

# *Account of Purley on Thames*

## Rain or Shine - Great Expectations

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The prospect of seeing Miss Havisham's wedding dress go up in flames (with Miss Havisham still inside it) enticed a near capacity audience to visit The Barn on Friday evening, January 16, to watch Rain or Shine's latest production, an adaptation by James Reynard of Charles Dickens's classic novel, Great Expectations.

The versatility of this touring theatre company never ceases to amaze me. The five actors, who now include one married couple - James and Claire - and one engaged pair - Rob and Pippa - plus Jayne, Pippa's mother, arrived at 4pm in their old battered minibus. Besides the cast, the bus also contained all their scenery, staging, costume rail, props, lighting, music and sound equipment. By 5pm everything was set ready for the evening performance and the actors were able to have a short break before their vocal warm-up.

While this was happening, members of Project Purley were getting The Barn ready. David, Martin and Richard set out the chairs, Ann, Catherine and Martin prepared refreshments in the small hall, while Marjorie made tea for the actors. Then at 7pm the doors opened and people settled in their seats waiting eagerly for the action to begin. The play is centred around the transition of the main character, Pip, from a young scallywag who is terrified by meeting Magwitch, the escaped convict, in a misty churchyard, to becoming a sophisticated young gentleman living in some style in London and pursuing a love affair with Estella.

Rain or Shine manage to compress the 500 pages of Dickens' novel and the sixteen-year timespan of Pip's life into a play lasting two hours. The actors work at frenetic speed, playing twenty parts during the course of the evening, changing costumes backstage, operating lights and music and rearranging scenery so that tombstones become chairs, a river appears at the front of the stage and the immolation of Miss Havisham happens in colourful and frightening detail. The fight on the river bed, the chase across the marsh by the soldiers and the punch-up between Pip and Herbert are other highlights of an enjoyable evening's entertainment.

As James explains in his director's note, decency and good triumph over deceit and villainy in the conclusion to the tale, and the cast received rapturous applause as they took their curtain call. The leaving collection reached a record high of £300, and this will be passed on to Macmillan Cancer Care, our chosen charity for the event. Putting on these evenings is always enjoyable for Project Purley because so many people benefit. The actors have employment, the audience are entertained, a chosen charity gains financially and The Barn is put to good use. We were especially pleased to see new faces watching the play on this occasion, and trust they will return on Friday 5 June, when Rain or Shine Theatre Company will perform Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in The Barn.

I record my thanks to all those members of Project Purley who assisted in any way with the evening's organisation, and those who supported us by just coming to watch.

David Downs