

The Merry Wives of Windsor

SYNOPSIS

The Merry Wives of Windsor

Sir John Falstaff (who appears in *Henry IV* Parts One and Two) is staying in Windsor and is short of money. He decides to seduce the wives of two wealthy citizens. He sends Mistress Ford and Mistress Page identical love letters, but they discover what he is doing and decide to turn the tables. They arrange a secret rendezvous at Mistress Ford's house.

The jealous Frank Ford has heard about Falstaff's plan and decides to test his wife's fidelity. Pretending to be Master Broom (or Brook in the quarto version), he pays Falstaff to seduce his wife on his behalf, twice almost catching them together, but Falstaff escapes, once by hiding in a laundry basket with the dirty washing and then being thrown into the river.

Three men would like to marry the Pages' daughter Anne: the French physician Doctor Caius is her mother's choice, while her father favours Slender, a relative of Justice Shallow. Anne herself is in love with Fenton. Mistress Quickly is being paid by all three to advance their cause.

A duel between Caius and Parson Evans is avoided when the landlord of the Garter Inn plays a trick on them, and they in turn pay him back.

Finally, in Windsor Great Park at night, Falstaff is set up for his final punishment, and one of Anne's suitors is successful.

Media:

DVD:

The Merry Wives of Windsor (BBC TV Shakespeare 1982), dir. David Jones

The Merry Wives of Windsor (1982), dir. Jack Manning

Falstaff by Verdi (various) (Italian 19th century opera loosely based on the story)

The Merry Wives of Windsor (Shakespeare's Globe 2012), dir. Christopher Luscombe

CD Audio:

The Merry Wives of Windsor (Arkangel Complete Shakespeare)

At the Boar's Head, opera by Gustav Holst

Sir John in Love, opera by Ralph Vaughan Williams (closely based on the story)

Merry Wives — The Musical (2006), dir. Greg Doran (songs from the soundtrack)

[Michael Mitchell]