

THE BOOK OF THE SMOKE

The London Occult Miscellany of Augustus Darcy (Deceased)



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in memoriam

Augustus Greville Darcy
1895–1934

Ex summa desperatione spes

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§ Dragons

On 30th November 1222 dragons were seen flying over the City of London. Such unusual activity must be a portent of ill omen, and so it was proved. Shortly afterwards London experienced terrible thunderstorms and severe flooding, the like of which has not been seen since. Perhaps coincidentally Halley's Comet, long thought to be a harbinger of doom and disaster, was seen in the sky over London in September of the same year. It has visited several times since, the last visit being in 1910. It will next be seen in 1986.

The dragons of 1222 may have been the first to visit the City, but many more have come and stayed, albeit as statuary. The most fierce is resident outside the Royal Courts of Justice in The Strand, atop the Temple Bar memorial. This beast marks one of the boundaries of the City and it is underneath his monument that the Lord Mayor of London traditionally receives the reigning monarch. More dragons are carved in stone at the entrance to St. Dunstan's in the West Church. Yet more are cast in iron on the supports of the Holborn Viaduct and, most famously perhaps, two dragons support the very coat of arms of the City of London.



THE DRAGONS WERE UNCHRISTIAN BEASTS
WHEN THEY FIRST APPEARED IN THIS SEAL OF 1670

THE OCCULT MISCELLANY OF AUGUSTUS DARCY *Dec'd*

also perished two immense wickerwork statues, reminiscent of the Druidical frames for human sacrifice, carried before the Lord Mayor on Midsummer and other ceremonial occasions.

The current wooden statues were installed in 1708 and are known as Gog and Magog, in remembrance of the tutelary giants of Britain, although this is somewhat contentious; an anonymous broadside of 1660 identified them as Corineus and Gogmagog. Hackney coachmen once swore by their names, and even in the 1700s it was said that apprentices of the various Guilds of the Guildhall were as 'frighted at the names of Gog and Magog as little children are at the terrible sound of Rawhead and Bloody-Bones'. It is known that before their pitiless gaze Lady Jane Grey and Sir Nicholas Throckmorton were tried for treason in Tudor times, and the Jesuit Henry Garnet tried for abetting the Gunpowder Plot.

§ The London Metal Exchange, Leadenhall Street (X1, 17L)

Founded in 1877, the London Metal Exchange is a major world trading centre for non-ferrous metals. Although there is nothing overtly esoteric about the business conducted there, all metals traded are symbolised by their alchemical sign.

§ The London Stone, Cannon Street (X1, 16L)

Tra maen Prydain

Tra lled Llyndain.

Traditionally translated, the ancient proverb runs: 'So long as the stone of Brutus is safe, so long shall London flourish'.

A piece of limestone approximately a foot square is built into the wall of St. Swithin's, London Stone church. Pieces of ancient stone are not uncommon in London but what is remarkable about this one is that such a dull bit of off-white limestone is believed to be so remarkable. In 1450 the rebel Jack Cade declared himself

pay taxes, the judge summed up No. 50, saying 'the house in question is known as a "haunted house" and has occasioned a good deal of speculation amongst the neighbours'. Numerous visitors in the 1870s, from Lord Lyttleton to a pair of housebreaking, inebriated sailors, reported supernatural experiences in rooms 'saturated with electric horror'.

It is true that the house has remained largely empty for many years now, with attempts to let it ending in failure as new tenants have so far vacated the premises extremely quickly. Many of the stories attached to the house refer to a room which engenders a feeling of dread in any who spend the night there. Some claim a madman lived and died there and his spirit remains; others maintain some monstrous creature, half human, half animal wanders the place after dark. Yet more accounts suggest the ghost of a little girl dressed in tartan frequents its gloomy corridors. Those brave enough to spend the night in the haunted room quit the place before dawn, driven half-mad. Certainly, they are in no fit condition to recount what they saw.

The house is presently available for lease. Apply to Messrs Springer and Barrett, Solicitors 133 High Holborn for particulars and to arrange a viewing.

§ The British Museum and Reading Room, Museum Street (X, 13K)

Given the extreme age of so many of the exhibits, and also their provenance, it is unsurprising that the British Museum is a magnet for the occultist. It is indeed a storehouse of mystical and magical treasures if one knows where to look. One of the founders of the Golden Dawn, Samuel MacGregor Mathers, was a frequent visitor to the Reading Room in the 1880s, where he took full advantage of the occult bookstocks and, apparently, irritated library staff with his abrupt manner. Both Mathers and Crowley drew

Annie Besant

News has reached me of the recent death of Annie Besant, for some years now a resident of India, where she ran a school. Annie was at first a social reformer, much involved with the Fabian Society, as was her friend George Bernard Shaw, and with the trades unions. In 1890 she met Madame Helena Blavatsky, founder of the Theosophical Society, and thus became engaged in Theosophy spiritual matters. Both she and Madame Blavatsky wished to prepare humankind for the arrival of the next World Teacher and Annie began this work with her usual focus and energy. By 1893 Mrs. Besant had moved to India. In 1908 she became President of the Theosophical Society and was also involved in co-freemasonry, that extraordinary offshoot of the masonic brotherhood that admits women and, were it not for the efforts of Mrs. Besant, would remain confined to continental Europe from whence it originated. In India she adopted and championed as a spiritual leader the boy Krishnamurti and returned to politics, through involvement in the Home Rule movement. Although she has not lived in London for many years, Mrs. Besant has been greatly influential in the city, setting up two co-masonic lodges and leading the Theosophical movement. Without her endeavours the path of the free-thinker in London would be the more difficult.

