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Blather: On The Ghost Bus

From: **Daev Walsh - Blather** <daev@blather.net>
Date: Fri, 18 Jun 1999 18:36:07 +0100
Fwd Date: Sat, 19 Jun 1999 09:20:07 -0400
Subject: Blather: On The Ghost Bus

B L A T H E R

p a r a n o r m a l p r o v o c a t e u r i s m

By Dave (daev) Walsh daev@blather.net
Web: <http://www.blather.net>

June 18th 01999, Dublin, Ireland Vol 3. No. 2

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featuring Blather's daev.

ON THE GHOST BUS

At 19:30 hours on the 25th of May, this Blatherskite ended a headlong bicycle sprint across Dublin's humid inner city, arriving at O'Connell St. with barely enough time to leap aboard the Dublin Ghost Bus and wave his credentials, before the spectral vehicle lurched away into the evening.

Operated by Dublin Bus, the city's public transport company, the double-decker Ghost Bus cuts a curious jib as it trundles about the backstreets in its livery of blues, purples and black, with darkened or curtained windows.

Inside the bus, the driver and assistant are dressed in normal Dublin Bus uniforms, but the decor is dark and decorated with prints of the Irish Hell-Fire Club and Bram Stoker. Upstairs - where the punters sit - is adorned with red velvet curtains and paintwork that seems to unconsciously suggest that 'Molly' - as the bus is known - is more flesh and blood than we would expect.

As we edge slowly through the evening traffic towards the River Liffey, we are joined by James, our guide for the evening, dressed in an immaculate high-collared white shirt, cravat and waistcoat. James introduces the rest of the crew: the driver, 'Francis "Blood-on-the-tyres" Schumacher', 'Blind Igor, the Phibsboro Psychopath', and of course, Molly herself.

As we cross O'Connell Bridge, we pull back the curtains - it seems far too bright and sunny to be on a ghost tour - to learn about the strange apparition that appeared by a floating restaurant - the MV Aran, which used to be moored by the Customs House back in the 1980s.

[Live view of O'Connell Bridge:
<http://www.ireland.com/dublin/liveview/index.htm>]

[See also:
<http://www.archeire.com/archdublin/bridges/oconnell.html>]

As we wheel up D'Olier St., passed the offices of the Irish Times, James reels off a list of famous writers who had studied in the approaching Trinity College - including, of course, Bram Stoker, author 'Dracula'. We learn of the year of Stoker's birth - 1847, or 'Black 47' - the worst year of the Irish Famine, his sickly childhood and Ballybock Cemetery, his habitual play place.

[Trinity College Dublin:
<http://www.archeire.com/archdublin/trinity/trinmain.htm>]

By now we're were on Nassau St. and turning up Kildare St., having patrolled a good half of Trinity's perimeter, and stopping off at the College of Physicians. Here we glimpse the beginning of a major topic of tonight's proceedings: Body Snatching. It was at this College that a Dr. Samuel Clossey operated his school of anatomy, apparently between 1786 and 1803. A 'tall, mean, overbearing' individual, he seems to have eschewed the frivolities of religion and emotion, to (paradoxically) revel in the delights of shocking his students - slicing up bodies to show that we are little more than meat. Clossey himself met a rather unsavoury end, thanks to his miserliness and bloodthirstiness. We won't give away the story here...

[Oddly, my copy of Dr. John Fleetwood's 'The Irish Body Snatchers

(1988) makes no mention of Dr. Clossey...]

Up Kildare St. a little further, and we pass by Leinster House - where the Dáil (Irish Parliament) can be found, and the National Museum. On the other side of the street from these public buildings is a row of fairly ordinary looking Georgian houses - one of which was the residence of Bram Stoker. Next we pass the Shelbourne Hotel, where, in 1910, in room 256, 'psychic' Sybil Leek allegedly contacted the ghost of one 'Mary Masters' in August 1965. Mary claimed to have popped her cogs in 1791 due to cholera. Apparently Leek's mother's maiden name was also Masters, and a row of Georgian houses was demolished to build the hotel, back in 1824.

Hans Holzer, in his book 'The Lively Ghosts of Ireland' mentions this case - Sybil Leek was a friend of his. We're sure James said the room was 256, however Holzer says 526, and well, as he was 'there' at the time, it's hard to argue with that.

[Leinster House:
<http://www.archeire.com/archdublin/18thc/leinster.htm>]

[Shelbourne Hotel:
<http://www.shelbourne.ie/>]

Then it's down Merrion Row, swinging a right onto Ely Place, where many of Dublin's rich lived - Oliver St. John Gogarty, Bram Stoker's brother Thornley, George Moore and John 'Black

Jack' Fitzgibbon, the Earl of Clare (1746-1802), who lived in No. 6. He is infamously reported to have hung 13 people in one day (for the sheer hell of it), stating that he would make the Irish as 'tame as castrated cats'. Oddly, he himself was castrated in later years during an altercation in a Turkish brothel. He survived this setback, and died, much later on. Apparently multitudes of commoners carrying sacks joined his funeral cortege - curious, for such an unpopular man. At his graveside the contents of the sacks were thrown onto his coffin - dozens of dead cats, in varying stages of decay.

