



HOWARDS END

PRODUCTION NOTES

Often considered E.M. Forster's masterpiece, **Howards End** is the story of two independent and unconventional sisters seeking love and meaning as they navigate an ever-changing world. Academy Award® winning screenwriter Kenneth Lonergan (Manchester By The Sea, Gangs Of New York) brings a fresh take to this adaptation directed by Bafta winner Hettie Macdonald (White Girl, Fortitude).

Margaret (Hayley Atwell) and Helen Schlegel (Philippa Coulthard) are intelligent and idealistic young women living together with their hypochondriac younger brother Tibby (Alex Lawther) in



Edwardian London. Since the death of their parents and despite their interfering Aunt Juley's (*Tracey Ullman*) best intentions, the sisters lead independent and slightly unorthodox lives. After meeting the wealthy and conservative Wilcox family on holiday, Margaret forms a friendship with the older and more traditional Ruth Wilcox (*Julia Ormond*).

When Ruth unexpectedly dies, Margaret finds herself drawn to the newly widowed Henry Wilcox (Matthew Macfadyen), a self-made businessman who inherits his late wife's beloved country home Howards End. Meanwhile, the passionate and capricious Helen takes up the cause of Leonard Bast (Joseph Quinn), a young bank clerk who is struggling to make ends meet, trapped by his promise to marry his alluring but vulnerable lover Jacky (Rosalind Eleazar).

THE ORIGINS

Howards End was first written and published by E.M. Forster in 1910. He described it self-deprecatingly in his journal as "my best novel, and approaching a good novel", and it is widely regarded alongside *A Passage To India* as his finest work. The story follows the Schlegel, Wilcox and Bast families - all living in and around London in the first decade of the 20th century. Although from completely different social classes and walks of life, their stories intertwine and ultimately converge at Howards End - the country home of the Wilcox family. The book is rich in symbolism, conflicting ideologies and reflections on the importance of human connection - but it is also a simple story of family, unlikely romance and the ties that bind us.

Executive producer Colin Callender explained his desire to adapt the classic by noting that, "what was so striking about the novel is that although it was set 100 years ago, the questions and challenges these young women were facing in the story are the very things my daughters face today". While he was familiar with the 1992 Merchant Ivory feature adaptation which received nine Academy Award® nominations and three wins, Callender felt that there would be great value in revisiting the story for a contemporary audience.

He then approached the prolific Academy Award winning screenwriter, playwright and director Kenneth Lonergan to adapt the novel, but "he turned it down!" Callender recalls. *Howards End* marks Lonergan's first foray into television and although he was very interested in the project, Lonergan was initially concerned that there would be elements of the novel he'd have to change in order to bring the story to life on screen. "The first thing that struck me was that it might come across a bit schematic, trying to map out the various layers of Edwardian society through these three families," recounts Lonergan, "but as often happens when you're working on something with that much depth to it, you realize it's you who have been shallow and not the material".

Lonergan quickly found many touchpoints in the story which are hugely relatable, regardless of the Edwardian setting. It is a piece which deals with many questions we still ask ourselves as a society today. "There's always that double sided thing of looking at another time period where the fascination is both how different it is from the way you live and how similar", he notes. "In the time *Howards End* was set, what was happening in politics, in society, in technology, had never happened before. And that's pretty much true of any ten year period you choose to look at. In



any big, industrial society there's a constant conflict between people who live different lives in the same environment."

Discussing his adaptation process, Lonergan notes "most of the dialogue is right out of the book, so the style and freshness is a tribute to Forster". "Kenneth's strength as a writer is his ability to delve into character, in tiny moments and little exchanges. In that sense he's a miniaturist," observes Callender. "It's not the big calamities or tragedies which define the power of his work - it's the small interactions between characters and how they connect."

ONLY CONNECT

"One may as well begin with Helen's letters to her sister."

Both the acclaimed E.M. Forster novel and screenwriter Kenneth Lonergan's four part adaptation begin with the correspondence between the two captivating Schlegel sisters - Margaret and Helen. It's a fitting start, as communication and connection - as well as family - are at the heart of Forster's story and this adaptation.

The two unconventional sisters make the acquaintance of the wealthy, pragmatic Wilcox family while abroad in Germany, a relationship which they continue once back in England. Through a twist of fate they also become involved with Leonard and Jacky Bast - a working class couple struggling for financial security.

Describing what draws the two sisters into this nexus of relationships, Hayley Atwell (Margaret Schlegel) says: "As their dynamic develops and they discover more about their place in the world, they start to become fascinated by these two other very different families, the Wilcoxes and the Basts. Margaret and Helen - these eccentric, intellectual, naturally curious siblings - find something which resonates with them in both of these families, and it sets in motion this journey of relationships between them all, and exposes how the world works to the idealistic sisters."

