

Oxfordshire Drama Network



Newsletter

OCTOBER 2026

EDITOR'S COMMENTS

Welcome to our October News.

We have a bumper crop of shows coming up; do try to see other group's shows.

In it there are more reviews from our 40th Festival entries. The awards will be presented at our Gala night on 10th October.

On a legal point, it is now law to put the total price to be paid for tickets on adverts etc, to include all compulsory fees. This mainly applies to on-line sales.

Mike Davies (Next issue Dec; deadline 20th Nov)



CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

Just like any show or performance the ODN committee are getting excited to welcome you to the 40th anniversary celebration on October 10th.

We have a performance from children and some sketches, poems and comedy readings from group members, as well as plenty of time to 'chill and chat' with a Mediterranean sharing platter during the evening and a glass of fizz on arrival (don't forget to bring your own drinks as well) And, we can't wait to hear who's going to get awards and hear the feedback from the summer festival as well, so it's all setting the scene for a fabulous evening!

ODN will soon be getting a new updated easy to use website as well and the committee are always looking at how to make the Umbrella of ODN even better for all the members and groups. Please always let us know if you have ideas or suggestions or need help or advice.

And then, quick as a flash we start gearing up into the winter festival with all the songs, colours, costumes, cheekiness and dramas, both on and off stage!! But coming full circle once again with the seasons of plays, musicals, shows and original performances, bringing in new actors and members, seeing others move on but holding onto the total love and dedication of the whole theatre family!

What will we see next?

Mandyrae ODN chair.



WHAT'S ON DIARY (details inside)

OCTOBER

6-10	Oxford Theatre Guild	King Lear
16,17	The New Nortonians	Larkrise (Staged Reading)
17	BCOS (Bicester)	Divas & Crooners
18	Buttercross (Witney)	Comedy Showcase
21-24	Henley Players	Gaslight
21-24	Kidlington A.O.S.	Sister Act
27-31	Abingdon Operatic Society	Come From Away
28-31	ADC (Abingdon)	"1984"
28-31	AmEgos	2:22 A Ghost Story
28-31	Banbury Operatic Society	9 to 5!
29-31	Witney Drama S	Hound of the Baskervilles

NOVEMBER

17-21	Studio T.C.	The Importance of being Earnest
19-21	Banbury Cross Players	The Girl on the Train
19-21	Compton Players	Calendar Girls
19-21	Hooky Players	"Ladies' Day"
25-28	Bartholomew Players	Plaza Suite
25-28	Blewbury Players	A Christmas Carol
26-28	Chiltern Players	Prescription for Murder
26-28	Kingston Bagpuize D.G.	Wizard of Oz, (Panto)
26-28	Wychwood Players	Fallen Angels

DECEMBER

3-5	DADS (Dorchester)	"A Spot of Murder"
3-5	Thame Players	Robin Hood - The Panto

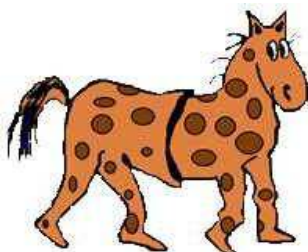
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40th Anniversary Festival Gala Awards Evening

The 40th Anniversary festival will culminate in our Gala Awards Evening, which will be held at Southmoor Village Hall, Draycott Rd, Southmoor, OX13 5BY on Saturday 10 October at 7.30 pm. Everyone will be welcome, but we especially hope that representatives from every participating group will join us to celebrate the festival—and perhaps collect an award! Further details about the evening, including booking information, will be circulated over the coming weeks.

We look forward to celebrating with you all with a glass of fizz on arrival and a Mediterranean sharing platter during the evening (don't forget to bring your own drinks as well).

WINTER FESTIVAL 2026/2027



Once again we will be running our Winter Competition for Musicals, Pantomimes or Seasonal Plays etc. Entries must be in by 5th December at the latest.

Entry forms available soon – see our website :-

www.oxfordshiredramanetwork.org/node/1679

Here is a list of some of the awards that we will be presenting next year at our 2027 AGM

AWARDS

The following are typical of the awards which will be presented at the Annual General Meeting next year.

- **The All-Round Production .**
- **Rising Star Award** (for Under 18's)
- **Musical Award** – this can include any incidental music, song, live performance.
- **Best Costume**
- **Chorus Award**
- **Best Baddie**
- **Best Cameo**
- **Best Front of House** experience
- **Best Tech** – this will include special effects, lighting, sound
- **Magic Moment**
- **Best Comedy** Performance

PROPS OFFERED

Roman/Greek pillars

I have a pair of polystyrene Roman/Greek pillars if any group wants to use them. They are 8 feet (2.43 metres) tall and are painted in sandstone colour. They were created for me by professional scenery makers and so are already fireproofed. Contact John Grant-Casey to hire or buy them.

johngc0007@gmail.com



PROPS WANTED

For Ladies' Day

Have you performed Ladies' Day? Hooky Players would be grateful for help with any props or costumes, especially white coats. If you have any, or know where we could find them, please contact secretary@hookyplayers.co.uk thank you.

AUDITIONS

AmEgos Theatre

is excited to announce our spring 2027 Musical
Dear Evan Hansen

If you are interested in taking part, please come along to the Talk in on Sunday 1st November.

That will be followed by auditions (15th Nov) and Call backs (22nd Nov)

Rehearsals start on Sunday 29th November for show dates of 8 - 10th April 2027.

Rehearsals and auditions will be in Childrey, performances in Wantage.

To get on the mailing list for this show, please email us at - AmEgos.Theatre@gmail.com

CASTING CALL

Young Scrooge & Fred for HAODS'

A Christmas Carol — The Musical

HAODS (Henley) are looking for a young male performer, aged 20–35, to play Young Ebenezer Scrooge and Fred in our upcoming musical production of A Christmas Carol.

THE ROLE

This is a fantastic dual role for a performer who can bring energy, charm, vulnerability and emotional depth to the stage.

As Young Scrooge, you'll play a man at the beginning of his journey — hopeful, passionate and capable of love, before the choices and disappointments of life begin to change him. As Fred, you'll bring that same warmth into the present day: Scrooge's cheerful, optimistic nephew who refuses to give up on his uncle despite his bitterness and rejection. The two roles offer a wonderful opportunity to show range within the same character lineage — from youthful idealism, through heartbreak, to the enduring power of kindness.

THE REHEARSALS

Monday and Wednesday at 7.30 in our Studio

Performance dates: November 18-21 2026, at The Kenton Theatre, Henley-on-Thames.

Contact:

the Director, markhampshire@gmail.com
or Julie Huntington, chair@haods.org

Laughter is Medicine

A Surgical Approach to Comedy

By David Hogan

ALICIA: Rex! Here, Rex! Come, Rex!

