

TRUE IRISH GHOST STORIES



St John D. Seymour, Harry L Neligan

True Irish Ghost Stories

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Contact: info@e-artnow.org

EAN: 4066338119728

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FOREWORD

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This book had its origin on this wise. In my *Irish Witchcraft and Demonology*, published in October 1913, I inserted a couple of famous 17th century ghost stories which described how lawsuits were set on foot at the instigation of most importunate spirits. It then occurred to me that as far as I knew there was no such thing in existence as a book of Irish ghost stories. Books on Irish fairy and folk-lore there were in abundance—some of which could easily be spared—but there was no book of ghosts. And so I determined to supply this sad omission.

In accordance with the immortal recipe for making hare-soup I had first to obtain my ghost stories. Where was I to get them from? For myself I knew none worth publishing, nor had I ever had any strange experiences, while I feared that my friends and acquaintances were in much the same predicament. Suddenly a brilliant thought struck me. I wrote out a letter, stating exactly what I wanted, and what I did *not* want, and requesting the readers of it either to forward me ghost stories, or else to put me in the way of getting them: this letter was sent to the principal Irish newspapers on October 27, and published on October 29, and following days.

I confess I was a little doubtful as to the result of my experiment, and wondered what response the people of Ireland would make to a letter which might place a considerable amount of trouble on their shoulders. My mind was speedily set at rest. On October 30, the first answers reached me. Within a fortnight I had sufficient material to

make a book; within a month I had so much material that I could pick and choose—and more was promised. Further on in this preface I give a list of those persons whose contributions I have made use of, but here I should like to take the opportunity of thanking all those ladies and gentlemen throughout the length and breadth of Ireland, the majority of whom were utter strangers to me, who went to the trouble of sitting down and writing out page after page of stories. I cannot forget their kindness, and I am only sorry that I could not make use of more of the matter that was sent to me. As one would expect, this material varied in value and extent. Some persons contributed incidents, of little use by themselves, but which worked in as helpful illustrations, while others forwarded budgets of stories, long and short. To sift the mass of matter, and bring the various portions of it into proper sequence, would have been a lengthy and difficult piece of work had I not been ably assisted by Mr. Harry L. Neligan, D.I.; but I leave it as a pleasant task to the Higher Critic to discover what portions of the book were done by him, and what should be attributed to me.

Some of the replies that reached me were sufficiently amusing. One gentleman, who carefully signed himself “Esquire,” informed me that he was “after” reading a great book of ghost stories, but several letters of mine failed to elicit any subsequent information. Another person offered to *sell* me ghost stories, while several proffered tales that had been worked up comically. One lady addressed a card to me as follows:

“THE REVD. ——

(Name and address lost of the clergyman whose letter appeared lately in *Irish Times*, re “apparitions”)

CAPPAWHITE.”

As the number of clergy in the above village who deal in ghost stories is strictly limited, the Post Office succeeded in delivering it safely. I wrote at once in reply, and got a story. In a letter bearing the Dublin postmark a correspondent, veiled in anonymity, sent me a religious tract with the curt note, “*Re* ghost stories, will you please read this.” I did so, but still fail to see the sender’s point of view. Another person in a neighbouring parish declared that if I were their rector they would forthwith leave my church, and attend service elsewhere. There are many, I fear, who adopt this attitude; but it will soon become out of date.

Some of my readers may cavil at the expression, “*True Ghost Stories.*” For myself I cannot guarantee the genuineness of a single incident in this book—how could I, as none of them are my own personal experience? This at least I *can* vouch for, that the majority of the stories were sent to me as first or second-hand experiences by ladies and gentlemen whose statement on an ordinary matter of fact would be accepted without question. And further, in order to prove the *bona fides* of this book, I make the following offer. The original letters and documents are in my custody at Donohil Rectory, and I am perfectly willing to allow any responsible person to examine them, subject to certain restrictions, these latter obviously being that names of people and places must not be divulged, for I regret to say that in very many instances my correspondents have laid this burden upon me. This is to be the more regretted, because the use of blanks, or fictitious initials, makes a

story appear much less convincing than if real names had been employed.

