

Reviews of.....

The Curse of Brigadoon

(and its exorcism)

Cast your mind back to a certain Quarterly Meeting last year. We were discussing future productions when someone mentioned *The Scottish Play* by name! There were gasps of horror, crucifixes were fingered, a few people were seen to shuffle round their chairs three times. Of course, we all laughed - but it had a hollow sound.

Soon, days and weeks became mysteriously interchanged; people vanished into thin air; men turned into women (but no women turned into men!).

Somehow, out of all this chaos, a dramatic offering of considerable strength emerged. Wonderful emotive music created a sinister ambience and three rather glamorous witches (slightly reminiscent of a seventies pop group) wove their spells with glee. Their victim was well and truly hooked.

Andy Allen's *Macbeth* was a strong brooding presence throughout the play. He showed us a man uneasy with his lust for power but lacking the moral strength to stop the terrible events unfolding. He was understandably bewitched by his ambitious wife played by a sultry Claire Cox. Their scenes together were the highlights of the play and both spoke the verse beautifully.

The set, or lack of it, didn't impede the drama but a more imaginative use of lighting would have enhanced some scenes, especially the battle, which was reduced to a few people marching on and off again. Some battle sounds would have helped here too.

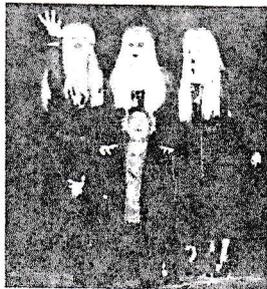
Heward Simpson was, as ever, a warm but commanding figure as *Banquo*. Bob Mann, Bob Clement, Linda Shaw and Marilyn Fairbairn all

contributed articulate and thoughtful cameos. It was lovely to see old friends like Carol, Vicky, Antony, Taffy and Adam cutting their teeth on Shakespeare and obviously enjoying it. There were several new faces in the cast, which was excellent. Derek Parkes, Sarah Young, Carole Sunderland, Jane Privett, Anna Buller and notably Dave Lovick as *Macduff*.

Costumes were a rather confusing mixture of Army, Air Force and *Ruritania* with some strange footwear and hair lengths not quite fitting in.

BCP owes a lot to Andy for stepping in and averting a major crisis in our programme for the second year running - congratulations to him and all involved.

Valerie Johns



There are, perhaps, three things that *The Scottish Play* is famous for: the crazed tyrant seeing daggers before him, the mad queen attempting to eradicate the spot of blood from her

hand, and the curse that surrounds any attempt to perform the play!



There was certainly ample opportunity to relish the first two, but when BCP decided to put on one of the Bard's more notable pieces, there was a veritable cascade of misfortune. The original director had to hand over the helm to another, as did the lead, and a problem over dates all led to a catalogue of potential disasters - which were, thankfully, avoided through the multi-talents of Andy Allen and the remaining crew.

From an original concept by Paul Sleet, the action was dressed in circa Second World War uniform on a stage that had no set, with the excep-

tion of the banquet scene with *Banquo's* ghost. In fact the plain black backcloth helped focus the audience on the text. The layout of *Macbeth's* castle was soon familiar territory, though the distinction between this and other places was, at times, a little difficult to grasp. The lighting (John Hicks) and sound (Mark Neale) were an aid to location, but the debate on such minimalism will carry on.

As to the characters themselves, *Macbeth* (Andy Allen) and *Lady Macbeth* (Claire Cox) stood out with good, clear speech that the audience could receive easily. It is (presumably) a difficult task to perform Shakespeare without making it sound like a 1940's British film version, nor like an adolescent recitation; this they did, and did well. There being no set to look at, I did not feel bad about closing my eyes and concentrating on, and enjoying, the language.

The Witches (Anne Bloor, Carol Kuhn and Vicky Stimpson) were



entertaining, as was Bob Clement's *Porter*, whose observations on the perils of drinking were met with audible laughter from the audience. Others screwing their courage to the sticking place were Adam Nadin as *Malcolm* and Linda Shaw as *Ross*.

I suspect that it is with great relief on the part of the cast and crew that the play completed its run, but, as is the way of amateur theatre groups, they barely have time to catch their breath before embarking upon the next production, *Lettice and Lovage*, in April.

