

Ghosts of London

Are there such things as ghosts? Some people say no way, others say definitely. No one can really say for sure that ghosts exist, but several places around London claim to be haunted, places such as Eldon House and the Grand Theatre. Let's examine the evidence and you decide for yourself if ghosts truly live in these places.

Eldon House

Eldon House, built by John Harris, is located on Ridout Street. It is a beautiful Victorian mansion, and still stands as one of the best examples of Victorian architecture in the city. The Harris' occupied the house for five generations, and the daughter of John Harris is said to be the object of the ghosts' affection.

Grand balls and parties were all the rage in the nineteenth century, and the Harris daughters were giving one on the fateful night. Sarah Harris was being courted by a young military officer, from the British garrison. The young officer's name was Wenman Wynniatt, and when Sarah asked him if he would be attending her party, he replied: "Oh yes I'll be there."

The night of the party Sarah waited and waited for Wynniatt and had convinced herself that he was not going to show up. Suddenly he appeared before her, but when she stretched out her hand to him, he just walked right passed her, without seeming to recognize her. This was apparently the last time she saw him, and his body was found the next morning on the banks of the Thames river. His watch had stopped at the exact moment he had appeared at the party. Although Sarah never saw him again, people have reported that the ghost of a young man appears in Eldon House every so often, and it is wondered that maybe the young man is still trying to keep his promise to Sarah.

Colborne Street

The Colborne Street house had been in the family of Beatrice Simms for many years, and after financial circumstances she was forced her to sell the house in 1943. She sold it, but always said she would return.

The house passed through different owners, and Beatrice Simms never returned before her death in 1967.

Ken Davis and his wife bought the house in 1967. They moved in with their six-week old baby in July. Things were calm the first few months, but in September they began to hear strange noises; creaking doors and footsteps. At first they put it down to the fact that it was an old house, but then they began hearing ghostly voices, and began feeling an eerie strange presence.

Even the Davis' family dog sensed something in the house. The dog was devoted to Mr. Davis and never left his side. However, on Halloween night the dog, which previously had stood at the top of the stairs, rigid with fright, disappeared and was never seen again. The Davis' budgie and two goldfish also died, and eventually their babysitter refused to enter the house, having received numerous frights.

Mrs. Davis reported that several times while feeding the baby late at night she heard footsteps on the stairs. She would be all set to scream for her husband, but the sounds would stop just before she would catch sight of whoever was climbing the stairs. Mr. Davis dismissed the nightly sounds to the nervousness of a new mother, but one day when his wife was away, he heard someone calling his name. The babysitter was in the basement, and he was upstairs, but when he went to see if anyone was in trouble he found nothing. Another time when the couple was out, and the babysitter was upstairs with the older children, she heard someone come in the front door, and then heard the baby laugh. Mrs. Davis insisted that the baby was too young to laugh. The babysitter went downstairs to investigate, but found nothing. The sitter was so scared she took the children and hid under the beds until the Davis' returned.

Eventually, the Davis' received a telephone call from a woman who had known the previous owners. She told the Davis' about Beatrice Simms, and that there were papers and books in the attic with Beatrice's name in them. After that Mrs. Davis said she took a friendly attitude to this whatever-it-was in their home. She mentioned that there was often a feeling of someone watching them, or that someone was standing at the top of the stairs. Finally, in February, the Davis' sensed a feeling of quietness about the house, as if the ghost of Beatrice Simms had moved on.

The Davis' do not say that they believe in ghosts, only that things happened. These events coincided with the death of Beatrice Simms, in Toronto, who had vowed to return to her beloved home some day.

Crabapple Restaurant

The former Crabapple Restaurant at 474 King Street, is home to a ghost named Victoria, a young girl who died after falling down the steep cellar steps.

Victoria made herself known to the restaurant staff, either in the basement or on the stairs. Often, however, she could be found in the kitchen banging around pots or singing lullabies.