Forster's novel emphasized the importance of truly engaging with people, especially those outside of one's ideological sphere. Kenneth Lonergan notes: "One thing that's interesting about the Schlegel sisters is that they see themselves, correctly, as living in somewhat of a bubble. They really care about the kind of lives they're living and the lives of those around them, although they're aware that, initially, their approach is intellectual and possibly disconnected from the mass of humanity. There's this ongoing debate in the story as to whether the Wilcoxes are more or less in touch with real life than the Schlegels."

HELEN AND MARGARET SCHLEGEL

One of the central threads in *Howards End* is the bond between the two Schlegel sisters and how it is tested and strengthened in equal measure over the course of the narrative. "It's hard to



summarize them,” admits Lonergan, “because it’s such an impressively complicated relationship that Forster creates.”

The loss of their parents as teenagers is a crucial factor in understanding the relationship between the two Schlegels. Philippa Coulthard (Helen Schlegel) notes: “Helen owes a lot to Margaret, who essentially raised her.” Discussing their shared worldview at the beginning of the story, Atwell explains, “The Schlegel girls are conscious of their place in the class system and the privilege they have - and from that stems a feeling of moral obligation to be of use and actively instigate social reform.” They are also both decidedly progressive, despite the limited foothold women had in society in this period. Tracey Ullman, who plays the Schlegel’s aunt Juley Mund notes: “It struck me how this was a time when women like Helen and Margaret couldn’t vote and they were not really allowed to work. There was nothing for them to do. Very few women went to university at that time.”

Both sisters go through significant journeys during the course of the story, demonstrated by their changing views on the Wilcoxes. “What’s endearing about Margaret and Helen is that they’re actually incredibly judgmental in the beginning. They think they know exactly who the Wilcoxes are - garish and money-grabbing and a bit crass,” explains Atwell. This easy categorization is complicated when they come to know the family more, with Atwell noting Margaret in particular comes to realize that “there’s much more to them, and indeed to all people than she initially thought.”

Coulthard notes: “The most remarkable thing about the sisters and why they are so enduring and fascinating is that they see the value in connecting with people outside of their immediate class and outside of their immediate ideological sphere.” Although they differ in their approach, their shared desire to effect change and grapple with what it means to live an engaged and moral life is what makes them such captivating characters. As they become more involved in the lives of the Wilcoxes and the Basts, both sister learn more about themselves and the world around them. Ullman adds: “They both do things that neither one expected or wanted for each other but it works out in the end, because they do love each other ultimately.”

MARGARET SCHLEGEL AND HENRY WILCOX

After the death of his wife Ruth Wilcox, with whom Margaret had struck up an unlikely friendship, Henry Wilcox finds himself growing closer to the eldest Schlegel sister. Summing up his character, actor Matthew Macfadyen shares: “I loved playing him. He’s sympathetic and pig-headed and full of vanity and just very interesting.” A self-made man and committed capitalist, Henry Wilcox’s view of the world is in direct opposition to the liberal and philanthropic Schlegels - he is confident of his status and wealth, and unconcerned with the existential questions of life. From her encounter with the Wilcoxes at the beginning of the narrative, “Helen sees Mr Wilcox as a representation of everything she thinks is wrong with the world,” explains Coulthard, relegating him to a world of *‘telegrams and anger’*.



“When we meet Margaret her most important relationship in her life is with Helen, and yet as she is becoming more and more attracted to Henry it is pulling her and her sister apart. However, Margaret can’t help pursuing that relationship with Henry because she finds there’s something fine in him that she feels is worth exploring,” Atwell explains. “Initially it’s not romantic interest, which develops later. It begins with more of a shared loneliness that they both had, and a shared desire for connection.”

As Margaret’s character explains to her sister, she begins to reconcile Henry’s worldview and their own - and see that both have merit:

“The truth is that there is a great outer life that you and I have never touched - a life in which telegrams and anger count. Personal relations, that we think supreme, are not supreme there. There love means marriage settlements, death, death duties. So far I’m clear. But here my difficulty. This outer life, though obviously horrid, often seems the real one - there’s grit in it. It does breed character.”

As Lonergan outlines: “Margaret sees something in Henry, and recognizes that he’s very much engaged with real problems and not with theoretical ones.”

Henry is an unlikely match for Margaret: he is much older, widowed and has a nearly incompatible worldview. And yet their relationship is one of literature’s most believable and complex unions. Atwell elaborates, “Their approach to their partnership almost goes against a social norm, contradicting this idea that we’ve got to change each other or find someone who’s exactly the same as you, matched up in every possible way. Margaret’s feeling is that it’s actually more interesting to take someone you have a connection with, and yet let them be fully themselves. And in turn hoping that they give you the same opportunity, and through that creating a very respectful and kind, loving relationship.”

