

# DO YOU NEED AN ENTERTAINING SPEAKER?

FUNNY BONES AND WISDOM TEETH  
AN APPOINTMENT WITH DR RAY LOWRY



I am a retired doctor and dentist, ex-comedy writer for TV, radio and stage, and a performer on the comedy circuit and after-dinner.

When I was a young man I didn't know what I wanted to do so I became a comedy writer. I also drove coaches and flew planes but I eventually found my calling as a doctor and dentist. But I never gave up the comedy completely – you need a keen sense of humour to survive in the health care professions. So all the time I was practicing I was also hoovering up the funny stories, salting away the comical incidents and storing my experiences like a squirrel stores nuts. Now those nuts are my livelihood.

The role of a health professional also demands a high degree of performance skills so all I learnt on ward rounds, in the clinic, giving lectures and on the conference platform have been put to good use in the world of post-retirement. As soon as I hung up my white coat I put on the comedians garb and headed for the comedy club circuit. The accumulated experience and knowledge means I can now really enjoy entertaining meetings, conferences, after-dinner gatherings and the like with tales from my miss-spent youth, reprehensible middle years and slow decline into anecdotage.

My speciality is the funny side of being a doctor and dentist in the 1970s and 80s. Hear about how we trained and practiced, the things that went wrong and the near-misses we had. It's gentle, adult humour (mostly self-deprecating) where the health professional usually ends up worse than the poor patient. Find out what goes on in medical and dental school, hospital and outside, and the goings on between staff behind closed doors.

## A selection of past performance venues for Dr Lowry

City Hall Newcastle National Dental Students Conference and Dinner  
Newcastle Dental Graduates Dinner St James' Park, Newcastle  
The Stand Comedy Club Newcastle (three times)  
Nancy's Bordello (for Grinning Idiot)  
The Ropery Sunderland  
Chillingham Arms, Newcastle (comedy club)  
Birmingham Dental Students Annual Dinner Hyatt Regency Hotel  
Health Care Supply Association (HCSA) Hilton Manchester Deansgate.  
BDTA Annual Dinner Ashmolean Museum Oxford  
Newcastle Dental Graduates Dinner St James' Park, Newcastle  
Royal College of Physicians London  
Royal Society of Medicine London  
Edinburgh Fringe  
MAC Birmingham  
Community College Kinross  
Many conferences in UK and abroad



## Endorsements

Just the Right Level for The Raucous Audience. You Held Your Own!  
*President, Local Dental Student's Society.*

After All Your Experience, Still The Human Face Of The Medic And Dentist. So Oral Surgeons Are Human After All  
*Committee Member Medical Student's Society (medsoc)*

Thank you very much for an interesting and funny talk. It was great to hear about medicine and dentistry from the other side of the counter, but without too much technical detail, and certainly not enough gore to upset the digestion! Thanks also for not talking down at us  
*Secretary, North East Rotary*

Teaching Can't Be Dull Then!  
*Delegate Training The Trainer Dinner*

I Didn't Realise Dental Public Health Could Be So Amusing. I'll Never Be Able To Look Our Local Consultant In The Face Again! Laurie S.  
*Local Medical Committee Dinner*

Thanks For An Entertaining Talk. Many New Stories And I Liked The James Herriott Approach  
*Social Marketing Conference Dinner*

Thank you so much for your after dinner talk, which went down really well!  
*- R... F... MSc FBCS CITP, F. Consultancy Services Ltd*

A retired doctor and dentist, Ray's Edinburgh Fringe show is a lovely mix of anecdotes, old school puns, double entendres and plain silliness from someone who really ought to know better. After laughing for an hour, you'll have the sneaking suspicion that you might just have learned something as well."  
*Andy Clark*

Ray,  
It was a pleasure to meet you. And you helped make it a very successful night. Thank you very much.  
*Wales Rotary.*

Last night went well didn't it? I had a couple of comments from people who mentioned how loud my laugh was so that shows how much I was enjoying it .....

