

Hindhead Walk

Scenes & Characters

Intro & All Scenes

Robert Hunter

Scene 1

John Tyndall
Mrs Louisa Tyndall

Scene 1a

Flora Thompson

Scene 2

A Highwayman
His Victims

Between Scenes

Hunter monologue – Farnham Road

Scene 3

Jonathan Hutchinson
Jane Hutchinson
Tennyson (non-speaking)

Scene 4

Broomsquire's Wife
Broomsquire

Scenes 5

Hunter monologue – summit & view

Scene 6

Sailor
Michael Casey
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Villager 1
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Between Scenes

Hunter monologue – Sailor's stone

Scene 7

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Hindhead Walk

Scene 1

Professor Tyndall, 1890

(Professor Tyndall appears, and hails Hunter)

Tyndall Ah, there you are Hunter. Glad I've found you.

Hunter Professor Tyndall! How are you, sir?

Tyndall Touch of gout again, but I thought a short walk today would do me no harm.
(Looking at the walkers) These friends of yours, are they?

Hunter My walking companions today, yes.

Tyndall Not come to buy up more of the land round my house then?

Hunter You know I, of all people, would hardly be bringing land speculators round, professor.

Tyndall Dashed nuisance they are! I came here for peace and quiet, and to enjoy breathing the purest air this side of the Alps. Mine was the only house up here when I built it six years ago in '84 – couldn't see another for miles – and then what happened?

Hunter I fear you advertised your views on the benefits of living at Hindhead too well. Others followed your example.

Tyndall How can one concentrate on doing serious work when there's some Londoner busy building – right in front of your study window?

Hunter Well quite, I...

Tyndall Is it any wonder I had to erect screens to protect my privacy?

Hunter The screens were, perhaps, slightly on the large side, professor.

Tyndall Large? They were only as large as I needed to stop myself being deafened and distracted.

Hunter 40 ft high, I believe.

Tyndall Indeed. Things of beauty and noble structures they are too. Larch poles covered in heather – to blend in with the surroundings.

Hunter Well blend they may, but...

Tyndall They've even got lightning conductors to protect them – I've no concerns about them – they'll not fall down in the wildest storm.

Hunter Your enthusiasm for them has not been shared generally by your friends and neighbours.

Tyndall It's the Tory press – they're against me on political grounds – trying to stir up trouble.

Hunter You gave another speech against Gladstone down in Haslemere only the other week, did you not?

Tyndall I'm against the man *and* his Home Rule Bill for Ireland, as you know.

(Mrs Tyndall appears)

Mrs Tyndall John, I thought I'd find you out walking. You should be resting you know.

Tyndall *(To Hunter)* Louisa's more than just a wife to me, Mr Hunter – she's my scribe, my clerk, my nurse, my constant companion...

Mrs Tyndall And having precious little effect at the moment. *(Acknowledging Hunter)*
Good day to you, Mr Hunter.

Hunter Good day, Mrs Tyndall.

Mrs Tyndall (*To Tyndall*) Dr Winstanley has prescribed draughts of magnesia and syrup of chloral – and it's past time for your next dose.

Tyndall (*To Hunter*) For the conqueror of the Matterhorn and the Weisshorn, it has come to this.

Hunter But the work of the famed physicist, colleague of Faraday and Huxley, carries on undaunted as before, I am sure.

Mrs Tyndall (*To Hunter*) We are about to write our biography.

Tyndall We have been 'about to write our biography' for as long as I can remember.

Mrs Tyndall This evening we will make a start.

Tyndall Enjoy your walk, Mr Hunter, and (*to the walkers*) to you all. I must return to my retreat.

Hunter Good day to you Mr Tyndall – Mrs Tyndall.

(The Tyndalls move off the way they came – Hunter and the walkers proceed)

Scene 1a

Flora Thompson, 1920s

(Hunter meets Flora Thompson)

Hunter Forgive me if I am mistaken, madam, but are you not the postmistress at Grayshott?

