

# Top marks for challenging play

Downham Stage Two's latest production "Sherlock Holmes and The Case of The Jersey Lily" saw the ultimate fictional detective solve a couple of mysteries featuring two real-life Edwardian characters, Bertie the lustful Prince of Wales and Lily Langtree (Jersey Lily), the notorious good-time-girl-cum-actress.

The author, Katie Forgette, also threw another scandalous character, Oscar Wilde, into the mix for a bit of extra spice.

The plot involved an alleged, productive liaison between Bertie and Lily, an illegitimate daughter living in Paris, compromising letters and photos, a present of some of the crown jewels for Lily, fake replacements and the most ardent wish of HMQR to have the real gems returned.

The audience was expertly guided through the plot by two Stage Two stalwarts, Suesie Windle who sweetly portrayed the luscious Lily, and Steve Cooke as the incredibly observant Sherlock.

In one scene Steve convincingly passes himself off as a forceful, female senior citizen, a feat which, in this season of pantomimes, could land him a role.

Holmes, of course, was assisted by his faithful companion Dr Watson, competently played by Robin Knipe.

Throughout the play Lily

was accompanied by her sidekick Oscar Wilde, foppishly portrayed by Bob Cleeve who, by nature of the role, was able to elicit many laughs from the audience.

Mrs Langtree, too, had a faithful retainer, the maid, Irma Tory, who later in the play morphed into the duplicitous baddy, Kitty Dupree. Both incarnations were convincingly played with great stage presence by Vivienne Thornber.

The observant of you will have noticed that Irma Tory is an anagram of Moriarty, Holmes's lifelong adversary, whose task, as the supreme villain, was to extract vast sums from Lily by threatening to publish the compromising correspondence between Bertie and Lily, thus bringing the monarchy into disrepute, and to reveal to the illegitimate daughter in Paris that she has illustrious parents. What a rotter.

Chris Bowers, who took on this role, gave a strong performance and left no one in any doubt that Moriarty is a mean, cruel, hard hearted and clever individual. Although, of course, he is inevitably outwitted by Sherlock and is even bettered by The Master in a well choreographed fencing duel.

Moriarty had a hard front man and go-between, John Smythe, played by Tim Martin, who managed to maintain



a menacing cockney presence throughout.

There were cameo roles for Stella Barnes as Holmes's housekeeper and for Brian Harworth and Darren Moss as two menacing abductors.

Of course Sherlock Holmes triumphs in the end. With the assistance of Abdul Karim, an emissary of Queen Victoria, portrayed in a highly superior

manner by a beturbaned Kim Croyden, Sherlock manages to save the face of The Nation by securing Bertie's love letters and even persuades Lily to return the jewels of the crown to their rightful place.

The author's final fictional homage to real events are in the last few words of the play where she suggests that Oscar Wilde, because of all the

dramatic events, is inspired to change the title of his play from "The Importance of Being Fortright" to "The Importance of Being Ernest."

The behind-the-curtain team did a magnificent job of so frequently changing Brian Harworth's ingenious set with the minimum of delay and the between-scenes atmospheric music maintained a mood of

mystery and suspense.

To watch the play required total concentration. Those that lapsed and those who didn't have a rudimentary knowledge of late Victorian history could have been baffled at times.

Top marks for Fran Osborne for being so ambitious as to select and direct such a challenging play.

# Stage Two Downham's Latest presentation

**By ERIC BEARDSWORTH**

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Stage Two Downham will present "Sherlock Holmes and The Case Of The Jersey Lily" by Katie Forgette, an American playwright, using Conan Doyle's famous detective character and his loyal friend, Dr Watson and mixing them with well known persons, Oscar Wilde and Lillie Langtry, plus the inevitable villainous Professor Moriarty.

Katie Forgette skilfully inserts some lines from Oscar Wilde and other famous writers, here and there, to add a touch of humour.

The wit of Oscar Wilde meets the cunning of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle when Wilde brings his friend, Lillie Langtry, to Baker Street. Someone has



stolen the highly intimate letters Lillie exchanged with the Prince of Wales, and now she is being blackmailed. Only Holmes can solve the case, going so far as to disguise himself as an early version of Lady Bracknell from Wilde's latest play, The Importance of Being Forthright, while Watson falls head-over-heels for the Jersey Lily and Prof. Moriarty attempts to

bring the Crown to its knees.

If you haven't been to a production at Downham, why not give it a try. The added possibility of enjoying an excellent meal before the show, at The Assheton Arms and appreciating the beauty of this unspoilt village, which has featured in many TV and film productions over the years, will make the whole experience one to re-

member. To old friends, who regularly attend, thanks are expressed again and Stage Two Downham members hope to see you there again.

Tickets can be ordered by calling the hot line on 07833 203495, Clitheroe Tourist Information on 01200 425566, or a meal deal is available. £20 for meal and ticket, at The Assheton Arms, Downham, call 01200 441227. Call and reserve a table. You will receive your ticket/s on the night.

Performances are at Downham Village Hall, Pendle Road, Downham, on Wednesday November 25th to Saturday November 28th starting at 7-30 pm.

**Cast, from left to right: standing - Bob Cleeve, Kim Croydon, Vivienne Thornber, Darren Moss, Chris Bowers, Brian Haworth, Tim Martin, Robin Knipe; seated - Suesi Windle, Steve Cooke. (s)**