

# Ghost Story

## Things that go *bump* in the night

Continued from MAGNA December 2007

Bill remembered the silly story of Bridget Coston haunting the church. "Stuff and nonsense" he muttered as he turned over and again closed his eyes. He tried to sleep. Suddenly, there was an outbreak of noise. A fire engine or perhaps a police car in pursuit of a reveller? This place really is noisy, thought Bill. The candles were still glowing and twinkling in the draughts of the old building. Time for another, thought Bill. Just to send me to sleep. He reached for his flask and took several deep swigs of whisky before again settling down to sleep. Soon be morning, he thought. And 200 pounds!



Bill was peering through the now gloomy church when he saw two spiders. Not just ordinary spiders but large spiders, bigger than a hand span across. He could see two, now three of them. They were standing close by him, very still and somehow menacing. He could see their eyes, and yes, they were looking not at him, but at each other. Bill thought, they are communicating with each other. He started to feel uncomfortable. He had never been scared of spiders much before but this felt different. These spiders were clearly plotting. One of them gave Bill a casual glance and then the other two started moving, one to the left of him, one to the right. Their spidery legs mesmerised Bill. He froze, unable to move or even breathe. The third spider had disappeared but now appeared in view again, without warning, above him, and now started a sliding descent down a filament of shining gossamer. Bill could see its eyes engaging his attention, then its jaws opened. The other two spiders now started advancing on him, one on either side, moving closer and closer. Bill tried to move, to get away from them, but found himself unable to move a muscle. He felt trapped in the sleeping bag, held down and imprisoned. Then, with all the might he could muster, he forced his way out of the sleeping bag... and landed on the cold, hard stone floor of the church. Bill looked around. Not a spider in sight. It was just a dream. Bill picked himself up and took stock. He was cold, and in his fall onto the floor he had hurt his wrist. He glanced at his watch and saw that

amazingly, it was already past 3am. He had slept the best part of four hours! Stupid dream, thought Bill. Its certainly colder than I anticipated. Bill wished he had put on more clothes. He limbered up to get his circulation moving and then remembered his other flask of whisky. Just the job, he thought and gave himself a big helping. The church was now much darker, although a shaft of moonlight still penetrated the west end. Bill thought, I would just like to go home now! He looked at the door and saw the key, hanging in its place and gleaming in the moonlight. As he gazed at it, it seemed to glow and he found it difficult to focus on it. The key seemed to move in the moonlight, although, of course, he knew it couldn't move on its own. Bill remembered his bet and decided to banish thoughts of going home and get back into bed for another sleep. "Just go back to sleep" he said to himself aloud. The effect of his speech was slightly unnerving and his voice seemed to echo round the building. Another slug of whisky helped to provide him with some normality once more.

Bill looked up at Bridget and Simon Coston and their children. "No sign of you tonight, eh, Bridget?" he said, again out loud. Although not a man of faith, Bill still respected what this building meant to generations of Greenford people. For over 500 years, they had been bringing their sorrows and

joys here, he thought. Did these strong emotions leave and “imprint” on the fabric, he wondered. Feeling colder now, Bill got back in his bed, hoping to avoid dreaming this time. He dozed lightly and woke up several times. He heard several more emergency vehicles screaming on their way along the Greenford Road. He heard the dull thudding of pantechnicons as they mounted the flyover just a few yards away from the church. He thought, I wonder if I am the only person ever to attempt to sleep in this church overnight? What would the rector say if he knew? Would he find out? Would Malcolm one day let slip this night’s activity? Was he doing something illegal? Did it matter? Bill reached for his flask and finished the whisky.

Bill awoke with a terrible sense of coldness. He checked his watch and it was 5.30am. The heaters in the church remained impassive and immobile. Bill thought, Oh, I wish I could turn these heaters on for a while. Without warning, the three heaters all burst into action. A loud bang was followed by the noise of gas rushing through the system and the metal work crackled into life. In the terrible quiet of the early morning church, these heaters sounded more like jet engines racing to prepare for take-off. Bill was taken aback by the timing of this combustion, and needed a few moments to calm himself. He was now feeling dry, and stupidly, he had forgotten to bring any water. Only 90 more minutes he thought, and again he dozed.

Bill heard a knocking noise. It dragged him from his sleep, slowing claiming his attention. Suddenly Bill felt anxious. This was not one of the normal church noises. This was a knocking, a person knocking on the door. It was persistent and getting louder. Then he clearly heard a soft voice. Bill froze. Yes, it was a voice, it was a woman’s voice. He could just hear her whispering “Let me in, please let me in.” Bill took a second or to adjust to this new reality. He lay very, very still and covered his face with the sleeping bag. The woman’s voice again said “Let me in, let me in.” Then she began a horrible, disturbing wailing sound and pleaded. “Let me in, please, let me in...” Bill sat bolt upright in his bed. Trying not to look at Bridget Coston, he simply shouted “Who are you? What do you want?” Silence. Then suddenly, the woman screamed and Bill heard the sound of her footsteps running away down the path in the church yard and out on to the street. He could still hear her hysterical screams as he struggled to get out of bed, to divest himself of the clinging bedding. His leg caught on something and Bill felt himself falling heavily.