The bus turns back onto Stephen's Green, heading up the Monk's walk, while James starts ramming a hatpin through a doll wearing a letter 'F', while Francis, the driver, starts screaming below. The 'passengers' are also given a go - some are more 'passionate' about stabbing than others, it seems. This leads into stories of how a Blacksmith's 1798 curse lead to the death of the 7ft (2.13m) tall Lieutenant Hempenstall, a.k.a. 'The Walking Gallows', who could hang a man with his silk cravat. According to Peter Somerville-Large's 'Irish Eccentrics', some wit dedicated two lines of verse to the Lieutenant's demise:

'Here lies the bones of Hempenstall,
Judge, jury, gallows, rope and all.'

Before we know it, we're out of the bus and creeping down Long Lane, with James in his overcoat and trilby, carrying a bag of tools and swinging an umbrella. Into St. Kevin's Park with us, formerly St. Kevin's 'Cemetery'... where members of the Thomas Moore family, the poet, are buried. To the rather startled bemusement of some of our number, our guide demonstrates - using tools and gestures - the practice of body-snatching - whether it was of full bodies for sale to the medical community or merely the removal of teeth and hair from the corpses of cholera victims. We were shown how the corpse would be impaled under the chin and pulled from the grave, and a box of human teeth was passed around, to the consternation of several people...

St. Kevin's seems alive with stories - George 'Crazy Crow' Hendrick, an 18th century day-time 'porter of musical instruments' and night-time 'sack-em-up', practiced his snatching skills at St. Kevin's, some of which allegedly led to the entrapment of some of his colleagues in a mausoleum. Dr. Fleetwood book 'The Irish Body Snatchers', however, tells us that Hendrick only became a musical instrument porter in 1832, when the passing of the Anatomy Act killed the body snatching business.

The ivy-laded church ruins, in the centre of the park, apparently house the ghost of Bishop Dermot O'Hurley, executed in Penal Times. High season for bishopric apparitions is said to be 'late July'. Arthur Wellesley, better know as the Duke of Wellington, was baptised

in the tiny church.

We pile back onto the bus, and head over to St. Patrick's Cathedral, while James manages to horrify some passengers with readings from Jonathan Swift's (author of 'Gulliver's Travels', and Dean of St. Patrick's in the 18th century) infamous political satire 'A Modest Proposal - For Preventing The Children of Poor People in Ireland From Being Aburden to Their Parents or Country, and For Making Them Beneficial to The Public'. Swift himself is buried beneath the floor of the medieval building, and although our guide doesn't mention it, the Dean is said to appear in various locations around Ireland to this day...

[A Modest Proposal
<http://art-bin.com/art/omodest.html>]

We hook into New St., where we notice that the adjacent school was established in 1432. So far, the stories have seemed well researched, and acknowledgement has been made of those which are more apocryphal. However, the most dubious tale yet is of an almost premature burial 'inside' St. Patrick's featuring a lady who apparently suffered a cataleptic fit.

She was revived when one of the funeral attendants attempted to

divest her of her wedding ring - and her finger with it. She is said to have run home from the church, wondering what she was doing there, bleeding from her wound, and subsequently lived for 32 years. Unfortunately, this seems to be one of those archetypal tales which insists on showing up again and again. The first time this writer heard of it was about 15 years ago in Wexford, this time it referred to the apparent demise of the matriarch of a local estate, and her resurrection at the hands of a terrified grave robber.

[St. Patrick's:
<http://www.archeire.com/archdublin/17thc/stpats.htm>]

Next to St. Patrick's is Marshe's Library, assembled by Bishop Narcissus Marshe in the 17th century. The tour doesn't enter here, but if we may digress, this place is always worth a visit, as they have regular topical exhibitions of selected works - a couple of years ago they had a showing of publications relating to 'mythical' animals - but when these books were published, such creatures were thought to be real. They also have a first edition of 'Gulliver's Travels'...

The Bishop's ghost is said to haunt the library, eternally searching for the note left for him, hidden inside a book by his niece, who he had reared from childhood. She eloped with a seaman, and left Marshe heartbroken...

[Marshes's Library:
<http://www.archeire.com/archdublin/18thc/marsh.htm>]

The bus heads up Patrick's St., under the arch at Christchurch cathedral, and pulling in at the top of Winetavern St. to hear tales of 'Hell', the jungle of sin which stretched along the side of the hill from Christchurch to St. Audeons. Apparently there exists an 18th century newspaper notice, advertising:

'To Rent: Rooms in Hell. Lawyers Preferred'.

[Christchurch Cathedral:
<http://www.archeire.com/archdublin/17thc/christch.htm>]

On the southern end of Hell, over on Fishamble St., a new pub called 'Darky Kelly's' can be seen. Kelly was an 18th century 'madame' who kept a house known as 'The Maiden Tower' in the building in which the pub now resides. It was said to be 'notably labyrinthine' by officers of the law who once raided the place, probably because they spent so much time there before leaving...

