

THE FOUR MEN

BY HILAIRE BELLOC

EDUCATION RESOURCE PACK



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SOUTH DOWNS
NATIONAL PARK

Hilaire Belloc Biography



Hilaire Belloc Portrait, 1910
T. & R. Annan & Sons (Public domain)

Many people associate Belloc with his Cautionary Tales and his other humorous verse for children, but Belloc was far more than an Edwardian Roald Dahl.

Hilaire Belloc was born in La Celle-Saint-Cloud in France on 27th July 1870, to a French father and an English mother. Less than two months after his birth, the French suffered a catastrophic defeat in the Franco-Prussian War. In 1871, revolution came to Paris followed by brutal suppression. A year later, Belloc's father died. His mother returned to England, taking the young Hilaire with her. She unwisely invested her money with a fraudulent stock broker and much of the family fortune was lost. These dramatic events shaped Belloc's life. He remained ever vigilant of German ('Prussian') territorial ambitions, fearful of revolution and distrustful of financial institutions.

The young Belloc grew up in Slindon in West Sussex (his mother being unable to afford to live in fashionable London). He was very attached to the South Downs landscape and even as a boy would walk for hours in the 'high woods' and enjoy looking out towards the English Channel. He also developed a deep affection for the Sussex country people: their customs, traditions, songs and dialect. In later life the urbanisation of Sussex greatly distressed him. In 1936 he wrote that it was now possible to hear the sound of motor traffic on Chanctonbury Ring and that the glorious peace of country life had been shattered.

The young Belloc was a brilliant scholar and gained a 1st class honours degree from Balliol College, Oxford. He became President of the Oxford Union and was renowned as a gifted orator and debater. In 1896 he married an American, Elodie Hogan. He had met her some years earlier in London when she was visiting England with her mother. Belloc travelled to America to gain her hand in marriage, making his own way across the continent to her home in California. The journey – much of which was taken on foot – took many weeks and demonstrated not just his love for Elodie but also his determination to overcome all obstacles, no matter how great.

By 1906, Belloc was living at Kings Land in Shipley in West Sussex, which would be his home for the rest of his life. He was an established and well respected writer and journalist, with five children to support. By this time he had marked himself out as a controversial and fearless campaigner. He was a Liberal MP, although a very unorthodox one. At times he appeared very radical and aligned himself to the left of British politics, with, for example, his opposition to the Boer War and his support for Irish Home Rule. At other times he seemed deeply conservative and reactionary, as when opposing extending voting rights to women, or in his opposition to the introduction of National Insurance.

There were two elections in 1910, Belloc successfully contested the first one but declined to fight the second. He had come to the conclusion that the political system was hopelessly corrupt and beyond reform. On leaving the House of Commons, he said he was pleased to have quit the 'dirtiest company' it had ever been his misfortune to keep. In 1912 he published 'The Servile State', in which he set out his political philosophy. Belloc would advocate neither capitalism nor socialism, but a third way that he termed Distributism, that was based on the equitable division of land. In short, Belloc argued, a man could not be truly free unless he owned enough land to feed himself and his family. Underpinning all his political opinions was his Roman Catholic faith and his belief that political problems required a theological rather than an ideological solution. Together with Cecil Chesterton (brother of Belloc's lifelong friend, G.K.Chesterton), Belloc edited the New Witness magazine. In 1912, the magazine broke the story of the Marconi scandal, which implicated senior government ministers in the corrupt purchase of shares and insider trading. The scandal nearly brought

down the government and tarnished the reputations of several leading politicians, including David Lloyd George.

In March 1913, while driving from his home at Shipley to visit his mother at Slindon, Belloc passed one of the favourite beauty spots of his youth – Halnaker Hill. He was distraught to see that the windmill that had been its crowning glory had been blown down in a storm. He shortly afterwards wrote the poem Ha'naker Mill, which reads like a premonition of disaster:-

Ha'nacker Hill is in Desolation:
Ruin a-top and a field unploughed.
And Spirits that call on a fallen nation
Spirits that loved her calling aloud:
Spirits abroad in a windy cloud.

Spirits that call and no one answers;
Ha'nacker's down and England's done.
Wind and Thistle for pipe and danciers
And never a ploughman under the Sun.
Never a ploughman. Never a one.

Disaster did indeed follow. England was soon to be engulfed in the First World War and the young men of Europe slaughtered in their hundreds of thousands on the battle fields of France and Belgium. The poem also suggests that the rural life that Belloc had known as a boy could not survive in the new world that was coming. More than this, Belloc also suffered personal loss: his wife died later in 1913, and his eldest son was killed in action in 1918.

Belloc was at his most prolific during the 1920s. He wrote book on many subjects, including histories and novels. He also wrote biographies and theological works. He became embroiled in a number of long-standing disputations. In response to H.G.Well's 'Outline of History', Belloc sought to put a very different case to Wells, who had arguing in favour of scientific progress leading mankind to a bright new future. Belloc rejected Wells' contention, even pouring scorn on the theory of evolution. Wells thought that religion had become redundant and was a belief system best left in the past. Belloc begged to differ and argued that Christianity rather than 'scientific socialism' could answer the problems that confronted the human race.

Throughout the 1920s and 30s, Belloc continued to argue that the world and the English in particular, were sleep walking into a new dark age. He warned that free-born Englishmen risked becoming the slaves of the bankers and the financial system. Christianity may decline but other religions would not. Belloc was regarded as rather ridiculous when he warned that the West risked at its peril "the burning flame of Islam", that might well rise up in the future to challenge western values. For Belloc, of course, these were the values of "The Faith" not of the consumer capitalism that emerged in the years after his death.

The Second World War saw the fall of France to Nazi Germany in 1940. The surrender of France followed by the collaboration of French politicians and generals with the Nazis, stunned Belloc and he never recovered from the shock. The loss of his second son shortly afterwards led to a collapse in Belloc's health. He suffered a number of strokes and although he did not die until 1953, the last years of his life were lived in a twilight world. He is buried at West Grinstead in West Sussex. But even in his dotage, Belloc retained both his humour and his courteous manner.

- Chris Hare 2017

Section 2

The Four Men: a Farrago An analysis by Chris Hare



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Introduction

Hilaire Belloc was a prolific writer, who, over the course of fifty years, produced work of fiction, verse, political polemic, history, travelogue and religious tract. His book, 'The Path to Rome', is often cited as his most important work. It was certainly his first clear statement of his religious and political ideas: "Europe is the Faith and the Faith is Europe". Written when he was only in his early thirties, the book is imbued with a deep understanding of human nature and the necessary role of man's spiritual life. Yet, there is much humour here too. Belloc could not sustain a serious thought for too long without the irresistible desire to poke fun at the conceit of man-made doctrines. As Belloc travelled across Europe, on foot, to Rome, it was the majesty of the Alps that transfixed him more than any idea in any book. Equally, hearing Mass in a small isolated mountain church was, for Belloc, the most sublime and life-affirming moment.

