

MAG – 063 – The End of the Tunnel

Content Warnings:

- Claustrophobia
- Tunnels and underground
- Nyctophobia
- Decapitation and hanging

Discussions of: Paranormal encounter, warfare, panic, death

Mentions of: Breaking and entering, hospitals

SFX: low drone, high pitched tone.

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro]

JONATHAN SIMS

Rusty Quill presents: The Magnus Archives. Episode sixty-three. The End of the Tunnel.

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro *Continued.*]

[Tape clicks on.]

ARCHIVIST

Statement of Erin Gallagher-Nelson, regarding an urban exploration trip beneath St Paul's Church, West Hackney. Original statement given March 31st, 2014. Audio recording by Jonathan Sims, Head Archivist of the Magnus Institute, London.

Statement begins.

ARCHIVIST (STATEMENT)

I'm sure you know what urban exploring is. I'm sure you've had plenty of amateur yahoos in here who stumble across a ghost in some old factory, so I'll spare you the breakdown of how it works. And if you don't know what it is, well, the internet's a thing. Look it up. I'm about as close to a professional as you can get out of what's basically trespass as a sport. I work as a photographer and, if I play my cards right, I can get more money from an abandoned pump station than from shooting some spoiled human Barbie for 'Self Hate Monthly' or whatever. It's always been me and Luke Nelson. He was my wife's brother and did all the lighting for our shoots. At least until he was eaten by the darkness last week. That's why I'm here. Because I didn't dream that. It happened. I don't care what Steph says. I don't need to talk to a shrink. I need to talk to you.

We were underneath St Paul's Church in West Hackney – horrid, boxy building, really makes you wonder about God's housing standards. I mean, I'm just saying if it was my house, I'd be pretty pissed. Still, I guess if He didn't want it, He should have protected its predecessor from Nazi bombs. Because St Paul's used to be St James' before it got blitzed all the way to rubble. Everyone

always forgets how much London is under London. I mean, it's not as bad as somewhere like Edinburgh, where they literally buried half the city and built a new one on top, but in some places it's not too far from it. And I'd been doing a lot of research into St Paul's-that-used-to-be-St James', because it looked like it might be exactly one such place.

Plans of the drainage and underground of the neighbourhood seemed to indicate that there was a large subterranean area directly beneath St Paul's that appeared to be avoided by all public works, yet the plans for the modern church didn't indicate anything below ground level. What this told me was that the old church of St James probably had quite a sizeable under-presence which hadn't been completely destroyed by the bombs and which its inheritor didn't use. Early to mid-19th century Victorian vaults, undisturbed for 70 years? It was exactly the sort of thing that's in vogue at the moment with a certain section of arty magazines, and I was sure I could sell a few to Getty and a handful of other stock photo sites. And hey, it wasn't like I hadn't broken into a church before.

Luckily, St Paul's, West Hackney was Church of England, meaning they didn't lock up as tight as some places. Catholic churches can be a real pain as they actually have some valuables inside that need to be protected, but this, like most C of E, was plain and unadorned inside. So, while they took plenty of care

with the offices, they weren't so conscientious about locking up the main church building, because quite frankly, there was nothing to steal, unless you like hymn books. It took me and Luke less than a minute to get inside. It was last Tuesday, the 25th. I suppose technically it was Wednesday, the 26th, as it was well past midnight when we made our move.

Once we were in, we kept our torches low, stowed our equipment, and went looking for anything that might get us deeper inside. At first it looked like we might have been mistaken and there was no way beneath. But then Luke spotted what looked like a removable panel in the floor, just off to the right of what passed for a podium. It was heavier than it looked, but, after a bit of work with the crowbar, it came off. It didn't look like it had been removed in decades, maybe not since the new church was built, but what surprised me was the air that came out when it shifted. It hissed like a long-held breath and the air that rose up from that hole was icy cold and damp. Not unexpected, but what did surprise me was how clean it smelled. Like an autumn night after the rain.

