

Fields of Gold

By
Alex Jones

The theatre critic, Michael Billington famously wrote an article following the foot and mouth epidemic, asking why no one had written the play about such an important event. I did and it was produced by Alan Ayckbourn at his theatre in Scarborough and was published by Oberon Books.

Produced by Alan Ayckbourn for the Stephen Joseph Theatre, Scarborough, October-November, 2004.

Milk-quotas, artillery shells, crop-circles destroying his corn, a son who speaks to aliens and secretly wants to be a girl, a mother who sleeps in a JCB bucket, and a daughter who wants to transform his farm into an organic nightmare of hippy proportions are more than farmer, Ben Handley can bear. His wife, Mags desperately tries to hold the family together; but when disease is at their doorstep something has to give, and no amount of curry or alcohol will help now... Also charting the devastating foot and mouth epidemic that ravaged the country, Fields of Gold is a timely play about a neglected industry and a way of life that is rapidly becoming a thing of the past.

Programme notes: Some years ago I worked as a Samaritan volunteer in Worcester, and was surprised by the number of calls I had from farmers in the area. But over the next few years I was to learn that the suicide rate in farming communities was extremely high, and the real facts of rural life bear little relation to the misconceptions we have of the idyllic, cosy country cottage lifestyle we see depicted so often in magazines and on television. And so the calls kept coming, and it was always the same story: spiraling debts, isolation, complicated paperwork, animal health scares and the constant pressure of having to sell their produce in a changing market economy of falling prices. All of this on top of the pressure of having to provide an income for their family conspired to drive some to desperation, and sometimes in their darkest moments, even to take their own life.

Having lived for some time now in rural areas, I have worked now and again on farms in and around Hereford and Worcester and have come to know some of the farmers there personally. It would be a lie to say that all farms are wracked by debt and depression, but I have seen enough to know that there is a real crisis in the farming industry, and it is clear that British Agriculture is experiencing the worst agricultural depression since 1930's. A farmer I knew gave up his dairy herd a few years ago, having tried desperately to make the books balance, but as he said to me at the time: "*Farming's finished in this country - and no one cares*". The farm had been in his family for generations, and now he works as a builder; his land is leased, his barns are now *conversions* and his herd all slaughtered.

This kind of thing is happening all over the country, and pretty soon England's green and pleasant land will look very different. The thing is - *do we care?* If we don't, then a much neglected industry and way of life will soon become a thing of the past. We will import the food we eat, our landscape will change irrevocably, and the skills and livelihood of a thousand generations will disappear forever.

Farmers are under pressure like never before. Most farmers you speak to will know of someone within the industry who has taken their life because of the intense stress. But there is no escape from their quandary - work is home and home is work - it's a way of life and sometimes there is no other way of getting away from it, except of course by leaving it all behind.

Alex Jones - October 2004.

**SYNOPSIS & SAMPLE SCENES
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CHARACTERS

BEN/BERNARD - EARLY FORTIES

LILY - EARLY SEVENTIES

MAGS - LATE THIRTIES

JULE/JULIE - TWENTY ONE

JEM - SEVENTEEN

DAVE - MID TWENTIES

*The Handley family all speak
with a Cumbrian dialect,
Dave with a London dialect.*

ACT 1

SCENE 1

THE KITCHEN IN THE HANDLEY'S FARMHOUSE. THERE IS AN AGA, A FIREPLACE WITH A MANTLEPIECE, A BIG WOODEN TABLE WITH CHAIRS AROUND, A SOFA, TWO DOORS, ONE OF WHICH LEADS TO THE STAIRS, THE OTHER TO THE HALL AND FRONT DOOR. ALTHOUGH THE KITCHEN IS CLUTTERED WITH VARIOUS FARMING IMPLEMENTS, IT IS STILL COZY AND CLEAN. MAGS AND BEN ARE SITTING AT THE TABLE EATING THEIR BREAKFAST. BEN SQUIRMS IN HIS CHAIR.

BEN Sorry my fart smells.

MAGS Everybody's farts smell.

BEN Not like mine.

PAUSE

MAGS You moved the cows, yet?

BEN Not yet.

MAGS When yer movin' 'em then?

BEN Ah doan't know, soon ah s'pose.

MAGS They finished with yon pasture. You said they need movin'.

BEN Ah know ah did.

PAUSE

I farted again.

PAUSE

S' a ripe n' that.

MAGS (SNIFFS) Shouldn't've had that curry.

BEN S' a balti, en't it? Bit strong on the old arse-ring.

MAGS Spare the details, eh Ben? Anyway, doan't know what ye're doin' spendin' money on a take-away when we're so broke.

BEN Bloody 'ell, gorra have a treat now an' again!

MAGS Ah could've med a curry.

BEN *You* mek a curry?!

MAGS Some fancy vegetables an' yan of them jars of cook-in sauces.

BEN En't the same.

MAGS Yer got another bottle of whiskey, an' arl.

BEN Doan't miss a trick, you.

MAGS Gorra be careful; every penny counts.

BEN Wha's life for?

MAGS I'm jest sayin'...

BEN What's life fer if yer can't 'ave a curry now an' then?

PAUSE

MAGS Yer movin' the cows then?

BEN Not reet at this moment, no.

MAGS No, 'cause ye're too busy fartin'!

PAUSE

You sin 'em this mornin'?

BEN Nah, not yet.

MAGS Should tek a look.

BEN We're safe enough out 'ere.

MAGS Should still tek a look.

BEN I will tek a bloody look if yer gie me a chance... *bleedin' 'ell!*

MAGS En't no need ter swear all the time.

BEN Aye... well.

MAGS No need at arl.

BEN Aye... alreet... sorry.

MAGS Should think so. S' bad enough hearin' it from Lily.

BEN She can't 'elp it.

MAGS Mebbe not, but it jest dun't sound reet - a woman of her age.

PAUSE

So they're alreet, the cows?

BEN Leave the frettin' ter me.

MAGS I got a right t' know...

BEN Aas the one who's responsible for' farm.

MAGS We're all responsible.

BEN Yer doan't need ter worry.

MAGS Aye, yer can say that...

BEN SWIGS UP HIS TEA.

BEN Oh, alreet if it'll shut you up ah'll go an' move 'em..! If the aliens en't had 'em.

MAGS Well if we 'ave any more landin's we're gonna be in deep trouble.

BEN We'll settle the feed bill end o' next month. It's all in hand.

MAGS So yer say.

THE DOOR SUDDENLY BURSTS OPEN AND LILY CHARGES IN.
SHE HAS A TATTY BUNCH OF FLOWERS IN HER HAND.

LILY You bunch of bastards!!

BEN (SHOOK) For Christ sake!

LILY You bunch of claggy bastards!

MAGS Mornin' Lily, moderate yer language please.

LILY S' enough t' mek me bleedin' well cuss!

BEN Calm down, Mam.

LILY Doan't you tell me ter calm down. Who's the bloody parent 'ere?
You do as ye're told, lad or ah'll gie thee such a clout, as big as you are.

BEN Sit down.

LILY (CLOUTS HIM) Doan't you shout yer orders t' me, yer claggy twat!

MAGS Tha's a new 'n; ah'm not even sure what it means.

