

## Historical Notes for Mr Scarletti's Ghost

Brighton's Royal Suspension Chain Pier was built in 1823. It has been represented in paintings by both J M W Turner and John Constable. By 1871, when this novel is set, it was falling out of fashion as it had competition from the West Pier, which was opened in 1866. The Chain Pier was destroyed in a storm in 1896. The West Pier closed in 1975. Since then, it has been ravaged by storms and fire, and today its skeletal remains are considered to be beyond restoration.

Sake Dean Mohamed (1759-1851) was born in Patna, India. He and his British wife settled in London where he opened the capital's first ever Indian restaurant, the Hindoostanee Coffee House, in George Street. The site is now commemorated by a plaque. He later moved to Brighton, where he established his Indian Medicated Vapour bath in 1821. The business attracted high society visitors and he was granted a Royal Warrant and became known as 'Dr Brighton'.

Brill's Baths was a popular sea-water bathing and leisure establishment which opened on East Street Brighton, in 1869. An earlier establishment because of its shape and protrusion onto the sea front was nicknamed 'Brill's bunion.'

Christ Church with its tall slender spire was built in Montpelier Road Brighton in 1838. In 1871 when Mina and her family worshipped there, services were taken by Reverend James Vaughan. The church was badly damaged by fire in 1978 and the ruins were finally removed in 1983.

The Ghost Club was founded in 1862, and Charles Dickens is known to have been a member. Twice dissolved and revived, it exists today and its members hold regular meetings and conduct investigations into paranormal phenomena.

Daniel Dunglas Home (1833-1886) was one of the most acclaimed mediums of his day who attracted many wealthy patrons. The case of Lyon v Home in which Home was obliged to repay the substantial funds he had obtained from an elderly widow, is documented in *Bar Reports* volume VII 1868, pp. 451-457. Robert Browning's poem, Mr Sludge the Medium, first published in his *Dramatis Personae* in 1864, was an attack on spiritualism, and Sludge was based on Home. Mrs Browning believed in Home, and her comments regarding Home being both morally worthless and a true medium are from a letter she wrote in 1856. *The Browning's Correspondence* no. 3742. Vol 22, pp.138-140

Modern spiritualism was effectively founded in 1848 when sisters Kate Fox (1837-1892) and Margaret (1833-1893) then living in Hydesville New York, claimed to be in touch with spirits that made clicking and rapping noises. Their fame spread and they embarked on a successful career as mediums, appearing before large audiences. In 1888, Margaret made a public confession of trickery, saying that the noises had been made with their joints, although she retracted her statement in the following year.

Sir David Brewster (1781-1868) was a scientist especially noted for his pioneering work on optics.

William Crookes (1842-1919) was a chemist and physicist, editor of the *Quarterly Journal of Science* from 1864 to 1878. Following the death of his younger brother from yellow fever at the age of twenty-one, Crookes became interested in spiritualism, and conducted scientific experiments with noted mediums including D D Home. Many of his contemporaries thought that he was too uncritical and easily duped by frauds. He later became president of the Society for Psychical Research and the Ghost Club.

In 1825 Dr Frederick Struve of Saxony opened a German Spa in Brighton, selling his mineral waters. It was enormously popular for several years, but fell

out of fashion and was closed by 1850. The company continued to produce the bottled waters until 1891 when it merged with another.

The London Dialectical Society was a professional association established in 1867, which in 1869 formed a committee to investigate spiritual phenomena. A report was produced in July 1870, but the methods of investigation were criticised as unscientific. When the Society declined to publish it, it was published by the committee in 1871. One member of the committee, Dr James Edmunds attended a seance held by the Davenport brothers, Ira Erastus Davenport (1839-1911) and his brother William Henry (1841-1877), American stage illusionists who toured Britain in 1868. The Davenports claimed that their effects were produced by spirit power, but Edmunds wrote of his exposure of their trick with the supposed spirit drawing. The Davenports were best known for the cabinet in which they were placed, tied up, with musical instruments, which would then be heard to play. They were frequently denounced as frauds, most famously by magician John Neville Maskelyne, (1829-1917) who had a similar cabinet constructed and demonstrated in public how their tricks were achieved.

Mrs Agnes Guppy (later Guppy-Volckman) (1838-1917) was a popular spirit medium noted for producing apports such as fresh flowers. In June 1871 she claimed to have been transported almost instantaneously from her home to a house three miles away. The claim was ridiculed in the press.

The M Houdin mentioned by Richard was the legendary French magician and father of the modern art of conjuring and illusions, Jean-Eugène Robert-Houdin (1805 –1871)

Women were admitted to study medicine at Edinburgh University in 1869 but faced considerable hostility, and were not permitted to graduate. Davina Hamid would later have been able to obtain her medical qualification at the London School of Medicine for Women which was founded in 1874.

John Henry Pepper (1821-1900) was an analytical chemist and lecturer who developed the method devised by engineer Henry Dircks (1806-1873) in which a ghost-like image of an actor was projected onto a stage. Dubbed 'Pepper's Ghost' it was first demonstrated in 1862.

Lawyer Edward William Cox (1809-1879) was a member of the Dialectical Society, and served on the committee that investigated spiritualism. He assisted William Crookes in his experiments and coined the term 'psychic force.'

The New Oxford Music Hall in New Street, Brighton, was opened on 6 August 1868.