

Society : Mortimer Dramatic Society
Production : Always Listen To Your Nose
Written By : Alys Ware
Date : 07/02/25
Venue : St John's Hall, Mortimer
District : 13
Reviewer : Cate Naylor

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[Show Report](#)

I was so pleased to join you again for your annual theatre supper evening and as always, was made to feel very welcome by Jean and the front of house team. This murder mystery play was written by Alys Ware and was a sequel to Murder by the Book which I saw a couple of years ago. This time, Chief Inspector Grim has retired, but can't help getting involved to assist his nephew when Professor Julian Birch-Lawton is found dead in the living room of his cottage. With lots of villagers holding a grudge against the professor, there was much for the hapless village police sergeant and his constable to get to grips with. Thank goodness for Chief Inspector Grim (retired)!

We joined a table of other audience members and enjoyed getting to know them. The evening started with a delicious main course of Shepherd's pie cooked by catering team the **Gourmet Queens** and we then settled into the first act where we were introduced to the murder victim and the suspects. Acts two and three were punctuated by a dessert of apple crumble and custard and coffee, before we were encouraged to join in the sleuthing. It was fun to chat with the other amateur detectives on our table as the evening progressed and to 'interview' the suspects as they milled around in the intervals. The story had lots of twists and turns with little titbits of clues being dropped to help us with our detecting and I am pleased to say that after much deliberation, we did 'get our man', cheering along with the rest of the audience as Revd Steeple got his comeuppance.

Cast in order of appearance

Tom Shorrock (Chief Inspector Grim, retired)

Tom was perfect in this part and looked and every bit the country gentleman and very comfortable reprising his role as Grim. He spoke with a wonderful west country accent which he maintained throughout and delivered his lines slowly and deliberately with a measured tone and never losing

clarity in his diction. Although this wasn't his case (as he kept reminding us, he had retired), he very comfortably guided his less than confident nephew through the motions of solving the case. Tom had excellent stage presence and a good deal of confident authority absolutely instilling in us all that we and Sergeant Flintlock were very much in safe hands.

Mary Aukland (Perdita Nimble)

You can always count on Mary to deliver a great character part, and her portrayal of the Professor's discontented housekeeper was no exception. She was grumpy in both her line delivery and her demeanour, leaving us in no doubt that she was not happy with her lot. Mary's facial expressions very clearly conveyed her feelings as she continually reacted to what being said and going on around her. She had clear diction, excellent projection and a strong west country burr.

Clive Solomons (George Willowfeather)

It was clear from Clive's portrayal that his character George was somewhat scared of the Professor as he tried without success to win his arguments. He was quiet and cowed in his interactions with the professor and moved around the stage with a distinct lack of confidence. His line delivery was considered and although a little on the quiet side, we could still hear him.

Derek Spears (Julian Birch-Lawton)

Playing the murder victim, gives an actor the licence to be unpleasant enough to leave the audience in no doubt as to why someone might want to murder him. Derek delivered the character with a touch of arrogance and a 'holier than thou' disposition. He had an eye for the ladies and was certainly smarmy enough to support jealousy as a reason for murder. He was described by some of the characters as being a bully and although, it was clear that George was a little scared of him this element of his character did not come over strongly in his portrayal. Developing this would have given even more evidence for motive.

Kerry Thomas (Sister Eldith Thurston)

Kerry was very confident and natural in her portrayal of the no-nonsense and efficient district nurse. She looked very comfortable in the role delivering her lines clearly with expression and with a believable west country accent. She showed a lovely change in character when she came out of the professor's sitting room having (we later heard) found him dead on the floor, and her reaction to

being caught out for being there was brilliantly shown in her face and her physicality. She was always in character even when not the centre of attention with good stage presence and natural movement.

Kim Antell (Roisin Steeple)

Seemingly the very genteel vicars' wife, Kim gave a lovely portrayal of a woman who is not all that she seems. She was cultured and lady-like giving the professor coy looks as he gave her raunchy literature to read, but under the surface she was a woman with a grudge. With a sweet smile on her face and a gentle demeanour, she gave occasional glimpses of the fire in her eyes. Kim moved well around the stage with an upright posture befitting of a woman of class.

