

Jayne Morgan's Review from North Norfolk News. June 2013

A Sell Out Tour

Who knew that Colman's of Norwich exported far more than its fine yellow fiery condiment at the start of the 20th Century? Rob John's new play brings to life this fascinating and little known story of our very own "Canada Boys".

fEast theatre played to full-houses at every venue on their tour of Norwich and North Norfolk last week. ' I think the word spread after the first night at Sheringham Little Theatre ' said Mandy McKenna, fEast theatre's Co-Director and Company Manager. 'This play seems to have hit a nerve. Everyone has heard of Colmans but few know about the Canada Boys not even Sir Timothy Colman who attended the last night.'

'The Canada Boys' is a Norfolk story full of comic and moving moments brought to life by skilful professional performances of fEast regulars Owen Evans of The Nimmo Twins, Robin McLoughlin, Tabitha Woodgett together with newcomer Dawn Finnerty.

It is a local tale of local people. Jack (McLoughlin) has never been further than Cringleford and young Ethel (Woodgett) has never even seen the sea. They are suddenly confronted with broadening horizons - literally and metaphorically- in this pivotal period on the eve of the Great War. From the opening scene on a bridge over the Wensum in 1911 as Jack breathes in the pervading smell of mustard from the Colmans factory at Carrow, where he and his older brother work , the events of 1914 and the mustard gas pervading the trenches of Europe are foreshadowed.

The two brothers' family struggles and developing romantic relationships are intricately woven together with the tale of Colman's industrial development and philanthropic endeavours - culminating in the export of 18 young men to the colonies by boat in 1912 (one month after the Titanic's fateful voyage) as newly trained farmhands and dairy men.

But Jack has bigger plans. He is well read and political - dreaming of pursuing a trapper's life in the wilds of Northern Canada, fuelled by his reading of Jack London novels which he eventually shares with Ethel. He broadens her horizons too, by taking her all the way to Cromer to wet her feet paddling in the sea. This amusing scene, expertly played by Woodgett and McLoughlin had the audience in stitches.

Rob John's play has taken a little known piece of local history and universalised it with humour and poignancy in a fine piece of writing which not only speaks to Norfolk but has something to say to us all. FEast theatre hope to revive this production shortly due to it's popularity.

Jayne Morgan