

## *Account of Purley on Thames*

# Rain or Shine - The Hound of the Baskervilles

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The game was afoot in The Barn on Friday evening, December 9th, as Rain or Shine arrived to present their spoof-like version of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's classic thriller, "The Hound of the Baskervilles." There was a surprise for the capacity audience even before the play began, as welcomed onto the stage was Maidenhead resident and former Reading Evening Post reporter Clive Baskerville, who is a distant relation of Henry Baskerville. Henry was Conan Doyle's coachman when the doctor was travelling across Dartmoor, and his surname was the inspiration for Baskerville Hall, where much of the action takes place.

But the play begins in Sherlock Holmes's study at 221B Baker Street, where Doctor Watson, played with obvious relish by Anthony Young, and who is on stage virtually throughout, meets the cross-dressed Dr. James Mortimer, who describes the strange goings-on at Baskerville Hall.

Much of Act One is down to exposition and explanation, but the pace and the comedy, both spoken and visual, really increases as the setting moves to the Hall and the misty, spooky, atmosphere of the Great Grimpen Mire. Act Two sees the enthusiastic Watson and the more cerebral Holmes cavorting across the somewhat rickety though atmospheric stage set – what a pity that modern day fire regulations would not allow us to use dry ice to create the Dartmoor mist – as they attempt to track down the escaped convict and the legendary hound.

Of course everyone was eagerly awaiting the arrival of the hound itself and, as he bounded, or should I say emerged on stage, he did not disappoint. Appearing as a diminutive hand-held glove puppet, he snarled and growled at the actors and the audience in a style reminiscent of a Basil Brush or a Roland Rat, and was not averse to take an extra bow or two even after his demise!

The three players alongside Doctor Watson perform a variety of roles and clearly enjoy themselves as they change costume, character, voice and posture. The actual story seems secondary to the slapstick, but the tale is neatly concluded as the final scene returns us to Baker Street, where the legendary detective is playing his violin and explaining the twists and turns in the drama to his faithful supporter and companion.

My sincere thanks to all those who came to watch, and especially those behind the scenes, as well as the families who provided overnight accommodation for the cast. A most enjoyable occasion for all concerned, and most important of all, we have been able to raise the sum of £600 to be donated to Blind Children UK, a charity based at the Guide Dogs for the Blind Centre at Burghfield.

*David Downs.*