

Life of J.B. Priestly

J.B. Priestly (John Boynton Priestly) was born in Bradford, Yorkshire in September 1894. His parents were middle class and his surroundings were similar to the town on Brumley where the Birling family from the play live.

After his time at school Priestly (aged 16) briefly worked as a clerk in a wool office before joining the British Army at the start of the First World War; he served on the Western Front and took part in the Battle of Loos. Some of his work reflects on this period of service.

In 1919 Priestly went to Cambridge University to study and then moved to London to be a writer. Despite producing novels, essays and articles Priestly is now primarily known as a playwright. Much of his writing includes his strong political beliefs and his hatred of lies and hypocrisy. We see evidence of this as he explores the inequalities in society in *An Inspector Calls*.

In 1942 Priestly helped to set up the Common Wealth Party, a new political party which believed in public ownership of land and a stronger emphasis on democracy. As a socialist, Priestly believed that we are all part of the same society and should therefore share any wealth and benefits. He thought it was essential that we all contribute to society rather than just take from it. In 1945 the Common Wealth Party joined with the Labour Party.

During the Second World War Priestly had a weekly slot on BBC Radio but eventually his broadcasts were cancelled, probably due to his criticism of the government of the time. Winston Churchill's Conservative cabinet believed his messages to be too based on socialism. It is possible that his broadcasts helped influence people to accept his ideas and, in turn, contributed to the Labour Party's win in the 1945 General Election. The character of Inspector Goole in *An Inspector Calls* appears to be the socialist voice of Priestly.