Flora Why, good heavens, sir – I was at Grayshott twenty years ago, but I am now at the post office in Liphook. You have a long memory.

Hunter I thought I recognised the face. Miss Timms, is it not? Sir Robert Hunter of Haslemere – I was legal adviser to the Postmaster-General at the time.

Flora It was Timms in those days, but I have since been married. I am now Mrs Thompson, Flora Thompson.

Hunter If I recall correctly, you were known then for your love of walking – and I see you still do so today.

Flora This was where I used to come with friends in my Grayshott days. We used to walk up to the Gibbet Hill declaiming poetry and Edgar Allan Poe.

Hunter You used to serve Conan Doyle at the post office in Grayshott, did you not?

Flora He and Mr Bernard Shaw used to come in. I confess I listened eagerly to their conversation, but I could never bring myself to speak to them.

Hunter I'm sure they would have been delighted.

Flora But I was too shy – I was only 20 years old at the time.

Hunter You are making some notes as you walk, I see.

Flora I compile what I call my Peverel Papers. They are nothing of any great merit, I'm afraid, but these notes help me to remember what I've seen each day.

Hunter Shall we see these notes in print?

Flora They are published in a little magazine called *The Catholic Fireside* – but you may not have seen them.

Hunter I regret I have not.

Flora Well, perhaps you have not missed much – though the magazine seems to think them well liked by their readers.

Hunter I shall look out for it – and indeed for any further works you may publish. You never know, you too may one day be a famous author – a household name.

Flora Well it's nice to hear encouragement, Sir Robert. It's more than I get from my husband, I have to confess.

Hunter We must let you continue with your perambulation, Mrs Thompson.

Flora And you with yours, Sir Robert.

Scene 2

Highwayman

Hunter There was once a curate of Haslemere, the Rev James Fielding, appointed in 1786, who was suspected of being a highwayman in his spare time. I don't know if this is he.

He had three daughters and a wife, but apparently home and parish duties weren't enough to keep him occupied.

It's said that Parson Fielding used to rob mail coaches on the Portsmouth Road and hide the bags in his cellar, at *Town House* in Haslemere High Street. They also found the brass plates of mail bags in *Chase Farm*, another of his houses situated conveniently on the county border with Sussex.

(We see a robbery happen)

Scene 3

Hutchinson and Tennyson, 1866

(The walkers arrive at the viewpoint where they overlook Inval)

(Jonathan Hutchinson and his wife climb up from below)

Hutchinson Well, my dear Jane, does not this countryside please thee? Is it not a solace after the smoke of London?

Mrs Hutchinson Very much better, Jonathan. And the children will enjoy it too.

Hutchinson But perhaps thou shouldst not have climbed up here in thy present condition...

Mrs Hutchinson Nonsense, I am perfectly fit. Having had five children, I believe I know what I *can* do and *cannot* do while expecting a sixth.

Hutchinson So I see. Still, it's a long way up from our house in the valley.

Mrs Hutchinson I have never felt fitter. It is the air here.

Hutchinson We shall have to keep the London property as well, of course – I must live within reach of the Hospital during the week...

Mrs Hutchinson But with the railway now open to Haslemere, we can come here when we wish. It's only an hour and a half from London.

Hutchinson When I retire we can live here all the time.

Mrs Hutchinson *(Suddenly)* Jonathan, look! *(She points through the trees)* Is that not...? The Poet Laureate?

(Tennyson can be seen walking past in the middle distance)

Hutchinson Tennyson? I was told he has been seen rambling around here – looking for some land to buy, to build a house.

Mrs Hutchinson Doesn't he look every bit the poet? Long hair, long cloak and black hat.

Hutchinson He is not coming this way, it seems.

Mrs Hutchinson But perhaps if he buys land here we may have him for a neighbour. How would that be?

Hutchinson We should not see much of him. I believe he seeks only solitude.