Darky Kelly was executed, for the alleged murder of her child, the body of whom was never actually produced. Her prosecutor? One Simon Luttrell, Sheriff of Dublin, alleged Hell-Fire Club member, and reportedly the father of the child...

We roll downhill, and around the corner onto Cooke St. On our right is the rear of 'Adam and Eve's' church, which faces onto Merchant's Quay. In Penal times, when Catholic mass was outlawed, there used to be a tavern on the site called... 'Adam and Eve's'. This pub had a small church hidden inside it, where illicit worship was carried out - think of it as alcohol prohibition in reverse. Consider it... people going out under the auspices of drinking, but instead 'really' going to

mass. For Joyce fans, 'Adam and Eve's' is mentioned on the first page of 'Finnegans Wake', albeit the other way around.

'riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation back to Howth Castle and Environs.'

The bus stops off again by the north-facing gate of the city walls, dating back to 1240AD. James unlocks the gate, and we crowd in, and up the 'Forty Steps'. Here we hear tales of nuns making reports to the Gardai in 1955, following their encounters with leper ghosts, and mysterious green ladies, thought to be Darky Kelly bringing her unwanted offspring to St. Audeon's church. Fine frightening environs for dusktime tales...

[St. Audeon's:

<http://www.archeire.com/archdublin/17thc/staudeon.htm>]

[City Walls:

<http://www.archeire.com/archdublin/17thc/citywall.htm>]

The remainder of the tour brings us around Smithfield, on the north side of the Liffey, where we hear tales of 'Billy the Bowl' - the legless murderer of Stoneybatter, 'Prince Hackball' (Patrick Corrigan), the infamous pickpocket, and the mysterious 'Scaldbrother', mentioned in a previous Blather issue. Some tales of Irish wakes (i.e. funerary traditions), and we amble back to O'Connell St., where Molly prepares to collect another horde of unwitting victims.

Highly recommended, for tourists and residents alike...

Scaldbrother:

<http://www.blather.net/archives2/issue2no24.html>

Departs from:

Dublin Bus
59 Upper O'Connell St.
Dublin 1
+353 1 8734222

<http://www.dublinbus.ie/>

The Dublin Ghost Bus Tour site:

<http://www.dublinbus.ie/html/travinfo/tours/ghost.html>

Price: £12.00

Duration: 2 1/4 Hours

Departure Time:

Tuesday-Friday: 7:30pm
Saturday: 7:30pm and 9:30pm
Sunday: 7:30pm
No Monday Tour

At the moment, the Ghost Bus seems to be operating between March and late Autumn. It may a good idea to phone Dublin Bus to confirm that the tour is actually on.

Dave (daev) Walsh
June 18th 01999

This issue is archived at

<http://www.blather.net/archives3/issue3no2.html>

OWLMAN PLEA! - From our man in Exeter, Mr. Jonathan Downes.

"Three years ago I published a book called 'The Owlman and Others' which told the story of how my ex-wife and I travelled across the semi-mythical land of Cornwall in search of high adventure, free drinks, and the legendary 'Owlman of Mawnan' - a grotesque feathered bird-man which haunts the area immediately surrounding Mawnan Old Church in southern Cornwall. Last year, noted fortean Film Director Ben Cusden and I started work on a feature film loosely based around the book. Very loosely.

Setting my fevered imagination to work I wrote a screenplay which owes more to cult American 'trash' director John Waters than anything else. The results of our labours can be found at

<http://www.fortunecity.com/roswell/arecibo/236/>

Now - here's the complicated bit. We only made sixteen minutes of it because we ran out of money. The reaction we have had from press and punters is stunning. Everyone loves it (even though it is completely ridiculous. We need about ten thousand quid to finish it, and anyone investing in it could be reasonably assured of a decent return on their investment as well as being part of the most influential piece of fortean bollocks to have

been made for video ever!

Any fortean philanthropists out there?"

- Jon Downes, Centre for Fortean Zoology

<http://www.eclipse.co.uk/cfz/su2223@eclipse.co.uk>

BLEEDIN ERRATA!

In a classic show of carelessness, in the issue 'Hell-Fire Francis' we accidentally referred to the late Anton Szandor LaVey as 'Anton Salvador LaVey'. Appropriate punishment has been delivered. Thanks to Marcello Truzzi and Peter Lakbar for catching that one...

<http://www.magonia.demon.co.uk/newmag.htm>

What's new at Magonia

06/06/99

Visions of Bowmen and Angels

The strange case of Arthur Machen and the Angels of Mons. By Kevin McClure

Magonia Monthly Supplement #15

ETH - questions that need answering; Satanic update; Allagash under fire

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Guest of Honour:

Robert Rankin

Bestselling author of

The Brentford Trilogy and Apocalypse

Other Guests Include:

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Maggie Furey, Robert Holdstock,

Graham Joyce, Tom Mathews, Ian McDonald,

Kim Newman, Geoff Ryman, Michael Scott,

Brian Stableford, Dave (Daev) Walsh and

James White

9-10 October 1999

Royal Marine Hotel

Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin, Ireland

<http://www.iol.ie/~jshields/octocon/>

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