REX: (*Enters.*) Stop treating me like a dog. I'm going.

ALICIA: Stay! (*Rex stops.*) I don't treat you like a dog.

REX: You do.

ALICIA: No, I don't. (*Points to chair.*) Sit!

That's a scene from my play *The Value of Verity*, an adaptation of *The Importance of Being Earnest* set in a modern American high school. But how dog-like is Rex? Does he pant, hang his tongue out, and seem wolfish? Or is he not doggish in the least, but rather a proud and well-behaved (sorry, intelligent) high school sophomore repeatedly offended by the treatment from his sister?

Of course, this choice will depend on the actor, the director, and the production. There will be

productions where a canine-like Rex provides the perfect opportunity for physical and character comedy, and other productions where a continually offended and very human Rex evokes laughter and sympathy in equal measures.

The important thing is that, in addition to Alicia's obliviousness, there are other things to laugh at. That's because the best comedies will always have more than one of four types of comedy happening simultaneously.

Let's go over the four types of comedy:

1. Shakespeare said that brevity is the soul of wit, so let's go on about that a little bit, shall we? Because verbal comedy is one of the basic types of stage humor. Besides wit, it



occurs in the form of puns, malapropos, banter, sarcasm, and innuendo. These are the original and eternal ways of making jokes. The only problem with that is, as Tom Stoppard wrote in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, "Eternity is a terrible thought. I mean, where's it going to end?" He has a point, so I suppose I'll stop writing about verbal comedy before Mrs. Malaprop from Sheridan's *The Rivals* accuses me of being "as headstrong as an allegory on the banks of the Nile."

2. You won't believe what happened to me as I was trying to write this next line. I'd just finished a banana and was standing at my desk racking my brain about what to say about another type of comedy. I couldn't think of anything, so I spun around in frustration and then just kept spinning and spinning as I slipped on the peel I'd just discarded. Oh well, perhaps as I nurse my wounded pride, I'll use this as a workable, if clichéd, example of physical comedy.

3. Irony can be described as a linguistic device in which the actual or intended meaning is literally not the literal meaning. But that's not the irony I want to write about, which is ironic. (Or is it?) Dramatic irony, on the other hand, is when the audience of a play knows more than the characters do. This is a classic form of situational comedy that also includes farce, reversals, escalation, and mistaken identity. There's nothing ironic about that. (Or is there?)

4. Obsessive characters can be quite fun to watch as they go on and on and on about their obsessions. The only concern is if they become tiresome as they go on and on and on. Because going on and on and on about... well, I think you get the idea about this type of character comedy so I don't have to go on and on and on about any of the other types of comedic characters, including the eccentric, fool, straight man, etc.

Laughter is the best medicine because it triggers a cascade of rapid physical, neurological, and emotional benefits that lower stress, reduce pain, and

more. A hearty laugh acts as a natural tool to bring your mind and body back into balance. In today's world, we all can use a good laugh, and what better place to get it than in a theatre? Of course, not everyone responds the same to the different types of humor, and people often have a preference for one style over another. As a director, try to include multiple types of humor happening simultaneously in your staged comedy so that everyone can find something to laugh at.

While laughter is involuntary and personal, it is also contagious. That's why in any funny play, you hope to get someone laughing at some type of comedy — verbal, physical, situational, or character — so that they can infect others around them with their merriment. Indeed, one of the most wonderful things for all playwrights and directors is watching actors turn mere words on a page into communal joy and laughter — that is, into the unique and uplifting magic of live theatre.

David Hogan is an award-winning author of novels, short stories, stage plays, and screenplays. He is a graduate of Vanderbilt University and Babson College and a dual citizen of Ireland and the US. You can learn about David on his blog at www.DavidHoganWriter.com

From: www.pioneerdrama.com

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Oxford Theatre Guild

King Lear

By William Shakespeare

This production of King Lear re-imagines Shakespeare's tragedy in a modern-day setting, centred on the private world of a wealthy, influential family. This is no longer a kingdom in the traditional sense, but a personal empire built on status, history, and control. Power here is not political, it is familial, and the consequences of its division are deeply personal.

At the centre is Lear, the patriarch or matriarch of the household, who chooses to divide their estate between their children based on public declarations of love. This act fractures the family, setting in motion a rapid and devastating collapse of relationships, identity, and stability.

When: Tuesday 6th to Saturday 10th October at 7.30

Plus a 2.30 matinee on Saturday

Where: The Pegasus Theatre, Magdalen Road, Oxford.

Tickets: £18/£16 (+£2 Booking fee)

<https://pegasustheatre.org.uk/events/king-lear>



The New Nortonians

Larkrise by Flora Thompson

A Staged Reading

The story of Lark Rise is a semi-autobiographical account written by Flora Thompson, depicting late 19th-century rural English life in a small Oxfordshire hamlet based on her childhood home of Juniper Hill.

Where: The Glyme Hall Chipping Norton

When: Friday 16th and Saturday 17th October 2026 .

Tickets: available from September

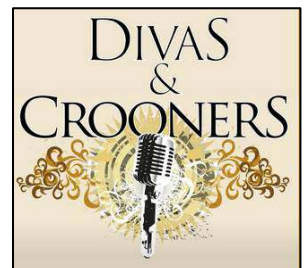
Email: williamsbill614@gmail.com

BCOS

(Bicester Choral & Operatic Society)

Divas & Crooners

A concert of amazing music featuring hits from artists as diverse as Shirley Bassey to Whitney Houston, Frank Sinatra to Freddie Mercury, Shirley Bassey, Adele, Michael Bublé, & Harry Connick Junior.



When: Saturday, 17 October at 7:30 PM

Where: St Edburg's Church, Bicester

Tickets: from Coles Books, Bicester or

www.ticketsource.co.uk/bcos (+ booking Fees)

Buttercross Theatre Productions

Comedy Showcase

The Comedy That
Didn't Go So
Wrong...Or Did It?

Get ready for an evening of laughter, surprises and pure theatrical fun! A Comedy Showcase brings together a lively mix of performance styles, featuring fast-paced

modern Shakespearean comedy based on his Sonnets, alongside improvised and devised pieces, complete with audience participation, created and performed by a talented ensemble of actors.

Expect sharp wit, playful chaos, and a joyful celebration of all things comedic.

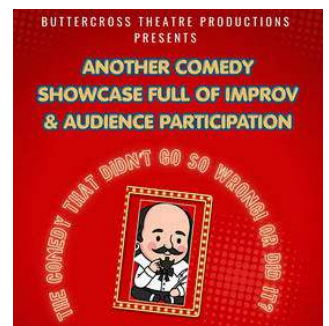
This show is perfect for audiences of all ages who love imaginative, spirited theatre.

