



AMATEUR THEATRE REVIEW:

The Incident Room – Ashton Hayes Theatre Club

A Tense, Thought-Provoking Dive into a Landmark Investigation

The Incident Room is a gripping and intelligent piece of theatre that delves into the real-life investigation of the Yorkshire Ripper during the 1970s. Set largely in the chaotic heart of the Millgarth police incident room, the play reconstructs one of the largest manhunts in British history- not through the eyes of the killer, but through those trying desperately to stop him.

This is no sensationalist true-crime tale. Instead, Hirst and Byrne deliver a fast-paced, tightly written drama that questions institutional blind spots, the role of women in policing, and the devastating human cost of investigative missteps. At the centre is Sergeant Megan Winterburn, a fictionalised composite character based on real women in the force. Through her, we see the emotional toll of the case, the ethical dilemmas faced by those in power, and the deep frustrations of working within a male-dominated system that often refused to listen.

The set design was nothing short of extraordinary. Intricately constructed and meticulously detailed, the space conveyed a sense of organised chaos that perfectly mirrored the intensity and complexity of the investigation. Every scrap of paper, every file, every bulletin board felt deliberately placed, contributing to a living, breathing environment that was both authentic and immersive. Particularly striking was the use of a period-accurate television and domestic living room area, which evoked a powerful sense of time and place. That familiar, slightly faded homeliness transported me back to my own childhood, grounding the production in a deeply personal reality and reminding the audience of the human lives behind the headlines.



The direction from Yvette Owen was remarkably meticulous, with not a single movement feeling accidental or out of place. Every gesture, pause, and transition was executed with precision, creating a sense of urgency and emotional weight that never faltered. It was clear that this director had studied the case in depth, not just to recreate events, but to understand their impact. There was a deep sensitivity in the staging, a palpable sense of responsibility to honour the women whose lives were lost, and to reflect the failures of the system with integrity rather than spectacle. This thoughtful, deliberate approach gave the production its emotional power and moral clarity. I think we've all wondered what really goes on in these secret incident rooms and watching this performance felt like a peak inside!



The cast were absolutely fantastic, every single performer brought such depth and clarity to their role that I found myself completely drawn into their world. The characterisation across the board was so strong, with each actor offering something distinct and compelling. I especially loved the brilliant contrast between the Manchester and Leeds stations; the humour, the energy, the little quirks that made each team district so different, was fantastic and relatable. It was genuinely hilarious at times, and those moments of levity made the heavier scenes hit even harder. Together, they told the story with real heart and purpose, and it was a joy to watch such a strong, connected ensemble bring it all to life.



It must be noted that Kathryn Cooke's performance as Megan Winterburn was truly phenomenal. Taking on such a weighty and emotionally complex role is no small feat, but she carried it with remarkable grace, nuance, and power. I was genuinely blown away she embodied Megan's quiet resilience, capturing both the meekness and internal conflict of a woman navigating a male-dominated system, and the (sometimes) quiet strength that ultimately drives her forward. Her performance never once felt forced or overstated; instead, it was deeply human, layered with vulnerability, intelligence, and quiet determination. It was a portrayal full of integrity, and it anchored the entire production beautifully. On a personal note, I would like to congratulate Kathryn and thank her for her performance. I really was hooked on her performance, and I truly believe she felt the real weight of justice for all the women affected by this case.



Overall, what stood out is how *The Incident Room* held a mirror to our society's past failings without moralising. It invited the audience to reflect on how things have changed, and how far there is still to go. In the age of true crime podcasts and Netflix docuseries, this production offered a rare and refreshing depth: it humanised the investigators, scrutinised the systems they worked within, and honoured the women whose lives were lost. Well done, all, for handling such a sensitive story.

Reviewer: Rebecca Topping – AMT Productions
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We cannot wait to see what Ashton Hayes Theatre Club do next and if you want to know as soon as we do make sure to keep an eye on their web site. Please follow the link below to view their web site. <https://www.ahtc.org.uk/>