



Show Report

SOUP Productions

The House, The Boys & The Trial

19 June 2026

PRODUCTION INFORMATION

PRODUCTION	The House, The Boys & The Trial
SOCIETY	SOUP Productions
VENUE	St Thomas' Church Hall
GENRE	Drama
CAST SIZE	15
WRITER/DIRECTOR	Michael Pirks
SET DESIGN TEAM	Ruth Gosney, Drew Gosney, Michelle Drinkwater, Colin Drinkwater & Emmett Drinkwater
TECHNICAL SUPPORT	The Studio, Widnes
PRODUCTION/THEATRE PHOTOGRAPHER	Colin Drinkwater (Jorube Portrait Photography)
THEATRICAL MARKUP ARTIST	Abigail Smith
POSTER DESIGNER	Jake Liken & Samantha-Jane Twigg
PROGRAMME DESIGN	Ruth Gosney

CAST LIST

CHARLIE BAXTER	Josh Hopson
GREGORY FISHWICK	Jake Liken
SIR ISSAC HITCHEN	Andy McQuoid
JACQUES / LUCINDA	Marcus Cameron
THOMAS RIX	Liam Derbyshire
ISABELLE FISHWICK	Samantha Duxbury
MARY BAXTER	Jayne Dittrich
ROBINSON	Neil Atherton
MARGARET	Michelle Drinkwater
OSCAR / CLERK	Emmett Drinkwater
KITTY	Michele Dean
VOICE OF THE JUDGE	Spencer Lawrence
CONSTABLE / VILLAGER	Matty Hillier
CONSTABLE / VILLAGER	Carlos Raul
BARMAID / VILLAGER	Corynne Dittrich

DATE OF PERFORMANCE	Friday 19th June 2026
DATE REPORT PUBLISHED	Sunday 21st June 2026
ADJUDICATOR ID	NSA0003

NSA LOGO ON POSTER	No
NSA IN PROGRAMME	Yes
PROGRAMME CLASS	Essential Information

THE REVIEW

REVIEW WORD COUNT	1670
STRONGEST ELEMENTS	

A Powerful Sense of Community and Purpose

- One of the most striking elements of the production was the clear sense that this was a piece deeply rooted in and meaningful to its community. Rather than feeling like a straightforward retelling of scripted dialogue, the performance carried an authenticity that reflected genuine personal and collective investment from the company.

A Poignant Courtroom Farewell

- A memorable moment came in Charlie's final speech from the dock, delivered by **Josh Hopson** with conviction and emotional clarity. The performance was so compelling that the audience was held in complete silence, fully absorbed in the weight of the moment. Hopson conveyed both vulnerability and strength, ensuring the speech landed with real emotional impact.

Monologue of Emotional Power and Control

- **Jake Liken**'s monologue as Gregory marked one of the production's most impactful moments. His performance was packed with emotional intensity, supported by excellent control of pace and tone that allowed key moments to land effectively. His striking use of stillness and silence created space for emotion to resonate. Combined with piercing eye contact that held the room, Liken commanded attention with confidence and precision, resulting in a moment of genuine theatrical power.

This was my first visit to see **SOUP Productions**, and what a production to experience for the first time. **The House, The Boys & The Trial** originally staged for Warrington Pride in 2025, has returned by popular demand and is perfectly timed to coincide with Pride Month.

Writer and director **Michael Pirks** provided a warm welcome before we settled into our seats and took in our surroundings. The production was staged at The Studio in Widnes, an independent arts venue and community hub. Formerly a Methodist Sunday School, the building is now operated by the local registered charity LOOSE (Music, Theatre, Arts Project) and hosts a

diverse programme of live music, theatre and wellbeing events. Its spacious setting provided an ideal backdrop for this thought-provoking piece.

The House, The Boys & The Trial tells the true story of the 1806 raid on a Warrington tavern known as the Sodomite House, during which five men were arrested and brought to trial. Using excerpts from actual court transcripts, the production explores the lives of those involved and highlights the harsh realities they endured. Prior to the performance, audiences were advised that the production contained mature themes, including discriminatory language, violence and sexual abuse.