When: Sunday 18th October at 6pm

Where: Langdale Hall, Witney, OX28 6AB

Tickets: Adults £7.50 from:

www.buttercrosstheatreproductions.co.uk



Henley Players

Gaslight

by Patrick Hamilton

Bella Manningham is afraid that she is losing her mind. Her own home seems to have taken on a malevolent presence, with valuable items going missing and objects being moved. Are the servants to blame, with some kind of vendetta against her?

Then a stranger appears with a story to tell, and tensions build as secrets start to unravel. Step into a world where every shadow whispers and every flicker of the gaslight hides a secret.

When: 21st and 22nd October 7.30pm Adult: £20.00, Student, Senior, Keepers/Friends: £19.00
23rd and 24th October 7.30pm All **Tickets:** £22
24th October 2.30 matinee: Pay What You Like: £7.50 minimum

Where: Kenton Theatre, New Street, Henley-on-Thames, RG9 2BP

Tickets: from The Kenton Theatre Box office: 01491 525050 or www.thekenton.org.uk

Website: www.henleyplayers.com



Abingdon Operatic Society

Come From Away

A Musical by Irene Sankoff and David Hein.

The remarkable true story of 7,000 air passengers who were stranded in the wake of 9/11. Grounded in the tiny town of Gander, Newfoundland, when US airspace closed, the community grew to double its original size overnight. The musical details the extraordinary charity, kindness and open-hearted hospitality of the local townspeople, who provided shelter, food and comfort to completely unknown travellers during a global crisis.

Tickets are available at a special rate for young theatre goers who were born after the event in 2001.

When: Tue 27th to Sat 31st October at 7.30pm
+ Saturday Matinee 2.30pm

Venue: The Amey Theatre, Abingdon School, Park Road, Abingdon, OX14 1DE

Tickets: £20 Adults, £18 Seniors,
£16 Young People (25 years old and under)

by calling 0333 666 3366 at £20 / £18 / £16 or
online at £21.56 / £19.40 / £17.25 from:

<https://www.ticketsource.com/abingdonoperatic>



KAOS

Sister Act

When nightclub singer Deloris Van Cartier is placed in protective custody in a convent, chaos and harmony quickly follow. Disguised as a nun, Deloris transforms the struggling choir into a soulful sensation, discovering friendship, purpose and the power of music along the way.

Bursting with disco-inspired songs, high-energy choreography and laugh-out-loud moments, Sister Act is a joyful celebration of community, confidence and finding your voice. This vibrant production recommended for 12+.

A fun, uplifting night

When: Wed 21st to Sat 24th October at 7.30pm

Where: The Gosford Hill Theatre, Kidlington

Tickets: £15/£10 from Oxford Building Supplies, Anemone Florist, Kidlington or
www.ticketsource.com/KidlingtonKAOS (£16.04/£10.69)

Music by ALAN MENKEN Lyrics by GLENN SLATER Book by CHERI STEINKELLNER and BILL STEINKELLNER. Additional book material DOUGLAS CARTER BEANE. Based on the Touchstone Picture Motion Picture 'Sister Act' written by Joseph Howard



ADC (Abingdon)

"1984"

By George Orwell, Adapted
by Nick Hern

Big Brother is watching. Are you listening? Oceania is a world ruled by fear. The Party watches everything. History is rewritten. Truth is whatever those in power decide it to be. Under the ever-present gaze of big brother, Winston Smith risks everything in a desperate search for freedom, love and human connection.

A story of rebellion, betrayal and the fight for the human soul, 1984 remains one of the most compelling warning ever written.

Set in All Saints Church in Sutton Courtenay where George Orwell is buried, it explores the unsettling relationship between faith, authority and control. Told through immersive sound, choral voices, electronic music and striking visual imagery.

When: Wed 28th to Sat 31st October at 7:30pm

Where: All Saints Church, Sutton Courtenay, OX14 4AE

Tickets: £15 (£12 conc) from The Bookstore, 15 Bury St (The Precinct) or
from <https://www.abingdondramaclub.co.uk>
£15.17 (£12.94)



AmEgos 2:22 A Ghost Story

by Danny Robins

Jenny and Sam have recently moved into their new home. But something feels frightening and wrong. Very wrong.

Every night at 2:22 there is the sound of footsteps coming from the baby's room. Could the house be haunted?

As the clock ticks on, secrets will emerge and ghosts may appear ...

When: 28 - 31st October at 7.30pm

Where: Buscot Park Theatre, nr Faringdon.

Tickets: £14.30 from AmEgos Website:
www.AmEgosTheatre.com



Banbury Operatic Society

9 to 5!

Music and lyrics
by Dolly Parton

Set in the late 1970s, this hilarious story of friendship and revenge in the Rolodex era is outrageous,

thought-provoking and even a little romantic.

Pushed to the boiling point, three female co-workers concoct a plan to get even with the sexist, egotistical, lying, hypocritical bigot they call their boss. In a hilarious turn of events, Violet, Judy and Doralee live out their wildest fantasy – giving their boss the boot!

With clever schemes, unexpected twists and plenty of laugh-out-loud moments; packed with catchy songs, big dance numbers and unstoppable energy, 9 to 5 is a feel-good celebration of empowerment, friendship and the joy of fighting back...with style!

Based on the seminal 1980 hit movie.

When: Wed 28th to Sat 31st October at 7.30pm

plus matinee 2.30pm on Saturday 31st

Where: Wykham Theatre, Wykham Park Academy, Ruskin Road, Banbury OX16 9HY

Tickets: £18.70 (£16.50 conc) from
<https://www.ticketsource.com/banburyoperaticsociety>



Witney Dramatic Society Hound of the Baskervilles

A spoof

by Steven Canny and
John Nicholson

A brilliantly funny fast-paced spoof packed with mystery, mayhem and theatrical ingenuity.

When Sir Charles Baskerville is found dead on the fog-shrouded moors of Devon, rumours are abound of a terrifying supernatural hound that has haunted the Baskerville family for generations. With danger lurking around every corner, Holmes and Watson are called upon to unravel the truth behind the legend before another Baskerville falls victim to the curse.

This inventive comedy combines classic detective drama with hilarious comedy and plenty of surprises along the way.

Will Holmes solve the case? Is there really a monstrous hound stalking the moors? And can Watson keep up?

When: Thur 29th to Sat 31st October at 7.30pm

Place: The Corn Exchange, Market Sq. Witney, OX28 6AB

Tickets: Truck Music Store, Woolgate Centre, Witney, or: On the door £15

Online: (£16.26) from:

www.ticketsource.co.uk/witney-dramatic-society



Studio Theatre Club The Importance of being Earnest

by Oscar Wilde

It's a frothy, frivolous, brilliantly witty play.

With a glitteringly funny plot, it mocks Victorian hypocrisy by highlighting the absurdity of a society that prizes superficial appearances over genuine truth.