BEN That hurt.

LILY Ah warned thee, din't I?

BEN (SIGHS) So what is it now?

LILY The bathroom.

BEN Wha's wrong wi' bathroom?

LILY How the bloody hell should ah know?

BEN What thee talkin' about, Mam?

LILY Yon bathroom, yer little tosser!

MAGS (SIGHS).

BEN Wha's wrong wi' it?

LILY It's gone!

BEN It's gone?

LILY Yer bloody know it's gone!

BEN Where to?

LILY How the bloody hell should ah know? You tell me.

BEN Ah doan't know where it's gone.

LILY How am ah s'posed t' have a shit if I can't find' bathroom?
How am ah gonna have a bath?

BEN The bathroom en't gone. It's where it's allus bin.

LILY Yer bloody moved it!

BEN How can ah move a bathroom?

LILY Never mind how - *why*? Why did yer move it? You tryin' to torment me?

BEN Ah can't move a bathroom during' night. It's a major construction job.

LILY Tha's what meks it so bloody galling!

MAGS The bathroom's where it's allus bin, Lily.

BEN Next ter Jem's room.

LILY The bathroom's never bin next ter Jem's room.

BEN Well where wuz it then?

LILY You know where it wuz - across' landing from my room!

BEN Tha's our room.

LILY Doan't you cum it wi' me, boy! Ye've moved it an' ye'd better tell me where.

MAGS It's next ter Jem's room, Lily.

LILY It had better be. (EXITING) An' if yer move it again ah'm gonna brain you, yer bloody loony!

BEN You off fer a bath, then?

LILY If tha's alreet wi' you?

MAGS Immersion's on, should be hot enough.

LILY This place is like a madhouse! Movin' bloody bathrooms; never heard the like.
SHE EXITS, SLAMMING THE DOOR BEHIND HER.
(OFF) You mad bastard!
PAUSE

BEN What a lovely start ter the day!

MAGS Fairly routine, ah'd say.

BEN I could strangle the daft cow sometimes.

MAGS She's still yer Mam.

BEN More's the pity.

LILY (SHOUTS OFF) *Bernard!*

BEN Oh Christ, 'ere we go again!
LILY ENTERS.

LILY Oh here you are! Bin searching all ower.

BEN Thought yer wor gonna 'ave a bath, Mam?

LILY Aas in a minute. Wuz out this mornin'.

BEN Oh aye, where'd yer go?

LILY Top meadow.

BEN What were yer doin' there, then?
PRODUCES THE BUNCH OF WILD FLOWERS NOW BEHIND HER BACK.

LILY Picked some flowers. For Maggie, really.

MAGS (TAKES THEM) Oh Lily, they're lovely!

LILY Pretty n's, en't they?

MAGS They're lovely!

LILY Well you know - en't much I can do round 'ere. I know ah'm a bit of a pain, but ah want yer ter know how much I appreciate yer lettin' me cum back.

BEN It's as much your farm as our's.

LILY Ah know that, but all the same...

MAGS (KISSES HER) Ye're welcome 'ere, Lily, doan't worry none... ah'll get a vase for these.

LILY En't no shit on 'em.

MAGS No.

LILY 'Cause there's shit all over them fields.

BEN Allus is.

LILY Well you oughta do summat about it, lad. It's a bloody disgrace! Need a kick up the arse!

BEN S' the cows, en't it?

LILY No need blamin' the cows, lad! Your old Da, wouldn't let 'em get away wi' that'. You tidy it up.

BEN Alreet, Mam.

LILY Shit all over the fields... can smell it in 'ere an' arl.

BEN Aye well, doan't yer worry none. Ah'll sort it out.

LILY See yer do... Well, ah'll gan an' 'ave me bath, then. Doan't go movin' it again, will yer? (EXITING) Bloody stupid thing ter do, that.

SHE MEETS JEM, WHO IS ENTERING THE ROOM AS SHE LEAVES.

JEM Mornin' Nan!

LILY Mornin' young n'. You 'elp yer Da' tidy that field up.

JEM Aye, alreet.

LILY HAS GONE. JEM SITS AT THE TABLE.

There's bin another landin'.

MAGS Oh not another!

JEM Aye, can see it from my room.

BEN Wha's the damage?

JEM Looks like a big craft. Not the mother ship, like; probably a scout ship.

BEN If I get hold of 'em, the bloody swines!

MAGS All that corn!

JEM They've got their eyes on this place, alreet.

BEN S' the bloody army, ah reckon.

MAGS No Ben, s' just a bunch o' kids messin' about.

JEM No - s' the aliens.

MAGS S' just a bunch of kids larkin' about.

BEN Well if I catch 'em, ah'll put another hole up their arse!

MAGS Doan't get goin' out wi' that gun again.

JEM Guns are no use 'gainst their technology.

BEN Ruinin' a poor man's livelihood! Scarin' the stock an' arl.

MAGS (WITH TEAPOT) Want some tea?

JEM Thanks.

BEN Ohh... bloody corn!

MAGS Mebbe it en't much.

JEM It is - great big circle wi' three little n's round it. *Should see it!*

BEN S' the army!

MAGS It en't the army.

BEN Bloody army wallahs playin' their silly games again. Think they own the place they do. Can't step ower the top meadow wi'out some soddin' tin 'ead blowin' a whistle, goin' doo-bloody-lalley!

MAGS It's the range. It's fer your own safety.

BEN Ye're beginnin' t' sound like 'em!

JEM I bin ower there lots o' times.

MAGS Well you stay away - s' dangerous.

JEM Tha's where the aliens are.

BEN Why doan't they bomb the little green gits, then? Stop 'em mashin' my corn, do summat bloody useful, 'stead o' blowin' the countryside ter pieces?

MAGS They gorra practice somewhere. 'Sides most o' the shells land in' sea.

BEN Bloody army!

MAGS Can't blame the army fer everythin'.

BEN Why not?

MAGS Obsessed, you are.

JEM Could be their planet's dyin'... tha's what I think, anyroad.

JULE ENTERS.

JULE Nan said yer moved the bathroom.

BEN Aye, but I put it back.

JULE (SNIFFS) You bin eatin' them curries again?

BEN S' a balti, n' it?

JULE Dun't think they agree wi' yer. (SITS AT THE TABLE) Sin the news yet this mornin'?

BEN Ah doan't wanna see anymore pictures of cattle bein' burned thank you very much; some BBC bloke in a suit slaggin' off farmers!

JEM Well it *were* farmers fault, weren' it?

BEN Pig farmer.

JEM Still a farmer.

BEN Doan't you start. What the army're doin' t' stock is like Auschwitz! Bloody big pits, n' bonfires.

JULE They gorra kill infected cattle, no choice.

MAGS Can we all settle down an' 'ave our breakfast, please?

BEN There's another crop circle.

JULE Oh bloody 'ell! Big n'?

JEM Reckon it wor a scout ship.

JULE Is that big?

JEM Not as big as the mother ship, but still pretty big.

MAGS S' them kids from the estate, ah reckon.

BEN S' the army.

JULE It en't the army.

MAGS Ah said that.

