

# THE WIGAN GIRLS

Presented by Arts and Community in Thornbury

Director: **Barbie Davies**

Musical Director: **Kate Phillipson-Masters**

From A level improvisation to huge community play, ACT's production of *THE WIGAN GIRLS* at Thornbury Leisure Centre revealed a true picture of Victorian life, in particular that of coal mining. The colourful fairground scene introduced a variety of characters in an enormous cast of different ages, all authentically costumed, whether mill girls, pit families, politicians or aristocrats. Props and scenery seemed to be moved effortlessly by the cast and the action flowed seamlessly from music hall to pit to scenes involving the élite of Victorian society and Queen Victoria's surprise appearance in her pony-driven carriage!

The rousing singing of the Wigan girls, with strong orchestral accompaniment, demonstrated their determination to work, in spite of adverse criticism. Accents were impressively sustained in speech and song, while make up was extremely important in conveying the filth in which miners lived and worked, compared with the beautifully groomed upper classes. Arthur Mumby's diaries, plus authentic slides, provided interesting historical interjections throughout and the background to the battle of rights, while the contrasting society ball, peppered with revealing short cameos, was beautifully costumed and choreographed. We glimpsed the education of the wealthy, as opposed to the harsh existence of poor children, all portrayed with wonderful spirit and voices. Sound and lighting effects contributed greatly to the atmospheric pit disaster and the end of the love story, effectively intertwined with the action of this unforgettable production.

Like these fighters whose community spirit helped them achieve their aims, let's hope that ACT can realise its dream of a theatre-based community facility in Thornbury.

**Review by Loretta Hedges**