Our first, post-Unicorn, play will be an in-the-round staging of Oscar Wilde's comic masterpiece at Abingdon's Old Magistrates' Court.

When: Tue 17th to Sat 21st November at 7:30pm

Where: Old Magistrates' Court, Bridge St, Abingdon, OX14 3HU

Tickets: from <https://www.studiotheatreclub.com>

and (nearer show dates) from The Bookstore, Bury St (The Precinct), Abingdon

N.B. Fri & Sat Sold out already!



Banbury Cross Players The Girl on the Train

Every day, Rachel takes the train. Every day, she watches them. The couple who seem to have the perfect life. Until one day, she sees something she can't explain.

Then, the woman disappears.

Now Rachel must work out what she saw – and whether she can trust her own memory.

Where: The Mill Arts Centre Banbury

When: Thu 19th to Sat 21st November at 7.30pm
+ matinee 2.30pm Saturday

Tickets: £17 from

www.themillartscentre.co.uk/event/the-girl-on-the-train

or call The Mill Box Office on 01295 279002.

Based on the bestselling novel by Paula Hawkins and DreamWorks film, and adapted by Rachel Wagstaff and Duncan Abel, this amateur production of "THE GIRL ON THE TRAIN" is presented by arrangement with Concord Theatricals Ltd. on behalf of Samuel French Ltd.



Compton Players Calendar Girls

by Juliette Towhidi
and Tim Firth

Calendar Girls is the heart-warming and uplifting true story of friendship, courage, and community spirit. The play follows a group of women who create an unexpected fundraising calendar in support of a local cause.

Full of laughter, warmth, and poignant moments, this much-loved tale celebrates resilience, camaraderie, and the power of ordinary people to do something extraordinary.

When: Thu 19th to Sat 21st November at 7.30pm

Where: Compton Village Hall, Burrell Rd,
Compton, RG20 6NP

Tickets: £12 / £10 from:

www.comptonplayers.co.uk



Hooky Players "Ladies' Day"

By Amanda Whittington

Be transported back to 2005, to a fish packing factory in Hull. Life is a long, hard slog for the fish trimming ladies Pearl, Jan, Shelley, and Linda.

But their fortunes are set to change when they head to Ladies' Day at Royal Ascot. Factory overalls and hairnets make way for posh frocks and fascinators as the four friends hit the races for an eventful day out.

Will the ladies fulfil their dreams? Will they find fame and fortune or rekindle a lost romance? Secrets are spilled with the champagne and friendships are tested to the limit as the day unfolds and tempers fray. Are they doomed to disappointment or will they hit the jackpot?

When: Thu 19th to Sat 21st November at 7.30pm

Where: Hook Norton Memorial Hall,

Tickets: £12.30 from <https://www.hookyplayers.co.uk>



Bartholomew Players Plaza Suite

by Neil Simon

Three bitter-sweet but funny plays all set in the same plush hotel suite at the Plaza Hotel in New York in the 1960's.

Directed by one of our Patrons, Laurence Marks (co-author of many well-known TV series including "Birds of a Feather" and "Goodnight Sweetheart").

When: Wed 25th to Sat 28th November at 7.30pm

Where: Eynsham Village Hall, Back Lane,
Eynsham, OX29 4QW

Tickets: £14 from Evenlode DIY or on the door

Website: www.bartholomewplayers.co.uk



Blewbury Players

A Christmas Carol

by Charles Dickens,
adapted by
Myf Laugharne.

Our aim is to create a Victorian London Christmas Eve which will surround the audience from the moment they enter the Church.

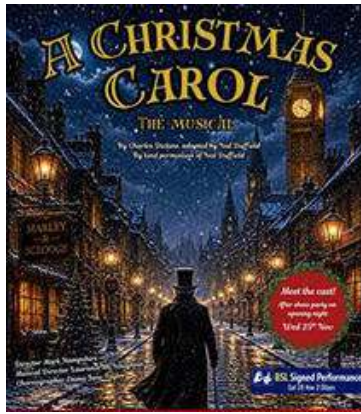
We may be a little early with our performance in late November, but we want to inject a little piece of Christmas spirit for everyone to take away with them, as Advent begins.

When: Wed 25 to Sat 28 November

Where: St Michael's Church, Blewbury

Tickets: available from 30th October via

<https://www.blewburyplayers.co.uk/a-christmas-carol>



Chiltern Players

Prescription for Murder

by Norman Robbins

The play, as might be guessed from the title, is a gripping murder mystery.

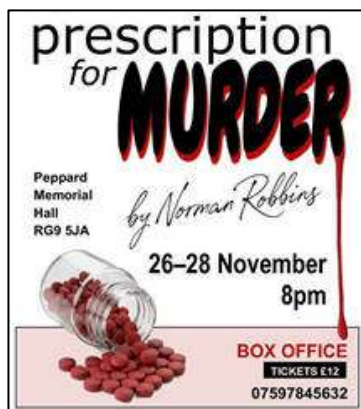
There is never a dull moment for Dr. Richard Forth. Not only does he have a hectic work schedule and an awkward friendship with his ex-girlfriend, but his wife, Barbara, is constantly ill and nobody knows what is wrong with her. When Eric Dawson, a stranger, claims to have known Richard's second fiancée - a woman Richard claims does not exist, Barbara's health worsens. With bad luck spreading almost as quickly as bad news, it seems somebody is out to kill Barbara, and anyone else who gets in their way.

When: Thur 26th to Sat 28th November at 8pm

Where: Peppard War Memorial Hall,
Peppard Common, RG9 5JA

Tickets: £12 from 07597 845632

or email ChilternPlayersTickets@Yahoo.com



Kingston Bagpuize Drama Group

The Wizard of Oz,

The Pantomime

by James Barry

Follow the Yellow Brick Road to Kingston Bagpuize this November for The Wizard of Oz, The Pantomime !

Join Dorothy and Toto on a magical adventure as they encounter the Scarecrow, Tinman, Cowardly Lion, Munchkins, Wicked Witch and plenty of monkeys along the way. Expect laughs, music, mayhem and all the traditional fun of a family pantomime. Supporting Sobell House

When:

Thursday 26 & Friday 27 Nov: 7.30pm

Saturday 28 Nov: matinee 2pm, evening: 6.30pm

Where: Southmoor Village Hall, Draycott Rd,
Southmoor, OX13 5BY

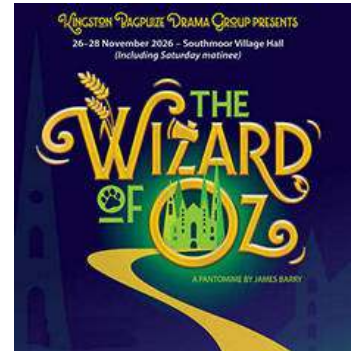
Free parking, licensed bar and soft drinks available.

