

Portrait & Premiere: *Godfrey's Ghost* & *The Cherry Blossom Screen*

West Meon Village Hall was full on Sunday 17 June for a two-part evening of entertainment – an affectionate portrait of Arnold Ridley and then a short play. The link between the two is Nicolas Ridley, who has both written his father's biographical memoirs (*Godfrey's Ghost*) and the play: *The Cherry Blossom Screen*.

The first part of the evening was a talk by the author about his father, Arnold, who is best known to many as Godfrey in *Dad's Army*, although Nicolas was keen to flesh out the other aspects of Arnold's long life and many careers, including soldier, boot salesman, repertory actor, playwright and actor again. Ironically, Arnold Ridley had been in both world wars before adding the home guard role of Godfrey to his long and interesting CV.

We learned about a man who defied the stereotype that the humble Godfrey portrayed – hearing tales of great theatrical successes and crashes, defenestration, friendships with the fine and famous and chain smoking!

The second half was the premiere of the playwright son Nicolas's new play: so we were seeing it for the first time – as was the author himself. And West Meon Theatre did itself proud, as usual, with the four-actor ensemble presenting a perfectly paced comedy set at a local village art competition – located somewhere between West Meon and the Archers' Ambridge.

Hazel Town (as a Mrs Bossy Boots), Becky James (younger, modest – but always a scandal in her wake), Katie Jacobs (as the frosty London-based art dealer) and Helena Gomm (as the dizzy – but wise – friend from Godalming) squeezed all the wit and tenderness from this enjoyable drama. It was an excellent presentation of an as yet unpublished play.

The play is a perfect piece for local drama groups with humour, broad and subtle, shades of pathos and a witty tale of amateur artistry, pretention, deceit and all the usual goings on in village life.

Keith Jacobs