

Death of a Well-Spoken Gentleman



A Murder Mystery

by

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Customer Taster

Death of a Well-Spoken Gentleman

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The ladies of the WI are gathering to hear a talk on the history of a local family and their stately home, but there are undercurrents of resentment, jealousy and deceit. Then, just as the meeting is starting, the guest speaker is found murdered...

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Death of a Well-Spoken Gentleman Customer Taster

Overview

Death of a Well-Spoken Gentleman is a Murder Mystery designed to be played by 7 people who read witness statements. It is structured so that whilst these could be memorised and acted, they do not need to be memorised. However, they are intended to be read aloud in character rather than as neutral text. The witnesses, are, of course, also the prime suspects. In addition to the witness statements, there is a map of the vicinity of the murder and three pieces of evidence.

It can be played in three ways

- Performance to an audience
- Performance to an audience with the actors as participants
- Played as a “dinner party” mystery, with the diners taking the roles

In the first case, the actors will know the solution in advance; in the other two, they will not. In the last two cases, it is assumed that “the organiser” will also be a participant, playing one of the characters - hence there are various indications that the organiser should avoid looking at some of the documents in advance of the event!

Structure

This murder mystery pack contains:-

- The Organiser’s Overview (largely represented in this taster). The full version includes both guidelines for running in front of an audience and guidelines for running as a dinner party mystery.
- A Pack of Witness Statements [One example presented in the taster]
- A sketch map of the immediate vicinity of St Eustace’s Church and hall [Included in the Taster]
- A list of the witnesses (to help the audience to remember who’s who)
- DI Naughton’s Introduction to the Evidence (included in this document)
- Three pieces of evidence, gathered from the home of the deceased [One Example included in this Taster]
- “Solutions sheets” for the audience to enter their solutions
- Denouement - the official solution, scripted in two forms - either as a solo from DI Naughton or narrated by Naughton with repirses of evidence from the Witnesses.

Characters

D I Naughton - police investigator (and master of ceremonies for the mystery). Age and gender unspecified.

Brenda Chalmers - Bookings Secretary for the Women's Institute branch. Age and marital history unspecified, though the story suggests that she is currently unattached. Very fussy.

Deidre Bandini - WI Branch Chairwoman. Has been married for around 40 years. Brisk and efficient. Wealthy.

Charlotte James - WI Branch Secretary. Age unspecified. Married.

Angela Mayhew - Ordinary Member of the WI. Age unspecified. Divorced. Timid.

Emily Parsons - WI Branch Treasurer. Has been married for around 40 years. Competent businesswoman.

Felicity Pringle - Ordinary Member of the WI. Age and marital status unspecified, although the story suggests that she is currently unattached. Vivacious gossip, prone to distractions.

The Witness Statements

The pack contains

- An introduction by Detective Inspector Naughton
- A statement to be read-out by each of the six witnesses

These statements are intended to be read as the start of the mystery. They contain most of the information required to solve the mystery, but there are additional important written clues to be distributed after the statements have been delivered.

Performance

Running the Mystery in front of an audience

Note that you need to purchase a performance licence from the Murder Mysteries page of the Lazy Bee Scripts web site.

Preparation

- If the actors are going to participate in the mystery (by trying to guess whodunnit), then most of the preparation should be done by DI Naughton (who is not a suspect, and therefore can be trusted with all the material).
- Distribute the map and witness list to the actors and give each one their own witness statement so that they can familiarise themselves with their parts in the mystery and develop their characters.
- Even if the actors will know the solution in advance, it is sensible (and fun) to run a rehearsal in which they don't know and have to solve the mystery themselves
- Decide on how and when the materials will be distributed. (Who will distribute the materials? Who will collect the solutions? Detective Inspector Naughton might have additional staff to do this!)
- Decide how and when the best solution will be chosen, and what to do in the event of a tie. (Consider awarding prizes for the best and worst solutions.)

Event Set-up

- It is assumed that the audience will be grouped by tables.
- Each table should have a solution sheet, a map and a list of the witnesses

Witness Statements

DI Naughton's introduction and the six witness statements should be read as one sequence.

Audience Discussion, Additional Evidence and Conclusions

- Allow the audience to discuss their suspicions amongs themselves for a few minutes.
- DI Naughton announces the availability of additional evidence.
- Distribute the additional evidence
- Allow the audience further time to discuss (and revise) their suspicions
- Ask the audience to complete the solution sheets
- Collect the solution sheets

Solution

- The actors (DI Naughton or the whole company) read out the denouement
- There may be an option to read out some of the (more bizarre) audience solutions!
- Declare the winner and award prizes.

Format and Timing for performance to an audience

It is assumed that the event will be run around a sit-down meal, with the audience grouped around tables.

