

WILLS AREN'T JUST FOR THE ELDERLY

No-one wants to think about their demise, but have you considered just what might happen to you, your belongings and those left behind should something happen? Whilst the pandemic has given many of us a reality check that we aren't in fact immortal, a staggering number of young professionals still haven't had a professional will done.

Is a will right for me?

A Will gives you a voice and ensures that your wishes are acted on upon your death. It also gives you a place in which to indicate how you might want your funeral to be carried out. Whilst this wouldn't be legally binding, it does give your loved ones assurance that they are doing as you would wish.

What if I don't have any assets?

Many people believe that if they don't own a house or have a lot of money in the bank, that there is no point in having a Will. This simply isn't true, your assets stretch much further than you might think and include personal possessions, bank accounts, life insurance and even digital assets. Whilst digital assets remain legally undefined, common examples have come to include social media accounts, Spotify, iTunes, funds held with PayPal, eBay, any other financial interest (such as Cryptocurrency or online banking services), and so on.

Who will be your Executor?

Your executor(s) are the people named in your Will who will administer your estate. They have the task of ensuring your wishes are followed on your death. You can appoint almost anyone you want to do this job, but you will need to make sure they are over 18, trustworthy and capable of carrying out their role of being an executor.

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YOU GOTTA ROLL WITH IT

Before high-tech sound effects were triggered by the press of a button, theatres relied on something rather more analogue – as you're about to discover

WORDS FREYA PARR

he thunder run is like a skittle alley. A skittle alley in the ceiling of a Grade I-listed building. A skittle alley that zigzags across the rafters, and which cannonballs are thrown down in perfectly timed choreography by teams of people, before they are hauled back up to be released again. Before the days of HDMI cables and mixing desks, this was how Bristol Old Vic created the sound of onstage thunder. It was the original surround sound.

"The thunder run is all about creating an illusion and being truly inventive – it's what theatre is all about," says duty manager and resident history buff Andrew Stocker, who has worked here for 42 years and has enough anecdotes (including that time he met Arthur Miller) to fill a book. He's brought me up into the raised ceiling above the Old Vic's main auditorium to see the thunder run in person. You can still see the faint histories of the actors and technicians who have worked up here in decades gone by, filling time between scenes. The back wall is covered with scribbles and – as seems to be customary in every generation – the odd lewd drawing.

These days, there is plenty of hidden tech to give cues to the backstage team – but in the

days of the thunder run, it was a slightly clunkier affair. "They would have had to either rely on listening very hard, or someone would have to break out of character on stage to shout 'Thunder!' to the back of the stage," explains Andrew. "They would have also had wind and rain machines. The sound of rain was created by dried peas inside a wooden drum hitting the sides of a kind of greaseproof paper, for instance."

This particular thunder run is a rare beast, with only three others still in existence in the UK – one at His Majesty's Theatre and one at the Playhouse, both in London. "Bits and pieces have ended up in museums, and the other two thunder runs in London are no longer in working order – so nothing comes close" ▶



Faster than a cannonball
Bristol Old Vic's thunder run in all its original glory



Photos: Mike Hume

thenearfield.com

SPOTLIGHT MOMENTS

Escape the endless franchise movies clogging up the big screen, and return to original drama at one of the southwest's beloved theatres



DOUBT: A Parable

Ustinov Theatre, Bath
7 February to 8 March

Maxine Peake stars alongside Olivier winner Ben Daniels in John Patrick Shanley's hit drama. Set in a Catholic school in the Bronx, Sister Aloysius has suspicions that one of her teaching fathers is abusing a vulnerable pupil.
nfd.io/parable

Mazepa

Front Room Theatre,
Weston-super-Mare
20 February

Acclaimed Ukrainian performer, writer and director Volodymyr Smotritel performs his solo play, *Mazepa* – the story of a man, Ivan Mazepa, who finds himself cast out of his homeland in his dotage.
nfd.io/mazepa

Northern Rascals: SHED

Pound Arts, Corsham
8 March

A powerful contemporary dance-theatre production from Yorkshire's Northern Rascals. These three short stories exploring adolescence, modern love and female safety will be performed within a pop-up set.
nfd.io/shed

The History Boys

Cotswold Playhouse, Stroud
25-29 March

Head back to school for a new production of Alan Bennett's classic play, which sees a bunch of sixth-form lads prepare for the Oxford and Cambridge entrance exams under the guidance of their eccentric teachers.
nfd.io/historyb

