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The Titfield Thunderbolt

A play

Philip Goulding

Based on the original Ealing comedy screenplay
by T.E.B. Clarke

Samuel French — London
www.samuelfrench-london.co.uk





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THE TITFIELD THUNDERBOLT

First presented by New Perspectives Theatre Company, in December 1997 to February 1998, with the following cast:

Clifton/Joan Weech/Miss Coggett	Catherine Neal
Mr Blakeworth/Sam Weech	Graham Colclough
Mr Valentine/Vernon Crump/ Mr Clegg	Michael Strobel
Lady Edna Chesterford	Mary Elliot Nelson
Dan/Harry Crump/Mr Ruddock/ Mrs Bottomley/Sergeant Wilson	John Davitt

Directed by Gavin Stride
Designed by Alison Hefferman

Subsequently presented by Third Space in Farnham, Surrey, from October to December 2004, with the following cast:

Clifton/Joan Weech/Miss Coggett	Sarah Lawrie
Mr Blakeworth/Sam Weech	Clive Holland
Mr Valentine/Vernon Crump/ Mr Clegg	Michael Strobel
Lady Edna Chesterford	Francine Morgan
Dan/Harry Crump/Mr Ruddock/ Mrs Bottomley/Sergeant Wilson	Edmund Wood

Directed by Gavin Stride
Designed by Iain White

Subsequently presented in a co-production by Bill Kenwright and CV Productions at the Queen's Theatre, Hornchurch, and Windsor Theatre Royal, from August to October 2005, with the following cast:

Clifton/Joan Weech/Miss Coggett	Loveday Smith
Mr Blakeworth/Sam Weech	Steven Pinder
Mr Valentine/Vernon Crump/ Mr Clegg	Paul Leonard
Lady Edna Chesterford	Kate O'Mara
Dan/Harry Crump/Mr Ruddock/ Mrs Bottomley/Sergeant Wilson	Philip Reed

Directed by Bob Carlton
Designed by Rodney Ford
Lighting designed by Chris Jaegar



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CHARACTERS

Lady Edna Chesterford
Clifton
Mr Blakeworth
Dan Taylor
Vernon Crump
Harry Crump
Joan Weech
Sam Weech
Mr Valentine
Miss Coggett
Mr Ruddock
Mrs Bottomley
Sergeant Wilson
Mr Clegg

Suggested doubling for a cast of 5

ACTOR 1 (F):
Clifton/Joan Weech/Miss Coggett
ACTOR 2 (M):
Mr Blakeworth/Sam Weech
ACTOR 3 (M):
Mr Valentine/Vernon Crump/Mr Clegg
ACTOR 4 (F):
Lady Edna Chesterford
ACTOR 5 (M):
**Dan/Harry Crump/Mr Ruddock/Mrs Bottomley/
Sergeant Wilson**



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which appears at the back of this script –
The Ferroequinologist's Lament № 6.
composed by Alan Edward Williams –
is available on free loan from Samuel French Ltd.



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SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I

SCENE 1

SCENE 2 Titfield Railway Station

SCENE 3 Down Country Lanes/Mungo's Farmyard

SCENE 4 Titfield Railway Station

SCENE 5 The Vicarage

SCENE 6 *The Pig and Whistle* Public House

SCENE 7 Titfield Railway Station

SCENE 8 The Village Hall

SCENE 9 Titfield Railway Station/On the Train/
On the Bus

ACT II

SCENE 1 In the Countryside

SCENE 2 On the Train

SCENE 3 *The Pig and Whistle* Public House

SCENE 4 Near the Engine Shed

SCENE 5 The Vicarage

SCENE 6 Titfield Railway Station/On the Train

SCENE 7 Mallingford Station

Time - 1952



PRODUCTION NOTES

The Titfield Thunderbolt is a play about a small community. Wherever possible the audience should be a part of that community and the actors should get amongst them whenever they can. There is ample opportunity for this.

