

London After Midnight

Episode One:
The Dead Are Missing From Their Graves

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First Production

London After Midnight: The Dead Are Missing From Their Graves was first performed during the 2005 Minnesota Fringe Festival.

Produced by Hardcover Theater, the play had the following cast:

Charles Holland, William Burke – Anthony Brown

Sir Robert Peel, William Hare – Sean Byrd

Sir Francis Varney, Professor Moriarty – Robert Gardner

Flora Bannersworth – Lindsay Goss

Officer Bucket, Henry Gray, The Baron – Arnie Roos

Queen Victoria, Mrs. Bannersworth – Shanan Custer

The production was directed by Anne Byrd.

Second Production

London After Midnight: The Dead Are Missing From Their Graves was later remounted at the Bryant Lake Bowl in Minneapolis. The full production was staged in November 2005.

Produced by Hardcover Theater, the play had the following cast:

Charles Holland, William Burke – Anthony Brown

Sir Robert Peel, William Hare – Sean Byrd

Sir Francis Varney, Professor Moriarty – Robert Gardner

Flora Bannersworth – Jane Froiland

Officer Bucket, Henry Gray, The Baron – Arnie Roos

Queen Victoria, Mrs. Bannersworth – Shanan Custer

The production was directed by Anne Byrd.

Production Style

The London After Midnight play series is a theatrical mash-up of history and fiction, mixing together literary characters and real personages of the Victorian era. Much of the fictional source material is taken from Penny Dreadful literature.

It is written in a presentational style. The characters often break from the play action to directly address the audience. Because of this, the play can be staged with minimum scenery. You only need a few blocks to create acting levels and barriers.

Cast of Main Characters

The London After Midnight characters can be cast to fit the needs of your production. You can cast these roles individually or double and triple cast them as needed. The minimum cast for each episode is six – four men and two women.

These are how the main characters can be cast using six actors:

Young Victorian Man #1 (20s-40s) – William Burke, Charles Holland

Young Victorian Man #2 (20s-40s) – Sir Robert Peel, William Hare

Mature Victorian Man #1 (40s-60s) – Sir Francis Varney, Professor Moriarty

Mature Victorian Man #2 (40s-60s) – Officer Bucket, Dr. Henry Gray, Baron Stelmuyer (Jack Pringle)

Young Victorian Woman (20s-30s) – Flora Bannersworth

Mature Victorian Woman (30s-60s) – Queen Victoria, Mrs. Bannersworth

Additional Characters this Episode

Each episode contains several minor characters, some only appearing once during an episode. Cast these additional roles from your main cast with whoever is available at that point during the performance:

Prime Minister	Marmaduke
MP	Butcher's Wife
Waiter	Mourners
Doctor Jarvis	Chorus
Anthony Charles Harris	Mob

CHORUS

In the great city of London...
Night...
Is falling!

(House lights down, stage lights up dim & blue. Eerie, suspenseful music.)

A blanket of darkness settles over the city;
Darkness like fog envelops the gaslights,
Creeps like a cat through streets and alleys;
Darkness like a nameless horror
Oozes into every nook and cranny.
Everywhere the darkness goes
It leaves behind a trail of shadows;
And in some of those shadows are even deeper shadows;
And if in those deeper shadows there is something darker still
Slowly turning its head to look at you
With red staring eyes –
It is better not to think about what that thing might be.
Picture this instead:

(Actors move to set up the opening scene.)

In an antique chamber of an ancient house,
A young girl lies on a stately bed.

FLORA

Oh, what a terribly windy, rainy night! And so dark! Except for occasional flashes of lightning!

(Thunder and lightning.)

CHORUS

Each flash illuminates the window.

FLORA

I reassure myself with the thought that the beast cannot possibly get into my room.
Outside my window is only a narrow, slippery ledge.

CHORUS

With a thirty-foot drop to the hard earth below.

FLORA

So I say my prayers, and try to get the best sleep that I have had these many nights.

