



St George and the Dragon, Mere Lecture Hall

IN this year of pageantry and royal celebration, it's fitting that the first pantomime of our season is (very loosely) based on the story of that most English of heroes, St George (and please don't write in to say he was actually a Greek, like Prince Philip!) Some years ago Chris Wood joined forces with Ian Grieg to write the panto for the then ImpACT at Spetisbury, and this year he has revived and tweaked to make it appropriately Mere-relevant. It calls for a large cast, which put a strain on the accident and illness strewn MADS, but in spite of last minute stand-ins and a prompt with her own lines, it was all right on the night.

The story has all the usual

pantomime characters, with a bit of a twist. The dame was played by a woman, the fairy by a man and there was a mad professor and a vegetarian dragon thrown in for good measure

The burghers of Mere (that's beefburgher, hamburgher, cheeseburgher and dragonburgher), led by the Burgher King, Big Mac, process through the town on the dawn of the annual Dragon Pageant, while idle George gets under his aunt Norah Bone's feet, and his dog the doughty Dragon Hound SirLoin sets up a good chat with the audience.

Lord Trout Tickler, a wizard in the disguise of a landed gent, conspires with his supporters, the butcher Mrs Burden and her daft assistant Brawn, to take over the land. At the end of a day of feasting and drinking, SirLoin is put

out of the house for the night, and, searching for somewhere comfy to sleep, finds an odd and very large egg shaped stone. As soon as Lord Trout sees it, he recognises that it's a dragon's egg.

Here is the coup de theatre for the show, as the egg is hatched into a dragon growing to monstrous proportions before our eyes.

By the end the dragon has revealed that he's no carnivore, Trout is scuppered, George and Big Mac's daughter are wed and they all live happily ever after - just as it should be.

The company was fortunate in the excellent musical duo of Alan Benson and Mike Durkee, and even Thursday's small audience managed a loud version of Bluff the Tragic Dragon.

The clever set disguised most of the shortcomings of the stage, and there were memorable performances from Howard Smith as Fairy Nough, Anne Rich as the dame, the wonderfully arch Mary White as SirLoin, Eric Kincaid as the improbable Big Mac and Chris Wood having great fun in the glittering purple robes of the wizardly baddie.

Great fun was had by all. GP-W