

Ghost of the House of Magic



My name is **Simon Drake**. In the cold winter of 1995 I started refurbishment work on a huge neglected, derelict and damp Public House in the Borough of Southwark in London. Parts of the building hail back to the late 1700s and it was first licensed in about 1860. By the time I got my hands on it, it was a veritable shit hole, a dump with huge potential. But it was cold, very cold.

Eight Polish builders worked ten hour days for five dusty months until the huge old house was ready to be decorated. To make the most of remaining limited resources after such a long program of work, I found some a small team of decorators who would come in on budget and brought the three down from Newcastle. The decorators didn't want to pay for bed and breakfast accommodation so slept in a small room upstairs in sleeping bags with a bar heater. The building had been derelict for seven years and was totally secure although somewhat unsightly; all windows being boarded up with thick shuttering ply as well as the doors. The one door that opened to the street was padlocked shut with a heavy chain. The security was to thwart squatters returning, as over the years a horde of them including somewhat interestingly 'Withnail and I' actor Paul McGann, had taken up residence in the old place.

After a two nights the decorators complained to me about disturbing noises in the night. They described running and stamping noises and I was amazed as these three macho, burly decorators seemed genuinely frightened. That night they slept, at their own expense in a cheap local hotel which sapped a quarter of their pay. They didn't care, nothing would have made them stay in the house again after dark. Although their intention was to get the job done as fast as possible after that night they wouldn't work at all after nightfall. These chaps are still alive and I am happy for anyone to contact them to verify this.

About three weeks later, after I had moved in, I also heard the awful running. It was as if a petulant child with lead boots was running around directly below, continually for about two minutes. Two minutes is a long time when you are white with fear. There was nothing at all subtle about the sound. I sat there trembling with my heart punching until it stopped. Shortly after my then girlfriend refused to ever stay the night here again after she said she had claimed to have seen ghosts in the middle of the night. Frankly I thought she was making up some excuse or had just simply lost it. Sadly the relationship didn't last, perhaps I should have taken her more seriously but maybe subconsciously I didn't want to believe I was lumbered with a home tainted with the supernatural.

Then other odd things started to happen. The installation of a winch to power a small lift proved to have on going, totally unexplainable electrical problems. Ian King, the highly qualified engineer who had installed it had made several visits and was at a loss as to the cause. Not knowing how to resolve it I phoned around any friends who I thought may have an idea and eventually David Charkam an actor friend, came up with something that seemed dubious at first but I had run out of options so I listened.

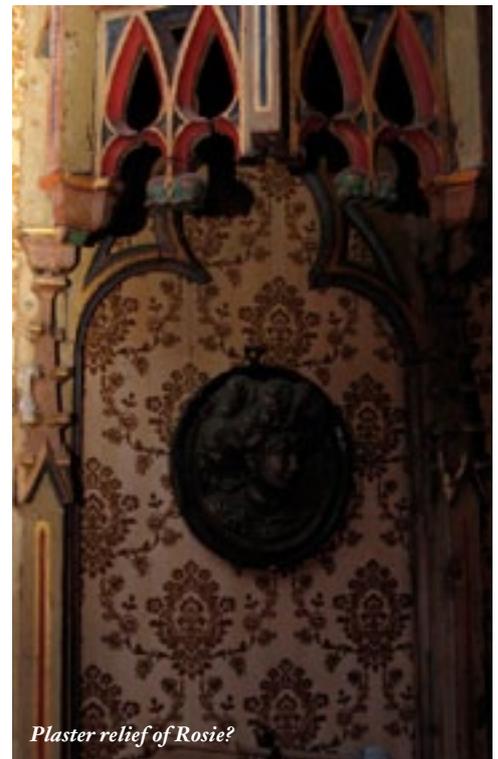
David suggested contacting healer and Feng Shui expert, Gay Annand as she had experience in matters relating to many areas including strange things happening in houses. An appointment was made and Miss Annand arrived on a big, heavy, old fashioned bicycle from her home in Pimlico. A willowy short woman with a kind smile and a manner to make anyone feel perfectly at ease. I escorted her through the garden and into the Red Room as our bar area is called. She asked me for the architect plans and Miss Annand and I sat downstairs on two chairs behind the low, central bar. She swung a small pendulum over the plans and quickly detected a line of some kind of energy going across the site. She deduced it was a deep underground stream flowing diagonally across the building. On examining the upstairs area Miss Annand found out the stream was directly below the electronic control box of the winch and suggested moving the box about eighteen inches to the left. The following week I omitted to tell Ian, the down-to-earth engineering expert the reasons for moving it, thinking Ian possibly would not have moved it had he known the reason why, the engineer being a man of science and likely the type that dismissed Feng Shui as new fangled, alternative, poppycock. He moved the control box with that gentle English reserve of not wanting to pry as to why.

