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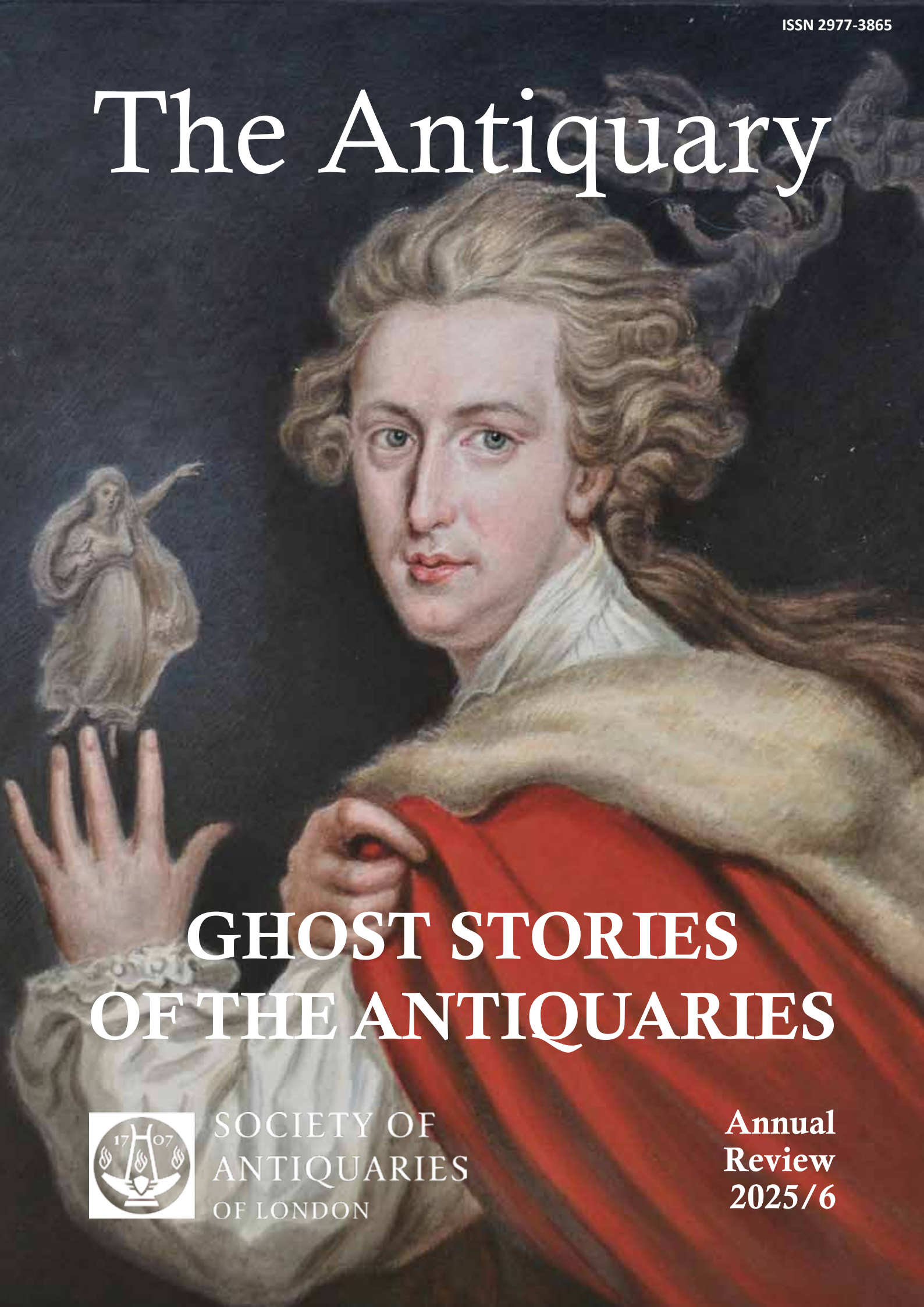
The Antiquary



GHOST STORIES OF THE ANTIQUARIES

SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES OF LONDON

Annual Review 2025/6

Ghost Stories of the Antiquaries

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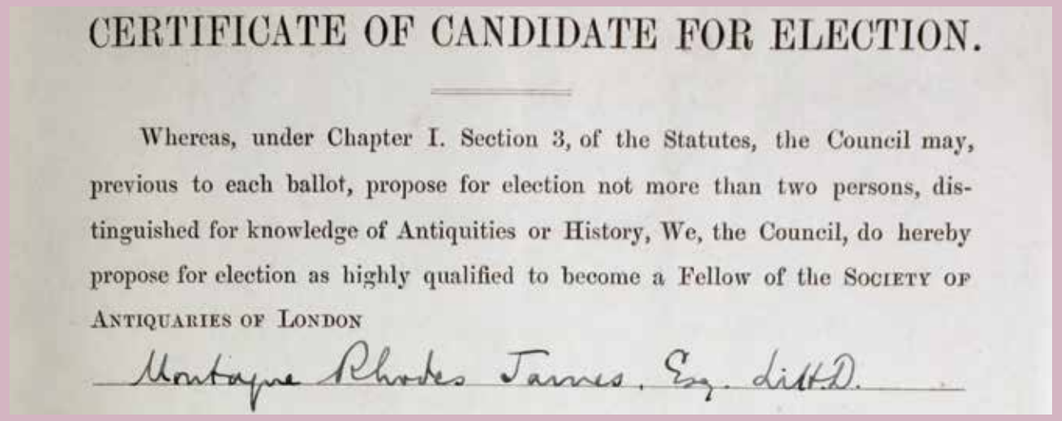

CERTIFICATE OF CANDIDATE FOR ELECTION.

Whereas, under Chapter I. Section 3, of the Statutes, the Council may, previous to each ballot, propose for election not more than two persons, distinguished for knowledge of Antiquities or History, We, the Council, do hereby propose for election as highly qualified to become a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London

Montague Rhodes James, Esq. LittD.

Election certificate for Montague Rhodes James © Society of Antiquaries

EDITOR: Thomas Williams FSA

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Cover image: Thomas Lord Lyttelton receives a ghostly visitor who warns him of his death, Prattinton Collection © Society of Antiquaries

The Society of Antiquaries of London (founded in 1707) is an independent learned society whose main purpose is the 'encouragement, advancement and furtherance of the study and knowledge of the antiquities and history of this and other countries' (Royal Charter, 1751). With the support of more than 3,000 Fellows distinguished in various heritage disciplines, we pursue conservation, research and dissemination of knowledge of the material past through our Library and Museum collections at Burlington House (London) and Kelmscott Manor (Oxfordshire) as well as our grants, lectures and seminars and publications.

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

By Thomas Williams FSA

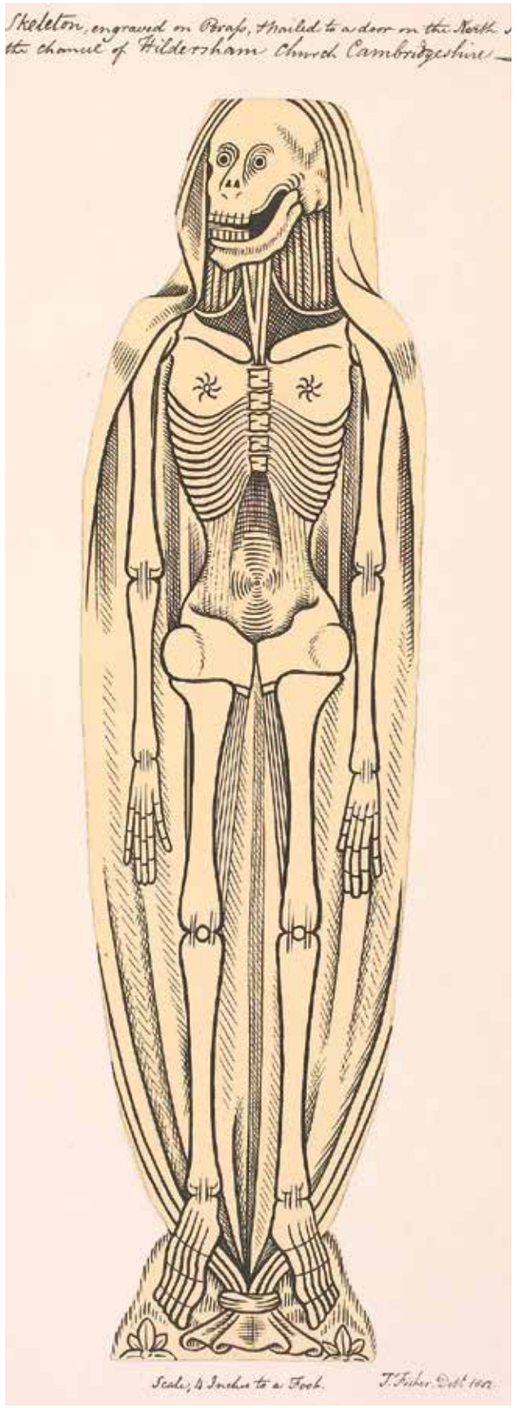
Thomas Williams FSA

Antiquarianism is necromancy. The dead stare through the eyes of images wrought in life (or sometimes afterwards), their voices breathe through words inscribed on parchment, paper and stone. And, of course, the work of their hands and their very bones themselves are disinterred from their resting places and pressed to reveal what they remember of the lives they lived and the worlds they knew.