Alison Heffernan's splendid design for New Perspectives Theatre Company's 1997 small-scale tour of the play was an end-on affair. The main playing area was the raised railway station platform. When the characters boarded the train carriage they simply took one step downstage. To the left and right of the platform area were two higher, square rostra. The stage right rostrum functioned as the engine room of the train. The driver faced upstage whilst driving the train. The stage left rostrum functioned as the driving area of the bus. Other locations were suggested by minimal alterations to the main platform area. When the platform became the pub a pub sign appeared and the bench on the platform flipped over to become the bar. An old standard lamp and the picture of *The Titfield Thunderbolt* on the wall suggested the vicarage. A throw across the bench turned it into a sofa. It's preferable if these locations can appear swiftly - carrying heavy stuff on and off should be avoided wherever possible. The design should be ingenious and imaginative, making a virtue out of any financial limitations - using double-sided signs, clever carpentry etc. - and should, as much as possible, allow for a fluidity of movement from one scene to the next. In Alison's design there was a white picket fence at the back of the platform and then a narrow channel in between this fence and the painted rural landscape backdrop. When the train was moving the movement was suggested by trees, bushes, cows, horses, telegraph poles etc. flashing past. This was simply done by having actors run down the channel carrying small, amusing cut-out props. Photographs of Alison's design are available from the author.

The inspirations for Gavin Stride's 2004 production for Third Space included the Indian scientist and toymaker Arvin Gupta and the profusion of *Crafty Things To Do* manuals from the 1950s. Iain White's



traverse design put the acting area down the middle of the space with the audience on two sides, facing each other. There were identically-shaped raised rostra at either ends of the acting space. These could represent pub, vicarage, platform, bus cab, engine room etc. by similar simple changes as in the New Perspectives design. These sections were movable (on wheels) so that they could be moved to the middle of the acting space and joined together to form the train and the carriage - and uncoupled when necessary so that the one could drift away from the other. There were special hanging devices over both sections so that pub signs, pictures, signals etc could be swiftly affixed to show the audience where the scenes were taking place. The Titfield Thunderbolt was cleverly constructed in this production from found objects such as dustbins, buckets, watering cans, oil drums etc. The idea was to capture a sort of “make do and mend” spirit - and this worked admirably.

In contrast, in the production at the Queen’s Theatre, Hornchurch (designed by Rodney Ford) - a full-size engine came steaming on for the final scene. This was undeniably impressive – and if you have the financial wherewithal and the space to create such a spectacle – then go for it. But, if not, the main thing is to be imaginative – and to have fun.

Finally, a note on cast size. The play was written to be performed by a cast of 5 (2 women and 3 men). But if you have the players available the cast needn’t be limited to that number. Weech and Blakeworth needn’t be doubled, but if they are played by different actors certain doubling jokes will need to be cut. The characters of Valentine, Dan, Clegg, Ruddock and Miss Coggett would all make meaty enough individual roles if the company have the forces required. In fact, the only characters which should always be doubled are Harry Crump and Sergeant Wilson - the reason being that it’s Wilson’s resemblance to Harry which makes Joan realize she might possibly be in little bit in love with the younger Crump.



ACT I

SCENE 1

The cast enter and sing The Ferroequinologist's Lament № 6. The song can be accompanied by piano – or played on whatever instruments cast members are adept with – or even sung a cappella

All At Adlestrop and Ampleforth,
Leaves lie on the line
At Cockermouth for Buttermere,
At Luton Hoo and Swine
The train is late at Bassenthwaite,
At Oyne and Auchmacoy,
Holmfirth and Hay-on-Wye,
Haydock - Ide, Knock - and Hoy

Oswestry, Usk, Mangotsfield,
Blyth, Bottisham and Lode
Now no trains go – from Edwinstowe
Or from Clackmannan Road
At Ullesthorpe and Lutterworth,
Pant, Parsley Hay and Brock
At Thornton for Cleveleys
No-one waits – and no-one winds the clock