Tickets: Adults £16, Children £11

Family (2 adults + 2 children) £52

Book via TicketSource:

www.ticketsource.com/kingston-bagpuize-drama-group



Wychwood Players

Fallen Angels

by Noel Coward

Two women receive postcards from the debonair Maurice, a former friend and old flame. Now happily married to dutiful but dull husbands the women decide how to respond. Champagne flows and chaos and misunderstanding follows as the husbands arrive home early from their golf weekend!

A sparkling evening of 'Cocktails, Canape and Comedy'

Enjoy a relaxed evening seated around tables with a delicious array of nibbles and a festive cocktail or mocktail to compliment the entertainment.

Funny, charming and not to be missed!

When: Thu 26th to Sat 28th November at 7.30pm

Where: The New Beaconsfield Hall,
Shipton-under-Wychwood, OX7 6BQ.

Tickets: see www.wychwoodplayers.com



"A Spot of Murder"

by Geoff Bamber

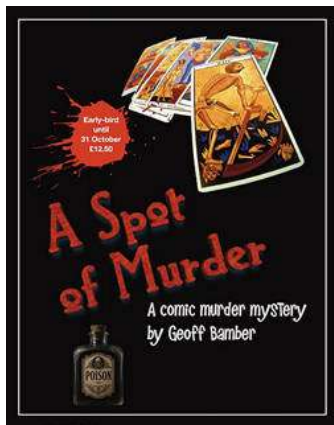
When faded theatrical diva Corrina Marcham senses that she is in great danger, she calls in Detective Inspector Trench to investigate a murder that hasn't been committed yet - her own. With the suspects marooned at the Marchams' isolated house because of a storm, Corrina ensures that Trench's journey has not been wasted by conveniently dying. Has Corrina simply died of fright after an alarming Tarot card reading? Has she committed suicide in a bout of thespian depression, or has she really been murdered? And by whom?

Can Trench and the eager PC Pendlebury uncover the truth before they have to call in somebody else to do it properly?

When: Thu 3rd to Sat 5th December at 7:30pm

Where: Dorchester on Thames Village Hall,
7 Queen Street, OX10 7HR

Tickets: £14 from www.ticketsource.co.uk/dads
(Early Bird £12.50 up to 31st October)
By arrangement with Lazy Bee scripts

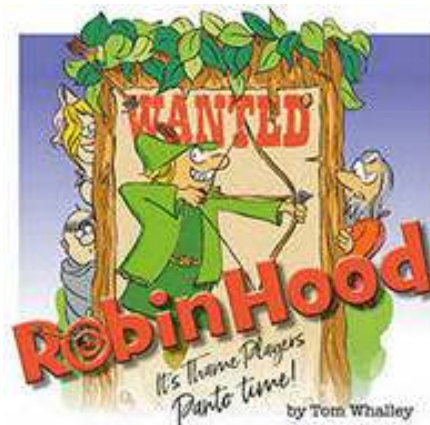


Robin Hood - The Panto

by Tom Whalley.

As always there will be fun and laughter for all the family.

The show is almost certain to sell out, so make sure you don't miss it.



When:

Thu 3rd to Sun 6th December &
Wed 9th to Sun 13th December

Weds Thurs & Fridays at 7.45pm

Saturdays & Sundays at 2pm & 5.30pm

Total running time Approx 2.5Hrs

Where: The Players Theatre, Nelson Street,
Thame, OX9 2DP

Tickets: £11 to £13 (inc fees) from
www.thameplayers.co.uk from 19th Oct

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REVIEWS

The Sinodun Players Murder, Margaret and Me by Philip Meeks

Dame Agatha Christie had a deep connection to Wallingford, she served as Sinodun Players president from 1951-1976 and was a regular member of the audience for pantomimes and shows performed in the Masonic Hall. It seems very fitting that the Players celebrate her by performing this production to mark the 50th anniversary of her passing.

Murder, Margaret and Me is a play that delves into the unlikely friendship between the actress Dame Margaret Rutherford and the renowned mystery writer Dame Agatha Christie. The play takes you through certain life events of these two powerful feminine forces; beginning with the first meeting which ends in mutual disdain all the way through to the ending where secrets from both ladies' pasts are revealed leading to an uncompromising friendship. The story is narrated in sorts by 'The Spinster' as she is billed in the programme and in the directors notes he states 'I shall leave you to find out for yourselves who she is and what role she has to play. What would a play about the Queen of Crime be without a little mystery?'.


As soon as you entered the theatre you were immersed in the production as you looked down upon the stage to see 'The Spinster', sat in a rocking chair downstage left, knitting away whilst being accompanied by music from the Marple suite from the films. This created a very welcoming atmosphere and grasped the audience's attention from the onset; making us all excited for what was to come and who the woman knitting could be. The programme continued the theme of the production with a very pretty blue and white flower pattern and a picture of afternoon tea on the front page.


The set design was very good, mostly indicated place, and swept the audience into the world of the mid twentieth century. The furniture and properties were excellent; from Dame Agatha's office, which

housed her trusty typewriter, to Dame Margaret's house, which included a piano topped with picture frames, to a very grand chandelier which appeared from the sky to add some elegance to certain scenes. The background of the stage was adorned with large, bright projections of illustrations of different locations which were used creatively to move from one scene to the next and created atmosphere. The illustration of the large tree in Madras, India, was particularly beautifully striking and played a poignant part in the latter stages of the play. The original artwork was by local artist Alison Williamson and in the style reminiscent of the British artist Eric Ravilious.

Clever set changes with minimal props supported the transitions of scenes and guided the audience through the pace and movement of the play. Music was highly appropriate and used to great effect during these scene changes and to create a different mood and atmosphere. Pieces of which included Song of India by Rimsky Korsakov, the ITV Poirot theme and the main Marple theme from the movies. Sound effects were minimal but were executed with precision; a particular stand out was when Dame Margaret entered on a pony and trap and a stage hand came behind her with two coconut shells to create the sound effect of the pony's hooves. The lighting and use of all space on stage was very effectively used to create different areas on the stage and indicated movement to different 'places' and passage of time. This minimized the need for intensive movement of furniture and props around the set which allowed the play to flow at a good pace. The only downfall to this was the use of stagehands to bring on and remove props at some points which was intrusive and distracting from the atmosphere of the piece which the director had gone to great lengths to establish.

The use of makeup and period costumes was exactly right in portraying gentrified middle England, communicating the attributes of the characters immediately and accurately; especially that of 'The Spinster' (aka. Miss Marple as we find out at the end of the play). Costumes were also used throughout the piece to amplify a change in location with small changes in hats, cloaks and scarfs executed superbly throughout.

