

# **The Marbury Mysteries**

**A play about the history of  
Marbury Country Park**

**Written by Robert Meadows**

***Performed 3 - 6 July 2002***



Heritage  
Lottery Fund



Local Heritage initiative



The  
Countryside  
Agency



CHESHIRE  
COUNTY COUNCIL

## THE MARBURY MYSTERIES

The Audience gathers in the Rose Garden.

### THE PERFORMANCE OF THE REDUCED HERITAGE PLAYERS

Emcee

Player 1

Player 2

The Troupe of Players

**The Emcee steps forward**

EMCEE Ladies and gentlemen! Boys and girls! The entertainment is about to begin. With no expense spared, the Reduced Heritage Players proudly present for your delight, education and edification, a bite size life and times of the history of Marbury.

**Fanfare. The Troupe enter**

EMCEE Act One. The History of Marbury Hall

**Like a team of gymnasts, the Troupe creates a physical image of the Hall. Lead Players step forward.**

PLAYER 1      There once was a hall

PLAYER 2      You can tell by this wall. (*He points*)

PLAYER 1      It was wide. It was tall.

PLAYER        But it rotted

**The Physical Image collapses.**

EMCEE Act Two. The Owners of Marbury Park and Hall.

The Emcee adopts the tone of a Major Domo. The Troupe parade like a pageant. They create a series of snapshot pictures.

EMCEE (In a French accent) Warim Vernon, 12<sup>th</sup> Century Baron of Shipbrooke! (Pointing elsewhere) William de Mereberie! (A third character is indicated. Now in his own accent) Sir 'Fortified Place By Mere or Water', better known as Humphrey Marbury. Followed by his extensive family of Just Williams, Little Johns and Richard's the Last! (Another significant point) The Right Dishonourable Earl Rivers! (Rivers tries to grope a member of the audience. He pulled away by...) The Rightly Renowned Barrymores and the very well known Smith Barrys. (The Company cheer) ...including The Hunting Smith Barrys.

**The Players present a hunt. One player takes on the role of the fox.**

HUNTER        The Tarporley Hunt, no less. Tally ho!

EMCEE Note the distinctive green collar

**A hunt is enacted.**

FOX            (**Laid back, doing its nails**) Noted, but not impressed.

EMCEE See Bluecap! The fastest hound in the North West!

FOX            Over-rated!

EMCEE Five hundred guineas says he can catch you before any other hound.

FOX Done. They were not very successful huntsmen as you can see. Good at catching deers, old stags in particular, but the typical eighteenth century fox like my good self was far too ingenious and crafty to be hounded to ground by this lot!

**The Fox is surrounded. Bluecap waits to pounce**

FOX The other notable feature of an eighteenth century dog fox was the lack of eyes in the back of his head!

**The Fox is captured.**

EMCEE The Gambling Smith Barrys!

PLAYER 1 Oi! Fancy a flutter?

PLAYER 2 Go on then. What's your game?

PLAYER 1 Cock fighting?

PLAYER 2 Not so sure I like the sound of that!

PLAYER 1 Up at the grotto. Your cock against mine.

**Two Players take on the role of fighting cockerels**

PLAYER 1 In a pit. One leg apiece staked to the ground with an iron spike. They fight. Claw eachother to bits with their vicious talons. Last one standing's the winner. See?

PLAYER 2 Sounds lovely. Sure there isn't a law against this sort of thing.

PLAYER 1 Not yet but there will be!

PLAYER 2 Good.

**The Troupe depict the Cock Mains. It is a brutal picture.**

PLAYER 1 What d'you think? Great innit!

PLAYER 2 **(Ironic)** A wonder to behold!

EMCEE Then perhaps you'd prefer the Magnaminous Smith Barrys!

PLAYERS Gifts for the poor!  
Here's for the needy.  
Have some sweets  
But don't be greedy!

**The Players throw sweets towards the children.**

EMCEE What a fine looking bunch! See them hanging on the walls. Framed for immortality!

**The Players form portraits on a staircase.**

PLAYER 1 **(It is as if he is reading titles and captions)**  
'John Smith Barry' Boozer and a bit of one. Rebellious and naughty. A duellist. A charmer.

**(The picture animates)**

'Chateau James Barry' Celebrating the birth of his son, Arthur, with a party on the ice when the mere froze over. Note two roasted pigs. Full orchestra. And copious barrels of beer. Ten gallons of rum. Four thousand guests'

**(The picture animates)**

'Arthur Smith Barry', himself. At his twenty first birthday In the company of poets, dreamers and others, less restrained

**(The picture animates)**

Raymond Smith Barry, last of line. Like flying small aeroplanes. Crashed one in the war.

**(The pictures crash)**

And sold the place to...

**The Players mime sports.**

PLAYER 1 Anyone for tennis?

PLAYER 2 A swim!

PLAYER 3 A pot at a partridge!