From Billingsb'rough and Horbling,
Claypole and Commodity,
From Daisy Bank and Bradley
And Irlams o' th' Height
From Ecclefechan, Limpley Stoke,
From Box and Bamfurlong,
Audenshaw, Burra Tor,
Banff, Bovey - Birkenshaw and Tong

From Brampford Speke and Bluntisham,
From Gresford Halt (for Llay),
From Diggle, Delph and Saddleworth,
From Nigg and Gaminglay



From Campsie Glen, Heckmondwike Spen,
From Shap and Abbeydore,
Plympton and Pimlico,
Stockbridge and Spooner Row,
Kelso and Westward Ho!
Oh, we shall go,
We shall go no more.

All the cast remain on stage

As Edna introduces the characters, the actors might put on the relevant hat and step forward to adopt (for a brief moment) a dramatic attitude for that character. Some music under this, if possible – giving the flavour of an early radio play, perhaps

Edna Ladies and gentlemen, (Insert company name) Players proudly present *The Titfield Thunderbolt* by T.E.B. Clarke, in an exciting new adaptation by Philip Goulding. Starring (Insert name) as the Reverend Sam Weech — and the town clerk - Mr Blakeworth; and (Insert name) as Miss Joan Weech — and young Clifton. Also starring (Insert name) as Mr Valentine — and Mr Clegg — and Mr Vernon Crump. With a guest appearance by (Insert name) as Lady Edna Chesterford; and introducing (Insert name) as Mr Dan Taylor — and Mr Harry Crump — and Mr Ruddock — and Sergeant Wilson — and (*checking her cast list*) — Mrs Bottomley? Other parts are played by members of the cast. So, all aboard for the Titfield Thunderbolt!

SCENE 2
Titfield Railway Station

It is morning. The station calendar on the wall tells us that it is Friday 6th June, 1952

Clifton, the Platform Manager enters, going about his duties — eventually putting up a poster telling of the closure of the line

Blakeworth, the town clerk enters and takes off his cycle clips

Dan, a scruffy old fellow, enters carrying a sack that he seems anxious to conceal

Blakeworth decides he'll try to make conversation with Dan



Act I, Scene 2

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Dan blows his nose in his shirt sleeve

Blakeworth (*cheerily*) Morning Dan.

Dan (*reluctantly*) Aye.

Blakeworth Off to market with your spoils then, Dan? Sack looks a bit empty to me.

Dan What is or ain't in ere's my business and my business alone, Mr Blakeworth.

Blakeworth Quite.

Clifton walks past them on his way to put the poster up

Clifton (*to Dan*) Morning.

Dan Morning.

Clifton (*to Blakeworth*) Morning.

Blakeworth (*to Clifton*) Morning. (*To Dan*) Must be a bit of a home from home for you though, this place I reckon. How are things "Chez Dan"?

Dan You might seek to mock, Mr Blakeworth, but it do have its benefits, does living in a disused railway carriage.

Blakeworth Really? Perhaps you might care to elucidate?

Dan What? Well — as you knows, I likes a drink.

Blakeworth We'll encounter no divergence of opinion there, Dan.

Dan Ah. Well, fact is, no matter how much grog I might sup of an evening, I knows when I wend me weary way, I ent likely to put me key in the wrong front door. See, unlike these rabbit-'utches yon council puts up, my home has character. It's hindividual. And there's the rub. I've never yet unwittingly stumbled across another man's threshold, nor am I likely too.

Blakeworth I'm sure we'll all sleep sounder for being cognisant of that.

Dan 'Sides, I had many happy years working on these here railways, and now I spends me final days surrounded by me memories. Here comes the train then, Mr Blakeworth, I think I'll go further down the platform, I likes to bag me usual seat up near the engine.

He moves along and exits

The train comes in. (Noise of this can be voiced by cast). Clifton could wave the train in as it comes to a halt — there need not be any visible evidence of the train

Clifton Titfield, this is Titfield. All change. All change at Titfield!



