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VIGILO-OPPERIOR-AUDIO
1818



MAGNUS INSTITUTE
LONDON

STATEMENT

Silvana, Harold - June 4th 2002

Old Passages

I'm a builder. Sort of. I always find myself using the words 'craftsman' or 'artisan', but that's mostly because of my client base. I specialise in renovation and alterations on listed buildings and those of historical or architectural significance. In simple terms it's not much different to any other sort of construction work, except it takes about three times as long and costs ten times as much. That's not to say I rip people off. You need to spend almost half the time just planning exactly how you're going to tackle any given job, while preserving or recreating the original architecture as much as possible, and then you have to be incredibly careful when you're doing the work. I'm quite serious when I say that if you're not paying attention and keeping the alterations well-documented, you can get sued for millions over knocking out the wrong brick. Plus, the materials aren't cheap. So yes, my services are expensive, but me and my team are worth every penny. And the sort of people I deal with, or should I say the sort of people whose personal assistants I deal with, can afford it.

Having met a few of the Institute's donors, I can well imagine

I don't have a company, per se. People hire me for me, and I have a small team I trust to help out with the work itself. They're technically freelance contractors, but the pay's good enough and, in London at least, there's enough work that they're happy to wait on my call.

I've found plenty of interesting things in this job. I suppose that's not unexpected when you're digging around old buildings. We got kicked off a job once when we found some bones under a very venerable country house that will remain nameless, as the owners contacted the British Museum, who couldn't take over fast enough. There have also been a few jewellery pieces that found their way to other museums, and once we found a box of 17th century erotic poems that I think are currently languishing in the storerooms of the V&A museum. But I never found anything like what was under 100 Pall Mall.

Nice to know they're not ignoring EVERYONE'S emails.

We'd been called in to do some work on the basement and ground floor of the Reform Club. It wasn't anything major. Some upkeep on a few of the historic pieces, replace a few of the earlier renovations. The amount of actual work involved was minimal, but it was a Grade I listed building, so the amount of care we had to take stretched it into a week-long job. It didn't help that we had to schedule around the fact that it's still a very active social venue, so we could only actually come out of the basement when it wasn't full of people too important to see builders. Grade I listing is a significant payday, though, so I certainly wasn't going to rock the boat.

It was about two in the morning when the kid showed up. It was just me and Rachael Turley, who does most of our marble work, though we were mostly just doing surveying at that point. Alfred Bartlett was out getting coffee, though god knows where from at that time of night. We were just kicking our heels really, since he's the plumber and we needed his expertise. Now Alf has been in the business for nearly 40 years, and there wasn't a thing he didn't know about water or sewage systems, but we often joke that it's pushed everything else out of his head. I think he must have forgotten to lock the door when he headed out, and that's how the kid got in. That said, this was still the first week in March and it was pretty cold, so I'm surprised we didn't notice the draught.

In the end I suppose it doesn't matter. The fact is that Rachel and I had been sat there chatting for maybe five minutes when we noticed we weren't alone. In the doorway leading back to the stairwell stood a thin figure. He looked to be in his late teens, I'd guess. He was dressed all in black, with heavy looking boots and a T-shirt with the logo of some band emblazoned on it, Megadon or Mastodon, or something like that. His hair was long and greasy, almost down to his shoulders, and looked to be dyed almost the same black as his clothes. He did not look like he was supposed to be skulking round the Reform Club, but I'd encountered more than one member whose rich children were going through a 'rebellious period', so couldn't be entirely sure. I decided to be gentle in my initial enquiries and asked

familiar description. Need to check some dates.

him if he was lost, told him this part of the basement was off-limits due to renovations.

That seals it. Must be Gerard.

The kid shook his head and asked if we'd found anything yet. Any of "Leitner's pages" Now this took me aback a bit. I wondered how long he'd been standing there, because Rachel and I had just been talking about the man. Jurgen Leitner was a businessman from Norway, I believe, who used to have offices in the ground floor of the building next to the Reform Club, 100 Pall Mall. I don't know what his business was but, when I was first getting started, back in '87, we got a call from Mr. Leitner, requesting a consultation in his Pall Mall office. At that point it was just me and Rachel, and we mostly did stone restoration and alteration, so we assumed Mr. Leitner wanted our opinion on a property outside of London. Our reputation back then was not sufficient to get us access to any of the sort of Central London buildings we now work on.

