

# Entertainment & Leisure

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## Author swears bad words have always been with us

By **MATTHEW WILSON**

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ANYONE who has ever ventured an opinion in public will know the feeling of being hemmed in by what it is and is not socially acceptable to say.

Back in June the comedian Jo Brand found herself at the centre of a social media storm after a joke she made about “milkshaking” was broadcast on BBC Radio 4’s *Heresy* programme.

She had told the show’s presenter Victoria Coren Mitchell: “Certain unpleasant characters are being thrown to the fore and they’re very, very easy to hate. And I’m kind of thinking, ‘Why bother with a milkshake when you could get some battery acid?’”

Having been booked to appear at a Henley Literary Festival pop-up event at Christ Church two days later, Brand took the opportunity to “humbly apologise” for what she said had been “crass”, “insensitive” and “tasteless” remarks.

Her words were widely reported and the apology succeeded in defusing the situation.

But when even an experienced wordsmith like Jo Brand can unexpectedly find herself on the wrong side of public opinion, what hope is there for the rest of us?

Coverage of the recent general election campaign saw Channel 4 claim that Boris Johnson had used the phrase “people of colour” when in fact the former Henley MP had said “people of talent”. The broadcaster later apologised.

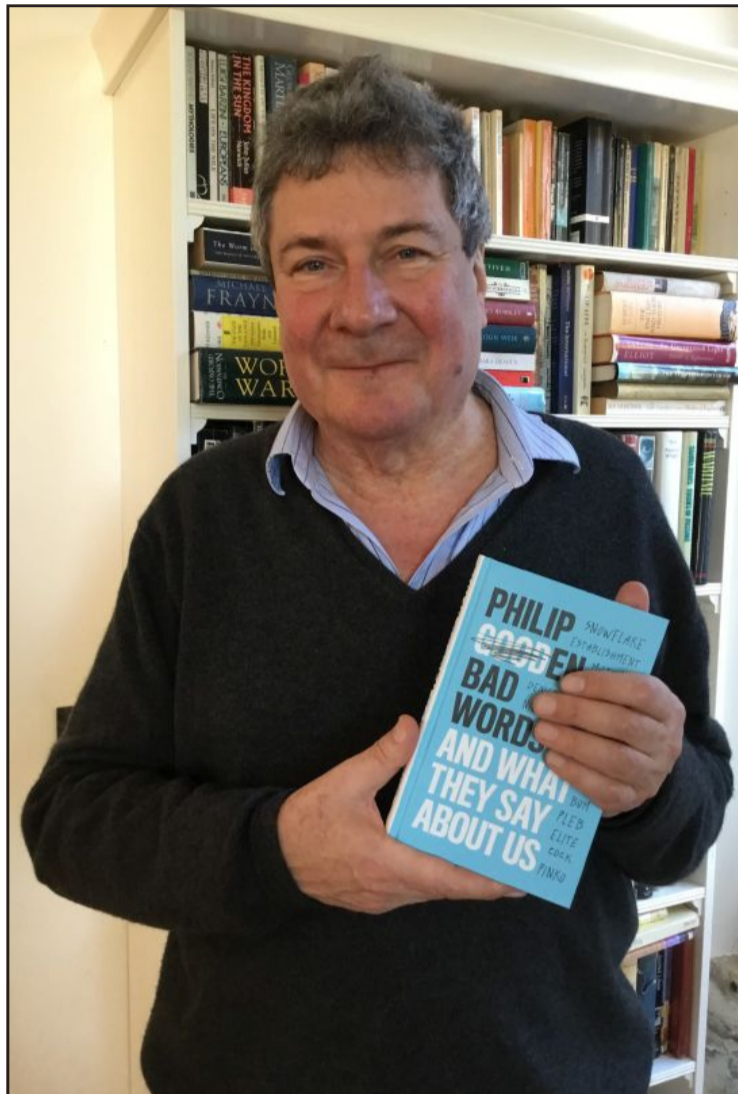
Now a new book that aims to shed some much-needed light on taboo words and expressions and how they change over time is to be the subject of a talk by the author at Henley Library later this month.

Philip Gooden, who lives in Holton near Oxford, is known to *Henley Standard* readers as a reviewer of theatre, exhibitions, and events at the Henley and Cliveden literary festivals.