(Another lightning flash. A man stands in the window, eyeing FLORA hungrily. He is VARNEY the VAMPYRE. As thunder rips through the sky, VARNEY carefully opens the latch, steps inside, and approaches the bed, his tongue

licking his fangs. FLORA sits up. As VARNEY reaches for her, she finds her voice.)

FLORA

Charles! Mother! Help, help!

(CHARLES HOLLAND bursts into the room, with MRS. BANNERSWORTH on his heels. CHARLES brandishes a bottle of holy water. VARNEY snarls; CHARLES recoils.)

MRS. BANNERSWORTH

Press on, Charles! Splash him with the holy water!

CHARLES

Die, fiend, die!

(CHARLES splashes the vial of holy water on VARNEY. At first VARNEY reacts as if burning, then he laughs.)

It didn't do him any harm!

MRS. BANNERSWORTH

Is that the water the priest blessed?

CHARLES

Yes, the very same bottle!

MRS. BANNERSWORTH

I don't suppose you spilled it and replaced it with the ordinary kind?

CHARLES

No, upon my life!

FLORA

Charles, do something!

MRS. BANNERSWORTH

Did you remember to bring a cross?

(With a mixture of determination and terror, CHARLES holds the cross before him.)

VARNEY

What a well made cross. Medieval vintage. May I examine it?

CHARLES

But you are... I was told that you would –

(VARNEY grabs the cross and kisses it, then tosses it aside.)

MRS. BANNERSWORTH

Charles, where did you get that cross!

CHARLES

It's a cross! What's the difference where I –

(VARNEY grabs CHARLES and snarls dangerously close to his neck.)

– got it. Oh my.

(VARNEY shoves CHARLES aside. FLORA screams and looks to MRS. BANNERSWORTH, who faints.)

FLORA

Mother, no!

VARNEY

I see you made preparations for my arrival, Flora. I am sincerely flattered. But it will take much more than old folk remedies to kill me.

FLORA

Get away!

VARNEY

I cannot help myself, Flora. I must sup once again upon your sweet red nectar. Your blood has a purity surpassed by few women.

FLORA

No, no...

VARNEY

You have foolishly doomed these two. After I feed from your neck, I shall break both of theirs.

(A clock begins to toll twelve. Tableau. The CHORUS breaks the frame.)

CHORUS

Listen! The old cathedral clock is tolling twelve!

It must be time for

London...

After...

Midnight!

Victorian Tales of Crime and the Supernatural!

CHORUS (CONT.)

Where the highest of the high
Meet the lowest of the low!
Royalty and cockneys!
Vampires and civil servants!
Men of science!
Grave robbers!
Dignified gentlemen with disreputable secrets!
Elegant ladies with unruly passions!
Tonight, Episode One:
“The Dead Are Missing From Their Graves”!

(Actors restore the tableau. Thunder!)

(VARNEY grabs FLORA and throws her down on the bed. He rips off the bandage that is covering her neck. He bends over her.)

(FLORA, however, has found a gun under her pillow. She shoots VARNEY in the belly. He screams in pain and collapses on the floor.)

CHARLES

Was that a silver bullet, Flora?

FLORA

No, just lead!

(MRS. BANNERSWORTH staggers to her feet. CHARLES picks himself up as well.)

MRS. BANNERSWORTH

Quickly, Charles, get up! Stop him! Grab his arms!

(CHARLES attempts to seize VARNEY. Although badly hurt, VARNEY breaks free and jumps out of the open window.)

CHARLES

He fights like a wounded bison!

MRS. BANNERSWORTH

You must go after him, Charles, immediately!

CHARLES

I must?

MRS. BANNERSWORTH

Are you all right, Flora?

FLORA

I am, but hurry, Charles! Capture the vampyre! He must never again be allowed to harm an innocent girl like me!

(Aside.)

Footnote: *Varney the Vampyre* was a very popular Penny Dreadful published in 1840s London. Readers would buy a new chapter each week - for a penny. It was the pulp fiction of the day.

CHARLES

Yes, Flora. I shall defend your honor, and hunt down this monster!

MRS. BANNERSWORTH

And remember the hammer and stake!

(Exit CHARLES, FLORA and MRS. BANNERSWORTH.)