It is no wonder that Antiquaries, however rational we might feel ourselves to be, are haunted people – haunted by the ever-present past that hovers at our shoulders in dimly lit libraries, whistles through the skeleton remains of shattered abbeys, or passes weirdly through our fingers as we catalogue the objects that passed through so many other hands - now oddly joined to our own.

This issue of the *The Antiquary* honours the memory of M. R. James FSA, who died in 1936 - 90 years ago this year. James was elected to the Fellowship in 1903, during his long tenure as Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (1893–1908), and his contributions to medieval scholarship were remarkable (and impossible to do justice to here). His wider enduring fame, however, is as a teller of ghost stories. Four volumes - *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* (1904), *More Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* (1911), A *Thin Ghost and Others* (1919) and *A Warning to the Curious and Other Ghost Stories* (1925) secured James' legacy in this department. All were deeply informed by his professional life - in setting, subject matter and erudite tone – and were enormously influential in setting the trajectory of supernatural fiction in the 20th century.

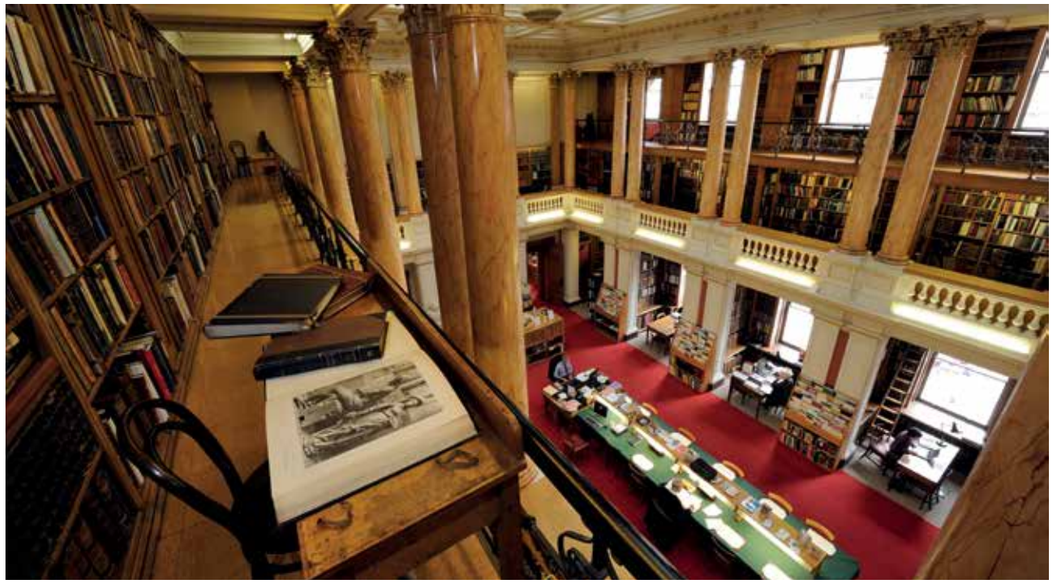
The articles collected here reflect the legacy of James and the antiquarian dance with the restless dead in various ways. From the sad but benign spirit of Morris at Kelmscott to the slobbering 'Elemental' of Leap Castle, and from the winding sheets of West Africa to the Nazi-haunted bunkers of Guernsey, the contributions on show demonstrate that in our dealings with the past we walk ever in danger of disrupting the unseen veil...



Drawing of a skeleton, engraved on brass and nailed to a door on the North Side the Chancel of Hilersham Church Cambridgeshire, LDSAL2020.21.8 © Society of Antiquaries

THE ANTIQUARIES' GHOSTS

By Nanina Shaw Reade



A view from the balcony of the Society's Library, where ghostly apparitions have been sighted © Society of Antiquaries of London

I was employed by the Society on a part-time basis in the late 1970s to record subscriptions and other matters for the auditors. Hugh Thompson was Secretary and John Hopkins Librarian. I normally worked alone in a small top floor room overlooking the courtyard, but had been temporarily moved across the landing to a larger room. It was probably the room that housed a huge card index known as the Papworth Collection, an ideal candidate for putting on to computer, as I remember mentioning to a visiting Herald.

This is where I experienced an 'encounter'. It was late afternoon in winter. There was nothing visible or audible, but a tapping on the shoulder, a strange feeling which I literally shrugged off. Again, the tapping. I left the room to busy myself at the filing cabinets downstairs.

Some weeks later, at morning coffee in the small office in the library, someone started talking about the Antiquaries' ghosts. There was the 'perfume ghost' in the bookstacks in the basement: invisible, but who only 'manifested' to young men who would search in vain between the stacks.

There was the chair being drawn back from the large library table on soft carpet. Did the chair actually move or was it just heard? I believe this occurred on quiet Saturday mornings.

A man, I think wearing a top-hat, had been seen on more than one occasion on the top landing. I was not physically aware of him, but later a little apprehensive.

There may have been others.

Then someone said, 'Do you remember the electrician working on the top floor? He had a ladder in the corner immediately opposite the door. He thought his mate was tapping him on the shoulder, so called out telling him to stop. There was no one there.'

It was the exact spot where I had been tapped on the shoulder. On hearing this I went very quiet but said nothing!

The basement bookstacks, where the 'Perfume Ghost' is said to roam © Society of Antiquaries of London

THE HAUNTED DOLLS' HOUSE

By Elizabeth Clark Ashby FSA

The Dolls' House at Windsor Castle © Royal Collection Enterprises Ltd 2025 | Royal Collection Trust

At one o'clock in the morning, a clock chimes in the dolls' house displayed in the bedroom of the collector. Alarmed, he wakes. The miniature house has come to life. Its occupants, no longer dolls, stage a tale of murder and revenge. The collector retreats to the seaside in distress, and there he discovers that the tale is true.

This is an outline of *The Haunted Dolls' House*, a tale handwritten by M.R. James in 1922 for the miniature library of Queen Mary's Dolls' House at Windsor Castle, and later printed in *The Empire Review* in 1923. 'It was automatic to ask the Provost of Eton, who knows more about supernatural life than anyone living, to write a ghost story', recalled E.V. Lucas, who was involved in collecting the miniature library. Indeed, a letter in the Royal Archives reveals that the story's title came from Lucas: 'I venture to suggest that one of your delightful ghost stories ('The Haunted Dolls House'?) would be peculiarly appropriate. I enclose a little blank book for the purpose.' James obliged, writing, at nearly 5000 words, the longest piece in the library. At the end of his manuscript, he added that his tale is, unwittingly, very like his 'The Mezzotint', published in *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* in 1904. James's book, only 4 cm tall, joined tiny manuscripts by Arthur Conan Doyle, A.A. Milne, and 170 other early 20th-century writers.
The Dolls' House at Windsor is a rich source of inspiration for disturbing tales. Vita Sackville-West's specially written miniature manuscript, *A Note of Explanation*, features a spirit who invisibly runs the model home's baths and turns on its electric lights, to the consternation of the House's custodians. The androgynous spirit, who has witnessed numerous episodes of fairy-tale history, has been claimed as an antecedent of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*. Max Beerbohm's protagonist in his manuscript, *Meditations of a Refugee*, is another tiny Dolls' House dweller, whose account of his time in the miniature royal home is cut short by the menacing approach of the 'Comptroller of the Household'.

Queen Mary's Dolls' House itself, however, is unoccupied. Dolls were deemed too 'unreal': while the objects displayed might look normal if enlarged to full size, dolls never could. The uncanniness of dolls and dolls' houses, being lifelike but not living, did not only inspire stories of otherworldly occupants at the time the Dolls' House was being constructed. In 2023, modern authors wrote miniature books in celebration of the House's centenary. Both Sarah Waters and Anthony Horowitz featured haunted dolls' houses. In the creepy *The Underhand House*, Waters' protagonist is cursed to live in a dolls' house, where she discovers mysterious hidden depths; while in *A Tiny Ghost Story* by Anthony Horowitz, a vengeful ghost is condemned to haunt a toy house, rather than the family home she planned to terrorise. The association of Queen Mary's Dolls' House with the supernatural has lasted a century, fuelled by M.R. James, and driven by the vacant, realistic-but-unreal model mansion in Windsor.

M.R. James (1862–1936), *The Haunted Dolls' House*, 1922. RCIN 1171452 © Royal Collection Enterprises Ltd 2025 | Royal Collection Trust

THE SPIRIT OF KELMSCOTT

By Joscelyn Godwin FSA

Kelmscott above the Fafnir Hedge by Edward Godwin (c.1943) © Society of Antiquaries, Kelmscott Manor Collection

Stephani and Edward Godwin lived at Kelmscott Manor from 1940 until 1948. The house, willed by May Morris to Oxford University, was much as she had left it, and the legacy of her father's taste and handiwork was everywhere to be seen. The Godwins were artists and writers, nostalgic for the Pre-Raphaelites and willing to take on the Manor with all its inconveniences and act as its caretakers. Surrounded by Morris's belongings, reading his poetry, their life assumed a ritual quality, banishing the War and the ugliness of the modern world.

