

Bookhounds of London

West End Rumours

A strange man in smoked glasses has entered two or three establishments in the Strand demanding direction to “Master John Denley’s shop, as I must needs deliver a consignment of books to him.” His accent is queerly broad, and his manner both arrogant and reticent. He walks with a pronounced limp. So far, nobody has successfully explained to him that John Denley closed his occult bookshop in Catherine Street in 1840 and died in 1842.



There is a “secret library” hidden in plain sight in the stacks of the British Museum by a conspiracy of librarians. Only they know the secret catalogue, and they shelve the books (often suitably rebound in false covers) in seemingly innocuous and slightly incorrect locations throughout the Library stacks.



Surgeon, electrical experimenter (using galvanism to revive catalepsy), Freemason, antiquarian, and embalming expert (he wrote a book on mummification) Thomas Pettigrew served as librarian to the Duke of Sussex from 1818 to 1845. His three-volume catalogue of His Grace’s collection, the Bibliotheca Sussexiana, covers only a portion of the whole, mostly theological and religious works from all over the world. Builders working on Pettigrew’s Savile Row quarters (and surgery) have discovered a cipher manuscript inside a wall – and word on the street is that it’s a secret addendum to the Bibliotheca covering the blasphemous tomes Pettigrew left officially uncatalogued, including the debatable and uncanny Sussex Manuscript.



Ernest Maggs, a principal of Maggs Bros. Rare Books, hopes to use his firm’s profits from the sale of the Codex Sinaiticus by the Soviet government to move his establishment from its Conduit Street shop to Berkeley Square in Mayfair. Specifically, to No. 50, Berkeley Square, which has remained untenanted (and thus quite reasonable for a Mayfair address only 300 yards from Bond Street) since 1870. However, before he can recommend such action to his partners, he needs to be reassured that the “oozing, shapeless horror” that haunts the third floor is no more. It has driven at least four people mad, killed at least two men who slept there overnight (and one who jumped out the window and impaled himself on the surrounding fence in 1879), and has been seen by numerous witnesses including Lord Lyttleton, who fired a shotgun full of silver sixpences at it in 1872.

