

Of the Plantagenet Chronicles


Part 1

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

- **Ben Jaffa** - A Blackmore of the Theatre, producing backdrops, smokes and mists as plays demand about the PlayHouses of London
- **'Sandy Bell'** - Borderland Reeve from far North in England, the edge itself of Scotland, fled South seeking better fortune.
- **Valentine Plymmyswoode** - Dedicated to the study or the Arcane, Esoteric and Occult.
- **Ned Culpable** - Apothecary 'Apprentice' to Old Man Mustard and his Apothecary Shoppe.
- **Thomas Blitheman** - Poet. Playwright. Dabbler in the Arcane. Gentleman.
- **James Burbage** - Owner of The Theatre, Shoreditch.
- Ratty Rogues - Various.
- Leicester's Men - Actors. Various.
- **Nicholas Treningham** - A man of Papist sympathies.
- A Spirit.


Pre curtain - An Exposition

Upon the roads, the highways and byways of England, our cast assemble.

f **'Sandy Bell'** there is little to tell. A border-man taking the long way south to seek fortune, and some assured life with less risk than his so much further north, he finally draws to **The Bell** tavern one evening after a long ride, a crude handbill thrust upon him on the road late that afternoon by an old woman, but one with a brisk turn of heel and a twinkling eye. The bill reads

"On This Night At Mr Burbage's The Theatre, on the road situated at the west of Shoreditch Street and north of Hog Lane cross road are to be seen at the most assured and well known players here known to all and on as Leicester's Men, most assured in their plays of stage Plantagenet Chronicles a new play by the quill of Nathanial Horton, here before seen in other works of good fortune but this last year ..."

Perhaps by happenstance The Bell is the last Inn before London proper, and opposite across the road from **The Theatre**. Sandy stables his horse, tosses his bags in a room, and drifts to the Tavern proper to wash the dust from his throat with a decent Ale and meet with his first decent meal in days.

f **Ned Culpable** there is little to tell. Apprenticed boy and man to Old Man Mustard, Apothecary of Renown, he is about his chores in the shop at the Old Man's demand, and then about to depart on Errands, when the Old Man's head pops out of his back room waving a hand bill of sorts.

“‘Ere, you might like this - some Old Bagge left it yesterday, not a regular. These new ‘Theatre’ things. She said to tell you”. The paper fluttered onto the counter and The Old Man disappeared back inside, but not without “What are you gawping at? Those gall-bladders won’t wait! Get on w’ya!”

Ned read the bill as he left the shop.

“On This Night At Mr Burbage’s The Theatre, on the road situated at the west of Shoreditch Street and north of Hog Lane cross road are to be seen...”. And so on.

Ned got on for the waiting gall-bladders, but interest piqued he decided an evening at **The Theatre** for his (gorgeous, pouting) **Polly** would be in order...



f **Valentine Plymmyswoode esq.**, there is little to tell. A Master of Scholarly Pursuits in ... *obscure* learnings. He is respected and a name known and retained by those with wider Influence.

It is then a morning without other distraction that a knock upon the door of his home is enough to rouse him from an early morning sip of spiced wine. An urchin, a small coin exchanged and thence into his hand a letter, waxed for travel, and waxed in seal by **Northumberland**.

Within a note little more than ‘*I am to Court at Her Majesty’s request, leaving immediately, but the enclosed came into my possession most recent. Of interest - if you would you be so kind*’, a flowery ‘N’ and hasty seal. Besides the note only a bill of theatre which read

“On This Night At Mr Burbage’s The Theatre, on the road situated at the west of Shoreditch Street and north of Hog Lane cross road are to be seen...”. And so on.

And so on.

