



# A wonderful evening

WHAT more could you ask from an evening's entertainment?

An Alan Ayckbourn comedy and an exceptionally strong cast led me to believe I was in for a wonderful evening – I wasn't wrong.

Stage Two celebrated its 20th year by reviving its first ever production at Downham – "Round and Round the Garden", directed this time by Eddie Bootle.

Norman is trying to whisk his sister-in-law Annie away for a dirty weekend (without his wife's

## "Round and Round the Garden" by Alan Ayckbourn; Downham Stage Two

knowledge, of course). Annie is also being wooed, indecisively by the local vet.

Her forceful sister Sarah and Sarah's hen-pecked husband, Reg, have been co-opted to look after the house and mother in her absence, but alas, Annie gets cold feet and decides not to go away with Norman.

The weekend, awkward already, becomes more so when Norman's wife Ruth arrives.

Bob Cleeve never lets an audience down. He played Norman 20 years ago and again in this production. His performance was, as always, a pleasure to watch and had the audience with him from the outset.

Lesley Howarth

as Annie, portrayed her longing for a "slice of life" with great sympathy and sweetness, but with a little acerbity – perfect!

Steve Cooke was a slightly rumped, very earnest, diffident Tom, the vet, who had the audience chuckling all evening.

Sarah was played competently by Pat Bowker. Although the characterisation slipped occasionally, she was a seriously nagging wife!

Liz Wrigley as Ruth had, judging by the laughs, some of the funniest lines in the play. They were delivered simply, without

attempting to force the humour – well done!

For me the star of this production was Brian Howarth.

He portrayed the hearty, bluff, schoolboyish Reg perfectly, showing Reg's exuberance when away from his wife and in contrast, his weakness, when being hen-pecked by her.

Good direction from Eddie Bootle, making excellent

use of the stage, the set and the characters. A lovely garden set constructed by Dan Bradbury and Gerry Purchase, full of delightful detail.

All-in-all an excellent evening. If you haven't yet seen a Stage Two production you should. Alternatively you could join this excellent group and become a member.

GERALDINE METCALF

Stage Two—20 years at Downham

Liz Wrigley

THE NEXT Stage Two Downham production will be the Alan Ayckbourn comedy **Round and Round the Garden**'.

This play has been selected as part of Stage Two's 20 year celebration on the Downham stage. It was their first Downham production exactly 20 years ago this April and has the same leading player [Bob Cleeve] playing the troublesome 'Norman'. Bob is joined by Brian and Lesley Haworth, Liz Wrigley, Steve Cooke and newcomer to the Downham stage, Pat Bowker. Pat has been in many plays for the Trinity drama group.

Play dates are Wednesday 29th April to Saturday 2nd May at 7.30pm. Tickets are £5 on Wednesday and £6 on other nights available from Tourist Information [can order for collection on the door] 01200 425566 or from Fran Osborne 01200 423301 or Liz Wrigley 01200 423005.

We hope you will be able to come and join us.

## Stage Two Downham



**A** RETURN to comedy brought the audiences in for the recent Alan Ayckbourn play, 'Round and Round the Garden'. Attendance was better than for some time which has also helped to boost Stage Two funds. A recent bid for lottery funding through the 'Awards for All' scheme failed so the group depends solely on audience attendance for their income.

The play was well cast with the three diverse couples and their prickly relationships. Although the players were far from 'young' for romping round the garden, they carried the fun and games off with aplomb. Comedy requires good timing and good delivery of lines and, in this play, the cast brought out the best from the script.

Bob Cleeve revelled in his role as the philandering Norman, a part he played some 20 years ago when the play was the first to be presented on the Downham stage. Lesley Haworth played Annie, his 'amour', with great feeling, a bit dizzy and very longsuffering. A newcomer to the Downham stage, Pat Bowker who has appeared in plays for the Trinity group for years, paired with Brian Haworth playing Sarah and Reg. They arrived to 'look after mother'. Sarah lost no time in wrecking Norman and Annie's plan for a weekend away and continued to inform and interfere throughout the story. She portrayed so well the classic 'nagging wife', even insisting that Reg must wear an apron to do the washing up. Brian's character, Reg, seemed always to be an irritation to Sarah. He played the role convincingly. The slow-witted vet, Tom, who used the family's pet cat as a reason to visit Annie so often, was played to perfection by Steve Cooke. He was slow to catch on to almost everything around him. Steve kept brilliantly in character throughout the play and had some good lines in his dialogue with the other players. Liz Wrigley did not appear until the second act – there were several references to her character 'Ruth' throughout act 1, building up a picture of the family member most of the others would not wish to cross. Again, Liz had some good lines to deliver, the best of them with the tardy Tom, who she 'sent up' with great enthusiasm.

The group has had good feedback from the audience, so much so that they plan to do another play from the trilogy known as 'The Norman Conquests', probably in spring 2010. Stage Two's next performance will be in November 2009, dates to be arranged.

