

DECEMBER THEATRE OUTING.

"Time and Time Again" at "The Mill" at Sonning.

The Mill at Sonning's pre-Christmas production of Alan Ayckbourn's "Time and Time Again" attracted a full coach-load of Probus members and guests on Sunday 13 December.

The play, written in 1973, will have some resonance for a Probus audience, but in quality it rates quite low within its genre. What we are presented with is: three men behaving ridiculously each in his own way; one middle-aged woman contributing an element of stabilization; and one young woman whose affections are the focus of the plot. The last of these, Joan (played by Amy Hall), has some determination about her along with her reticence and her decent looks. All the players are reasonably audible within the small Mill theatre.

The story starts with Joan tepidly linked with clean-living chap Peter (Nicholas Atkinson), star of the village cricket and football clubs — which it is nice to know are keeping going, as are apparently a couple of distantly mentioned pubs. But Leonard (Ian Targett) is there too, Leonard thirty-something with his failed marriage and of dreamy disposition; and Leonard and Joan fall for each other (sort-of). There is a nice moment when they stumble into the small fishpond under the gaze of its for-Leonard-iconic guardian gnome and perform a brief dance there. Graham (John Arthur), brother-in-law of Leonard and employer of Peter, disapproves of this development, as of much else that surrounds him: he's really noisy about the place, his wife Anna (Lesley Meade) keeping order up to a point.

Peter notices after a month or three, as Saturday cricket yields to Saturday football (the sun still shining over the sleepy village), that Joan is no longer around him; Leonard, vague and even cowardly, fails to speak out; Peter concludes that Joan's involvement is, rather, with Graham and attacks him. This moment of drama is quite effective — and funny, as admittedly are some episodes and lines scattered here and there. The play ends soon after, with Joan walking away from both the feeble youngish men in her life.

So, a quiet world, a little excitement, inadequate characters adequately portrayed (but no more), a small ration of humour. If my relative lack of enthusiasm for the performance is evident, pre-Christmas Sonning is always a good and cheerful day out, with the Lindsay organization of the outing exemplary as ever.

Richard Bird.