Valentine considered the state of his Travelling doublet, and his shockingly limited variety of hose, let alone any sort of hat. He eyed the chair that tended to hold Hats, and forlornly concluded that he only possessed any-sort-of Hats. Anyway, what exactly would one wear to a ‘Theatre’?



f **Thomas Blitheman**, there is little to tell. A man about town, a man of learning, of style, an up and coming Poet and Playwright, and a dabbler in *Other* matters. He is all that is About To Be in Queen Elizabeth’s London. He is barely aware of the old woman that thrusts a play bill into his hands in a crowded early morning street near Bishops Gate.

“On This Night At Mr Burbage’s The Theatre, on the road situated at the west of Shoreditch Street and north of Hog Lane cross road are to be seen...”. And so on.

And so on.

‘Aha!’ He realises. ‘A play! One of Horton’s! And at Burbage’s The Theatre! Another opportunity to converse with Equals - perhaps even with Horton, and some time with Burbage! Time to invest in a copy writer for my Latest Masterpiece!’

Without Much Ado About Anything he is away to dress in his finest, and arrange new copy, ready for any and all opportunities that might present...

Of Ben Jaffa there is little to tell. A man of distant birth in far lands of roiling history, become that of Theatre, captured with that which is fantasy, and the enchanting words of Players in a magic all their own. In this fantasy he adds his own talents to draw the audience with sight and sound within the stage.

Now, employed these last months by James Burbage at The Theatre in Shoreditch, he is most excited as **Leicester's Men** come to The Theatre, to undertake a play by Nathaniel Horton entitled **Plantagenet Chronicles**, opening for the first night but this coming day!

A busy time indeed, with dress rehearsal, curtains and drops to ensure are painted and placed, and smudge pots to provide mist for the dawn soliloquy in Act 1. Amongst the bystanders observing the Dress none catch his eye, for he is a busy man doing that which he loves.

Act 1 Scene 1 - Plantagenet Chronicles

First night at The Theatre (prop James Burbage) for a new play from Nathaniel Horton, performed by Leicester's Men (of those most noted, Robert Wilson, John Laneham, and Richard Tarlton amongst others). Burbage lets slip to Ben Jaffa that Edmund Tilney (Her Majesty's Master of the Revels) has instructed him that this first bight should be a good performance, for a person of note may be in the audience, and should be impressed. There is also rumour that a new players company, The Queen's Men is to be formed shortly, with the best drawn from the theatre companies and the establishments themselves.

Later that night, performance due Ben scanned the crowd out of curiosity as it streamed in. It wasn't hard to spot the 'important person' at the back, and another, both in fine clothes and talking earnestly. The visitor was of dark complexion, albeit not so dark as Ben's.

The play began. All proceeded smoothly for the first few minutes until lines were read and the smoke pots fired by Ben as cue.

*"Two-legg'd rat-es
i talk all to thee
because creeping creatures,
coequal being the most cursed,
did compare to thy evildo'rs
v'rmin human predat'rs,
a creeping snake
stands tall'r than thee all"*

Consternation - first, the words are not as expected, with middle lines added anew. Then, instead of pots producing smoky mist much more coils up, swirling in most peculiar fashion into almost serpent like coils. Swirl and coil as the words are spoken, and then deeply upon the stage the men as rats appear, to cries of surprise from the players. These are not men in grey cloaks as expected, but are rats the size of men, armed not with bated swords but sharp ones. A vicious fight, not of the stage, breaks out upon it, and another yet as the crowd draws back in horror from giant rats

upon their hind legs, diet dressed and armed as men! Behind the audience there are more figures glimpsed.

At the back of the audience there is kerfuffle and screams, A fight. Man down. As the smoke swirls thickly about the audience they start to scramble for the exits. Amongst the audience there are a few who make a straight line for trouble though, pushing and shoving through the throng.

In fine clothes a man named Elias Epworth holds a bloody wound to his side, gasping 'They have His Excellency- get them!' In pursuit Sandy Bell and Ben Jaffa, followed by Ned Culpable and the (*Gorgeous. Pouting*) Polly in arm. As they all emerge from The Theatre, a disappearing cloak, and the cries of direction from theatre evacuees and bystanders guides them to cottages further down the road. Hurried figures of men in grey and slammed doors lend direction as the Ottoman Emissary is hustled out and away, apparently unaware anything is amiss.