**He shoots a gun in the air.**

EMCEE Marbury Park: The Country Club Consortium

PLAYERS Yahoo! What!

EMCEE Later to be followed by The Men from ICI

**The Troupe perform skits: mixing chemicals, throwing salt in the air and over their shoulders and such like acts.**

EMCEE And last but not least the Countryside Rangers! Ladies and gentlemen. The Owners of Marbury Hall.

**The Emcee returns to his role as compere.**

EMCEE Act Three The Natural History of Marbury, An abstract upon its Fauna and Flora

**The Troupe impersonates the fauna and flora as described by the Lead Players.**

EMCEE The Fish

PLAYER 1 Eel. Tench. Pike, Carp

PLAYER 2 And squirrels.

EMCEE Bird Life

PLAYER 1 Ducks. Geese. The Lesser spotted Twitter.

PLAYER 2 And squirrels

EMCEE The Habitat

PLAYER 1 Trees. Bushes. Mere. Mud  
Nice when the sun's out.

PLAYER 2 For the squirrels.

EMCEE Act Four The Myths of Marbury The Marbury Dunn

**Lead Players take on the roles of the Horse and its owner.**

PLAYER 1 Oi. You! Horsey!

PLAYER 2 What d'you want?

PLAYER 1 Do us a favour, eh?

PLAYER 2 For hay I'll do anything.

PLAYER 1 I've got a bet with bookies that you can't ride from 'ere to London and back again in a day.

PLAYER 2 Can't ride from 'ere to London and back again in a day?

PLAYER 1 Can't you?

PLAYER 2 Course you can.

PLAYER 1 Bet you can't.

PLAYER 2 Can.

PLAYER 1 Prove it.

PLAYER 2 What's in it for me?

PLAYER 1 I'll put you out to stud.

PLAYER 2 Done!

TROUPE **(They sing the Marbury Dunne Song as the Player 2 as Horse gallops)**

Here, here goes Marbury Dunne

The finest horse that ever run

Gallop in a linen sheet

With silver hoofs upon her feet!

PLAYER 2 And he's coming in to the finishing line now. The crowd can't believe their eyes. A Hercules of a Horse. Rides in triumph. And yes, yes, yes...he's knackered!

PLAYER 1 You done it.

PLAYER 2 Done it and done in. I think I'm a goner.

PLAYER 1 I'll make you immortal.

PLAYER 2 Ta.

PLAYER 1 The Marbury Dunne.

PLAYER 2 That was. **(He 'dies')**

EMCEE And the Marbury Ghosts.

**The Troupe make 'spook' noises.**

PLAYER 1 **(Cod American)** Brad. I'm so frightened.

PLAYER 2 We should never have come to these haunted woods,

PLAYER 1 Look! There! Shimmering in the hollows. It's ...**(The Player screams)**

PLAYER 2 **(Like a Film Trailer)** The Marbury Lady. Coming to a deserted country lane near you. Soon. Catch it before she catches you!

**The Troupe make spook noises. The Emcee returns to his role of overall commentator**

EMCEE Thank you ladies and gentlemen,. That concludes this evening's performance. I hope you've enjoyed the work of the Reduced Heritage Players. If you'd care to make your way back to the car park as instructed by our Front of House Team. Thank you.

**Esmee steps forward**

ESMEE No my friend. No, that will not do. There's more to tell about Marbury. Much more to know.

EMCEE Sorry, we've done our bit. Can't think of anything more to say about the place. Nice for a stroll. I suppose. Lake's quite pretty. Good for woodpeckers, I'm told. And that swimming pool's rather unusual. But that's about it. Not much else here. Now, as I said: if you'd care to make your way...

ESMEE If you want the story of Marbury, I'll tell it for you. Unlock its secrets.

EMCEE Oh yes! And who might you be?

ESMEE The Marbury Lady! A teller of tales. Listen to me and you'll learn something of the soul, the spirit of Marbury. For it is a special place! With so many stories! And you will help me tell them!

EMCEE You think so, do you!

ESMEE I know so!

**She enchants the Reduced Heritage Company!**

ESMEE **(She has an exotic accent)** Come to Esmee, my little ones. Let me enchant you! Then you can all play with Esmee, eh? Help me to tell you all my little tales. They will excite you! **(She toys with men in the audience)** The first, it is a story of romance and passion. **(To a man)** You like romance and passion? **(She improvises until she gets a response)** Yes I thought so. But also of great sadness and heart break. **(She kneels and begins to dig)** It is a story of long ago. Let us climb back through the ages. And the past, it is buried, n'est pas? We have to dig up the earth and find it again. So what have we found here? **(To a child in the audience)** You, my little one, come here. Come to Esmee and tell me what we have found? Come! **(A child volunteer is encouraged to come forward. The child will be encouraged to say what he/she sees)** A box! **(Walking around with the child)** Is it a box of delights? Will it have treasure? Or does it hide some terrible secret? Or like Pandora's, is it full of cruel desire and little hope? Shall we see? **(Esmee and the volunteer take the box to a woman in the audience)** Open it! Look inside! Now! What is it? What do you find there? **(The volunteer will say what they find and Esmee will repeat the information)** A lock of hair! But who did it belong to, I wonder!

