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Society : Beaufort Players  
Production : The Wind in the Willows  
Date : 19 November 2015  
Venue : Church of the Ascension Hall, Ealing  
Report by : Zena Wigram, district 2

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[Show report](#)

Thank you for inviting me to this excellent production. While it was a shame that so few people were there, I was grateful for the fact that you did decide to keep the Thursday performance so I could attend. While the audience was sparse, given the quality of the performance on opening night, I can only imagine that subsequent performances with bigger audiences were even better – if possible!

Director **Diana Dishley** had selected a delightful adaptation by Mike Kenny of the children's favourite by Kenneth Grahame. It is indeed a shame that Producer **Karen Gundersen** wasn't able to see how well the imaginative production was brought to life by the excellent group of committed performers. Everyone involved had clearly worked hard and rehearsed thoroughly, so the entire play ran beautifully smoothly.

The show was set in the round (and therefore almost everyone had front row seats at the performance I attended). Diana had plotted very clever use of the acting space with Toad Hall on the main stage and a second area on the floor of the hall, where the performers created all the other locations. **Alan Robinson, Chris Burns** and **Thomas Cobb** had created a suitably gloomy deserted Toad Hall with cobwebs and dead leaves (of which more later) around the faded grandeur of the hall. The grassy knoll in front of it was supplemented by carefully colour co-ordinated movable blocks which became various bits of scenery depending on how they were used by the talented cast.

**April Parker** opened authoritatively as Chief Weasel and estate agent, introducing us to the location. I really loved the moment when, to everyone's surprise, the pile of dead leaves and netting on the floor turned out to be Mole: I have no idea how long **Gemma Robinson** had been quietly crouched there, but it was a superb reveal. Gemma was utterly delightful from start to finish as loveable Mole. I enjoyed her short-sighted peering, and the way she acted with her whole body. Her accent was beautiful and enhanced the character without ever getting in the way of clear enunciation, and she reacted beautifully with the other characters and the audience.

I also really enjoyed **Peter Fullagar** as Rat, with delightful exaggerated mime where necessary to place us securely in his boat (for example), a lovely relationship with the other characters, and tremendously expressive eyes. Both Peter and Gemma had lovely positive energy throughout, and encouraged us to join in their adventures by being thoroughly in the moment at all times.

The story develops for a while before introducing the irrepressible Toad of the title, and **Alan Robinson** was worth the wait. He threw himself thoroughly into the part, and seemed to have a boundless store of energy. He managed to make Toad a character to sympathise with and enjoy despite his bad behaviour, and made us cheer him on even at his naughtiest – perfect for a children's show.

**Chris Burns** as Badger managed a really good balance between being an impressively strict authority figure and staying approachable enough not to unnerve the younger audience members. I liked his deep voice, and he coped well with a few minor word struggles which I'm sure he will have conquered later in

the run. His limp varied a little: at times he was nearly immobile and leaning heavily on his stick, while on other occasions the stick appeared to be merely decorative.

One of the most attractive things about Beaufort Players is the tremendous teamwork you all display. The team of Wild Wooders who shifted scenery and became all sorts of different characters executed their complicated work – almost choreography – beautifully. The scene changes were all very well planned and obviously very well rehearsed, and I would like to thank each one for your hard work. I particularly admired those who threw themselves into their animal characters and made a real effort to move and behave like their animals throughout, especially **Di Harvey-Judd's** rabbit.

I'm sorry I can't comment on all the multiple characters you played as you supported and developed the story, but please be assured your contributions were noted and appreciated. For example, the people rowing the boat, the great chase sequence, the way the car had such well co-ordinated live sound by the cast mixed with recorded sound effects, and the way you used your suitcases as commuters in the train, then to make the train, and then later the sides of the barge: these were all classy and slick, and a testament to director and actors all putting in a lot of hard work to make it appear seamlessly easy. Despite my necessarily being right under their noses, the actors were so thoroughly in character that they seemed not to notice my scribbling away at my notes, and never for one moment lost focus: I was very impressed.

**Charlie Kennedy** and **Russell Gillman** made a truly gorgeous Horse – well-rehearsed, beautifully acted and they presented really excellent physical theatre and teamwork. I also loved Russell's policeman, who showed super focus in the courtroom, and did excellent work with his eyes throughout.

Stepping in at the last minute to play the Judge, **Thomas Cobb** not only made the part his own, but showed his experience by using the script so subtly that I doubt many people will have noticed it. He interacted neatly with **Diana Dishley's** clearly presented Clerk, who gently persuaded the audience to join in the action by standing for the judge's entrance and exit.

**Matilda Eason-Jarvis** made a most attractive gaoler's daughter, falling for Toad, and I liked **Di Harvey-Judd's** strict washerwoman – even more as she relaxed into her part and slowed down.

**Frances Thomson** was a lovely gullible Engine Driver, and **William Baldwin** made a stern and astute Guard. I enjoyed **Mary Hill** as the distracted Otter worrying about her quietly disobedient son Portly (**Philip Hazeley**) who stepped purposefully off at every opportunity, deaf to his poor mother's calls. Philip also did well with **April Parker** as the two lost hedgehogs, too – in their ingenious bathmat costumes – and Mary had a super and completely different accent when she was the Bargee. **Maria O'Beirne** and **Russell Gillman** worked well as the car passengers, with lovely clear dialogue.

**Roger Dishley** had, as usual, made clever music choices for incidental music throughout. I also loved the beautifully appropriate sound effects which were all perfectly timed despite, in some cases, what must have been extremely tricky visual cues.

Also as usual (dare I say?) was superb lighting by **Pete Balls**, ensuring that all the acting areas were illuminated at appropriate times in ways that supported the action and the time of year, but never intrusively so – and I did enjoy the falling snow!

Everyone had fabulous costumes by the very talented **Krystyna Kobiak**, well-fitting and attractive, with lovely attention to detail right down to the buttons on Toad's waistcoat. They were complemented by excellent make-up by **Mary Turner** and **Kate Cheetham**.

A number of people helped to co-ordinate the scenery and the lovely props by members of the cast, led, I understand, by **Mary Hill** with **Maria O'Beirne**, **Matilda Eason-Jarvis** and **NP** (who was in charge of Rat's clever river). The most impressive of the props was the splendid gipsy caravan and the items packed into it, as well as the beautiful boards to show the seasons, which were carefully painted and decorated so that even those members of the audience who couldn't read would be able to understand them.

**Elaine O'Sullivan's** supportive prompt was quiet and efficient. **Russell Gillman** and **Krystyna Kobiak** had created the informative programme.

Thank you to Elaine for arranging the tickets, and to all of you for your warm welcome. My congratulations on a delightful evening of quality theatre by an excellent team.

Zena Wigram  
District 2