

Rutherford & Son by Githa Sowerby
Bartholomew Players - 30 Nov – 3rd Dec 2022

Set in a northern town in 1912, this play revolves around the fortunes of the Rutherford family and their glass works. Although written in 1912, it has stood the test of time and its challenges can easily be related to the present day.

The Master (Rutherford) rules his factory and household with a rod of iron. He has no appreciation of his workers, or women. Rutherford was superbly played by the excellently cast John Casey, who maintained his overpowering character and accent throughout.

His sister, Ann, (Elaine Leggett) was equally bitter in her dealings with the Rutherford offspring, a stance which continued for the whole play. Obviously, a family trait. She gave a hard time to Mary, (Kate O'Connor) wife of her nephew, John, particularly as Mary was from London and a complete outsider. Rutherford's sons were well played and a contrast to Rutherford. John, (Joe O'Connor) and Richard (Ed Miller), both suffered the wrath of Rutherford. Richard for taking the 'easy' option and becoming a curate and John, for wanting to patent his new invention for glass making and trying to get his father to pay for it. The factory foreman Martin (Ianto Wain) who was in on John's secret glass formula is bullied into divulging it to Rutherford, breaking his loyalty to John. It is further complicated with Martin having a liaison with Rutherford's daughter, Janet, beautifully played by Libby Foreman, who befriended the beleaguered Mary. The loss of his invention results in John stealing the petty cash and leaving the area and his wife. Rutherford demands that Janet leave the house because of the disgrace it would bring on him (it's all about him). Rutherford is later confronted by a robust Mrs Henderson (Jo Burns), mother of one of his ex-employees who had also previously pilfered cash from the company, pleading for another chance for her son, which fell on deaf ears. Now, with her husband gone, in similar circumstances, Rutherford orders Mary out of the house with her son, where Kate's performance really shone, as she offers a deal to Rutherford that they should stay and be maintained by him and in return, he may have control of his grandson in ten year's time and teach him the business then she will leave. To which he reluctantly agrees.

The whole play was expertly directed by Gareth Hammond and the parts all played well, although some of the male accents wandered a little. There was an epidemic of table-banging to emphasise points, which got a little excessive. The set, lighting, costumes and sound were all very good and appropriate creating a good atmosphere. There was some confusion regarding use of the curtains, which could have been a first night hiccup. But congratulations to all.

I look forward to Bartholomew's production in May of 'A Bunch of Amateurs'

Nigel James