

# British Theatre Guide

News, reviews, features and podcast on theatre across the UK

## Love on the Dole

Walter Greenwood and Ronald Gow  
Finborough Theatre  
(2010)

Along with the Orange Tree, the Finborough in Earl's Court works hard to keep plays of the past alive. Even though this adapted novel was voted one of the 100 Best Plays of the Twentieth Century, *Love on the Dole* is one of those works that we might have heard of or known from the 1941 film starring Deborah Kerr but are unlikely to have seen.

It presents a timely reminder that however bad the current recession might be, double dip or not, it is a cakewalk compared to the Depression of the early 1930s, where the dole (financial support for the unemployed) could be withdrawn leaving families to enter the workhouse or starve.

Most of the drama is set in the cramped Olivia Altaras-designed kitchen of the Hardcastle family, Mancunians from Salford's dire "Anky Park", who are working class and proud of it.

The central figure is strapping Sally Hardcastle, well played by Emily Dobbs. She becomes the bedrock on which the others rely, her soul kept together by love for Carl Prekopp's political agitator Larry. They make a good couple with love built on principles rather than money.

Mirroring their courtship is that between her little brother Harry and pretty Helen (Jack Monaghan and Sadie Pickering).

The pick of the acting comes from Fiona Whitelaw and particularly William Maxwell as the older Hardcastles. She scrimps and saves, while he upholds family values with a grim, old-fashioned pride that even back in the thirties was dying out and is now almost completely forgotten.

In the space of only a couple of hours, there is much to try them. Indeed, in Beckie Mills' production, they sometimes appear to be wending their way through an early pilot for *Coronation Street*, not helped by melodramatic plotting and some pretty ropy acting from sections of a large cast.

Mother is burdened by a trio of self-proclaimed friends who do a good imitation of a cackling coven of witches. The others suffer unemployment, pregnancy, delayed marriages, hunger, death and in the final reckoning, a fate much worse even than that, at the hands of the local backstreet bookmaker, Ben Crowe as Sam Grundy.

At its best, *Love on the Dole* is a heart-rending family story that reminds us how lucky we are to be living in our own time.

With a little less unnecessary frivolity, this fussy revival might have ensured that the play's impact had all of the power that must have been present for those who saw it when life really was like this and it wowed around a million people in the year or so after it was first performed. Even so, much of the sheer desperation of these blighted Northerners still shines through.

Reviewer: [Philip Fisher](#)