

# Classic anti-war tale is recruited by Playgoers

SERIOUS and thought-provoking theatre returns to West Cumbria next week when Workington Playgoers Club open a five-night run of John Arden's classic anti-war play *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*.

The play, directed by Paul Adams, will be staged at the Theatre Royal from Tuesday.

Though set in the 1880s, the play's themes are more important than the historical context.

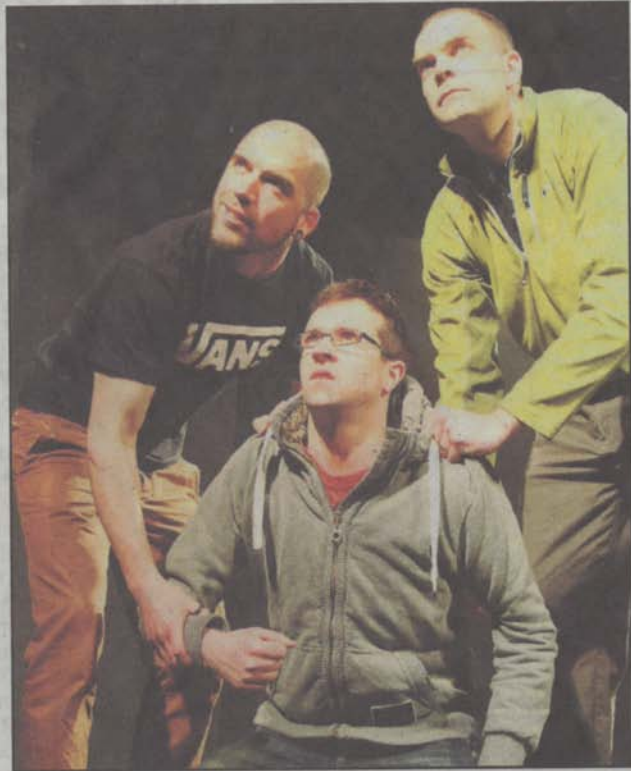
The background is a colonial war and the story centres on a group of soldiers led by Serjeant Musgrave (James Sheppard).

The group appears to be a recruiting team when they arrive in deepest winter in a strike-hit northern coal-mining town.

The mine owner and mayor (played by Stuart Evans), together with the parson and influential magistrate (Thom Robb) and the local constable (Luke Norendal) see an opportunity to use the soldiers to break the strike.

The two female characters, Mrs Hitchcock (Francesca Smith) and Annie (Allix Atherton) give the play significant direction.

The drama is considered



**SERGEANT MUSGRAVE'S DANCE:** Workington Playgoers, from left, Robert Hallard as Private Hurst, Mark Baille as one of the miners and Ben Brinicombe as Attercliffe

to be the definitive work by Barnsley-born Arden who died last year at the age of 81.

A Marxist with strong

moral convictions, the play expounded some of his views although he made it clear that he was neither a pacifist nor a proponent of

armed revolution.

The first professional production was at London's Royal Court Theatre in 1959 and its narrative remains strong and relevant.

There were local casting problems – all happily overcome. The Playgoers club is not flush with mature male actors so to choose a play with a requirement for 14 set a big task.

Paul Adams decided on a young cast, but that didn't solve everything.

He said: "I had it cast but, then, one person decided to get married in what would be the middle of it all, two changed jobs and one felt he ought to concentrate on his A-levels.

"Replacing them was not easy, but I managed by calling in favours, cajoling and remembering people I had seen in junior productions.

"Four were seen on the Theatre Royal stage fairly regularly, some have stage experience elsewhere; some have only ever done musical theatre and one person has never acted before.

"I have been impressed by how they have come together as a team and have developed a really high standard."

For tickets, call 01900 602122.