday 8 March 2020**

Marine Promenade, New Brighton, Wirral, CH45 2JS

**Tickets from £22 plus booking fee**

Website: [www.florarpavilion.com](http://www.florarpavilion.com)

Box Office: 0151 666 0000

##### **STOCKPORT PLAZA**

**Tuesday 10 March – Thursday 12 March 2020**

Mersey Square, Stockport, SK1 1SP

**Tickets from £22 plus booking fee**

Website: [www.stockportplaza.co.uk](http://www.stockportplaza.co.uk)

Box Office: 0161 477 7779

##### **WARRINGTON PARR HALL**

**Saturday 14 March – Sunday 15 March 2020**

Palmyra Square, Warrington, WA1 1BL

**Tickets from £22 plus booking fee**

Website: <https://parrhall.culturewarrington.org/whats-on>

Box Office: 01925 442345

## **ST HELENS THEATRE ROYAL**

**Tuesday 17 March – Saturday 21 March 2020**

Corporation Street, St Helens, WA10 1LQ

**Tickets from £22 plus booking fee**

Website: [www.sthelenstheatreroyal.com](http://www.sthelenstheatreroyal.com)

Box Office: 01744 756000

## **LANCASTER GRAND THEATRE**

**Monday 23 March – Tuesday 24 March 2020**

St Leonardgate, Lancaster, LA1 1QW

**Tickets from £22 plus booking fee**

Website: [www.lancastergrand.co.uk](http://www.lancastergrand.co.uk)

Box Office: 01524 64695

## **CREWE LYCEUM**

**Wednesday 25 March – Thursday 26 March 2020**

Heath Street, Crewe, CW1 2DA

**Tickets from £22 plus booking fee**

Website: [www.crewelyceum.co.uk](http://www.crewelyceum.co.uk)

Box Office: 01270 368242

## **SOUTHPORT THEATRE**

**Friday 27 March – Saturday 28 March 2020**

The Promenade, Southport, PR9 0DZ

**Tickets from £22 plus booking fee**

Website: [www.waterfrontsouthport.co.uk/events/whats-on](http://www.waterfrontsouthport.co.uk/events/whats-on)

Box Office: 01704 500036

## **PAVILION THEATRE RHYL**

**Tuesday 31 March – Saturday 4 April 2020**

East Parade, Rhyl, LL18 3AQ

**Tickets from £22 plus booking fee**

Website: [www.rhylpavilion.co.uk](http://www.rhylpavilion.co.uk)

Box Office: 01745 330000

## **GRAND THEATRE SWANSEA**

**Monday 6 April – Tuesday 7 April 2020**

Singleton Street, Swansea, SA1 3QJ

**Tickets from £22 plus booking fee**

Website: [www.swansea.gov.uk/swanseagrandtheatre](http://www.swansea.gov.uk/swanseagrandtheatre)

Box Office: 01792 475715

## **DARLINGTON HIPPODROME**

**Thursday 9 April – Saturday 11 April 2020**

Parkgate, Darlington, DL1 1RR

**Tickets from £22 plus booking fee**

Website: [www.darlingtonhippodrome.co.uk](http://www.darlingtonhippodrome.co.uk)

Box Office: 01325 405405

## **MALVERN THEATRES**

**Tuesday 14 April – Wednesday 15 April 2020**

Grange Road, Malvern, WR14 3HB

**Tickets from £22 plus booking fee**

Website: [www.malvern-theatres.co.uk](http://www.malvern-theatres.co.uk)

Box Office: 01684 892277

## **DEVONSHIRE PARK THEATRE EASTBOURNE**

**Friday 17 April – Saturday 18 April 2020**

Compton Street, Eastbourne, BN21 4BW

**Tickets from £22 plus booking fee**

Website: [www.eastbournetheatres.co.uk](http://www.eastbournetheatres.co.uk)

Box Office: 01323 412000

## **GAIETY THEATRE ISLE OF MAN**

**Thursday 23 April – Saturday 25 April 2020**

Villa Marina, Douglas, Isle Of Man, IM1 2HJ

**Tickets from £22 plus booking fee**

Website: <https://www.villagaiety.com/>

Box Office: 01624 600555

## **BECK THEATRE HAYES**

**Monday 27 April – Tuesday 28 April 2020**

Grange Road, Hayes, Middlesex, UB3 2UE

**Tickets from £22 plus booking fee**

Website: <https://becktheatre.org.uk>

Box Office: 020 85618371

## **THEATRE ROYAL WINCHESTER**

**Thursday 30 April – Saturday 2 May 2020**

21-23 Jewry Street, Winchester, SO23 8SB

**Tickets from £22 plus booking fee**

Website: <https://www.theatroyalwinchester.co.uk/>

Box Office: 01962 840440

## **EPSTEIN THEATRE LIVERPOOL**

**Monday 4 May – Saturday 9 May 2020**

Hanover House, 85 Hanover Street, Liverpool, L1 3DZ

**Tickets from £22 plus booking fee**

Website: <https://www.epsteinliverpool.co.uk/>

Box Office: 0844 888 4411

## **GRAND THEATRE BLACKPOOL**

**Monday 11 May – Wednesday 13 May 2020**

33 Church Street, Blackpool, FY1 1HT

**Tickets from £22 plus booking fee**

Website: <https://www.blackpoolgrand.co.uk/>

Box Office: 01253 290190