It's baffling, although most fortunate, as I use the lift to make my entrance in the main show, that after all this time, some 18 years later not even once has the fuse blown. It did so many times before Miss Annand came to visit. Also, quite out of the blue, Miss Annand asked me, "You know you have ghosts, don't you". I admitted he had heard a few reports, but didn't believe in such things. My experience of nearly 40 years in the entertainment industry made me skeptical. I have met many obvious charlatans, and not a few deluded individuals. Still, I agreed to allow her to try to contact the ghost mostly to humor the kind Miss Annand and through the time-consuming process of dowsing with a pendulum, she discovered that there was the ghost of a patron of the pub and we spent a further 2 hours slowly interpreting the movements of the pendulum as the entity spelled out her messages. The first being the ghost's name, Rosie.

The spirit suggested "looking in the old soil", an expression that I couldn't see the meaning for some weeks afterward. I asked whether Rosie was responsible for the running and stamping noises that had been heard. It transpired this was not her, but another, more malevolent entity that had taken up residence in the cold, damp building during its years of dereliction.



Items from "Looking in the old soil"



Plaster relief of Rosie?

Rosie however explained she was indeed responsible for chasing the negative spirit away. Miss Annand explained various measures to keep the malevolent spirit away and what to do to ensure that it wouldn't return. This involved placement of small crystals in the centre of all the windows on the ground floor and keeping a small light on at all times downstairs. She also advised placing a large lump of quartz at the base of the foundations of the RSJ that supported the lift to keep the winch stable. Most of the ghost seemed to relay her delight at the colour I had brought back to the building after its darkness for so long.

I kept thinking about the expression, "looking in the old soil". It wasn't until a long time later a search in the detritus of Victorian in-fill, which sits on soil of Roman origin in a sealed off part of my cellar, that I unearthed a dusty, antique plaster



The 'Ghost Walk'

relief of a woman in Victorian garb, suspected to be likeness of Rosie, the house's benign ghost. Miss Annand had also established that Rosie had become very popular for playing delightful tunes on a piano which once sat in the old tavern.

The session continued and I asked if I would be able to see with Rosie and was told that I was probably not sensitive enough to see paranormal "echoes" in my waking state, but she would make herself known to me in other ways and that I would indeed see her soon enough. Miss Annand explained that sensitivity to ethereal 'echoes' is strongest in animals, the young and women, particularly pubescent girls. The majority of possessions, experiencers of poltergeists being teenage girls.

I asked Miss Annand to ask Rosie if she wanted help in being 'moved on' from being a spirit in the house, immediately a chill wind blew through the room and Miss Annand whispered, "Oh dear she didn't like that, let's take it as a 'no' shall we". I asked her to ask Rosie if she found it offensive that I had themed the old cellar as a spooky attraction, like a piss-take of the then very naff London Dungeon. Miss Annand interpreted that Rosie didn't mind at all and that she loved the colour and enchanting atmosphere that I had brought back into the house and was very happy it had been restored to even beyond its previous glamour from the mid 1800's.

The 'Ghost Walk' runs diagonally thru the arch approaching us and out thru the door to the garden then she walks back again some minutes later. Miss Annand explained how the spirit enters and how she walks across the room and that she becomes very small while in the Red Room due to the fact that the floor had been raised by ten inches since. Also that Rosie generally tends to materialize on weekend evenings.

A few nights later I was sleeping in bed and dreamt I was walking through the venue way back in Victorian times. I walked down a corridor which is now demolished and stood in the doorway of the snooker room (a meter in from the arch on the pic above) The room was dimly lit, it was dusk. After a while I heard gentle, soft piano music being played. As my eyes adjusted to the light I could make out a shadowy figure hunched over the far end of an elaborate upright piano with brass candle holders.