The event does not require any props beyond the materials in the pack, nor does it require any specific setting or furniture.

The timetable is flexible, but is intended as an opening bid for how long each part of the event might take.

Suggested timetable

7.30	Introduction by DI Naughton, Witness Statements
7:55	First course (and preliminary discussion of suspicions)
8.10	DI Naughton announcement and distribution of additional evidence
8.15	Main course served... Audience argue
8.35	Audience requested to write their solutions
8.40	Solutions Collected
8.45	Dessert (cast review solutions)
9.00	Denouement
9:10	Public review of solutions and awarding of prizes
9:20	Coffee

Customisation

The mystery was written for a first performance in 2014. You are welcome to tweak the dates and ages of the characters should this be appropriate to your production.

Sample Witness Statements

Introduction by DI Naughton

Evenin' all.

My name's Naughton. I'm a Detective Inspector on secondment to the local constabulary. I'm here because we believe that you may be able to help us with our enquiries.

It is my duty to outline to you our investigations concerning the body found in the churchyard of St Eustace's earlier this afternoon. You should find in front of you a simple sketch of the area to help you understand where the body was found in relation to the other events of this afternoon.

We have ascertained that the body in question is that of a Mr Anthony Hindmarsh, a gentleman living about twelve miles from here, just outside Longmead. He was, apparently, well known in the locality for his talks on the history of the area, and indeed this afternoon he was on his way to give a talk to the local Women's Institute.

The deceased was found on the path that runs through the churchyard from the car park to the hall where he was due to speak.

The preliminary scene-of-crime report indicates that the cause of death was a broken neck due to a heavy blow from behind with a blunt instrument. The nature of the weapon is currently unknown, but there are no other signs of a struggle and no indication that the body was moved.

A briefcase belonging to the deceased was found open at the scene, with papers blown around the churchyard, and some photographs of Partingly Hall, the subject of his intended talk. The Scene-of-Crime Officers gathered what they could find of the scattered documents. We suspect that some papers are missing, but it is hard to be conclusive, as they weren't there.

The deceased was smartly dressed, including a blazer and tie and a Swiss watch. His pockets contained handkerchief, wallet, car keys, house keys and a fountain pen. The wallet contained credit cards, a store loyalty card, twenty-five pounds in notes and a betting slip from William Hill, the bookmakers.

We have taken witness statements from those who were in the immediate vicinity at the time of death. We would like you to listen to them to see if there is anything that might indicate the perpetrator, the method and the motive. Please listen carefully.

Brenda Chalmers, Bookings Secretary

I'm Brenda - Brenda Chalmers. I'm the WI Bookings Secretary. It's my job to arrange the speakers for our monthly meetings, so of course it was me that invited Tony - Mr Hindmarsh. He's - he was - such a well-spoken gentleman. His talks were always very popular. So clear, and he knew such a lot about the district. He'd given us all the local churches and the progress of the Black Death. This time it was going to be the Cranleigh Family - from when they built Partingly Hall right up to the time they sold it. Lovely building. Late Tudor, I think. All stone pillars in the windows and that sort of thing. Lovely to look at, but I wouldn't like to have to clean it. They had to sell it, of course to pay their debts. Death duty, you know? From when old Lord Cranleigh died. They were going to sell a painting. One by that Frenchman - what's his name? - the one who painted those women in sarongs. Gauguin, that was it. Old Lord Cranleigh didn't like it. The painting. While he was alive. "Frightful daub" he called it, but it was worth millions. That's what Tony - Mr Hindmarsh - said. He'd put it away somewhere - Lord Cranleigh I mean, not Mr Hindmarsh - but when they came to sell it, they couldn't find it. They had to sell the whole hall instead. Such a shame. It's changed hands a couple of times since. One of those gurus had it as a retreat - all the fashion it was back then - then it was a conference centre. Not sure what it is now, but it's not the same when it goes out of the hands of the family.

