

# The Old Inn in Wiltshire

By Jessie Adelaide Middleton

A lady well known to me, the widow of a distinguished London medical man, went through, with her husband, the following weird experiences, for the truth of which she is quite ready to vouch.

“Some years ago,” she said, “my husband and I were on a cycling tour, and we put up one evening at a very old inn at Salisbury, called, let us say (for I would rather not give its real name and it is now pulled down), the Green Dragon, dead tired, and we went to bed quite happily unconscious of anything ghostly. The room was of the typical kind found in old country inns: rather bare of furniture, with big bay mullion windows. The bed faced one of the windows which overlooked the street below.

“About the middle of the night we were both awakened by loud knocks at the window and by a tremendous noise going on in the street—the tramping of many feet and the stamping of horses. My husband got out of bed and looked out of the window. There he saw blue lights flashing and a tumult going on below, and saw the reflection of helmeted heads on a hoarding opposite, which enclosed the spot where a building had lately been pulled down.

“He thought it strange, but, fearing to alarm me, said it was nothing and returned to bed. I must here mention that my husband was not at all an imaginative man, but very downright and scientific, and did not easily accept anything that could not be explained.

“Next morning he told me what he had seen, and added that, at the same time, he had smelt the strong smell of gunpowder, which I had not done.

We talked it over, and agreed that it was most extraordinary and that we would speak to the landlord. As I came out of my room to go downstairs I noticed a brass plate on the door of the room next to ours, and on going to see what was on it, read the words—

## THE DUKE’S ROOM

I concluded this must be the room where rents were collected by some titled landowner’s agent, and when the landlady came into the coffee-room, where we were having breakfast, I asked her if such was the case. She said ‘No,’ and then told us that it was called ‘The Duke’s Room’ because the Duke of Buckingham had slept in it the night before he was executed in the market-place, adding, You’ll find all about him in one of Shakespeare’s plays.’ She took me upstairs and showed me the room, which had an oak floor and beams, and looked very much like a typical haunted room.

“‘Oh,’ I said, ‘there ought to be a story about this.’

“‘Yes, there is,’ said the landlady; ‘but there’s a much worse one about your room.’

“She then told me that Oliver Cromwell had often stayed at the inn in bygone days, and had slept there the night before a battle was fought. There was fighting going on below, and Cromwell had watched it and had knocked at the window while directing his men. Many people who had slept in the room had heard the knocks, as if given by some one watching a fight, and had seen the blue lights and the men in armour down in the street

below. It was always on the date of the eve of the battle when his soldiers went out and never came back alive.

“We wanted to hear more details, but had to move on to the next town to keep an appointment, so reluctantly rode away. I have never been to Salisbury since, but if ever I go it is now too late to go to the Green Dragon and try to find out more.”

The story interested me very much, and I have since investigated it further. The town, as all readers of history know, played a part in the civil wars, and was repeatedly full of armed troops and the scene of rioting and fighting. The Duke of Buckingham, whose rebellion and death are described in Shakespeare’s *Richard III*, was without doubt executed in the market-place on a hastily improvised scaffold.

In Sir Richard Colt I-bare’s *History of Wiltshire* (1843) the following interesting sequel to Buckingham’s execution is to be found, which throws a curious sidelight on my friends’ experiences—

“It is proper to observe that a stone is still pointed out as that on which Buckingham suffered. This stone is in the yard adjoining the house now occupied by Messrs. Styles & Large, which formerly belonged to the Blue Boar Inn.

“The most remarkable circumstance connected with this locality is the recent discovery of a skeleton found just under the pavement in making some alterations in a kind of kitchen or outhouse belonging to the Saracen’s Head, which is close to the site of the Blue Boar. It was that of a person apparently above the middle size, and had been deprived of the head and right arm. The workman by whom it was found omitted to notice whether or no the bone of the neck had been separated by a sharp instrument, but could remember that the bone of the arm appeared to have been cut off just below the shoulder, as if by a saw. These remains were destroyed without proper examination. Of itself the discovery would prove nothing, but if the fact of Buckingham’s execution at Salisbury be considered as indisputably established we shall not be guilty of too great a stretch of imagination in supposing that these were his mutilated remains, interred clandestinely, or at least without ceremony, near the spot where he suffered.”

My friend kindly added another strange experience she had while living in an old house in Gordon Square, Bloomsbury, when she was first married. She had not been long in the house, when she ran up to her bedroom one evening to bring down a book that she had forgotten.

The room was furnished in old-fashioned style, and had a big four-poster bed with dark purple curtains. The last tenants of the house had been her husband’s father and mother, and the house was decorated in the solid and substantial early Victorian style prevalent in their day.

As she opened the door, she saw, to her horror, a coffin, covered with a pall, on the bed before her, and as she gazed at it, standing there aghast, something said to her, “There’s a bride in that coffin.” The blinds were up, and the light from the street-lamp outside fell fully on the coffin. It lay there, not in shadow, but in bold relief, and to say that the watcher was terrified is to put it very mildly. As she looked, the coffin slowly faded away and the white bed-cover came into view. Then, and then only, had she power to move, and, turning round, she fled downstairs.

A few days after, she was talking to an old neighbour whom she had known for many years. Without mentioning a word about her strange experience connected with the coffin, she asked some questions as to the history of the house and its inmate, and soon

gathered that, before her father-in-law had lived there, a young couple had taken the house. The wife was taken ill and died, while still a bride, in the very room in which the new tenant then slept, and the sad affair so upset the husband that he gave up the house at once.

Nobody else seemed to have seen a coffin or heard a mysterious voice, but several visitors to the house had complained of uncanny feelings while in it, for no particular reason.