

# Spotlight on a local resident

## Alvin Rakoff

Alvin Rakoff, Canadian writer, director and producer, has spent most of his distinguished career in England, directing more than 100 television, film and stage productions. He lives in Bedford Park with his second wife Sally Hughes, Managing Director of The Mill Theatre, Sonning.



Alvin has worked with leading actors in film and television and won numerous awards, including International Emmy Awards for *A Voyage Round My Father*, starring Laurence Olivier, and *Call Me Daddy*, starring Donald Pleasence. He gave unknown extra Sean Connery his first leading role and drama student Alan Rickman his first professional job, as well as nurturing many other young actors. Theatre work ranges from *Hamlet* at Bristol Old Vic to the Cruise Charity performance at the Royal Albert Hall before Her Majesty the Queen. More recently, he directed productions of *Separate Tables* with Anthony Valentine; his own adaptation of Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep* and *A Sentimental Journey*, the story of Doris Day.

He has written numerous film scripts and three novels: *♫ Gillian* was translated into 10 languages; *Baldwin Street*, based on early days in his parents' shop in Toronto and *The Seven Einsteins*, a genetic thriller. Recent writing includes: *Too Marvelous For Words*, the story of lyricist Johnny Mercer. Films include *On Friday at Eleven* starring Rod Steiger; *Say Hello to Yesterday* which he also wrote, featured Jean Simmons and Leonard Whiting; *Hoffman* starred Peter Sellers; *City on Fire*, which he co-wrote, starred Henry Fonda.

### **When did you move to Bedford Park and what brought you here?**

I moved here in 1968 with my first wife, the late actress Jacqueline Hill, and my daughter Sasha. Our first floor flat in Holland Park was perfect for two, but not suitable for a child. We'd already been looking around for a house when one evening I met Richard Briers in a restaurant, thanks to

Jacqueline who had worked with his wife, Ann Briers. Richard said he'd just bought a house in Bedford Park, an area I hadn't heard of. That evening, we arrived home to find a letter from an estate agent with details of a house in the same road. We looked at the house on a miserable wet day but the unusually large living room was so light and airy we decided to buy it.

### **Have you done much work on your house and garden over the years?**

Yes, masses. The previous owner had taken out most of the original features and we restored many, for example removing the false ceiling in the living room. In the garden, we created a paved area and extended the lawn by removing a flower bed that reminded me of a graveyard! We've added trees, including a Mimosa and Apple tree.

### **How important is your environment to you when you're working? Do you work from home?**

Very. All my writing and preparation work as a film director is done in my study. I work there on my current project: *An Act of Love*. My son, John, is a film producer and found the original script when going through old manuscripts. He said I mustn't let it go and must work on it but these days I don't have the same self-discipline and things seem to take much longer.

### **What do you like most about living in Bedford Park?**

It's unique – the sight of the houses as you walk around, the Green, the Terrace and the buzz of the High Road.

### **Do you feel involved in the local community?**

From the earliest days, I've been a member of the Society. I was shocked by the destruction of houses in the early 60s and relieved so much effort was made to save them. I also have memories of sitting in Tom Greeves' house, hearing him play the harpsichord!

To read more about Alvin's extensive career: [www.alvinrakoff.com](http://www.alvinrakoff.com)

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