

Review from Lance Bassett – April 2016.

The Hollow made no dent (!) in the reputation of Banbury Cross Players, its third production of their 2015/16 season. They delivered an excellent rendition of this wordy and lengthy whodunit by Agatha Christie with huge parts for some members of the cast

The Hollow is the name of the house in which the play is set. The Set itself was excellent; a combination of attention to detail yet leaving the audience room to use their imagination. Congratulations go to Linda Shaw and Andy Sutton. Directed by Liz Riley the play is set in the 1930's so there is plenty of Art Deco and cigarette smoking and people calling everybody 'dahling'. Great stuff..

So, enter Henrietta and Sir Henry Angkatell. Now practically everyone in this play is related to each other but alas I lost the plot a tad regarding who are cousins, siblings, aunts, uncles etc. Anyway, Tara Lacey plays Henrietta. She played the part with great style and grace and certainly convinced me she was the artist niece (I think) of Sir Henry portrayed by BCP stalwart John McCormick. Credit to Mr McCormick who made a worthy effort as the up-market Sir Henry with his nose-in-the-air performance and subtle eyebrow raising at every opportunity. Sir Henry's wife, the forgetful Lady Lucy was also superbly acted by Janice Lake who looked sounded and acted just as you would expect from the Lady of such a house.

Another niece (I think) Midge Harvey arrives for a weekend house party. Midge, played by Kate Groves, is employed in a London dress shop. She scurries about in a dress she had borrowed from the shop and is very keen on another cousin (I think) Edward Angkatell who had inherited the family home of Ainswick and was eligible bachelor of the family. Peter Griffiths portrayed Edward and was clearly initially nervous in the part. Prompts were evident from a number of the cast throughout the performance but in fairness it was the first night and many of the parts contained acres of dialogue.

As I mentioned the play is extremely wordy and little happens in the first act save for introducing the characters. So now we meet the serving staff, Debbie Andrews as Doris the chatty maid and Nik Lester as Gudgeon the faithful retainer who looked as though he had been understudying Carson in Downton Abbey and could certainly 'buddle' for a living.

Enter John Cristow, a doctor, and Gerda his wife, the final guests arriving for the weekend. He is clearly a bit of a rotter and in short time we learn that Henrietta is his mistress. Lucky fella. Rob Hall was Cristow and had the characterisation off to a tee. Lauren Dunn, who again was totally convincing in her role, played Gerda, his rather dull wife.

So the scene is set, all have arrived at The Hollow and then we learn that Hollywood star and former beau of Dr Cristow has moved in just down the road. Hannah Smart played Veronica Craye, the local girl made good, and she had set her cap once again at Cristow by inviting him back to her place to fix a light bulb (that old chestnut).

We understand that Dr Cristow did indeed go back to Veronica's and returned to Gerda's bed at 3am. We could see where this was going and Dr Cristow got his comeuppance in the form of a .38 calibre bullet at the end of the first act, but from whom?

The plot line of Act Two is simple, who did it? The main protagonist in the Act is Inspector Colquhoun of Scotland Yard, entirely convincing as the man in charge of the case. Intelligently played by Roger Riley, the Inspector is aided and abetted by Lee Dwyer as Detective Sergeant Penny, and the duo proceed to interview the guests and staff of The Hollow.

It should be said here that the scene changes involved two maids who added to the entertainment immensely with a touch of humour as they moved the props swigging the left over wine and

pinching the chocolates, a brilliant touch whoever thought of it. The music throughout the performance was spot on too and enhanced the mood of the period. Top marks to Mark Neale on Sound. Where were we – oh yes - the inspector is stumped as Ms Christie uses bluffs, twists, turns and double bluffs in her script leading us to believe any one of the characters could be the murderer. Of course eventually we find out who the swine was that shot Dr Cristow and I won't say who it was but the end of the play is highly original and brought a more than satisfactory end to the evening's entertainment.

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