

Compton & Shawford Magazine

February 2024



LOCAL NEWS • EVENTS • GARDENING • HISTORY

THE SWORD IN THE STONE

The 2024 Shawford Pantomime

This year the Shawford Panto was 'The Sword in the Stone', four performances of which were put on in the Shawford Village Hall between January 11th and January 13th. It was based (very loosely!) on the story of King Arthur and his magical sword Excalibur.

The script, with its excellent dialogue, was written by the one and only Simon Theobalds, whose inventiveness seems limitless even after thirty years of panto production. John Amos directed with great good humour and seemingly limitless energy.

The songs, so important for creating atmosphere, were again written by Martin Harris who displayed his usual penchant for, and panache with, puns. Many of the songs were delivered by Marcus Whitfield, who played Merlin the magician with wizardly wackiness and terrific engagement with the audience.



The other notable singer was the multi-talented Amelia Stepney, playing Princess Eloise, whose beautiful voice added a different vibe to the proceedings.

The sword is actually pulled from the stone by 'young' Arthur, Alex Robbins (charismatic and word perfect from the first rehearsal, apparently) playing the role of his own father 30 years younger! For Tim Robbins, adroitly bringing humour, pathos and authority to the role, is the adult King Arthur, accompanied by Sheila Forbes as his regal Guinevere.



This older Arthur has lost Excalibur and this is the basis for all the panto shenanigans thereafter, the sword being coveted by the evil Morgan le Fay (a magnificently malicious Sarah Hawkins).

She sends her henchman, Sir Vile (played with splendid servility by John Amos) to find it, supported by Cudgel and Pike (James Marshall and Anthony Fletcher, excellent as hapless would-be hard men) and a group of Morgan's evil minions (Alex Robbins, Christina Burdyrug, Lottie Fletcher, Arthur Townell and Imogen Webster) bringing deadly dastardliness.

King Arthur, of course, has the backing of the Knights of the Round Table: Sirs Lancelot, Tristram, Gawain and Kay (amusingly played by Ken Staunton, Eileen Gorrod, Jenny Walmsley and Simon Theobalds).

In the palace kitchens we find Madge the cook (Antony Fanshawe, rising to the challenge of his first role as dame) who ultimately discovers Excalibur in the broccoli patch (don't ask).

Madge's assistant, Eustace (Annabelle Sharpe, with a confident stage presence belying her age) provides the love interest for our princess and ultimately shows himself to be the hero of the story by taking on and defeating the evil Morgan le Fay.





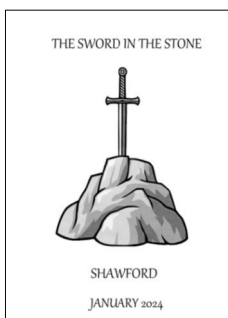
Thus comes the happy ending: Eustace is made a knight for his heroic deed, which means he can now marry the princess and the baddies are appropriately punished!

Congratulations to all involved, including the band (Martin Harris, Jon Shurlock, Richard Croker and Gordon Munro), the crew back stage and those who managed the costumes, make up, set design, construction and painting, prompting and lighting (Bryan Green, Pamela Potts, Liz Whitfield, Bridget Amos, Jo Fowle, Louise Tyson, Jude Vallis, Kevin Hughes, Mark Hegan, Jon Hawkins, Robin Sharpe, Katie Stepney, Ella Tyson, Pam Theobalds).





Special thanks to Andrea Green for handling the tickets so ably. The Shawford Pantomime has become a much-loved community activity which couldn't happen without the encouragement and support of families and friends. Long may it continue!



*Review by Hugh Mungus-Fungus and Crystal Ball
Photos by Adrian Walmsley*