For Stephani, still in her twenties and often left alone while Edward was away teaching, there was nothing spooky about the ancient house. "It was like a fairy world … the most enchanted place on earth." The Manor became alive, somehow fused with Morris, so that through "the dusty scent of tapestry and pale, worn elm-wood floors, newelled banisters, gris de Flandres tankards, icy well water" she sensed "William Morris himself … the garden-close of his ever-beautiful mind." Edward was no less susceptible. "We all but wept, thinking of him in this very room -- here in spirit still. Oh, how we love him!"

William Morris by Stephani Godwin, from Edward and Stephani Godwin, *Warrior Bard: The Life of William Morris* (London: Harrap, 1947)

In a rare moment of exaltation, Stephani could write: "How utterly perfect is our life here -- if only all life were like this, and for all -- thus must Morris have felt." Edward caught this mood in *Warrior Bard*, their biography of Morris, imagining the poet dying in sooty London: "Why, soon he would be at Kelmscott, seeing, feeling, knowing, living it all, as he had never done before in human body."

But all was not easy for these guardians of the Earthly Paradise. Penury, relations, housework and child-bearing all interfered with the idyll. In a time of deep distress, Stephani turned to Morris in prayer: "William Morris! Let us not speak our need, you share this room with us, and know our thoughts. If you are here beside me, know that you are loved and thanked by those to whom your gift is beyond price."

After the war, Kelmscott's isolation was broken by workmen, pilgrims, and a short-lived boys' school. The couple exhibited their paintings and published their biography and Stephanie's poems. American "New Thought" and its gospel of positive thinking became their guide. The presence of Kelmscott's *genius loci* faded, as ghosts often do. Only on the eve of their departure for America, Stephani wrote a long farewell to Kelmscott, as sincere as for any human being, and asked forgiveness for not having been equal to the gift received. "Forgive me for leaving you to those who cannot understand your secrets."

Quotations are from Stephani's and Edward's journals, partly published in *The Starlight Years: Love & War at Kelmscott Manor 1940-1948*, edited by Joscelyn Godwin (Stanbridge: Dovecote Press, 2015).

THE GHOSTS OF WAR: INTANGIBLE HERITAGE IN THE CHANNEL ISLANDS

By Gilly Carr FSA

Restored M19 bunker near La Corbière, Jersey © Gilly Carr

Many people in the Channel Islands believe – or rather, 'accept' – that the ghosts of German soldiers, left behind after the Nazi occupation of 1940 to 1945, haunt the islands. Indeed, ghosts of the occupation have been around for decades. *Folklore of Guernsey*, written by Marie de Garis in the 1970s, discusses them, and I have a childhood memory of my Guernsey mother driving me along Les Vauxbelets after dark, remarking casually that a ghost of a German soldier on a motorbike haunted the crossroads up ahead.

Certain bunkers, especially those with labyrinthine tunnels such as the German Underground Hospital in Guernsey, have a particular reputation for being haunted. It's hardly surprising, as these structures are dark, damp, have a certain smell and sound. Each of your five senses tells you that these places are uncanny; you hardly need a sixth to confirm it. As you walk along the tunnel, the footprints of hobnailed jackboots still visible in the concrete, the echo sounds like soldiers marching behind you. As you increase your speed, so do the soldiers.

Some bunkers are heritage sites and have been restored to how they looked when operational. These are time capsules, and have been fitted with bunk beds, plastic food on the tables, German uniforms in the lockers, and swastikas on the walls, making it feel like the soldiers have stepped out for just a moment. Others are empty shells, left to rust and crumble from concrete cancer. Ghosts have been seen, their cigarettes smelled, their radios and telephones heard, and their presence felt at bunkers of all kinds, whether restored, abandoned or reused. Many people have heard of 'Fritz', who is to be found at the Mirus Batterie in Guernsey, now used for wargaming. Fritz makes the lights flicker when he's around and wears a long black leather coat.

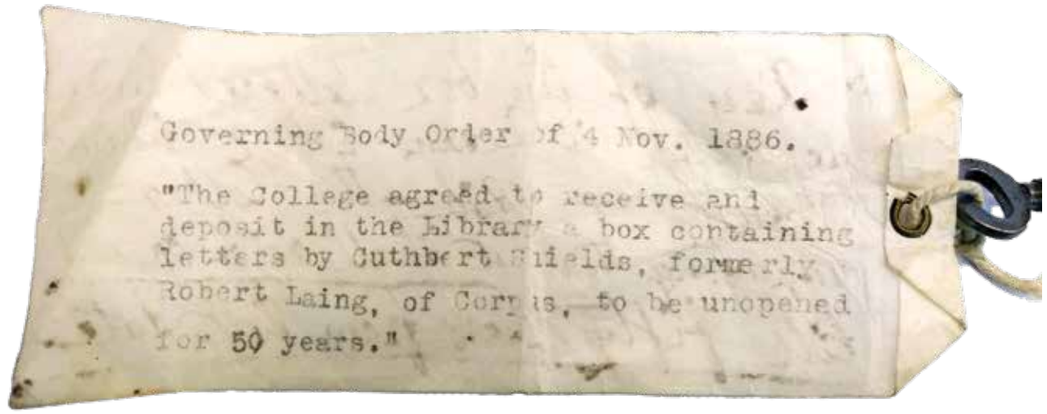
The second post-war generation restored bunkers as a way of learning about the occupation in the face of their parents' silence. This is where and how they encountered the ghosts and I have heard stories of steel doors slamming on calm days and pillars of mist appearing while painting bunker walls. The third generation, however, deliberately go ghost hunting in bunkers (with some success) as a way of vicariously experiencing a period of Channel Islands' history that they missed. Given that the occupation is a defining part of modern identity in the Channel Islands, such ghostly experiences are actively sought.

The heritage of the occupation is still highly valued in the Channel Islands today, and includes features such as the bunkers, the militaria left behind, the artefacts in museums, the memorials, and the Liberation Day ceremonies. All heritage has its intangible aspects: the ghosts, just like the memories of that period, linger still.

The German Underground Hospital, Guernsey © Gilly Carr

CUTHBERT SHIELDS, GHOST OF THE QUEEN'S COLLEGE LIBRARY, OXFORD

By Felix Taylor FSA



The label of the infamous key, detailing its instructions of use

Legend has it that on his death in 1908, Cuthbert Shields, Fellow of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, left a small tin box to The Queen's College Library. His will instructed that it was not to be opened for fifty years. A succession of Fellow Librarians waited for the embargo to end, and in 1958 the box was taken to the 17th-century Upper Library where finally it was unlocked.

In attendance were the Fellow Librarian, the bursar, and a professor, who discovered several bundles of confessional letters written in spidery black handwriting. They left, taking the box with them. As they descended the stairs, the professor asked who the fourth member of the party had been – an old man with white hair whom he had seen accompany them. Neither the Fellow Librarian nor the bursar had seen anyone.

Shields was born Robert Laing in March 1840 in North Shields, Northumberland (now Tyne and Wear). Laing graduated from Wadham College, and was elected a Fellow of Corpus Christi in 1868. Over the following decade, Laing helped to achieve reforms of the teaching of history at Oxford and lectured at nine colleges, Queen's included. He loved theatre, and belonged to the Corpus Christi's dramatic society, the Owlets Club, where his recitals of Keats and Edgar Allan Poe were famous. In 1878 he fled the university following a breakdown, possibly from the strain of his unrequited love for a grown Alice Liddell and his campaigning for Liberal candidates in the parliamentary byelection. He maintained in his diaries that he was 'driven out of Oxford'.

After a spell in a Fulham asylum, Laing left England 'a broken man, yet a bold man'. He then changed his name, taking 'Cuthbert' after the saint of the early Northumbrian church, and 'Shields' after his birthplace North Shields. He journeyed to Rome, then further east where he may have spent time with the Druze and was apparently 'worshipped as a god'. The final episode in this extraordinary sabbatical occurred in Jerusalem in 1885 where he made some prognostications to a group of German painters who later asserted their accuracy according to various psychical journals.

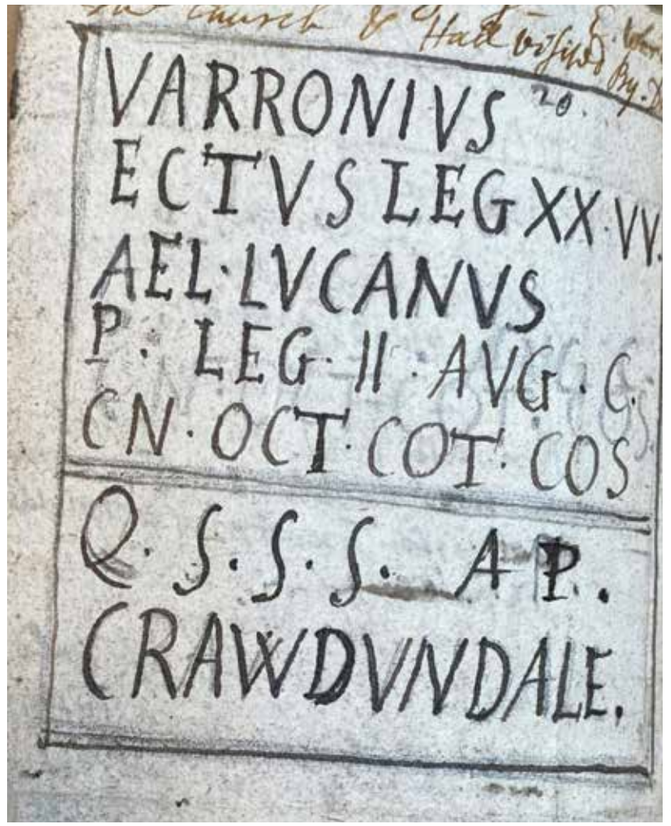
Shields returned to Corpus Christi in 1886, where his interest in mysticism and the occult intensified: 'It was his habit to give excellent dinners to a select party of friends', recalled an obituarist, 'and afterwards to take the floor and talk of black magic until his hearers' flesh crept'.