BEN Bunch o' camouflaged hooligans, probably think it's a great joke!
THERE IS A DISTANT THUD AS BOMBING STARTS ON THE RANGE.
Bloody 'ell! What time is it?!

MAGS Eight o' clock, gone.

BEN *Eight o' bloody clock* an' they're bombin' already!

JEM Pity they dun't drop a bomb on this place.

MAGS Doan't you speak about yer 'ome like tha'!

JULE Gerrin' worse, he is.

JEM Up your's!

JULE Goin' on about aliens all the time. You wanna get out a bit.

JEM You wanna stay in a bit.

JULE 'Least I got a life.

JEM Call that a life, jiggin' yer tits at bloody clubs all night?

MAGS (WARNING) 'Ey -

JULE Ye're just jealous!

BEN Jealous o' you?!

JULE (SMILES) I reckon you wanna *be* me.

BEN In yer dreams!

MAGS Pack it in you pair!

JEM I got a life; ganna mek contact soon.

JULE Sad git!

JEM They bin 'ere again, en't they?

JULE Ah think we'd've noticed a bloody great spaceship landin' on' corn.

JEM Not if they wor usin' a cloakin' device.

BEN *Shut up the pair of yer!* Crikey, s' like a bloody soap-opera in 'ere some morning's.

MAGS Aye, well we know where they get it from, dun't we?

BEN Wha's that supposed ter mean?

MAGS Hardly Mr Sunshine, lately, are yer?

BEN Excuse me, but who's doin' all the arguing' 'ere?

MAGS Should set an example.

BEN I en't done 'owt!

MAGS Well mebbe yer should - them cows fer a start off.

BEN Reet, ah'll go an' move 'em then. Mind if ah finish me tea first...*crikey*. (TO JEM) N' you - get yer lazy arse off ter school!

JEM I en't gannin'.

BEN Yer bloody are!

JEM Ah'm not.

MAGS Ye've got ter go ter school, Jem. Everybody needs qualifications these days. Look at yer sister - she's got a first class diploma now.

JEM In agriculture?!

MAGS 'Ey, yer sister's done very well ter get that diploma.

JEM Doan't need a diploma ter milk a cow.

JULE What d' *you* know about farmin', anyroad?

JEM Enough.

JULE Yer can't even hold a shovel.

MAGS Leave him alone, Jule.

BEN She's reet. Wouldn't hurt him ter get stuck in now an' then. When ah was his age I was ploughin' an' drillin', ah was.

JEM Get the violins out.

MAGS Y' can stop it, all on yer. I en't havin' this ower breakfast.

BEN Stroke o' dawn ah wuz up.

JULE So what? Ah've bin up nearly two hours already.

JEM Wha's this? A misery competition?

BEN Doan't know what hard work is.

MAGS Now I said tha's enough!

BEN 'Bout time he pulled his weight.

JULE All he pulls is his plonker.

JEM Aye, well you'd know ah s'pose, bein' an expert on plonkers.

JULE Like ah said - jealous, yer sad little virgin.

MAGS I en't havin' that kind o' talk in my house! *Now stop it.*

BEN Up an' down' fields: *rain, snow, hail...*

JULE Aas in the fields 'afore you. Aas allus out there first.

BEN Ah keep me eye on this farm. Ah'm alluss doin' summat: accounts, plannin'...

JULE *Plannin'?* You en't changed 'owt fer years.

BEN Ah've told yer a thousand times - aas not changin' farm ter suit your wacky ideas! Spent two bloody years at college an' thinks yer knows it arl!

JEM I'm giein' up 6th form.

BEN No ye're bloody not.

JEM Ah'm seventeen, ah can please meself.

BEN Not in my 'ouse yer can't. Ye're goin'.

JEM So *mek me!*

BEN Ye're goin' t school!

JEM I en't!

JULE We *should* be goin' organic.

BEN What?!

MAGS Not now, Jule.

JULE Stuck in a rut, you are.

BEN IS ABOUT TO COME BACK AT THEM WHEN
THERE IS SUDDENLY MORE EXPLOSIONS OUTSIDE.
BEN GRABS HIS GUN.

BEN Eight o'clock, eight o' bloody clock! Listen to 'em - blowin'
the countryside ter pieces!

MAGS Where yer gannin' wi' that gun?

BEN Ah'm gonna fire a few off. Let 'em know ah can mek a noise an' arl.

BEN BEGINS TO EXIT.

MAGS Ben..! You are not ter stir things up out there...

BUT HE HAS GONE.

Obsessed, he is. Ah'd better gan an' keep me eye on him.
(TO JEM) Get theeself ter school, you!

MAGS EXITS.

(CALLING OFF) Now, jest calm down, Ben..!

PAUSE

JEM I en't goin'.

JULE SHAKES HER HEAD IN DISGUST.

MUSIC.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACKOUT.

SCENE 2

THE CORNFIELD. APPROACHING DUSK, THE SAME DAY. JEM IS SITTING IN THE CORN BY THE BOUNDARY FENCE, LOOKING AT THE SKY WITH BINOCULARS. JULE APPROACHES WITH A CARRIER BAG.

JULE Lookin' fer aliens?

JEM Yeah.

JULE Wanna fag? (TOSSES BACCY AND RIZLAS).

JEM Aw, thanks Jule!

JULE Beer?

JEM Great.

TAKES FOUR PACK FROM CARRIER, TEARS ONE OFF AND HANDS IT TO JEM. HE TAKES A SMALL PACKET FROM HIS POCKET.

Got some blow. ah'll roll us one up.

JULE Nice one!

JEM Dad calmed down?

JULE Not really.

JEM What is it now?

JULE Had a phone call; can't move' cows.

JEM But we need ter move 'em.

JULE There's bin a case confirmed at a farm near Eskdale.

JEM Tha's miles away!

JULE Well *Maff* says we can't move 'em.

JEM Eskdale's's miles away. Our herd's clear.

JULE S' *Maff*, en't it? En't tekin' no chances.

JEM Soddin' 'ell! S' like the Gestapo.

JULE Well he's gerrin' the disinfectant out, anyroad.

JEM Aw shit!

JULE Bales o' straw down by' gate. Yer could gie us a hand later.

JEM We gorra disinfect ourselves everytime we cum an go?

JULE Looks that way.

JEM Bloody rigmarole. Next thing they'll 'ave us walkin' around ringin' a bell shoutin' *unclean*.

JULE S' bin on the cards for years, this.

JEM Oh God, doan't start on about arl that organic stuff again; s' borin'.

JULE *You're borin'.*

JEM HAS FINISHED ROLLING THE JOINT. HE LIGHTS UP, TAKES A DRAG AND SIGHS. HE PASSES IT OVER TO JULE.

JEM 'Ere, get yer laughin' gear round that -

JULE (TOKES) *Mm, nice!*
PAUSE
Yer mean it, 'bout not goin' ter school?

JEM Aye.

JULE Dad's furious.

JEM Dun't care.

JULE Mam's worried ter death.

JEM Ten't my fault.

JULE Why?

JEM Just dun't like it, tha's arl.

JULE Tha's arl?

JEM Tha's arl.

JULE So what yer gonna do?

JEM Dunno... summat.

JULE Waster!

JEM S'pose so.
PAUSE

JULE You bin in my underwear drawer again?