Sandy, Ben and Ned follow, then to kick in the door of the cottage. Beneath a poorly disguised trap to a cellar and thence a tunnel leading along the line of the road above.

Alas, this is not for Polly, and Ned is forced to retreat to vouchsafe passage for her back to her father back in London. However, but by chance he recalls an old friend of family living nearby whom is reliable and will ensure Polly's return through the descending dark of evening, thence he hurries back.

Meanwhile Sandy and Ben follow the passage beneath the street and cottages. Shortly another cellar broken through. Within they see signs of Popery and idolatry, and a ladder leading up to a closed trap above. Quiet now, Sandy leads the way. Braced and spring-heaved up to blow the trapdoor he bounds up to the surprise of the three Roughts in the room above!

In the chaos of the moment both he and Ben make it out of the trap door and a brief, bloody sword fight ensues. Finally Ben manages to kick the last Rought down the open trap to plunge to his death on the floor of the cellar below. All that the dead Roughts had about them of note was a simple, rather unconvincing rat mask, and a gold crucifix upon an chain, hidden in a pocket.

In the back room of the cottage into which New and Sandy have emerged a family cower, their two children hiding in their mother's skirts. Rescued, they explained they had been held as hostage this day, for the other men had rushed through, some departing through the rear door, some to the front and the street. They had with them another, confused, protesting, richly dressed, and chivvied on at sword point, his hands bound.

A quick check out the back of the cottage showed stone walled common land, with a dip in the wall at corner leading to another field, and then beyond a building. In between a trodden path worn in spring grass of regular use. Sandy and Ben run low to the wall and peer over to observe and sight momentarily silhouettes in the dusk dawdling about the structure distant. They decide through lack of cover a roundabout way is best. Back to the cottage they depart through the street door. With Sandy through the door Ben turns to them with a warning that they should clear their cellar for others will follow, less tolerant of papist devilry than he.

A roundabout route down and around about the lanes and Artillery fields, they come upon a lane that leads to trees and behind the old Charnel House and Chapel decades past abandoned. Amongst the trees approach is easier, and they observe at least two idling before the building, clearly there as safeguard. Our watchers see others coming from the rear of another house some doors away from their original vantage. Perhaps one that could be used - a quick count of back doors and roofs in the gloom suggests how many up and down.

Later that same evening Ben and Sandy watched from the road, and identified the cottage with visitors going in but none coming out, and the candles that burned in the windows to guide the faithful, three in one, two in another. They knocked in a similar vain, looking as pious as possible, and were allowed within after a brief and reassuring conversation with the old woman there answering. Some luck that Ben, as a man of the theatre, has picked up a little charm and wit of those that act. They are shown through and proceed the path to the old charnel house.

Greeted at the door, last in, they stand at the back. It is clear a Catholic service for more than 20 or so hidden Catholics from the area about. A Mass, incense, Latin and all the papist trappings. But the priest in charge is a man charismatic. He holds all there in his sway, their eyes wide and glazed with devotion to his every word. As he moves amongst the congregation it is clear his touch and blessing is a spiritual and physical impact upon each man and woman. Unable to avoid, even Ben and Sandy feel it, but resist its siren call to their emotions.

The service ends but skilful questioning gathers males of the priests as they leave (NAME), and they slip away to darkness awaiting the quieting of the departing and the guards and a return to break in. It is hardly difficult, so 'breaking in' may be overcomplicating. A sharp stiletto through the cracks to lift the latch bar is all, with no involvement from the primitive 'lock'.