Shields also developed a fondness for Queen's and its Provost, J. R. Magrath. Perhaps the College Library had been a sanctuary during his persecution? Following his death from an 'internal complaint' in 1908, Shields was buried in Holywell Cemetery and lives on as a prominent piece of College folklore: the ghost of the Upper Library.

Contrary to the 'official' legend given above, however, records show that Shields left the box to Queen's in 1886 on his return to Oxford and that it contained letters to Edwin Palmer, archdeacon of Oxford. It therefore would have been opened in 1936; but by whom, and what actually happened next, remain mysteries…

'RAISING DOBBIES': A TALE OF TWO NORTHERN ANTIQUARIES

By Jane Platt FRHistS & Verity Platt FSA



Thomas Machell's sketch of one of Bainbrigg's inscriptions. See William Camden, who translated it as, 'Varronius Captaine of the XX legion Valens Victrix ---- Aellus Lucanus Captaine of the second legion Augusta, encamped (or did some such thing)'. See Britannia ed. Sutton, *Westmoreland* 7, Revised 2023 © Cumbria Past/CWAAS

Creatures known as 'dobbies' frequently feature in the folklore of rural Westmorland. These child-sized, magical beings, akin to bogarts, were so fond of stealing that locals appeased them by leaving bread and milk outside the caves and holes which were their underground haunts.

A lively record of dobby behaviour appears in the work of Thomas Machell (bap.1647 – d.1698), whose unfinished *Collections towards a History and Topography of Westmorland* were fully published for the first time in 2025. The Oxford-educated son of Westmerian gentry who became rector of Kirkby Thore, Machell was inspired by contemporaneous Oxford scholars, including Robert Plot and Anthony Wood. While his interest in local tales, games, traditions, dialect, folklore and humour led him to record many stories told him by local 'informants', these vernacular practices exist in interesting tension with his antiquarian eye for ancient artifacts.

Such is the case in his account of Appleby, where the schoolmaster Reginald Bainbrigg (1544/5-1612/13) was an important antiquarian predecessor whose detailed reports of Roman remains and inscriptions – some of which he placed on his school wall – were the earliest recorded in the far north of England:

Here is a house which they call the Garden House, 3 stories high, all the front of which is adorned with Romain Inscriptions, the collections, I suppose, of Reg[inald] Bainbridge, whom I take to have built it, and putt the north end thereof in the orchard [where there is] a little hole or setting of earth, occasioned, they say, by 3 boyes who came to digg her[e] for moneys which he had hid: one holding the lanthorn & other 2 digging. But just when they came to descover the coffer, there rose up 3 little creatures like ratts, and with a puf of wind issuing out of the hole they were all 3 blowne several ways a 4r of a mile distant from the place. Viz. One to The Gards, another to St Nic[holas] Backs and another to [the] Vicar[age].

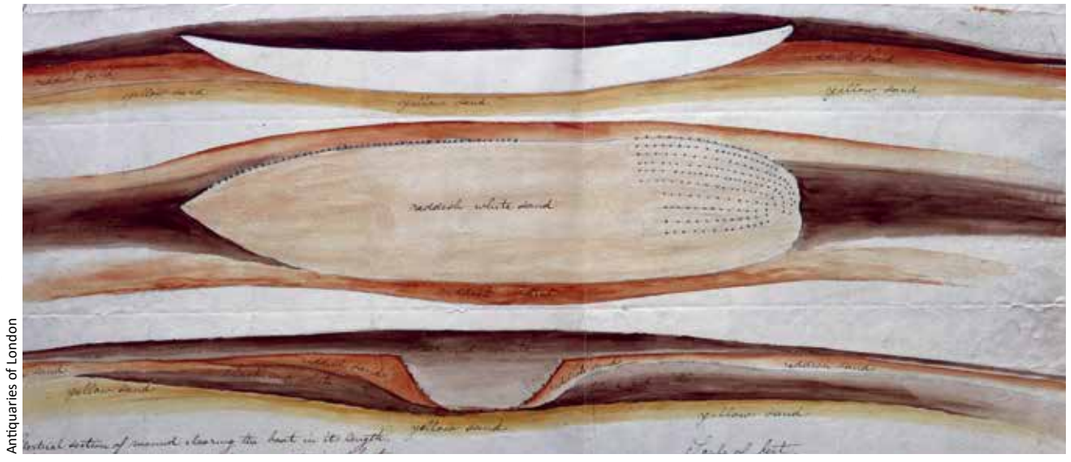
I doe not vouch for the truth of this storie, which I thinke to be in some measure ground upon the opp[inion] some have to this day of his being a conjurer & raiseing dobbies which danced about the schoole. [Bainbrigg] hid his money in the wall of the schoole and the house which he had built for the public good. He is said allsoe to have buried a purse of silver under the foundations [of the] said schoole, which I take in the same sense.

On documenting the Appleby school inscriptions (fig. 1) Machell reported that some locals believed that Bainbrigg had 'left a Spell or Inchantment upon Them; That no man could read them unless he lay 3 days & 3 nights upon his Back'. Nevertheless, he also described Bainbrigg as 'a learned Ingenious person', who was 'look'd upon as a Conjurer but was in Reality a very good man.' In this way, he charted the complex layering of local histories and traditions, whereby knowledge of Roman antiquities was both the object of suspicion and the source of significant cultural, and even supernatural, authority.

Further reading: Thomas Machell's *Collections towards a History and Topography of Westmorland* (ed. Jane Platt, Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society, 2025).

SHIPS, CROWNS & KINGS: AN EAST SUFFOLK GHOST STORY IN TWO PARTS

By William Filmer-Sankey FSA



'A rather well defined mound commanding the level fields of rough grass'. The plan and section of the Snape boat burial clearly fit M.R. James's description of the barrow guarded by William Ager © The Society of Antiquaries of London

Part 1: A Warning to the Curious

M.R. James's *A Warning to the Curious* is a cautionary tale for archaeologists, relating the ghastly death of a young antiquary, Paxton. Despite warnings, he digs up an Anglo-Saxon crown, the last of three buried to protect East Anglia from invasion. In doing so, he incurs the wrath of its last hereditary and recently deceased guardian, William Ager.

Aldeburgh, where *A Warning to the Curious* is set, lies in the Sandlings, a part of East Suffolk now believed to be the heartland of the early East Anglian Kingdom of the Wuffingas. James knew it well, but there were other, antiquarian, reasons to place the story here. In c.1690 an 'Anglo-Saxon crown' was reportedly dug up at nearby Rendlesham, a known vicus regius of the Wuffingas. Secondly, as FSA, James would have been familiar with the sensational excavation, in 1862, of an Anglo-Saxon ship burial mound at nearby Snape, complete with a gold ring mounted with an antique intaglio. The mound in which Paxton found the crown is clearly modelled on the Snape barrows. The 'antique intaglios and cameos' set into Paxton's crown recall the Snape ring.

The moral of *A Warning to the Curious* is that Paxton really should have known better. William Ager (deceased) is a constant warning half-presence ('There was always somebody there') and his cry at the moment of discovery ('Oh, I can't tell you how desolate it was. And horribly threatening too') leaves no doubt that revenge is inevitable.

Part 2: An Encouragement to the Curious

Some 15 years later, and 12 miles from Aldeburgh, Mrs Pretty was contemplating the excavation of a group of mounds on her Sutton Hoo estate. Perhaps with William Ager's warning in mind, she consulted her Spiritualist mentor as to whether to press ahead. She had seen shadowy figures around the mounds and – according to one account – 'a large white horse with a helmeted rider [..] the burial of a man and the flashing of gold objects'. The mentor's response was positive; indeed, when Basil Brown – employed by Mrs Pretty to open the first mounds – attended a Spiritualist meeting in the adjacent town of Woodbridge, the medium urged him to 'assert yourself and go on digging'.

The result, of course, was the 1939 excavation of the Sutton Hoo royal ship burial, which totally transformed our understanding of Anglo-Saxon East Anglia.

When asked if he believed in ghosts, M.R. James replied: 'I am prepared to consider the evidence and accept it if it satisfies me'. Readers, particularly those contemplating the excavation of Anglo-Saxon cemeteries in the Sandlings (as I have done), should decide for themselves, fully aware of the potential consequences.

