

**T**HE dinner guests of Sir Alexander Seaton and his lovely but light-fingered wife were replete with food and wine. Sitting at the table, the delights of which were renowned in Edinburgh society, they relaxed in a soft candle-lit glow and anticipated the arrival of post-prandial liqueurs.

Their hosts were regaling them with tales of their recent sojourn in Egypt – and of how Lady Zeyla had ‘acquired’ an amusing artefact from the recently discovered tomb of a Pharaoh’s daughter.

‘It’s a tiny bone which I had to have – so I stole it!’ declaimed the socialite in her cut-crystal accent.

The diners smiled politely, unaware they were about to be joined by another guest in the New Town mansion – an uninvited and malevolent spectre at the feast which would display its feelings in a decidedly impolite manner.

Suddenly, all hell broke loose. Sir Alexander would recall: ‘The table went hurtling! Chaos ensued! The maid fainted – as did Zeyla’s hysterical cousin, Gert. We were so terrified we spilt the brandy, port and crème de menthe.’

It was the beginning of a nightmare of hauntings, things that went bump in the night and the appearance of an apparition that scared the servants witless.

‘In terms of poltergeist infestation, it is spectacular,’ said a delighted Geoff Holder, who has compiled a list of Scotland’s most famous cases for his latest book on the paranormal history of Scotland.

He added: ‘It was a cause célèbre – a veritable Curse of the Mummy’s Tomb. And because it happened in 1936, it was in an era which invited scientific investigation.’

‘Was it the disgruntled ghost of an ancient Princess? Was the mayhem created by the stressed minds of an unhappily married aristocratic couple?’

‘We’ll never know. It was never explained and stopped as abruptly as it arrived. That’s the fascinating thing. Poltergeist episodes fall into repeating patterns – but we still can’t explain them.’

Mr Holder, who investigated 134 cases, discovered that Scottish poltergeists – it means ‘noisy ghost’ in German – take many forms and have been documented for centuries.

He said: ‘There’s no doubt many stories are nonsense. But I’ve concentrated on those which were documented by reliable witnesses.’

Over the centuries, investigators have sought to explain the unique phenomenon.

Mr Holder said: ‘In early times, it was blamed on demons. It’s a worldwide phenomenon and in Bulgaria it is believed to be the work of vampires.’

‘But by the 19th century, when we embraced rationalism, poltergeist activity was dismissed as a hoax.’

‘There are, however, many cases where trickery is excluded – and by the 20th century we were talking about psychokinesis – the power of the mind under stress to create and release unseen “forces”.’

‘The Curse of the Mummy’s Tomb is one such case.’

**A**FTER the British archaeologist Howard Carter discovered the tomb of Tutankhamun in 1922, Egypt became a smart place for the wealthy to visit. While in Egypt, Sir Alexander and Lady Zeyla were afforded a rare opportunity to visit a newly opened tomb, believed to contain an Egyptian princess.

‘I wish to God that we had not gone,’ Sir Alexander would write later.

Their guide led them to the tomb in the shadow of the pyramids, where Lady Zeyla filched the artefact. When they returned, it was ‘mounted’ in a glass case and revealed for the first time to their guests on the fateful November evening in 1936.

And then the troubles began. For weeks, the family was disturbed by nocturnal occurrences. Sir Alexander armed himself with a trusty Webley revolver and kept watch.

‘I felt rather foolish for doing so,’ he told members of his club. But one night, he was alerted by a yell from Zeyla.

‘Grabbing my revolver, I dashed downstairs to be met by a very scared nanny. We entered the

Flying furniture, a pharaoh’s daughter and the poltergeist with a sense of rhythm – welcome to:

# NOISY GHOSTS AND SPOOKED HOSTS

by Jim McBeth

drawing room, where it looked as if a battle royal had taken place – and there in the middle of the chaos was the damned bone.’

Mr Holder added: ‘Journalists were soon at his door, particularly after a young cousin “met” a “funnily dressed woman” on the stairs.’

‘Seaton wanted to destroy the artefact but his wife would not allow it. By now, the tale had gone round the world. If it happened today, it would still fill newspapers.’

Eventually, Sir Alexander waited until his wife was out and took a hammer to the bone. Mr Holder added: ‘From that moment the “haunting” stopped.’

‘Alas, his marriage would last not much longer than the bone – the couple divorced.’

Another such ‘brilliant case’ was the musical poltergeist of Port Glasgow. In 1864, Hugh McCardle was living in a tenement flat in the Renfrewshire town.

The ‘noises’ began in the dead of night and went on so long they brought neighbours into the street.

McCardle called the police. A sergeant, a constable and a local merchant, Andrew Glendinning, arrived simultaneously.

Mr Holder said: ‘They searched the flat but all they could hear was the banging.’

To revive their spirits, one of them began singing Let Us Gang to Kelvingrove, Bonnie Lassie O.

‘The poltergeist banged in time to the tune,’ said Mr Holder. ‘It was a music lover. They then sang Scots Wha Hae and again it kept tune. It was bizarre.’

But nothing was so bizarre as the spectral hand. ‘They all saw it,’ said Mr Holder. ‘It floated around the room as coal, crockery and potatoes were flung about.’

But like many other manifestations, it stopped suddenly and never came back.

The Muirkirk haunting of November 1867 was a similar case. A railwayman and his sons moved into an old farmhouse in the Ayrshire village – which they had been warned was ‘haunted’.

One night, the three boys were woken by a loud ‘moaning’ as if

someone was in pain. The father ran to the room in time to see furniture, clothes, bedding – and the boys – sucked up and hurled to floor, said Mr Holder.

‘Dad rescued them and searched for the source of the disturbance. When he found nothing, he locked the room and never entered it again.’

But perhaps the strangest episode uncovered by Mr Holder was the case of the unhappy schoolgirl. It is one that appears to validate the theory that poltergeists originate in the stressed mind of those afflicted by them.

**O**N the eve of 1960, Irish youngster Virginia Campbell, 11, was part of an extended visit to relatives in Clackmannanshire.

‘Ginny’ and her mother left behind the girl’s beloved dog, Toby, and her father, who was clearing up family business before making the trip. They moved into the relatives’ home, where Ginny shared a room with her cousin.

Mr Holder said: ‘The phenomena began in 1960 – loud banging from the headboard of their bed. Several people witnessed it. Before it was over, four local clergymen and three doctors would be involved.’

‘They witnessed furniture moving and heard the banging. They watched pillows move and saw a sewing machine burst into life. And then the strangest thing happened. Virginia’s father and the dog arrived – and everything returned to normal.’

‘But there was a twist in the tale. Just two years ago, an expert analysed recordings of the “haunting” and compared them to recordings from around the world. He found there was a pattern in the cases.’

The expert was industrial chemist Dr Barrie Kelvin, who remembers the case well. He said: ‘I approached it as a scientist and, in the final analysis, I can’t explain the phenomenon.’

‘But after analysing recordings from many cases, I found there was an acoustic pattern to them. What I don’t know is why?’

‘In each case the rapping sounds cannot be accounted for by normal means.’

● *Poltergeist Over Scotland* by Geoff Holder is published by The History Press at £9.99.



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