

# UNIQUE

MAGAZINE

ISSUE 5

Exclusively for



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# TOM HIDDLESTON

WHY IT'S BEEN A DEFINING YEAR FOR THE PROLIFIC ACTOR

TAKE ME HOME





# DEAD over dinner

*Celebrating its 20th anniversary in 2016, Moneypenny Productions in Edenbridge puts on fun, interactive murder mystery events that are as entertaining as they are immersive. Lawrence Brown tells us more about what happens when a three-course meal is accompanied by murder most foul*

### **So, Lawrence, how did Moneypenny get started?**

We've been trading for 20 years, so this is an anniversary for us. The idea was to specifically concentrate on murder mystery events; as such, we've become experts in our field. On average, the company runs about 250 events a year, roughly 150 of which I personally facilitate. In the last three years, we've run events in countries such as Holland, Belgium, France and the Bahamas. We go all over, really! The tastes and trends have changed over the years, as it's become far more of an interactive performance and production.

### **Talk us through how a murder mystery works...**

Every event is split into five performed scenes, which include a costumed cast of four actors, who set up the scene, characters and narrative to tell the story for the audience to witness. The task of the audience is to solve the crime – who committed the murder, how the murder was committed,

and why the victim was killed. They have to witness these performed scenes, which are very theatrically done. The more unusual element is that each one of the audience members is provided with an opportunity to interrogate the characters, which makes for a really unusual evening.

### **Do they always arrive at the same conclusion?**

It's interesting, because some people don't necessarily see the same situation as having the same outcome, and have different knowledge about different subjects. One of the good things about murder mysteries is that, because you play as a team, as opposed to an individual, you have to pool your knowledge and resources. If you don't know something, someone else on the team probably does, so it really encourages conversation, and the night takes on a different dynamic because of it. You find yourself talking to people you wouldn't normally talk to.





### Sounds like a pretty immersive experience...

At these events, because everyone starts from the same point of the story, they get involved to the degree they want to. The bit people love most isn't the interrogation, but the jury service element at the end, when each team of diners has to come up with their own answer of who did it, how and why. Trying to get 10 people around a table to all agree on the three elements of the answer is a really interesting situation that most people don't find themselves in.

### Is dinner served throughout?

The whole thing is set over a three-course meal, and in particular with Alexander Hotels, the food is extraordinary. In fact, one of the things the chef at Rowhill Grange does is tailor the menu to reflect the theme of the murder mystery, and when you have that flow through an event, it just makes the overall experience for the diner so much better. Out of all the venues we go to, I'd definitely recommend Alexander Hotels, and Rowhill Grange in particular, because if you convince the venue to get involved on that level of interactivity, imagination and flair, it's a completely different ball game.

### It almost seems like something out of an Agatha Christie story...

It's playing on the expectations of the audience. Because everyone has a different favourite detective, we're trying to cater to a vast array of murder mystery genres. What we try and do with the events is have seasonal shows; there will always be a spring, summer, autumn and winter show. We have so many people who come back and see us that we have to change the scripts every three months and cover all sorts of genres.

### What genre can guests look forward to at your upcoming 'Final Feast' evening at Rowhill Grange?

It's medieval meets Tudor meets *Game of Thrones*. It's knights in shining armour, princesses and rumours of dragons, so I think it will promise to be a really unusual event and something very different. We see a lot of themes pop up again and again, but at the moment, I think there's definitely a taste for something you feel you recognise, but have never seen before.







### Would you say you deliver that?

By the time you've bought a ticket and a couple of drinks, you've really invested in the evening, so you want to see something you wouldn't normally see elsewhere, which is definitely what you get with our murder mysteries. In fact, we go a step further, because you don't just see something you wouldn't see anywhere else; you're also part of the production, which puts it onto a different level.

### How about the less confident participants – are they put on the spot?

When people think of a murder mystery, they often think it's not for them because they don't like to be singled out. The good thing about our productions is that the audience plays the part of detectives; they're the ones who receive, as opposed to provide, the information, so they interact with the characters, but don't play the parts.

### Why do you think the events are still so popular after all these years?

At the end of the day, one of the reasons murder mysteries are really successful is that, whether we acknowledge it or not, people like to know a secret that other people don't. There's this thrill of being privy to something, and being the only one in the room who knows this bit of information. People also love to be nosy and take an interest in other people's lives. You start to really warm to, side with and prefer certain characters to others, so when you find out their flaws, history or darkest secrets, it really makes life a lot more interesting, even if it's just for a few hours.

### Where's it all heading in the next 20 years?

I think it's going to get busier, because people are looking for an alternative to the digital trend of entertainment, and want an opportunity to relax in company, so there's a push away from technology and big, grand-scale area events. The thing about murder mystery events is that, because they have that interactive element, they become a lot more personal, which is the joy of what we do. It's peeking behind the curtains of life and uncovering those little secrets, which I think people are really fascinated by.

The Final Feast Murder Mystery will be held at Rowhill Grange on Friday February 24 2017, from 7.30pm. Tickets are available now, priced £40 per person. To find out about future Murder Mystery Dinners, contact the Rowhill Grange Sales Team on 01322 612 778, email [sales@rowhillgrange.com](mailto:sales@rowhillgrange.com) or visit [www.moneypennyproductions.co.uk](http://www.moneypennyproductions.co.uk)

