Julie Everton’s playwriting engages with the relationship between fact and fiction. She has experimented with form and structure to find the best way to tell the story. For example, her play ‘Pig in a Poke’ (Royal Court Theatre 1991) fictionalised key aspects of her teenage life in a surreal black comedy to explore gender and animal rights. Her Play “Firestarting” (1996) developed stories which a group of teenagers told about their lives, combining these in a fictional form for them to perform, whilst retaining a core factual basis.

In 2014-15 she collaborated with co-writer Josie Melia to research and write a play ‘The Bombing of the Grand Hotel’. We conducted extensive interviews with key people involved in the event, including Pat Magee, who laid the bomb for the IRA and Jo Berry, whose MP father died in the blast. Their story formed the heart of the drama. ‘The Bombing of the Grand Hotel’ was researched at the British Library, Argus Archives, and Imperial War Museum.

Structurally inventive, the play uses both fictionalised scenes and characters and verbatim text, finding ways to capture the truth of living people stories in a compelling dramatic form.
Research Context

October 2015 saw the 30th anniversary of the IRA bomb at the Grand Hotel Brighton, which killed 5 people. Many academics have written about aspects of the IRA’s England Campaign, notably Professor Graham Dawson (Brighton University), Dr Garry McGladdery (University of Belfast), Nadine Finch (University of Bristol) and Stephen Hopkins (University of Leicester).

There are several Northern Irish theatre companies engaging with post conflict issues such as revenge/reconciliation related to Northern Ireland, notably Kabosh Theatre and Tinder Box in Belfast. The plays of these companies focus on the micro and domestic ways in which nationalist and loyalist communities in Belfast managing to live post conflict. Plays on the subject of revenge and reconciliation are being explored by theatre companies like Hydrocracker (Brighton).

Contemporary plays dealing explicitly with politics and historical events as subject matter, notably ‘A Marvellous Year for Plums’ by Hugh Whitemore, about the Suez Crisis, ‘House’ by James Graham about the hung parliament of 74-78, involve dramatizing real people and manage this in different ways both formally and stylistically.

The questions which underpinned the research and development of the play include:

How might a live play engage an audience with an iconic historical event?
How might a writer engage with the stories of real living people?
How does collaboration impact on the work produced?

The following sections explore these questions.
I began researching a new play on the Grand Hotel Bomb with my co-writer, Josie Melia, in August 2012. The 30\textsuperscript{th} Anniversary of the bomb was approaching in October 2015.

We conducted interviews with Jo Berry, whose father was killed in the bomb, and Pat Magee, who laid the bomb, and developed relationships of trust with them over three years. We also researched in the newspaper archives at Brighton Museum, at the British Museum and Imperial War Museum. We interviewed members of the emergency services, of the Irish Community in Brighton in the 1980s, politicians and historians. Professor Graham Dawson advised us about the wider context of the IRA’s England Campaign.

‘The Bombing of the Grand Hotel’ received research and development funding from Arts Council England towards two rehearsed readings of a first draft. We worked with our director/ dramaturg Paul Hodson towards these readings. These reached capacity audiences at the Cockpit Theatre, London and The Old Market, Brighton in January 2014. The programmer of the Brighton venue commented

“We were so glad to get such a great turn out for the reading. It had a real buzz, testament to the fact that the subject matter is pertinent and fascinating for many people “Helen Jewell.

After this reading, we formed a theatre company, Wildspark Theatre, in order to successfully apply for production funding from the Arts Council, and raised match funding of £3000 through a Kickstarter crowdsourcing campaign. For this campaign we made a video, in which we discuss the inspirations behind the play. See appendix 2 and click on link to see this.
In October 2015 we put on a rehearsed reading of a new draft of the play at the Sallis Benney Theatre, as the centrepiece of a two day symposium to commemorate the 30th Anniversary of the Grand Hotel Bomb. During the symposium, academics discussed the Grand Hotel bomb in relation to the IRA’s England Campaign, and theatre practitioners discussed political theatre in relation to the Northern Ireland Conflict. We gave a paper as part of this on the process and ethics of dramatizing the lives of real living people.

After the reading, we recognised the need to focus the dramatic narrative on the journeys of two main characters, Jo Berry and Pat Magee, so wrote a brand new final draft of the play in January and February 2015. Co-writing brought unanticipated benefits of putting my own writing process in the spotlight, and offering me the opportunity to learn from a different approach from my own. We developed relationships of trust with Jo Berry, which led her to offer us transcripts of their first two meetings. This enabled us to use powerful verbatim material to write a twenty minute scene depicting their life changing first meeting. Reviewers and audiences commented on how compelling this scene was.

