



Show Report

Altrincham Little Theatre

When We Are Married

17 May 2026

PRODUCTION INFORMATION

PRODUCTION	When We Are Married
SOCIETY	Altrincham Little Theatre
VENUE	Altrincham Little Theatre
GENRE	Drama
CAST SIZE	14
STAGE DIRECTOR	John Newman
STAGE MANAGER	Lisa Barker
PROPERTIES	Lisa Barker, Janet Reidsma
CONTINUITY	Christine Heath
WARDROBE	Jude Craig
COSTUMES	Altrincham Little Theatre
WIGS	Janet Reidsma
SOUND DESIGN	Jan Taylor
LIGHTING DESIGN	Jan Taylor
TECHNICAL OPERATOR	Jan Taylor
SET DESIGN	Lisa Barker, Barbara Harris
STAGE CREW	Paul Blackwell, Martin Carrick, Don Hines, John Howe, Andy Peate, Alan Reidsma, Lisa Barker, Pauline Glover, Stephen Glover

CAST LIST

Joseph Helliwell	John Westbrook
Maria Helliwell	Cherrill Wyche
Albert Parker	Stephen Moss
Annie Parker	Alison Gould
Herbert Soppitt	Bill Platt
Clara Soppitt	Barbara Steel
Henry Ormonroyd	Charlie Cook
Lottie Grady	Kathryn Fennell
Reverend Clement Mercer	Alex Clarke
Nancy Holmes	Hana Ramsden
Gerald Forbes	Jacob Austin
Mrs Northrop	Jude Craig
Fred Dyson	Josh Burns
Ruby	Sarah Morgan

DATE OF PERFORMANCE	Sunday 17th May 2026
DATE REPORT PUBLISHED	Monday 18th May 2026
ADJUDICATOR ID	NSA0001
NSA LOGO ON POSTER	Yes
NSA IN PROGRAMME	Logo Only, No Banner
PROGRAMME CLASS	Best Essential Information

THE REVIEW

REVIEW WORD COUNT 1875

STRONGEST ELEMENTS

Direction and Comic Vision

- Barbara Harris' clear direction and understanding of Priestley's humour transformed a potentially slow, dialogue-heavy play into a fast-paced production that generated constant audience laughter.

The Attention to Detail

- From the opening animation to the Edwardian set dressing, the society has an incredible team that put in the extra effort consistently to sets, technical elements and they all create a welcoming community space for all.

Chemistry and Casting

- The cast worked as a genuinely cohesive ensemble, with believable relationships and natural chemistry that made performances feel authentic rather than simply acted.

It was a pleasure to attend the final production of the season at Altrincham Little Theatre, who had chosen J. B. Priestley's *When We Are Married*. I will admit from the outset that this is not one of my personal favourite plays. It is incredibly dialogue-heavy, has the potential to drag in places, and because it is such a well-known and frequently performed piece, it carries its own challenge. Without passionate direction, a clear creative vision, and a cast capable of delivering Priestley's humour with precision and conviction, it can easily lose momentum and feel dated. However, I can safely say that this was absolutely not the case here.

Director **Barbara Harris** delivered an exceptional production that immediately felt purposeful and carefully considered. There was a clear vision from the outset and, perhaps most importantly, a cast that worked together as a complete ensemble. The chemistry and understanding between performers meant that the comedy landed naturally and consistently. Throughout the evening both I and the audience around me were in absolute stitches. There

were moments of genuine, uncontrollable laughter throughout and, for me, that is always a sign of a production where everyone involved fully understands the style and rhythm of the piece.

What continues to set Altrincham Little Theatre apart from many societies in the region is its incredibly strong sense of community. It feels less like a theatre group and more like an extended family. Performers from previous productions were helping as front-of-house stewards for this show and there is clearly a real appreciation amongst members for every aspect of the theatre's operation. That community spirit appears embedded within the organisation itself and long may it continue as the society moves towards its 131st season later this year.