Blakeworth attempts to make conversation with Clifton

Blakeworth Delightful morning.

Clifton (*pointing out the notice*) Not from where I'm standing, sir.

The notice says "Important Notice. The passenger train service between Titfield Station and Mallingford Junction will be permanently withdrawn on and from Saturday, the 21st June, 1952, and accordingly the public is hereby given notice of closure."

Blakeworth Oh dear. Ah well. Every cloud has a silver lining. No doubt we'll muddle along somehow. Chin up.

Clifton Thank you for your valuable reassurance, sir. The train is ready for boarding, sir.

Blakeworth I'll wait for Lady Chesterford if you don't mind. We like to share a carriage.

Clifton Suit yourself.

Vernon Crump enters. He gleefully eyes the sign

Vernon Lovely morning, Mr Blakeworth.

Blakeworth Crump. Surprised to see you out of your pit so early.

Vernon It's the early bird catches the worm, so they say. Thought I'd take a last look at the old place afore she passes into history.

Blakeworth There'll be those sorry to see her go.

Vernon Can't say as how I'll be one of 'em.

Clifton (*in Crump's ear*) All aboard now, for the eight forty-seven to Mallingford!

Crump I ent goin' nowhere.

Blakeworth Story of your life, eh Crump?

Crump I've a feeling the best days of my life are just beginning.

Clifton (*pointedly*) I said "All aboard!"

Blakeworth No need to resort to such vociferous declamation, man. Can't proceed yet, anyway. Lady C's still not materialized.

The following action takes place as they wait. There might be checking of watches, clocks etc. and looking around to see if Lady Edna has arrived yet. Perhaps this is a common occurrence — Lady Edna making the train with only seconds to spare



SCENE 3
Down Country Lanes / Mungo's Farmyard

The country lanes and the farmyard are located in any available space – aisles, the actual space in between rows of seats (don't worry about inconveniencing the audience, it's that type of show)

The chickens and any other creatures scattering in the barnyard can be voiced by the other actors

As this scene happens we see, simultaneously, the characters on the platform waiting for Edna to arrive

Harry Crump tootles along on his Steamroller

Up behind him steams Lady Edna Chesterford in her Morris Minor

(It is not expected that a producing theatre company will construct life size replicas of these vehicles. A couple of steering wheels will suffice)

Edna hoots her horn at Harry

Edna Move that damned steamroller aside, Harry Crump, some of us have trains to catch.

Harry If I move her over any further Lady C, I'll be in the ditch.

Edna As good a place as any for a Crump, in my opinion.

Harry Well if you fancy it so much, try it yourself.

Harry swerves

Edna *(beeping her horn)* Blasted hooligan! Come on, man, I'm in a hurry!

Harry I've got her flat out as it is.

Edna Blood and sand! You force me to take a short cut through Mungo's farmyard.

Edna does so. This might take her through the audience. (Sounds of squawking chickens and miscellaneous farm animals from rest of cast)

Meanwhile...



SCENE 4
Titfield Railway Station

Clifton (*checking his watch*) Can't wait no longer. We're three minutes late already.

Blakeworth Three and a half, to be exact. Where the devil's she got to this morning? I'm due in Court at half-past nine.

Vernon Helping put some other poor debtor behind bars, no doubt.

Blakeworth Your familiarity with my duties speaks volumes, Mr Crump.

Clifton Time to go now! Lady C or no bloomin Lady C!

Clifton blows his whistle

Blakeworth boards the train. (This can be achieved simply by having the actors take one step downstage)

Edna rushes on

Edna Hold that train!

Blakeworth About time too!

Edna What's the idea, leaving me behind on market day?

Clifton Four minutes late, Lady Chesterford, ma'am.

Edna Church clock says four minutes early.

Clifton British Railway's run by Greenwich, not Titfield time. (*He blows his whistle again*)

Edna As a point of fact my great-grandfather built this station for Titfield, not Greenwich! (*Boarding the train*) And I'd have been here a good deal earlier had it not been for that young buffoon Harry Crump, and his antiquated steamroller snarling up the country lanes. (*Out of the window, aimed at Vernon*) A chip off the old block that one, if I'm not mistaken.

