

## ANOTHER SUCCESS FOR THIS FIRST-CLASS GROUP

It is not an easy task to produce a serious period drama.

The restrained archaic language, the sombre Victorian atmosphere, the tension and pace of a thriller presented a challenge to Downham Stage Two.

It was a challenge which the company met very successfully in its performance of 'Gaslight', by Patrick Hamilton.

Patrick Hamilton was himself the victim of a bullying father and Liz Wrigley, as Bella Manningham, sensitively portrayed the abused wife, relentlessly bullied by her domineering husband.

She cleverly sustained the pathos and fear in the first act and then gradually began to turn the tables on her tyrannical husband in Act Two, with the help of Rough, the ex-police inspector.

Eddie Bootle was skilful in balancing the urgency needed to solve the crime, with snippets of wit and humour, which he timed so well.

I would have liked to 'hate' Mr Manningham rather more for his despicable treatment of his poor wife and his previous murderous crimes. His character was at times too nice, but Michael O'Hagan certainly looked the part of a Victorian gentleman.

Both Deborah Tudisco, as the cheeky maid Nancy and Pat Hargreaves, as Elizabeth the house keeper, gave convincing performances and must be congratulated on their 'London' accents and contrasting characterisation. Their humour was refreshing and engaging.

Brian Howarth as the arm of the law added authority to the dramatic ending.

As the curtain rose we were drawn into a wonderful Victorian parlour, built by Dan Bradbury. With its deep red walls, tiled fireplace and authentic furniture and artefacts, we were transported back in time.

The silent member of the cast, without which there would be no play, was the flickering gaslight. David King and David Scott produced excellent effects and created the gloomy interior of a Victorian home, accentuated by haunting music and sound effects. Excellent costumes and props by Margaret Smith and Lesley Howarth.

Under the direction of Mel Scolah, who brings to every play his wealth of experience and knowledge. Downham Stage Two has yet again delighted its audiences.

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