JEM Yer what?

JULE You bin messin' about wi' my underwear?

JEM No! I en't touched yer bloody underwear.

JULE 'Cause yer like ter wear my panties, dun't yer?

JEM What?!! Where'd yer get that idea from?

JULE They go missin' fer a couple o' days an' turn up again all crumpled.

JEM Ah doan't know what ye're talkin' about.

JEM Anyway ah'm 'avin' a bit of a clear out. Yer can 'ave 'em if yer like.

JEM Ah doan't want yer panties!

JULE Please yerself.
PAUSE

JEM Ah'll tek 'em to Oxfam though, if yer like.

JULE Ah'll leave 'em outside me door in a plastic bag.

JEM Okay... I'm goin' ter town; may as well drop 'em in.

JULE So yer wun't need ter rifle my drawers anymore, will yer?

JEM No... I mean *no, I never!*

JULE Whatever.
PAUSE

JEM I wouldn't do 'owt like that. S' not normal, is it?

JULE No.

JEM No, din't think it wuz.

JULE But if yer enjoys it, wha's the problem?

JEM Ah doan't enjoy it... I mean if I *did* I wouldn't, but ah don't... so I *don't*.

JULE Whatever... (TAKES A DRAG AT THE JOINT) S' good blow.

JEM Got it from Mel.

JULE You ever really sin an alien?

JEM Oh I sin 'em alreet! Hear 'em an' arl sometime.

JULE Well yer wanna tell 'em ter leave our corn alone. Lost a lot this time.

JEM Ganna mek contact soon.

JULE Barmy git.

JEM You see.

PAUSE AS THEY BOTH DRINK AND SMOKE.

(SMILES) S' nice this, en't it?

JULE (NODS).

A SOLDIER SUDDENLY STANDS UP IN THE LONG GRASS AT THE OTHER SIDE OF THE BOUNDARY FENCE. HE POINTS A GUN AT THEM.

DAVE Don't move!

PAUSE

Don't move a muscle - this is a warning!

PAUSE

What are you doin' so close to Ministry Of Defence property?

JULE Bugger you an' the army! This is our property this side o' fence.

DAVE Really? What you doin' with those binoculars? You been spyin' on our activities?

JEM Aye. What yer gun'ter do about it, yer khaki git?

DAVE I don't have to take mouth from civilians. Put your hands up; I'm takin' you in.

JEM Go an' 'ave a wank.

DAVE Who d' you think you're talkin' to, *farmer boy*?

JEM You - army twat!

DAVE I'm not accustomed to insults.

JEM Stick around a bit then.

DAVE Know what I'm gonna do?

JULE Surprise us.

DAVE I'm gonna shoot yer... both.

JEM Yer wouldn't dare.

DAVE Wouldn't I?

JULE Police'd have you soon as they found our bodies.

DAVE (SMILES) Who says they'll find your bodies? The army's got ways of disposing of embarrassing information. People disappear all the time.

JULE Yer mean it, doan't yer? Ye're really gonna kill us.

DAVE Yeah.

JULE I think yer should seriously consider the consequences of such an action.

DAVE I've had enough of your kind of scum. Always makin' complaints about the range; always stirrin' up trouble with the locals. I wonder why we bother safeguarding democracy an' world peace for raggy-arsed yokels like you!

HE LIFTS THE GUN TO HIS SHOULDER AND TAKES AIM.

JULE Nowt we can do ter change yer mind?

DAVE No.

JEM Would a can o' beer help?

PAUSE

DAVE Oh, all right then.

DAVE STEPS OVER THE FENCE INTO THE MEADOW, *HIGH FIVE'S* WITH JEM.

JEM How goes it, Dave?

DAVE Same as usual. (KISSES JULE) Alright sweetheart?

JULE Alreet darlin'.

DAVE Giz a toke -

TAKES A LONG DRAG AT THE JOINT.

Mm, that's better! (SIGHS) *What a day!*

JEM You lot started early enough. Dad went doo-lalley; wuz on the range wi' his gun, firin' all around him.

DAVE (CRACKING OPEN A CAN) He wants to be careful.

JULE Under pressure, ah reckon. What wi' disease gerrin' closer an arl.

JEM Woan't reach 'ere.

JULE Could do, s'possible.

JEM Shit!

JULE Why're you suddenly so concerned anyhow? Ye're never gonna be a farmer.

JEM Mebbe not, but it's still me home.

DAVE Join the army; make a man of yer.

JULE Doubt it.

JEM (HORRIFIED SHE MIGHT SPILL THE BEANS) *Jule!*

DAVE I'm serious. I've had a great time; been all over the world: Germany, Belize, America. Give it a go -

JEM Doan't think it's me, really.

JULE Tha's a relief for the armed forces.

JEM Leave off, Jule.

DAVE Dunno what I'll do once me time's up. A lot of 'em end up in the Met.

JEM Swap one uniform for another; meks sense.

DAVE I'd have you in a cell straight away: *smoking illegal substances.*
(TOKES)
Your Dad should try some of this; might calm him down a bit. I'll pop round with an ounce of skunk.

JEM (LAUGHS) *Like yeah!* He'd blow yer arse away.

JULE Best stay away from the silly bastard at the moment. See yer in town t'night, eh?

DAVE 'Bout time I called round, though. Said hello an' all that.

JULE This en't the right time, believe me.

DAVE Should introduce myself. I mean, pretty soon I'm gonna get me next posting.

JEM She wun't go wi' yer.

DAVE S' up to her, Jem.

JEM She's a farmer; she wun't live anywhere else.

DAVE Could be posted any moment.

JEM She wun't leave the farm, will yer Jule?

JULE I like farmin'

DAVE An' I ...

JEM ... like killin'.

DAVE I've never killed anybody.

JEM S' yer job though, en't it?

DAVE You lot kill all the time.

JEM *Beasts, yer.*

DAVE Still killin'

JEM Animals.

DAVE Bunch of murderin' bastards, farmers.

JEM Gorra keep the army in bacon butties, en't we?

JULE Ah'm glad you en't killed anybody, Dave.

DAVE Ditto darlin', ditto.
THEY KISS, BRIEFLY. JEM TAKES UP HIS BINOCULARS.

JEM I sin one!

JULE Bollocks!

JEM Ah did - I sin one!

JULE Where?

JEM Streak o' light at the horizon.

DAVE Probably a jet.

JEM No it weren't. They're cumin', they're cumin'!

JULE (INDICATING JOINT) You wanna leave off that stuff.

JEM Yer missed it! It wor plain... bloody 'ell, yer missed it.

DAVE Be a jet.

JEM Not at that speed.

DAVE Could be a comet, I s'pose.

JEM Green?

DAVE It was green?

JEM S' their fusion reactors - anti-gravity device, gives off rays, like.

JULE Wish they'd beam you up.

DAVE We'd know if there was anythin' out there, Jem. We've got radar all over the ranges.

JEM Come off it, Dave. Wi' respect, mate; ye're just a bloody foot-soldier, lowest o' the low; they en't gonna tell you owt.

DAVE JUMPS ON JEM AND THEY WRESTLE ON THE GROUND.

THEY ALL LAUGH, ESPECIALLY JEM.