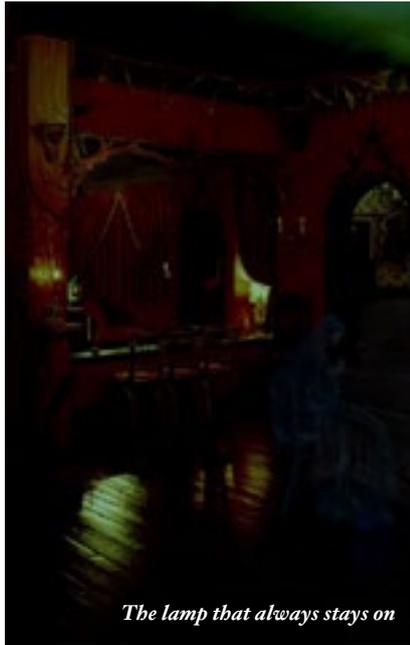
This piano was with it's back to a wall (now demolished but visual proof exists it was once there) to the right of double French windows (now demolished) that led directly to the garden.



Rosie's Piano



The Ghost Door



The lamp that always stays on

I had not be aware of this old rooms design at all previously to this dream, in fact these days there is a single door to more modern public conveniences in that exact spot. The figure turned to look at me as the music became louder. I saw an elderly woman in Victorian garb looking straight at me with a warm smile and knew for certain it was Rosie. It was just a very brief meeting as I awoke with my heart racing and covered in perspiration. I sat up in bed panting and was terrified to clearly hear that the same piano music was continuing in my waking state! I got up and rushed down the corridor to the thick door which separates the upstairs flat from the much older downstairs level. For two decades now, this door has been called the 'Ghost Door' due it being about 2 inches thick, very solid and efficient in sound proofing.

As I opened the door the music became audibly louder but as I descended the stairs it faded away and all I could hear was an echo of it. As I got to the old snooker room, now the bar area there was nothing at all to be seen. I went back to bed.

The following day and old lady who had lived all her life next door, 87 year old Elsie, was passing the building with her vicious Scottish terrier and I asked her if there was ever a piano in the building. Elsie told me she remembered her dad playing 'cock-a-ninny tunes' on this old upright piano occasionally when she was very young but that was before the snooker room was opened up into a larger area and the public toilets added. "It's all changed now son," Elsie said. She was a cranky old thing at the best of times and continued, "It's all foreigners and Lady Di now. Bleeding waste of space the lot 'o them." As Suzy-q, her spiteful midget dog pulled on her lead, old Elsie hobbled off in her dressing gown and slippers down the street. Elsie was South London to her very bones. There was always a feeling of 'No one gets in and no one leaves'. From a few meters away she turned back and said to me, "Oi you know that place is haunted doncha boy?" "Yeah so I gathered Elsie," I replied, "You told me already when I moved in." Elsie repeated herself a lot.

I got a ladder and placed it by the pond in the garden and stretched up and peered carefully over the public toilets and to my amazement could clearly see a wide semi circle of vertical bricks shaped like a lintel which would have certainly been over double doors at one time, thus proving the existence of the French windows from my dream.

Mostly over the years, when we don't have a hundred or so guests at our shows, it's been quiet and calm living above the venue. It's a lovely place to live but the ghost of Rosie is still heard walking about in the mansion from time to time. Only recently my totally skeptical 'Sauf London' maintenance assistant nicknamed 'Uncle Jobby' (don't ask) and I both heard what sounded exactly like a woman's footsteps directly above our heads when working in the cellar, it was totally impossible for anyone else to have been in the building at that time. Ask him, he is the big lad who resembles a bouncer who stands to the left of the bar a lot.

These days I do sometimes feel that something, maybe even Rosie is protecting the building from something dark and yes it's true, sometimes after locking up as I walk up the big flight of stairs; I rush just a little with a slight chill wind from downstairs following me. I may not believe in ghosts but I don't in actuality think I am ready to face one head on. Are you?

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UPDATE: Yesterday on 25th March 2013 the Cuming Museum was burned down in a huge fire. Many artifacts from the history of this building and the local area were totally destroyed. Last night Abby, my wife saw a woman in black carrying a basket with her hair in a Victorian style, standing by her bed in the dead of night. Abby is not prone to lies or flights of fancy. I believe Rosie appeared before her on the same day the museum burned down. The question is why...