*Booker Kinross*

## Ray Lowry's comedy life story

Most people like a laugh but some of us go further. I am a fan of comedy and have been so since I was young. Early on I found it immensely pleasurable to laugh and I found myself looking out for funny things: jokes, articles, films, radio programmes and performers. I was quite a solitary child and found great comfort that there were people "out there" who shared my odd view of the world and made fun of it. I was particularly drawn to the Goon Show, Round the Horn, Hancock and I'm sorry I'll read that again on radio; Benny Hill, Sykes, Harry Worth, Monty Python and The Comedians on TV. I became a devoted fan of many comic performers and formats. I could quote many of the best material by heart. I was smitten.

But, like a small group of followers, I soon began to take things further. I started to imitate my heroes. Imitation was soon followed by weak developments of the material, then I began writing and performing what I thought were good versions of my favourite laughter-makers. Most of my comic outputs were weak imitations of the genuine article but I felt I was joining a unique club: the comedy aficionados.

My metamorphosis continued when I went away to boarding school and university. As I started mixing with other people, I soon found there were a few like-minded individuals in these communities. And we would start to gather together, sometimes clandestinely (as we guessed we were slightly outside the main pack), and enjoy mutual comedy gatherings, reminiscing about classic comedy turns and, eventually, putting on our own shows. This climaxed at university when a small group of us put on substantial stage and cabaret performances and I started semi-professional writing for BBC radio and making regular trips to London to be in the audience of recordings of I'm sorry I'll read that again, the Goon show and Monty Python's Flying Circus.

I even tried turning professional when I left university. Although I had qualified as a dentist, I thought my first love was comedy, especially writing. So, with my close friend, I tried my hand at churning out commercial comedy material, and with some success: we got regular freelance work and even started writing commissioned treatments for prospective television and radio programmes for the BBC and got an agent.

We had a great time and got really immersed in the business. We went to meet top names in comedy at the time: Kenneth Williams, Amy Macdonald, Benny Green, Ted Ray, Sheila Hancock, Tommy Cooper, Dave Allen, and John Cleese. And we met many people behind the scenes: script writers and editors, radio and television producers and directors; agents, theatre managers, technical people, and writers. We went behind the scenes in the commercial theatre, BBC and Independent television. It was very seductive and we were made offers that whetted the appetite of fledgling comedy professionals like we felt we were.

Then I chickened out. I found that, when I turned a hobby into a job, tried to make a living out of a pastime, all the fun went out of it and it became a drudge and a chore to keep producing what were large volumes of material, most of which would be rejected. And it seemed that there was no certainty in any of it: not only would we not be guaranteed the work, but there seemed no rhyme or reason behind what made it onto the screen and what we produced. Sketches we thought were good were rejected but lazy, me-too material (weak copies of other people's work) got accepted more times than not. It was frustrating.

I also began to realise that what talent I had was precarious. Sure, I was keen, enthusiastic, besotted with the business and prepared to work. I was also getting somewhere, be it slowly. But I also realised. Looking at others like me trying to make a go of it, that there were an awful lot of us, and, worse, that those that made it were either very much more talented or very lucky. It didn't seem to me that I could base a life's work on a little talent and a lot of luck.

I also had a good look at my character and personality. I realised at that time that I was basically an insecure individual, who needed a huge degree of certainty in my life, that I thrived on predictability and routine, even though I thought of myself as a rebel and an outsider. So the career with a pension won and I turned back to professional life in health care and away from comedy. Almost entirely.

I kept a little of my heart in the world of comedy. I realised my youthful excursion into the funny business had been based mostly on ambition and technique: I had little personal experience of life to write about but knew how to turn anything I came across into something funny through formulaic writing. But now, as I turned my back on comedy (temporarily as I hoped), I realised I would be able to amass plenty of good material which, I hope one day, I would be able to turn to to get back into the

funny business, this time with the right credentials and experience to make something of it. And I was right.

I never really lost the comedy nosiness side of me. As I progressed through my professional development (dentistry, medicine, hospital and administrative health service and finally academia) I tried to capitalise on my extra-curricular interests and make further my funny business development as much as I could and when the opportunities arose. So, for example, when I trained and development my writing skills (and got experience), I would make sure my comedy writing skills were nurtured at the same time. If I was learning to write in an engaging way, I would go further and study comedy as an engagement strategy.