The Four Men is a very different book. It is confined to the much smaller geographical area than The Path to Rome – the county of Sussex. Yet, at the same time it journeys much further than the Path to Rome – exploring the mystical and unseen world and the destiny of man. Belloc's chosen vehicle for this odyssey is the chance meeting of four men. These travelling companions never reveal their real names but confer on each other descriptive epithets that most clearly describe their personalities. There is Grizzlebeard, The Sailor, and The Poet. The narrator – Belloc – is simply called 'Myself' – "for that is the name I shall give to my own person and my own soul". From the first pages, the reader is made aware that this is no ordinary travel book or novel and these are no ordinary men. Belloc subtitled his book 'a farrago', which the dictionary tells us means a 'confused mixture'. Although the reader may at times be confused, Belloc was very clear in his intention of exploring all those things in life that to him seemed important and necessary.

It is helpful to see what Belloc's biographers thought of 'The Four Men'. All three make the link between The Four Men, published in 1912, and the Path to Rome, published ten years earlier. Writing in 1957 – only four years after Belloc's death – Robert Speight observes that whereas "The Path to Rome was a pilgrimage, The Four Men is an exploration". It is "the mixture of the real with the imaginary that gives the book its unique flavour".

A.N. Wilson agrees, commenting "The Four Men" is different, more poignantly elegiac, more hauntingly religious". Joe Pearce, Belloc's most recent biographer believes that in writing The Four Men, Belloc "provided a metaphysical path through Sussex to accompany his path to Rome, a secular pilgrimage conveying a soul's love for the soil of his native home". Both Rome and Sussex are holy places and, as a result "The Four Men is full of spiritual premonitions of 'the character of enduring things' amid the decay of time".

Enlightening as these observations are, they obscure the humour that is central to the book. Belloc may have thought deeply about matters both material and Divine, but he also drank deeply as well, and when drinking he liked to sing songs, which he admitted could be both lewd, loud and blasphemous. Just as there was day and night – life and death – so, for Belloc, profundity had to be balanced by levity. This coming at life from two directions simultaneously was the Bellocian way. He found "the goodness of God in the drinking of ale, which is a kind of prayer," and added, "drinking good ale is a more renowned and glorious act than any other to which a man can lend himself".

Belloc wrote many songs in the folk song idiom. As a young man, living in Sussex, he would have heard songs being sung by men working in the fields or groups of men singing in inns or at country fairs. 'The Four Men' is peppered with these songs, ranging from The Sailor's Carol ("rank blasphemy", as Grizzlebeard calls it), to a song about Duke William of Normandy, to the very surreal 'His Hide is Covered in Hair'. Belloc delighted friends and family with his impromptu rendition of these songs, which more often than not, were sustained by a tankard or two of good ale!

Meeting The Four Men

We are introduced to each of the four characters in turn. The book opens with Myself, sitting in the George pub at Robertsbridge, “drinking that port of theirs,” as he waits, possibly for a train, to take him on “some business”, “not even for ambition or for adventure, but only to earn”.

It is then he decides that as he is on the soil of his native Sussex and with “Kent a mile or two behind,” he will walk towards the west and his home by way of the Arun valley. In his mind he resolves to get up and go, back to his home, if only for one day. He slams his hand on the table, exclaiming, “I will go from this place to my home.” He is then surprised to hear the deeper voice of an older man rejoining, “And since I am going to that same place, let us journey there together.” Thinking himself to be alone, Myself is surprised and angry at the interruption, but the old man explains that he too wishes to travel to that part of Sussex also. “A man is more himself if he is one of a number; so let us take the road together, and, as we go, gather what company we can find.” This is Grizzlebeard, who we learn is a tall, vigorous man, though “well on in years.” His eyes are deep set and “full of travel and of sadness.” His hair is curled and plentiful and “the colour of steel,” as is his beard.



Photograph by Sam Pharoah
sampharoah.com

Grizzlebeard and Myself meet their next companion at the inn at Brightling –

We found there a very jovial fellow with a sort of ready smile behind his face, and eyes that were direct and keen. But these eyes were veiled with the salt of the sea, and paler than the eyes of a landsman would have been; for by the swing of his body as he sat there, and the ease of his limbs, he was a sailor.

With the Sailor as the third companion, they meet the fourth, on the road and quickly ascertain who this man may be –

We watched the man before us more closely, and we saw that as he walked his long limbs seemed to have loose joints, his arms dangled rather than swang, he steered no very straight course along the road, and under his felt hat with its narrow brim there hung tawny hair much too long, and in no way vigorous. His shirt was soft, grey and dirty, and of wool, and his collar made one with it, the roll of which peeped above his throat, and his coat was valveteen, like a [game] keeper's, but he was not like a keeper in any other way, and no one would have trusted him with a gun.....Then we saw him stop suddenly, pull a pencil out of some pocket or other, and feel about in several more for some paper as we supposed. “I am right,” said Grizzlebeard in triumph. “He is a Poet!”

The Poet, Sailor and Grizzlebeard, are already on their journey. It is Myself who changes his plans. Even though, it would seem that the other three join him, it is he who joins them. Famed psychoanalyst, Carl Jung, has written of “the archetype of the triad, which calls for the fourth to complete it,” suggesting that Belloc, however unconsciously, was tapping into a profound symbolism.

Myself comes from the world of work and conformity, Grizzlebeard represents the wisdom of years, while the Poet represents the naivety of youth. The Sailor stands for freedom: “You must not be surprised if I go off by this road or by that at any hour, without your leave or any other man's; for so long as I have money in my pocket I am determined to see the world.”

It has been suggested that the four men are all aspects of Belloc's own personality. He is journeying alone but the different aspects of his personality are alive within him. When Belloc was a young man he wished to be

a poet. Indeed he wrote much verse throughout his life but he never really believed he wrote as good a verse as he would have wished. For relaxation, Belloc sailed the coast of England in his yacht, the Nona. As an old man he sported a great beard, and although wearied by personal loss (his wife and both his sons died when still young) and increasing poor health, he never lost his courteous manner or sense of fun.

Jung might almost have been writing of Belloc when he described the personality type that takes “further steps along the road” than other men. “He will go alone,” wrote Jung, “and be his own company. He will serve as his own group, consisting of a variety of opinions and tendencies – which need not necessarily be marching in the same direction. In fact he will be at odds with himself.” Such a man, Jung concluded, will seek solace in his surroundings as a defence against “his inner multiplicity.” The landscape of Sussex – its hills and rivers, its market towns and villages were, for Belloc, the port in the storm of life. As he travelled around the world for work, sometimes being absent for more months of the year than he was at home, that very home became his anchor amidst the “ever changeful sea” of life.

Landscape of The Four Men

As the four men talk and walk, they pass through the High Weald of eastern Sussex with “its little pointed hills”, and into the South Downs that dominate the western part of the county. We are always reminded that the landscape is ancient and rooted in the history of past generations:-

So all along the road we went under Chanctonbury, that high hill, we went as the morning broadened: along a way that is much older than anything in the world....By that way we went, by walls and trees that seemed as old as the old road itself, talking of all those things men talk of, because men were made for speech and for companionship...