Richard Hollingum

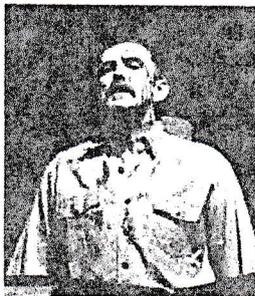
.....that Scottish Play

The Myth of *Macbeth*

Contrary to popular mythology, allegedly *Macbeth* gained its reputation as an unlucky play because it was so well known and liked by travelling players and audiences that when misfortune struck and a play had to be cancelled, *Macbeth* was performed instead. Be that as it may, this production certainly incurred many problems on the way and Andy and his cast must be congratulated on actually putting it on at all.

A group of us spent Sunday lunch-time discussing the previous evening's performance. Various points emerged. The two theatre members present were not familiar with the play and found the continual switching of actors from one part to another confusing and we all agreed that the final battle was inevitably limited by the few actors taking part. *The Witches'* prophecies (Birnam Wood coming to Dunsinane, *Macduff* not being "of woman born") were insufficiently flagged for newcomers to the play and hence their importance in *Macbeth's* downfall was lost.

Just as 'football is a game of two halves', this drama was a play of two casts. There were towering performances from the two leads, Andy Allen (*Macbeth*) and Claire Cox (*Lady Macbeth*), who were solidly supported by Heward Simpson (*Banquo*), Linda Shaw (*Ross*), Carole Sunderland (*Lennox*), Bob Clement (*Porter, etc*), Derek Parkes (*Duncan*) and Anne Bloor, Carol Kuhn and Vicky Stimpson (*the Witches*). The gap between them and the triers and odd passenger in the minor roles was considerable. Even so, it was good to see new (to us) faces having a good stab (excuse the pun) at their parts, for instance, Adam Nadin (*Malcolm*) and Dave Lovick (*Macduff*).



There are some things that can only be said by insiders who love the society. Hold your breath.....! When we first joined in the early 1970s we were struck by the consistently high general standard of the performances so that you had to remind yourself that this was an amateur society. A very weak performance stood out like a sore thumb. There were lots of fun and games off stage of course and the occasional intrigue, but a very professional attitude on stage and in the wings. Are we losing some of that, for the want of a better word, discipline? Some niggling things noticed in this production:-

An actor in a 'spear-carrying role' does not have to twirl it like a drum majorette or bang it on the floor to stress a point.

The 'forty-five degree problem', ie standing at an angle of forty-five degrees to the front of the stage when speaking to another actor, ostensibly so that the audience can hear and see you. Most normal conversations are delivered full frontal towards the person addressed.

Hand chopping movements for emphasis - the mark of the true amateur.

Chatting in the bar during the interval. At least one guilty person was seen. This is absolutely not on! How are the audience meant to suspend belief if they see you between acts?

This is a bloody play but there wasn't much of it around. That's fine given the minimalist approach adopted, but in that case the fights and murders have to be convincing. They were not. The equivalent of 'bang, you're dead' ain't good enough. One assassin's hair disguise was positively laughable rather than frightening. (There are celebrated real incidents in Scottish history such as where one clan chief entertained his rival to a sumptuous meal before ruthlessly stabbing him to death across the supper table.)

These detracted from the strong atmosphere of foreboding and ambivalence created by the central characters which was a great pity. For all that there were some splendid moments and Andy and Claire are deservedly singled out for special praise in achieving performances among the very best BCP has produced.

Mary and Gerard Sullivan

If it were done.....

Well, we did manage to do it (after a few little problems)! My sincere thanks to everyone who took part and/or assisted in any way with the production - I hope I've managed to thank you all individually, but if I've somehow overlooked your contribution please be assured that it was greatly appreciated. I hope you enjoy(ed) reading the reviews, both on these pages and the one in the *Banbury Guardian* (18 February - if you missed it, you can find it on the web site).

A video recording of the Saturday night performance was kindly made by Mike Bachelor and copies have been made by *Blinkhorns* of Banbury, available from me at £6.70 each.



Production photographs are published with the kind permission of Alan Davies, from whom further copies can be ordered if required (see the web site for details).

Andy Allen