When the restaurant was converted into office space, the contractors were warned about Victoria. The contractor, Mario Morello, says the first thing he noticed was the disappearance of his tools. He did not meet Victoria, however, until one morning when he started to tear down the bathroom. When he walked into the bathroom the door slammed behind him. He put down his tools, opened the door, and it slammed again. There was no wind or draft to explain the slamming door. Morello thought that maybe Victoria was taking a bath and tried to spook him because she did not like the company.

The Ghost of Huggabone's Hill

For more than 150 years the ghost of Huggabone's Hill has been part of London's farming community. In 1835 a man named Castle-John Hodgins and his son Henry, were on their way to register for the election. They travelled by horse and cart along London's dirt roads. Huggabone's Hill which runs between University Hospital and the university residences, was very steep at one time. On the way home, the horse and cart went out of control. Both Castle-John and his son were killed. For years afterwards farmers said as they travelled up and down the hill, their horses would stop, shy, resist, and let out a 'neigh', just at the point where Castle-John and his horse were killed.

London East

In London East, it looks like any ordinary 12 years old bungalow, on a quiet street. But the people who have moved into it say it is very, very haunted. The owners asked that they not be identified, or their house, because they might decide to sell it.

The owners say there is a constant pattern to the visits. Someone walks across the carpeted living room floor to the fireplace at the end wall. It is not a casual walk, but a stomping. The ghost also walks down the basement stairs to the gas furnace which is directly under the fireplace.

In the basement are a couple of broken snow shovels, which had been left behind by previous owners. There have been four different owners in the 12 years since the house has been built. About five feet from the furnace, sits one of the steel bases of the shovels. Every time the ghost enters the basement he kicks that steel base.

The woman owner of the house has also seen a female ghost. When she is at the bathroom mirror brushing her hair, a woman's head is reflected over her shoulder. The ghost has gray hair and is a little on the chubby side. She was about 5 feet 3 inches tall, about 60 or 65. She had a expressionless look on her face.

Another time the woman owner went downstairs to get some potatoes for supper. While in the basement, she spotted a woman who seemed to be wreathed in beaming smoke. She was so upset up that she ran up the stairs, woke up her 14 year old son to tell him, and did not even notice that she still had the potatoes in her hand.

The male owner often got up at 5:30 a.m. for coffee, and reported that every morning he had heard the back door open and close, even though it is locked. Then he heard heavy footsteps going down the basement stairs, and the kicking of the shovel. One morning he thought he caught a glimpse of an old man with gray hair and a handlebar mustache.

The teenaged son has a spider web collection in his room, and one night it started to flop about madly as if someone had stumbled into it. A friend of the son was visiting one night, and heard noises coming from the basement. When he questioned the son about these noises, the son calmly replied: "Oh, that just our ghost". No one goes down into the basement anymore, unless they absolutely have to.

Peg Leg Brown

The story of Peg Leg Brown has been around since he was executed on May 16, 1899. Little is known about Peg Leg, but after he allegedly murdered London policeman, Michael Toohey, he fled the district. He was eventually found, tried and hanged one year later.

Brown maintained his innocence until his death, and on the way to the gallows he said that his innocence would be proven by the fact that "grass would never grow over his grave." The fact that the jail graveyard is now the parking lot of the Middlesex County Courthouse, gives proof to his statement.

Brown is said to haunt the courthouse at dawn on the anniversary of his execution. No one has yet offered any proof, but a former guard used to tell prisoners that Peg Leg would not rest until everything was quiet. He would then stump along the corridors pretending to be Peg Leg until the prisoners quieted.

For more information see [Peg-Leg Brown](#)

Ambrose Small

Ambrose Small, 53 year old theatre magnate, and part time gambler disappeared from his office in Toronto, leaving a childless wife, and a \$2 million fortune. With his disappearance one of the most baffling *whodunits* in the records of Canadian justice began.