The set, designed and constructed by **Ruth Gosney, Drew Gosney, Michelle Drinkwater, Colin Drinkwater** and **Emmett Drinkwater**, was intentionally minimal and suited the piece well. Benches, market carts and courtroom lecterns established each setting without distracting from the story being told.

One minor observation was that the audience could see directly into the wings, meaning cast members preparing for entrances were occasionally visible. This did not significantly detract from the performance, but with such an intimate venue, awareness of sightlines is something that could easily be refined in future performances.

Lighting, sound and projections were provided by **The Studio Team**. In keeping with the overall style of the production, the understated lighting complemented the mood of each scene. I particularly appreciated the use of colours reflecting those of the Pride flag, subtly reinforcing the themes of the production.

Sound levels were well balanced throughout, especially considering the size of the hall and the fact that the cast performed without microphones. The projections supported the storytelling without overwhelming the action on stage. There were a few moments during Act Two where voice-over cues appeared slightly delayed. However, these were only minor observations from the performance I attended and did not detract from the overall impact of the production.

The production centred around two key characters: Gregory Fishwick and Charlie Baxter. Gregory, played by **Jake Liken**, is presented as a devoted family man with a deeply conflicted and troubled soul. During Act One, Jake portrayed Gregory with confidence and physicality, reflecting the character's pursuit of lust and his use of the House as an outlet for his desires. In contrast, Act Two revealed a far more vulnerable and emotional side to the character as his past was gradually uncovered. A standout moment came during Jake's powerful monologue, delivered with excellent control and a clear understanding of when quieter moments should be allowed to breathe. Combined with strong vocal delivery and effective audience connection, he held the audience's attention throughout.

Gregory's journey provided a striking contrast to that of Charlie Baxter, played by **Josh Hopson**. While Gregory's story was driven by lust and inner conflict, Charlie represented love, loyalty and compassion. Devoted to caring for his ailing mother, Charlie viewed the world with an innocence and wonder that made him instantly endearing. Josh displayed impressive emotional range throughout the evening, portraying Charlie with sincerity and tenderness. The

gentle moments shared with his mother highlighted the character's selflessness, creating a striking contrast to Gregory's experiences.

I was especially impressed by Josh's partnership with **Marcus Cameron**, with the pair sharing some particularly affecting moments. However, it was Josh's final speech from the dock that proved one of the evening's most memorable moments. Delivered with conviction and emotion, the audience listened in complete silence, and the themes expressed felt just as relevant today as they would have done in 1806.

Marcus Cameron played Jacques, a young man exiled from his native France because of his unconventional lifestyle. Drawn to those on the margins of society, he forms an unexpected friendship with Charlie Baxter. Marcus's performance was thoughtful and well considered, balancing Jacques's flirtatious nature with moments of genuine tenderness. He and Josh Hopson shared believable chemistry, and their scenes together were staged with sensitivity, creating moments that felt soft, loving and entirely appropriate to the story being told.

In addition to Jacques, Marcus introduced audiences to his drag alter ego, Lucinda, providing a memorable lip-sync performance that brought energy and fun to the production. One particularly striking image saw Marcus and Josh almost recreate Michelangelo's The Creation of Adam, a subtle visual reference that demonstrated the care and attention paid to the storytelling throughout the production.

Andy McQuoid portrayed Isaac Hitchen, based on the historical figure who offered refuge and a degree of freedom for men to explore their sexuality. Andy made a commanding entrance, carrying himself with all the airs and graces expected of a man of status and influence. As the story progressed, a more nurturing and protective side emerged, revealing someone who genuinely cared for the men who frequented his establishment. Andy injected welcome moments of humour into difficult subject matter, providing light relief without undermining the seriousness of the story. His authority and stage presence made for an engaging portrayal.