The level of care and attention people put into even the smallest roles or responsibilities genuinely makes ALT stand out. There is a collective passion here that audiences can feel before the show even begins. Huge congratulations are deserved for this final production of the season and I genuinely do not think I have ever seen the auditorium so full. That is a huge credit to the marketing and publicity team.

It was so busy, in fact, that there was a little confusion among audience members regarding seating arrangements, with some people accidentally occupying the wrong seats. While a packed auditorium is certainly a positive issue to have, perhaps in future, for particularly busy performances, it may help to have stewards remain inside the auditorium to assist with any confusion. A very minor point, but one worth considering.

The production itself began with a lovely touch - a short animation designed by Jan Taylor which immediately established both setting and tone. Using old wedding photography, images of the town, suitable period music and carefully selected fonts, the sequence built anticipation beautifully. It eventually led to an image of the set itself and, as the curtain opened revealing the stage exactly as shown in the photograph, it was met with enthusiastic applause from the audience.

It was such a simple but effective creative decision and immediately demonstrated the fastidious nature of the creative team. It was one of those early moments that immediately reassured the audience they were in very safe hands. It set expectations from the beginning and showed a level of attention to detail that continued throughout the evening.

The stage crew and set design team consistently produce high-quality work at ALT and this production was no exception. The Edwardian setting was beautifully realised through thoughtful decor and careful design choices. Sky-blue walls, complementary wallpaper, a chaise longue, painted terracotta flooring and carefully placed dressing including a barometer, net curtains, glassware and a piano all worked together to create an authentic environment.

Attention to detail remains one of ALT's strongest qualities and there is always a sense that everyone involved pours genuine passion and care into every element of the production. The set looked lived in rather than simply assembled.

One small observation from my seat: one picture frame appeared to remain reflective and due to its angle caught a stage light throughout much of Act One. This meant a reflected light was visible from the audience for extended periods. It is only a very minor issue and certainly not production-breaking, but perhaps something to consider when positioning reflective materials in future.

Joseph Helliwell was portrayed by **John Westbrook**, who brought a wonderfully stern and overpowering presence to the role. He had a naturally commanding quality and occasionally presented Joseph with an almost aggressive bluntness that suited the character perfectly. His comic timing was excellent and he understood precisely when to pause and allow moments to breathe before delivering dialogue. Those pauses generated some of the evening's biggest laughs and his confidence on stage was evident throughout.

Alongside him, **Cherrill Wyche** portrayed Maria Helliwell with grace and elegance. Her upper-class accent remained consistent and believable throughout and she complemented this with excellent posture, movement and mannerisms. There was a genuine emotional depth to her performance and she balanced comedy with sincerity extremely well.

Albert and Annie Parker were played by **Stephen Moss** and **Alison Gould**. I have seen Stephen perform many times now and his work simply continues to improve. There was a confidence and assurance in his performance that immediately drew focus. He directed his work outward beautifully, embraced the exaggerated elements of the role and made full use of facial expressions, reactions and wonderfully timed eye rolls. He was an absolute joy to watch.

Alison Gould brought excellent reactive acting and wonderfully observed facial expressions throughout. Her softer moments added emotional depth while her comic instincts delivered some very memorable reactions. Her cackle alone generated audience laughter and her controlled frustration during arguments felt authentic and believable.

The final married couple, Herbert and Clara Soppitt, were portrayed by **Bill Platt** and **Barbara Steel**. Bill delivered Herbert with fantastic comic timing, presenting him initially as submissive and slightly gormless before allowing the character to evolve later within the play. Through strong character work he elevated moments that could easily have passed unnoticed. He grounded the larger personalities around him effectively and maintained excellent projection throughout. Despite significant audience laughter he never once appeared close to breaking character.

Barbara Steel once again demonstrated why certain performers simply know exactly which roles suit them best. I have seen Barbara perform numerous times and this role felt entirely natural for her. Her posture and stage presence were excellent and she possesses a wonderfully distinctive expression which can only really be described as a Victorian-horror-style grumpy pout. She commanded both the stage and the performers around her and paid close attention to reactive acting throughout. Even during argumentative moments there was careful control in her projection and physicality.

