



BY THE WAY

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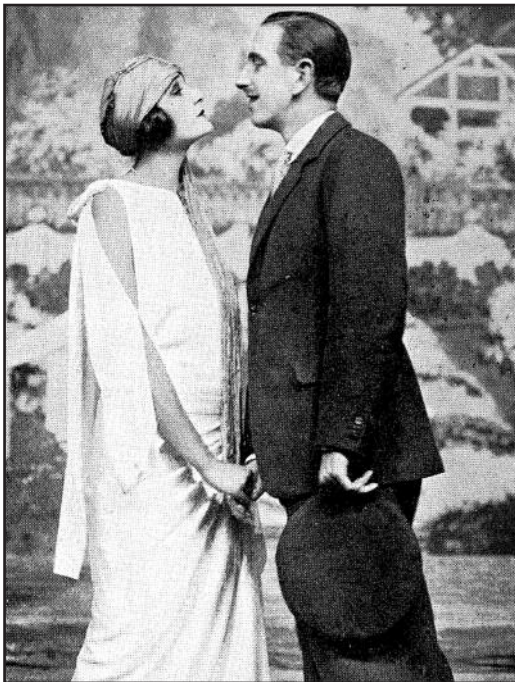
Male Actors of the Grossmith Company

Notes written by **Eddie Grabham** about four of the most important male actors who appeared in musical comedies from 1919 at the Winter Garden Theatre, London, under George Grossmith Jr's management.

Peter Haddon (1898–1962)

Cicely Courtneidge called her brother-in-law Peter Haddon 'The Duke of Er' because of his well-known drawl playing aristocratic roles. Having joined the Footlights at Cambridge, he was on stage by 1920. His elegance, style and good looks contributed to his graduation to the West End, where he understudied George Grossmith at the Winter Garden. He was the natural choice to play the Marquis of Harrogate in the Wodehouse-Grossmith-Kern musical comedy *The Cabaret Girl* in 1922.

Still at the Winter Garden, he played the Hon Dud Wellington in *The Beauty Prize*, by the same trio, the following year. In 1928 he toured with Plum's *Good Morning, Bill*, taking the leading role (created by Ernest Truex for the West End production in 1927), and he reprised it for a 1934 revival, which he himself produced for a run of 78 performances at Daly's Theatre.



Molly Ramsden and Peter Haddon
in *Kissing Time*

A further Wodehouse role in 1934 was less successful. His Earl of Droitwich in *Who's Who* (the second version of a Wodehouse-Bolton play from which the book *If I Were You* was derived) lasted a mere 19 performances. In the following year, true to his aristocratic stage persona, Peter Haddon played Sir Evelyn Oakleigh in the Palace Theatre production of Cole Porter-Wodehouse-Bolton's *Anything Goes*, a much more successful enterprise.

Peter Haddon's long and successful theatrical career extended to production and theatrical management.

Leslie Henson (1891–1957)

It has been claimed that Ivor Novello considered Leslie Henson to be 'one of the truly great English comedians of the century'. He made his West End debut on Boxing Day, 1912, in *Nicely Thanks* at the Strand. George Grossmith and Edward Laurillard, who were managing the Gaiety at the time, sent him to New York in 1915 to appear on Broadway in *Tonight's the Night*, and when he appeared in the same play in London he was an instant success. Keen to keep him at the Gaiety, Grossmith and Laurillard cast him as Pony Twitchin in *Theodore & Co* (which had a score by Novello).

Following war service, he returned to work for Grossmith and Laurillard at their Winter Garden Theatre, newly converted from an old music hall. Its opening show was *Kissing Time*, the English version of the Bolton-Wodehouse-Ivan Caryll Broadway hit *The Girl Behind the Gun*. Leslie Henson played Bibi St Pol in a strong cast which ensured a run of 430 performances.

When the Grossmith-Laurillard partnership ended, Grossmith continued to manage the Winter Garden. Henson stayed to appear in *A Night Out* (1920) and Bolton-Wodehouse-Clifford Grey-Kern's *Sally*, the following year. He then took over the role of Mr Gravvins in *The Cabaret Girl* from Norman Griffin in January 1923, four months after its opening. His final link with Plum was in *The Beauty Prize* (1923), where he appeared alongside Peter Haddon.

He became a prominent film star in British films in the thirties and made his final stage appearance as Mr Pooter when the elder Grossmiths' *Diary of a Nobody* was dramatised in the mid-1950s.

Stanley Holloway (1890–1982)

Stanley Holloway will forever be remembered for his portrayal of Albert P Doolittle in the Broadway and London productions of *My Fair Lady* (1956 and 1958, respectively), a role captured for posterity in the popular 1964 film version. He is also remembered for his popular monologues delivered in a trademark Yorkshire accent, though he was actually born in London, where he sang as a boy soprano before developing a pleasant baritone voice.

Following service during WWI, Holloway made his West End debut as Captain Wentworth in *Kissing Time*, at the Winter Garden (see above). He stayed with Grossmith at the Winter Garden for *A Night Out*, but it was as an original member of *The Co-Optimists* (five seasons at the Royalty theatre between 1921 and 1927) that he found real fame.



Leslie Henson and Tom Walls in
Kissing Time

Tom Walls (1883–1949)

Tom Walls's West End debut was in *Sir Roger de Coverley* at the Empire, Leicester Square in 1907, and he continued to work at the Empire until 1909. Following a tour in musical comedy in Australia in 1910–11, he joined the Gaiety company in February 1912, and appeared in *The Sunshine Girl*. George Edwardes owned Daly's Theatre as well as the Gaiety, and cast Walls in *The Marriage Market* in 1913. Walls and Edwardes shared a passion for horse-racing, and Walls eventually owned a Derby winner, April the Fifth.

Walls (playing Colonel Bollinger) appeared with Leslie Henson in *Kissing Time* at the Winter Garden, and soon after the pair produced and starred in *Tons of Money* at the Shaftesbury, the first in a very successful series of what became known as the 'Aldwych farces' (the Aldwych was the theatre at which the subsequent productions were presented). Most of the scripts were by Ben Travers, and the company included others with links to Wodehouse shows such as Ralph Lynn and Yvonne Arnaud.

He entered the film industry as both actor and director and in the 1930s directed 17 films (including many Aldwych farces), in most of which he acted. He continued as a film actor until his death in 1949.



Stanley Holloway as Beach with Ralph Richardson
as Lord Emsworth in 1967

His long and fruitful screen career also started in 1921. He was appointed OBE in 1950, and was surprisingly cast as Beach in the BBC TV series *Blandings Castle* in 1966 when he was in his seventies. He made his last film, *Journey Into Fear*, in 1976, and the following year he travelled to Canada to play in the *Shaw Festival* production of *You Never Can Tell*.