



Above: Helen Barter, as 'prosecuting counsel' Maggie Parkes, cross-examines Joan Lee, as Helen Francis, watched by the 'judge', Carolyn Taylor and 'shorthand writer' Mary Green. Below: Alan Taylor, as Don Parkes with the 'defendant' Nick Hobden with Carolyn Taylor and Joan Lee



## Objections over-ruled

The Faringdon Community Theatre is guilty. Most decidedly guilty. Guilty of a brave decision to tackle a serious 'adult' play — slightly risqué language and all.

Not all will have been suited by the departure from tradition, particularly those who head for the amateur theatre specifically in order to escape 'that sort of thing' on TV. But only if as therapy for the actors who crave the occasional vehicle for their talents other than farce and whodunnit, who can blame them for tackling Leslie Darbon's social thriller 'Time to Kill'.

It was a challenge for everyone, both on and off stage, and for producer Beryl Rees who was making her debut for the company. For 'Time to Kill' is a one-set play, where a group of neighbours on a middle class Berkshire housing estate set up a kangaroo court to 'try' the local Lothario. The alleged purpose of the drawing room 'hearing' is to determine who, by omission rather than commission, 'murdered' Rosemary Mancini by leaving her to die of a drugs overdose. But it turns out that each of the participants has their own ulterior motive for the truth to out. Though the 'defendant' is the one manacled and threatened with summary execution, the finger of guilt actually spins around like a compass needle.

### Tour de force

This was a tour de force for Helen Barter, who played the 'prosecutor', Maggie Parkes. She rose to a tremendously challenging and demanding part superbly well. The fluidity of her movement around an unchanging set kept this pot boiling when it could so easily have sputtered into tedium. And she gave her character complete credibility.

Nick Hobden as the 'defendant', Alan Sexton, also rose to the occasion with a well-considered performance. And Mary Green did well with both accent and comic timing to provide a little light relief as the scatty 'court shorthand writer' who, like all the rest, ends up as a witness as well as a 'court' official.

Joan Lee was just about right with her apparently diffident 'clerk to the court' who helps change the course of the 'evidence'. A bewigged Carolyn Taylor presided as the 'judge', and Alan Taylor played opposite Helen Barter as the husband who turns out to hold a key to the denouement.

Full marks to all for taking on, and making a good fist of a difficult play — and for managing to maintain the momentum and energy which could so easily have been understandable casualties of such a static stage format. My compliments, too, to the set designers and constructors, Peter and Jo Webster, Alan Taylor, Walter and Irene Schoonenberg and Carole Tappenden.

-J.S.