

**Beaufort Players**  
**‘The Clink’**  
**28<sup>th</sup> - 30<sup>th</sup> July 2011**

This “bawdy romp” presented by the Beaufort Players in the Ascension hall on 28, 29 and 30 July would test the talents of even the most stellar West End cast. Set in the last days of Elizabeth I’s reign, it is a complicated tale of plotting about who will succeed her and the auditions she has ordered for the entertainment of a Dutch Protestant trade delegation, all with echoes of the Thatcher era in which it was written by Stephen Jeffreys, an “experimental playwright”.

For a large talented group like the Beaufort Players, one of its attractions must have been that it needed seventeen actors but its rather dense dialogue and many twists and turns posed a major challenge. In the event only June Burgess as Elizabeth and Kester Worme as the butler seemed like real people, though Rachel Thorn deserves commendation for the consistency of her Spanish accent. Altogether I found it hard to keep up with the plot, largely because it was often hard to follow what the main characters, played by Chris Burns, Amy Jackson and Craig McCrindle, were saying. At times too the dialogue was quite unpleasant with much debauchery and blasphemy. In particular I could have done without an all-too-vivid description of hanging, drawing and quartering.

If there is a lesson to be learned from this production, it is surely that the Beaufort Players should chose plays which are not only fun for the cast to perform, as this one must have been, but which will also fully engage the audience. The programme described it as “riotously funny” but in fact it got very few laughs, at least on the opening night when I saw it, and the audience’s applause at the end seemed more dutiful than heartfelt.

Nevertheless there were many good things about it. The director, Matt Tylianakis, used the hall’s small stage very well and the different locations were deftly portrayed in a simple but effective way. The Tudor costumes were always a delight to the eye, the make-up convincing, the lighting effective and the music and sound-effects well chosen and perfectly timed.

Full marks too to those responsible for the publicity, programme, ticketing, front-of-house and refreshments, but above all to the producer, Lisa Gillman, for coordinating what was clearly a very complicated production.

*John Harrison*