

<b>Production</b>	Breaking the Code
<b>Society</b>	Frodsham Players
<b>Venue</b>	Frodsham Community Centre
<b>Type of Production</b>	Play
<b>Director</b>	Carole Shinkfield
<b>Written by</b>	Hugh Whitemore
<b>Review</b>	30.11.23
<b>Reviewer</b>	Jake Powell

Frodsham Players returned to Frodsham Community Centre for their production of 'Breaking the Code', directed by Carole Shinkfield. Performed on the floor with the audience on three sides, this was a compelling piece of theatre from start to finish. The direction from Carole was confident and assured. As soon as the performers were visible to the audience, they were in character. With the audience being on three sides, performers having their backs to parts of the audience was inevitable. This did not hinder the production in any way. The vocal delivery from the entire cast was exemplary. It made the scenes more natural, as the performers could face each other and deliver believable conversations. The set was very good, with blackboards creating the back of the stage. The blackboards were full of equations and mathematical formulae that were referenced throughout the play, such as the Fibonacci sequence. The rest of the set was made up of different furniture; a table, chairs, cabinet, hat stand. The enigma machine was ever present on stage, reminding the audience of the invaluable work of Alan Turing. It was a masterstroke having the stage crew dressed in period costume to do the scene changes. They were characters in their own right. These were done in full view of the audience and were all very well-rehearsed. The simplicity of moving the table and chairs to create a new location, or adding a tablecloth was effective. Even when not doing scene changes, the stage crew were a constant presence, as if they were working alongside Turing at Bletchley. The costumes were very good and in keeping with the period.

Lighting and sound were both well integrated into the production. The lighting was unobtrusive, and changed subtly for each scene. The sound effects used were good and cued well. The music used for the scene changes was well selected and suited the production well.

Seb Farrell was outstanding as Alan Turing. Very rarely off stage, Seb commanded the stage. He totally immersed himself into the character – he was Turing. The constant nail biting gave a sense of a nervous nature; the stutter was natural and not overdone. Seb created excellent onstage relationships with the entire cast. It was a totally convincing, and emotional, performance.

Sophie Flowers played Pat Green. This was a good performance and Sophie worked well with Seb. There were some lovely moments and Sophie told Pat's story well. The love, heartbreak and acceptance were all there in Sophie's performance.

Andrew Wilson was great in both roles as Ron Miller and Nikos. His Ron was cocky and self-assured; his Nikos was fun and lively (and performed entirely in Greek!). Both contrasting characters, but both delivered skilfully.

David Copley gave an imposing performance as John Smith. David has a commanding voice, which he used well in this pleasing cameo role.

Andrew Rauer, a last-minute cast replacement, did very well as Turing's close friend, Christopher Morcom. There was a strong, believable relationship developed between Andrew and Seb.

David Leslie gave a strong supporting performance as Dillwyn Knox, Turing's mentor. The physicality that David brought was totally believable. His scene with Seb in Act 2 was a masterclass between them both, and you were invested in David's performance.

Ian Lancaster was very good as Detective Sergeant Mick Ross. He had a great air of authority and commanded his scenes. It was a natural and believable performance, with Ian working well with his scene partners.

Julia Burgess delivered a good performance as Sara Turing, Alan's doting mother. The final moment when collecting Turing's belongings was delivered well by Julia and emotional.

Overall, this was an excellent production, with a tight knit ensemble of performers, an outstanding leading performance, and great technical elements integrated into the production.

Thank you to Frodsham Players for their kind invite and hospitality. All the best for your next production, 'Accidental Death of an Anarchist', next year.

This review is dedicated to the memory of Gill Burd, Honorary President of Frodsham Players, who passed away earlier this year.