**Esmee takes up a raised, central position. The Players are formed in a circle.**

ESMEE Two hundred years ago ... or so. Marbury Hall. What a fine estate! And as we wander through that house, some of its treasures take our breath away!

**The Players become a frieze of the objet d'art that Esmee describes.**

ESMEE Paintings by Rosa. Tintoretto, Valasquez, Van Dyck. Beltraffio's 'Madonna and Child'. Sculptures from the Levant. Constantinople... Egypt. Of Polyhmnia singing a bridal song. A vase with,

in high relief, the marriage of Paris and Helen of Thousand Ships crafted upon it. Other figures of muses. The fragment of the Parthenon frieze, all but discarded. The finest collection of marbles in England. Priceless treasures. And...

**James Hugh steps forward to join the Players frieze.**

ESMEE And the portrait of the master himself, James Hugh Barry. An well-travelled, sophisticated, cultured man. A man of fortune and grace. And wealthy too. **(To her escort)** It means I must goodbye to you. **(A servant takes the 'volunteer' escort back to his place in the audience)** Oh James! What a catch he'd be for some fine Cheshire lady! A Warburton from Arley. An Egerton from Tatton.

**The Female Players promenade around James Hugh.**

ESMEE Like Marbury moths, they were, these fine ladies! Flitting and flirting about him. Here some Bordered Beauties. There a Blotched Emerald. That! A dusky Brocade. Here a Feathered Thorn or two. But he rejected them all, blind to their attentions. For the heart of James Hugh Barry was drawn to another. And it was a forbidden love.

**James Hugh and the Players step out of focus.**

ESMEE Two hundred years ago ... or so. One bright night. One midnight. There is a knock upon the door of Marbury Hall.

**A Woman steps forward.**

ESMEE The woman waits in the cold air. She has come from far away, my friends. A foreign land. And now, she stands, a stranger in another country, like a beggar at a rich man's door. So what has drawn her here? Words of love.

**A Servant steps forward**

SERVANT And here's another cold soul that night making his way from the servant's quarters to answer the call. As if life ain't 'ard enough! **(As if opening the door)** Yes, madam?

WOMAN **(In French, as will be all her utterances)** Is your master at home?

ESMEE The girl was French, they say.

SERVANT I beg your pardon?

WOMAN James Hugh Barry... I have come to see him,

ESMEE It was the master she wanted.

SERVANT Lost your way, 'ave you?

WOMAN You must tell him I am here. That I have come. I promised I would come.

SERVANT Is it Northwich you're after? Just follow the smoke and you'll find it.

WOMAN I must see James.

ESMEE The girl was desperate.

WOMAN You must fetch your master now. Bring him to me!

SERVANT You're not from 'round 'ere, are you?

ESMEE **(To the Servant)** Fetch your master.

SERVANT I know what this is. One of his entanglements. He's a bit of a one when he's off on his travels!

ESMEE Let her see him.

SERVANT Though he doesn't usually give them a forwarding address. He'll have promised he'd return. He does that. Promises.

ESMEE Let her in.

SERVANT Very well but I think you're in for a bit of a disappointment, my girl. I'd carry on for Northwich. You could make some little lumpman very happy!

**James Hugh steps forward as does Ann Tanner. She enters, miming the rocking of a baby.**

ESMEE And suddenly he was there before her. And it should have been so romantic.

**James Hugh and the Woman stare at each other**

ESMEE They should have thrown themselves at one another.

ANN James?

ESMEE But they did not. They could not.

ANN James! Who is this poor creature?

**She faces James Hugh. / and // indicate where the characters begin to speak**

ESMEE Hear what she thinks, what she tries to say but what is never understood./ And hear what he thinks but cannot say.//

WOMAN You said I would be your treasure./ You called me princess. Your Egyptian princess. You said I was the greatest wonder of them all. Follow me, you said. Promise me that. And I have. Here I am. For you.

JAMES //I know that we've met. I can't quite place where. Somewhere abroad. On my travels. There were quite a few 'encounters'. And there's a look in her eyes to suggest a promise was made but I'm damned if I can remember it.

WOMAN **(In French)** Have you forgotten me?

JAMES I'm sorry?

WOMAN **(In French. Ann translates)** He said he would return for me but he never came. I waited and longed for him. So I have come to him instead.

ANN So is it your intention to introduce me to this lady?

JAMES No, my dear! That wasn't my intention.

ANN A souvenir from abroad? Another little trinket.

JAMES I can explain everything.

ESMEE **(Commenting)** Now there's a line that's echoed through history!

WOMAN **(In French)** He is my lover.

ANN **(To the Woman)** Really? How charming!