Chanctonbury Ring

West Sussex County Council Library Service | www.westsussexpst.org.uk

The landscape is almost a fifth companion and the cause of much discussion and reflection among the four travellers. There is one memorable moment in the book, when Myself beholds the full moon rising over Chanctonbury on Hallowe'en. We are invited to see a mystical interaction taking place between the ancient hilltop and the 'holy moon' shining down on its prehistoric features. Belloc, the Catholic, often seems more like Belloc, the pagan.



Southdowns at Washington

West Sussex County Council Library Service | www.westsussexpst.org.uk

This beloved landscape was indeed a home to Belloc – a spiritual as well as a physical home. As they approach the end of their journey, they stop one last time to drink and sing in a country inn. “I knew myself indeed to be still in my own county”, says Myself, “and I was glad inside my heart, like a man who hears the storm upon the window, but is himself houseled by the fire...”

There were some parts of Sussex that Belloc thought were best avoided. These were towns of “the London sort”, by which he meant Burgess Hill and Haywards

Heath and would certainly have included Brighton too, had that town being on their route. These towns had grown up with the railway and represented a dramatic interruption in the slow pace of rural life. This was the “detestable part of the county, which was not made for men, but rather for tourists or foreigners, or London people that had lost their way”.

The sky above the landscape is a recurring theme in 'The Four Men', particularly the sky at dusk, a vivid sight "full of departure and of rest". On approaching Henfield one evening, the four men are deep in conversation and then they see that the day is passing as they walk towards the setting sun:-

The sky was already of an apple green to the westward, and in the eastern blue there were stars. There also shone what had not yet appeared on that windless day, a few small wintry clouds, neat and defined in heaven. Above them, the moon, past her first quarter but not yet full, was no longer pale, but began to make a cold glory; and all that valley of Adur was a great solemn sight to see as we went forward upon our adventure that lead nowhere and away. To us four men, no one of whom could know the other, and who had met by I could not tell what chance, and would part very soon for ever, these things were given. All four of us together received the sacrament of that wide and silent beauty, and we ourselves went in silence to receive it.

The Philosophy of The Four Men

The philosophy of 'The Four Men' finds its expression in the landscape, where the spiritual and the every-day come together as one: "...if a man is part of and is rooted in one steadfast piece of earth, which has nourished him and given him his being, and if he can on his side lend it glory and do it service, it will be a friend to him for ever, and he has outflanked Death in a way."

The elemental forces of life that caused philosophers to pause and consider at length, could for Belloc, be summed in a simple domestic chore, such as the boiling of a kettle:-

I woke next morning to the noise, the pleasant noise, of water boiling in a kettle. May God bless that noise and grant it to be the most sacred noise in the world. For it is the noise that babes hear at birth and that old men hear as they die in their beds, and it is the noise of our households all our long lives long; and throughout the world, wherever men have hearths, that purring and that singing, and that humming and that talking to itself of warm companionable water to our great ally, the fire, is home.

Everything comes in its season and none can escape the turning of the year and the passing of time. All Hallows falls on November 1st, which, Belloc notes, nicely balances out "All Fools", six months earlier, on April 1st, when the year "is light and young, and when she has forgotten winter and is glad that summer is near, and has never heard the name of autumn at all, or of the fall of the leaves". Belloc would have been familiar with the folk song "The Life of a Man", that speaks of man's life being no more than the leaves on the tree, that will be "beautiful and bright" one day and then be withered by the frost and blown away by the storm.

The Bellocian philosophy, although profound, was not inclined to self-indulgence. At one point in the book, Grizzlebeard gets into a long and heated argument with a philosopher whom he meets in a pub. The 'balderdash' conversation is brought to a sudden conclusion when the Sailor 'baptises' the philosopher by pouring a tankard of ale over his head. Think, by all means, says Belloc, but not for too long. Comradeship is gained by doing rather than thinking: "men become companionable by working with their bodies and not with their weary noodles, and the spinning out of stuff from oneself is an inhuman thing".

Humour of The Four Men

The story is great fun and very amusing, but in case it all seems like a figment of Belloc's imagination, a letter published in the West Sussex Gazette in 1957, suggested that battles on the Sussex/ Kent border were very real at the time 'The Four Men' was set in 1902. The letter also highlights the reality of Sussex individualism, and its determination to keep up local traditions:-

....until this century the county was always markedly different in almost every aspect from the rest of England, and its exclusiveness produced a particularly strong local patriotism that evidenced itself in

frequent week-end battles with 'foreigners' on its frontiers, particularly with the men of Kent, who, even when I was a boy, were still regarded much as Frenchmen and Germans were.

The main humour in the book is found in the dialogues between the Sailor and the Poet. With the former forever deprecating the Poet's verse, while praising his own efforts in this regard. The Sailor is forever playfully boastful, declaring on one occasion that the song he is about to sing "is of a good loud roaring sort....and you must know that it is more than one thousand years old". It had in all probability being composed that very day!

After lamenting one of the Poet's lyrical efforts, the Sailor declares that he must be a vegetarian and that like most "men of your luxury" he was probably afraid of his body, which was, the Sailor noted, "a lanky thing". To which Myself added a denunciation of all "water-drinkers also, and caterwauling outers, and turnip mumbler, enemies of beef, treasonable the immemorial ox and the traditions of our human kind!"

Another exchange, see the penniless Poet, mocked for his penury as the four men sit down to eat and drink in another Sussex inn:-

The Poet: In the matter of eating and drinking I am with you all, but in the matter of paying I differ from you altogether, for I have nothing.

Myself: How is this, Poet? It was only today that I saw you with my own eyes at the Bluebell paying for a mug of beer with a labouring man.

The Poet: It was my last money, and I did it for charity.

The Sailor: Then you must have the reward of charity and starve.

The Poet is again the butt of the joke when he suggests they could eat "some kind of cheese", to which Myself in mock horror tells him that in Sussex there is only one kind of cheese:-

In Sussex, let me tell you, we have but one cheese, the name of which is CHEESE. It is One; and undivided, though divided into a thousand fragments, and unchanging, though changing in place and consumption. There is in Sussex no Cheese but Cheese, and it is the same true Cheese from the head of the Eastern Rother to Harting Hill, and from the sea-beach to that part of Surrey which we gat from the Marches with sword and bow. In colour it is yellow, which is the right colour of Cheese. It is neither young nor old. Its taste is that of cheese, and nothing more. A man may live upon it all the days of his life.

Here is the devout Catholic, Belloc, parodying the Holy Sacrament. But then this was the same Belloc, who on being challenged by a group of rationalists as to how he could possibly believe the Jesuits when they told him that the Holy Communion bread turned into the flesh of Christ and the wine into his blood; responded by saying, "If they told me it turned into elephant's droppings, I would believe them!" Belloc often shocked his co-religionists as much as he did the sceptics.

Heroes and Villains

Reading 'The Four Men', Belloc's dislike in other people becomes apparent. He disliked lawyers and politicians and especially the new rich whom he saw encroaching in every direction. He also had little time for the police, whom he saw as the servants of the rich. Several times, the four men pass through woods that were private property but through which the Sailor knew little known paths they could take "so the servants of the rich could do us no hurt". It is also stated that a man must be careful if he sings as he walks in the open countryside, as the police will arrest him as a vagabond. The poor say that the rich are wicked and since they are the great majority of men they are "likely to be right".