HELEN SCHLEGEL AND LEONARD BAST

“When Helen meets Leonard Bast, he’s the perfect cause for all of her righteous idealism. It comes from a very good and well-intentioned place, but is ultimately naïve, and so he becomes her anthropological experiment. She has no concept of the realities of poverty,” explains Coulthard.

Helen and the impoverished Leonard Bast meet at a concert, after which Helen mistakenly takes home his umbrella. While Leonard’s partner Jacky doesn’t understand his desire for intellectual improvement and culture, Bast is drawn to Helen and her world of art and music which he has never truly been able to access before. Actor Joe Quinn (Leonard Bast) describes his character’s predicament, “He’s a frustrated young man because all of the constraints in his life are through no fault of his own, they’re a result of the society that we see and he’s alive in.” Through Bast, Helen has an outlet for her indignation about the class system and the way in which the wealthy profit at the expense of the poor. While Helen is driven by the desire to connect and meaningfully enact change, Bast has “a combination of self-loathing and self-



respect that compels him forward all the time,” notes Lonergan. He adds, “Bast is a fairly ordinary young man with some ambition to rise above his station in a world where it’s almost impossible to do so. I think that’s something anyone can relate to.” Addressing Helen’s misguided but sincere desire to help the Basts, Lonergan notes: “Nobody really throws themselves into something with quite the same enviable fervour as someone who’s fairly new to the world. But she does it with great intelligence.”

STYLING THE FAMILIES

Costume Designer Sheena Napier and Hair and Make-up Designer Catherine Scoble both worked tirelessly to create the wardrobes and looks of *Howards End*, a time when the world was entering into a new century of technology, discovery, and the beginnings of women’s liberation. Speaking of the Schlegels’ looks, Napier says: “Margaret has more independent character in her clothes than say, all the Wilcoxes - but as the eldest and de-facto parent to her siblings she’s quite bright but also a little more formal than they are.”

Speaking about Helen’s bohemian costumes and more forward-looking design flairs Napier adds: “I think that everybody thinks that a period starts at a particular time, but it’s not like 1 January 1910 everything suddenly changed. Somebody will anticipate trends as a more avant-garde dresser and I feel that about Helen.” Because of its setting in the relatively recent past many of the dresses and accessories used in the show are authentic Edwardian garments, sourced by Napier from various vintage markets.

On the framework for her styling of the Wilcox characters Napier notes: “The Schlegels are cultured, you see them going to art galleries and listening to music, whereas you feel that Henry’s house is full of paintings but they’re probably bought as an investment rather than something aesthetic for him to enjoy.” Henry Wilcox’s pragmatism particularly comes across through his outfit choices. “There’s his frock coat and this is his uniform really. It’s a city suit. He wears that at work and for weddings and funerals,” observes Napier. “He’s never ever without a tie. Even playing croquet he has a tie on!”

Hair and make-up wise, Scoble kept both Schlegel ladies more natural and relaxed than women at the time are usually portrayed. Specifically discussing Hayley’s look as Margaret, Scoble says, “I wanted her hair to feel soft and as though it could move, not like a wig - a bit like people have their hair now, a bit messy and reflecting her personality.” All of the creative team had independently found the work of Edwardian-era street photographer Edward Linley Sambourne, whose work shows men and particularly women of the time in naturalistic poses - often in motion, which gives a sense of how people really dressed and carried themselves in that era.

“We’re so used to period drama being styled in a certain way with people all buttoned up and with hair that looks like if they move it’s going to fall off,” Scoble notes. “These characters feel like people who you can relate to. It’s a story that just happens to have been set in that period, but is relevant now.”



BUILDING HOWARDS END

“Well - it’s everything, in a way,” notes Kenneth Lonergan on the eponymous house. With a central location so key to the world of the story, Production Designer Luke Hull had his work cut out for him - especially as someone who had never worked on a period production before.

“Hettie (Macdonald, the series director) deliberately wanted to do something very different and less reverential, and that’s what became interesting and exciting, this idea of shooting it in such a way that it could still be today. The period element is very much a background, it’s the world, whereas the series is really about the people,” explains Hull.

That said, Hull still had to visually recreate a very specific sense of Edwardian England, which was especially important when he was searching for locations. Hull explains: “We spent a lot of time trying to find spaces that weren’t obviously idyllic or pretty, but a bit more real.” In hunting for *Howards End* itself, Hull admits “It was difficult because it’s not a farmhouse - it’s still a big house, it’s got to say they’ve got wealth. But it’s also got to have a certain magical, mystical quality about it.” The final choice was a characterful old privately owned country home in Surrey, originally built in the 16th century but featuring additions from multiple eras, with a garden designed and planted by the renowned Gertrude Jekyll in 1911.