The chemistry between all three married couples felt entirely genuine. Their interactions felt natural and authentic and there were moments where it felt less like acting and more like observing real relationships unfolding. Given the static nature of the set, there was also excellent movement and staging throughout to ensure visual variety to maintain pace.

Charlie Cook portrayed **Henry Ormonroyd** with strong projection and excellent physical characterisation. He captured the scruffy and drunken nature of the role well, using carefully measured movement and vocal emphasis to create a believable performance.

Kathryn Fennell's portrayal of Lottie Grady arrived with purpose and confidence. She entered the stage determined to create chaos and made sure everybody knew it. Her diction was strong and she embraced the forceful energy of the character fully.

Alex Clarke played Reverend Clement Mercer and, having seen Alex perform many times before, he continues to provide consistent performances, usually similar characters however, with strong projection and clear character choices. He always appears focused and calm on stage.

Nancy Holmes was portrayed by **Hana Ramsden** with warmth, softness and sincerity. She maintained a convincing accent throughout and brought a gentle innocence to the role that worked beautifully.

This production also welcomed several new society members and it was wonderful to see them integrated so confidently. Their inclusion was highlighted through a redesigned programme which felt bolder, clearer and more artistic than previous editions. It worked very well and gave debut performers deserved recognition. I am assuming this may be Jan's work but this was not credited in the programme itself.

Jacob Austin portrayed Gerald Forbes with confidence and enthusiasm. His projection and characterisation were strong and his performance felt genuine throughout. He worked especially well alongside **Hana Ramsden** and together they created a believable portrayal of young love. It is simply a shame the role itself is relatively small because I would have welcomed seeing more.

Jude Craig made an excellent society debut as Mrs Northrop. Although a smaller role, she elevated it significantly through strong comic timing and excellent delivery. Her sarcasm and authoritative presence generated considerable audience laughter. She found exactly the right balance between self-importance and humour and ensured every moment counted.

Josh Burns brought fantastic energy to Fred Dyson. His enthusiasm and stage presence suited the role well and he delivered the flamboyant reporter with confidence.

Sarah Morgan portrayed Ruby with strong diction, posture and projection. While at times I would perhaps have liked to see more outward focus toward the audience, she captured Ruby's youthful and gossipy nature very effectively.

I would genuinely like to see all of these newcomers return in future productions with larger opportunities.

One of the most refreshing aspects of this production was seeing such a broad age range represented within the cast. Less experienced performers can learn a tremendous amount from working alongside seasoned performers and there was a lovely sense of shared energy and enthusiasm.

The production was cast exceptionally well and huge credit must go to **Barbara Harris** for bringing together such a successful ensemble. I genuinely do not think I have laughed this much during a production of *When We Are Married* before and that ultimately comes down to direction and the creative team and cast where they have the same vision and mentality. Every emotional moment felt authentic. Every outburst was measured and controlled. Pace remained strong throughout and comic timing was executed beautifully.

Thank you also to **Jan Taylor** for technical support with lighting and sound. The warm stage wash worked effectively and the yellow glow within the rear corridor successfully suggested a separate space. If I were being incredibly picky, perhaps it leaned slightly green at times and looked a touch artificial, but that really is nit-picking. Sound effects were well sourced and productions only truly come together when all departments work cohesively.

Finally, thank you to chairman **Steve Smith**, Jan, and all cast, crew and committee members who took the time to speak with me throughout the season. It is becoming increasingly rare to find societies like ALT that continue producing theatre with such care, passion and community spirit. With rising costs continuing to affect amateur theatre, supporting societies like this is increasingly important to ensure future generations continue to have opportunities.

Thank you for your kindness, hospitality, support and, most importantly, your friendship and sense of community this season. I very much look forward to seeing you all again at the awards evening in October and for another exciting season ahead.

PHOTOGRAPHS







PROGRAMME

