

# The Haunted House at Notting Hill Gate

By Jessie Adelaide Middleton

Mrs. Schwabe, of 18, Palace Gardens Terrace, has kindly given me the following story, for the truth of which she is quite ready to vouch. The incidents related in it happened to intimate friends of hers, and I have seen the house in question, which is not far from Kensington Palace. But Mrs. Schwabe has asked me not to make the actual address public. I will tell the story as nearly as possible in her own words, as she gave it to me one afternoon lately.

A young married couple, whom I will call Mr. and Mrs. Henry, made their first home after marriage in London, in a large house close to Kensington Gardens. They were quite young people, aged about twenty-four and twenty-seven, not in the least neurotic or even imaginative and not at all likely to “see things.”

The house they took was situated in a fashionable terrace, one of many others built exactly after the same pattern, with nothing to distinguish it from those on either side. They transacted the business of taking it through a well-known agent, after it had been standing empty for eighteen months or two years.

The first unusual thing that happened occurred the very day they moved in, and while the furniture was being deposited in the various rooms.

It was about twelve o'clock, mid-day, and the workmen had gone away to their dinner. Mrs. Henry was thoroughly tired out with the moving, and sat down on a box in the hall to rest. While she was sitting there, an old lady came quietly out of a small study behind the dining-room and went slowly upstairs. She was dressed in a bonnet and cloak and looked, as Mrs. Henry said afterwards, “quite solid and substantial.” One thing Mrs. Henry noticed as she passed quite close to her, and that was that she had a curious mark or scar across her forehead.

Mrs. Henry concluded that she was some one who had business there, during the upset of moving, and thought she might be looking for her to speak to her, so she ran upstairs after the old lady, but although she looked everywhere and went into all the rooms, she could find nobody, so went downstairs again, wondering if she had dreamt the whole thing.

Two or three weeks afterwards she entered the house with her latch-key, at about the same time, and there, standing in the hall, was the same old lady. Again she went upstairs and again Mrs. Henry followed her—this time more quickly—but when the first floor landing was reached, the figure had disappeared. Thinking it extremely odd, Mrs. Henry now concluded that the old lady was a supernatural visitor, but she said nothing, having the usual shrinking from admitting that she had seen a ghost.

Soon after, her three maids came to her in a body and gave notice. They were all country girls and were much-valued servants. Pressed for a reason for wishing to leave, the spokeswoman said: “We should like to tell you, madam, that when we are doing our work we see an old lady walking about the house, *and we don't like it.*”

“What harm can she do you?” said Mrs. Henry, who saw it was useless to deny the fact, and judged it better to face the situation.

The maids looked at one another and giggled nervously. Finally, after a little more talk, they consented to stay and said they would “put up with it.”

As time went on, Mr. and Mrs. Henry made friends with the next-door neighbours, who had lived in the same house for many years. One day Mrs. Henry said to the lady: “Did you know the people who lived in our house before we took it?”

“Oh, yes, very well indeed,” was the reply. “They were an old couple named Mr. and Mrs. Thompson. Mr. Thompson died first, and the poor old lady fretted for him most dreadfully.”

“Did they use the small room behind the dining-room very much?” asked Mrs. Henry.

“Oh, yes, constantly. It was old Mr. Thompson’s study and he always sat in it. After his death the old lady was always in that room; she used to sit there to look at his books and the things he had used, and to revive old memories.”

“What was she like in appearance?”

“She was a curious-looking old lady, with a large red scar across her forehead, the result, she told me, of a burn.”

Mrs. Henry then related her ghostly experience, and her next-door neighbour said that undoubtedly the old lady she had seen must have been Mrs. Thompson, for the description of her tallied in every particular with that of the old widow.

For several months after this conversation the ghost was not often seen again, and Mrs. Henry had other things to think of, for a little son was born to her and various other events happened. By this time she had become so accustomed to the presence of the old lady that she was no longer perturbed when she used to see her crossing the hall.

One day, when her little boy was about three years old and was able to trot about, he was having a game all by himself with a waste-paper basket, which was one of his favourite toys. Presently he kicked it into a corner, and his mother, who was watching him, told him to go and fetch it out. To her amazement, the child hid his face in her lap and refused, saying: “Lady there.” But after a few minutes he ran to fetch it, saying cheerfully:

“Lady gone now!”

He used often to watch the old lady—visible to his childish eyes alone—walking across the room, following her with his glance in the most uncanny manner. He could not have heard anything about the ghost, for he was much too young to have had the story told him.

The young couple have since then gone to live in the country, and the house is now occupied by other people.

Asked if she had any theory of her own regarding the apparition, as she is deeply interested in occult subjects, Mrs. Schwabe told me she thought it was a case of ordinary haunting.

“Evidently,” she said, “old Mrs. Thompson’s thoughts had, during her life, been very much in the small sitting-room, dear to her from association. She had been devoted to her husband, and we know that she used to go to his room, after his death, to look at his possessions and revive old memories. For a time she haunted the house, and then she evidently got on a higher plane and ceased to appear. Ghosts do not haunt a house indefinitely, if there has been no crime, and there was, as we have seen, none in the case I have just related.”