DAVE You cheeky little sod! Think you can talk to Her Majesty's finest like that?!

JULE Go on, Dave - slit his scrawny little throat!

DAVE QUICKLY OVERPOWERS JEM AND SITS ON HIM, PINNING HIS HANDS TO THE GROUND.

JEM Yeah? You an' who's army? (LAUGHS) I shouldna' said that - you 'ave got an army, en't yer?

THEY ARE ALL LAUGHING.

DAVE Yeah - take me to your leader!

THEY ALL LAUGH AGAIN. LILY SUDDENLY KNEELS UP IN THE CORN BEHIND THEM. SHE HAS BEEN WATCHING THEM, CONCEALED AND LOOKS *WELL* ANGRY. JULE SENSES SOMEONE WATCHING, BUT WHEN SHE TURNS TO LOOK, LILY HAS DIVED BACK INTO THE CORN.

JULE Hey, shut up a minute!

DAVE Wha's up?

JULE Thought I 'eard summat.

DAVE CLIMBS OFF JEM. JEM REMAINS ON HIS BACK, SMILING.

DAVE It's bloody E.T!

JULE Tell Dad an' he'll be out wi' his gun.

DAVE You don't need yer Dad. I'll protect yer!

THEY KISS. JEM WATCHES. THEY CLOCK ON HE'S LOOKING.

JULE What you lookin' at?

JEM Carry on - I en't gunna bother yer.

JULE You are *not* gunna watch us messin' about!

JEM I were'nt gonna watch... Ah'm gonna look fer crafts.

DAVE Go on, Jem - give us an hour, eh?

JEM RELUCTANTLY STANDS UP.

JULE Here - (THROWS HIM A CAN) have another can.

JEM Thanks.

HE'S ABOUT TO WALK OFF, WHEN HE NOTICES MAGS APPROACHING.

Mam's cumin'!

JULES STUBS THE JOINT.

JULE Dave -

DAVE What?

JULE Could yer..?

DAVE What?

JULE I en't told anyone yet, an' yer shouldn't be on' land, really.

DAVE Oh, come on Jule...

JULE Jest this once, 'till ah've told 'em, like.

DAVE You're a hard woman.

THEY KISS.

JULE Talkin' about hard.

JEM She's cumin'.

DAVE I'll sort you out later.

DAVE DIVES INTO THE CORN.

MAGS (APPROACHING) You sin yer Nan?

JULE No. How long's she bin missin'?

MAGS Hours. Ah doan't know where she gets to. (EXASPERATED) *Oh... silly woman!* (SNIFFS) I can smell smoke. You bin smokin'?

JEM No.

MAGS Bet you 'ave; bet yer smoke an' arl. Ye're goin' ter school t'morra'.

JEM I en't.

MAGS You blinkin' well are.

JEM I bloody en't.

MAGS Ye're gonna need yer qualifications, Jem.

JULE Dad still in a mood?

MAGS Jest sulkin' now, 'way he does.

JULE (LAUGHS) Buy him a curry, that'll cheer him up.

MAGS No thanks; smell about the place..! Where has she got to? (SHOUTS) *LILY..!* Gonna 'ave ter call the police again. I hope she en't wandered off the farm.

JEM Searched all the barns?

MAGS 'Course we 'ave. An' the 'ouse top ter bottom. Yer Dad said ter leave it, she'll turn up.

JULE Ah'm sure she will; does normally.

MAGS Ah'm worried. She's bin much worse lately: proper agitated an' wound up, *n' all that swearin'!* Ah divn't know she knew such words.

JULE Everybody swears on farms.

MAGS Help us search, will yer?

JULE Aye... aye in a minute.

JEM Cum on Mam, let's check the lane. She could be in the old chicken shed again.

MAGS Hadn't thought o' that.

JEM See yer when ah see yer.

JULE Not if I see you first.

JEM AND MAGS EXIT.

Coast's clear.

DAVE EMERGES FROM THE CORN AND DIVES ON JULE.

DAVE Come 'ere you sexy little bitch, you!

JULE Ooh... no, what you ganna do ter me, soldier boy?

THEY GET STUCK IN.

Oh Dave..! *oh God!*

DAVE God an' all his angels, sweetheart!

LILY SUDDENLY STANDS UP IN THE CORN, SHE LOOKS DOWN AT THEM. SHE HAS A HEFTY BRANCH OF A TREE IN HER HANDS.

LILY You claggy bastard!

DAVE SITS UP, SURPRISED.

DAVE What?

LILY WHACKS HIM ACROSS HIS HEAD WITH THE BRANCH AND HE FALLS TO THE GROUND. SHE BEGINS TO LAY INTO HIM.

LILY You bloody claggy army bastard!

JULE PULLS HER OFF HIM. THEY FALL TO THE GROUND.

JULE No Nan, no! What are yer doin'?!

LILY The claggy army bastard!

SHE SITS DOWN AND JULE GOES TO DAVE.

JULE Dave..? Dave..?

HE DOESN'T STIR.

My God no, he's dead! (CRYING) Ye've killed him! Ye've killed him, Nan!

MUSIC. LIGHTS FADE TO BLACKOUT.

SCENE 3

THE HOUSE. THE NEXT MORNING. BEN IS SITTING AT THE TABLE WITH THE TELEPHONE.

BEN Hello... Ben Handley here... (LAUGHS) Handley Farm, tha's reet. How are yer..? Good, aye grand..! Well I heard yer wuz lookin' fer a baler... About three years old, good nick... surplus ter requirements, like... Yeah..? Well ah divn't know - make me an offer, like... *How much..?* Oh cum on, Mr Davies, it's three years old..! Well ah wuz thinkin' more in the line of... No, no, let me think about it... er, we've got a rotavator too, s' a... Reet jest the baler... aye...

MAGS ENTERS WITH A BUCKET OF POTATOES.

Well... ah'll... look, ah'll get back ter yer. (RINGS OFF).

MAGS Who's that?

BEN Ah... jest, yer know another rep tryin' ter flog us summat.

MAGS Aye?

BEN Aye... get sick on it.

MAGS Aye, they can get reet pushy. What wuz it?

BEN What?

MAGS What wuz it they wor tryin' ter sell us?

BEN Ah, yer know... seed, fertiliser.

PAUSE.

MAGS Ben... we gorra talk.

BEN Oh... aye?

MAGS I think it's time we faced up ter things.

BEN Things are fine, pet... I admit, well yer know there's allus summat outstanding, but tha's farmin' these days - same wi' everybody.

MAGS Ah'm not talkin' about 'farm, ah'm talkin' about Lily.

BEN Me Mam, what about her?

MAGS Look, this en't easy...

BEN What en't easy?

MAGS Well she's gerrin' worse, yer know she is; allus goin' missin', gerrin' confused an' ter top it arl - this business in' cornfield.

BEN She's happy 'ere, Mags.

MAGS Is she? Ah'm not sure.

BEN 'Mongst her own.

MAGS Well... *ah'm* findin' it difficult. S' like ah'm a full-time carer, an' ah've got enough ter do about 'place as it is.

BEN She's me Mam.

MAGS Ah know that, love...

BEN End o' discussion.