Addressing the array of phases we see the house in during the series as it’s occupied and vacated by different families at different times during the narrative, Hull notes “it’s more about how it *changes* that represents how the characters merge together, and grow, and clash with each other.”

Beyond the central house, the design team was tasked with recreating London as a bustling Edwardian metropolis, as well as reflecting the status and world of each family through their surroundings. “It’s difficult because you don’t want to simply say ‘Oh they’re poor, they’re rich, they’re somewhere in between’. It’s a lot more complicated than that,” explains Hull. “Let’s rather say the Schlegels are more about the color, they’re looser, they have lots of arty friends, they smoke in the house, and they play games and go out. Whereas the Wilcoxes are a little bit more formalized. They’re more restricted by their own class structure, and then the Basts are practical, functional, they need to just get by.”

Commenting on the environment of Forster’s London, Hull adds: “I think there’s very little change in terms of how people go about their lives. That’s what was really exciting about recreating this world, I mean we still commute to work in the same way. We drive cars, and cars were just coming in at the time.”

The idea of home and what it means to belong is also an important note in the story. As Lonergan notes, “It’s silly to put too definite a label on what is an overriding metaphor, but the house is I think the most comfortable place in the story - a safe and constant space.” To that point, Ullman observes “We’re all looking for a *Howards End*, aren’t we?”



THE SCHLEGELS

MARGARET (HAYLEY ATWELL)

Margaret Schlegel is an intelligent, idealistic young woman, the de facto head of the Schlegel family since the deaths of her parents. The Schlegels have a combination of English and German heritage, and a commitment to culture, literature and the arts. Intellectual and unconventional, Margaret challenges the social mores of her time while trying to live life on her own terms. At her core Margaret believes in the importance of empathy and looking past the divisions of class and wealth, which loom large in turn-of-the-century England, to find human connection. Progressive and introspective in a way that was actively discouraged in young women at the time - Margaret's unorthodox approach to life and her disregard for social convention draws her into an unexpected relationship with the businessman Henry Wilcox.

HELEN (PHILIPPA COULTHARD)

Passionate and capricious, Helen is Margaret's younger sister - with a similar but more uncompromising view of the world than her older sibling. Helen has a romantic disposition and a strong sense of injustice to the inequalities she perceives in society. A chance encounter changes the course of her life when she meets Leonard Bast, a young bank clerk who has fallen on hard times at work and at home. Moved by his situation, the Schlegel sisters try to intercede on his behalf - a well-intentioned act which has unforeseen consequences.

TIBBY (ALEX LAWTHOR)

The youngest of the Schlegels – a consummate academic, Tibby has been raised and slightly indulged by Margaret. Sometimes irritating but essentially a good hearted teenager, Tibby is both self-absorbed and occasionally surprisingly insightful, still refining his ideas of the world as he studies at Oxford.

AUNT JULEY (TRACEY ULLMAN)

In the wake of the passing of Margaret and Helen's parents, Aunt Juley feels responsible for her nieces' wellbeing. She takes it upon herself to serve as a moral guardian and curb their more outrageous impulses. Sister to the Schlegels' deceased mother, Aunt Juley takes a dim view of the girls' untraditional lifestyle, but despite her occasionally disastrous intercessions, she is unfailingly kind hearted and committed to her nieces' welfare.



THE WILCOXES

HENRY (MATTHEW MACFADYEN)

The owner of Howards End, Henry Wilcox is a self-made businessman, conservative, pragmatic and traditional in his ideas of gender, society and class. A father of three and a widower since the passing of his wife Ruth, he is caught off guard by his growing feelings for the vivacious and opinionated Margaret Schlegel, who challenges his preconceptions and forces him to examine his view of the world.

RUTH (JULIA ORMOND)

Graceful, wise and otherworldly, Ruth Wilcox is the cornerstone of her family. Very traditional in her view of the world but deeply intuitive and connected to Howards End, she becomes a close friend to Margaret despite the differences in the way they see the world.

THE BASTS

LEONARD (JOE QUINN)

Leonard Bast is a young man intent on rising above his working class circumstances. Though he works as a bank clerk, he has the soul of a poet and aspires to a life of educated culture. Surviving paycheck to paycheck, he lives in modest accommodations with his partner Jacky, a faded beauty with a dark history.

JACKY (ROSALIND ELEAZAR)

Orphaned at a young age, taken advantage of and abandoned - Jacky has survived hardship her entire life. Uneducated and without the means to provide for herself properly - she latches on to her fiancé Leonard Bast. Desperate and physically strained by her illness, Jacky is completely shut out of the privileged world of arts and literature which Leonard attempts to enter.