Mrs Hutchinson Whereas thy creed would bring every London waif and ragamuffin out here to populate the heaths and commons.

Hutchinson I feel it is every man's right, whatever his station in life, to enjoy God's healthy countryside as we do. Those that would keep it to themselves are being unconsciously selfish.

Mrs Hutchinson Thou art a devotee of Mr Tennyson's work, though – our family has heard thee declaim it to us often enough.

Hutchinson I have no quarrel with Mr Tennyson – it is the old established families who would rather see partridges here than children. They must learn that children are worth more than partridges.

Scene 4

Broomsquire, 1860s

(A Broomsquire and his wife appear in front of the walkers)

Broomsquire's Wife *(To the walkers)* Nice birch and heather besoms. New brooms to sweep your floors clean – only thruppence each.

Broomsquire Afternoon to ye, ladies and gentlemen. You've been lucky enough to meet up with Edward Moorey, broomsquire to the Royalty. I supply the Duchess of Kent – the old Queen Mother herself with besoms.

Broomsquire's Wife Takes them all the way up to Lunnun himself he does...

Broomsquire Wouldn't trust anyone else to do it, not I – not to supply Royalty.

Broomsquire's Wife Sometimes he sells the horse and cart when he gets there too, and has to walk back.

Broomsquire Worth it though Ann, worth the journey. 'By Appointment' I am – I has it written on me cart, I do.

Broomsquire's Wife So who'll buy a Royal broom? You won't get one this quality anywhere else. Quality fit for a queen it is. Cheap at twice the price.

(Business ensues with the walkers, who may indeed wish to buy the brooms)

Broomsquire's Wife Bless you sir, madam.

(The walkers then move on)

Hunter In my time, there were broomsquires' families living all around these parts. About all you could do with the land here, except graze animals. There were fewer trees around then, of course, because of all the animals grazing. Much more open, the view.

Scene 5

View from Gibbet Hill

(The walkers arrive at the viewpoint, looking north and east)

Hunter Looking from the highest point of Hindhead, to the north and round to the east, we can see... *(describe view)*

William Cobbett was less enthusiastic about it. In his *Rural Rides* he says: *(quote from Cobbett)*

In 1905, all of Hindhead Common and most of the land immediately below us towards

Witley was owned by the then lord of the manor, a man by the name of Whitaker Wright. Now Mr Wright, though born in the north of England, in Cheshire, had emigrated to America in 1866, made a fortune there, married, had two sons and become an American citizen. Then something went wrong with his companies there, and he came back to this country with his family in 1889 – no longer a millionaire, though still solvent.

Eight years later, in 1897, the *Financial Times* included him in a list of millionaires again, so he obviously hadn't lost his touch. It was about this time that he bought the Manor of Witley, and then, bit by bit, other land surrounding it, including Hindhead Common where we stand now.

In a local newspaper article of 1899, entitled "The Despoilation of Hindhead", he is accused of sending in gangs of men with an 'infernal machine' to cart away earth, a couple of tons at a time, and take it down to Witley Park where he was making improvements.

However two years later, in 1901, he was in more serious trouble – accused of fraud in his business dealings. He fled with his family, first to France, and then by boat to America, but was arrested on landing at New York. He managed to delay extradition for several months, but eventually was brought up for trial at the High Court in London in January 1904.

The verdict went against him and he was given a 7 year custodial sentence – but rather than face that, he secretly swallowed a cyanide capsule which he had hidden about his person, washed it down with a glass of whisky we're told, and died within 15 minutes. Very dramatic. He was also found to have a loaded Smith & Wesson revolver in his pocket, so he was obviously taking no chances!

However his estate now came up for auction, and a group of local men, myself included, decided to put in a bid for Hindhead Common to protect it from further vandalism. I'm glad to say we succeeded, just, and it was transferred to the safe keeping of the National Trust in January 1906.

(Hunter turns towards the open space behind them)

Now behind us, over here (*indicating the open summit area*) we have an area which has been used for many things ...