Sensitive interpretation of the script by director Simon Tavener allowed the audience a good insight into the characters on stage and their relationships and the development of these during the play. It was clear to see the cast was well rehearsed with confident movement, good quality interactions between the actors, vocal skills and stage groupings; this demonstrated a good rapport between the cast, crew and director. The director's interpretation of the three roles was obvious in the way he worked with the cast to develop each one to bring out their different personalities and characters.

The whole play was underpinned with strong acting throughout from all players. Jay Aggettas the spinster was brilliant throughout and demonstrated great skill in presenting the three very different characters she portrayed in very convincing style. She has a keen understanding of theatrical skills and uses them to excellent effect. Marilyn Johnstone was entirely convincing as Dame Margaret Rutherford. She had clearly studied her characteristics intensely and was able to produce her remarkably accurate facial expression and voice. Marilyn also successfully managed to interpret Dame Rutherford's moodiness and depressive periods whilst never losing a grip on the amazing energy she brought to this role. Last but certainly no means least, Sarah Enticknap's characterisation of Dame Agatha Christie was secure and sustained throughout. She portrayed the softening of the character, who was almost brutal at the start, with sensitivity and flair as the play progressed.

Well done to everyone at Sinodun players, an utterly enjoyable production and an apt commemoration to Dame Agatha Christie.

40th FESTIVAL REVIEWS

Sinodun Players

Underdog: the other Brontë

July 2026

Congratulations to Sinodun Players for a successful and imaginative production of Sarah Gordon's portrayal of the Brontë sisters.

Foyer was pleasant and welcoming and the Front of House staff were courteous and efficient. The stage was open and the projection of the Yorkshire Dales around Haworth set the scene immediately. The simple and unfussy set created changing locales and atmospheres very clearly. Costumes and makeup were appropriate in supporting the specific era, characters and atmosphere of the play. Lights and sound underpinned the production very creatively to create mood and atmosphere – particularly during the 'editor' scene and the letter writing scene. All effects were executed with precision. Projections were used to great effect throughout the production, e.g. Branwell's argument with his father, the Victorian toilet scene and the scene with Branwell and Emily. The music was chosen with care and the choice based on solid research. Pangbourne choral society performed beautifully. Unfortunately, it was not always possible to hear their wonderful renditions.

Acting was generally very good and, at times, excellent. Actors were well rehearsed and

worked well together, particularly in the ensemble scenes. The atmosphere of the piece and its characters were well understood and consistent throughout the production, as were the accents. The dynamics between the three Brontë sisters was particularly well portrayed, e.g. the finale of Act I. Their development of the 'cracks' appearing in the sisters' relationships due to Charlotte's ambition was very well done as was the death scene of Anne and Emily and their subsequent 'conversations'.

Natalie Davies gave a convincing performance as Charlotte. She was particularly strong in the London scenes, while writing Jane Eyre and in her interaction with her dead sisters.

Holly Smithson's interpretation of the character of Emily was excellent. Her rebellious spirit came through always. The portrayal of her different relationship with each of her sisters was clear and consistent throughout.

Sorrel Gibson gave a spirited performance as Anne Brontë, capturing her quiet strength and developing her independence perfectly.

Heather Banyard was excellent as Branwell. She portrayed the sensitive and rather weak brother's attempts at projecting the patriarchal Victorian male perfectly.

The ensemble and supporting actors were very well rehearsed and all gave strong performances. Their interactions were smooth and confident and their role play was spot on. Alex Watts as Professor Heger and Donna Thomson as Mrs. Robinson/Ingham gave particularly noteworthy performances.

Dorothy Hirsch directed the play with sensitivity and a light touch. She did not labour points but rather used minimal and unfussy settings to clearly establish the atmosphere and message of the play, e.g. having Charlotte write on the floor was novel and imaginative. Using minimal props for maximum theatrical effect. The rejection letters scene was, again, handled with simplicity for maximum effect – the message came through clearly.

Her use of supporting actors to add texture was always safe and supported the main action very well. Stage groupings were meaningful and underpinned by a firm understanding of motivation. The shaping of the whole piece and her creative use of lighting, demonstrates Dorothy's impressive understanding of theatrical dynamics.

Encore Youth Theatre

"Around the stage in 5 plays"

Encore Youth Theatre's latest production, *Around the Stage in 5 Plays*, was performed in the midst of one of this summer's hottest spells, making for a rather warm evening in the theatre. Yet neither the soaring temperatures nor the lack of air conditioning could dampen the enthusiasm of the 48 young performers, whose energy and commitment shone throughout the performance.

Encore Youth Theatre, the junior section of Sinodun Players, has always placed inclusivity and enjoyment at the heart of everything it does, and this production was a perfect reflection of that ethos. Devised and directed by Diana Christie, *Around the Stage in 5 Plays* cleverly combines adaptations of five much-loved classics—*Around the World in 80 Days*, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, *The Railway Children*, *Treasure Island* and *Alice in Wonderland*—into one imaginative adventure.

The presentation of the production perfectly reflected Encore's approach to storytelling. Rather than relying on elaborate scenery, the action unfolded against a striking backdrop of five brightly painted flats, each depicting one of the classic stories featured in the evening's adventure. It was a colourful and effective design that immediately established the production's journey through different worlds, while leaving plenty of space for the cast to bring each scene to life. The props were simple and inventive, with small pieces of scenery carried on and off by the young performers, allowing locations to change seamlessly without interrupting the flow of the action. I particularly enjoyed the folded cardboard ship's bow, behind which the cast stood to create the illusion of travelling by sea, the fantastic elephant on a stick during *Around the World in 80 Days*, and the cardboard train front that instantly transported us to *The Railway Children*. *Alice in Wonderland* offered some especially imaginative visual moments, from the wonderfully surreal Salvador Dalí-esque table complete with oversized teapot to the inspired use of the 'Drink Me' bottle, where a tiny bottle was cleverly replaced with an oversized version to create the illusion of shrinking.

The costumes were equally impressive. Bright, colourful designs brought *Alice in Wonderland*, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, *Treasure Island* and *Around the World in 80 Days* vividly to life, while *The Railway Children* was appropriately dressed in period costume. We were told that some outfits had been adapted to help the cast cope with the exceptional heat, but this certainly wasn't apparent from the audience's perspective. Lighting, music and sound effects complemented the action beautifully, helping each of the five stories develop

its own distinctive atmosphere without ever overwhelming the performance.

With a cast of 48, this was always going to be an ensemble piece, and that was undoubtedly its greatest strength. From the opening tableau, with the cast absorbed in their newspapers as the upbeat music burst into life, the stage was filled with energy that never really faltered, despite the sweltering conditions. The chorus work was well choreographed throughout, creating atmosphere and transporting the audience effortlessly from one story to the next. Just as impressive was the stage discipline shown by the entire company. Every performer remained fully engaged, whether at the centre of the action or supporting from the sidelines.

