

In the Spotlight this week:

Gordon Duffy

TV, theatre and film actor

Farmer showed me how to handle a sheep for my role in Heartbeat

You have appeared in quite a few series on television?

I've been in Emmerdale, All Creatures Great and Small, Stay Lucky, Heartbeat and a number of other shows.

Your relatives must be impressed when they see you on the screen?

Not all of them - my mother wants me to be in Coronation Street and won't be impressed unless I get a part in it.

What character did you play in Emmerdale?

I was a nasty poacher who shot the son of one of the regulars. I enjoyed being in that programme for nine weeks.

How did you get on with the regulars in the cast?

They are all fairly nice people. It was good to work with them.

What sort of character were you in Heartbeat?

I was a farmer in that for a few weeks. The storyline around that time was about a beast on the moors. When I went for the part I took a copy of the Mercury with a story about some creature which had been attacking sheep in Teesdale.

Did that help you?

It showed I knew something about the kind of story that was coming up in the programme. I don't know if it helped but I got the part, which I enjoyed.

Did you do any preparation for your farmer role?

Gordon Duffy has had a successful acting career after training in London and Paris. He now lives in Barnard Castle while teaching performing arts and studying for a masters degree. He means to go back to full time acting in a few years' time and is likely to be seen regularly on television once more. He has had interesting roles in a number of popular TV series and in commercials as well as doing a lot of theatre and film work.

He was appearing in a pantomime in Teesdale when he met Janice McGhie, who is now his wife. The couple have linked their names to become the Duffy-McGhie family. Janice, well known for her work in running Kirklands day nursery, has a son and daughter, Holly 19 and Ben 18. Gordon and Janice have two sons, Ralph 8 and George 3.

Gordon says he is happy to be at home while the boys are growing up, rather than touring with stage plays or filming on location, but he is also looking forward to acting again.



Gordon Duffy: many good television roles behind him

What came after that?

I was in a number of adverts - Budweiser beer, Courage Best Bitter and John Smiths. Adverts pay well and they also help to get you known.

Your next television show?

All Creatures Great and Small. I was Alan the auctioneer in some episodes. Some of the filming was done at Leyburn, where I was involved with a very erratic sheep.

Did you make friends with any of the stars of the series?

The actors like Christopher Timothy and Robert Hardy were all perfectly pleasant and good to work with. Shows like that are a good experience.

Any other meetings with well known actors?

I was PC Abrahams in Stay Lucky with Jan Francis and Dennis Waterman. I had to arrest Dennis in one scene.

Did you audition for any other series?

I went for a part in the Channel 4 series The Manageress starring Cheri Lunghi. It was about the first woman boss of a league football team. I was chosen as one of the 18 players in her squad.

Did you enjoy the role?

On the first day I suffered a leg muscle injury and was carried off and that was me out of the series. I was sorry because the show went fairly well. I was

particularly looking forward to the role because I had a bit of experience as a footballer. They invited me back for a second series but I was doing something else by then.

What was your footballing background?

I was on the books of Grimsby Town as a 15 year old schoolboy at the time Lawrie McMenemy was manager. I was a left back and played in the club's boys' team. But I was never going to be good enough to become a professional player.

Have you ever been in a film for the cinema?

I've been in a couple of movies. One was Invitation to the Wedding with John Gielgud and Ralph Richardson. They both gave some helpful advice to the younger actors but it was a really awful film. I played an American footballer.

It didn't do well at the box office?

It was hardly shown at all before being released for TV. My next film wasn't a lot better. It was an American one, Lords of Discipline. I was a GI recruit.

It gave you a tough time?

It meant getting up at 4.30am for six weeks and going round and round an assault course, getting covered in mud.

How did you come to end up in Teesdale?

I did several shows for the Durham Theatre Company. I came to Barnard Castle as the Pirate King in a pantomime and met Janice, who was in the audience. We got talking afterwards, and before very long I made my home here.

What are you doing now?

Teaching performing arts on Teesdale and studying for a masters degree. I'm doing this so I can spend time at home with my children while they are growing up, and then I mean to go back to full time acting.

What made you decide on this change?

I toured all over the country for six months with Wuthering Heights. I remember being in Southampton on a Saturday night and dashing home for one day before going off somewhere else. I wasn't getting much time with the children.

Any other factors?

I was in for a part in a commercial for a type of rice. If I had got it there would have been two weeks of filming in South Africa and a £15,000 fee. I was called to London five times and it cost me about £700 but I didn't get it.

Do actors spend a lot of fruitless time on auditions?

On average you get one job out of 12 auditions, and 88% of actors are out of work at any time.

But you still want to go back to it full time?

I still enjoy some acting work as well as teaching. When I'm ready for more parts again I'll let my agents know. I think I'll be a better actor in future. It's one of those jobs in which you can get better as you get older. I would like to run my own company at some point, taking shows into village halls and small theatres.

All sorts of characters come to life on special school day

There were lots of colourful characters from books and nursery rhymes on show when nursery children paid to dress up for World Book Day at Cotherstone School. Their contributions raised over £40 for Chernobyl disaster victims.

Niall Pattison Linighan made a wonderful Pinocchio, minus his nose which, and he insisted he was telling the truth, had fallen down the lavatory at lunch time.

Everyone could hear Alice Greener and her horse, complete with bells, as they clattered their way to Banbury Cross. There were characters from Jack and the Beanstalk, Jungle Book, Toy Story and Fireman Sam. Nursery rhyme characters included Ross Landon as the Knave of Hearts, Ashleigh Kettlewell as Little Bo Peep and Laurence Wilcox as The Grand Old Duke of York.

One of the biggest cheers of the day was for head teacher Mrs Pat Barker who was dressed from head to toe in green as Teletubby Dipsy.



Laurence Wilcox and Ross Landon



Christine Alderson keeps an eye out for the wolf

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Lyndon Greener as Woody from Toy Story

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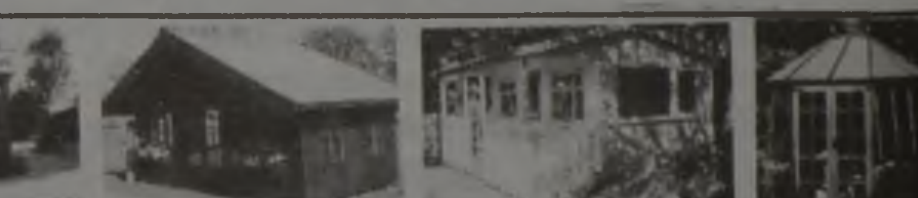
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