



183 - *NOT* the bloody Carpenters Arms, South Marston - 9th January 2006
or - the Case of the Missing Hash

It being Sunday morning, I repaired - as was my wont - to the chambers of my good friend Sherlock Holmes for breakfast. As I alighted from my cab outside the familiar façade of 221b Baker Street, I espied a scantily-clad, perspiring, elderly gentleman hopping anxiously from one foot to the other as he awaited the door to be opened. Before Mrs Hudson could perform this service, I asked him his business. "A terrible tragedy has befallen my companions", he cried frantically, "beyond even the powers of Sherlock Holmes to explain, I fear - but no other has it is his power to attempt to solve the mystery". "Calm yourself, sir, and be patient" I replied. "Mr Holmes will soon get to the bottom of it, have no fear."

We were admitted to Holmes's study, where the great detective sat our visitor - a Mr Michael Fisher - in an armchair. Holmes spoke: "I perceive, sir, that you are a former naval officer, currently in practice as a solicitor, and a member of a recreational running club." Accustomed as I was to Holmes's powers of deduction, I could not help but express my astonishment. Holmes smiled indulgently: "*Elem-*" here he checked himself; "I must stop saying that - it is *self-evident*, my dear Watson; as to the former naval officer - Fisher was dancing a hornpipe on the steps whilst awaiting admittance - and observe, Watson, the curious fish-bite scar on the forearm - clearly a wound sustained in the Cod Wars." I did not understand. "What kind of fish?" I queried. Holmes showed some annoyance. "*Eel - or manta ray*, my dear Watson. As I was saying - Fisher's manner of speech suggests the officer class, and his current occupation is betrayed by his mean and avaricious demeanour - so penny-pinching as to sweat by running from the station rather than take a cab. And the recreational running - the short trousers - ill-suited to a brisk January day, and the vest emblazoned with 'Kennet Valley Hash House Harriers' - a species of social exercise amongst the rural working classes - speak for themselves".

"Mrs Hudson has provided breakfast" he said, waving at the salvers laid out on the sideboard. "please help yourselves. As there is clearly an urgent mystery to solve, I shall think more clearly with the aid of my violin." With that, he fetched his Stradivarius, on which he munched thoughtfully as Fisher unfolded his tale. This was soon told: arising before dawn to set a trail for his companions to follow, from the Carpenters Arms public house near Swindon, he returned upon completion of his exertions expecting to find his friends waiting to embark upon the trail. But the publican claimed to have sent them elsewhere, and positively declined to elaborate further. "I fear" sighed Fisher "that he has done away with them. I searched frantically all around, but was unable to discover any trace of their whereabouts." And with that, he broke into a manly sob.

"Be of good cheer, Fisher" smiled Holmes. "This matter is easily solved. No harm has come to your companions. Watson, fetch down the 'S' dossier." I did as I was bid, and Holmes read briefly from the papers therein assembled. "There is a report of the Carpenters Arms near Swindon", he said. "They are all low rogues there."

"All!" I cried. "*All?* - I meant Harry, my dear Watson" he replied - "the landlord. And Hilda, his wife. But while they are scheming, surly, obnoxious vermin, I doubt they are murderers. Let me see; your companions, Fisher - are there any who possess a level head?" Fisher did not pause. "Certainly", he said - "Margaret Bradbury, our Grand Old Mistress, is a schoolteacher." "What sort of school?" I asked. "*Elementary*, my dear Watson" replied Holmes; "You told her tale in 'the Abbeymead Scandal', I recollect - three Cabinet ministers and a peer of the realm. A most remarkable woman. She will have known how to deal with an emergency. And I believe there are walkers in your party?" "Indeed" replied Fisher, "Terry is a capable man - loves nothing better than to stride across the fields and meadows, despite his troublesome hips." "A countryman?" I enquired. "*A lame man, Terry*, my dear Watson" responded Holmes, "But a determined walker - none better." And he fell into a brown study - next door to the parlour wherein we sat. Presently he emerged clutching a map of north Wiltshire. "Watson, I have it" he cried. "Consult Bradshaw for the time of the next train to Swindon. Bring a Baedeker and your old service revolver" - and with that he shot out the door - alas, still in his dressing gown. Bradshaw being away for the weekend, I looked up a railway timetable. We hailed a cab to Paddington. "What is a Baedeker?" asked Fisher. "I have no idea" I replied. "I always bring a cheese sandwich - he seems satisfied with that."