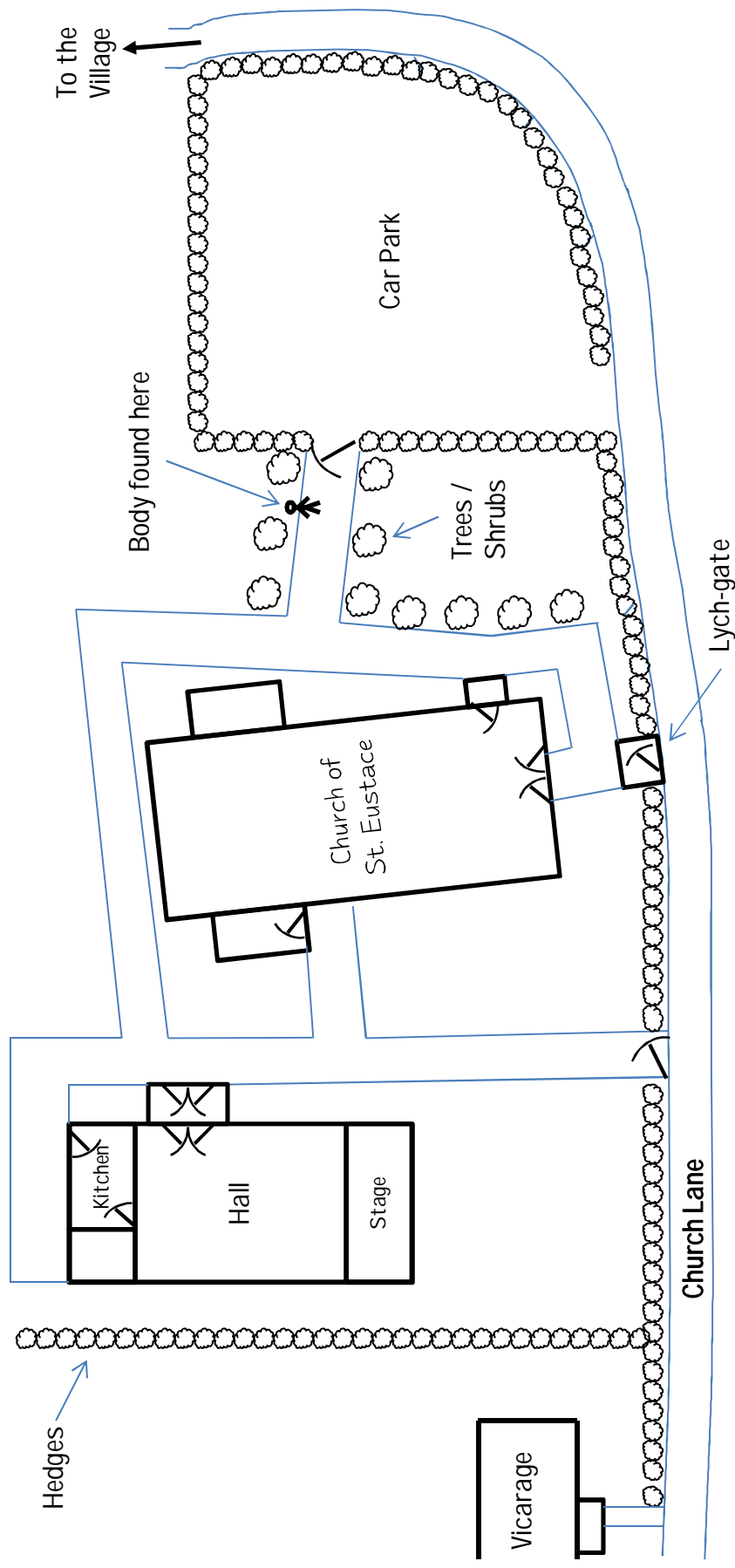
This afternoon? Yes, I got there first. Well, I always try to do that when there's a speaker - I see it as my job to make sure everything's right for them. Tony - Mr Hindmarsh - especially. He's very particular about his appearance - dapper my old Mum would have said - and he liked everything just so. That's why I come early, to make sure everything's right. I brought a big tin of biscuits - Fox's, they were, his favourites. I parked in the car park as usual, then walked through the churchyard and unlocked the hall ready to set up.

Charlotte James arrived next. She seemed in a bit of a mood, wielding her great thick minute book as if it was a meat cleaver. She even said something rude about Mr Hindmarsh. I left her to put out the chairs, and took my biscuits and went to sort-out the kitchen.

I didn't see Deidre arrive. Deidre Bandini. It's an Italian name, but she and Carlo have lived here for thirty years. Deidre's our Chairwoman. She was there when Emily came to get me. I thought Tony must have arrived, but he hadn't - they just wanted me so they could start the meeting. I asked her - Emily, this is - if she'd brought his expenses, and of course she had - quite a heavy bag of cash. She's very efficient. I really don't know how she manages to concentrate, what with all that business going on with their showroom. I heard they would have to close.

Anyway, we started the meeting, but it all came to a stop when they found him - Tony - Mr Hindmarsh - I mean the body...

Sketch Map of the Environs of St. Eustace's Church and Hall



***Evidence, Part 1:
Copy of a handwritten letter, unsigned, found on the desk of the deceased.***

This has got to stop. You've had your fun out of me, but I can't afford it any more. I've drained our accounts to shut you up and Alan is already suspicious of what I've done with it all, so either he finds out from you or he follows the financial trail and draws the same conclusion. Either way, it's over. You've had your last penny from me.