



GHOSTLY MONKS AND ST BENET'S ABBEY.

It is not uncommon for horror stories to have grown up around the sites of England's former monasteries. In the turbulent centuries after Henry VIII's reforms, monks were often thought to have had supernatural powers and were associated with mysticism and superstition in many people's minds.

Several tales about villainous monks at St Benet's Abbey have circulated over the years. Mostly they are linked to the political intrigues and double-crossing which goes on in powerful establishments.

This version of the story comes from a collection of local history documents compiled by William Henry Cooke, a resident of nearby Stalham. He handed them to Russell Colman, a member of the mustard manufacturing family, in 1911. The papers now rest with the Norfolk Record Office and we are grateful to them for allowing their reproduction here.

The Shrieking Monk of St Benet's, as retold by William Henry Cooke.

In common with all orthodox ruined abbeys and priories, the gloomy old gateway of St Benet's is haunted! The apparition is known as the Shrieking Monk and is of fearful significance. Woe betides those who hear the fearful screams, and fatal it is for those who have the ill luck to witness the final act of the dread tragedy which takes place at midnight in the ruined gateway.

The performance commences with a fearful commotion, above which frantic cries of agony are heard. During a lull, a stout beam is seen thrust out above the archway. Shortly after, at the end of it is seen the form of a monk, writhing in the agonies of death. Then the body swings, stiff and stark in the

darkness of the night. An appalling groan closes the awful scene.

It is generally believed that the apparition is that of Essric, the bailiff monk who basely betrayed the Abbey so as to become Abbot. The spectre is more often seen in the late autumn or winter; a dark, foggy night being the most suitable time. Even to this day, few would care or dare to pass the old ruin after darkness had set in.

Many years ago, on All Hallows Eve, a wherryman lost his way in the fog and darkness. At last he found himself opposite the old gateway, at the time an extra special performance was going on, rooted to the spot with horror to witness the awful closing scene.

As soon as it was over, with a yell of terror he rushed forward to reach his wherry which was moored in the river close to the old Chequers Inn. He fell into the water there and was drowned.

There was another apparition of good import, which used to appear on the causeway leading from the Abbey to the Hospital of St James. All that we can learn of it was very shadowy and undefined. Some think it had to do with the rescue of the young monk Edwin and the holy Saint Benedict as recorded in the Legend of the Seal.

An improved system of drainage and the high cultivation of the land is supposed to have put an end to the apparition but no system of drainage or cultivation appear to have the slightest effect on the Shrieking Spectre!



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