

To many people Wolverton will be an uninteresting little town through which fast Inter-City trains flash on their way to Birmingham. Now it is one of the older-established communities which are being linked together with a wealth of new development to form the brave new city of Milton Keynes.

But Wolverton, with its few streets in a grid pattern, is a fascinating example of industrial history in its own right, and in "All Change," a large-scale production in the Stantonbury Theatre, in itself equally fascinating as a way in which a theatre is linked with a vast new educational and leisure complex, its story was told. This surely was the perfect example of community theatre in action - a piece of highly significant but probably little-known local history written and performed by a skilled and enthusiastic team of residents under the direction of a dedicated and accomplished producer in Roy Nevitt, director of drama for the Stantonbury Campus.

One of the most remarkable aspects of the production was the way in which people of all ages had been integrated into it - tiny children who illustrated the entertainment placed before Queen Victoria on her visit to Wolverton, teenagers playing railway staff and the riff-raff who made Wolverton something of a frontier town during the construction of the line, and their elders who portrayed those responsible - politicians, landowners, lawyers, engineers - for the arguments and difficulties which beset the London to Birmingham Railway in its early days.

The narrative, largely researched by Margaret Broadhurst, was full of human, political, social and technical interest, and in addition to acting which for the most part was more than merely competent, there were a number of original songs written mainly by Paul Clark and "J" Cunningham and performed by a mixed vocal and instrumental group under Rib Davis. Of these, the amusing and charming "Refreshment Room Song" was staged with a period flair that was quite outstanding.

Peter Hepple

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"Who'd want to live on school and community documentaries in a dump like this?" was the taxi drivers comment as we drove through that colossal building known as Milton Keynes. It did seem pretty rootless, all mud and little boxes. But beavering away in the heart of the city and finding more than roots is the Stantonbury Campus Drama Group, whose director is Roy Nevitt.

"All Change" is the result of many months spent delving into the archives and it goes to show just how much theatrical mileage there is in our own back yards. Meticulously researched, it tells of the coming and going of the railway to nearby Wolverton - of the "Captain Swing" riots, politics and chicanery; conflict, success, fame and notoriety and the final demise of Wolverton.

In the two hours of action, packed with ballads and local jokes, the narrative technique is always varied; there is a fierce mime drama about a punch-up with the bargemen and a wonderful description of Mr Punch's attempts to drink red hot soup in the five minutes allocated for refreshments at the Wolverton "Change". It was like some glorious local celebration - with plenty of simple rousing songs and lots of scope for every kind of talent.

Peter Fanning

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