Just one word. I can imagine some of my readers (to be numbered by the thousand, I hope) saying to themselves: "Oh! Mr. Seymour has left out some of the best stories. Did he never hear of such-and-such a haunted house, or place?" Or, "I could relate an experience better than anything he has got." If such there be, may I beg of them to send me on their stories with all imagined speed, as they may be turned to account at some future date.

I beg to return thanks to the following for permission to make use of matter in their publications: Messrs. Sealy, Bryers, and Walker, proprietors of the *New Ireland Review*; the editor of the *Review of Reviews*; the editor of the *Proceedings* of the Society for Psychical Research; the editor of the *Journal* of the American S.P.R.; the editor of the *Occult Review*, and Mr. Elliott O'Donnell; Messrs. Longmans, Green and Co., and Mrs. Andrew Lang; the editor of the *Wide World Magazine*; the representatives of the late Rev. Dr. Craig.

In accordance with the promise made in my letter, I have now much pleasure in giving the names of the ladies and gentlemen who have contributed to, or assisted in, the compilation of this book, and as well to assure them that Mr. Neligan and I are deeply grateful to them for their kindness.

Mrs. S. Acheson, Drumsna, Co. Roscommon; Mrs. M. Archibald, Cliftonville Road, Belfast; J.J. Burke, Esq., U.D.C., Ragoon, Galway; Capt. R. Beamish, Passage West, Co. Cork; Mrs. A. Bayly, Woodenbridge, Co. Wicklow; R. Blair, Esq., South Shields; Jas. Byrne, Esq., Castletownroche, Co. Cork; Mrs. Kearney Brooks, Killarney; H. Buchanan, Esq., Inishannon, Co. Cork; J.A. Barlow, Esq., Bray, Co. Wicklow; J. Carton, Esq., King's Inns Library, Dublin; Miss A. Cooke, Cappagh House, Co. Limerick; J.P.V. Campbell, Esq. *Solicitor*,

Dublin; Rev. E.G.S. Crosthwait, M.A., Littleton, Thurles; J. Crowley, Esq., Munster and Leinster Bank, Cashel; Miss C.M. Doyle, Ashfield Road, Dublin; J. Ralph Dagg, Esq., Baltinglass; Gerald A. Dillon, Esq., Wicklow; Matthias and Miss Nan Fitzgerald, Cappagh House, Co. Limerick; Lord Walter Fitzgerald, Kilkea Castle; Miss Finch, Rushbrook, Co. Cork; Rev. H.R.B. Gillespie, M.A., Aghacon Rectory, Roscrea; Miss Grene, Grene Park, Co. Tipperary; L.H. Grubb, Esq. J.P., D.L., Ardmayle, Co. Tipperary; H. Keble Gelston, Esq., Letterkenny; Ven. J.A. Haydn, LL.D., Archdeacon of Limerick; Miss Dorothy Hamilton, Portarlinton; Richard Hogan, Esq., Bowman St., Limerick; Mrs. G. Kelly, Rathgar, Dublin; Miss Keefe, Carnahallia, Doon; Rev. D.B. Knox, Whitehead, Belfast; Rev. J.D. Kidd, M.A., Castlewellan; E.B. de Lacy, Esq., Marlboro' Road, Dublin; Miss K. Lloyd, Shinrone, King's Co.; Canon Lett, M.A., Aghaderg Rectory; T. MacFadden, Esq., Carrigart, Co. Donegal; Wm. Mackey, Esq., Strabane; Canon Courtenay Moore, M.A., Mitchelstown, Co. Cork; J. McCrossan, Esq., *Journalist*, Strabane; G.H. Miller, Esq., J.P., Edgeworthstown; Mrs. P.C.F. Magee, Dublin; Rev. R.D. Paterson, B.A., Ardmore Rectory; E.A. Phelps, Esq., Trinity College Library; Mrs. Pratt, Munster and Leinster Bank, Rathkeale; Miss Pim, Monkstown, Co. Dublin; Miss B. Parker, Passage West, Co. Cork; Henry Reay, Esq., Harold's Cross, Dublin; M.J. Ryan, Esq., Taghmon, Co. Wexford; P. Ryan, Esq., Nicker, Pallasgrean; Canon Ross-Lewin, Kilmurry, Limerick; Miss A. Russell, Elgin Road, Dublin; Lt.-Col. the Hon. F. Shore, Thomastown, Co. Kilkenny; Mrs. Seymour, Donohil Rectory; Mrs. E.L. Stritch, North Great Georges St., Dublin; M.C.R. Stritch, Esq., Belturbet; Very Rev. the Dean of St. Patrick's. D.D.; Mrs. Spratt, Thurles; W.S. Thompson, Esq., Inishannon, Co. Cork; Mrs. Thomas, Sandycove, Dublin; Mrs. Walker, Glenbeigh, Co. Kerry; Miss Wolfe, Skibbereen, Co. Cork; Mrs.

