

**PROSCENIUM**

**The Merry Wives of Windsor**

By William Shakespeare

**The Merry Wives of Windsor**

Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> to Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> June 2016  
Compass Theatre, Ickenham

# The Merry Wives of Windsor

William Shakespeare

## The Cast:

Sir John Falstaff .....	Robert Ewen
Master Frank Ford .....	Charles Anthony
Master George Page .....	Carl Quaif
Mistress Margaret Page .....	Zena Wigram
Mistress Alice Ford .....	Hannah Lester
Sir Hugh Evans .....	Mark Sutherland
Dr Caius .....	Duncan Sykes
Mistress Quickly .....	Izzie Cartwright
Justice Robert Shallow .....	Keith Bayross
Abraham Slender .....	Alan Glover
Hostess of the Garter Inn .....	Susi Thornton
Anne Page .....	Hollie Summerfield
Fenton .....	Glen Scott
Pistol .....	Debbie Ellis
Nim .....	Oliver Spinks
Robin .....	Becca Grant
Peter Simple .....	Jackie Quaif
John Rugby .....	Arnold Glickman
Servants .....	Ben Morris and David Hampton
Fairies .....	Jessica Larkman, Libby Stone, Greta Stone

Directed by .....Shirley Wootten

Stage Manager ..... Richard Kessel  
Assisted By .....Crystal Anthony  
Lighting Design and Operation .....Roger Turner  
Original Music ..... Duncan Sykes  
Sound Operation ..... Bob Kessel and Bobbie Fowler  
Properties ..... Jenny Glover and The Company  
Costumes ..... Caroline Bronne-Shanbury, Shirley Wootten  
(with thanks to Annie Hertler-Smith)

### **Justice Shallow, “A worthy gentleman...”**

“A worthy gentleman...is a thing out of whose corruption the generation of a Justice of the Peace is produced. He speaks statutes and husbandry well enough to make his neighbours think him a wise man...His travel is seldom farther than the next market town, and his inquisition is about the price of corn...Nothing under a subpoena can draw him to London: and when he is there he sticks fast upon every object, casts his eye away upon gazing, and becomes the prey of every cutpurse. If he go to court, it is in yellow stockings, in a slight taffety cloak, and pumps and pantoffles.”

*Sir Thomas Overbury, 1614*

### **Mistress Ford and Mistress Page**

“Wives in England...are not kept so strictly as they are in Spain or elsewhere. They go to market to buy what they like best to eat. They are well dressed, fond of taking it easy...They sit before their doors, decked out in fine clothes, in order to see and be seen by the passers-by...their time they employ in walking and riding, in playing cards or otherwise, in visiting their friends and keeping company, conversing with their equals (whom they term gossips) and their neighbours, and making merry with them at child births, christenings, churchings and funerals...England is called the paradise of married women.”

*Van Meteran, 1575*

## **Merry England**

“Merry England was chiefly merry by virtue of its community observances of periodic sports and feast days. Mirth took form in Morris-dances, sword dances, wassailings, mock ceremonies of summer kings and queens and lords of misrule, mumblings, disguisings, masques – and a bewildering variety of sports, games, shows and pageants improvised on traditional models...

The seasonal feasts were not, as now, rare curiosities to be observed by folklorists in remote villages but landmarks framing the cycle of the year, observed with varying degrees of sophistication by most elements in the society.”

*CL Barber, 1959*

“The English are serious like the Germans; lovers of show, liking to be followed wherever they go by whole troops of servants, who wear their masters’ arms in silver fastened to their left arms, a ridicule they deservedly lay under...they are vastly fond of great noises that fill the ear, such as the firing of cannon, drums and the ringing of bells, so that it is common for a number of them, that have got a glass in their heads, to go up into some belfry and ring bells for hours together for the sake of exercise.”

*Paul Hentzner, 1598*

## **Social Class in England**

“We in England divide our people commonly into four sorts, as gentlemen, citizens or burgesses, yeomen, and artificers, or labourers. Of gentlemen the first and cheefe (next the king) be the prince, dukes, marquesses, earls, viscounts, and barons: and these are called the nobility; they are also named lords and noble men; and next to them be knights and esquires, and simple gentlemen...Citizens and burgesses have next place to gentlemen, who be those that are free within the cities, and are of some substance to bear office within the same...Our yeomen are those, which by our lawyers are called Legales homines, free men born English,

and may dispense of their own free land in yearly revenue to the sum of forty shillings sterling... The fourth and last sort of people in England are day labourers, poor husbandmen, and some retailers, copy holders, and all artificers... These have no voice or authority in our commonwealth.”

*William Harrison, 1577 (later Canon of Windsor)*

“In London the rich disdain the poor. The courtier the citizen. The citizen the countryman. One occupation disdaineth another. The merchant the retailer. The retailer the craftsmen. The better sort of craftsman the baser. The shoemaker the cobbler.”

*Thomas Nash, poet, pamphleteer and dramatist (1567-1601)*

“Against the general background of economic instability and managerial concern [after the First World War], there occurred some important modifications in the social order. While at no time in the modern age was European society firmly fixed, class structure did have a certain consistency before the war. It was said of France, but it might as well have been said of most of Europe, that an ambitious individual could move upward from one social stratum to another, but no one could not expect the strata themselves to be altered. Yet the War changed this general condition also.