Examination of the chapel and charnel house beyond reveal little, for they have been cleaned and all evidence of papalist activity removed. Within the charnel house an old priest hole in a hollow wall is discovered, but naught else than a scrap of paper with a date and reference to St Leonards, a ruin of the old 'actors church' up the road slightly. They depart as they came, ensuring all is returned as it was, and head back to the Bell Tavern across from the Theatre by a roundabout route.

Act 1 - Scene 2 - Back at The Theatre

Meanwhile, one of the rat men who'd been fighting upon the stage itself is overpowered, subdued and sat upon to keep him quiet. Initial interrogation yields the name of the 'leader' of the gang, Edmund Buckley, the occasional nature of the work, and a complete non-understanding of what was going on, rat-ness and the misbehaviour of smoke pots.

Elias Epworth meanwhile, is aided and wounds dressed by Ned, after initial assistance although he is horrified on confirmation that his charge, The Emissary, has been abducted. He insists a message be sent to Court immediately with news of this abduction to one person only, a man simply referred to as 'Blythe'.

About the emptied theatre Valentine Plymmyswoode steps forward having observed much of the excitement. While a careful inspection of the site revealed little, it is Burbage standing amidst the ruins of his first night that attracts Plymmyswoode's attention.

By way of introduction Valentine let's slip he has a patron interested in the theatre (a statement almost true in some respects, and equally misleading) and Burbage's ranting at the same about Ben Jaffa for the smoke pots to grovelling, a tour of the Theatre, and best cakes and wine within his office. Valentine clarifies many of the points with Burbage, Nathaniel Horton, the plays author, the leads in Leicester's Men performing, the identity of the guest abducted, and the pots that produced the miasmatic smoke. They part, neither the wiser, but now rather calmer.

Another stops by then, introducing himself to Valentine Plymmyswoode as the poetry and theatre aspirant Thomas Blitheman, also taking an interest in strange events. A brief inspection of the deserted back curtain reveals the smoke pots, and they borrow one for 'examination'.

Act 1 - Scene 3 - A Tavern, Later Still.

Over ales in various Taverns introductions are finally made and all gain acquaintance. Discussion raises the changed wording of the first night when the smoke pots air. Some spell perhaps? It is not clear if the words are as they are meant to be, or they must have been used many times in rehearsals..

Interrogation of the captured rat-man had revealed little. Examination of the used smoke pots had revealed they were other than Ben's normal supply. Old Man Mustard had identified the makers mark as belonging to 'That Russian, Petrov.'

Act 2 - Scene 1 - An Apothecary Shop

Old Man Mustard's directions had the accuracy to be expected from an old Apothecary, and the shop of the Russian is quickly located in a back alley. From the moment the corner is rounded it is clear they have chanced upon some altercation at the shop. Two large men, of Russian accents are beating the Apothecary assumed to be Petrov within and wrecking his shop, demanding something from him. Sandy and Ben intervene directly, Ned ready to catch strays or interference from outside, and with some good fortune (and that they have armoured up overnight) make lucky work of the two Russian antagonists after being told to fuck off and an exchange of pistol fire and blades without warning.

The apothecary Petrov is surprisingly ungrateful, snarling that he will not do this anymore, nor will he risk his life and family for 'Cecil'. He rants, demanding of them all, do they think Karl and Alexi here are bad, but Grigori, thy know Grigori? No? Never meet him, nor his master if possible, the Ivanovich boy is better or worse. He Petrov will go, this is too much. Tell Burleough it's over, you are Cecil's men - go now, for the shop will burn and he will be gone, etc...

Amidst his ranting Ned does calm him enough for some moments (being in the profession) to ascertain a description of the person who purchased the pots from him some days ago, and identify that he kept his ledgers in the 'back room'. The description given sounds suspiciously like it may be Horton. They depart to much swearing in Russian.

Act 2 - Scene 2 - Laneham's Lodging And Horton's House

John Laneham's lodgings, where a ~~last~~ young fan departs when Ben arrives. Laneham explains that the script was changed by Horton during the day before, actually on the morning of the first night, and waves his amended copy. He assumed Burbage knew and just went with it. Laneham opens the carefully copied pages, and shows Ben the alteration, there in Horton's own hand.