I also developed my performance skills with an eye on my comedy ambitions. When I was making a name for myself on the lecturing and conference circuit, I sought out expert coaching in making my performances funny as well as good communication. I consorted with professional actors, directors, writers and performers.

Teaching and coaching was also an area to exercise my dormant comedy muscles. I developed techniques that used role-play and comedy and became an expert in bringing on relative underperformers so they would flourish in exams, public speaking and entertaining.

Finally, I became a comedy hoarder, picking up, recording and developing all sorts of funny business, stories, experiences and anecdotes that I reckoned would come in handy when I returned to my old love – the comic trade. And I managed to get increasing opportunities to be funny and bring on that side of my life. In the end, I started to pick up work as a funny after-dinner speaker and stand-up performer. So when I retired from my day job, I was ready to return to my old flame.

From: "Presentations and public speaking: the lessons from stand-up comedy" available from Amazon.UK.



Your television winner—No. 5

# UP THE REVOLUTION!

by RAYMOND LOWRY

The peasants are massing for the French Revolution—but it's not quite the Revolution the history books remember! For a start, the peasants are led by a certain revolting Robby S. Pierre, whose assistant is called Camembert ...

*Fast, furious farce this week wins £30 for Raymond Lowry of Moseley, Birmingham, a 21-year-old dental student at Birmingham University. We have adapted to short story form the first episode from his comedy series idea.*

Robert S. Pierre	IAN HENDRY
Camembert	JOHN ALDERTON
Louise XVI	WILFRED PICKLES
Marie Antoinette	MOIRA LISTER
Marie Thérèse	CYD HAYMAN
Sir Hugo Green-Green	HUGHIE GREEN



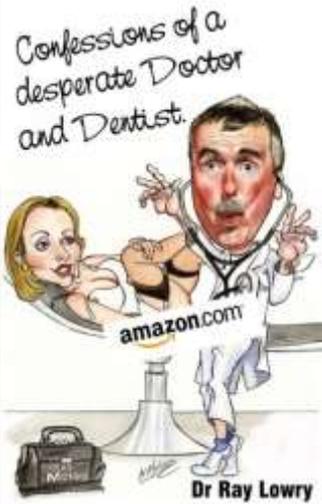
daughter shrugged. "All the kids say it," she said.

"And I say come away from the window while you're not wearing a wig, or they'll start calling you a head," said the Queen.

"Do you smell a bit," Louis said. "I've always said that foreigners start at Dover, anyway."

The Theatre de Bingo was packed when the royal family sat down in their box and the curtain drew back to reveal the British Ambassador, Sir Hugo Green-Green, who held up his hand for silence (a silence already reigning far more securely than Louis) and

July ... see it ... know ... Look, ... is—whv ... you ... tri—, tricolour again," Robby joked. "All right, the spread's hers—but don't let your permissive aristos try and



## Dr Lowry (serious) Curriculum Vitae

Dr Lowry BDS, MB ChB, DRCOG, FFPH is a qualified doctor and dentist, Born in Birmingham in 1950, and after winning a flying scholarship from the Royal Air Force, he was educated at Birmingham University where he qualified as a dental surgeon (BDS) in 1972, winning the Arthur Youngson prize for dental prosthetics; then at Leicester University where he qualified as a medical practitioner (MB ChB) in 1982. In the intervening years he practised dentistry as a general dental practitioner, a community dental officer and a hospital dental surgeon. He continued his professional training in general medicine, psychiatry, obstetrics and gynaecology and general medical practice. Ray then completed formal training in public health and became an NHS consultant in 1990. He has been a senior lecturer in dental public health at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne and is on the specialist registers for medical and dental public health and holds the DRCOG and the FFPHM (Postgraduate qualifications in obstetrics/gynaecology and public health medicine respectively). He retired in 2010 He has published over 50 articles in the learned press. He was the training programme director for public health in the Northern Region and an examiner for the Faculty of Public Health.