Vernon And a good morning to you too, Lady C.

The train starts to move off

Note: Whenever trains are in motion the actors should behave accordingly – swaying and jolting to the rhythm of the ride. In addition – and depending on the design, of course – upstage (as if through the far-side windows of the train) we might see objects passing – telegraph poles, trees, bushes, cows, horses, sheep etc. These could speed up or slow down depending on what speed the train is supposed to be travelling at. This device should be used sensibly, of course, so as not to pull focus from whatever else is happening



Act I, Scene 4

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Blakeworth You want to try getting on your bike, Edna, like the rest of us, of an a.m. Keep you healthy at the very least.

Edna The bicycle is a recreational tool, in my opinion, Blakeworth, and an antiquated one at that. Shall we move further up the train? I do like to be near the engine.

Edna begins to lead Blakeworth up the train — their progress will eventually take them off stage

During the following passage, the train, the passengers and Clifton vacate the stage, leaving Vernon alone on the platform

What was I saying? Oh yes. We must embrace the march of progress.

Blakeworth Talking of progress, Edna. You'll have seen the sign no doubt.

Edna What sign?

Blakeworth About the withdrawal of the railway line. They posted it up, this morning.

Edna and Blakeworth exit

Vernon proceeds to put up a new sign next to the other one, whistling as he works.

Harry enters during this, momentarily startling Vernon

Harry Up to no good as usual then, Dad?

Vernon All legal and above board this time son, believe you me.

Harry They say there's a first time for everything.

Vernon What's eating you? Had enough of that old steamroller already have we? I knew it wouldn't last. You should have listened to your old dad. The wind of change has been blowing in this direction, son. And I've had a sniff of it for some time.

Harry I've no idea what you're prattling on about, Father. But it was a shaping up to be a good day 'til Lady Muck nearly run me into the hedge. Thinks she owns Titfield, that one.

Vernon Ah. Well she'll be needing to think again before too long. Because there's about to be a new power in the land. See?

The poster is now up. It reads "Very Important Notice. An alternative passenger Omnibus Service will be operated by Crump and Son Road Transport Company (incorporating the Titfield Road Transport Company) servicing the area formerly covered by the railway."



Harry Only one problem with that, Dad. We ain't Crump and Son. Nor will we ever be. Not in a business sense any road.

Vernon hands Harry a photograph

Vernon Afore you says another word. What d'you reckon to her?

Harry *(after a pause)* It's a knackered old bus, Dad.

Vernon Ain't she a beaut? And I got her cheap. Years left in her yet though, son, take my word for it.

Harry Two things my mother said to me on her death bed —

Vernon God rest her soul...

Harry One. Never take the old man's word for owt. And two, no matter how desperate you are, don't go into partnership with your father.

Vernon She could be a bitter woman, though I loved her none the less for that. But even she'd have seen that this is different. We can't lose, son.

Harry No offence, Dad, but leave me out of it.

Vernon You don't need to make a decision immediately, lad. Just let me keep the name, eh? Indulge your old man for appearance sake. And once I've proved to you this one's a winner, you can hop on board at your leisure.

Harry Like I said, Dad, I've already got a job.

Vernon A steamroller driver! When you could be an "omnibus operative".

Harry I intend to make a go of it, Dad. I've been asked to put in an estimate for levelling a footpath through Ravens Wood. If I get that I'll be set up for the next few months at least.

Vernon You want me to put in a word for you, son?

Harry *(too eagerly)* No thanks, Dad — I wanna stand on my own two feet, see.

Vernon Like father like son, eh boy. *(He hugs him)*

Harry Leave it out, Dad.

Vernon *(leading him out)* Not still mooning over that young lass at the vicarage are you?

Harry Get off! I dunno what you mean.

Vernon *(off — proudly, knowingly)* Like father, like son.