Although it somehow feels unfair to single out individuals in a production built so firmly around teamwork, a few performances particularly caught the eye. Niamh gave a wonderfully confident performance as one of the storytellers, delivering the "Kids Today" line with excellent comic timing and real assurance. Hannah brought warmth and sensitivity to Bobby in *The Railway Children*, while Bea's Cheshire Cat was full of feline physicality, making excellent use of the stage. Ruby also impressed as Billy Bones in *Treasure Island*, using expressive facial reactions and strong characterisation to create an engaging and memorable performance. These, however, were just a handful of highlights in a production where every member of the company contributed to the success of the whole.

At the end of the evening, what stayed with me most wasn't an individual performance or a particular scene, but the obvious enjoyment radiating from the stage. Diana Christie's direction was seamless throughout, with the young cast displaying impressive discipline, confidence and commitment while making a demanding production look effortless. Her vision of creating five ensemble pieces, rather than a handful of starring roles while others waited in the wings, proved to be an inspired one. Through movement, imagination and teamwork, every young performer made a valuable contribution and was given the opportunity to shine.

It is incredibly heartening to see youth theatre thriving in Wallingford, nurturing not only talented young actors but also teamwork, creativity and self-confidence. Whether this was their first time on stage or one of many performances to come, every member of Encore Youth Theatre should feel immensely proud of what they achieved. I thoroughly enjoyed the evening and look forward to seeing these talented young performers continue to grow in confidence and skill over the years ahead.

Launton Village Players

“Frozen”

July 2026

In the middle of a heatwave, it somehow seemed entirely fitting to spend an evening watching Frozen. Staged in a farm shed just outside Launton as part of Launton Village Players' 40th anniversary celebrations, Disney's much-loved musical tells the story of sisters Elsa and Anna, whose relationship is tested when Elsa's magical ability to create ice and snow is accidentally revealed. Blending humour, adventure and unforgettable songs with themes of love, acceptance and family, it is an ambitious undertaking for any amateur company, demanding strong acting, singing and choreography alongside imaginative staging and convincing theatrical effects.

The first thing that struck me on arrival was the sheer scale of the enterprise. Transforming a large agricultural barn into a fully functioning theatre was an impressive achievement in itself. Marquees housed dressing rooms, refreshments and the technical team, while an army of marshals and front-of-house volunteers ensured the warm welcome that has become something of a trademark for Launton Village Players.

I initially wondered whether the simple black staging might feel stark in such a large space, but those concerns quickly disappeared once the show began. The colourful costumes, inventive props and imaginative effects brought Arendelle vividly to life. Simple ideas were often the most effective: a turn of a door transformed palace interiors, gateposts suggested the entrance to the kingdom, while blue silks recreated the storm at sea. Elsa's magical powers were cleverly represented with streamers, falling snow and dramatic ice shards appearing from the wings, while the transformation during Let It Go—using shimmering icicle lights, metallic streamers and a white staircase—created a magical ice palace before our eyes. The snow machine was used sparingly but effectively.

The costumes looked fabulous throughout, while lighting and sound complemented the action without overwhelming it. I particularly enjoyed the sauna scene with the chorus dressed in towels – it provided a moment of comedy after the drama of the first half.

The musical numbers were accompanied by pre-recorded backing tracks, with strong ensemble vocals throughout. The colourful maypoles and dancers gave the opening number plenty of energy, while Zara Mayes and Abigail Burgess harmonised beautifully as the young Anna and Elsa, Zara in particular capturing Anna's infectious optimism. The choreography made excellent use of the performance space, from the lively coronation celebrations to the energetic Fixer Upper, ensuring the production maintained its pace from beginning to end.

Beth Heale brought warmth, charm and infectious enthusiasm to the older Anna, delivering For the First Time in Forever with confidence and sharing a lovely chemistry with Ash Foster's Hans during Love Is an Open Door. Ash Sherwood was outstanding as Kristoff, combining an excellent singing voice with superb comic timing and genuine sincerity, particularly during Kristoff Lullaby. Chloe Mason was a scene-stealer as Olaf, skilfully combining puppetry, terrific vocals and wonderful comic timing to create one of the audience's favourite characters. Liam Payne clearly relished the pompous Duke of Weselton, providing an enjoyable comic turn, while Georgie Gilmore impressed with clear, confident vocals as the Bishop. Nicky Roberts embraced both the emotional and vocal demands of Elsa, delivering a heartfelt Let It Go to close the first act before revealing the character's vulnerability in Monster. The duet I Can't Lose You with Beth Heale was one of the production's emotional highlights.

Director Julia West deserves enormous credit for bringing together so many moving parts into a production that flowed effortlessly from beginning to end. Scene changes were slick, the pacing rarely faltered, and every element appeared carefully considered, allowing the story to unfold naturally despite the technical demands of the show.

Frozen is an enormous undertaking for any amateur company, let alone a village drama group, but Launton Village Players rose magnificently to the challenge. As the audience left the barn humming the songs and wearing broad smiles, it was clear this ambitious production had captured the magic of Disney's much-loved musical. Congratulations to everyone involved on a wonderful celebration of forty years of bringing theatre to the village.

Branching Out Drama Society

Much Ado About Nothing

by William Shakespeare

There can be few better ways to spend a summer's evening than watching Shakespeare outdoors, and with the sun shining over the beautiful surroundings of Bruern Farms and Café, we could hardly have wished for a more perfect setting for *Much Ado About Nothing*. One of Shakespeare's best-loved comedies (and one of my personal favourites!), the play weaves together mistaken identities, misunderstandings, romance and deception, while exploring themes of love, honour, trust and forgiveness. Although filled with humour and witty banter, it also demands a great deal from its performers. Shakespeare's language must be delivered with clarity and confidence, the comedy relies on impeccable timing, and the balance between the play's light-hearted moments and its darker emotional turns is never easy to achieve. It's an ambitious choice for any amateur company, but one that can be very rewarding when it all comes together.

The presentation of this production was delightful from start to finish. The terrace outside Bruern Farms & Café had been transformed into the perfect outdoor theatre, with the audience seated on the lawn looking towards a beautifully dressed performance space. Behind us, the café's barbecue and bar offered a warm welcome and the chance to enjoy refreshments before the action began, adding to the relaxed, community feel of the evening. Flower garlands, draped fabrics and a softly lit gauzy canopy created the impression of a garden prepared for celebration, while a small, raised platform offered a variety in levels without ever dominating the space. As dusk gradually settled in, strings of fairy lights twinkled overhead, enhancing the magical atmosphere, before discreet patio lights at either side of the stage took over as daylight faded. There was no elaborate lighting rig or theatrical trickery needed; nature provided the backdrop, and enhanced it beautifully.