Myself recounts the story of 'Peter the Politician', who tries to sell his soul, but is forever being frustrated in his attempt by a series of ever inferior Devils. Eventually, Peter the Politician, in anger and frustration, storms out of hell, leaving his soul behind, thus, he loses rather than sells his soul.

We are introduced to the incredibly pompous Lord Justice Honybubble: “the constant exercise of bullying men who could not reply had given him a commanding manner”. But the real villain of ‘The Four Men’ is the ‘Hideous Being’, who turns out to be very rich indeed and by far the most odious person they meet on their journey:-

He had a lump which was not his fault, and a sour look that was. He was smoking a long churchwarden pipe through his sneering lips. There was very little hair on his face, though he did not shave, and the ear turned towards us, the left ear, had been so broken that it looked pointed, and made one shudder. The sneer on his lips was completed by the long slyness of his eye. His legs were as thin as sticks, and he had one crossed over the other; his boots had elastic sides to them, and horrible tags fore and aft, and above them were measly grey socks thin and wrinkled. He did not turn or greet us as we appeared.

Belloc was a great believer in courtesy and in treating people with good manners. During their journey, the four men, entertained the labouring men they met in the pubs that they visited and paid for their beer “because we were better off than they”.

The poor are, in a sense, the heroes of ‘The Four Men’ – it is their songs that cheer, their beer that quenches the thirst, and their eggs, bacon and cheese that sustain the four companions. But the one man who stands out for praise is John ‘Mad Jack’ Fuller, Squire of Brightling in the early nineteenth century. Fuller was a maverick Tory MP, who spent much of his personal wealth on putting the local unemployed to work. He loved to eat and he loved to drink. He was suspended from the House of Commons for insulting the Speaker and after he died he was buried in a pyramid in Brightling churchyard. Myself tells us that Fuller lived in a “roaring way”:-

He spent all his great fortune upon the poor of Sussex and of his own parish, bidding them drink deep and eat hearty as being the habits best preservative of life, until at last he died. There is the story of Fuller of Brightling, and may we all deserve as well as he.

An End

At the end of the Four Men, it seems as if Myself’s travelling companions may not have been ordinary men at all, but spirits, or conjured up aspects of Belloc’s own personality: “But as I walked along I looked furtively first to one side and then to the other.....and it seemed to me (whether from the mist or what not) that they were taller than men; and their eyes avoided my eyes”. Grizzelbeard declares that he and his two companions must now leave Myself this side of the border with Hampshire: “when he had said this, I was confused to wonder from his voice and from the larger aspect of himself and his companions, whether indeed they were men”.

Myself strains his eyes in the mist as he watches them disappear into the enveloping mist. He walks, bereft, high up onto the Downs and writes poetry to ease his mind, concluding:-

So, therefore, though myself be crosst
The shuddering of that dreadful day
When friend and fire and home are lost
And even children drawn away –
The passer-by shall hear me still,
A boy that sings on Duncton Hill.

Relieved by this poetical release, Myself heads southward “through the gathering darkness” to his home. It is clear that this home is the home to be found after Death as well as a physical home, and as such is a comfort to both the writer and his readers too.



Duncton village near Petworth
West Sussex County Council Library Service | www.westsussexpst.org.uk

Section 3

The Four Men
Conn Artists stage production
October 2017



SOUTH DOWNS
NATIONAL PARK

THE FOUR MEN

BY HILAIRE BELLOC

ADAPTED BY ANN FELOY

DIRECTED BY NICK YOUNG

Presented by special arrangement with The Estate of Hilaire Belloc
c/o Peters, Fraser and Dunlop Limited
Drury House, 34-43 Russell Street
London WC2B 5HA

CAST

MYSELF Ross Muir
GRIZZLEBEARD David Stephens
SAILOR Lee Payne
POET Jake Snowdon
BARMAN (MAD JACK FULLER & Others) Karim Bedda

CREATIVE

Adapter Ann Feloy
Director Nick Young
Producer Ross Muir
Designer Laura Kimber
Production Stage Manager & Lighting Design Matthew Pike
Graphic Design & Illustration Richard Snaith
Hair & Make-Up Jessica Barthel

WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK...

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Adapting The Four Men

by Ann Feloy

It would be a mistake to think it easier to adapt a book for stage than to write a play from scratch. To write an adaptation is to continually have the author looking over your shoulder and, in the case of 'The Four Men', Hilaire Belloc is a huge presence to sense sitting in an armchair in the corner of the room, drinking port and considering your every line.

Belloc said of 'The Four Men' – "I put my whole heart into that book but no one cares about it". No pressure there, then. Knowing that didn't make the task any easier but it did spur me on to write the adaptation. How could anyone put their heart and soul into something which was then left unread and forgotten? Furthermore, having read the book and delighting in it, I wanted others to read it. As the book is out of print, I felt a stage play would help bring it to a wider audience and I hope this has been the case since it was first performed in 2009.

Most adapters, I believe, genuinely desire to do justice to a book and its author. In the case of 'The Four Men', I had to show the Belloc estate I had been faithful to both. The reason for this is that in England work remains in copyright up until 70 years after the writer's death. As Belloc died in 1953, his estate had to approve my adaptation. If they hadn't been happy, the curtain would never have risen on the play you see today.

This need to satisfy several demands, leads to a constant tension about what to include and what to omit. It is vitally important to convey the essence of the book and to depict the main characters and their relationship to one another but this has to be done in two acts of not more than roughly 50 minutes each. One of the hardest things is to leave out a witty speech, a song, some banter, a beautiful soliloquy or even an incidental character you absolutely love but for the sake of the length of the play, has to be cut.

And what about introducing something that isn't, in fact, in the book? 'The South Country' is one of Belloc's most beloved and well known poems but it isn't actually in 'The Four Men'. However, I hope that anyone who knows this book would allow me the indulgence of including it in the final poignant moments as it fits so well in both theme and mood.

Finally, I have a sneaking feeling that Belloc wrote this half intending, one day, for it to be performed. The dialogue of the four main characters is set out a little like a stage play and, although Belloc never said so, it may have crossed his mind that it could be performed by actors on a stage. Of course, a great deal has to be imagined, for the whole book is steeped in the beauty of the Sussex countryside in Edwardian England at the time of Halloween. However, I hope this adaptation allows Belloc's words to transcend the confines of the theatre and take the audience on a captivating journey that touches the soul, as I believe he intended.



Photographs by Max Dench

Director's Thoughts - by Nick Young

'One Tree Hill'. My childhood park in Honor Oak. The very name brings back powerful smells and sights and memories. We all have these precious triggers in our brains. What are yours?

Hilaire Belloc's *The Four Men* deals with many themes: his deep love of Sussex, myths and legends of the County, Sussex folk songs, Sussex Inns(!), and the four ages of a man Youth (Poet), Middle age (Sailor), and Old Age (Grizzlebeard). These last three characters are all aspects of Belloc himself. He did, in fact, do the walk across Sussex – but alone. How beautifully and pointedly he recreates and sends up the characters (and himself).

