The Happiest Days of Your Life by John Dighton
performed by Huntingdon Drama Club, 11 - 13 November 2011

Reviewed by Chris Avery

Director Richard Meredith describes The Happiest Days of Your Life as "the perfect winter warmer – guaranteed to raise a laugh." He was proved right as we enjoyed a thoroughly jolly (with or without hockey sticks) evening in Huntingdon.

In the postwar chaos of 1946, the bombed out St Swithin's School for Girls is billeted on the masters and pupils of Hilary Hall School for Boys. Conflict and chaos ensue, egged on by a little deliberate sabotage by Hopkins Minor, and further complicated by the arrival of two sets of visiting parents, each with a very different agenda. Mayhem mounts until yet another letter from the Ministry unites the warring factions to repel yet more boarders…

This production boasted an excellent set, full of period detail, with no obvious anachronisms. Costumes were similarly well chosen, and the cast all adopted period mannerisms and speech patterns with gusto. The pace, excellent in the opening scene, dropped a little in the second half, but this production was never slow. Generally, moves and groupings were effective, and apart from the occasional line delivered upstage, we could hear every word – which I appreciated, as this is an excellent script, full of humour, puns and one-liners, which had us chuckling throughout.

Dean Laccohee as Dick Tassell and Scott Hutchison as Rupert Billings were a particularly effective pairing, with Scott Hutchison's excellent timing extracting maximum humour from his sardonic asides. Jeanette Brown's Miss Evelyn Whitchurch, MA (Oxon) swept all before her, and although Kelly Mason as Miss Gossage seemed initially a little hesitant, she hit her stride while flirting in Amazonian mode with the hapless Mr Billings. Michael Black was suitably lugubrious as the much put upon caretaker Rainbow, bearing the brunt of all the necessary subterfuges.

Well done to all concerned for providing such an excellent evening's entertainment.