There was no ladder or stairs down, but we'd brought plenty of rope, so in we went. The gloom seemed to swallow us, and I would have sworn that at times I could feel it physically pressing against me. As it turned out, it was only a couple metres down to the floor of the underground tunnel, and our flashlights

Showed exactly what I'd hoped for: old Victorian brickwork. The passage stretching away from us in both directions was absolutely perfect and I wasted no time in setting up a few shots, while Luke placed the lighting rigs. Down there, the flashes seemed almost blinding, but I was sure I was getting some excellent shots. It was only when I had a quick glance through them on the screen of my SLR that I began to get irritated. Clearly, Luke had been standing in front of the light when I had started to shoot. In every single image, where the far wall was lit by the bright lights, you could see the clear shape of a person's shadow.

I got into quite an argument with Luke about it. He insisted that he'd never make such a rookie move. I told him that he could argue with me, but not with the camera. Eventually he stormed off to 'go exploring' further on. I took another picture before I followed him. The shadow was still there, and it seemed to be ever so slightly closer.

I don't know why I ignored it. The human mind is amazingly adept at ignoring things that don't make sense, that it doesn't want to see. I convinced myself it was a quirk of the angles at that location. I didn't even let myself entertain the thought that it could be a problem with my extremely expensive camera, so I definitely didn't consider the possibility of a supernatural explanation.

I followed Luke further on until, after about 20 minutes, we came to the ruins of a chamber of some sort. The roof had collapsed, probably from the bombing that had destroyed St James' church, and the rubble blocked off most of it. It looked like it had once been a circular room and on either side of the entrance I could see doorways blocked with fallen stone. There was no way we'd be able to shift enough debris to access them, but it was strange; as the torch beams played across them, even with most of them completely covered in collapsed masonry, they still didn't seem as dark as the corridor we'd come from.

I took some photos – the composition of the place was excellent and the blocked doorways had an odd sort of stark grandeur to them. They were certainly well made if they managed to survive what looked to be a direct hit by a Germany bomb. I checked the photos and there were no shadows, which was something of a relief.

We headed back the other way. When we reached our ropes, hanging down from the hole above us, Luke started to have some concerns. Well, I say concerns, he wanted out of there. He wanted us to pack up and climb out and leave, telling me he was getting 'weird vibes' from the place, and trying to convince me we'd seen enough. Looking up at that bright square, lit invitingly

with the moon shining through the church windows, I was half tempted to agree with him. The trouble was that, due to the problems with the first shoot, I had one, maybe two pictures of a quality I could do anything with and that wasn't nearly enough. I told him bluntly that I didn't have enough and if I didn't get paid, he didn't get paid. I saw the conflict on his face. He wanted to get out of there, sure, but apparently not as much as he wanted to make rent. So, on we went, further into the tunnel.

I don't know how far we went. I stopped every 10 metres or so to set up and try to get a good picture, but the shadows were back and worse than before. Now there'd be two or three of them in some pictures. It wasn't quite as clearly a human silhouette, so I managed to tell myself that it must be a quirk of how the tunnel reflected the light, even though, looking back, that makes no sense whatsoever. Still, I kept going, hoping to find somewhere where I could get some shots of the stark, gloomy tunnel with bricks so black they almost looked like coal. We'd move, set up, shoot, check and then I'd swear at my camera.

I don't know how many times we did this. Luke got jumpier and jumpier the whole way. It didn't feel like much more than 10 minutes we'd been doing it, but when I checked my watch, we'd been down there for almost two hours. We had finally come to the end of the path and it was just that. An end. A

blank wall of bricks indicating the stopping of the tunnel that seemed to go under a good deal of Hackney. At this point, I at last decided to write the whole thing off and head back. It was as I turned to Luke to tell him this that my torch died.

There was no fanfare, it just fizzled for a second, then turned off with a faint pop. I looked over to Luke, about to ask him to pass me the spare batteries, when I saw his face. I don't think I've ever seen anyone as scared as he was at that moment. Then his torch went out as well and there was nothing but darkness.

