

It's the Faringdon Dramatic Society's 70th anniversary this year, and 800 years since Faringdon received its Market Charter from King Henry III.

To commemorate these historical events, FDS created 'Faringdon Follies', a chronicle of the town's history since 1218.

The plan for the production was to show FDS creating and producing the 'Follies' with group members coming up with various ideas, including the costumes, under the watchful eye of Jo Webster and FDS 30-year veteran Carol Tappenden. A neat idea that worked well with ongoing snippets of these suggestions, some helpful some not so, throughout the show.

Where better to illustrate this fascinating story of an Oxfordshire Market town than the sumptuous surroundings of 18th century Buscot House. The small theatre set in the grounds is a 64-seat Art Deco masterpiece and the perfect setting for the performance devised and directed by Debbie Lock and Carolyn Taylor.

The production was in two halves, Act 1 featured a glimpse of events in the town from 1200-1900 AD and opened with a brief slide show of Faringdon town scenes ancient and modern. The story progressed and included a short scene about the Civil War when Faringdon was a Royalist stronghold and Cromwell took exception to this. The well-acted piece featured the impressive talents of the group's younger members plus Adrian Wells as the convincing Royalist Colonel having morale trouble with some of his troops. Young FDS member Jack Metcalfe was a treat to behold as the soldier defending his comrade. His performance was well rehearsed, confident and his delivery first rate. Well done that man.

The set for this playlet was merely a window looking over the countryside projected onto the back wall. An idea that not only worked well but was also an excellent photograph.

The Faringdon story progressed with brief glimpses of Monks, murder and mayhem in the town.

The interval gave the audience a chance to discover more about Buscot House with a stroll in the magnificent gardens on a warm spring evening.

So to Act 2 where we find another short scene with FDS stalwart Peter Webster as the eccentric Lord Berners who inherited Faringdon House in 1930 and turned it into the centre of a glittering social circle, the 'Chipping Norton' set of the day if you will.

An admirable performance by all in this short story which included Noel Coward (Duncan Sinclair) and Martin Waymark as Salvador Dali admirably played to the point I expected him to knock up a surrealist masterpiece any minute.

Songs were aplenty during the evening, even a Faringdon Rap and an adaptation of Tom Lehrer's Pigeons In The Park. There was something, as they say, for everyone.

Much detail in Act 2 centred around Faringdon Folly, with a film, slides and the story of its creation. It was in fact the last tower to be built in England and in 2005 accommodated the largest wristband in history (22 metres) during the Making Poverty History project.

The only minor gripe I had for the whole evening was the printed Programme, which failed to indicate who played who and what in the various pieces throughout the performance.

So, an excellent night of entertainment from a talented group whose members range from seniors to youngsters. The cast finally took the stage for a rendition of 'This is my Town', a rousing tribute to Faringdon. Happy birthday FDS.

Lance Bassett for ODN