

# The Worthing Society

Conserving, Preserving  
and  
Safeguarding our Heritage

Heritage Leaflet No: 5

## HAROLD PINTER



(1930-2008)

This is the fifth of a series of leaflets being produced by the Worthing Society to accompany the plaques erected throughout the Town to commemorate notable people, buildings, and events in the town's history. For more information about the Society and its activities go to our Web Site at:

[www.worthingsociety.org.uk](http://www.worthingsociety.org.uk)

**HAROLD PINTER**  
1930 - 2008  
PLAYWRIGHT  
ACTOR AND DIRECTOR  
LIVED HERE  
1962 TO 1964  
THE WORTHING SOCIETY 2008

1 GROSVENOR RD  
2 HUMPHRYS RD  
3 GRAFTON PL  
4 STANFORD SQ  
5 MARKET ST  
6 GUILDBOURNE CENTRE

In 1962 builders moved into 14 Ambrose Place, in the heart of Worthing's theatreland to renovate the building. It was reported the house had been purchased by Harold Pinter regarded by many as the most exciting dramatist of the day. Theatregoers, who were accustomed to stars appearing at the Connaught Theatre with a repertory company which had achieved national prominence, were thrilled that this young major talent would soon be amongst them. Why did he choose to come to Worthing and buy a house in Ambrose Place.

Harold Pinter was born on the 10<sup>th</sup> October 1930 in Hackney, to Jewish parents of Polish origin. He attended the highly selective High School Hackney Downs where Joe Brearley the English Master was a guiding influence. He loved literature, was encouraged to write prose and poetry and contributed to the School Magazine. He excelled at games and loved cricket, his favourite pastime. Aged 16 Harold was persuaded to act in School productions. Joe Brearley remained a friend until he died in 1973, and visited him in Worthing. Pinter acknowledged his debt to his teacher in prose and poetry. He left school in 1948.

Pinter spurned University and became a professional actor. In 1951 he joined the great Irish actor manager Anew McCaster for a six month tour of Shakespeare to Ireland learning about stagecraft, directing and acting. He toured with Sir Donald Wolfit's Company but disliked his overbearing manner, leaving to spend years with various repertory companies, ever learning stage technique. It is uncertain when he began to write plays but through much of the 1950's he earned a threadbare existence in various reps.

In Bournemouth he worked with Guy Vaesen, the director who took Pinter under his wing, and they became lifelong friends. He had a tempestuous relationship with leading lady Vivien Merchant, an actress of talent and allure. They married at a Bournemouth Registry Office in September 1956. They all worked together at the Connaught Theatre after Guy Vaesen became resident director in April 1957, Pinter using the stage name David Baron for reasons only he knew.

In 1958 his first major play "The Birthday Party" received a mixed reception. His next play "The Caretaker" written in 1959 initially presented at the Arts Theatre Club transferred to the Duchess Theatre in the West End in May 1960, won awards and ran for 444 performances. The play opened on Broadway in October 1962.

The Caretaker transformed Pinter's life, giving him public and international recognition and relative wealth. He had time to write.

During the summer of 1960 he moved from Chiswick High Road to a larger flat in Kew. Three years later he moved with Vivien and son Daniel to 14 Ambrose Place. Harold Pinter used his own name when he played Mick in a Guy Vaesen production of his hit play at the Connaught.

Whilst in Worthing he wrote "The Homecoming" which Peter Hall regarded as Pinter's "greatest and biggest play". An enactment of dysfunctional family relationships it opened at the Aldwych Theatre directed by Peter Hall in June 1965 and on Broadway in January 1966, winning three major awards.

During 1962 Pinter wrote a screen adaptation for the film "The Servant" and was paid £3,000. His play for television "The Lover" starring Vivien Merchant and Alan Badel won praise and awards. Pinter was in demand and his screenplay written in 1965-66 earned him £20,000.

In 1966 he was awarded a CBE. His star continued to rise. Among his later stage plays were "The Hothouse", "Betrayal", "Old Times" ; his screenplays included "The Quiller Memorandum", "The Last Tycoon", "The French Lieutenant's Woman" and "The Remains of the Day".

In late 1963 Guy Vaesen left the Connaught and in 1964 Pinter moved with his family from Worthing to a very grand large house in Hanover Terrace, Regent's Park.

In 2002 he became a Companion of Honour. In 2005 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

On Christmas Eve 2008 Harold Pinter died leaving a distinguished legacy. His ephemeral work as an actor and director of greatness is recalled by those who saw his performances, and much is written.

His work for film, television, and radio, prose and poetry emphasise his versatility. His concern for language, way with dialogue, the private world he created, his deep understanding of theatre, ensure his place as one of the most important dramatists of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.



In June 2009 the Mayor of Worthing, Councillor Noel Atkins, unveiled the plaque to commemorate Harold Pinter's time in Worthing. He is shown above accompanied by David Sumner, Worthing Society Chairman

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