Ambrose Small began his career amid the sawdust and cigar smoke of his father's bar. He owned theatres in Toronto, Hamilton, London, St. Thomas, Kingston and Peterborough. "He was a slight, high-complexioned, hollow-cheeked man with a walrus mustache, a quick nervous manner, a temperament that was noisy and bluff, when then were going well, bleak and watchful when he was crossed, and a fondness for travelling, making big bets and minding his own business." (p 13, MacLean's).

The day before his disappearance, Small sold all of his holdings to Trans-Canada Theatres for \$1,700,000. On the morning of Tuesday, December 2, 1919, he and his wife left their stately Rosedale home in Toronto, having arranged to meet at the Grand Opera House on the south side of Adelaide Street, between Bay and Younge, in downtown Toronto. Small met his wife at the theatre, went to lunch, and then dropped his wife off at a Catholic orphanage on Bond

Street. Small said he would be home for dinner at 6. At 5 Small met with his attorney, Mr. Flock. Mrs. Small returned home about 5 p.m. and when her husband did not turn up she began to check around with friends and people he worked with. Nobody knew where he was, but his wife suspected that he was with one of his 'women friends'.

On December 16, 1919, James Cowan, manager of the Grand, contacted the police to begin investigating Small's disappearance. A \$50,000 reward was offered, if Small was found alive, and \$15,000 if found dead. Early in the investigation two newsmen testified they had seen Small walking along Adelaide Street sometime after 6, and the owner of a hotel said Small had dropped into the hotel Tuesday night and stayed until around 7.

The police followed several leads but never found the body of Ambrose Small. The Grand Theatre in London, had been searched thoroughly by police, who tore up floor boards and even sifted through the furnace ashes. The Grand Theatre was eventually sold and in 1976 was taken over by Rob Wellan. Mr. Wellan reported that sometimes late at night, while working at his desk, the drawers of his filing cabinets slowly open by themselves. But he does not believe in ghosts, he insists. In the 50s and 60s when the Grand was home to London Little Theatre, actors and stagehands frequently reported seeing Small's ghost walking the wings or standing in the fly-loft. Numerous séances over the years have failed to make contact however.

Since about 1977, when the Grand was renovated the ghostly appearance have virtually stopped. Some people have speculated that the ghost may have moved to Stratford, since Small owed the Avon Theatre too. It was reported that a stagehand apparently encountered Small.

The Ridgeway

The house in question, stands on the Ridgeway, a beautiful street that winds it's way along the Thames river. It has 15 rooms, and according to the family who lives there, one of those rooms is actively haunted.

When the family first moved into the house, the teenaged daughter slept in the master bedroom. She recalls waking up night after night, terrified. She was so terrified she would leave the room and sleep on the living room sofa. After four months of sleeping downstairs she switched rooms with her parents. For the daughter the problem was solved, but the father soon began experiencing strange happenings. 'Every night, I would wake up. I started checking my watch. Night after night, it happened at the same time, 3 a.m. One night I woke up and knew if I looked at my watch it would be 3 a.m. So I waited and waited until I knew the time would be 3:20 or 3:30. When I finally looked at my watch, it was 3 a.m. His wife had been unaffected by the strange happenings, until one night. Both woke up and watched an Anniversary clock with four brass balls that turned, run in perfect order. The strange thing was that the clock had not worked in years and the key to wind up the clock had been lost. The clock ran for about a day, then stopped working.

Eventually the couple moved to another room and were never bothered again.

Fire Hall

Houses are not the only buildings to be haunted in London. One of London's oldest fire halls is said to be actively haunted. No one has actually seen the ghost but he has been heard walking through the fire hall in the still of the night. One fireman recalls waking up in the middle of the night and feeling someone watching him. Another fireman recalls waking up on a rainy night and hearing footsteps leaving the room where he was and entering the room where the window was. The fireman assumed one of the other men had opened the window, but no one came back into the room. The fireman got out of bed to investigate but no one was in the room.

Are there such things as ghosts? Who knows for sure but the stories of such happenings make good reading and storytelling, on dark, lonely nights. Don't they?

London Free Press, 1969-1977

MacLean's Magazine, January 1951

The Detroit News, April 21, 1985