

Channel Hopper

Gerard O'Donovan

To tie in with *The Alan Clark Diaries*, BBC4 has been showing Clare Beavan's terrific adaptation of another Clark diary, this one by Alan's younger brother, Colin. Published in 1996, *The Prince, the Showgirl and Me* was a hilarious account of the summer 40 years earlier, when 24-year-old aspiring film-director Colin worked on Laurence Olivier and Marilyn Monroe's film version of *The Prince and the Showgirl*. It started with Colin (read winningly by Patrick Barlow) recording: "Larry and Vivien came down to stay the weekend at Saltwood Castle, my parents' home in Kent. Mama told Vivien I wanted to be in films. I was mortified." Thus Colin secured a job with Olivier's film company; and he proved the perfect, wide-eyed guide not only to Pinewood in the mid-1950s but

also to the awful, unwelcoming snobbery directed by Olivier and his cronies towards Monroe and her entourage. ("A self-satisfied, argumentative, pseudo-intellectual," sneered Sir Larry of Monroe's husband, playwright Arthur Miller.) Unsurprisingly, the shoot didn't go well, with Monroe constantly late and corpsing while Olivier seethed in infantile resentment. Colin captured it all in a scintillating style not dissimilar to his brother's, right down to the primly pithy accounts of sexual encounters. Even the final chapter, in which he described how he'd achieved an unsuspected intimacy with Monroe, had its charm, whether in reality that conquest was just a young man's fancy or an old rogue's desire to set tongues wagging.