A Good House

Bristol Old Vic
14 February to 8 March

When the inhabitants of a small town wake to find a grubby shack in their suburban enclave, it sets loose racialised fears and anxieties. This tack-sharp satire – a co-production with the Royal Court Theatre, written by South Africa's Amy Jephta and directed by Bristol Old Vic's artistic director Nancy Medina – grapples with themes of community politics, property, capitalism and race.
nfd.io/agoodh

The Winter's Tale

Tobacco Factory
Theatre, Bristol
20 February to 29 March

The Winter's Tale is a story of jealousy, resilience and, as Frankie once sang, the power of love. But in usual Tobacco Factory fashion, this will be an unusual and imaginative interpretation.
nfd.io/twtale

Funeral Teeth

Wardrobe Theatre, Bristol
18-20 March

Another queer, autobiographical, confessional production from the Succulent Theatre girls. Promising to put the fun in funerals, this contemporary performance unpacks loss and grief, and our reaction to it.
nfd.io/fteeth



In the gods

The Thunder Run Experience will take you high into the Old Vic's rafters

“SIR IAN WAS VERY EXCITED TO HOLD A CANNONBALL, AND YOU CAN'T SAY NO TO GANDALF”

to this,” says Andrew. “We’re lucky because of our relatively small size and scale. If we’d been a bigger Victorian theatre, we’d have had a lot of historic renovations to make us more of a commercial venture. Those modernisations would have meant kit like this just wouldn’t exist any more.”

The thunder run had fallen into disuse in the latter part of the 20th century, until Bristol Old Vic's major redevelopment project in 2012. As part of this multimillion-pound restoration, the theatre was awarded funding from the

Heritage Lottery Fund to restore its iconic sound-maker. It was heard by the public for the first time again in 2016 in a production of *King Lear* during the theatre's 250th-anniversary celebrations, accompanying a dramatic monologue by Timothy West in the eponymous role.

“It was a workout for the team behind the scenes, because the rumble of thunder needed to be heard consistently behind the four-and-a-half-minute monologue,” says Andrew. “They had to collect the cannonballs at the bottom, and then immediately

haul them up to line them up again between the wooden struts. They had to work out what the best technique was to create the sound of thunder, because it can't sound too routine. No records existed on how they operated it, so the team had to decide the order of different-sized balls being released at different times to create something that sounds organic.” It was a hit with audiences, who got more out of the experience than simply a sound effect. “The alley the balls go down is connected directly to the rafters, so that feeling goes right through you.”

Photos: JonCraig.co.uk

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"THE THUNDER RUN IS ABOUT CREATING AN ILLUSION AND BEING TRULY INVENTIVE"



A few years later, the thunder run was heard for a second time this century – but in a slightly more ad-hoc manner. Having heard about this near-mythical sound effect, Sir Ian McKellen visited the Old Vic and asked if he could take a peek. It was Andrew Stocker himself who took him up into the rafters to have a look. "Now we have the viewing platform, but at the time there was just a rickety ladder across a wooden beam," explains Andrew. "Sir Ian was very excited to hold a cannonball, and

you can't say no to Gandalf, so I agreed. But then he just threw it. In a performance, you'd have a stage technician at the end of the chute to catch the balls, but there was no such thing at 11pm on a Sunday night. I thought, if that goes through the ceiling, that's my career over. Fortunately, it got wedged on a stray nail."

It's not just stage technicians and very lucky journalists who get to see this fascinating bit of 18th-century stage equipment

Grand designs

The view from the stage at Bristol Old Vic, which Daniel Day-Lewis called "the most beautiful theatre in England"

up close. Alongside its regular theatre tours, Bristol Old Vic also hosts monthly instalments of the Thunder Run Experience – an opportunity for theatre lovers to hear it in action, visit the original roof space, and hear more about the long and colourful history of this incredible object. "It's wonderful to be able to open the doors and bring people in here," says Andrew.

There's so much to be gained from going behind the scenes at historic theatres, many of whom run their own regular tours, such as Bristol Hippodrome and Theatre Royal Bath. If you're ready to delve deeper into the rich theatrical heritage of the southwest, the Bristol Theatre Collection, at the University of Bristol, is home to 450 years' worth of theatrical history and is well worth a visit.

"At the end of the day, audiences come in and experience something special. The theatre is a very magical place," says Andrew. In a world of instant gratification, streaming and scrolling, these behind-the-scenes opportunities help lift the lid on how the magic is created – which is usually a magic experience in itself. [n—f](https://nfd.io/thunder)

Bristol Old Vic's Thunder Run Experience runs on 22 February and 22 March. nfd.io/thunder