On the train to Swindon, Holmes chewed hungrily at his Baedecker. "I believe your companions will have removed themselves to the next-nearest hostelry, and started their Hash from there" he said. "If we hurry, their trail may still be warm." He produced a bloodhound from his dressing-gown pocket. "Hercules and I will follow them from the country club. Is there likely to be a strong scent?" "Dave's trainers!" responded Fisher gleefully. "And meanwhile, Fisher and Watson will take a cab to Nightingale Woods - part of the Great Western Community Forest, and with luck, you will find your friends searching for you beneath the tree I see marked on the map." "Which tree, Holmes?" I asked. "A lemon tree, my dear Watson" the great detective replied.

And so it proved. Runners and walkers alike were soon discovered in the forest - although in truth none of the trees were taller than most of the Hashers. Fisher was overjoyed. "How can I repay your kindness, Holmes?" he enquired thankfully. "Let us repair to the country club" he replied warmly, "and partake of of some refreshment." "Refreshment?" I asked, puzzled. "Ale, man - and tea my dear Watson" he answered. "And I believe there is sustenance good for the system." "System?" I replied, fearful of his response. "Alimentary, my dear Watson. And the Baedecker reveals that the kitchen will provide an excellent steak, or citrus chicken". Wait for it, wait for it - "Steak?" I said. Holmes groaned. "Á la Monterey, my dear Watson." I took refuge behind Fisher; "And the citrus chicken?" I faltered - Holmes exploded: "A lime entrée, my dear Watson."

Soon we were warming our hands before a roaring fire, and Fisher - now more suitably clad, called upon the fragrant and delicate Margaret to address the company, which she did gracefully, thanking the 'Hare' Fisher and fulsomely praising Holmes, who was busily engaged with a generous portion of grilled deerstalker and chips.

Holmes and I took our seats in the mobile-free compartment back to London. There was much I did not understand; ignoring the warning glances from Holmes as he sat engrossed in his newspaper, I plucked up courage to begin: "But Holmes, how did you -". Holmes threw down his *Sunday Sport* in a rage. "It's *BLEEDIN' OBVIOUS*, my dear Watson," he bellowed, and puffing furiously on his bloodhound, sank into a deep silence from which he did not emerge until we reached Paddington.

Many thanks, Mike, for a brilliantly improvised run - which kept my new running shoes dry. And many boos for the miserable old git at the Carpenters Arms.

And now a bit from Mike:
New Grand Old Master

Margaret will have been our lovely Grand Old Mistress for three years in April and she has decided that she will hand over the responsibility of being our leader to another on Sunday April 17th. This is such an important occasion in Hashing that we are having a special party after the Hash run to celebrate it. So, there will be a trail as normal (pub to be decided, but probably not the Carpenters Arms at South Marston) and it will be laid by Margaret and Mike (our first two GOMs). There will then be a party in the pub with celebration and ceremony, buffet and beer and speeches and singing. Please put this great event in your diaries now.

A bit of Hash lore. Hashing is not a club - it is an informal association of like-minded free spirits and as such it has no rules. It does however have a wealth of customs and conventions, for example the custom of awarding down-downs after the run. There is a convention that a GOM has absolute authority in matters affecting the Hash and so Margaret is the only person who can appoint her successor. She will without doubt choose that successor wisely and we look forward to finding out whom it will be in April.

Yours Mike

Fifth Coming Hash Runs

184 - 23rd Jan - The Hatchet Inn, *Lower* Chute - Jeremy

185 - 6th Feb - The Downgate, Hungerford - Maurice & Andrea
(past the Station, leading onto the common)

186 - 20th Feb - The Bugger's Arms - Katrina

If you want to have a bash at a Hash, or find out where The Bugger's Arms is please ring GOMargaret on 01793 703744, or the late Keith Mitchell on 01672 511530 - email keith@pallettfs.co.uk - website <http://kvhash.mysite.freemove.com>