

Faringdon Community Dramatic Society

The river-bank comes alive



Toad (Sophie Webster) in typically expansive mood, disguised as a washerwoman, with Jenny's aunts (left), and Jenny (Jemima Headey) discussing tactics with Toad before his jail-break. Below: Ratty (Carole Tappenden) and Badger (Ieuan Thomas) remonstrate with the escapee.

Faringdon Community Dramatic Society can be proud of itself. It may have departed from traditional pantomime this year with John Morley's adaptation of *The Wind in the Willows*, but there is no doubting that it scored a major triumph through good casting, confident production and some inspired performances.

For amateurs, this group shows up some remarkable individual talents. It's not easy, for instance, to be a scene-stealer while dressed and

made-up all in black, and conveying an apologetic, wimpish personality... But Maria Hussey, once into her stride, turned Mole into one of the show's most lovable characters.

Perhaps it's not quite so difficult to play the villain of the piece, especially if you are called Chief Weasel, but Carolyn Taylor choreographed her part so that instead of strutting (that was left to Toad), she writhed and slithered around the stage in a way that managed to combine menace with sensuous-





Portly Otter (Rory Willett) with the rabbits (left) and the bargewoman (Barry Willett) with Dobbin (Alistair Warner and Nigel Murrin)

ness. Her sinuous performance was particularly well maintained during a longish musical number.

And so, to Toad. What can one say, except that Sophie Webster played the part for all it was worth, squeezing every last breath of comic vanity from this classic character. Her command of the stage is astonishing, and the audience was itching to clap every appearance, such was its impact.

I mentioned good casting: well, how could one better Mike Durham as the policeman, or Ieuan Thomas as the venerable Badger ("I knew Toad's father you know, and his grandfather, and his uncle, the archdeacon..."). A bewigged Dave

Headey was the perfect chief magistrate, and Reginald and Fiona lovely as daffy 1920s-style lovers. Top marks to young Rory Willett as Portly Otter, and Jemima Headey as Jenny the Policeman's daughter, both of whom turned in amazingly mature performances.

Barry Willett went for the visual laughs as the busy bargewoman, while Alistair Warner and Nigel Murrin were reasonably well coordinated as Dobbin. Carole Tappenden gave us a suitably nautical be-blazered Ratty, and Debbie Lock a nice, homely Mrs Otter. And Jo Webster, Mary Green, Ruth Willett, Joan Lee and Helen Barter must have had a lot of fun as Jen-

ny's aunts, judging by their enthusiastic, bubbly and all-too-short appearance.

Congratulations, Peter Webster and Helen Barter, for producing and directing a top-class show, and for being ambitious enough to depart from traditional pantomime. It worked!
I.S.

