



# Dramatic News

Aug 2008

[www.huntingdondramaclub.org.uk](http://www.huntingdondramaclub.org.uk)

In Our 63<sup>rd</sup> Year

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## Lunch and play-reading

Saturday, 6 September at 2 pm: lunch at Ronald's (he'll provide food – bring something to drink and maybe a little contribution to the food), followed by a dramatised reading of *Barbecue*, a one-act play. Please let Ronald know by 1 September if you're coming: [ronstevenson@btopenworld.com](mailto:ronstevenson@btopenworld.com) or phone Michael and John (01480-454486).

## Autumn production

*Ghost Writer* has been cast and rehearsals have started. If you'd like to help in any way, eg selling tickets, set building, front of house, please contact Chris Rogers (Producer) on 0775 441 8375 or [chris\\_f\\_rogers@hotmail.com](mailto:chris_f_rogers@hotmail.com).

Performances: 31 October and 1 November at Brampton Park Theatre, 6-8 November at the Commemoration Hall.

## Ghost Writer: an outline

Ghost Writer is a comedy set in the attic of Alex's house, where his friend Edward, a successful writer, is staying as he can't bear to go back to his own house following the suicide of his wife Ruby a year previously. Alex has taken Edward in and is trying to distract him from his self-pity with Glenda, a younger aspiring actress, who is also currently single. This plan may even have worked but Ruby, Edward's dear departed wife, decides that this is the moment to make a ghostly reappearance to clear her name of the slur of suicide and find out who murdered her.

She has a plan for Edward to write a play about the events of the night that she died and for him to invite all the main suspects to take part in a play reading to flush out the killer: Francis, a caustic middle aged actress past her prime and best parts, and Hedley, a 'ham' who sees himself as a great, if undiscovered actor, a view sadly not shared by casting directors on both sides of the Atlantic. Poor Edward has to cope with presenting his play, the bickering of the 'cast', trying to flush out the killer and constant interruption from Ruby, who only he can see.

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## Spring production

**26-28 March** at the Commemoration Hall. If you're interested in directing, please give the committee a proposal by the end of September. There are plenty of people wanting to act, so we'd like a play with a largish cast (say 10-15) that's reasonably balanced.

*Myra Arundel  
London*

*Dear Judith,*

*I am writing to thank you for inviting me to stay in your lovely rustic home. I had a divine time and the family's hospitality was very warm, especially that of Simon and of course dear David!*

*It was a shame the rain called a halt to any other physical activities—such as the tennis at the weekend. I do like to play tennis at the weekend.*

*I'm sorry that I had to finish such a thrilling weekend so early but I was offered a lift to London with your other house guests and I had urgent matters to attend to.*

*Do thank Clara once more for all her hard work on my behalf, she really is such an asset to your home.*

*Yours sincerely*

*Myra Arundel*



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## WHAT'S THE DRAMA CLUB ALL ABOUT?

Of course the Club exists to put on plays: that's why we pay our paltry £12 a year (or don't pay, in some cases – you know who you are!). We stage two or three productions a year. We also arrange play readings, workshops and theatre trips, as well as non-dramatic events, like poetry evenings, Burns Nights and parties.

### Audience needed

For many of these activities, we don't need anyone else. But the productions require audiences: I doubt if many of us would put in the time and effort a play requires if nobody was going to watch (and we have to recover the £1,500 to £2,000 costs somehow). It seems that fifty years ago the Club had a large, loyal following, and regularly sold 500 or more tickets for a four-night run. These days far fewer people will come and see a production simply because it's us. That even applies to some Club members, let alone the general public.

### Publicity

So we have to work hard to attract and retain audiences. One way is through publicity, and this has improved a lot in recent years. We also encourage audience members to join our mailing list, so that we can contact them when a production is coming up. A great deal is down to Club members and supporters selling tickets to friends, relations and acquaintances: if everyone receiving this newsletter sold four tickets, every performance would be a sell-out.

### Co-operation

Another way in which we're trying to build an audience is through contact with other organisations in the area. We co-operate with drama groups like Huntingdon Youth Theatre, Pantomime 89, Brampton Park Theatre, SIMADS and Spotlight Productions, and that can help everyone.

