

THE PHANTOM COACH

Saturday 24th, December 1977.

The clock on the Council House had just struck 4 o'clock in the afternoon, and as I looked out of our office window in Chapel Bar I could see that a flurry of snow was beginning to fall. Down in the Old Market Square I could see people scurrying around doing their last minute shopping, and young children watching the animated Christmas display in the windows of Griffin and Spalding on Long Row. This never ceases to fascinate the children every year, as it did me as a youngster, and from the Old Market Square the sound of carols drifted up from the Salvation Army Band.

My friend Gareth Rees and I had known each other for years, and had been conducting paranormal investigations for about ten years. In most cases we could put things down to natural causes, but some cases proved to be the exception. Tonight we are going to investigate a tragic death and a phantom coach. We had heard this story many times over the years, and had recently read the testimonies from two reliable witnesses, a police officer and a clergyman. The story goes that a young coachman named Silas Barrett who was in the service of Lady Margaret had taken the coach used for everyday use down to a blacksmiths on the Fosse Road to have a suspension-spring repaired, and had called in to see Polly Green a serving wench in the Angel Tavern in the town of Leicester, unfortunately he had completely forgotten that he had to get back to get the second coach with the family crest on it prepared and harnessed to take Lady Margaret to the Midnight Mass. He quickly took his leave of Polly, and in all haste drove the coach up the road through Groby to the stables. When he swung the coach into the drive it caught a pillar, and he was thrown off, and the terrified horses careered on to the stables. The body of Silas Barrett was found the next morning, he had died of a broken neck. It is since this time that the apparition has been seen, but the observant had noticed that for some reason it only appears when Christmas eve falls on a saturday.

We had made arrangements to stay in a pub called the Stamford Arms in Groby, about four miles from Leicester, and a mile from the site of our investigation. Having gathered meters, recording equipment, cameras and note-books together, and securely locked everywhere up, we got into Gareth's BMW, and headed up

Derby Road to join the M1 for the short run to Groby and the Stamford Arms. It was getting dark as we left the M1 to drive down the A50 to Groby, and I got a glimpse of the old stables. What a marvellous sight they must have been in the days when the magnificent coat-of-arms were above the stable arch, and the clock was on the dome.

On arriving at the Stamford Arms we were given two modestly furnished single rooms, and we checked in as commercial travellers working for the Shell Oil Company, because this saved a lot of curiosity about what we did, and we were quietly left to go about our business without jokers and pranksters getting in the way. The pub didn't open until 6 o'clock, so we had time to unpack our equipment, and make our plans. We intended to walk the mile or so up Bradgate Hill to avoid any attention to ourselves, as we knew that it was private property. I had been struggling with a cold for a few days so I told Gareth that I would get a couple of hours rest before we went at 10pm, and that I would see him in the bar later, before we set off.

I awoke with a start. It was pitch black, and as I lay there gathering my thoughts I could hear the sound of Johnny Mathis, 'When a Child is Born' coming from the bar below. I put the light on, and sat up in bed. It was then that I noticed the piece of paper on the bedside table. It was a note from Gareth it read: "You looked worn out mate, I've gone up to the stables by myself, don't worry, I'll see you later... Gareth." I hurriedly got dressed, and putting my camera and tape recorder into my pocket, I slipped down the back stairs and out by the car park. Although it was very slippery underfoot I made my way up Markfield Road by the church where I saw by the clock that it was 10.15pm. Pulling my collar up closer I put my head down and headed onwards up Bradgate Hill. By now it had started to snow again, and the stables seemed miles away, and to make matters worse my torch had packed- up. At last I reached the drive to the stables, and looking across the fields I could see the outline of the stables in the moonlight, and as I got nearer I could make out the remains of the marble coat-of-arms above the archway and the clock-housing above it. As I approached the archway I called out Gareth's name several times, but I could hear no response. The last thing that I remember was tripping over something in the blackness of the archway and falling.

As I slowly regained consciousness I was aware of voices all around me, and I heard someone say "Good! I think that he's back with us... you had a bad fall,

and you have a nasty head wound!" When I opened my eyes the brightness was too much, and I quickly had to close them again, I asked "Where's my mate, Gareth?" I was told that I was in Leicester Royal Infirmary, and that a doctor would be along to talk with me later. When I could finally look at my surroundings I found that I was in a single room. It was about an hour later that a nurse came in and gave me some foul-tasting tablets. She told me that I had been there for two days, but she couldn't tell me anything about Gareth, but that a porter had put my camera, tape recorder and torch that he had been given by the ambulance attendant in my bedside locker.

At about 4 o'clock there was a knock on the door, and a doctor came in accompanied by a police officer. The officer nodded towards me, glanced at the doctor and back at me. "I'm very sorry sir, but I'm afraid that I have some very bad news for you with regards to your friend and colleague Gareth Rees... I am very sorry to have to tell you that he is dead. We believe that he climbed up the clock - housing above the stables, and fell through the rotten flooring on to the cobbles below... he died of multiple fractures and exposure. You were very lucky to survive yourself, if the landlord of the Stamford Arms had not come up to your room to see if you wanted a drink, he would not have found the note that Mr Rees left you, and he was able to alert the emergency services". Forensics have examined the camera and tape recorder that he had with him, but they don't give us any clues. The doctor said that he would see me on his rounds, and they then left me to my thoughts. I found it hard to believe that he would be so daft, as to do such a thing, but then again, we all do daft things at times!!.

A week later I was told that I could go home the following day, so I went to empty my bedside locker, and as I lifted the tape recorder out, I turned it over and on the back I saw a little Welsh Dragon emblem. I knew that this was Gareth's tape recorder, and not mine. I looked at it, and realised that the tape had played out and switched itself off.

I re-wound it and pressed 'play'. At first I heard nothing at all, and then I heard the sound of terrified horses as they thundered closer, and the clatter of steel on cobbles, finally a long drawn out scream, and then an eerie silence.

We will let the findings remain as they are... but we know the truth, don't we?. Six months after this terrible tragedy an exorcism was organised, and to this day the phantom coach has never been seen again, and we can be sure that peace has been brought to this place once more.

Ernie Twells....Copyright 2/11/20.