MAGS She's on'y gonna get worse, Ben.

BEN Doan't wanna talk about it.

MAGS She'd be better off where she can get proper 24 hour care. She's gonna do hersel' a mischief wanderin' round farm, sleepin' in fields, gerrin' lost arl the time.

BEN We allus find her, doan't we?

MAGS Ah divn't think you appreciate just how much hard work she is.

BEN Ah doan't mind it.

MAGS But it's me tha's lookin' after her an' on top of everythin' else we got foot-an'-mouth on' doorstep.

BEN She's not gannin' in a home.

MAGS Ah know it's difficult fer yer...

BEN Tha's it, Mags - end o' discussion.

MAGS Ah love her as much as anybody; jest bein' realistic. Ah'm a wife, a mother, another hand about 'farm - ah'm exhausted by it arl.

BEN End o' discussion, Mags.

PAUSE.

MAGS Aye... well alreet. Next thing we gorra talk about though is 'cows. Ah've bin thinkin about it; we need ter tek precautions.

BEN I have, yer know I have; put them carpet off-cuts cross lane an' arl, soaked 'em in disinfectant.

MAGS Need ter do more than that. It's startin' ter get a real grip round 'ere.

BEN Well... what more can I do?

LILY ENTERS.

LILY Got any *All Brown*, Mags?

MAGS *All Brown?* Wha's that?

LILY *All Brown*, ter mek yer shit; ah'm fair bunged-up, I am.

MAGS *All Bran*, Lily.

LILY (SLIGHTLY ANNOYED) Tha's what ah said - *All Brown!* Helps yer ter...

MAGS (SIGHS) Ah know what is does. Sit yerself down, Lily.

MAGS GETS CEREALS, BOWL, MILK, ETC. AND SETS IT BEFORE LILY. SHE HAS TO PUT CEREALS AND MILK IN FOR HER.

BEN An' how's me Mam this mornin'?

MAGS Bunged-up! Are yer deaf as well as stupid? Ah need a good clear-out.

JEM ENTERS.

JEM Any chance o' some toast?

MAGS Two slices?

JEM Aye.

BEN He should be at school. You had a word wi' him?

MAGS Ah can't mek him go, can I?

BEN *Lazy sod!* Get off ter school!

JEM No.

BEN You should obey me - ah'm yer father.

JEM I'm en't gannin' anymore.

BEN Who's in charge in this house?

LILY Will yer stop pickin' on yon lad!

BEN He's gorra go ter school, Mam.

LILY You think ye're in charge, doan't yer?

BEN Well... I...

LILY Know who's in charge?

BEN Well...

LILY Answer me when I talk ter thee!

BEN Ah... ah divn't know, Mam.

LILY Yer Dad, that's who. It's his farm an' then your'n an' then Jem's. So shurrup!

JEM Ah divn't want it.

LILY 'Course yer want it.

JEM It's Jule who wants it.

BEN Dad's dead, Mam. Ah keep tellin' yer.

MAGS Ben, will yer please be a bit more sensitive.

LILY What a thing ter say! What a thing ter say about yer own father!

BEN Well he's hardly about ter walk through' door, is he? He's bin pushin' up daisies fer' past four year.

MAGS Insensitive, you are.

LILY What a thing ter say!

BEN (GIVING UP) Oh giz a cup o' tea -

MAGS S' in the pot.

BEN (IRONIC) Thanks a lot!

MAGS *Who's in charge?* We all share this place as far as ah can see.

JULE ENTERS.

JULE Some tea, Mam?

MAGS RISES AND GETS A MUG FOR HER.

MAGS Sit yerself down, love. Ah'll pour yer one.

BEN Marvellous! Pour *her* a bloody cup!

JULE What?

MAGS Oh ignore him.

LILY You sin yer grandad this mornin', Julie?

JULE He's dead.

LILY Oh.

BEN LOOKS FOR A REACTION.

MAGS Finished milkin' now?

JULE Aye an' ah took some feed over t' meadow.

BEN How's it lookin'?

JULE S' gerrin' bad. Grass is all but gone. When can we move 'em?

BEN Ah dunno, when they says we can.

JULE It'll be a quagmire if it rains.

LILY Farm's your's then, Bernard.

BEN What?

LILY After aas gone. Farm's your's if yer Dad's dead. He *is* dead, en't he?

JEM Definitely, Nan.

LILY Wish people'd tell me these things.

BEN S' bin a while now, Mam.

LILY So why keep me in' dark? I can't mek you out, lad. Ye're an odd 'n an' no mistakin'. What a thing ter do! You shoulda' told me. Things like that are important.

BEN (SIGHS) Ah've got a headache.

MAGS Not surprised the way yer put it away last night.

LILY *Ah'm* constipated.

JEM (LAUGHS) Need a good shit, eh Nan?

MAGS Alreet Jem, no need fer you ter join in.

LILY Ah need a good shit... *if ah could find 'bathroom!* (GLARES AT BEN).

BEN Ah could do wi' a drink now.

MAGS Reet, now we're all together we need ter discuss 'farm.

JEM Well - s' a load o' fields wi' animals an' crops in it.

JULE Funny!

MAGS Cum on everybody, ah'm bein' serious. Disease is gerrin' closer day by day. There's bin a case confirmed twenty miles away; we doan't wanna lose cows.

JULE No way they're cullin' my herd!

MAGS Which is why I reckon we should seal off the farm.

JEM Oh no!

JULE I en't stayin' in.

MAGS S' the thing ter do. No comin' an' goin'; nobody callin' round.

BEN What about me curries?

MAGS I think that's the last thing we need ter worry about.

JULE "What about yer curries?" What about me life?!

JEM Ah've gorra be able ter get out, Mam.

JULE When d' you go out, anyroad?

JEM Ah go out.

JULE Where?

JEM Me Sat'day job.

JULE What a fulfillin' life yer lead.

JEM Ah know what ye're worried about.

JULE Careful what yer say, little boy.

JEM Gerrin' yer end away.

MAGS Yer know I doan't like that smutty kind of talk in 'ouse. *Cut it out now!*

LILY Army bastard!

MAGS Look - ye've set yer Nan off now. Yer shouldn't use words like that, Lily.

BEN Right though, en't she?

JULE Yer what?

BEN Ganna get yerself a reet reputation, gannin' wi' the army.

JEM Not the *whole* army.

JULE Ah'm warnin' you -

JEM Ah wor stickin' up for yer then, actually.

JULE Divn't bother.

JEM He's a nice bloke, Dave. I like him.

BEN *Nice bloke?* He's a bloody soldier!

MAGS Aw, he did seem nice, though. He din't make a fuss about Lily, either.

LILY Who din't?

JEM *Dave*, Nan - you remember in' corn.

LILY What thee talkin' about?

JEM Had ter go to hospital; had concussion.

LILY He wor rapin' Julie.

MAGS He weren't rapin' her, Lily.

BEN Well if he weren't rapin' her, she should be ashamed of herself.

MAGS What?!

BEN Lettin' him do... dirty stuff to her... *in the open air, an ar!*

LILY Ah welt 'im one, ah did. Ah cracked his head open. (LAUGHS).

MAGS Yer shouldna' done it, Lily.