### STAGE TWO DOWNHAM - ANNIVERSARY

IN VIEW of both Stage Two and Downham Village Hall celebrating milestones this year [20 years and 50 years respectively], Stage Two would like to suggest a 'joint venture'.

We are planning a walk on an evening in early July [to be arranged] – date in next newsletter. The walk is a 5 mile walk around Downham fields and paths. Gerry Purchase of Stage Two has agreed to lead the walk – a leaflet is also available.

We will start at 6.30pm and plan to end up at the village hall for refreshments at the end of the walk.

We will put posters in the village hall and outside the Post Office with more news about the walk.

Elizabeth Wrigley on behalf of Stage Two Downham

# Stage is set for a special

## occasion

**T**HIS year marks the 20th anniversary of a well-established and respected Ribbles Valley theatrical group.

A long-time favourite for fans of all ages, Stage Two Downham was formed when it moved to the picturesque village from Waddington in 1989. Previously called the Waddington Players, members used to meet for rehearsals at the village's St Helen's Sunday school.

When it moved to Downham, it made its debut under its new name with "Round and Round the Garden".

To mark the 20th anniversary, members thought it was only fitting to once again stage their first drama, which they successfully performed in April.

In the past two decades the group has gone from strength to strength and developed a reputation for high-quality amateur productions, providing a venue for thespians to participate in the local theatre and arts scene.

### TALENTED

Stage Two Downham boasts about 20 talented members, with ages varying from as young as teenagers to sprightly 70-year-olds. Between them they have clocked up an impressive 625 years of theatrical experience.

Apart from the absence of an autumn play in 2003 due to the filming of BBC drama "Born and Bred", during the past 20 years the hard-working group has put on two performances a year, which have been greatly appreciated by large and enthusiastic audiences.

Members of Stage Two Downham were involved in a "railway experience" in the early days. They dressed up and entertained passengers at Oakworth Railway Station. It was the 20th anniversary of "The Railway Children" film and they re-enacted scenes from the story at the Station.

However, it's not all singing and all-dancing as it seems and there is a lot of hard work behind the scenes with rehearsals, learning lines, stage management, lighting, finding props,



by Faiza Atzaal

costumes and so on. Secretary and Clitheroe resident Fran Osborne explained: "I think it's a talented group of people that come together and perform really well. However, most members have jobs and families, and a lot of hard work, time and effort is put into rehearsing."

"The way we work in Downham has been fun and there has rarely been any ill feeling. The teamwork and friendliness are exemplary."

Glen Purchase, ex-chairman added: "We have more fun during the rehearsals than we ever do actually performing. It's a nice hobby and we like to make everyone welcome."

"We have always had a good relationship with villagers in Downham and those involved with the village hall. Thanks to our productions, we have managed to help to upgrade the village hall."

Bob Cleve, actor and an original member of the group, said the group was always on the lookout for fresh young talent.

"For many years I was beginning to think that the prospects for amateur dramatics, whether for straight plays or musicals, were doomed towards the gradual extinction as the audiences literally, died off," he added.

"However, there is tremendous amount of new, young talent around and it is enthusiastically embracing live theatre and bringing its own audience with it."

"So it is with Stage Two - new people, new ideas, new audiences all bringing a new vibe to the amateur theatre."

"Long may it continue, but I fear that my ability to recreate roles 20 years later is beginning to wane!"

Bob recalls a classic moment when rehearsing for "Noises Off".

"It was certainly the most difficult



Downham Stage Two's production of "Frankenstein" was a monster success.

play that I have ever performed and produced many moments of panic, but we managed to struggle through and none of the audience were any the wiser - neither were we for that matter!" he said.

"But it does show that you can fool most of the public, most of the time - so long as you do it confidently!"

"I also remember shedding genuine tears during the closing scene in 'A Pack of Lies' and at the other end of the scale 'corpising' with Brian Howarth in 'Move Over Mrs Markham' in 1993 at exactly the same place as during the Waddington Drama Group's production in 1981.

### ILLUSION

"After all, isn't that what acting is all about: creating an illusion and convincing the audience that it is real?!"

Stage Two Downham will be treading the boards again next month with Alan Bennett's comedy "Habeas Corpus". Fran added: "This is one of Alan Bennett's finest plays. It's a mad, satirical romp, in which we meet the Wicksteed family and friends who put the pleasures of the body above everything else!"

The cast includes, Steve Cooke, Geraldine Metcalf, Suesi Windle, Richard Sanderson, Glen Purchase, Tom Garner, Andrea Cawley, Kim Croydon, Liz Wrigley, Brian Howarth and Eddie Booth.

It will be staged at 7.30 p.m. between November 25th to 28th at Downham Village Hall. Tickets are priced £5 on Wednesday and £6 on all other nights. Anyone wanting to buy tickets is asked to contact Fran Osborne on 01200 423301 or the Tourist Information on 01200 425566.



School uniform was compulsory for the cast of another memorable production, "Daisy Pulls It Off".

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