SCENE 5
The Vicarage

With a minimum of fuss, we have been transported to the Vicarage, where Weech, the Vicar, is furtively reading a railway magazine. When his niece Joan enters, Weech hastily pretends to have been studying his bible



Act I, Scene 5

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Joan I'll get off now shall I, Uncle?

Weech What's that? Have you organized the flower rota, my dear?

Joan Yes, Uncle. It's just that I said I'd cover the end of the evening shift at *The Pig and Whistle*. It's Mr Moffatt's evening off, and you know what Mr Valentine's like. He's liable to take the relief barman's instruction "See yourself out when you've finished" as an open invitation to camp on the floor of the snug.

Weech Oh my dear, I do wish you would heed my desires and cease your casual employment at that den of iniquity.

Joan It's really not so bad as you imagine uncle. Besides, I don't like to be beholden to you for everything. You were kind enough to offer me a home after my father was detained as a guest of his late majesty, it's only right I make the effort to bring a little money into the house.

Weech Bottom drawer, eh Joan, old thing?

Joan Uncle?

Weech I'm quite worldly enough to have noticed that Crump boy casting furtive glances towards the vicarage as he trundles past on that contraption of his.

Joan I'm sure Harold Crump's not what you might call an appropriate suitor, Uncle. Having the background he does.

Weech The sins of the father must be forgiven, my dear. As indeed will be the sins of your father, my own dear brother...should he be fortunate enough to outlive his spell in prison. No, young Harry Crump must be judged on his own merits. Don't you agree?

Joan I've no idea why we're having this discussion, Uncle.

Weech Have it your way, my dear. As I've a feeling you shall. Off you go then. I shall continue to contemplate this Sunday's sermon.

Joan (*not fooled*) Yes, Uncle.

The doorbell rings

Weech And send away whoever that might be. It's far too late for visitors.

Joan (*perhaps pulling aside a curtain*) It's Lady Chesterford, Uncle. She appears rather agitated.

Weech Oh dear. In that case you'd better send her in, Joan, forthwith.

Joan exits

Greetings off

Edna enters



Edna Hope I'm not interrupting anything important, Sam.

Weech Not at all, Edna, not at all. Just reacquainting myself with the wisdom of the Lord.

Edna (*not fooled*) It's actually the railway I've come to talk to you about.

Weech The railway! Well I never. How exciting.

Edna You've not heard the news, then?

Weech There's news! In Titfield! What an action-packed evening this is turning out to be.

Edna They're closing it down, Sam.

Weech The railway? Never.

Edna It's true, I'm afraid.

Weech But we're the oldest surviving branch line in the civilized world. (*Referring to a picture on the wall*) "The Titfield Thunderbolt", Edna. From these magnificent beginnings we have been witness to a glorious chapter in the history of steam. I can't believe we are now expected to simply turn the page and bid farewell to such a focus of local pride.

Edna They say my great-grandfather lost the will to live the day they took that old beauty out of service. But it's not just us, this is happening everywhere, Sam. They've even closed the Canterbury to Whitstable line.

Weech So I heard. Doubtless there weren't men of sufficient faith in Canterbury. But here — no, it's unthinkable.

Edna Quite frankly, I was hoping you'd see it this way. We have to fight it, Sam. No doubt about it.

Weech Quite so, Edna, quite so.

Edna It'd mean a virtual monopoly for Vernon Crump, you know, if this went through.

Weech What's Crump the Elder to do with this?

Edna He's bought a filthy old omnibus. He intends to run an alternative service.

Weech And I'll warrant it will be alternative if Old Crump's anything to do with it.

Edna It could be the end of Titfield as we know it.

Weech Good grief. Well, I must confess, I'm at a loss to know what to suggest.

Edna I was speaking to Blakeworth about this on the train this morning.

Weech Blakeworth? Refresh my memory.

Edna The town clerk.

Weech Got him! Carry on...

Edna Well, he said that the only solution would be to buy up the line.

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