An author of fiction and non-fiction, his previous books on language include *Who’s Whose?*, *The Story of English* and the award-winning *Faux Pas?*

Mr Gooden is due to speak about his latest book, *Bad Words: And What They Say About Us* at the library in Ravenscroft Road at 6pm on Monday, January 27. Admission is free and all are welcome.

A spokesman for the book’s publishers, Robinson, said: “Once upon a time, the worst words we could utter were short, simple and



Picture: Olivia Marsden

**Asterisky business:** Philip Gooden with a copy of his book *Bad Words*, about which he is giving a talk at Henley Library on Monday, January 27

tended to be four letters in length. Now things are more complicated.

“To be insulted as a ‘snowflake’ or an ‘expert’ is arguably worse than being called a \*\*\*\* or a \*\*\*\* or even a \*\*\*\*. So what are today’s ‘bad words’ and how are they different from yesterday’s taboo expressions?”

“This entertaining guide to the shifting sands of bad language is indispensable in an increasingly divided world in which abuse becomes ever more widespread and vituperative.

“Philip Gooden shows how and why taboo words and contentious expressions, including those four-letter ones, were first used in English.

“He discusses the ways such words have changed over the years and explores how a single syllable or two may possess an almost

magical power to offend, distress or infuriate.

“*Bad Words* investigates the most controversial and provocative words in the English language in a way that is both anecdotal and analytical. Combining intrigue and scandal, the book delves into expressions connected to religion, ethnicity, nationality, politics, swearing and oaths, and includes contemporary issues like political correctness and elitism.”

Speaking at Blackwell’s bookshop in Oxford last month, Mr Gooden said the idea for the book had been inspired by looking back on the theatre critic Kenneth Tynan’s notorious use of the F-word on television in 1965.

He told the audience: “Although this took place at something like 10.30pm at night, it caused the most extraordinary furore. There were

headlines in the newspapers, there were questions in parliament, there were demands that Tynan be removed from his job at the National Theatre, where he was working with Laurence Olivier, and so on.

“And yet that very same word which Tynan had the temerity to utter, quite deliberately, quite intentionally, in 1965, can now be heard pretty constantly on the television after 9pm, certainly on Channel 4, certainly on BBC Two, on BBC Four, and quite frequently on BBC One and ITV. It can be read in several newspapers and it can be found scattered through much writing.

“And it interested me to ask myself why and how had this great change come about in a word that half a century ago was so taboo that to say it aloud on television would cause questions in parliament.

“Why had that become normalised when other words which 50 years ago were quite acceptable, which we didn’t think about, but now when used are dangerous and perhaps for the speaker could be considered toxic in some ways? And I also asked myself, how does this change in the use of taboo words reflect back on us as a society.”

Asked if he thought the number of things that are effectively unsayable had grown over the years, Mr Gooden said: “The mass media have expanded the potential to offend and be offended, especially in a Twitter age, but I’m not sure they have added to the total stock of ‘unsayable’ things.

“My impression is that there is a pool of taboo or at the least vulgar expressions and that it stays at a fairly constant level. If one word is taken out, then a different one may be added. For example, the *Times* will use ‘s\*\*t’ fairly freely, and not just in quotes, which wouldn’t have been the case a few years ago. But they will be more careful over terminology to do with race and now gender.”

Of all the “bad words” in his book, which had he found the most enjoyable to write about and why?

“I enjoyed doing research on ‘gay’ and ‘queer’ because these are ambiguous words with double lives, and trying to pin down the moment when the covert meaning went mainstream is an interesting task. Also writing about elites and the establishment because these are such topical concerns.”

● Mr Gooden’s talk on January 27 will be followed by a question and answer session. Henley Library has asked that people looking to attend speak to a member of staff or call 01865 815278 to book their place.



**Faithful:** Abba Sensation have performed all over Europe

## Top tribute acts are lighting up Kenton

**TWO** leading musical tribute acts are coming to the Kenton Theatre later this month.

Abba Sensation on Friday, January 17, are followed by Pop Up Bowie on Saturday, January 18.

The four-piece Abba act have performed throughout Europe. Their stage show combines costume changes, lighting effects and a faithful reproduction of the original band’s sound.