This life is transient – what really lasts? For Poet and Grizzlebeard it is first love – but not for cynical Sailor. Even this memory fades. And for Belloc, quite simply it is being part of his beloved Sussex. At the beginning of the play he consciously abandons his empty 'grown up' life of work and modernity, and abandons himself to walk across Sussex and rediscover his roots.

The Four Men, it seems to me is especially relevant today. We have been cut off from our roots and move into mainly suburban living, cocooned by double glazing and street lights. We never walk at night in the Country. Our rich culture has been sanitised and whittled away by television, our folk songs replaced by international Gangster Rap. Without our culture, who are we? Where and who do you connect with? What songs move your soul? What are your important memories? Where does your soul lie? What are your unique beliefs?

'*The Four Men*' is a fascinating piece of original theatre. It is not a mere travelogue, promoting this fascinating County. It is a journey of discovery through our life. What a privilege it has been creating this production for Conn Artists, and sharing its humour, passion, poignancy and poetry with you.



From top left: Nick & Ross discussing the script | promotional photograph by Sam Pharoah | Karim and Jake learning some of the music for the show | the cast rehearsing the hut scene.

BIOGRAPHIES

ANN FELOY - Adapter

Ann Feloy studied journalism and worked on newspapers in the UK and Australia in her 20s. She moved into PR and Public Affairs after a while, working as a lobbyist for the RSPCA at one stage. In 1995 she re-trained to teach English as a foreign language and worked in this country and the Middle East.

Her love of the English language and communication took a more creative turn when she took up writing plays, once performing her own work at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.

She received Lottery funding in 2014 to write and direct Worthing's community play 'The Just Cause - Victorian Romance and a Rollicking Good Riot' for 200 performers of all ages. She also co-wrote a comedy 'Barbara Cartland – In The Pink', which was an unusual subject for someone who got an MA in Women's Studies; but that was another story.

'The Four Men' is her first book adaptation and it has been performed at Brighton Fringe and at Chichester. This is the first time it has been taken on tour.

'The Four Men' play is dedicated to my son Oliver with everlasting love. Ann Feloy.



NICK YOUNG - Director

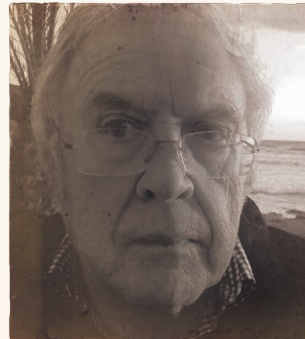
NICK got the directing bug when he used to invite another 5 year old from school to come and watch his puppet shows, staged in an old empty wireless. He launched his first Company, Rafter Players, modestly, with a production of Hamlet staged in a Victorian attic.

Over the next ten years the Company grew, touring its productions throughout Scandinavia and Russia – as well as Brixton! He also directed them in the first film production of The Tempest, shot in Cornish Poldark country.

At Oxford he read English (very occasionally) and directed numerous shows, including the famous Burton-Taylor Dr Faustus, when he was the student director to Professor Nevill Coghill. He joined the RSC as a trainee director and worked with actors such as Dame Helen Mirren and Patrick Stewart. All this gave him the excuse to name-drop heavily ever since.

He became Artistic Director of the world-famous Ludlow Festival, staging epic Shakespeare in the Castle, which he nearly burnt down in an over-ambitious flaming battle scene in King Lear. For ten years he was the Artistic Director of the Connaught Theatre, and it gives him much nostalgic pleasure to be directing this premiere in that place. He formed Rainbow Theatre and wrote and directed its repertoire. There are few school children in the South of England who have not been subjected to one of his productions.

In 1999 he founded Rainbow Shakespeare with his wife Alex, creating exciting Shakespeare for family audiences. Nick loves Sussex and was delighted to be invited to direct this production which so encapsulates everything that is unique and magical about the County.



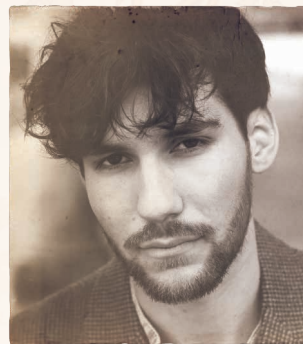
CAST

KARIM BEDDA

KARIM BEDDA originally hails from Chichester, West Sussex. He later moved to Wales, where he trained in classical guitar and music composition at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama.

It was only after graduating that he first took up acting, by way of doubling and walk-on roles in film and TV, including getting burnt alive on BBC's Casualty and being hand double for Benedict Cumberbatch in Marvel's Doctor Strange. However, having ambitions to be more than disembodied hands, he threw himself into developing his acting skills and taking on more challenging projects. Fast-forward a couple of years, and here he is. You're never too young for a midlife crisis!

Recent theatre roles include Charlie in Brother, Ned in Seeing the Light and Lysander in Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream. Now he has returned to tour Sussex and beyond, combining his love for music and drama in The Four Men.



ROSS MUIR

Ross trained at Guildford School of Acting.

London appearances include the Almeida Theatre, Arts Theatre and New Players Theatre. Alongside national tours in the UK and Germany, Ross has enjoyed 10 seasons with Rainbow Shakespeare including the roles of Hamlet, Benedick (Much Ado About Nothing) and Oberon (A Midsummer Night's Dream).

Ross produced and directed Conn Artists' debut production Vintage Hitchcock: A Live Radio Play in 2013 and The Good Doctor. He then took the mad decision to perform two one-man shows, The Importance of Being Oscar, about the life of Oscar Wilde; followed by J.M. Barrie in Courage. He swears he will never do another one-man show again as it took forever to learn the lines!

Ross is therefore delighted to be alongside other actors on this "journey across Sussex" and he'd like to thank the cast, director and creative team for such an enjoyable experience on The Four Men.



LEE PAYNE

Lee trained at Mountview Theatre School.

He has appeared on numerous television programmes throughout the nineties. Credits include The Bill, The Demon Headmaster, The Brittas Empire and Drop the dead donkey.

He has also toured extensively throughout the UK. Major credits include Shylock (Merchant of Venice), Sergeant of Police (Broadway Pirates), Trevor (Bedroom Farce).

Lee has also appeared in panto as The Giant in Jack and the Beanstalk and The King of Gooseland in Mother Goose.



JAKE SNOWDON

Jake is an actor musician so committed to his craft that after being cast he immediately decided to move to Storrington to fully experience Belloc's journey across the downs (nothing to do with his partner's job nearby...).

Jake is a recent graduate from the Guildford School of Acting and has since been on tour with the new musical 'Ophelia: Madness in Blue', worked with budding projects 'Green Boots' at the Barbican pit theatre and 'The Hanging of William Duell' with Bottom Drawer productions.

Jake's singing work has linked him with composers Andrew Fisher and Michael Finnissy and other groups including Blossom Street, Witt Studio, The Collective and the Mozart Festival Chorus. This is Jake's first outing with Conn Artists Theatre Company and loving every second!



DAVID STEPHENS

David trained at ArtsEd London where he honed his acting and beard growing skills. His diverse work has included T.I.E., short films, BBC Radio, The Globe Theatre and national tours.