I could hear him fumbling for something that I assumed were the camera lights and a second later I heard the *click, click, click* of him trying to turn them on. Nothing happened. He kept clicking the switches, on and on, and I could feel his desperation, but we were still trapped in the pitch black. Eventually he stopped and we just stood there. I wanted to say something reassuring, to reach out and let him know I was still there, but I was terrified of breaking the silence. There was just his breathing, laboured and scared. I became aware of my own breath, quick and betraying the panic I was trying to pretend I wasn't feeling. And then I heard it. The third set of breathing.

It was quiet, at first. Long and slow and very deliberate. The more I listened, the louder it seemed to become, as though whoever was down here with us was making sure we could hear it. And then another set of breaths joined it, deep and throaty. And a fifth, a sixth, then more. We were surrounded on all sides by the sound of breathing, getting louder, getting closer. Luke let out a small whimper and all together they stopped.

In their place there came a scraping sound. Something metal, it sounded like, being dragged across the bricks. Far away behind us, but getting closer and fast, it was joined by a heavy, thumping tread, footsteps coming towards us, rhythmic and unhurried. I almost thought it could be my heartbeat, pounding in my ears, but the echo assured me it was coming from down the tunnel. Then the scraping came again, now from the other direction, and I sank to the floor, clutching my camera to my chest like some sort of protective talisman. It was silent, once again.

The noise that broke the stillness this time is the one that is still ringing in my ears. It was far more dreadful than the others because of how familiar it was, though I had never heard it in such a manner before. It was Luke's voice and it was screaming in agony. A shrill, gut-wrenching screech of pain and fear that wiped away all thought in a second and replaced it with blind panic. I wanted to run, but my legs had locked up. Somewhere in my mind, I remembered the

flash on my camera, and my fingers instinctively flicked the switch. As I pressed the button, the screaming stopped with a wet snap and, for the worst moment of my life, an explosion of light shot through the darkness.

I saw Luke hanging in the air. There was nobody around him, but on the wall, in stark black outlines, I saw two long, thin shadows standing beside him. On each, I saw one spindly arm gripping his shadow by the shoulders, while the other held up the shadow of his torn off head. In front of me, the real one just hung there, dangling as if by some invisible thread, blood dripping onto the body below it. His eyes were staring at me, as though pleading for my feeble flashing camera to save him. I screamed.

The next thing I remember was the painfully bright light of a dozen torches on my face. It was the rector of St Paul's and a small group of what I assumed to be parishioners. He didn't say a word as he gently led me back towards the entrance. I looked around to see if Luke's body was there, but I knew deep down that the darkness had eaten him and he was gone.

The rector was very understanding, though I wasn't making much sense. He spoke soft words of reassurance, brought me out into the sick, pale blue of dawn and called an ambulance to look me over. I didn't get his name and it was only after I'd reached the hospital, I realised he had taken my camera.

Since then, I've been under observation in the hospital. Nobody listens to my story and Luke has been officially listed as missing. Steph has been very supportive, but I can see the pain in her eyes. She knows I was the last one to see her brother and it eats at her. I don't really know what to do now, except to keep the lights on.

ARCHIVIST

Statement ends.

It should come as no surprise to me by now that the foundation stone of the original church of St James' in West Hackney was laid on the 17th November 1821 by Sir Robert Smirke. Even so, I was very much hoping to find at least one architectural oddity lurking beneath the streets of London that did not bear the mark of him or his students. This particular encounter doesn't seem to have much in common with manifestations from similar buildings. We've had something of a spectrum from him and his ilk. Cobwebs, entombing, difficulty in navigation, and now a violent, murderous dark.

My first thought was the People's Church of the Divine Host, as they seem to have some affinity to the darkness, but I can find no connection of any sort between them and West Hackney church. Not that any of the staff there were very helpful. Every one of them claims to have no memory of encountering Ms

Gallagher-Nelson, despite hospital admission records clearly stating she was picked up from there on the morning of the 26th March 2014. Tim is convinced that at least some of them are lying, but there's little we can do to gain any information they don't wish to volunteer.

We've been unable to follow up with Ms Gallagher-Nelson. All attempts to contact her have been prevented by her wife Stephanie Gallagher-Nelson, who has made it abundantly clear that we are not welcome and are to attempt no further contact. Luke Nelson remains missing.