The tops of hills have been used from time immemorial for sending signals of various kinds. The earliest form would be by lighting a fire, but although this hill is so prominent, it seems that others like Blackdown were often used in preference, as they were in a better position to form a chain of signal stations.

In 1885, a new sort of signalling station was erected here. It was a heliograph, sending messages by the light of the sun. They were read 13 miles away on Hungry Hill near Ripley, or at least they should have been, but on the opening day smoke from heath fires prevented it. No sign of this construction exists now.

Then during your last war, the army set up an experimental radar station here, although for security reasons it was called an anti-aircraft battery. Engineers concreted the roads to bring equipment up here. Now all that has gone too.

Scene 6

Sir William Erle's Cross and the Sailor's Stone

(Hunter and the walkers move over to the Cross)

Hunter Over here you'll notice Sir William Erle's cross, erected in 1851, that's seven years after I was born, on the site of the old gallows.

He erected his Cross some 65 years later, after the gibbet had disappeared, to bring light and hope to a dark and gloomy place. The inscription in Latin reads: "After death,

safety; In death, peace; In life, hope; After the darkness, light.”

Up until 1826, when a new cutting was made further down the hill, the Portsmouth road ran right past by this spot – the track is still there – it was narrow, winding, and bordered by open land and with a steep drop into the Punchbowl on one side. Many a grim tale could be told of passages over Hind Head in those days.

The most famous of these concerns a sailor, we don’t know his name, who was walking along the road in September 1786. Sailors then often walked between London and Portsmouth, but this one fell in with three other men, having bought them drinks at the old Red Lion in Thursley...

(Hunter and the walkers move to the old Portsmouth road)

(The sailor and three men appear walking up the road)

Sailor So, Michael Casey, you claim to be one of my shipmates of old. I can’t say I remember you.

Casey *(Irish)* It was some time ago. I remember your face well, but not your name.

Sailor And your friends here, you’re all bound for Portsmouth?

Casey Aye, back to sign on again – but we’ve not been as careful with our money as you have. Ours is all spent.

Sailor Careful? Fortunate more like.

Casey You mean you came upon the money by chance?

Marshall Gambling, perhaps.

Lonigon Or maybe you stole it.

Sailor Ask no questions, I’ll tell you no lies. At least I’ve been generous enough to buy you drinks at the last two taverns.

Casey So you have.

Marshall You’ve enough there to buy us drinks at all the taverns from here to Portsmouth.

Lonigon And have sovereigns to spare.

Sailor Luck, my friends.

Casey Well, you won’t mind sharing your luck with your old shipmates, will you?

Sailor There’s only one of you reckons to be my old shipmate.

Casey But we’re all in this together *(significantly, to Marshall and Lonigon)* aren’t we my brave boys?

Marshall We’re with you Michael.

Lonigon Just say the word.

Sailor *(Uneasily)* We agreed to keep each other company on the road, did we not?

Casey So we did. But we’ll keep the company, and you can keep the road. *(He draws a knife, and the other two follow suite)*

Sailor Villains!

(They surround him)

Casey *(To the others)* Down the slope – we’ll do him there.

(The sailor is dragged off the road, yelling out – there they stab him repeatedly until he is still)

Casey *(Comes back to the road and looks around)* Right, bring his things and we’ll be off before someone comes. Is the body hidden Jimmy?

Marshall *(Appears carrying clothes)* Ted’s just doing that now.

(Lonigon appears also carrying some of the sailor’s belongings)

Casey Did you hide him well, Ted?

Lonigon I did that, Michael – he'll not be found quickly.

Casey Right, then let's make ourselves scarce.

(They walk quickly off down the road towards Portsmouth)

(As they go, two villagers appear out of hiding)

Villager 1 Mercy, did you see that!

Villager 2 Have they gone?

Villager 1 Aye, they've gone. Quick – over there and see what's happened.