David continues to work with theatre companies across Sussex and is a regular with Arundel's Drip Action Theatre Company. He recently toured with Lewes based Something Underground Theatre Co. in their production of 'A Good Jew'. In 2015 David performed his first self-penned one-man show 'Pulling Up The Drawbridge' at The Brighton Fringe.

David also runs story making sessions with pre school children at Woodstock Nursery, Worthing, where he has helped them to create performance pieces from their own stories. In May 2016 David was privileged to portray Hilaire Belloc in Belloc's home village of Shipley where, working with Ann Feloy, he performed Belloc's songs and poems with virtuoso violinist Andrew Bernardi and members of Belloc's family.



CREATIVE TEAM

LAURA KIMBER - Designer

Laura graduated from Northbrook College with a BA in Theatre Arts specialising in Set, props and Costume Design.

Since then she has worked for Worthing Theatres in various departments. Laura has worked on a few productions during this time and the Conn Artists' production of Vintage Hitchcock in November 2013 was her first professional stage design, which was followed in June 2014 by The Importance of Being Oscar, in October 2014 by The Good Doctor and by Courage in September 2015.

Laura would like to personally thank James Sainsbury and Kristian Bell for all their help in getting the set and props looking amazing, as well as Vicki Halliday at Guildford School of Acting for her knowledge and support with the costumes.

MATTHEW PIKE - Production Manager / Lighting Design

Matthew graduated from Northbrook College with a BA in Theatre Arts specialising in Production Management, Lighting Design and Stage Management and is currently Deputy Technical Stage Manager at Worthing theatres

Matthew is a freelance Lighting Designer working in the South East Area; production credits include Into the Woods and Legally Blonde (Worthing Muscial Theatre Company), Seussical the Musical (Bros Musical Productions), Chess (Arundel Festival 2017), Les Miserables: Schools Edition (RSOPA - Worthing)

Alongside Ross and Laura, Matthew is proud to be a founding member of the Conn Artists Theatre Company and hopes to see it go from strength to strength.

JESSICA BARTHEL - Hair and Make Up

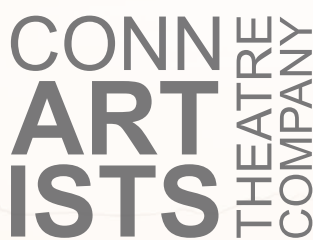
Jessica graduated from the University of Greenwich in 2013 with a BA in Drama.

She has worked with the company as hair and make-up designer and costume assistant since their debut production in November 2013 and looks forward to working alongside her friends and colleagues on many shows to come.

RICHARD SNAITH - Graphic Design and Illustration

Richard graduated from the University for the Creative Arts in 2008 with a BA in Fine Art.

He has worked with the Conn Artists since their 2014 production of the The Good Doctor, helping to produce promotional material and illustrated elements of the stage design.



Conn Artists was founded by Ross Muir, Laura Kimber and Matthew Pike in 2013 out of a passionate desire to keep regional theatre burning bright and alive.

The aim was to give opportunities to like-minded artists to come together and create exciting theatre work which would eventually tour.

Our name playfully refers to the Connaught Theatre, Worthing which as local artists in the area we are delighted to be associated with; using its history as a source of inspiration as well as being able to make a positive contribution to its current theatre programme. We are grateful for the support of Worthing Theatres.

We are also delighted to welcome back Nick Young, former Artistic Director at the Connaught Theatre, having invited him to direct The Four Men which is our first touring production.

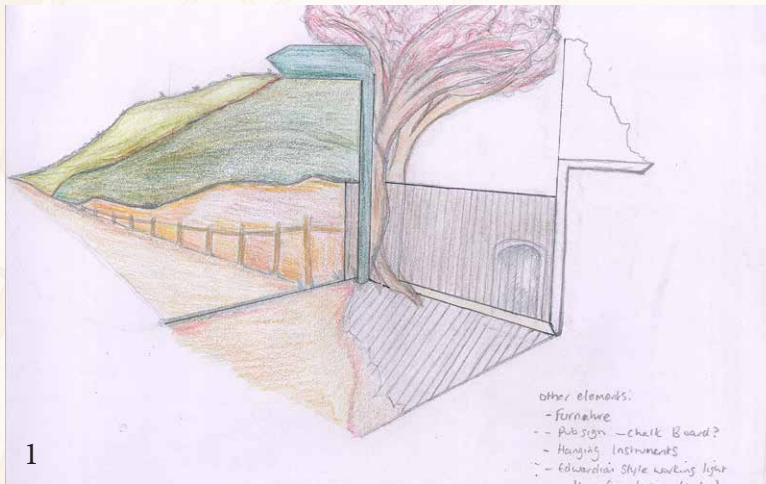
Previous productions:

Vintage Hitchcock: A Live Radio Play (2013) | The Importance of Being Oscar (2014)
The Good Doctor (2014) | Courage (2015)

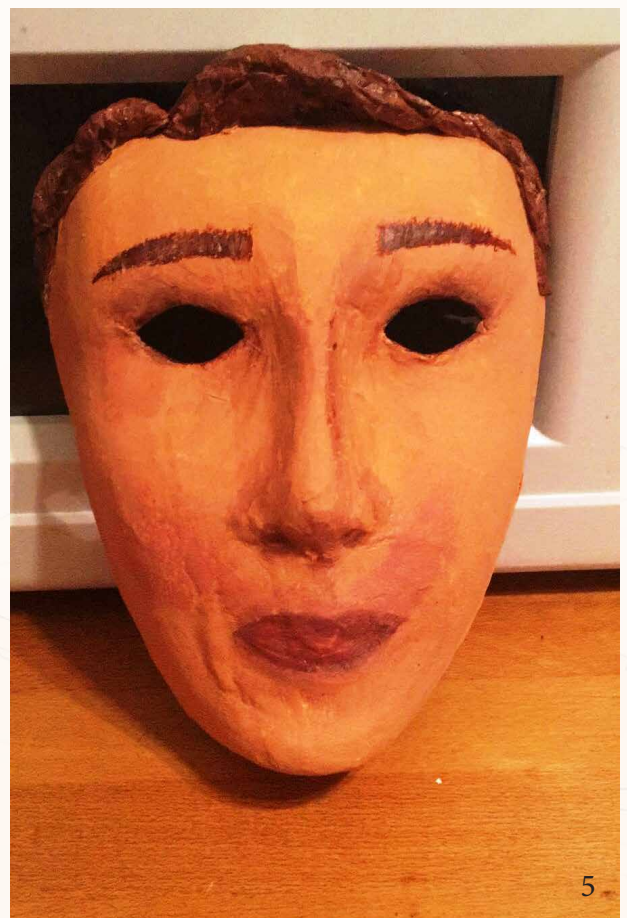
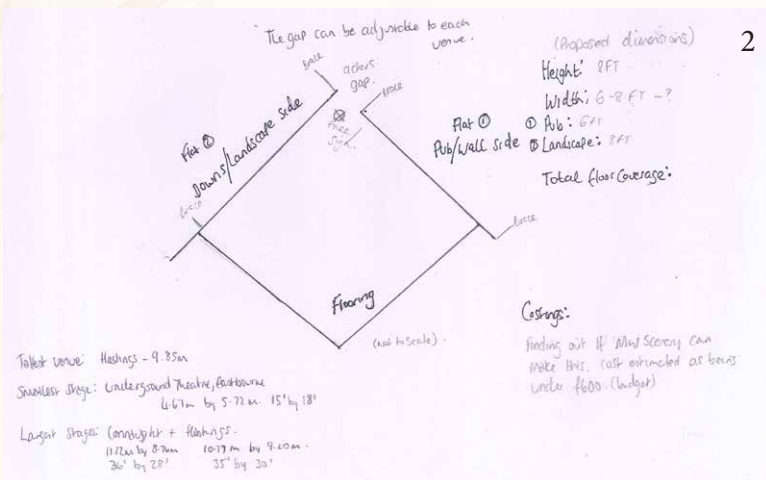
contact@conn-artists.co.uk
www.conn-artists.co.uk