As Paxton lamented, "I am not forgiven. I have got to pay for that miserable sacrilege still'.

Further reading:

Murphy, P. and Porcheddu, F. 2015, 'The Lay of a last Survivor: "Beowulf", Great War Memorials, and M.R. James's 'A Warning to the Curious'', *The Review of English Studies (NS)*, 66, no. 274, 205-222.
Filmer-Sankey, W. and Pestell, T. 2001 *Snape Anglo-Saxon Cemetery: Excavations and Surveys* 1824-1992, EAA 95.
Phillips, C.W. 1987 *My Life in Archaeology*, esp. 72-73.

LEAP OF FAITH

By Tim Purbrick FSA

'The Thing was about the size of a sheep, thin, gaunt and shadowy in parts. Its face was human, or to be more accurate, inhuman in its vileness, with large holes of blackness for eyes, loose slobbery lips, and a thick saliva-dripping jaw, sloping back suddenly into its neck. Nose it had none, only spreading, cancerous cavities, the whole face being one uniform tint of grey.'

The 'Thing', or 'It', or 'The Elemental', is a foul ghoul that smells like a rotting corpse and has a semi-transparent lower half. It is only one of the unhappy denizens of what is reputed to be the most haunted castle in Ireland.

Sitting almost at the centre of the country, Leap (pronounced Lep) Castle in County Offaly was lived in by my ancestors, the Darbys, for several hundred years from around 1659 until it was looted and burnt down during the Irish Civil War in 1922.

The Castle is thought to have started its life in the 13th century, within the kingdom of the O'Carrolls. At some stage an 'oubliette' was built – literally a 'place of forgetting'. This was a disguised dungeon with only one trapdoor entrance. When the Leap oubliette was emptied in the 1800s, three cartloads of human bones - perhaps as many as 150 bodies - were removed from this hell-hole along with evidence of long metal spikes on which victims had apparently been impaled. Grim stories abound. Victims of the O'Carrolls were, it is rumoured, bricked alive into the Castle walls and left to die. A priest, murdered by his own brother at prayer, gave rise to the legend of the haunted Bloody Chapel. Other tales tell of mass poisonings and nocturnal massacres, rape, infanticide and suicide – most occurring in the context of endemic clan violence.

Not surprisingly, these grisly legends have regularly inspired supernatural echoes. Aside from 'The Elemental', there is the luminescent, cold 'Red Lady' who walks the corridors with a raised knife, 'Charlotte', who can be seen falling to her death from the battlements, and her sister 'Emily', who drags her deformed leg as she hurries after her elder sibling. There is also the 'Governess' who can be seen in the hall, along with a man who sits by the hall fire; chanting can be heard from the Priest's House where a man pushes a barrel up the stairs; a monk who passes through windows and another non-being who lies heavily on beds and snores. In one bedroom a cold hand might reach out to briefly hold yours before its owner's body falls on the end of the bed.

Jonathan Darby was the last of the family to own and live at Leap. His wife, Mildred (1867 – 1932), was a writer of Gothic fiction, held seances at the Castle and contributed to the *Occult Review*. It is largely thanks to her that the memory of the Castle's sad inhabitants have survived so vividly. How much store one sets in her experiences is up to the reader to determine, but in the words of Sacheverell Sitwell: 'Leap has to be seen to be believed'.

Further reading:

Darby, Mildred, *Leap Castle, The House of Horrors*, (Windwhistle Press, 2019)
Freeman-Attwood, Marigold, *Leap Castle, A Place and its People*, (Michael Russell (Publishing) Ltd, Norwich, 2001)
Leap Castle website, leapcastle.net/?page_id=29

Mike Searle / *Castles of Leinster: Leap, Offaly* / CC BY-SA 2.0

GHOSTS IN WEST AFRICA

By Kevin C. MacDonald FSA

Caption The interior of a 19th-century shrine in Nerekoro (near Segou), taken by the author. The figures in it are of this world. Probably. © Kevin C. McDonald, 2006

Notions of ghosts in West Africa are quite complex and differ from European traditions. The aesthetics of 'what is frightening' may also vary: for example woven textiles – winding sheets and costumes (not ghostly bedsheets) – can have a profound dread in the Mande world. For over 35 years I have worked in West Africa, mainly in Mali, and after survey and excavations have often found myself discussing the dead by moonlight.

Lost souls are generally said to inhabit areas away from human habitations in thickets or lonely roads. Such spirits are often spoken of euphemistically, using expressions such as "I have seen the thing that lives in darkness" or "something met me"…

Regarding material culture, there are notions I have encountered amongst the Senufo, whereby the dead may re-enter the world through objects formerly associated with them – whether a drinking goblet, a pot or even their hearth stones. For this reason, personal objects owned by the newly departed can be smashed or disposed of in designated areas. These places - cemeteries for the things of the dead - are called navatyegi by the Senufo.

The colours associated with death and ghosts are variable across West Africa. In some more southerly areas, the colour red is favoured. It is said that phantoms are recognisable by their reddened mouth or their fiery breath. Conversely, for the Bamana and Malinke of Mali ghosts are reputed to always appear in white which is viewed as the colour of death.

Ghosts are considered dangerous for two primary reasons. First malevolent ghosts can cause sickness, second the sight of a ghost can provoke terror that can lead to madness or death. The prevention of vengeance by angry ghosts is part of the rationale for correct rituals, shrines, and protective objects.

Enough of general principles. Let us proceed to a few stories I have collected over the years in Mali.

A Story from my colleague Dr Seydou al hajj Camara

"In my village, on a street lined to both sides with compound walls there was a small pond into which wastewater from baths and laundry were drained. Animals sometimes drank there. One night walking home, the road was strange – the buildings had changed somehow – the noises were different and the pond was not there! In its place was a long white winding sheet, a shroud some ten metres long. It hovered about so far

Sacred Pond, Tozougou © Kevin C. McDonald, 2006

above the ground [he indicated a height of about 30cms]. No one held it at either end and yet it was perfectly taught. Then it began to move suddenly – back and forth – then back and forth again along its long axis as if it were being pulled first from one side and then another. I became very frightened. Where was I? But my father always told me 'you must never show fear at night or evil will befall you' so I walked past this funeral cloth with my eyes averted. The road began to change again and the normal sounds of the village resumed and so I reached home safely."

Recorded around Segou

"At night, in the countryside, one can often see lights in the distance. Small, bright balls of light. You pursue them but they retreat before you and then nothing is there. Sometimes along roads or paths they can even follow you as you flee from them."

"In Mali we do not have haunted houses but we do have haunted places. Sometimes it's a pond, sometimes a field, sometimes forests or rock formations – there you can find cold spots that show you spirits are present. If you have felt this you know – it makes your hair stand on end. You can feel inside and out of these cold spots – they are very concentrated, sometimes also the spirits that make these changes in temperature can throw rocks at you to let you know they are there."

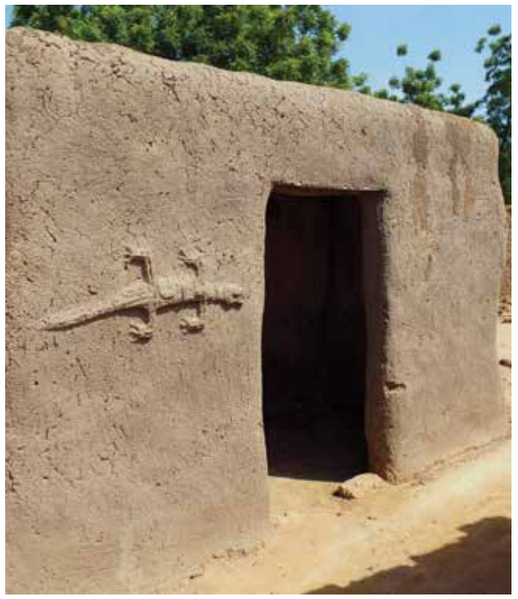
Story from a Peace Corps Volunteer

When I was doing survey in the south of Mali in the vicinity of Sibi, I met a US Peace Corps volunteer from Alabama. He spoke good Malinke and went around to organise well-digging in isolated villages to combat the river blindness. The villages were deep amongst the inselbergs of the Manding Mountains.

One day he set out to visit a small hamlet on his motorbike. On arriving at this hamlet of a dozen dwellings, he found it deserted. He wandered around calling out, and found no one. Then he saw, walking towards him, an old man dressed in old-fashioned white garments who led him to a vestibule.

He waited there alone for about an hour when he heard approaching footsteps and looked out to see the villagers returning from their fields. They greeted him and the elders came to sit and hear what he had to say. After discussing the well-digging programme, he received a positive response and set a date for the return of the well-digging team. As he began to take his leave of the dugu-tigi (village head), he asked if he might thank the elder who he had met when he entered the village. The dugu-tigi asked that he describe him. When he had done so, the dugou-tigi said "Ah. He is one of our ancestors. He is often seen around the village. Sometimes we see him in the distance, and sometimes strangers meet him as well".