BEN Well if we do seal 'place off, yer wun't be seein' *him* fer a while anyroad.

JULE Great!

MAGS We gorra do summat, Jule. Think o' the implications.

JULE Aye, ye're reet, Mam. We need ter stick tergether ter beat this one.

JEM Ah'll get plenn'y o' cans in; we'll be okay.

BEN Ye're too young ter drink anyroad.

JEM Just follerin' 'family tradition, Dad.

BEN Ah'll gie you such a clout one e' these days, yer cheeky sod!

JEM (GRINS) Can't hit kids; s' illegal now.

LILY Yer should call social services, Maggie; report him fer that's child abuse, that is.

BEN Ah din't mean 'owt'. S' an expression, tha's arl.

LILY Has he done 'owt sexual to yer, Jem?

BEN Ah beg yer bloody pardon?!

LILY 'Cause you 'ear about it, doan't yer? Ah mean it 'appens.

BEN Mam, how can yer say such a thing? How could you think such a thing o' me? Aas yer son - aas Bernard, yer son.

LILY Yer shouldn't threaten yer family wi' violence.

BEN Christ, *you* caved Jule's boyfriend's 'ead in wi' half a soddin' tree!

LILY Shoulda' sin what he wor doin' to her in' corn - *disgustin'*!

MAGS They're a couple, Lily. Dave's her boyfriend.

LILY (POINTS AT BEN) N' yer should report him ter social services. Yer know what thee wants, doan't yer?

BEN Surprise me.

LILY A psychiatrist.

BEN Thanks.

LILY A psychiatrist an' some o' them tablets that mek yer... (CAN'T FIND THE WORD).

BEN Die?

LILY (FINDS IT) *Calm down.*

MAGS Thank you, Lily tha's enough advice fer now. Le's start gerrin' stuff sorted. Ah'll start ringin' round; tell everyone ter stay away from 'farm.

JULE Aye, we'll beat it: nobody's gonna kill my herd. Ah'll get some notices med up ter warn people away.

JEM Ah'll help paint 'em, Jule. Aas good at art!

JULE Ah'll be in old barn then.

JEM Soon's aas finished me toast.

JULE EXITS.

LILY He's dead then, yer Dad?

BEN 'Fraid so, Mam.

LILY Thought I hadn't sin him fer a while.

BEN Yer'll still go back t' school when it's all ower.

JEM I wun't.

BEN Openly insolent - *openly insolent!*

LILY Report him ter 'social services, Mags. They'd be on him like a ton o' bricks, they would.

BEN Oh shut up, yer daft ol' bat!

LILY Divn't yer talk ter your elders like that, you chauvinistic bastard!!

BEN Great - ah'm a chauvinist now!

JEM Well, s' an improvement on a paedophile.

LILY He's one o' them an' arl! Ah bet he beats you up, dun't he Mags? Doan't you stand for it!

MAGS He dun't beat me, Lily. He's never laid a hand on me, ever.

BEN Wouldn't bloody dare.

LILY He should be helpin' his family, not abusin' 'em!

BEN Go an' tek yer Nan out, Jem. Show her the flyin' saucers.

JEM Aye, cum on Nan. I got summat'll relax yer; get yer bowels movin' an' arl.

LILY S' not a radox bath, is it?

JEM No, s' better than a bath.

LILY (GETTING UP) He moved the bathroom, *silly bugger!*

BEN See yer later, Mam.

LILY (EXITING) *Pervert!*

LILY AND JEM EXIT. BEN LOOKS DEPRESSED.

MAGS Cheer up, Ben.

BEN What?!

MAGS Things could be worse; 'least we got our health.

BEN Me own mother wants me locked away.

MAGS She doan't know what she's sayin'.

BEN Christ, I look after her; took her in rather than stick her in an 'ome.

MAGS (SUDDENLY SERIOUS) No Ben - *I* look after her.

MAGS EXITS. BEN WAITS A WHILE AND THEN OPENS THE DOOR TO SEE IF ALL IS CLEAR, THEN HE RETRIEVES A BOTTLE OF WHISKY HE'S CONCEALED IN THE KITCHEN. HE SWIGS IT STRAIGHT FROM THE BOTTLE AND SIGHS, SATISFIED.

BEN *Ohh, that's better... that's much better!*

MUSIC. LIGHTS FADE TO BLACKOUT.

REVIEWS

thisisUll.com - For some time now *thisisUll.com* has been bringing news and reviews of events that are happening in Hull. It is quite noticeable that what is going unreported is what's happening in the near-by towns surrounding the city of Hull. A search of the Internet finds several places and events, all within easy reach from Hull, which may interest an audience starved of this information. In response to this lack of coverage from the mainstream media of Hull, *thisisUll.com* sets out to bring a taster of these places and events. *The Stephen Joseph Theatre* in Scarborough is a case in point. Ask most people in Hull about the theatre and you'll most likely receive a blank look in return. *The Stephen Joseph Theatre*, located in the centre of Scarborough, is a beautiful Art Deco styled theatre on the outside but has a contemporary designed interior that makes for a pleasurable and relaxing viewing experience. The latest play to receive a world premier at the theatre is *Alex Jones' Fields Of Gold*. *Fields of Gold* is essentially a very funny play. Whilst the humour paces the production and is used as a mechanism to entertain, the play also has a serious point to make about the farming industry and family life. Set in the midst of the *foot and mouth* disease of 2001, *Alex Jones* explores how the family-based farms that once provided a livelihood for many have now shrunk to a residual in the farming community. This play portrays the struggle these families have to endure, merely to make a living. *Ben Handley (Colin MacLachlan)* is the current proprietor of Handley Farm, a farm that has been in his family for generations. It is the certainties of years of family tradition that plays-off against the uncertainties brought about by the impending disaster about to hit the farm. As *foot and mouth* disease sweeps through the livestock, Ben has to face up to the fact that farming and his family are changing irrevocably. Ben is forced to come to terms with the fact that it is his daughter, *Jule (Claire Lams)*, and not his son, *Jem (Andrew Turner)*, who is interested in the future running of the farm. The financial problems and the unpalatable idea of organic farming are only minor distractions though for Ben though as he also has to cope with Jem's preoccupation with aliens and cornfields, a deteriorating relationship with his wife *Mags (Susan Twist)*, Jule's blossoming relationship with an unsuitable boyfriend, *Dave (Andrew Brooke)* and his live-in mother, *Lily (Judy Wilson)* who suffers from Alzheimer's Disease. It's certainly not all doom and gloom though. Much of the humour in the play is derived from how Ben interacts with his family. The black comedy will have you laughing along before the excellent script writing reveals the serious point lurking beneath the laughs. *Andrew Turner* is excellent as Jem and steals the majority of the best comedy lines whilst the cameos from Ben's mother, Lily, are often hilarious. As the play moves forwards you are skilfully pulled in two directions by the script writing. Whilst Ben is essentially a decent man who is doing the best he can for his family in very difficult circumstances, the darker, much more unpleasant side of his character is never far from the surface, making it difficult to feel too much sympathy for him. Quite how far Ben will go to protect the farm and the price he is prepared to pay for this, both financially and emotionally, remains in the balance until the very end of the play. *Fields of Gold* is a humorous, yet moving slice of family life on a contemporary farm that is trying to make its way in an increasingly uncertain world. The issues the play touches on are not only relevant to the countryside and farming. The dilemmas and issues that Ben and his family have to face are relevant to everybody. *Nick Quanttrill*