@ConnArtistsCo 
facebook.com/connartiststheatrecompany 

Set, Props and Graphic Design



other elements:
 - Furniture
 - Pub sign - chalk Board?
 - Hanging Instruments
 - Edwardian style working light



1. Set design in colour
2. Plan of the stage design with notes
3. Set tree in the making
4. Masks for the Sailor's first loves
5. Mask of Belloc (Myself)



1. Map of the journey across Sussex, created for the show Programme



2. Sunset at Long Furlong looking at Church Hill - photo by James Sainsbury, Archaeologist & Operations, Worthing Museum and Art Gallery. Used as a photographic print on the gauze backdrop.

Production shots

From the performance at The Capitol, Horsham, 26th October 2017

All photographs by Max Dench



From left to right: Lee Payne as Sailor, Jake Snowdon as Poet, Ross Muir as Myself and David Stephens as Grizzlebeard.



St Dunstan pulls the Devil by the nose with a pair of red-hot tongs.



Poet is asked the question: 'Which way is West?'



The Four Men meet an eccentric huntsman.

Tour Dates – October 2017

Thurs 5th Oct | Connaught Theatre, Worthing
Fri 6th Oct | Connaught Theatre, Worthing
Sat 7th Oct | Memorial Hall, South Downs Centre, Midhurst
Wed 11th Oct | White Rock Theatre, Hastings
Thurs 12th Oct | South Holland Centre, Spalding
Fri 13th Oct | The Phoenix Theatre & Arts Centre, Bordon
Tue 17th Oct | Belloc Theatre, The Oratory School, Reading
Thurs 19th Oct | The Spring Arts & Heritage Centre, Havant
Sat 21st Oct | Under Ground Theatre, Eastbourne
Thurs 26th Oct | The Capitol, Horsham

Praise for the show:

“Ann Feloy has made a marvellous job of adapting the book for the stage, filleting it down to its essentials whilst director, Nick Young, and his creative team successfully give the text life. But of course it is down to the actors to turn the written characters to flesh and blood which they do without question.”

The Argus | Review, The Four Men, Connaught Theatre, Worthing, October 5th 2017



It may be an elegiac period piece about the dwindling of country ways and the autumn of life. But this new touring production from Worthing company Conn Artists has made regional theatre feel in ruder health overnight.

The Stage | The Four Men review at the Connaught Theatre, Worthing



The stories of Sussex retold, the legends, the myths, the truths and the experiences of Hilaire Belloc all come to life in this wonderful play that revives the history of a fascinating county, unearthing tales that have been long forgotten.

Theatre South East | The Four Men, A Heartwarming Tribute To A Beloved County



In-House production company Conn Artists are starting their tour of The Four Men at their home theatre and, as one might expect, presenting a Sussex tale, to a Sussex audience, in a Sussex theatre ensures them of the warmest of receptions on their opening night.

The Sussex Newspaper | Review, The Four Men, Connaught Theatre, Worthing



Press Reviews:

The Argus | Review, The Four Men, Connaught Theatre, Worthing, October 5th 2017

Although born in France, Hilaire Belloc was truly a Sussex man. Coming to England as a young child he was brought up in Slindon, eventually moving to Shipley. It was his great love for the county, its people, customs, traditions and songs that caused him to write *The Four Men* – a great hymn of praise to the Sussex countryside in Edwardian England.

It tells of an imaginary journey made by Belloc from east to west - Robertsbridge to Harting. The journey is made with three companions, Grizzlebeard, Sailor and Poet who are aspects of Belloc himself. Along the way they talk, tell of Sussex myths and legends, sing local songs, visit inns and sink vast quantities of ale.

Ann Feloy has made a marvellous job of adapting the book for the stage, filleting it down to its essentials whilst director, Nick Young, and his creative team successfully give the text life. But of course it is down to the actors to turn the written characters to flesh and blood which they do without question.

As Belloc, or Myself as he names himself, Ross Muir could not be bettered. He gives a marathon performance that segues effortlessly from narrator to character. David Stephens makes a truly venerable Grizzlebeard, full of the wisdom of old age whilst Jake Snowden fully captures Poet's romanticism and youthful ignorance. Much to the audience's delight was Lee Payne's coarse and belligerent Sailor who comes near to stealing the show with his comic talent and lusty singing. Sharing the comedic spotlight, Karim Bedda is called upon to play all the other parts. He highlights as Mad Jack Fuller of Brightling, the Devil and various ladies.

The show is full of music, songs and witty in-jokes with Burgess Hill and Haywards Heath being a couple of the targets.

The Stage | The Four Men review at the Connaught Theatre, Worthing

It may be an elegiac period piece about the dwindling of country ways and the autumn of life. But this new touring production from Worthing company Conn Artists has made regional theatre feel in ruder health overnight.

Produced in association with Worthing's Connaught Theatre and the South Downs National Park, *The Four Men* is an adaptation of an out-of-print book by the Edwardian poet Hilaire Belloc. Better known for his *Cautionary Tales*, in October 1902 Belloc set out to walk the length of Sussex from East to West, heading for Harting and the woods of his childhood. The result was *The Four Men*, a leafy travelogue, inn-interrupted odyssey, and poignant allegory of the ages of man.

The Sussex drinking songs translate perfectly to the stage in local writer Ann Feloy's unhurried adaptation. So does the easeful comic dialogue between the four characters: Myself, played with subtle charm by Rainbow Shakespeare's Ross Muir, is joined on his secular pilgrimage by a young poet, a cynical sailor, and a rich old man. Honorary fifth bod Karim Bedda helps enact the pub scenes and curious vignettes from South Downs folklore.

But *The Four Men*'s specific allure is in staging an aspect of life that rarely gets a theatrical look-in. Leaning on a sty and sipping at their hip flasks, at times the four men simply stand and savour the view. There's a rare message here about taking joy in our landscape, as Myself comes to realise how he might, after all, outflank death.

Theatre South East | The Four Men, A Heartwarming Tribute To A Beloved County

The stories of Sussex retold, the legends, the myths, the truths and the experiences of Hilaire Belloc all come to life in this wonderful play that revives the history of a fascinating county, unearthing tales that have been long forgotten.