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“Hello Bill! How are you?” The words were spoken by the rector. He was sat by the bedside of Bill in what appeared to him to be a hospital. “Where am I?” “Ealing A and E, actually, but don’t worry, you will be better soon.” “What happened?” “Well, Bill, you tell me! All I know is that I arrived at church at 6.30am to get ready for the 7am



mass and there you were, lying on the floor with blood on your jogging top.” “Oh, no!” “From an examination of the equipment in the church, you appear to have spent the night there alone but somehow contrived to injure your head. How’s it feel now?” “Er, OK I think. Do you know what happened?” “Well, Bill, I did find two empty hip flasks on the floor. Did they play a part?” “Whisky, yes,” said Bill, trying to recover his memory of the previous night. “There was this woman’s voice, eerie, moaning, shouting for me to let her in...” “Ah, that would be old Jenny. She often hangs about the Old Church early, waiting to speak to me.” “Jenny?” “Yes, she is something of a vagrant, but quite harmless. You really scared her today, Bill. She thought you were a ghost.” “I thought she was a ghost!” They both paused and looked at each other. “But why were you in church at 6.30am? Malcolm said you wouldn’t be around until later.” “Oh, did he? He’s obviously forgotten that today is Saint Andrew’s day! Mass at 7am. When I found you, I rushed back to the rectory, woke Marion and phoned for an ambulance. They brought us both here to A&E just in case you had done some damage to yourself, but as it happens, you seem to have got away lightly. Just a little concussed.” Neil sat back and let Bill doze on for a few more minutes. Bill roused himself and

asked "What time is it?" "Time for breakfast! Perhaps you would like to come back with me and we can have breakfast together?" A nurse pushed her face into the curtained cubicle. "Everything ok?" she said to Bill, smiling at Neil. Bill looked at her in surprise. "Don't worry Mr Hampson, the doctor says you can go home whenever you are ready. No permanent damage! Oh, by the way, you have visitors." "Visitors?" One by one, the heads of Emma, Malcolm and Derek appeared round the curtain and they took up positions around Bill's bed. They were looking very confused, all of them. Neil said "Well, I think perhaps someone had better explain?"

The explanation came, and it sounded sillier and more irresponsible than any of them could have imagined. "All's well that ends well, I suppose!" said Neil. Bearing in mind all that happened, I think we can all just forget this incident, but with two conditions." Emma looked at Neil and said "That sound nice to me, but, these conditions, what are they?" Neil smiled. "Well, that little kitty of 200 pounds- wouldn't that make a nice contribution to church funds?" Everyone nodded, but without too much enthusiasm. "Splendid, then we are agreed." As he handed the cash over to Neil Malcolm asked, rather cautiously, "And what about the second condition?" "Well, in order to discourage other people with a similar idea, I think that an account of this little escapade ought to be written by Bill and then published in our parish magazine, don't you?"

And this, dear reader, is where we began our story.

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#### **Four Postscripts.**

From Emma, received by email

First, I am glad that the person known as "Bill" has not been identified. His anonymity should be respected.

I would seriously like to discourage any speculation about who "Bill" might or might not be.

Secondly, I am glad that throughout the whole sorry story, it is clear that I was always doubtful, and had the group listened to me, the incident would not have taken place at all.

From Malcolm

I think it might be a very bad idea to publish this article. Rather than discourage others, it will put ideas into their head and we are likely to see a repeat of the stunt. On the other hand, as Church Treasurer, I confirm that contributions to church funds are always welcome. Perhaps we should make it an annual event, find a sponsor and raise money through it? I intend to make a proposal along these lines to the next meeting of the Parochial Church Council.

The Magna Committee received the following from the Churchwardens

Whilst we are unhappy about ill-considered activities such as those described in the article, we are glad that the end of this story has proved satisfactory and that the church has benefited by 200 pounds. In future, anyone wishing to spend a night in the church should apply to the Churchwardens (address on the inside back page) who are currently undertaking a risk assessment and enquiring into the insurance implications.

From "Bill"

Although I agreed to write this account of the over-night incident in Holy Cross Church, I wish to confirm that everything that happened could be explained by entirely natural factors, and so although I forfeited my money in the wager, I claim a moral victory.

Postscript from the rector

I do not myself believe in ghosts and consider that there is nothing to be feared from being inside the church other than an over-active imagination and fear itself. I am not in any way pre-disposed to prevent explorations of the paranormal, however should anyone wish to propose another, more controlled, experiment in the old church, I would consider being part of the team, but under no circumstances should alcohol be allowed.