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ST. JOHN D. SEYMOUR.

DONOHIL RECTORY,
CAPPAWHITE, TIPPERARY,
February 2, 1914.

CHAPTER I

HAUNTED HOUSES IN OR NEAR DUBLIN

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Of all species of ghostly phenomena, that commonly known as “haunted houses” appeals most to the ordinary person. There is something very eerie in being shut up within the four walls of a house with a ghost. The poor human being is placed at such a disadvantage. If we know that a gateway, or road, or field has the reputation of being haunted, we can in nearly every case make a detour, and so avoid the unpleasant locality. But the presence of a ghost in a house creates a very different state of affairs. It appears and disappears at its own sweet will, with a total disregard for our feelings: it seems to be as much part and parcel of the domicile as the staircase or the hall door, and, consequently, nothing short of leaving the house or of pulling it down (both of these solutions are not always practicable) will free us absolutely from the unwelcome presence.

There is also something so natural, and at the same time so unnatural, in seeing a door open when we know that no human hand rests on the knob, or in hearing the sound of footsteps, light or heavy, and feeling that it cannot be attributed to the feet of mortal man or woman. Or perhaps a form appears in a room, standing, sitting, or walking—in fact, situated in its three dimensions apparently as an ordinary being of flesh and blood, until it proves its unearthly nature by vanishing before our astonished eyes.

Or perhaps we are asleep in bed. The room is shrouded in darkness, and our recumbent attitude, together with the weight of bed-clothes, hampers our movements and probably makes us more cowardly. A man will meet pain or danger boldly if he be standing upright—occupying that erect position which is his as Lord of Creation; but his courage does not well so high if he be supine. We are awakened suddenly by the feel that some superhuman Presence is in the room. We are transfixed with terror, we cannot find either the bell-rope or the matches, while we *dare* not leap out of bed and make a rush for the door lest we should encounter we know not what. In an agony of fear, we feel it moving towards us; it approaches closer, and yet closer, to the bed, and—for what may or may not then happen we must refer our readers to the pages of this book.

But the sceptical reader will say: “This is all very well, but—there are *no* haunted houses. All these alleged strange happenings are due to a vivid imagination, or else to rats and mice.” (The question of deliberate and conscious fraud may be rejected in almost every instance.) This simple solution has been put forward so often that it should infallibly have solved the problem long ago. But will such a reader explain how it is that the noise made by rats and mice can resemble slow, heavy footsteps, or else take the form of a human being seen by several persons; or how our imagination can cause doors to open and shut, or else create a conglomeration of noises which, physically, would be beyond the power of ordinary individuals to reproduce? Whatever may be the ultimate explanation, we feel that there is a great deal in the words quoted by Professor Barrett: “In spite of all reasonable scepticism, it is difficult to avoid accepting, at least provisionally, the conclusion that there are, in a certain sense, haunted houses, *i.e.* that there

are houses in which similar quasi-human apparitions have occurred at different times to different inhabitants, under circumstances which exclude the hypothesis of suggestion or expectation.”

We must now turn to the subject of this chapter. Mrs. G. Kelly, a lady well known in musical circles in Dublin, sends as her own personal experience the following tale of a most quiet haunting, in which the spectral charwoman (!) does not seem to have entirely laid aside all her mundane habits.