We collaborated with our Brighton based production team to develop this final draft including dramaturg and director Paul Hodson, producer Beccy Smith in discussion with the artistic director of the Cockpit Theatre, Dave Wybrow. Later, we worked with movement director Emma Roberts to create movement sequences to explore the emotional subtext of the play and with sound designer Steve Wrigley to build a production soundtrack based on musical themes for both main characters. We cast four Irish actors, alongside two actors from the original readings. These Irish actors brought contextual knowledge.
A rehearsed reading of a first draft of the play was performed at The Cockpit Theatre London and The Old Market Brighton in January 2014.

‘The Bombing of the Grand Hotel’ was performed for 19 days at the Cockpit Theatre in London April 13 – May 2 2015, and for three days at The Warren, in Brighton May 6,7,9 2015 (see appendix 1 for production photos and posters of reading and production).

A blog by Josie Melia and I on writing drama about living people was published in Guardian Culture Professional (see appendix 2 for link to this).

“There’s a continuum that reaches from plays in which actors with headsets speak real people’s recorded dialogue verbatim, to plays “inspired by” real events and characters. Verbatim theatre can reveal and illuminate truths of an event and personalities by close attention to the real speech of people we don’t usually hear on stage. Work inspired by real events and characters investigates human truths predominantly via the imagination.

In both forms there’s scope for blending fact and fiction – real and imagined characters and dialogue – to bring a story to life to find its truth. Our aim with this play was to represent the two main people, Jo and Pat, imaginatively but truthfully – and fictionalise other characters in the story.

In early drafts we found that fictional characters can become so interesting that they overshadow the real lives of the people central to the story. In our production draft we have deliberately lost some much-loved characters, in favour of foregrounding and shaping the parallel stories of our two main people.”

Our theatre company, Wildspark Theatre partnered with Professor Graham Dawson, to organise a two day symposium at Brighton University to commemorate the 30th Anniversary of the Grand Hotel Bomb in October 2014. Actors presented a rehearsed reading of a draft of our play at the Sallis Benney Theatre as the centrepiece the symposium. I co-wrote and delivered a paper on the process of and ethics of writing about real people alongside co-writer Josie Melia as part of a panel on political theatre.
On May 15 2015 I led a workshop with Josie Melia on the process and content of the play to an international conference of theatre makers (Leonardo Theatre training Partnership) at Brighton University, in an event open to the public.

I gave a paper on “The Costs of Writing ‘The Bombing of the Grand Hotel’ about writing about real people and events at the HEA conference on Narrative at Brighton University in April 2014

— “the real challenge is to give a play dramatic shape without distorting the truth” Richard Norton Taylor (Verbatim Verbatim, Oberon Books (2008))
Managing director of Brighton Fringe Julian Caddy wrote in the Huffington Post after the first night

“Very privileged to watch The Bombing of the Grand Hotel. The most important play to come to Brighton in years”.

Jo Berry came to see the play about her life on Press night and later tweeted

“Just seen play, actors brilliant fantastic. Leaves me humbled, you have done my story justice, deep gratitude”

Marina Cantacuzino, director of international Forgiveness Project, which promotes individual stories of reconciliation between perpetrators of violence and their victims said she felt that the play revealed depths of emotional engagement and a political perspective on the story of Jo and Pat, which she thought she knew very well.

We did two post show discussions, alongside Jo Berry, which were extremely well attended, audiences included members of military and paramilitary organisations and their relatives, people involved with The Forgiveness Project, an international project exploring stories of perpetrators and victims in our culture of revenge, and victims of the IRA’s bombing campaign in England.

Audience member Sef Townsend, who survived the Warrington bomb, posted on Facebook (see appendix 1 for photograph)

“It's a poignant, raw and important piece of work”

In May 2015 we ran a workshop as part of the Leonardo Project which, to which members of the public were also invited as the event was advertised in the Fringe Programme. This led to a discussion with theatre makers from Amsterdam, Bucharest, Istanbul and Graz about plays about the relationship between perpetrators of political violence and their victims. This gave a sense of the play’s resonance across Europe.
20 script writing students from a module I teach attended the play in Brighton. My own teaching of both script writing and journalism has been transformed by being able to talk about the process of researching and writing and producing the play about an iconic historic event which happened on our doorsteps.
Dissemination

We had pre publicity coverage in Irish Post, Irish World, A Younger Theatre, Whatsonstage, Londontheatre.co.uk. London Calling, Londonista, Camden New Journal, The Stage, BBC Radio 4’s Human Zoo, Guardian, and a blog on writing about real people in Guardian Culture Professionals network (appendix 2).

We also experienced unsolicited press attention, and have learned about tabloid interest in the story, with articles in the Mirror and Brighton Argus appearing without consultation with us as writers or the company. We had to work hard to protect the relationships of trust built up with Jo and with Pat.

Our twitter reach doubled, with key twitter relationships, and our Facebook posts had a reach of 2.5K.

The play received good and outstanding reviews throughout the run.

