

'Table Manners' did group credit

by Elizabeth Wrigley

DOWNHAM'S drama group Stage Two did not disappoint their audience when they presented "Table Manners", by Alan Ayckbourn, the second in his trilogy of plays "The Norman Conquests".

Eddie Bootle once again directed following their success last April when the group performed "Round and Round the Garden". One year on this dysfunctional family moved in from the garden to the dining room to continue their thinl-veiled shenanigans.

The story revolves around the lives of three couples – two sisters and a brother, two spouses and for the unattached Annie, an ineffectual suitor. Norman plans to take his sister-in-law, Annie, away for a weekend. Brother and sister-in-law Reg and Sarah come over to look after mother believing Annie to be going with her dreary veterinary friend, Tom. Sarah soon puts a stop to their tryst and everything turns on its head when Norman's less-than-popular wife, Ruth, arrives.

A shift in dominance of characters put Sarah, the relentless nagging wife, in a major role, played competently and elegantly by Pat Bowker. She never "let up" interfering and complaining, finding nothing in her life that could possibly make her happy until the feckless Norman volunteered to take her away for a weekend. This was as good as a tranquiliser for Sarah.

Bob Cleave, comfortable in his "Norman" role, played the part to the letter – the boyish carefree style belying his selfish philandering behaviour. Bob sustained his character for long pieces of dialogue when the family were ignoring him at breakfast. Norman really appears to believe that everyone should like him.

Lesley Haworth returned in the role of Annie, portraying with ease the slightly scatty woman who has given her life to looking after her elderly mother. Lesley transformed the cardigan-clad dowdy Annie to a more vampish character in an attempt to show the family she was no longer "round and round the garden".

The "vacant vet", Tom, was played convincingly by Steve Cooke, providing many comic moments throughout the play. His slow-burning courtship with Annie hit a highnote when he threw a punch at Norman at the dinner table.

Sarah's husband, the gregarious Reg, was once again well portrayed by Brian Haworth. Chatty and amusing when free from the nagging Sarah, who he finds impossible to please, and, at other times, rather wistful when recalling his boyhood pastime of making model planes.

For the second in this set of Ayckbourn plays, Glen Purchase took the part of Norman's wife, Ruth. She brought in another contrasting character to this unwieldy family, confidently taking the role of the rather superior Ruth, who deals with her husband's amours with a somewhat scornful and dismissive approach. Her shortsightedness, cleverly acted, added a human touch to the part.

A well directed and convincing play, amusing from start to finish. The set was built to use the stage well as the whole play took place in the dining room, every detail contributing to the requirements of the story – thanks to Dan Bradbury and Gerry Purchase. Effective lighting and sound was provided by David King. A strong cast ably supported by good direction and efficient teams behind the scenes and front of house.

Well done Stage Two once again!

by Julie Magee

THE spring production from Stage Two Downham this year is the sparkling Alan Ayckbourn comedy "Table Manners".

In spring last year this talented group performed "Round and Round the Garden", another play in the Norman Conquests Trilogy by the same author.

In "Table Manners", which represents another battle in the trilogy, we see Norman, the well-known seducer, laying siege to his sister-in-law with hilarious consequences.

The character of Norman will be played by Bob Cleave, very ably supported by a very strong cast of Pat Bowker, Leslie Haworth, Steve Cooke, Brian Haworth and Glen Purchase. The producer



is Eddie Bootle.

The play will be performed at Downham Village Hall on Wednesday,

April 21st, until Saturday, April 24th, starting at 7.30 p.m.

Tickets are now avail-

able either from Citheroe Tourist Information Centre or from Fran Osborne on 01200 423301.

Stage Two Downham



The Company played to good audiences for their recent play 'Table Manners', the second in the trilogy of plays 'The Norman Conquests' by Alan Ayckbourn.

The strong cast of six players combined their talents to portray three somewhat dysfunctional couples thrown together for a weekend of disharmony around the dining table.

Sarah, played elegantly by Pat Bowker, interfered, complained and nagged throughout the play, her husband Reg, often the butt of her frustration and unhappiness. Brian Haworth played the bluff and hearty Reg convincingly with his weak unfunny jokes and, at other times, pensive moments when recalling his boyhood pastime of aeroplane modelling. Lesley Haworth's adept characterisation of the dowdy unattractive Annie, a hair's breadth from a weekend away with Norman, presented another contrasting character in the family melee. Norman's conquest fell flat due to Sarah's interference, although Bob Cleave, in this popular role for the third time, did not let the audience down. Cheery and carefree. Norman justified his actions easily, expecting his family to take his philandering in their stride. Steve Cooke skillfully portrayed Tom, the 'nice but dim' vet, a frequent visitor because he is sweet on Annie but totally unable to get to the point. His part created some comic moments, the best being when he threw a punch at Norman at the dinner table. The part of Ruth, Norman's wife, was well played by Glen Purchase, ranging from clumsy shortsightedness to a rather grand and very dismissive businesswoman.

A gentle comedy, the play was directed competently by Eddie Bootle with excellent backing from the set builders, behind the scenes team and front of house.

Another success for Stage Two.

Watch out for the third of the trilogy planned for April 2011.

The autumn play '84 Charing Cross Road' will be staged from November 24-27 2010.