Men in white cotton garments, for whatever reason, seem to figure in a number of tales that I have collected over the years. I have had people telling me about encounters with spirits in sacred groves who are dressed in this manner. I also had a doctoral student in ethnoarchaeology who worked in the south of Mali who told me that she frequently saw an old man in white in the view finder of her camera when taking photos of shrines around the village, but that he never appeared in any of the photographic negative or prints from her photo shoots.



Deninkoura Vestibule © Kevin C. McDonald, 2006

‘REVENANTS AND REMAINS: USING THE DEAD TO BRING MEDIEVAL MONASTERIES ALIVE’

By Michael Carter FSA

Byland Abbey by Antony McCallum (WyrdLight.com) is licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0

In the autumn of 2022, English Heritage and Manchester Metropolitan University collaborated to plan and deliver ‘Experiencing Britain’s Ruins: Revenants and Remains at Five Northern Religious Houses’. An AHRC-funded Follow-On project involving Dr Dominique Bouchard and Dr Michael Carter FSA (English Heritage) and Professor Dale Townshend FSA (MMU), its aim was to make monastic ruins and the lives of the monks and nuns who lived and prayed there accessible for contemporary audiences.

This was achieved by focusing on the historical connections between monasticism and the supernatural over 1500 years, from the time of the Desert Fathers and Mothers to the turn of the 20th century. The source material consisted of the demonic torments endured by hermits, monastic stories of tormented souls returning from Purgatory to secure the intercession of the living, tales of rotting revenants rising from their graves and the spiritual and physical harm they caused, sacrilege narratives of the Reformation-era, Gothic fiction of the 18th and early 19th centuries, and the antiquarian ghost stories of M.R. James and his contemporaries.

The project included five monastic sites in northern England — Byland, Furness, Lanercost, Rievaulx and Roche — all of which provided original source material, including stories of demonic visitations, ‘spirits of the air’, purgatorial torments, the restless dead, divine punishments, Gothic imaginings and modern fabulations. The Byland ghost stories, published by M.R. James exactly a century early, provided especially fruitful evidence.

In October and November 2022, free weekend events were held at these monasteries. They featured site tours (conducted by Carter and Townshend), creative writing workshops (led by acclaimed author Rosie Garland FRSL), youth-engagement activities (under the leader of Bouchard and involving sixth-form photography students from Barrow and Newcastle) and live performances of the ghost stories of M. R. James (Robert Lloyd-Perry, Nunkie Theatre). Further tours were held in the autumn of 2025 at Battle and Castle Acre.

Approximately 600 people attended these events. The youth engagement element led to the production of an online book and an exhibition at Furness Abbey, and feedback was universally positive. The project serves as a case study in academic impact beyond the academy, and of how to attract contemporary audiences to historic sites via the supernatural without sacrificing scholarly integrity.

Revenants and Remains received widespread media coverage with articles in the Independent, Financial Times and Guardian; Carter and Townshend were guests on BBC Radio 4 Sunday Worship on All Souls’ Day, 2024 from Byland Abbey; Carter was a guest on BBC Radio 4 *You’re Dead to Me* podcast in 2023, History Hit’s Gone Medieval podcast in December 2025 and in October 2025 wrote a comment for The Guardian about the Christian significance of Halloween. Carter and Townshend are currently completing a contracted monograph for Cambridge University Press on medieval monasteries and their supernatural associations, from the medieval to the modern.

FELLOWS’ TALES - HAUNTED MEN: T.C. LETHBRIDGE FSA & FREDERICK BLIGH BOND

By Adrian James FSA, Honorary Reviews Editor

Christchurch Priory, *Monasticon Anglicanum,* 1718 © Society of Antiquaries of London

The contribution of M.R. James to our appreciation of fictional ghosts is well-known; what of antiquaries who have consorted with putatively real ones? Thomas Charles Lethbridge (FSA 1927-71) was an Anglo-Saxonist and something of a latecomer to ‘psychic archaeology’; his interest in the paranormal harks back to that 19th-century ‘occult revival’ which was already out of date when he entered the fray. Hence his book *Ghost and Divining Rod* (1963), with its recurrent grumbles about ‘Darwinism’ and the scepticism of scientists, has rather an antiquated air, though Lethbridge himself used pseudo-scientific terms to explain his encounters with ghosts and ghouls, which he mostly perceived as presentiments of the uncanny associated with certain natural features.

He maintained that a person exercised by ‘a strong emotion in his psycho-field’ will impress that feeling ‘in the electro-magnetic field’ of a stream, tree, field or the like. When the charge ‘leaks back’ to the observer he may see the original picture which had caused the emotion. ‘It is no more remarkable than television. In fact it is very much the same thing.’

Was Lethbridge a charlatan? He seems simply to have been an impressionable man who had convinced himself of the truth of his mystical physics. The ‘ghosts’ he sensed exacted no archaeological intervention.

Far different was the case of Frederick Bligh Bond, architect and excavator of Glastonbury Abbey, who was steeped in the occult. In his book, *The Rediscovery of Glastonbury: Frederick Bligh Bond Architect of the New Age*, Tim Hopkinson-Ball recounts a story that Bond was showing two ladies around Christchurch Priory in Dorset when the trio were surprised by the spectre of a monk. When questioned about its business, this ghost was little less forthcoming than that of Hamlet’s father. The spectre said that at the Dissolution he had concealed the church plate in the tomb of Christopher Stonehurst, and that he would find no rest until the plate was restored to the church.

Bond subsequently established that a Christopher Stonehouse had indeed been buried in the churchyard but that the location of his grave was unknown. When Bond returned to the Priory the ghost obligingly reappeared. Bond then asked it to identify the place of Christopher Stonehurst’s burial, whereupon he was led to a grave with a blank tombstone bearing no inscription.

The spectre informed Bond that he had reversed the slab when the plate was buried so that only he would know where the treasure lay. Then the ghost vanished and Bond at once went to the Rector to ask for the grave to be opened. But the Rector soon died and his successor, apprehensive of ridicule, let the matter drop.

It would be curious to know how T.C. Lethbridge might have accounted for such a conversational ghost within his theory of electro-magnetic forces.

TOPOGRAPHY OF THE VAMPIRE: ARCHITECTURE, CONSERVATION & THE 1970 HIGHGATE VAMPIRE PANIC

By Christopher Moore FSA

'Curious onlookers managed to scale the 10ft wall in search of an open tomb'.

So ran the Evening News front page on 14 March 1970, after television coverage had drawn large crowds to Highgate Cemetery the previous night in the hunt for a vampire. A great headline but the media storm and its legacy reveals more about modern society than they do the living dead.

Highgate Cemetery

Highgate Cemetery is in two parts, divided by Swain's Lane: the West Cemetery (opened 1839) lies on steeply sloping ground. It is characterised by narrow processional routes, vaulted passageways, and sudden spatial 'reveals' built into its original design. Gates, high boundary walls, and dense self-seeded planting, along with vast root bases, constrain sightlines, add to its labyrinthine and ethereal atmosphere. The Grade I Egyptian Avenue, with its tunnel-like approach, funnels visitors into the sunken concentric rings around the site of the Cedar of Lebanon (which pre-dated the cemetery but was felled in 2019 and replaced), producing alternations of compression and exposure that are both dramatic and visually uncanny. However, by the late 1960s, war damage, untamed vegetation, lack of maintenance, and persistent vandalism had rendered these thresholds widely permeable after dark.

By that date, Highgate had already been featured in many ghost stories (one featuring a ghostly chicken) and the Cemetery had attracted infamy when an amateur bomb maker attempted to blow up the Karl Marx monument. Amid this charged atmosphere, letters in early 1970 described 'a tall man in a hat' vanishing through walls, while local 'expert' David Farrant (1946-2019) claimed to have seen a 'grey figure' that Christmas Eve. A later ITV broadcast converted the local hysteria to a mild national panic: a 'football crowd' shook the gates and scaled the walls; tabloids showed would-be hunters entering by night. Opened vaults, scattered bones, and burnt coffins were recorded in local coverage and later court proceedings, which entailed costly repairs and intensified security. Unsurprisingly, the vampire was never caught, but many of the vandals were; and unlike the legendary phantom that created the frenzy, the would-be hunters left lasting damage to an array of ancient monuments.

In response to the scandal created by the 'vampire' panic, the Friends of Highgate Cemetery was formed in 1975, eventually acquiring the site's freehold and progressively reordering the grounds to enhance views, improve access and better protect the site. Restoration of the Egyptian Avenue and the Circle of Lebanon (1991–97), crowned by a Europa Nostra award (1998), stabilised the fabric and closed the broken thresholds that had enabled the vandalism and nocturnal rituals. Today, the West Cemetery's highlights are open to visitors and tour participants, turning illicit passageways into a managed route and rightly reframing Egyptomania as an art-historical heritage rather than an occult backdrop. Given the decades of work it took to repair the damaged monuments, it is unsurprising that to current custodians the 'Highgate Vampire' reads less as folklore than as a dossier of trespass and vandalism; yet the legend persists, abetted by mid-century horror culture and by the site's own unique terrain.

The Friends of Highgate Cemetery Trust still runs daily tours - just don't ask them about their vampire; the topic, like the graves that were damaged, is most likely off-limits.