(Appendix 3)

The play’s emotional heft comes as, 16 years on from the bombing, Magee and Berry finally meet. This 20-minute scene starts off resembling the world’s most awkward first date, as the pair nervously small-talk their way around a particularly grim elephant in the room. The chemistry between the pair is both bizarre and compelling, and by the end they’re euphoric, doing philosophical somersaults as they seek to reconcile blame, guilt and forgiveness with senses of personal and political duty.

(...) there’s warmth and hope aplenty in this keenly observed examination of a truly unique relationship. David Clack, Time Out

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http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/apr/21/friendship-ira-bomber-daughter-victim-on-stage?CMP=share_btn_tw

After press night, we received very good reviews from Time Out, The Stage, Irish Post, Camden Review, Londonista, An, and Fringe Review in Brighton. You can read those by clicking on the links in Appendix 3.
The Guardian’s Lyn Gardner selected the play as one of her top tips for the week in April 2015 and Fringe Guru selected it as one of 5 must see plays in the fringe.

“There’s explosive stuff at the Cockpit in London where The Bombing of the Grand Hotel tells of the bomb that almost killed Thatcher and its aftermath”.

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APPENDIX 1: Production photos

Ruari Conaghan as Pat Magee, and members of the cast.
Post show discussion with Jo Berry on dramatising real people’s lives
Rehearsed Reading The Bombing of the Grand Hotel
by Josie Melia and Julie Everton
directed by Paul Hodson

The Bombing of the Grand Hotel (rehearsed reading)
October 1984. An IRA bomb explodes at the Grand Hotel Brighton during the Conservative Party Conference. The play dramatises this iconic event and its aftermath. At its heart is the story of IRA bomber Pat Magee and Jo Berry, whose MP father was killed.

Can enemies overcome trauma, hostility and the legacy of war to work together for peace?

2014 marks the 30th anniversary of the Brighton bomb. Based on interviews and research, this is a timely exploration of contemporary concerns about conflict and its aftermath.

Co-written by award winning Brighton playwrights Josie Melia and Julie Everton
Directed by Paul Hodson

Readings:
Wed 15 January 2014 at 7.30pm
The Old Market, 11 Upper Market Street
Brighton BN3 1AS
www.theoldmarket.com 01273 201801

Thurs 23 January 2014 at 7.30pm
The Cockpit, Gateforth Street, Marylebone
London NW8 8EH
www.cockpit.org 0207 2582925

Tickets free by request at box office

Thanks to photographer Crispin Rodwell (www.crispinrodwell.com)
The Bombing of the Grand Hotel

The attempted assassination of Margaret Thatcher in Brighton, 1984 and the unlikely relationship it triggered.

Mon 13 Apr to Sat 2 May

The Bombing of the Grand Hotel

1984. The height of Thatcher's power.

30lbs of gelignite rip through six floors of the Grand Hotel Brighton, shattering the Tory party conference. The most shocking attack on the British Government since Guy Fawkes.

This visceral new history play tells the story of the unlikely relationship between Pat Magee, who planted the bomb, and Jo Berry, whose father was killed in the blast. Can they really start to see the world through one another's eyes?

The Bombing of the Grand Hotel is written jointly by Julie Everton and Josie Melia, directed by Paul Hodson and produced by Wildspark Theatre and The Cockpit. Researched with the support of Jo Berry and Pat Magee, the play is a thought provoking and moving exploration of the political pressures and personal triggers surrounding a key moment of extreme public violence within a continuing struggle for change.
When two worlds collide, what good can come of it?

**Dates:**

Monday 13th April to Saturday 2nd May 2015

Tuesdays to Saturdays at 7.30pm

Saturday matinees at 2.30pm

Previews on Monday 13th and Tuesday 14th April - 7.30pm

BSL interpreted performance, Wednesday 22nd April, 7.30pm

**After show talks:** (included in the price of your ticket)

**Thursday April 23rd: Reconciliation Q & A**
Jo Berry (Building Bridges for Peace) and Marina Cantacuzino (The Forgiveness Project) discuss their remarkable experiences of reconciliation in action and answer your questions about the stories behind the play.

**Wednesday 29th April: Meet the Team Q & A**
Writers Julie Everton and Josie Melia alongside Jo Berry, the inspiration behind the play, discuss the background to the story, the challenges of turning facts to fiction and the creation of the show.

**Appendix 2: Prepublicity**

Our successful Kickstarter campaign


Guardian Professionals Blog

Our promotional video

https://vimeo.com/123925819

Jo Berry interview in Guardian

http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/apr/21/friendship-ira-bomber-daughter-victim-on-stage?CMP=share_btn_tw

Appendix 3

Selected Reviews

http://www.camdenreview.com/reviews/theatre/the-bombing-of-the-grand-hotel-at-the-cockpit-theatre#.VTo0GLktdWY.twitter

http://www.timeout.com/london/theatre/the-bombing-of-the-grand-hotel?fb_ref=Default

http://www.fringereview.co.uk/fringeReview/6389.html