It's hard not to fall in love with a story that shares so much knowledge of times past, mixed beautifully with genuine human interaction between The Four Men.

The story begins with Hilaire Belloc as "Myself" setting off on a four day journey across the Sussex Downs, but before he leaves he encounters three fascinating characters, all of whom join him on his adventure; Grizzlebeard, A Sailor and A Poet, all aptly nicknamed as their real names do not tell the stories of their lives. The direction from Nick Young, who previously directed at the Connaught Theatre when it used to be home to a repertory company, is superb and the characters are vivid and brought to life magnificently.

The bond is formed early on and as the journey is afoot the characters reveal more and more about their pasts, and the stories of the land in which they travel, growing the bond between the audience, the characters and the environment they find themselves in.

A simple set design by Laura Kimber is used to great effect, staging the transitioning worlds of the great outdoors on the Downs with the various Inns and pubs they visit along the way. In fact, across the story they travel 92 miles in four days, and consume 300 pints of beer!

The cast were born to play the roles they were given on stage. Ross Muir played the lead with clarity, empathy, and a genuine sincerity that was a joy to watch. David Stephens who played Grizzlebeard was rich in wisdom, Lee Payne who played the Sailor was outrageous and hilarious, whilst Jake Snowden brought a real youthful energy to the production as the Poet, with excellent Ukulele-playing skills!

If you're considering going to see The Four Men, you can expect hearty songs, insightful stories and genuinely funny moments throughout. Ann Feloy must be commemorated for adapting such a classic text and giving it a new dimension on stage.

My only criticism is that the length of the play was longer than expected, however as it is the opening of the tour I have no doubt that they will refine it going forward and will flourish even further at all of the forthcoming venues they perform at.

It has left me with a huge curiosity to learn more about the history of Sussex, the county I live in, and read more into Hilaire Belloc's treasured texts.

Well done to everyone involved for creating a heartwarming and insightful production. It is a real joy to experience, and with that I shall leave you with a Belloc Quote...

"I believe we should recover, while they can still be recovered, the principle joys of the soul"

In-House production company Conn Artists are starting their tour of The Four Men at their home theatre and, as one might expect, presenting a Sussex tale, to a Sussex audience, in a Sussex theatre ensures them of the warmest of receptions on their opening night.

Hilaire Belloc, the well known writer and journalist, grew up in Slindon in West Sussex and his book, The Four Men: A Farrago – published in 1911, tells the story of his walking journey across Sussex from Robertsbridge in the East via various public houses, through Heathfield, Uckfield, Ardingly, Ashurst and Amberley to South Harting in the West.

The stage adaptation, by Ann Feloy, of The Four Men features four main characters, Myself, Grizzlebeard, the Poet and the Sailor, each an aspect of Belloc's personality, as they journey over five days, sharing a range of anecdotes, folk songs and reflections of their Edwardian lives.

Myself is played by Ross Muir and it is he who takes on most of the narration throughout the piece. His performance is wonderfully crafted and Belloc's deep love of the Sussex countryside comes shining through every time he speaks.

As well as describing, beautifully, the amazing land around him, Myself also tells tales of famous Sussex people and events including the story of Mad Jack Fuller, a noted drunk who in 1810 was involved in an incident with the Speaker in Parliament and the tale of St Dunstan who, as the story goes, once pulled the devil by the nose with red-hot tongs.

Myself is joined on his five day cross-county journey by representations of the three ages of man. The Poet represents youth, the Sailor middle age and old age is represented by Grizzlebeard. All three actors show a deep love for their characters, and really "live the part" as they travel from pub to pub across the county. Jake Snowden is the Poet. Poor, and somewhat lacking in inspiration, he is often the target for the humour in the piece although his singing voice, and ability to play the Ukelele, soon make up for the character's inability to complete a verse.

As the Sailor, Lee Payne is a huge character. Crude and lewd at times, especially when relieving himself in the River Adur – to top it up!, he is the source of a lot of the fun, and most of the drinking songs, that appear throughout the piece.

David Stephens is both subdued and philosophical as old timer, Grizzlebeard. His performance is much more poignant as he approaches the end of his life and looks back at times past and loves lost. Looking every inch the Edwardian gentleman, he works well as the patriarch of the group.

Special mention has to go to the fifth member of the cast, Karim Bedda, who plays everyone else in the piece including Mad Jack Fuller, at least five pub landlords, a grumpy hunchback, a number of Sailor's female companions and even the Devil. He is also responsible for rearranging the furniture for each "pub" that the group choose to visit and for the positioning of the vast number of props used in the production. He works tirelessly throughout the show and manages to breathe life into each and every character he plays.

Overall this piece is all about the dialogue. The description of the scenery along the way, while simplistic in tone, does have the desired effect on the audience, who are all very familiar with the towns that are mentioned and the notable points that are featured. It has both local charm and an historical basis and, for all its simplicity, the tale is told very well.

SPONSORS

South Downs National Park

Conn Artists would like to acknowledge and thank the South Downs National Park Authority for their support with a grant from the Sustainable Communities Fund on the production project of The Four Men. In addition to the grant supporting the tour of the play around Sussex and beyond, including a special performance that was given at the Memorial Hall at the South Downs Centre in Midhurst; this Education Resource Pack has been created and is available to download for free on the SDNPA Learning Zone.



Our theatre production of The Four Men has aimed to support one of the two statutory purposes for National Parks in England i.e. Purpose 2 “to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Park by the public”. The Four Men production project reflects the ongoing need to educate and inspire people about the South Downs and the countryside environment, and the need to promote Sussex writer Hilaire Belloc’s work in relation to our cultural heritage.

Sustainable Communities Fund

The Sustainable Communities Fund (SCF) is a grant which is available to community and voluntary groups, social enterprise/’not for profit’ organisations and ‘for profit’ organisations delivering non-profit making projects in the National Park.



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www.mwsproductionsltd.co.uk

All aspects of production covered:

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Sound engineers

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Scenic construction

SM’s DSM’s ASM’s

And much more...



Knepp Wildlife Safaris - www.kneppsafaris.co.uk

Safaris

Whether vehicle-based or guided on foot our Safaris take you into the heart of the Knepp Wildland Project – 3,500 acres of natural habitat where you can enjoy a stunning proliferation of wildlife, from herds of free-roaming herbivores and flocks of birds to the rarest fungi and beetle.



Our Safaris are suitable for all - wildlife novice, amateur enthusiast or professional ecologist. Your guide, who is highly experienced in species identification, will take you to the current hotspots for wildlife activity according to the season.

About the Project

The Knepp Wildland Project is a pioneering experiment in habitat creation, the largest of its kind in lowland Europe. Here, natural processes – driven by large ungulates – are allowed to take place on an influential scale. Over the course of little over a decade, since the project began, we have seen a remarkable come-back of species, many of them nationally scarce. Knepp is now a hotspot for nightingales, cuckoos, turtle doves and purple emperor butterflies, to name a few. From observing species like these at Knepp, ecologists have gained new insights into their behaviour and habitat preferences, demonstrating that the Knepp Wildland Project, with its focus on natural processes rather than species targets, has ground-breaking scientific value.