THE MYSTERIOUS CASE OF THOMAS LORD LYTTELTON

By Kat Petersen, Archivist

Thomas Lord Lyttelton receives a ghostly visitor who warns him of his death, Prattinton Collection

For the past two years the Society has been digitising the vast collection of Peter Prattinton's 19th-century research material relating to Worcestershire, making it accessible through the Prattinton Cataloguing Project with the help of online volunteers.

While the majority of the archive comprises everything you would expect – extracts from manuscript records, views of towns and buildings, transcripts of tomb inscriptions – the unexpected is never far away.

In a volume of portraits appear four images of Thomas Lord Lyttelton (1744–1779) – including two where a ghostly spirit sits on his outstretched hand, and one dramatic scene with Lyttelton in bed and an apparition warning him "Prepare to meet thy God".

Lyttelton spent his short life with the sole aim of enjoying himself, including on a lively Grand Tour marked by gambling debts and duels, and a separate stint on the Continent which included prison time in Paris after an incident in a brothel. His time in England was likewise marked by drunken brawls – while also briefly being an MP for Bewdley – until he became a member of the House of Lords in 1773.

Shortly before his death at the age of 35 six years later, Lyttelton had allegedly told his friends that "a woman had appeared to him, first in the guise of a robin, and prophesied his death within three days", causing Walpole to reference the not infrequent appearance of women in Lyttelton's bedchamber. After his death a story also began to circulate that at the moment of his passing his figure appeared to a friend 30 miles away.

As John Cannon states in his entry for Lyttelton in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography – "Lyttelton would have been pleased to know that he died as he had lived, much talked about".

KELMSCOTT MANOR

A Year in Review at Kelmscott Manor

By Gavin Williams, Property & Estate Manager at Kelmscott

Cardboard model of Kelmscott Manor

Kelmscott Manor had another busy open season in 2025, our third since we reopened in 2022 after extensive conservation work to the buildings on the estate funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and others.

We welcomed over 23,500 visitors who experienced an exciting season full of activities and events. Highlights included our third annual Maker in Residence, Basket Maker, Sarah Le Breton. Throughout the season, Sarah ran several drop-in workshops and demonstrations which informed and entertained our visitors.

In June we launched our temporary exhibition *A literary man': William Morris and the book* which drew on the extraordinary collections of the Society of Antiquaries of London, following William Morris from boyhood to grave through the books he read, wrote, collected, designed, and concluded with a look at his legacy in the field of book arts.

Alongside the exhibition, award-winning poet Robert Seater and acclaimed visual artist Jessica Palmer collaborated to bring 'The House of Words' as part of our Summer of Creativity. This resulted in a new collection of poems written by Robert with illustrations by Jessica. Jessica also created a model of the Manor using recycled cardboard to represent the house of words. Visitors were asked "How would you describe Kelmscott Manor today?" and to explore what the place means to them. Approximately 500 visitors wrote responses which Robert read to create a poem.

Cotswold Archaeology returned to the Manor for the final year of the Community Archaeology Research Project and carried out further investigation of the car park field to the north of the village and the small piece of land next to the Memorial Cottages in the centre of the village. The latter area uncovered a medieval road surface and adjoining building with stonework footings which could have supported a timber framed building. Although there were not a lot of finds in the various dig sites, there is a better understanding of how the village has changed over time.

In August we welcomed back the Icelandic Horse Society of Great Britain, which was a real treat. September then saw our participation in Heritage Open Day, a national initiative which welcomed 564 visitors to enjoy the day seeing the house and taking part in various activities for free.

As soon as the season ended, activities began to clear the Tapestry Room ready for work to proceed on reinstalling the partition on the North side of the room. Two of the tapestries are being conserved ready to be put back in place as soon as they are ready while the third tapestry was taken down and packed away ready for the next stage.

We couldn't do all these activities and more without the support of our wonderful team of volunteers. Our Environmental Stewards have been hard at work planting over 1,300 whips and saplings around the estate and our Room Stewards volunteered a total of 5,222 hours in the house last season.

The Living People Who Haunt the Room: Learning & Engagement at Kelmscott

By Hannah Britton, Learning & Outreach Officer at Kelmscott

One of the most atmospheric rooms in Kelmscott Manor is the Tapestry Room, so named for the 17th-Century Flemish tapestries that have clothed its walls and enclosed its inhabitants for more than three centuries. William Morris loved this room, making it his primary workspace at the Manor, and writing evocatively of it on numerous occasions.

In one essay, he describes how the faded tapestries 'make the walls a very pleasant background for the living people who haunt the room and . . . give an air of romance which nothing else would quite do' (*Gossip about an Old House on the Upper Thames*, 1895).

*The Blinding of Samso*n in the Tapestry Room at Kelmscott Manor

In an issue dedicated to ghost stories, this seems an appropriate quotation to consider – although it is a haunting of a different kind.

The Tapestry Room and its historic textiles have been a focus for our Learning and Engagement programmes this year and will remain so for 2026, as the Society of Antiquaries continues its major conservation project 'Threads of the Past', which aims to protect the tapestries for future generations and enable them to be rehung in the configuration in which William Morris and his family knew them.

We are stepping into the past as we explore the stories of the tapestries – imagining the now ghostly hands of the dyers, spinners, and weavers who made them, and considering how they came to the Manor and how they inspired its inhabitants. But we are also bringing this past into the present moment as we ask the question: what value or meaning might they have for us today?

There isn't enough space in these pages to share all the facets of the project – you will have to come and haunt the Manor yourselves to find out more – but there is one element I would like to consider here. To haunt a place is to frequent it, to come back more than once. In a project that is about process and transformation, it was very important that our engagement programme would involve return visits.

In October, I began work with Age UK Oxfordshire, welcoming a group of 11 participants to the Manor, for a series of creative and skills-based workshops that are taking place monthly until April. The partnership aims to support individuals experiencing isolation, bereavement, or other challenges that pose barriers to engaging with others and with culture and heritage. They were the last group to see the Tapestry Room before architectural work began in November, and they will be among the first to see it transformed. Through the project, they are part of the new community of 'living people who haunt the room' now.

'Threads of the Past' is supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Aldama Trust, Blavatnik Family Foundation, The William Delafield Charitable Trust, L.G.Harris Trust, Mercers' Company, The Woolbeding Charity and Benefactors and Companions of Kelmscott Manor.

“CENTURIES OF HISTORY IN ONE SHOW” – AN EXCITING EXHIBITION BY THE NUMBERS

By Michelle Johansen FSA, Learning & Outreach Manager

In 2025, the Society of Antiquaries celebrated 800 years since the sealing of what is generally held to be the definitive version of Magna Carta. The celebrations took the form of a learning and outreach programme developed alongside a free public exhibition. Read on to discover what took place and the numbers that were produced by it.

1 new learning workshop for secondary school students was devised in response to the exhibition theme. *Magna Carta and the Making of History* was piloted with 50+ students from 5 schools during the autumn term.

1 toffee tin from the 1920s (its embossed lid featuring an image of King John and the rebel barons sealing the charter) was shown alongside other modern objects that brought the Magna Carta 1225 story into the present day, causing one visitor to comment “brilliant ideas, rock bands, everything, centuries of history in one show”.

2 postgraduate students and **3** school students completed placements on site, giving the next generation of cultural-heritage professionals meaningful work experience opportunities. An additional **20** sixth-form students ran an open day, called *Voice of the Trees*, as part of Kids in Museums takeover day in November. The day included a short dramatic performance, show-and-tells, and library tours – all with a Charter of the Forest twist.

2 makers-in-residence were recruited. Sohaila Baluch and Tamsin Loxley spent time in the library, gaining inspirations from historical sources to devise **8** creative workshops and **2** performance pieces that responded to the exhibition themes.

3 near-contemporary versions of the famous medieval legal charter were displayed as part of a new exhibition called *Magna Carta 1225*, which was open for **3** days a week from July to September 2025.

4 teenagers were trained in event production skills, supported by our partners at Westminster City Lions. The teenagers co-produced a medieval-themed Late Event enjoyed by **180** people, that included sword fighting in the courtyard and a popular pick-and-mix sweet stand.

5 new state-of-the-art display cases held additional objects (seals, statute books, a stunning illuminated psalm book) and text labels that told a wider story of freedom and power.

5 volunteers collaborated with staff on the contents for a limited-edition zine. More than **900** copies of this informal exhibition catalogue were distributed to visitors.

5 community groups enjoyed behind-the-scenes tours of the exhibition, including a group of **10** people from FaceWork Ukraine who translated our 1225 version of the charter into Ukrainian as part of the organisation’s commitment to providing workplace training for refugees.

8 drop-in workshops were facilitated by artist Sarah Newson, giving **100+** people of all ages and abilities the opportunity to write like a scribe or make a medieval seal during their visit.

40 volunteers made up an inter-generational team (aged 15 to 80+) who gave over **1,000** hours of their time to supporting the exhibition in visitor welcome roles.

44 spotlight talks on **7** Magna Carta themes were delivered by **6** volunteers and **1** staff member to provide an in-depth, intimate learning experience for visitors (“history – with passion” as one audience member put it).