“My first encounter with a ghost occurred about twenty years ago. On that occasion I was standing in the kitchen of my house in — Square, when a woman, whom I was afterwards to see many times, walked down the stairs into the room. Having heard the footsteps outside, I was not in the least perturbed, but turned to look who it was, and found myself looking at a tall, stout, elderly woman, wearing a bonnet and old-fashioned mantle. She had grey hair, and a benign and amiable expression. We stood gazing at each other while one could count twenty. At first I was not at all frightened, but gradually as I stood looking at her an uncomfortable feeling, increasing to terror, came over me. This caused me to retreat farther and farther back, until I had my back against the wall, and then the apparition slowly faded.

“This feeling of terror, due perhaps to the unexpectedness of her appearance, always overcame me on the subsequent occasions on which I saw her. These occasions numbered twelve or fifteen, and I have seen her in every room in the house, and at every hour of the day, during a period of about ten years. The last time she appeared was ten years ago. My husband and I had just returned from a concert at which he had been singing, and we sat for some time over supper, talking about the events

of the evening. When at last I rose to leave the room, and opened the dining-room door, I found my old lady standing on the mat outside with her head bent towards the door in the attitude of listening. I called out loudly, and my husband rushed to my side. That was the last time I have seen her.”

“One peculiarity of this spectral visitant was a strong objection to disorder or untidyness of any kind, or even to an alteration in the general routine of the house. For instance, she showed her disapproval of any stranger coming to sleep by turning the chairs face downwards on the floor in the room they were to occupy. I well remember one of our guests, having gone to his room one evening for something he had forgotten, remarking on coming downstairs again, ‘Well, you people have an extraordinary manner of arranging your furniture! I have nearly broken my bones over one of the bedroom chairs which was turned down on the floor.’ As my husband and I had restored that chair twice already to its proper position during the day, we were not much surprised at his remarks, although we did not enlighten him. The whole family have been disturbed by a peculiar knocking which occurred in various rooms in the house, frequently on the door or wall, but sometimes on the furniture, quite close to where we had been sitting. This was evidently loud enough to be heard in the next house, for our next-door neighbour once asked my husband why he selected such curious hours for hanging his pictures. Another strange and fairly frequent occurrence was the following. I had got a set of skunk furs which I fancied had an unpleasant odour, as this fur sometimes has; and at night I used to take it from my wardrobe and lay it on a chair in the drawing-room, which was next my bedroom. The first time that I did this, on going to the drawing-room I found, to my surprise, my muff in one corner and my stole

in another. Not for a moment suspecting a supernatural agent, I asked my servant about it, and she assured me that she had not been in the room that morning. Whereupon I determined to test the matter, which I did by putting in the furs late at night, and taking care that I was the first to enter the room in the morning. I invariably found that they had been disturbed.”

The following strange and pathetic incident occurred in a well-known Square in the north side of the city. In or about a hundred years ago a young officer was ordered to Dublin, and took a house there for himself and his family. He sent on his wife and two children, intending to join them in the course of a few days. When the latter and the nurse arrived, they found only the old charwoman in the house, and she left shortly after their arrival. Finding that something was needed, the nurse went out to purchase it. On her return she asked the mother were the children all right, as she had seen two ghostly forms flit past her on the door-step! The mother answered that she believed they were, but on going up to the nursery they found both the children with their throats cut. The murderer was never brought to justice, and no motive was ever discovered for the crime. The unfortunate mother went mad, and it is said that an eerie feeling still clings to the house, while two little heads are sometimes seen at the window of the room where the deed was committed.

A most weird experience fell to the lot of Major Macgregor, and was contributed by him to *Real Ghost Stories*, the celebrated Christmas number of the *Review of Reviews*. He says: “In the end of 1871 I went over to Ireland to visit a relative living in a Square in the north side of Dublin. In January 1872 the husband of my relative fell ill. I sat up with him for several nights, and at last, as he seemed