(They go over to where the sailor has been left)

Villager 2 You keep guard – I'll go down. *(He disappears)*

Villager 1 See anything? *(Pause)* I say, see anything?

Villager 2 *(Calling back, urgently)* I'm coming back!

Villager 1 What's down there?

Villager 2 *(Arriving, looking sick)* His head – nearly hacked off – it's too horrible to describe!

Villager 1 He's dead then?

Villager 2 What are you, stupid or something?

Villager 1 *(Looking the way the murderers have gone)* Shouldn't we follow them?

Villager 2 What, and end up like that? No, I'm back off down to Thursley. Raise the alarm there. *(He sets off)*

Villager 1 Wait – I'll come with you!

(They both hurry off in the London direction)

Hunter Michael Casey (42), James Marshall (24) and Edward Lonigon (26) were pursued down the Portsmouth road by a group of men from Thursley, and arrested at *The Sun Inn* at Rake. They were tried at Kingston and sentenced to be hanged – here, at the scene of their crime. After they were dead, their bodies were tarred and hung up in chains on a thirty foot gibbet, as a warning to others.

(Hunter and the walkers move off along the old Portsmouth Road towards Hindhead)

The remains of the unknown sailor were buried in Thursley churchyard, and a memorial stone set up by the side of the old Portsmouth road – we shall pass it shortly on the right.

View from Sailor's Stone

Hunter *(Topics of conversation: New road cut in 1826 – arena of the punchbowl – view would have been more open – grazing)*

Scene 7

Meeting with Arthur Conan Doyle

Conan Doyle Sir Robert, how nice to meet you taking the air.

Hunter And you too, Mr Conan Doyle. Pardon, Sir Arthur now, is it not - congratulations on your knighthood.

Conan Doyle Thank you. The government seemed to approve of my comments on the Boer War.

Hunter May I introduce you to my party of friends - Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, celebrated resident of Hindhead.

Conan Doyle Delighted to meet you all. Truth to tell, the area seems to be sinking under the weight of celebrated residents.

Hunter Past and present. Artists, writers, scientists, politicians...

Conan Doyle I've heard it referred to both as 'Mindhead' and as the 'Lesser Parnassus'.

Hunter I believe you have just taken delivery of a new automobile, Sir Arthur.

Conan Doyle 'Taken delivery?' - no, my dear Sir Robert, I delivered it myself - drove my Wolseley all the way here from Birmingham.

Hunter Quite a journey.

Conan Doyle The automobile is coming of age. Such journeys no longer seem incredible. I can foresee a time when a man will think no more of owning an automobile than a horse and carriage. Driving to the other end of the country will seem normal.

Hunter I'm not so sure - can you see every coaching inn storing gasoline as well as hay? For that's what it would need, surely.

Conan Doyle For a man of your foresight, Sir Robert, I am surprised you cannot see what I can imagine - the turnpikes filled with horseless carriages.

Hunter I hope you will not feel me backward if I continue to use horsepower of the animal variety, Sir Arthur.

Conan Doyle With all the dangers that entails, remember - I seem to recall Lady Hunter was tipped from her dog cart a few months back, was she not?

Hunter True, and suffered quite serious injuries at the time, though she is fully recovered now I'm happy to say.

Conan Doyle I am very glad to hear it. But, I rest my case, sir. There are far more accidents caused by horses than by automobiles. The car is a safer form of transport.

Hunter I suspect that may be simply because there are fewer of them.

Conan Doyle Ah, I see Holmes would not get the better of your logical mind, Sir Robert. Well, if you do not mind, I shall continue now with my constitutional.

He starts to pass by

Hunter You won't forget the meeting next week, will you - about the Hindhead Common Fire Brigade?

Conan Doyle *(As he parts)* I shall not - I shall be there - until then... *(He lifts his hat and walks on)*

Hunter *(To the walkers)* When a man of Sir Arthur's vision predicts turnpikes filled with automobiles, you have to wonder if he might not be proved right!