Realities of war brought home

The Brykcreem Boys, a play by Peter Durrant, was performed in a 'rehearsed reading' by students of Park House School at Greenham Common Control Tower under the direction of Andy Kempe.

The classic film The Great Escape has been on show all over the country to mark the 75th anniversary of the true story of the heroic exploits of 76 prisoners of war, who in 1944, attempted a famous escape from Stalag Luft III in Poland.

Another celebration of wartime heroics occurred last week at the Greenham Common Control Tower, where students from Park House School, under the direction of University of Reading Professor of Drama Education at the University of Reading, Andy Kempe, presented a rehearsed reading of a play called The Brykcreem Boys, which was written in 1978 by Peter Durrant and was first performed as a Play for Today on BBC2.

A play about a war that happened 75 years ago! Is that really what today’s young people need to be studying? “Empathically yes,” says director Kempe, who lives in Newbury.

“This is no boring exercise and this play certainly doesn’t glorify war in any sense.”

In 1944, aircraftman George Nunn falls asleep while guarding an airfield and gets fronlits in his face. He is taken to the nearest hospital, but quickly realises that the other patients, all RAF bomber crew, are there for very different reasons from him.

Initially bemused by their odd behaviour, he comes to understand that night when he joins them as they vigorously re-enact their experiences of the ill-fated raid on Nuremberg.

They are clearly suffering from a condition that used to be called shell shock, but these days is usually referred to as post traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD.

The young cast certainly immersed themselves in their roles and, if their understanding of the horrific realities of war was enhanced, then so was that of the audience.

The Brykcreem Boys, at Greenham Control Tower from February 4 to 14

The performers.

After all, the average age of a crew of a Lancaster bomber was 22; a more four- or five years older than that of the cast.


Introducing the evening, the playwright (Peter Durrant) explained the personal story behind the play, which was inspired by his father’s eccentric behaviour. This included playing Chopin’s Funeral March at Christmas lunch, and recalling endlessly his wartime experiences.

Curious the sparseness of the facilities at the atmospheric and iconic venue, and the fact that this was far from a polished performance, actually added to the effectiveness of the occasion and much credit must go to all concerned.

DAVID RYNS JONES

Remembering the Ugandan Asian refugees

At the control tower tonight (Thursday) The Day My Father’s Dreams Were Shattered.

In August 1972, president of Uganda Idi Amin ordered the expulsion of his country’s Asian minority, giving them 90 days to leave. This is a talk by Pragyna Nay, who arrived as a refugee at Greenham Common as a child, and Kim Hodges, who was a member of the team sent to Uganda to evacuate the Uganda Asians.

Doors open at 7pm, and the event is from 7.30pm to 8.30pm. 

Cafe available serving hot and cold drinks and cake.