better, I went to bed, and directed the footman to call me if anything went wrong. I soon fell asleep, but some time after was awakened by a push on the left shoulder. I started up, and said, 'Is there anything wrong?' I got no answer, but immediately received another push. I got annoyed, and said 'Can you not speak, man! and tell me if there is anything wrong.' Still no answer, and I had a feeling I was going to get another push when I suddenly turned round and caught a human hand, warm, plump, and soft. I said, 'Who are you?' but I got no answer. I then tried to pull the person towards me, but could not do so. I then said, 'I *will* know who you are!' and having the hand tight in my right hand, with my left I felt the wrist and arm, enclosed, as it seemed to me, in a tight-fitting sleeve of some winter material with a linen cuff, but when I got to the elbow all trace of an arm ceased. I was so astounded that I let the hand go, and just then the clock struck two. Including the mistress of the house, there were five females in the establishment, and I can assert that the hand belonged to none of them. When I reported the adventure, the servants exclaimed, 'Oh, it must have been the master's old Aunt Betty, who lived for many years in the upper part of that house, and had died over fifty years before at a great age.' I afterwards heard that the room in which I felt the hand had been considered haunted, and very curious noises and peculiar incidents occurred, such as the bed-clothes torn off, &c. One lady got a slap in the face from some invisible hand, and when she lit her candle she saw as if something opaque fell or jumped off the bed. A general officer, a brother of the lady, slept there two nights, but preferred going to a hotel to remaining the third night. He never would say what he heard or saw, but always said the room was uncanny. I slept for months in the room afterwards, and was never in the least disturbed."

A truly terrifying sight was witnessed by a clergyman in a school-house a good many years ago. This cleric was curate of a Dublin parish, but resided with his parents some distance out of town in the direction of Malahide. It not infrequently happened that he had to hold meetings in the evenings, and on such occasions, as his home was so far away, and as the modern convenience of tramcars was not then known, he used to sleep in the schoolroom, a large bare room, where the meetings were held. He had made a sleeping-apartment for himself by placing a pole across one end of the room, on which he had rigged up two curtains which, when drawn together, met in the middle. One night he had been holding some meeting, and when everybody had left he locked up the empty schoolhouse, and went to bed. It was a bright moonlight night, and every object could be seen perfectly clearly. Scarcely had he got into bed when he became conscious of some invisible presence. Then he saw the curtains agitated at one end, as if hands were grasping them on the outside. In an agony of terror he watched these hands groping along outside the curtains till they reached the middle. The curtains were then drawn a little apart, and a Face peered in—an awful, evil Face, with an expression of wickedness and hate upon it which no words could describe. It looked at him for a few moments, then drew back again, and the curtains closed. The clergyman had sufficient courage left to leap out of bed and make a thorough examination of the room, but, as he expected, he found no one. He dressed himself as quickly as possible, walked home, and never again slept a night in that schoolroom.

The following tale, sent by Mr. E. B. de Lacy, contains a most extraordinary and unsatisfactory element of mystery. He says: "When I was a boy I lived in the suburbs, and used

to come in every morning to school in the city. My way lay through a certain street in which stood a very dismal semi-detached house, which, I might say, was closed up regularly about every six months. I would see new tenants coming into it, and then in a few months it would be 'To let' again. This went on for eight or nine years, and I often wondered what was the reason. On inquiring one day from a friend, I was told that it had the reputation of being haunted.

"A few years later I entered business in a certain office, and one day it fell to my lot to have to call on the lady who at that particular period was the tenant of the haunted house. When we had transacted our business she informed me that she was about to leave. Knowing the reputation of the house, and being desirous of investigating a ghost-story, I asked her if she would give me the history of the house as far as she knew it, which she very kindly did as follows:

"About forty years ago the house was left by will to a gentleman named ——. He lived in it for a short time, when he suddenly went mad, and had to be put in an asylum. Upon this his agents let the house to a lady. Apparently nothing unusual happened for some time, but a few months later, as she went down one morning to a room behind the kitchen, she found the cook hanging by a rope attached to a hook in the ceiling. After the inquest the lady gave up the house.

"It was then closed up for some time, but was again advertised 'To let,' and a caretaker, a woman, was put into it. One night about one o'clock, a constable going his rounds heard some one calling for help from the house, and found the caretaker on the sill of one of the windows holding on as best she could. He told her to go in and open the hall door and let him in, but she refused to enter the room again. He