

Keeping Mum

Anglophiles in this country have long been charmed by the quirky English comedy, a precious genre whose action often takes place in an quaintly picturesque small town, often involving frustrated family relations, often featuring the person of a vicar at its center, and often incorporating—a nice murder or two. *Keeping Mum*, a recent British import contains all these ingredients, and, while it may lack the bite its makers may have wanted to achieve, it is mildly amusing—and will satisfy the Anglophiles' taste.

Reverend Walter Goodfellow (Rowland Atkinson) is the vicar of the parish church in the tiny Little Wallop. He is a bit addlepated, and his sermons are snooze-inducing. For his wife, Gloria (Kristin Scott Thomas), the bloom is off their marriage; she is chafing under the stifling requirements of her role as a vicar's wife as well as the narrowness of small-town life. Further, her teenaged daughter appears to be the town tart-in-waiting, and their young son is being bullied at school. At the same time Gloria is flirting with a local American golf pro, Lance (Patrick Swayze), she comes to hire a new housekeeper, a spinsterish but competent Grace Hawkins (Maggie Smith), eager to work for a real family.

Soon some of the irritants in the Goodfellows' life are surprisingly relieved. A neighbor's dog that barks incessantly disappears. Then its owner, a crusty old fellow, is no longer around. The son's tormentors back off after he gains a new defender. The stodgy vicar, working on a major convention speech, begins to consider incorporating humor into it, and Gloria also warms up to the housekeeper and begins to have second thoughts about Lance. The turnabouts are, of course, all due to Grace, who, it appears, will stop at nothing to create "a perfect home for a perfect family." Here we have a Mary Poppins with mayhem on her mind...

Directed by Niall Johnson, *Keeping Mum* offers grins rather than outright laughs but gets the look and feel of the village right and keeps the pace light. Atkinson, known mostly for his roles as idiot or cynic (as in "Mr. Bean" and "The Black Adder"), is quieter here, playing the distracted vicar as just this side of a wit. Scott-Thomas—seen little lately—is believable as the harassed homebody who wants to escape from her domesticity. Swayze, unfortunately, doesn't convince or appeal as Lance; he plays an over-the-top crude American, all garish tan and lecherous smile. Classy Gloria would never go for this guy, not matter how good his five-iron.

Then there is Maggie. This is a role the actress could do in her sleep. She simply embodies Grace, and, while it may be a piece of crumpet for her, it means she is no less effective as the droll domestic who comes up with One Whopping Surprise for Gloria Goodfellow.

Keeping Mum is no knockout, but if you feel like another amiable cinematic visit to that green and pleasant land over the pond, you could do worse.

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