End recording.

[Tape clicks off. Tape clicks on.]

ARCHIVIST

Supplemental.

I have been attempting to access Gertrude's laptop, but have thus far had no luck. None of the obvious passwords I've tried have been successful and I am unsure who can provide both assistance and discretion. There may be further clues on the other tapes, but so far, I've had no word from Basira. I'm so close to finding something, maybe I should just go down—

[The door opens.]

MELANIE

Excuse me, do you have a moment?

ARCHIVIST

Ms King? How did you, er... how did you get in here?

MELANIE

The new girl let me in. Are you all right?

[The Archivist shuts the laptop.]

ARCHIVIST

(Distracted) Hmm, Sorry?

MELANIE

You look like hell.

ARCHIVIST

It's been a hard few months. Look, can I help you? Because if you're just after another shouting match...

MELANIE

No, I, um... I actually do need your help.

ARCHIVIST

Mm. Interesting.

MELANIE

All right, can you not be an arsehole about it? I just need access to your library.

ARCHIVIST

So, talk to Diana. She runs the place.

MELANIE

Yes, I don't exactly have the academic credentials you guys demand. So I apparently need someone to vouch for me, and you're basically the closest thing I have to a friend here.

ARCHIVIST

We've spoken once and we ended up screaming at each other.

MELANIE

Yes, and that's more than I have with anyone else here. Also, uh, Georgie actually has some nice things to say about you.

ARCHIVIST

Oh.

MELANIE

That came as a surprise. You didn't even tell me you knew her.

ARCHIVIST

I... it was a long time ago. Before she started doing *What the Ghost?*

MELANIE

Huh.

ARCHIVIST

It's a surprise to me as well, to be honest. We didn't exactly part on the best of terms.

MELANIE

Mm.

ARCHIVIST

What exactly do you need from us anyway? Can't your showbiz friends help you?

MELANIE

No, I'm... most of... most of them won't talk to me anymore.

ARCHIVIST

What happened? Did word get out that you'd given a statement to us? What was it, "credulous idiots"?

MELANIE

Not exactly... look, in my business your reputation is all that you have.

ARCHIVIST

Hm.

MELANIE

The industry's mainly full of sceptics pretending to be believers pretending to be sceptics.

ARCHIVIST

I think the word you're looking for is charlatans.

MELANIE

Can you not? Please? I'm to... look, *Ghost Hunt UK* split up. I mean, not formally, but... well, you know, Pete was always a flake to begin with, and the others just drifted away.

ARCHIVIST

I'm sorry to hear that. I noticed you weren't updating any more.

MELANIE

I tried to get a new crew together, but it was tough. I took to going on expeditions solo, but I don't really have the skills to get useable footage. I saw a few weird things. Then I... then I got arrested.

ARCHIVIST

Go on.

MELANIE

Yes, I, um... I broke into the train graveyard up near Rotherham, got picked up by security and I... I wasn't doing well. When I was being thrown out, some late night dogwalker got a video of me screaming at them about ghosts, and when it went online...

ARCHIVIST

Your all-important professional reputation went with it.

MELANIE

Yes. Look, I have leads that I really need to follow up, but as far as my colleagues are concerned, these days *I'm* the ghost.

ARCHIVIST

Well, for what it's worth, I'm sorry. I do know what it's like to lack the respect of your peers. I'll have a word with Diana, see if I can get you into the library.

MELANIE

Thank you. Seriously. Now how do I get out of this place?

[Chair scraping]

ARCHIVIST

Hm? Oh, Sasha can show you out.

MELANIE

Sasha?

ARCHIVIST

Yes, she should be around here somewhere.

MELANIE

Oh. Right. Well, let me know about the library, okay?

[Door opening]

ARCHIVIST

Will do.

[Door closing]

ARCHIVIST

What a strange woman.

End supplemental.

[Tape clicks off.]

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The Magnus Archives – Episode 063 – The End of the Tunnel

Today's episode was written by Jonathan Sims and directed by Alexander J Newall.

It featured: Jonathan Sims as The Archivist and Lydia Nicholas as Melanie King.