A spokesman said: “Abba Sensation love audience participation, so you can sing along, clap or even get up and dance. If however you’re ‘too posh’ to join in, then no problem, just rattle your jewellery!”

Paul Anthony was voted the UK’s number one David Bowie tribute act at the National Tribute Awards 2016. His act has amazed and entertained audiences throughout the nation.

A Kenton spokesman



**Popping up:** Paul Anthony pays tribute to David Bowie

said: “With a full band Paul will perform two hours of Bowie’s biggest hits, taking the audience on a musical journey, experiencing the masterpieces that made Bowie the legend he is today. Pop Up Bowie aims to inspire, uplift and celebrate the life of a true artistic genius.”

Both shows start at 8pm. For more information and to book, call the box office on (01491) 575698 or visit [www.kentontheatre.co.uk](http://www.kentontheatre.co.uk)

## Spring concert has classical gems for all

**CONCERTS** in Caversham have announced details of an early spring concert at St Andrew’s Church in Albert Road.

The event on Saturday, February 29, promises an evening of classical gems for piano trio and oboe trio.

Performing on the night will be prize-winning musicians Jiafeng Chen (violin), Naomi Watts (cello), Jennifer Hughes (piano), and Timothy Watts (oboe).

The programme includes Beethoven’s piano trio in Eb major Op 1 No 1, Mozart’s Viennese Serenade in C for oboe, violin and cello, and Brahms’s piano trio in B major Op 8.

Tickets are £18/£20 in advance from Waltons the Jewellers in Caversham



**Pianist:** Jennifer Hughes

from Saturday, January 11. Alternatively, visit the online box office at [www.concertsincaversham.co.uk](http://www.concertsincaversham.co.uk), where tickets are £19/21. Students aged 16 to 25 are £5 and under-16s go free. Full-price tickets will be £20/£22 on the door.

For more information or to book, call 0118 948 4112 or 0118 946 3202.

## Play shreds university culture by the book

A NEW production of Willy Russell’s *Educating Rita* that is touring the UK to celebrate the award-winning play’s 40th anniversary is coming to the Oxford Playhouse next month.

Starring Stephen Tompkinson as Frank and Jessica Johnson as Rita, the show visits the Beaumont Street venue from Tuesday, February 4, to Saturday, February 8.

An Oxford Playhouse spokesman said: “*Educating Rita* tells the story of married hairdresser, Rita, who enrolls on an Open University course to expand her horizons, and her encounters with university tutor Frank.

“Frank is a frustrated poet, brilliant academic and dedicated drinker, who is less than enthusiastic about teaching Rita. However,

Frank soon finds that his passion for literature is reignited by Rita, whose technical ability for the subject is limited by her lack of education, but whose enthusiasm Frank finds refreshing. The two soon realise how much they have to learn from each other.”

The play was commissioned by the Royal Shakespeare Company and played at the Warehouse Theatre in London in 1980, starring Julie Walters and Mark Kingston.

Three years later, Walters reprised her role opposite Michael Caine in the BAFTA-, Golden Globe- and Academy Award-winning film version.

Tickets for *Educating Rita* at the Oxford Playhouse start at £10. To book, call 01865 305305 or visit [www.oxfordplayhouse.com](http://www.oxfordplayhouse.com)



Picture: Robert Day

**Meeting of minds:** Stephen Tompkinson and Jessica Johnson star in *Educating Rita*

## Blackpool organist’s tinkling the ivories

**THE** resident organist from Blackpool’s Tower Ballroom will be tinkling the ivories of Henley’s Allen Digital Theatre Organ next weekend.

Phil Kelsall is playing at the town hall on Sunday, January 12, at 3pm.

Noted for his distinctive style inspired by Reginald Dixon, one of his predecessors in the Blackpool role, Kelsall has regularly appeared on TV and radio and was awarded the MBE in 2010.

Doors open at 2.30pm for a 3pm start. Admission is £8. Refreshments will be on sale and a raffle held, with proceeds going to Thames



**Distinctive style:** Phil Kelsall

Valley Air Ambulance. For more information, call Susan Rusman on 0118 972 4988 or visit [www.henleyorgantrust.org.uk](http://www.henleyorgantrust.org.uk)