Now, with sight of Laneham's script change by Horton, Jaffa's occasional sight of him at Theatres albeit from a distance as he was not one to fraternise outside of the players, and the description from the Petrov, they decide to visit Horton's lodgings. Laneham knows the address, and is happy to pass it on. He agrees not to mention anything to Burbage, even if he bothers to go into The

Theatre that day, for he assumes the performance is suspended until further notice. Ben promises to send word if and when performance is restarted.

To Horton's, only a little way distant across London. The rooms are relatively bare, and Horton appears to be a man of little means. Little there, but a writers desk, crumpled papers, blank parchment and quills. Examination of his desk reveals a secret compartment, and after some jiggling and rummaging it is opened to reveal another gold crucifix upon a chain therein, of the same design as that already found on the dead ruffian who had abducted the Emissary .

Act 2 - Scene 3 - A Ritual

Back at Plymmyswoode's Place of Art, he hurriedly assembles a map of the locale of their suspect and a pendulum of sorts with which to be guided.

The ritual, many hours long invoking Heptarchs and Angelic Hosts, scattering of correspondences and smells best left to the imagination, centres oddly upon the Theatre as the centre of the abduction. If there was some magical nature to what has happened, and somehow the Emissary is involved, then The Theatre remains the centre of events.

Investigation of the theatre site via a conversation with Burbage (a full and frank conversation with some shouting and threats) and with Ben Jaffa, and intimate poking around by Valentine and Thomas found no secrets spaces. Indeed Burbage described The Theatre as being built upon the ruined site of an old Priory, Holywell, sacked and torn down in the great cleansing of Papist institution in the time of Henry, the Queen's father, in his split from Rome.

Act 3 Scene 1 - The Church of St Leonards.

A plan is formed and an approach to the old St Leonard's church made, making use of natural cover. It is but a moment at a distance for Bell to identify guards outlined against the sky at various parts of the church ruin.

Culpable, Jaffa, with Bell, leading for his abilities as a hidden man in rough country are exceptional, followed by Plymmyswoode and Blitheman, for their feet are firmly of the town.

With the tossing of Jaffa's flash bang (not dissimilar to a Spanish Grenado, but more flash and bang than boom and bits) and the charge up the stairs. There is short work of the half dozen men amidst the ruins, their breakfast rather ruined by the failure of both lookouts to look out.

There are pistol shots, sword play, and deaths, culminating in the last man attempting to flee into the crypts, only to be booted down the stairs from behind by Jaffa, then to tumble to the base of the stairs, landing with a crack, and great stillness thereafter..

From the aspects, clothes and weapons of the defenders it is concluded that they were local bravos, ruffians rather than mercenaries, not least for their woeful preparation, armour, and ill-advised attention to breakfast. Simple hired blades from any alley.

Act 3 - Scene 2 The Crypt

Where lies the body of the booted bravo at the base of the stairs a tunnel is before, set in stone by man, not carved by nature's forces. In the distance Jaffa detects echoed chants of Latin, indistinct but sure. Lanterns and lights are assembled, and order of march prepared

A long, long tunnel straight and the work of man is traversed before breakthrough via poorly carved steps into a wide and rough set of wide, arching, natural tunnels. There is some light from lanterns set about corners and sconces with torches sputtering, and the chanting grows louder, and more familiar, hymns of Latin or similar, voices raised in rejoice and worship.

Taking a nearby narrow tunnel branch holding dim light within, more guards are encountered. Bored, idle roughs with little but swords, perhaps more interested in stopping anyone leaving than expecting anyone to arrive uninvited when their compatriots protected the ruined church above. They are quickly and quietly dispatched by Messrs Jaffa, Culpable and Bell.