Nigel Antell (Reverend Jack Steeple)

In his characterisation, Nigel created a stereotypical vicar, a little 'other-worldly' and seeming oblivious to what was going on. His shock and horrified facial expression when he saw the book that the professor gave to his wife was priceless. He spoke with an affected, rather posh voice, which was a little reminiscent of Archbishop Runcie and worked well for the role. He came over as extremely decent, undogmatic and kind, but aren't the innocent looking ones the ones you need to watch out for?

James Burton Stewart (Constable Peter Pratt)

I really enjoyed Peter's portrayal of the long-serving rather ineffectual constable. His interpretation was very clever and spot on for the role. It is not easy to portray a totally useless character well, but Peter did just that, delivering the humour and comedic lines naturally and with perfect timing. On occasions, he lost his lines but cleverly picked them up and made it look like it was part of his interpretation of the role. Peter made this country constable his own, creating a very endearing and funny character.

Phil Collins (Sergeant Darius Flintlock)

Phil perfectly played the anxious and unsure nephew of Chief Inspector Grim. This was Darius' first murder to solve, and it showed. Everything about him, his physicality, his delivery and his facial expressions shouted, "I am out of my depth". I really liked the way he curled into himself and chewed his pencil to perfectly personify the nervous sergeant. Gradually under the guidance of his uncle, he grew in confidence and stature as he (or maybe Grim) solved the case. Phil delivered his lines with

appropriate hesitation, whilst maintaining good diction, and fluidity in his speech which was clear and expressive.

Creatives

Alys Ware (Writer and Director) assisted by **Katja Hunt** (Producer)

Having written and directed this murder mystery, Alys, obviously invested a lot of energy into the production, and it paid off as we were treated to an enjoyable evening of intrigue and sleuthing. Alys has a skill for writing, and I am so glad that she gave us another chance to spend time with Chief Inspector Grim. All the characters were interesting and well developed with just enough little clues given without it being obvious who the murderer was. She had worked with the cast to develop credible characterisations and believable relationships so that they looked comfortable on stage. She used the stage well, allowing the actors to move and interact and bringing them out into the audience between the acts gave an extra dimension to the play. As audience members, we had the opportunity to question the suspects, and they had the opportunity to misdirect us!

Alys was aided by producer Katja and together they brought a well-run production with all the many elements needed to make a show managed cohesively.

Keith Graham and Gareth James (Stage Managers)

The set was managed smoothly and efficiently with set pieces and set dressing changed in between acts one and two.

Neil Johnson, Jeff Howman, John Bale, Dyson England and society members (Set Design and Build)

This home-built box set worked well for the two locations. In act one, it was the entrance hall of the professor's cottage, sparsely furnished and with doors to the rest of the house. In acts two and three, it was transformed into a police station with a large reception desk with a notice board bedecked with period style posters and a seating area for the sergeant to interview the suspects.

Rob Wilderspin (Lighting Design and Operation and Sound)

Sound and lighting were well managed by Rob and on cue, The stage was well lit with no areas of darkness at the edges. There were some well-timed sound effects including an old-fashioned telephone ring and a chiming clock.

Katja Hunt and Amy Collins (Costumes)

Costumes were well sourced and clearly indicated the personas of each of the characters. Chief Inspector Grim's three-piece tweed suit was particularly fine and there was great attention to detail with Sister Thurston's nurses uniform complete with her hospital badges and a period nurse's cloak. The reverend's cassock was of the era and Mrs Steeple looked every bit the lady in her Edwardian skirt and pintucked blouse. Although, I thought that Sergeant Flintlock's clothes looked rather modern, Constable Pratt's costume looked very much of the era with a very impressive cloak.

Katja Hunt and Alys Ware (Properties and Set Dressing)

There was great attention to detail with the sourcing of the props with a gladstone bag, period telephone and feather duster. The posters on the police station notice board had been printed in Edwardian style and looked very realistic.

Thank you once again for your invitation to join you for this murder mystery theatre supper. It was a very enjoyable evening, and I so enjoyed pitting my wits against Sergeant Flintlock to solve this murder mystery. Congratulations to Alys and the cast and crew for another great production.

Cate

NODA London District 13 Representative