The period costumes looked wonderful, instantly transporting the audience into Shakespeare's world and complementing the beautiful outdoor setting. One concern with any open-air performance is whether the dialogue will carry, but there was never really an issue here (at least not from where I was sitting) and every line was delivered clearly and confidently.

The production got off to a bright and energetic start with the younger members of BODS performing traditional country dances before a clear and confident young messenger set the story in motion. The entrance of Don Pedro and his returning soldiers immediately established the camaraderie between the men – which I thought was excellent throughout – while the early verbal sparring between Benedick and Beatrice hinted at the relationship that would become the heart of the play.

With such a large cast, this was very much an ensemble production, and BODS should be proud of the commitment shown by every member of the company. The younger performers in particular displayed impressive maturity, adding colour, movement and atmosphere to the larger scenes. Of the main characters:-

Mark Jessey was, as ever, a very safe pair of hands as Leonato. He perfectly captured the character's generous hospitality, unwavering concern for family honour and heartbreaking vulnerability when that honour appears to have been destroyed.

David Cooke gave a thoroughly engaging performance as Benedick. His command of Shakespeare's language was excellent, delivered with confidence and clarity, while his energetic physicality brought the character's wit and swagger to life. He found the perfect foil in Kate Bull's spirited Beatrice. Independent, fiery and fiercely intelligent, Kate combined natural movement with expressive facial reactions to create a more nuanced Beatrice. Luke Rasdall clearly embraced the larger-than-life nature of Don Pedro, at times channelling more than a little of Rik Mayall's unforgettable Lord Flashheart from *Blackadder II*. It was an entertaining interpretation, full of energy and charisma, although I occasionally felt some of the innuendo throughout the production—not just from Don Pedro—was a little over-egged. Chris Bull was an excellent Claudio, capturing both the bravery and youthful impulsiveness of the character. Anthony Gofton brought an understated menace to Don John. He allowed the character's bitterness and manipulation to simmer beneath the surface, making him all the more effective. Amy HD gave Hero a delightful sense of playfulness, avoiding the trap of allowing the character to be overshadowed by Beatrice. She was especially enjoyable during the scene where the women convince Beatrice that Benedick loves her, embracing the fun of the deception, before delivering a sensitive and moving performance during the wedding scene as Hero's world comes crashing down around her.

The comic subplot was equally successful. John Witts' wonderfully pompous Dogberry, supported by Teresa O'Hara's equally entertaining Verges, and their team of watchmen generated some of the biggest laughs of the evening. Their interaction with the audience was beautifully judged, and there was some great characterisation.

This production had a lovely pace throughout and director Mandi Jessey clearly understood that *Much Ado About Nothing* works best when its humour grows naturally from believable relationships. The chemistry between the principal characters, particularly Benedick, Don Pedro and Claudio, never felt forced, and the ensemble scenes flowed with warmth and energy.

If I had one observation, it would concern the two famous scenes, where Benedick and Beatrice are each tricked into believing the other is secretly in love

with them. These are among Shakespeare's funniest sequences and offer enormous comic potential. The performances themselves were excellent, but the staging occasionally felt a little frenetic, with so much movement that it became difficult to believe the characters could genuinely remain hidden while overhearing the conversations. Beatrice's scene worked slightly better—I liked the idea of her hiding beneath the seating—but both sequences might have benefited from slightly tighter choreography to allow the comedy to land even more effectively.

Music played an important part in establishing the atmosphere of the evening. Josh Rowley's period-style accompaniment sat perfectly within the world of the production and helped reinforce the pastoral setting. My only slight reservation was the inclusion of one modern song in the first half. Kirsty Plant sang it beautifully, and her performance itself could not be faulted, but for me it jarred with the otherwise carefully established period setting. Likewise, the use of Mendelssohn's Wedding March—although instantly recognisable—belongs to a much later period than Shakespeare's play. By contrast, the music accompanying the Monument scene was beautifully judged, adding real emotional weight to one of the production's most poignant moments.

These are, however, very minor observations in what was a hugely enjoyable evening of theatre. Beautiful surroundings, glorious midsummer weather, an enthusiastic and talented cast and a production full of warmth, humour and heart combined to create a memorable performance.

Thank you, BODS, for a thoroughly entertaining evening.

Buttercross Theatre Productions Cluedo

September 2026

Congratulations to Buttercross Theatre Productions on being one of the first theatre companies to bring this hilarious play to the stage.

The set consisted of a series of backdrop projections of the various rooms, now familiar to all from the boardgame, Cluedo, on which the play is based. The addition of pieces of furniture served to augment this, e.g., a fireplace, some chairs and a drinks trolley. A series of doors along each side of the stage was very effectively used as a way of transporting the players around the 'board' from one crime scene to the next.

Projections of the actual board from the game, with cast's faces superimposed on the playing pieces was well used to guide the audience through the action.

Makeup and costumes were very well done with accurate attention to detail.

The guest's/suspects' costumes were very colourful and brought a sparkle to the play. Sound and lighting were executed with great precision. Synchronisation between actors and effects was very well rehearsed.

The shaping of the piece was confident and pacing was appropriate. The ensemble pieces involving the guests/suspects were very well directed and demonstrated a good command of stage groupings. The dinner scene was particularly well presented.

Acting was good across the board with some strong performances. The boardgame characters were played by Peter Hayward as a very pompous Colonel Mustard, Beth Mabbutt as beautifully mysterious Mrs. White, Toby Farmiloe as the hilariously bumbling Reverend Green, Natalie Fidler as the glamorous Mrs. Peacock, Tom Powers as ever suspicious Professor Plum and Jennifer Barton as the glamorous Miss Scarlett. These six actors gave consistently excellent performances demonstrating confidence and skill. Their performances showed commitment and a high degree of understanding of ensemble playing. There was evidence of high levels of commitment and excellent support between players.

Leon Hobley gave a solid performance as Wadsworth and demonstrated appropriate movement in his change of personae.

Jane Digby as Yvette gave a very engaging performance as the French maid. Her accent and 'French attitude' were very believable and were consistent throughout. Her engagement with the audience was perfect.

Helen White as the cook was hilarious. Her well-honed sense of comic timing had the audience in fits of laughter. Her skill was further demonstrated in her cameo roles as a Police Officer and a Singing Telegram Girl.

The cameo parts contributed well to the overall atmosphere of the production and were appropriately played by; Aidan Buckingham as the Newscaster, Motorist and the Inspectors, Ben Wyatt as Mr. Boddy and a Police Officer, Andy Roberts as Bobby a Police Officer,

The audience thoroughly enjoyed this theatrical presentation of the very familiar and very much-loved board game.

Well done all involved.