Driffeld Times - *Batty granny and a son who sees aliens - it's great stuff!* - Take a dysfunctional family - a batty granny who smokes weed, a near alcoholic father, a son who sees aliens wherever he looks, and a daughter besotted with her soldier boyfriend - and stir them down in a Cumbrian farm at the height of the foot-and-mouth crisis and you have a basic idea of what this is about. Mixing pathos with shafts of humour and some near-the-knuckle language, Alex Jones' hard-hitting new play in the round at Scarborough's Stephen Joseph Theatre draws some excellent performances from the half dozen strong cast. Judy Wilson as the eccentric grandmother, Lily must have thought all her Christmases had come at once when she first read for this part. She stole just about every scene she was in. Yet Colin Maclachlan as farmer Ben ran her close. His tortured, world-weary, half-drunken head of the family was beautifully played and the scene when he was driven to the brink of suicide was riveting edge-of-the-seat stuff. After a slow start, Andrew Turner as the immature alien-spotting Jem seemed to gather in confidence and the rapport he struck up with his batty granny was one of the more touching aspects of the piece. Claire Lams (Jule) and her soldier lover, Andrew Brooke (Dave) were a believable pair of star-crossed lovers, and Susan Twist did a good job as the harassed mother trying to hold her disintegrating family together. *Colin Crane*.

Yorkshire Post 'The Guide' - Last year Harrogate Theatre created a play about an issue that affected the community, the foot-and-mouth crisis. It was called *Silence of a Dale*. This autumn, Stephen Joseph Theatre in Scarborough is presenting a play that is ostensibly, about the same subject. In truth, however, it is an insight into a family on the point of implosion - foot-and-mouth disease, unlike *Silence of a Dale*, is almost incidental. Much like Ayckbourn's *A Small Family Business*, *Fields of Gold* deals with a family, which runs a business, each member playing their part.

Ayckbourn - whose theatre is staging the Alex Jones written drama - used the furniture business, Jones uses a farm. Really, the setting doesn't matter; the business of a farm in *Fields of Gold* works merely as a catalyst for the self-destruction of a family. As an examination of a family unit, the crises, ghosts and family secrets within it is a compelling story. In yet another impressive and imaginative use of the "in-the-round" setting, designer Jessica Curtis has brought a stage to the Stephen Joseph that doubles well as a crop field and a farmhouse. Set in a Cumbrian farm in 2001, *Fields Of Gold* brings us three generations who have survived on Handley farm - grandmother, father, mother, son and daughter. Given the trouble that some of the cast had in maintaining the Cumbrian accents, it may have been wiser to bring the drama closer to home. It is distracting to listen to the accents drifting in and out of North-West territory. The two actors most guilty of this lapse are the two youngest, Andrew Turner as Jem and Claire Lams as Jule. Fortunately they held their own in acting terms with the rest of the cast who were uniformly superb. Colin MacLachlan, as a father trying to cope in a modern world that is not his own, is a powerful presence, particularly when his refusal to face up to his problems - both on his farm and within his family - almost brings him to a bloody and awful conclusion. Underpinned with a dark humour throughout, *Fields Of Gold* invokes the best of Ayckbourn's own writing. The journey taken by a sexually confused Jem for example, provides completely unexpected moments of pathos and the tenderest humour, helped along by a sympathetic performance by Andrew Turner. *Fields Of Gold* is compelling drama that is entirely worthy of its place on the platform of the Stephen Joseph Theatre. *Nick Ahd.*

Yorkshire Evening Press - Once we worked the land, now the land doesn't work any more for so many farming families. The once green and pleasant landscape is changing. DEFRA stands for rural affairs, not agriculture; non-farming enterprises, modern industries, are establishing rural roots; fox hunting has been given its P45. Conservation more than food production, is the predicted way forward. Foot and mouth, that creeping plague of 2001, put another nail in the coffin of stalwart, family farmers: men like Ben Handley (Colin MacLachlan), the King Canute figure of 'Fields Of Gold', a new commission from Alex Jones. Jones has worked on farms in Worcestershire, and that personal knowledge of dairy herds and farming communities informs his bittersweet comic family drama, wherein he interweaves almost as many story strands as 'Love Actually', but far more successfully. Sheaths of corn stand golden as sunrise in one of the theatre-in-the-round doorways: a symbolic exit for traditional farming. Straw is strewn all around the kitchen floor of the Handley's Cumbrian farm. Beyond the fencing the army is conducting training exercises. Grandmother Lily (Judy Wilson) has Alzheimer's, a condition calmed by the herbal relaxation of school-skiving, dope-smoking grandson Jem (Andrew Turner), who is having problems with locating his sexuality and with contacting the crop circle-spreading aliens. Self-sacrificial sister Jule (Claire Lams), with a first-class diploma in agriculture has her eye on an organic farming future and her heart set on southern soldier Dave (Andrew Brooke). For beleaguered Ben, the bank, foot and mouth and whisky are the wolves at the door; wife Mags (Susan Twist) has to absorb all the family and farming ills, with no one giving anything back in return. Laurie Sansom's production hits its emotional straps, and Jones delivers moving scene after scene of rising, fractious, heart-rending drama and flinty defiant humour. This repertory run ends on November 20, but *Fields Of Gold* deserves to sow its seeds at plenty more theatres. *Charles Hutchinson.*

Reviews Gate - Though set in Cumbria, its farming background at the height of the 2001 foot-and-mouth catastrophe gives Alex Jones play a resonance in the Yorkshire farmlands around Scarborough, and Jones raises a rich clutch of other issues, both familiar and less charted. Even without the disease, Ben's farm is doing bad business, driving him into a cycle of drink and aggression. His wife Mags could easily become a long-suffering stereotype, but Jones strengthens her involvement in later scenes. Anyway, Susan Twist is too fine an actor to stay in the shadows. She provides a depth to Mags' patience (and finds optimism there), often through precise, alert detail in facial and physical responses to events in the farm kitchen where she spends most of her time. There's good work from Judy Wilson as Ben's mother edging into senility, dead set against her son, favouring her grandson, Jem. And from Andrew Brooke as a soldier temporarily stationed nearby, a tall figure whose love for the farmer's *petite* daughter Jule proves size doesn't matter when you're in love. But it's really in the young pair Jones places his centre of dramatic gravity. Jule (a vibrant Claire Lams, smilingly confident in her greater maturity when squabbling with her brother, showing serious maturity and moral concern when it matters) is a young adult forced to choose the farm she was born to and has lived for, or love. Teenager Jem's talk of aliens and speculation about the universe objectifies his sexual self-uncertainty. Director Laurie Sansom balances quirky character comedy and the serious overview finely, while the straw-strewn circles on the kitchen floor of Jessica Curtis' set blend into the golden exterior. So sure is the production's touch that even a cello picking out 'Twinkle Twinkle Little Star' as a spangled roof lights up is magical rather than sentimental. *Timothy Ramsden.*