The notion of the “country life” that seemed so appealing from afar and supposedly conferred on European life a certain gentility dissipated along with the clouds of war. The vast estates and the legions of domestic servants, which had been directed leisurely by this duke and that count, now entered history. Few lamented the departure of the aristocracy from the centre of European affairs, but it was a historical occurrence of great importance.

Yet the most important change in class arrangements occurred at the lower end of that large and amorphous group, the middle classes. There, there was a quantitative change in the “white-collar” workers whose position, if not aspiration, was similar to that of the blue-collar worker in the factory. The white-collar workers gained in numerical significance primarily through the bureaucratization of the state during the war.

Although the peacetime situation saw the retrenchment of state activities, government had become a major employer and would continue to be so henceforth in European history. But it was not only in the public sector that the white collar was the distinguishing feature of the new middle-class uniform. The growing administrative aspects of commerce brought the salaried individual into view as bank teller, department store clerk, and office secretary.

Here was the modern “Everyman”...the person seedily but neatly dressed, his costume complete with that final touch of upward-bound elegance, a flower in his lapel.”

*Raymond Betts, Europe in Retrospect, 1979*

## **Time**

“Opinions have differed on the season of the play... The winter tradition is a little easier to justify but the evidence is flimsy. One would expect precise descriptions for such a precise season but the text offers only hints. Page refers to Evans in doublet and hose on such a “raw, rheumatic day”. Herne’s oak is lifeless; but Falstaff is thrown into cold water not frozen and even “...*my belly’s as cold as if I’d suffered snowballs*” is qualified by “if”. His evocation at the end of the play, of rain, thunder, hail, snow and tempest could as well prefigure winter as be it. All these references, in fact, might as easily suggest autumn as winter, particularly when we remember that the buck Falstaff shoots at the beginning of the play was normally hunted in October. Above all neither spring nor winter provides a suitable festival to celebrate the play’s ending. It is not Christmas, Twelfth Night or May Day and yet everybody – even Page and Ford – appears to be on holiday. It is a festal time. A time for visiting friends, hunting and wooing. A time which has as a final ceremony an entire village running round at night dressed as fairies and hobgoblins, waving pumpkin lanterns and singing songs; an oak tree; the burning of a horned tree spirit. Bonfire night. Suitably, perhaps, the clue is given by Peter Simple. Trying to specify a long time ago, he refers to it as “*upon Allhallowmas last, a fortnight afore Michaelmas.*”

The only festival which makes sense of all the references is All Hallow Even, or Hallowe'en, October 31st. It was the principle and perhaps oldest bonfire festival of the Celts; the night of the transition from autumn to winter and originally a pagan celebration, awesome and mysterious. The early Christians took over this ceremony and made it their own. The dark side may still have been there, with its puritan overtones of witches-Sabbath; as Mrs Page says, "*No man means evil but the devil and we shall know him by his horns*". By the late sixteenth century all kinds of simpler village superstitions had humanized the legend. Some years later it moved up to five days and coped with Guy Fawkes: hot chestnuts, potatoes and possets remained the natural conclusion to the night's sports."

*Terry Hands, 1974*

## **The Season of Hallowe'en**

"As the clock struck twelve there was silence, for at this hour the souls of the dead would revisit their earthly homes. There were candles burning in every room to guide them, no longer familiar with the furry darkness of "Middle Earth", and there was a glass of wine on the table to refresh them...The "Hallow E'en" games...mostly involved the eating of apples and nuts – nuts which the Roman boys had played with at this season, and which gave to this evening the name of "Nut-crack Night" in the North. There were chestnuts roasting in the embers, an omen in every pop and leap. There was "bobbing for apples" in a tub of water; trying that is to catch them in the mouth without help of hands."

*G Jones, The English Festivals, 1953*

"The Hallow fires were lit at dusk – for luck, for saining of the fields, for protection against the fairies and witches who had taken the place of forgotten pagan spirits, and very certainly, for the sake of fun and merriment. They were lighted with ceremony, sometimes to the noise of blowing horns, circuited by dancers, and generally made the occasion of great festivity."

*Christina Hole, British Folk Customs, 1979*

# Colin Hickman



As many of you will know, Proscenium lost a long-standing member, friend and mentor last December, when Colin Hickman died.

Colin had agreed to direct *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, to bring our 2015/16 season to a close with a Shakespearean flourish. He had hosted a number of play readings, made decisions and put thoughts down on paper before his final illness, all of which influenced our own thinking as we planned and rehearsed.

We dedicate the production to his memory, trusting that he would be happy with what we have achieved.

He is greatly missed, but he lives in our memories and in our hearts.

## About Proscenium

Proscenium was founded in 1924. Since then, the aim of this experienced group has been to present classic and contemporary plays to as wide an audience as possible. Since 1990, performances have taken place at the Harrow Arts Centre and, more recently, at the Compass Theatre, Ickenham.

The company meets three times a week in Harrow for rehearsals, so that four plays are presented in each season. Social, fund raising activities and play readings take place throughout the year.

Secretary : Clare Wooster

Chair : David Pearson

Contact us at [www.proscenium.org.uk](http://www.proscenium.org.uk)