

*From the Diary of Jane Pugin*

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**Thursday, 30<sup>th</sup> September, 1852**

It is only now, after my darling husband has been laid to proper Christian rest in the chantry chapel of his beloved St. Augustine's Church, that I can bear to put in writing the terrible events of Tuesday, the fourteenth of September.

It is already a matter of record that, early that fateful morning, I discovered Augustus, slumped across his desk. He was foaming at the mouth, the victim of massive convulsions; his heart having given out at the untimely age of forty.

In giving my statement to the police sergeant, I thought it better to be less than transparent, omitting many salient facts. I prayed that we, his family, would escape further inquiry by the police and, perhaps more significantly, any molestation by some sensation-seeking Grub Street hack. By this subterfuge his legacy might perhaps remain untarnished by conjecture and intrigue.

Nor could I ever confess to a priest. Irrespective of the Seal of the Confessional, they may feel compelled to have me committed to the Abbey at Minster, to be tended by nuns for the rest of my days. The heinous acts I have innocently allowed to go on under my own roof are an affront to God and have left me touched by madness.

Thus, the true nature of events has so-far gone unrecorded. But, for my own sanity, I must exorcise the memories of that evening. By committing them to this diary, my life-long confidant, I might seek some redemption for my own small part in this blasphemous affair.

With the benefit of hindsight, I can see that liberating poor Augustus from the Bedlam lunatic asylum in early September, and bringing him home to Ramsgate, played straight into John's hands.

John Hardman Powell: Augustus' supposed friend and protégé. Husband to my stepdaughter, Anne. Designer of the stained-glass window in Augustus' study. The very window behind which the storm raged that night, sheet-lightning flashing out over the raging sea, illuminating the brilliant reds and golds of the inlaid glass pattern.

John Hardman Powell: the man who, I am now sure, deliberately destroyed Augustus' sanity and set him upon the evil path that resulted in his ignoble death that night. I can only pray it has not resulted in his damnation.

It was the same stained-glass window in front of which, at his massive oak desk and at the behest of Powell, Augustus delved into arcane texts to uncover the mysteries that would form

the basis of their experiments with geometry. Research which was supposedly for the greater benefit of Christians everywhere.

Ever since Augustus had published his “True Practice of Pointed or Christian Architecture” in 1841, he had believed in the power of trigonometry to release positive, spiritual energy. Powell first encouraged him and then pressed him to spend more and more time on this endeavour. I believe it was this mono-mania that sent Augustus to Bedlam in the first place.

Now, with Augustus released from Bedlam, they were at it again. Surrounded by ancient tomes, Augustus working late into the night, with our despicable excuse for a son-in-law urging him on relentlessly. Lord, I hate Powell for taking my husband away from me.

It was early on the Tuesday morning, around two o'clock, when, from my bed-chamber, I heard the cacophony emanating from Augustus' study. The servants had been dismissed and had either gone home or were in their own quarters, at the back of the house. In any event, they heard nothing over the howling storm, roaring in from the English Channel. I rushed downstairs in nought but my night-things to find Augustus comatose, splayed across his desk, an ancient manuscript clasped in his clenched fist. A single guttering gas-lamp cast dark shadows across his broken body.

Powell cowered, blubbing, behind a chair, one arm shielding his tear-covered face as he stared terrified at the left-top corner of the room. In his other hand, he brandished a green soapstone ornament, shaped like a star, as though it could shield him from all that he feared.

Across the room, picked out against my darling husband's gloriously patterned wallpaper, suspended by one hooked claw forced into the plasterwork, was a creature of such hideousness I nearly lost my mind from simply seeing it. The demon appeared to be hauling its insect-like body out of the mirror; its foul black visage snarling through sickle-like fangs that protruded six inches from its maw. The stench emanating from the beast's gaping orifice was enough to knock anyone back a full six foot. Yet, summoning all my strength, I prayed to a God I believed in more fervently than at any other point in my life, and barely managed to resist its fetid odour and petrifying gaze.

And yet, it hung there, seemingly pinned in place by the talisman that Powell wildly wielded. Its torso was half-encapsulated by the mirror - whose glass buckled and bowed like waves on the sea, yet did not shatter. The reflection of the room in the mirror was grossly dis-

torted. It reminded me of a disagreeable attraction we had uncomfortably laughed at in the Margate Tivoli Gardens, which made unnatural shapes out of our bodies, mocking God's handiwork. I had wanted to smash the fairground-glass there and then.

Inspired, I grabbed the green star from Powell, who meekly resisted before I tore it away. Relieved of his only defence and comforter, fear overwhelmed him and he scrambled behind me and bolted out of the door, trailing the stench of his own soil-filled trousers.

'Christ the Lord is risen today, hallelujah!' I sung out at the top of my voice. I turned and advanced on the foul fiend which was now desperately trying to claw its way out of the frame. Its burning red eyes were entirely focused on the star, as it growled and spat gobbets of sulphurous phlegm in rage and frustration.

Behind me, I caught a flicker of movement 'Mummy, I'm scared.' Peter, our young son, had somehow managed to escape his nursery and was clinging to the door frame for support.

Righteous maternal anger surged through me and I hurled the slick soap-stone at the nightmare, striking the quicksilver-sea surrounding the hellish creature. As the carving was swallowed by the undulating surface; the glass instantly solidified, then crazed and shattered as it froze in most unnatural forms, which seemed to stretch across planes from this mundane world into the Abyss, yet remained encapsulated by the frame.

Instantaneously bisected, the half of the beast in this realm flailed in agony and fell wetly to the floor; then dissolved into a pool of viscous slurry in front of my eyes before slowly bubbling and boiling away into a noxious cloud of vapour.

On the wall, the remnants of the mirror seemed perfectly normal: silver-backed glass teeth protruded out of the gilded border and across the broken wooden backing; smashed jags of mirror lay on the rug below.

Stunned, I collapsed to the floor sobbing. Little Peter launched himself at me from the hallway, embracing me like he would never let go. His father lay dead on the desk.

Powell was nowhere to be seen and has not surfaced to this day. I hope, for my step-daughter's sake, that is the way it stays. I shall not be responsible for my actions if I ever see him again.

When I had sufficiently recovered, I took Peter back upstairs to his room and tucked him in, all the while reassuring him that it was simply a nightmare, nothing more. I wish I too could be so easily comforted. Then I went back down to the study to set things straight before the servants awoke.

On shelves and in the desk drawers I found the esoteric readings and occult paraphernalia that had guided Augustus on this terrible misadventure. I burned them all, vowing that no one need ever know of the preternatural origin of that night's tragedy.

Now, before I go to my bed each night, I pray that I have done enough to keep the horrors in the mirror away, but I shall always know that they lurk there, waiting. Sleep evades me, for they are no longer the things of nightmares, but grown real and solid; waiting their chance to emerge once again.