CHORUS

As Charles exits in pursuit of Varney, the scene shifts to the august halls of Parliament. Chapter Two: In which Sir Robert Peel addresses the House of Commons.

(A general murmur from the MPs. The PRIME MINISTER raps his gavel.)

PRIME MINISTER

Order, order! A petition to the general assembly! The floor is yours, Sir Robert.

PEEL

Thank you, Prime Minister. Members of Parliament, it is a great honor to address you today upon a subject so dear to the heart of every Englishman - this, our great capital, a city renowned the world over, the mighty London!

(A cheer arises from the MPs.)

PRIME MINISTER

Footnote: Sir Robert Peel is regarded as the father of modern law enforcement.

PEEL

Surely this assembly of England's most distinguished citizens, who love London so well, knows precisely of what I speak when I say that our city faces dire calamity! A force so pernicious it could even dissolve the monarchy!

(Murmur of dissent.)

MPs

Is it Luddites? Trade Unionists? Napoleon the Third?

PEEL

No, gentlemen. None of these threats is as dangerous as our very own citizens! The streets of London are infested with pickpockets, cutpurses, and thieves, not to mention traffickers in every conceivable vice!

MP

Come now, Peel! That's what the gallows are for!

PEEL

Under our present system even the gallows cannot rid London of this scourge of crime. Only a centralized police force empowered to move through every neighborhood will be capable of saving our city! Therefore, I request that Parliament approve my proposal for a Greater Metropolitan Police Force!

(There is a great roar of complaint.)

MP

Peel, you madman, we already have too many police!

PEEL

Indeed we do! Gentlemen, I do not propose more police, heaven forbid, but to organize and compensate those forces we have.

MP

Your proposal is most condescending, Sir Robert. It suggests London's citizens cannot take care of themselves.

PEEL

But they can't! The city is overrun with crime.

PRIME MINISTER

And what does the Queen think of your plan, Sir Robert? Do you have royal assent to pursue this nonsense?

PEEL

No, Prime Minister, I have not yet had an audience with Her Majesty —

(The MPs are aghast.)

PRIME MINISTER

You have not yet consulted Her Majesty Queen Victoria? Without the imprimatur of the Crown, Sir Robert, you're wasting our time! I move to dismiss this petition. All in favor?

(MPs shout "Aye!")

Your petition fails, Sir Robert. Session adjourned!

(All exit.)

CHORUS

From the noise and bustle of Parliament
We move to a quiet and lonely park in Cheapside.
Chapter Three: In which moonlight works a wonder.

(VARNEY staggers onstage, clutching his stomach, then falls to the ground and dies.)

(Enter CHARLES with lantern and pistol.)

CHARLES

The vampyre's blood looks blue! Be calm, Charles, it is only a trick of the night.

(Seeing VARNEY, he approaches the body.)

What kind of vampyre is this? It scoffs at crosses and holy water, but apparently a lead bullet can kill it as if it were a man. Yes, it is dead.

(He swaggers around VARNEY, pistol aimed at the corpse's head.)

So, fiend, my duel with you comes to a bloody end! Did you think you could attack my dear Flora a third time? What a horror, that my love was forced to yield her blood to this monster... Will she perhaps become a vampyre as well? No, Charles, put that thought aside. Oh, the madness this creature stirs within me! Calm yourself, and do what must be done!

(He pulls out his hammer and stake, preparing to strike it into Varney's chest. Enter BUCKET.)

BUCKET

You there, sir! What is it you're doing?

CHARLES

I'm - Oh dear! My good man, I know this looks bad, but are you a policeman of some kind? Because, if so - help!

BUCKET

Officer Bucket of the Bow Street Runners at your service, sir.

(Aside.)

Footnote: At a later point in my career I hope to become Inspector Bucket from Charles Dickens' *Bleak House*. Another footnote: The Bow Street Runners were a small,

BUCKET (CONT.)

independent police force dating back to the 18th century.

(To CHARLES.)

Don't you that know mangling corpses is illegal in the City of London?

CHARLES

Oh, but you see! This monster broke into Bannersworth Hall earlier tonight, and attempted to... with Miss Bannersworth!

