

Michael Frayn's prize-winning play is an intriguing puzzle: is he saying what you think he is saying? On the surface, two disparate couples, David and Jane, Colin and Sheila, weave and counter-weave their lives over a decade or so. We are drawn, with them, into the complex business of human relationships and are taken through a maze, crossing and criss-crossing from one house to the other, from one couple to the other (and 'couple' here can mean any two of four). At the same time, we can conjure up an image of human conflict portrayed by two proposed tower blocks, set to replace neighbourly two-storey houses. Or, again, we can spot an analogy between the demise of the British Empire and the demolition of houses in streets which were once proud to bear those far-flung names.

~~Basildon~~ Road is just such a road and it plays an important part in the play, as slum-clearance architect, David, gets to work on his visions of grandeur for the dowdy street. His wife, Jane, meanwhile, visits all its residents in a vain attempt to complete her re-housing survey. Colin eventually squats there and runs a campaign to thwart David's plans, while his down-trodden wife, Sheila, encourages David and worms her way into his household, with uneasy results.

Mark Easterfield's production was honed and polished. The many entrances and exits, as well as costume changes, were timed to the second and executed with effortless ease. And he was well supported by his cast. Linda Howells as Sheila, the mouse who roared, was so believable. She cried and snivelled 'just like a woman' but could be roused to a fury, as when she threw a pan of stew over the hapless Colin in a masterly piece of theatrical business. Attention to detail was also evident after that shocking episode, when David rescued the pot from the floor and carefully used a cloth to hold what was obviously a very 'hot' metal pan. Stephen Smith, as David, gave us more than a few gems to ponder over, accurately reflecting the playwright's sharp observations on the de-humanising effect of high-rise living and the frustration caused by town hall bumbling and on-site blunders. "Someone's got to be happy", says David, carrying on regardless. As Jane, Bernardine Orrock portrayed another really believable person. The gradual build-up of her exasperation at Sheila's presence in the house and the latter's scurried exits to avoid encountering Jane was gripping stuff and splendid acting by both actresses. Colin, well played by Martin George, is not a very lovable character. And yet ... is he not the most honest member of the quartet? But then, was he not also the one to bring so much havoc to their lives? Then again

Nothing was as it seemed and Waterbeach Community Players kept us guessing and utterly absorbed throughout. A magical mystery tour indeed, added to which was another of those authentic WCP sets - a double one this time - which amazingly housed an Aga cooker. Marvellous! Congratulations to everyone concerned with this memorable production.

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