

## *Account of Purley on Thames*

# Rain or Shine - Much Ado about Nothing

R200570 21/1/2018

*Published in Project Purley Journal September 2018*

The year 2018 is one for anniversaries. It is one hundred years since the Armistice was signed at the end of the Great War and twenty years since Rain or Shine Theatre Company was formed. The two dates coincided as Rain or Shine performed William Shakespeare's best loved comedy, "Much Ado About Nothing," set not in the Elizabethan era, but in November 1918 as the men and women of the British military forces are returning home. Indeed the opening medley of songs featured a collection of World War One favourites such as "Pack up your troubles" and "Keep the home fires burning."

The performance in The Barn was notable for several reasons. The cast was larger than usual, including three newcomers, Jasmine Raymond, Jamie Littlewood and Peter Smith. It is always a pleasure to welcome fresh faces. Jasmine and Jamie are not long out of drama school, but Peter has already acted in 16 Shakespeare plays and he stood head and shoulders – figuratively as well as literally – above the other actors. The Royal Air Force uniforms were accurately designed and made by Jayne Lloyd, who also took the part of Leonato. Sadly this may be her last stage role with Rain or Shine, as she confesses that she finds it harder to learn lines as she enters the veteran stage of her career.

Anthony Young, a company regular, displayed a hitherto unheard excellent singing voice, Rob Keeves hammed it up for all he was worth as the constable Dogberry, John Cooper-Evans was an enthusiastic cross-dressing nurse, and Pippa Meekings flowered as the fiery Beatrice. It was a delight to see the interaction with the audience as the actors made all their entrances and exits via the main hall.

The set was minimal, just a brick wall and a rather shaky shell-blasted tree which wobbled every time somebody bounded on stage

and when Benedick was dodging up and down behind it. But the cast worked so hard – marching in step and saluting one moment, Morris Dancing the next, faultless in their projection in the long blank verse scenes, changing costumes, accents and emotions with rapidity as well as subtlety, that they fully deserved the lengthy applause they received from an appreciative audience.

I am grateful as always to Project Purley members who assisted in any way in preparing for the production and to the members of the audience who spent a warm spring evening supporting the event and donating so generously to the leaving collection. Your kindness has enabled us to raise £500 for Launchpad, a charity based in Merchants Place in Reading, and which not only provides temporary accommodation for the homeless but helps them to find employment.

Rain or Shine will return to The Barn on Friday, November 30th when the company will present a specially written play merging two classics. Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson will return in “The Curious Case of Doctor Jeckyll and Miss Hyde.”

*David Down*