50 students from **6** secondary schools translated the charter’s clauses from Latin to English as part of their classroom learning. This work was carried out in partnership with Classics for All and it generated attractive visuals that were included in the exhibition.

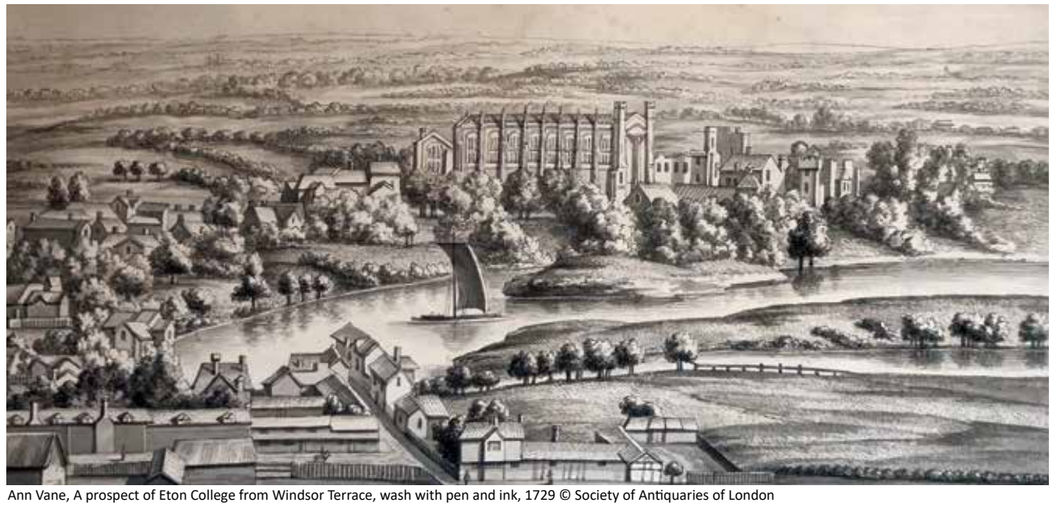
In total, **Magna Carta 1225** was viewed by more than **5,500** visitors from all parts of the world, with words such as “timely” “important” “inclusive” “relevant” and “informative” used to sum up their exhibition experience. This wide-ranging learning and outreach programme would not have been possible without a team of dedicated volunteers, a range of partner organisations, and the grants received from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Farrer & Co, the Worshipful Company of Art Scholars, the Magna Carta Trust, Edward Harvist Trust, and an anonymous donor.

Durham Johnston School enjoying a workshop

Made possible with Heritage Fund

DRAWN TO DISCOVERY: DIGITISING THE SOCIETY’S PRINTS & DRAWINGS

By Alexandra Ault FSA, Head of Collections & Libraries



Ann Vane, A prospect of Eton College from Windsor Terrace, wash with pen and ink, 1729 © Society of Antiquaries of London

The Society of Antiquaries of London holds one of Britain’s most significant collections of historic prints and drawings. Comprising over 55,000 items, it is an unparalleled visual record of people, buildings, monuments and material culture from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries.

Since 1707, Fellows developed this collection as a working, scholarly tool, used to record landscapes, architecture, and works of art. It includes works by George Vertue, Charles Barry, Augustus Pugin, Thomas Rowlandson, Ann Vane, Charles Stothard, Wenceslaus Hollar, and Thomas Girtin, alongside thousands of lesser-known but equally important draftswomen and men whose contribution to the canon deserves equal illumination. Many of the prints and drawings preserve the only surviving visual evidence of buildings, objects and landscapes now altered or lost.

90% of this remarkable resource can only be discovered through a card catalogue at Burlington House, making much of it difficult to access and research.

Thanks to a generous grant from the De Laszlo Foundation, we have begun work on the collection. Dr Chiara Betti joined us as Curatorial Research Assistant to deliver Phase 1, which comprises a collection survey, establishing cataloguing and digitisation workflows, condition assessments, numbering and storage protocols, and the foundations for a fully accessible online resource.

This pilot is the crucial first step towards unlocking the entire collection. We have already completed the cataloguing and digitisation of the prints after Charles Stothard’s drawings of the Bayeux Tapestry, which were hand-coloured in front of the tapestries themselves. There are so many more exciting and important works of art we are keen to make available over the coming months.

To realise Phase 2 and further open this extraordinary repository to Fellows, researchers and the wider public, we are seeking support from donors and funders. If you would like to hear more about and support this transformative project, please contact me at aault@sal.org.uk, or Dominic Wallis at dwallis@sal.org.uk or 020 7479 7092 to make a donation.

James Basire III after Charles Stothard, *A messenger is sent to Duke William*, hand-coloured etching on wove paper, 1819-23. LDSAL2025.41.5 © Society of Antiquaries of London

THE REPORT 2025

By Society President Martin Millett FSA

A detail of the entrance to Burlington House, photograph © Karolina Heller

The last 12 months have been busy and have we have seen a number of significant changes at the Society. Following our successful acquisition of a 999-year lease on Burlington House, we have been working on the future of the building on three fronts: fundraising, putting in place new systems for its management and planning for its refurbishment.

I am greatly encouraged by the response to our lease appeal. At the end of 2025 we raised £1,400,137, including the generous legacy of Dr Anthony Emery FSA, with 10% of the Fellowship contributing. This brings us to 29% of our target and represents a strong foundation for success. I am deeply grateful to all who have given and I warmly invite Fellows to support the appeal. Even modest gifts, collectively, can make a massive difference to the Society's future.

The complex issue of creating new systems for managing Burlington House in collaboration with the other Courtyard Societies has been progressing, building on the excellent working relations that we established during the long campaign to resolve the lease. These systems are now running, and we have appointed new managing agents to assist in this.

Meanwhile, a Past Matters Working Group has been formed within the Society to start planning for the refurbishment and development of our own apartments. It has begun work looking carefully at the existing spaces and reviewing past work on the building in order to develop a brief for architects. We will be holding a series of consultations with the Fellowship over the next few months to enable all to engage in thinking about making best use of our building for the future.

Alongside this and our regular programme of meetings and events, staff have also led major initiatives at Burlington House and at Kelmscott Manor (both supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund). The summer saw the ground floor and meeting room at Burlington House transformed for the exhibition *Magna Carta 1225* which welcomed more than five and half thousand visitors in addition to a series of educational events. As well as providing an opportunity for people to see important parts of our collections, the project also enabled us to explore how we can best use the building for such exhibitions in the future.

Meanwhile, at Kelmscott the Threads of the Past project which will restore the Tapestry Room to the setting known by William Morris, his family and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. The tapestries have been replaced temporarily by vinyl replicas, whilst the textiles themselves are away being fully conserved. Conservation building contractors have now started work to reinstate the partition wall which was removed in the 1960s. The tapestries will be returned in their original configuration this summer.

Finally, Fellows will be aware that 2025 saw senior staffing changes with the departure of Katy Drake and Dunia Garcia-Ontiveros and the arrival of their successors, Dr Sophia Collingwood (Finance Director) and Dr Alexandra Ault FSA (Head of Collections). Christmas also saw the retirement of Stephen Papworth, our Porter and Security Manager who has worked with us for 25 years.

Professor Martin Millett PSA

GRANTS 2025

By Marta Naumova, Governance & Grants Officer

Restoration of painted timber ceiling at St Thomas's Church in Salisbury, Wiltshire

William and Jane Morris Church Conservation Grants

Grants for 11 conservation projects were awarded in 2025, including:

- Painted timber ceiling at St Thomas's Church in Salisbury, Wiltshire.
- Wall painting at St Mary the Virgin Church in Syde, Gloucestershire.
- Chancel East Window at St Andrew's Church, Stratton.
- 7th-century Royal Coat of Arms at Church of St Nicholas & the Virgin, Stowey.

Research and Travel Grants

28 research and travel projects taking place in more than 10 countries were funded in 2025.

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For more than three centuries, the Society of Antiquaries of London has endured because each generation of Fellows has chosen not only to inherit its privileges, but to protect them. A gift in your Will is one of the most powerful ways to continue that stewardship.

A legacy is simple to arrange and creates lasting impact across the Society's work. Unrestricted gifts — entrusted to the discretion of Council — are especially valuable, enabling the Society to respond to need, seize opportunity and plan with confidence for the long term.

Such gifts help us to fulfil our core commitments

- Secure our home at Burlington House for the next 999 years
- Sustain, care for and widen access to our Library and accredited Museum collections
- Champion new research, lectures and publications
- Maintain Kelmscott Manor and deepen public engagement

By remembering the Society in your Will, you affirm the values that shape your Fellowship and help ensure that rigorous, independent antiquarian study continues to thrive.

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If you would like to discuss legacies, please contact Dominic Wallis, Head of Development, at dwallis@sal.org.uk or at 020 7479 7090.

You can also visit our website at sal.org.uk/support-us/legacy to learn more or scan the QR Code.

BURLINGTON HOUSE 999-YEARS: TOGETHER WE HAVE RAISED AN AMAZING £1.5 MILLION

THANK YOU TO EVERYONE WHO HAS CONTRIBUTED SO FAR

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If you have any questions about this fundraising campaign, please contact our head of Development, Dominic Wallis by email at dwallis@sal.org.uk.