

THE MRS HOOVER SHOW

Introduction

COMEDY TIME WITH MRS HOOVER

Four o'clock. Time for tea. And scones. (Or is it *scones* ?) And time too for some plain speaking — some home truths about home.

The doyenne of English seaside landladies (she wouldn't like that word *doyenne* — "It's French, isn't it? Haven't you got a proper English word for it?") has come to Poland to sample the renowned hospitality.

After more than three decades of cost-conscious catering for foreign visitors in her little terraced house in Brighton, Mrs Joyce Hoover is impatient to share her knowledge with the rest of the world, including aspiring hostmothers on both sides of the Vistula.

"Hospitality is my vocation. Serving others. Taking in visitors. Call it what you will. It's not an easy job: *you* imagine having to sit and listen to a bunch of foreigners telling you, in one tense and a vocabulary of 120 words, everything that's wrong with your food, climate, national character and television programmes!

"But I know it's worth it when I take them on their first-day tour of *Joyles* " (that's the little terraced house she shares with her husband Leslie, two cats, a three-legged Scottie and a militant Welsh Terrier called Kenneth). "I show them all the advanced facilities of a modern English home — you know, the heated hostess trolley, the swing-lid tidy bin, the radiogram and the toilet-brush holder cosy — and I see the look of wonder in their eyes."

She's also on a mission, a one-woman campaign against the *foreigning* of the British way of life.

"Overseas visitors come to these shores for a taste of Britain. But what happens? They end up sitting in continental-style cafe-bars drinking cappuccino and eating baguettes and enchiladas. We have one of the greatest cuisines in the known world (I include the Scots here, with their taste for oatmeal, offal and high-fat pies) and yet it's one of our best-kept secrets. I mean, how many overseas visitors get to try Steak & Kidney pudding, Shepherd's Pie, Bubble and Squeak, or Faggots in Gravy? How many of them have ever heard of Spotted Dick and Custard, or Tinned Pears with Evaporated Milk?"

Mrs Hoover is not afraid of courting controversy in the political sphere, too.

In an age of mass culture, globalisation and devolved regional assemblies, she talks openly of a "reUnited Kingdom" and warns against absorption into a bland, European superstate. "It comes down to a choice between prepositions," she says. "Are we going to be *in* Europe, *out of* Europe, or (my own preferred option) *above* Europe?"

Vive la difference! you might say. Except you shouldn't. Because it's French.

Check out www.mrshoover.com