Creeping through the main crypt hall, the individual cells were lit by candles and lanterns arrayed about the floors, some containing long dead corpses but others missing. Missing where became abruptly clear. The corpses shambled around the corner, horrifying all as that faced them. With primitive swords and knives bound to rotted limbs they stumbled forward swinging!

Gathering themselves from first sight of the walking dead Bell, Jaffa and Culpable, engage and many corpses are despatched again with swift blows, but not lightly, as scarred armour and some minor wounds attest. Pressing forward into more animated corpses Bell and Jaffa approach the source of the singing, followed by Culpable. They become uneasily aware (from screams of horror and the clash of weapons) that they are now attacked in the rear, with none but Messrs Plymmyswoode and Blitheman for defence.

The scene before them in an open chamber from the corridor is that of a Papist Mass, with three of orders surrounded by a worshipful community chanting and singing words not their own. Of the three there are Nicholas Treningham, Andrew Towley (both recognised by Bell and Jaffa from the charnel house) and Gabriel Thorpe, identified later. Treningham led the singing and chanting, with a large book in his hands, while Rowley held a chest containing a carved and etched human skull.

But this was a simple sight surrounding a terrible vision. At the centre of it all a spirit long lost to the mortal world was feeding upon the writhing form of the Turkish Emissary long sought!

With a cries of horror, all are momentarily taken aback, before Ben Jaffa charges the ghastly spirit - One swing of his sword shows Jaffa there is little to cut of the ethereal spirit, so he leaps beyond to take on the leaders, closely followed by Bell.

Caught mid-chant, mid-ceremony, and perhaps mid-spell, there is not time for the evil Papists and their devilish spirit to raise a defence and they are cut down, or nearly so. Treningham resists the blows rained upon him in a miraculous manner, but he turns to flee, darting towards stairs downwards at the rear of the chamber. Jaffa, ready for such a move kicks him down the stairs where he tumbles to the bottom and lies groaning, clearly now injured despite his unearthly protections of moments before.

Now freed from the ritual as those commanding die and the congregation stumbles to a halt, chants tumbling into chaos and catering in moments, the evil spirit rises from the Emissary and plunges down the stairs to engulf its late master and consume him: Treningham screams as it

plunges upon him. By the time Jaffa descends the stairs there is little but the wizened husk of a man, and the spirit has fled through the tunnels before, who knows where.

Meanwhile, Bell has cornered the priest, of the three the only one to try and defend himself. Alas, pushed down a narrow crack of rock that is hardly a passage, the priest is no match for Bell's experience and is quickly despatched.

Ned Culpable attends the Emissary, for he is weak, but at least alive, and then the awakening congregation. Bell and Jaffa recognise some of the faces from the service they attended days earlier in the charnel house, but others not. All awaken as if from slumber, confessing they know not where they are nor have memory of several days past. It is clear they are simply folk from the area, papists caught in a web of deception and corruption.

Plymmyswoode and Blitheman take charge and possession of the skull, its box and the tome that was in use. They are greatly pleased with themselves, for their estimates of distance and direction place the crypt below The Theatre, these crypts clearly part of the ruins of the old priory.

There are some matters to attend, such as the skull in a box and a heavy book of Latin about the dead but little more than to extract the Emissary, and treat the congregation kindly and get them away before any of a more religious Protestant bent round them up.

Out in the sunlight messengers are sent to Court, and it is a scant hour before a carriage escorted by heavily armed swarthy foreign riders arrives (perhaps Janissaries muses Ben), and the Emissary is taken into the care of his own

As they depart a lone rider remains, one dressed much more in the English style. A dapper, but average man introduces himself by the name of Blythe. He explains has been following events closely, and is comfortable to pass on Walsingham's approval of the everyone's actions here to save an innocent Emissary, a diplomatic relationship key to England's strength, and see the destruction of a satanic Catholic cell, one approved by the Pope himself, a 'Sodality' of 'St. Benedict'.

Well done, Blythe smiled warmly. He would be in touch...