

## Top Class Drama at Shute

“Journey’s End” by R.C. Sherriff was written ten years after the First World War ended and is a brilliant play about life in the trenches. It is full of drama and profound comment about war and about people. It is not an easy play for an amateur drama group to put on, not least because it requires ten men and most of them are supposed to be young. Most of our drama groups are relatively short of such folk. It is a great credit to director Elisabeth Miller’s skills as a diplomatist that she managed to persuade ten men of such ability to take part and to her skills as a director that the fact that many of the men were more mature than Sherriff required did not detract from the enjoyment of the play.

Shute Church was effectively transformed into a First World War dug out and the play was acted against a background of rumbles, explosions and general noise of war. The costumes were first class and the lighting very fitting for the various scenes.

The play is full of characters and it is the interconnection and relationships between these characters that is part of what the play is about. It is also a very telling analysis of what war is about and what it can do to people. Remarkable too for 1928 the play is quite an attack on war and those that propel us into it.

The main character is Captain Stanhope whose bravery has won him the Military Cross and who is regarded as a natural leader. However his success is very dependent on his high consumption of whiskey and this is a fact that he wants to keep from those back home. Towards the end of the play he makes it clear that he disagrees with the command of the war by the generals and we see his intense humanity as he comforts one of the characters in the play who is dying. This part was most effectively played by Tim Pritchard. He was able to show a range of emotions and use his voice most cleverly both to be angry and to be tender.

His second in command is the more mature in years Lieutenant Osborne played by Ian Craig. His was a superb performance. He conveyed to us a most likeable, trustworthy, humane, brave officer – just as Sherriff had intended.

Simon Hurst played the part of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Raleigh who is meant to be boyish, naïve, innocent and eager to please yet also resilient, physically tough

and capable. He represents the naïve believer in the kind of glorious war put forward in the propaganda at home used to recruit soldiers. Despite being older than Sherriff intended Simon gave a brilliant performance which was utterly convincing.

Experienced STAG member Simon Ford gave a marvellous performance as the frightened 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Hibbert who feigned illness in order to try to go home. The scene in which he broke down in hysterics in front of Stanhope was very good.

2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Trotter comes from a very different background to the other officers He is a very brave and capable soldier but less sophisticated, more fun. Tucker Stephens portrayed the character very well.

Another STAG stalwart Richard Stenning played the Colonel who acts in control but lacks sensitivity. He speaks as if he views war as a game. He lacks humanity and is more worried about getting into trouble himself. Richard was every bit the officer.

Mike Dowling played the part of Captain Hardy who is the one who hands over to Stanhope at the beginning of their six day shift. He provides a contrast to Stanhope, showing Stanhope as a superior officer. He is messy and disorganised. Mike's first class performance helped to get the play off to a good start at a quick pace.

Raymond Seward was very funny as the servant Private Mason who waited on the officers. Raymond is a master at comic timing and delivers all his lines really well. The audience looked forward to his every entry.

Mick Holdsworth was a very convincing Sergeant Major, Tim Love played the part of Lance Corporal Broughton and Mike Dowling doubled up as a German soldier.

There was not a weak link in the whole production. It was a tribute to the whole cast that at the end you could have heard a pin drop and all the audience felt emotionally drained.

Elisabeth Miller is to be congratulated on another brilliant production for STAG.