BUCKET

It appears he has been shot.

CHARLES

Yes. There is the wound, inflicted by my dear Flora with her gun.

BUCKET

I can't see very well under these trees. I'd appreciate it, sir, if you'd help me pull him out into the open. When the moon peeks out from behind those clouds, we should have a better view.

(CHARLES and BUCKET move VARNEY's body. As they continue to talk, moonlight brightens the scene.)

In my opinion, sir, this man is stone dead. Did you say a young lady shot him because he was attacking her?

CHARLES

Yes. But he's not a man. He's a vampyre!

BUCKET

That's an extraordinary claim, sir. You haven't been drinking, have you?

CHARLES

No, I'm a teetotaler. I know it sounds incredible, but this creature has attacked my Flora twice before tonight, and on each occasion he made a feast of her blood!

(Behind BUCKET and CHARLES, who do not see him, VARNEY suddenly opens his eyes. He touches his belly. The wound is gone!)

BUCKET

Well, it's not my place to doubt a young gentleman like you, sir. I'll just take your statement and then call the coroner. You say the incident occurred at Bannersworth Hall?

CHARLES

Yes. Know you the family, officer?

BUCKET

I expect most of London knows the Bannersworths. And if you don't mind my asking, who are you, sir?

CHARLES

Charles Holland. I am the nephew of the late Admiral Holland. Perhaps you recognize my name as well?

BUCKET

No, I am afraid not.

(VARNEY has come up behind them.)

CHARLES

It lives!

(VARNEY hisses into CHARLES' face, then tosses him aside and flees. BUCKET gets up and blows his whistle.)

BUCKET

Stop! Stop in the name of the Queen!

(BUCKET exits.)

CHARLES

How did the creature come back to life? The body was lying in the moonlight, and then... I cannot allow this vampyre to make further attacks upon Flora! I must return to Bannersworth Hall! I must defend my love! Despite being frightened out of my wits!

(He exits.)

CHORUS

And now once again an elegant setting:
Rich oak paneling;
Murmurs of contented voices;
The pungent odor of cigar smoke.

WAITER

Chapter Four: In which eminent Victorians congregate at the Athenaeum Club.

(To DOCTOR JARVIS.)

Your brandy, Doctor Jarvis.

DOCTOR JARVIS

Thank you, William.

WAITER

Footnote: Unlike other, more pedigree-conscious clubs, the Athenaeum selected many of its members on the basis of their intellectual achievements.

GRAY

(Reading a newspaper.)

Dash it all!

DOCTOR JARVIS

What's the matter, Doctor Gray?

WAITER

(Aside.)

Footnote: Henry Gray, Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons, achieved lasting fame as author of a medical reference work.

GRAY

Robert Peel is proposing to consolidate all the police forces of London.

ANTHONY CHARLES HARRIS

I take it you are opposed to his idea.

GRAY

On the contrary, Anthony Charles Harris, I think Sir Peel is proposing a long overdue reform. What infuriates me is that men with equally worthy ideas should struggle in vain. You certainly can empathize, Mr. Harris, considering your thwarted attempts to return to the ruins of Egypt.

ANTHONY CHARLES HARRIS

Here, here. But I know Robert Peel quite well. He'll stay on course, no matter the setback. He was my student once, during one of my first digs in Cairo. An impetuous, brilliant lad.

DOCTOR JARVIS

I'm not so certain Peel will succeed. He has made a speech to Parliament and was shouted down.

GRAY

Oh, he'll succeed in the end. He has the ear of the Queen, and the Queen's favorites always get what they want, by hook or by crook, dash it all!

ANTHONY CHARLES HARRIS

Good old Bobbie is certainly persistent, I'll give him that. Speaking of which, I understand you're writing a book, aren't you, Gray?

GRAY

A book? What I'm writing is much more than a book. It's an encyclopedia of flesh and bone, a portfolio of the corporeal, a field guide to the guts! It will cover the human body as comprehensively as the Oxford English Dictionary covers our native language! I'm on fire with this project, in case you couldn't tell.