

THE PICKWICK PAPERS

Rain or Shine Theatre
Maumbury Rings, Dorchester
Sunday 16th August 2026

This remarkably gifted troupe is still going strong after 28 years, readily regaling audiences with their pacy productions and prompting gales of relentless laughter. The added bonus of a beautiful outdoor setting, however, adds that extra golden touch, and tonight I felt blessed watching it all in the imposing sun-kissed Roman amphitheatre that is the Maumbury Rings in Dorchester.

This was another classic Rain or Shine run. Here they were again with all their theatrical hallmarks firmly in place: rapid-fire costume changes, clear and often grandiloquent diction all the way to the back row, amusing hairstyles and a passing nod to Monty Python (They were using coconuts!).

Into the mix went convincing regional accents, a hint of pantomime i.e. a few boos directed at the bad guy, multiple role-playing, corny jokes, including the Great Pothole Gag, how confident we felt about the present government and Nigel Farage (Cue the groans).

Having been dive-bombed by a few low-flying seagulls, looking to make off with our picnics, a squawking crow appeared bang on cue, skirting the outer perimeter of the vast dustbowl, now that this sweltering summer's fifth heatwave had left its mark.

Furthermore, quips about shortages of actors and even the legendary *Dad's Army* "Don't tell him, Pike!" joke were granted a look-in, garnering the loudest laugh of the evening during this Dickensian delirium, and all played out on another postage stamp-sized set garnished with some flower-festooned garden railings and a few tables and chairs.

Honestly, you could not make it up. For our part, we watched it all unfold spectacularly, all the time proudly wearing our Pickwick Club membership stickers.

Walking true to style, the entire tale was told by a hugely capable cast of just five actors sharing nearly twenty roles between them, each one of them displaying considerable depths of character, improvisation skills (What a clever horse and carriage) and much cross-dressing.

Whither next for Rain or Shine? We'll find out soon enough, and if it's half as good as tonight's madcap extravaganza, I have no doubt it will be worth the wait. Watch this space or else go to www.rainorshinetheatre.co.uk

Simon Lewis