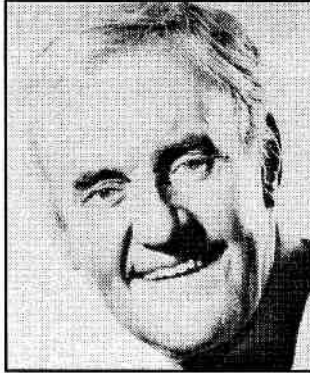


## Past and Present

**R**ichard Briers, loved by us all from "The Good Life" and numerous theatrical and TV appearances, took time out of his busy schedule playing Prospero, on tour, in "The Tempest", to talk to The Wychwood. The evening we spoke to him, was the Sunday the clocks went back, the day of terrible storms and overnight flooding. He had only just returned home from his Saturday night performance, in a very difficult role, after a 5- hour train delay. It was truly a dark and stormy night!

The story begins on the 14th January 1934 in Raynes Park, London, where "Dicky" Briers was born. He always wanted to be on the stage, exams could not compete and he was an actor by the age of 14! Richard is by his own admission a "townie", a Londoner based in Chiswick for the last 34 years. His children were born there. He jokes that, now he has his OAP bus and tube passes, he couldn't possibly leave, as he is 500 yards from the tube, and can be in Piccadilly Circus, for "voice - over's" in 30 minutes!

In 1977, he and his wife Anne, made their first foray into the countryside and bought "Woodchat Cottage" in Fiddler's Hill. It cost them the princely sum of £22,000, and they stayed there for nearly six years. They liked the little mixed settlement of Fiddler's Hill very much. Woodchat Cottage was a two up, two down with a tiny 40 - foot garden that looked over the fields. They called it "Woodchat" because it was the pedigree



## Richard Briers

name of their Labrador, Paddy! Richard remembers that: "It was lovely just to get a bolt hole. I was constantly in West End plays. Every weekend there would be two shows on Saturday, and then I would drive straight down the M40, getting to Fiddler's Hill at midnight, and returning after lunch on Monday"

In true "good life" fashion, Anne and

Richard did quite a lot to their cottage, including building a wall. He remembers with something less than affection, the "intolerable" central heating system! He had to lie on his stomach on the floor, with his head under the stairs and press a "godforsaken" knob about sixteen times, until it finally went "woomph" !

On another occasion he was "doing things with a paint roller" in the house whilst the farmers in the fields outside were cutting things down. He heard a "bloody noise " from upstairs, and peered into the attic to discover about three thousand field-flies buzzing around. He fled to Burford for a huge poison spray, and fired the whole can. He says that until then he never thought he could feel sorry for a fly!

He admits to being a terrible mimic and cannot help acquiring accents, particularly when he is ordering a Chinese take away over the phone! He remembers some great characters from "The Lamb", and clearly had tremendous fun living up to his reputation as "an amusing cove"!

**Liz Clarke-Watson**