### Raising our profile

The Club is represented on The Commemoration Hall Trust, PaTCH (Performing Arts at the Commemoration Hall) and the Huntingdon Community Liaison Group,

and we're on Huntingdon Town Council's civic list. So Club members arrange or attend many events in the town, from meetings to carol services, and the other people present are reminded of our existence and future productions. This helps ticket sales.

### Helping local charities

One way of bringing in a new audience is to raise funds for the Mayor of Huntingdon's charities. The two most recent occasions when we did this were *Bobby Dazzler* in 2004 and one performance of *Jane Eyre* last November. The mayor's secretary advertises the performance and sells tickets, we charge a proportion of the production costs, and the profits go to the relevant charities. A hundred people attended the Thursday night performance of *Jane Eyre*: around 75 of them were probably seeing their first Huntingdon Drama Club performance, and will hopefully return.

### We benefit, too

All these efforts not only raise our profile in the area: they also create goodwill. We can ask favours, or be given them without asking – for example, last year we were offered a venue for *A Murder is Announced* free of charge, because of our contribution to the life of the town.

### A request for help

Following the success of *Jane Eyre*, the current Mayor of Huntingdon has asked if we'll donate a performance to his charities. I very much hope we'll do that next spring, to strengthen our standing in the town.

I've tried to sum up what the Club is all about. It reflects our current constitution, as agreed in February 2005:

“The objects of the Club shall be to:

- promote the appreciation of drama
- hold play readings
- perform plays and improve facilities for their production
- assist local charities.”

Michael Black, Chair



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## NODA Reviews by Michael G Williamson, Noda Rep : District 1

### Hay Fever

Director : Valerie Gerrard Producer : Ann Monk

This was the Club's annual summer touring production at various venues and the light choice of play was ideal. Generally, the opportunities for women within this script are greater than for the men and all the women within this company gave strong, complementary performances which enhanced the production tremendously. The Bliss family itself, at the core of most of the action, was also well cast and worked effectively together as a team. This was one of the best performances that I have seen from Michael Black as David Bliss and the scene with Judith and Myra was particularly well done and a great credit to all three actors. Carol Wadey, as Myra, gave a very enjoyable interpretation of this role with good facial expression and there were also some nicely judged performances from Sarah Ward, Louise Nicholls, Phil Green and Daisy Spencer. This play is nothing, however, without a strong Judith and Jeanette Brown rose to the occasion admirably, creating a very believable character that fulfilled all the requirements of the text. A very pleasing summer entertainment.

### Cold Comfort Farm

Director : Mark Hébert

This was an interesting version of a well-loved classic which provided a lot of scope for a large cast. There were some really nice touches such as the original drawing by Deirdre Lee, the film poster in the foyer and the exploding clocks which kept everybody on their toes! In general, a lot of effort had been put into creating exactly the right atmospheric setting and the whole production team deserve congratulation.

Individual performances varied a little in quality and pace but perhaps this was to be expected in a piece where there were sure to be pre-conceptions. I particularly liked the light interpretation of Sarah Ward as Elphine, the varied reactions of Carol Wadey as Mrs Hawk-Monitor and the consistent gothic pessimism of Jeanette Brown as

Judith. Brian Perrett, Chris Topham and Kevin Webb each created believable characterisations that strengthened the action. Ann Monk was a memorable Aunt Ada Doom and it somehow seemed appropriate that she should also have been credited with the creation of the Sukebind! However, the real success of the performance rested with Caroline Harbord who created a very intelligent and sympathetic portrayal of Flora, around whom most of the action flowed.

### Jane Eyre

Directed by Michael Black

This was the atmospheric adaptation by Willis Hall and the simple presentation on a virtually empty stage, with good lighting and sound effects, admirably supported this. A large cast of 19, covering the 37 named characters, worked hard as a team to capture the imagination of the audience and there were no weak links. Scene succeeded scene and the pace never faltered. At the centre of the production was the character of Jane herself and the sensitive portrayal given by Anwen Pugh was both moving and memorable. This was a low-key, but extremely powerful, performance which aroused immediate sympathy and rapport. The role is not an easy one and Anwen is to be congratulated on creating a very sincere and believable interpretation. She was well supported by Bob Pugh as an impressive Mr Rochester. There were also strong performances from Caroline Harbord, Amanda Rogers, Jeanette Brown, and Mark Lamberth. It was excellent to note the large and enthusiastic audiences and the much improved lighting in memory of the late Jack Hyde, a well loved, long term Member of the Club.