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## Questions and answers

Q: How do you tailor your performance to your audience?

A: Sometimes I am able to choose to perform to the demographic grouping that like what I do so it is easy to make sure that my material and my audience are closely aligned. Mostly I have to do market research (whom am I speaking to, what are their common interests, what unites them, what divides them, what will most of them find acceptable etc) and try to align audience and material.

Q: Sometimes we as speaker/bookers find we are hiring a pig-in-a-poke. For example, we have tried unknown comedians who have turned out to be offensive or too extreme for our members. Can you reassure us you are on the right side of the line?

A: I don't like offensive material anyway. When I have performed in comedy clubs late at night, I don't use offensive material and abhor the Fing and blinding that goes on (especially from the comperes). Of course I need to use stronger material when up against stronger opposition and audiences that demand it but I don't enjoy it and don't use it by choice. I try hard to play to who I call the *index member* of the audience: the one person in the room who has to approve, the one who will dampen the audience if too offended. Also, when I am dining with hosts prior to making an after-dinner speech, I try out (in my head) some of the stringer stories and ask myself if I can face the people who's company I have enjoyed after I have spoken. And finally, I will take a steer from my host/the person who has hired me.

Q: What is the ideal performance length?

A: Less is more. I'm not being lazy or trying to short-change you as a booker but I find people ask me to perform for longer than the audience sometimes want or can tolerate. Ideally it should be left up to me at the time; I can usually tell when they have had enough.

Q: Can you customise your performance.

A: Yes, if you supply well-known character names or traits/issues I can usually tailor some of the humour to include them. But please don't set me up with false or offensive leg-pulls if the audience won't be happy with the gag.

Q: What fee do you charge?

A: Anything from nothing (for charities, low-key meetings) through petrol money and a small honorarium, to £150, even higher for a big occasion although I do far fewer of those these days. Let's negotiate if you let me know what your budget is. If both sides are happy with the remuneration it makes for a more enjoyable show.

Q: Are there any other expenses we as bookers might have to cover?

A: I appreciate help with travel and occasionally have to stay over-night if the journey home is onerous.

Q: What's it like to be an after-dinner speaker?

A: Good fun but it can have its down-sides. *Here is a piece I did for my newspaper column which sums it up tongue-in-cheek.*

### **After-dinner stints**

You've probably seen him if you've been to formal dinners. He's the man (and he usually is a man) on the top table, red-faced through drink and bloated like a gluttonous bull-frog. He has kept his fellow VIPs in stitches with his jokes and banter (you can't quite catch what he's saying; your lowly status has banished you to the back of the room and the constant swish of the waiter-service doors makes concentration impossible). He's obviously the life and soul of the organisation. You can't wait to get a dose of what's making them all howl with laughter, tears streaming down their faces, especially as you seem to have been placed with professional bores. Now here he comes, at long last...

But he's only doing the introductions. No, the real speaker is the fellow sitting next to him. Yes, that thin, pale, anxious-looking wretch who's picked at his food all night and stuck to drinking water. He's the guy fated to make your evening, settle your indigestion and send you to the bar afterwards with a smile on your face despite the solidifying mass of rubber chicken and black forest gateaux in your stomach.

Pity the after-dinner speaker.

Anyone who has ever given an after-dinner speech will know what the man has been through. It all starts out quite innocently. Perhaps you have a good story or two that tickles the fancy of someone organizing a

dinner and they are strapped for someone to do the speech afterwards. As most organizers will tell you, they soon run out of good turns which are free or affordable and willing to squander an evening for you and your colleagues.

So you agree to do the after-dinner speech. It is flattering and seems innocent enough especially if you sign up months in advance. You might even fantasize that this is the break into the lucrative after-dinner circuit you have always craved. It's utterly seductive at that distance.

Then the reality sinks in. The date looms in your diary like your annual physical prostate examination. You panic when you realize who will be there in the audience – more enemies than friends. And your pile of sure-fire material now shrivels alarmingly like an Arctic explorer's organ in the outside latrine. What was once an appointment with joy now looks like a blind date with King Kong. And you'll be the banana.

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