Liam Derbyshire portrayed Thomas Rix, another character inspired by a real historical figure. A notorious gentleman who exchanged intimacy for financial gain, Thomas proved willing to go to extraordinary lengths to secure his own freedom. Liam clearly relished the role, embracing the character's upper-class mannerisms and portraying Thomas with a confidence and arrogance that made him instantly recognisable. He successfully captured the manipulative and self-serving nature of the character, creating someone the audience could neither fully trust nor ignore. One area that could be explored further would be Thomas' emotional journey. A more pronounced shift in demeanour when he betrays the other men in the House, and again when events fail to unfold as he anticipated, would have heightened the impact of the character and provided an opportunity to showcase an even wider emotional range.

Jayne Dittrich portrayed Mary, Charlie's devoted mother. Initially presented as loving and gentle, the character undergoes a gradual transformation as age and declining mental health take their toll, revealing a much darker side beneath the surface. Jayne handled this journey with sensitivity and skill. The aged quality she maintained in her voice added authenticity to the role, and she convincingly moved between Mary's caring nature and the more troubling aspects that emerged later in the story. Mary was a character the audience could easily warm to during Act One, making the developments in Act Two even more affecting. Jayne

successfully conveyed this shift, creating a character who evoked both sympathy and disappointment.

Samantha Duxbury portrayed Isabelle, Gregory's devoted wife, whose hopes are centred around achieving happiness and creating the perfect family life. Samantha gave a believable performance, capturing the dutiful and respectable wife expected of the period. Even during scenes without dialogue, particularly the trial sequences, she remained fully engaged with the action around her. Her pivotal scene, in which she offers to "cure" her husband, was one of the production's most emotionally charged moments. While Samantha approached the scene with compassion and sincerity, exploring more of Isabelle's anger, hurt and betrayal could have added even greater depth. Nevertheless, she worked well alongside Jake Liken, and the pair shared a believable relationship throughout.

Michelle Drinkwater portrayed Margaret, a member of the local clergy and a staunch advocate of virtue and morality. She brought the authority and stage presence the role demanded, creating a believable figure whose convictions were clear throughout.

Margaret's grandson, Oscar, was portrayed by **Emmett Drinkwater** and provided an additional family dynamic within the production. There were occasions when some dialogue was difficult to hear, which may simply have been a result of the size and acoustics of the performance space. However, his opening speech in Act Two revealed some lovely flashes of emotion and anger, and I would have enjoyed seeing more of this intensity throughout.

Michele Dean portrayed Kitty, the proprietor of the tavern. Brassy, warm and no-nonsense, the character's personality was established from the moment she appeared. Michele brought confidence to the role, and her playful yet commanding interactions with Andy McQuoid added some enjoyable moments to the production.

Neil Atherton's Barrister Robinson possessed the authority and precision expected of the role. His measured movement and varied vocal delivery kept the courtroom scenes engaging, while his interaction with Spencer Lawrence's pre-recorded Judge helped reinforce the religious undertones surrounding the trial.

The ensemble, comprising **Carlos Raul**, **Corynne Dittrich** and **Matty Hillier**, made a valuable contribution to the production. Their reactions, movement and support work helped enrich the storytelling and added depth to the world being created on stage.

What resonated most with me throughout the evening was just how much this production clearly meant to everyone involved. It never felt as though the company were simply reciting lines from a script; instead, they were telling a story that held genuine significance for both them and the local community. As the final scene unfolded and a montage charting the history of the Pride movement through to the present day played out, I was struck by the enduring relevance and importance of the production's message. It was a powerful and moving conclusion, and I freely admit that it brought a tear to my eye.

The House, The Boys & The Trial is an ambitious and thought-provoking piece that has clearly been created with passion, care and respect for the stories it tells. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to **Michael Pirks** and everyone at SOUP Productions for their warm and

munificent hospitality throughout the evening. Their generosity of spirit was evident both on and off the stage, and I look forward with great interest to seeing what the company produces next.

PHOTOGRAPHS







PROGRAMME