### NODA

The National Operatic and Dramatic Association (NODA), founded in 1899, is the main representative body for amateur theatre in the UK.

Web: <http://www.noda.org.uk/>

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*Greetings from the Hotel Miramar, South of France!*

*I am writing this as I sit by the pool, thinking about the old place in Sussex – Cold Comfort Farm.*

*In early January, we stepped into a theatrical adaptation of a classic rural novel.*

*How lucky were we Starkadders, that my niece, Flora Poste came to stay with us. We didn't take to her at first. For one thing she had an awful lot to say for herself (so much dialogue to learn). Still, at least she spoke coherently. We often rambled and ranted on, or grunted and wailed. It's very hard to make grunts sound meaningful! No wonder that some of the audience thought they were at a 'funny farm'.*

*Our dear old farmhouse had definitely seen better days, and presented a real challenge to the production team. The sukebind, an exploding clock, spitted water voles and a cow with a wooden leg - these are what made Cold Comfort the place that it was. Reuben has made many improvements to it now.*

*The Hawk Monitors' place was definitely classier (another production team challenge). Not that I ever visited it. Elfine told me all about it, and old Adam sent me a postcard once, telling me how he and the cows had settled in.*

*Flora worked her charms on us all – even me in the end. I'm making up for lost time now! But I still look back to those Cold Comfort Farm days. Weeks of hard work and then suddenly it was over, and all the Starkadders moved on to a new life.*

*Ah, happy days!*

*All good wishes from Ada Doom*

Take one dance floor in a night club, add furniture, screens, lights, props and actors and you have **Hay Fever at the BRJ Club.**

The performance at the BRJ club presented its own challenges! However with the creative back stage team the transformation was complete. Well done to all those who made it possible.

Unfortunately the show was badly supported and the audience was quite small. We have it on good authority that those there really enjoyed it. Indeed Michael Williamson attended this performance: read his review on page 3.

Thanks should be given to the BRJ staff, who were very supportive to cast & crew.

This performance was staged to raise money for the free fireworks on Coneygear Park, Huntingdon on 5 November organised by OCAG ([www.o-c-a-g.org.uk](http://www.o-c-a-g.org.uk)).

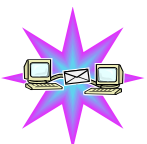
Check out the web site for more on Hay Fever.



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## Feedback from Brampton Hay Fever Audience

(7 forms returned)

### Did you enjoy the production this evening?

- ☺ Yes x 6

### What did we do well?

- ☺ Always good sets, enthusiasm and acting.
- ☺ All of it.
- ☺ Great at door. Perform! Good wardrobe and scenery.
- ☺ Everything!
- ☺ The production – timing.
- ☺ Set, acting, costumes.

### What could we improve for next time?

- ☺ Nothing
- ☺ Answering the telephone to book tickets.
- ☺ Nothing.
- ☺ Publicity.

### What sort of plays would you like to see us put on?

- ☺ A mixture – comedy and drama.
- ☺ Anything with Chris Topham in!!
- ☺ Murder Mysteries.
- ☺ Ghost Train.
- ☺ Comedies.
- ☺ Variety (not pantomime)
- ☺ Abigail's Party
- ☺ Tom Stoppard.
- ☺ Light comedies, musicals.

### What plays have you particularly enjoyed before?

- ☺ Sandcastles esp.
- ☺ Blithe Spirit and many others
- ☺ The beach hut one.
- ☺ Never been before.
- ☺ Alfie.
- ☺ Many but cannot recall titles (age related!)

### Would you come to HDC productions at the Commemoration Hall?

- ☺ Have done.
- ☺ Yes. I do!
- ☺ Prefer the Brampton Park theatre.
- ☺ Yes, we were sad to miss Cold Comfort Farm.
- ☺ We do already.
- ☺ Possibly.
- ☺ Yes.

### Any other comments?

- ☺ Keep up the good work
- ☺ Always enjoyable to see amateurs doing their best and obviously enjoying the results of the efforts they have put in.
- ☺ Put on more often please!
- ☺ Well done!
- ☺ Have a mailing list or email list.



*'What sort of thing is one expected to do?'*

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