Interesting. Have never had an actual description of the man.

When we first met Jurgen Leitner, he looked very much like I had imagined him. Portly, middle-aged, short blond hair in the middle of going grey, well-tailored business suit. His office surprised me, though, as it was almost completely bare, save for a desk and two chairs in front of it. There were no tables or bookshelves or filing cabinets or anything like that. He asked us to sit down and, though he spoke with a very faint accent, his English was perfect. We made small talk, but he seemed impatient, eager to talk about whatever it was he wanted us to do.

I asked him what the job was, and he stopped and looked at us closely. Then he said he simply wanted us to dig a hole. An unusual request, but not an unreasonable one, so I asked him whereabouts this was going to be. He rose, walked over to the corner and pointed at the floor. He said he needed a hole put through the floor. I thought there would have been a basement under there, and he said no, the building's basement didn't go under these rooms. He smiled an odd little smile as he said it, which put me a bit on edge.

Now, there was no way we could do a job like that without the building owner's permission and I told Leitner this. He began to get shiftier, then, and tried to tell us that he already had the permission. When we told him we'd need to confirm it with the commercial landlord, he got very defensive, told us that it was fine and he'd need to discuss it with some other contractors first. When we told him we'd just need to have a quick phone call with the owner, he started screaming that we didn't understand what we were talking about, that he didn't need to explain himself to the likes of us, and there were some things that were too important, too powerful to be owned. Then he just started yelling at us in Norwegian until we left. We didn't bother contacting the owners of 100 Pall Mall in the end.

odd. more unstable than in other interviews or encounters I've read.

It was without a doubt the weirdest interview with a prospective client that we'd ever had, and being so close to the site of it had Rachel and I reminiscing when this teenage burnout turned up. I asked him if he'd been eavesdropping, and he shrugged, and again asked what we had found. I was just about done with this kid, and started to tell him that he was going to have to leave, when Rachel interrupted me and asked what there was to find. The kid laughed, as though he and Rachel were in on some private joke. "Can you smell it?" he said, and for a brief moment, I could smell something. Damp old stone and musty paper, just a faint whiff. It took me off guard, and I think that was why I just stood there as he walked past me and picked up the hammer. He strode over to one of the walls and, with a swing far stronger than I would have thought possible from his age and skinny frame, he buried it into the wall. I heard a scream, high-pitched, but it definitely didn't come from any of us.

Ah, a smell I know well

This was enough to break me out of my stupor and I ran over and wrestled the hammer from the kid. He struggled and flailed, though he didn't say anything. As I tried to calm him down, Rachel called

me over, and I looked at where he'd hit the wall. In the centre of it was a neat hole; the other side was darkness. There shouldn't have been anything behind the wall except foundation, but it didn't look like this was a real basement wall. I let the kid go and walked over to get a closer look. Rachel started to examine it with her tools, before she confirmed what I'd already guessed – that it was a fake. It looked like someone had blocked off a passage, and then very carefully disguised it.

I wonder how many similarly hidden tunnels lurk under London?

It was at this point that Alf returned, and we had some considerable explaining to do. Through it all the kid, who said his name was Gerard, just sat there sullenly, listening to his CD player and waiting. When we asked him how he knew what was behind that wall he just shrugged, and told us that his mother knows all about this stuff. He didn't elaborate as to what "this stuff" might have been. We should have waited until morning and told the Reform Club staff what we'd found. We should have handed Gerard over to the police, but Alf was always too curious for his own good, and he suggested we have a look inside. Rachel and I half-heartedly tried to argue against it, but I think deep down we wanted to know just as much as he did. So in we went.

And what harm has curiosity ever done?

Knocking through the rest of the wall didn't take long. It had been built to look like the rest of the basement, but hadn't been constructed with the same skill. Ten minutes later our coffees lay forgotten on the floor and we stood before a passageway leading off into the musty darkness. A gentle breeze blew from this entrance, which didn't make any sense at all. We had plenty of torches, as you often need them during night work, so we each took one large one and a smaller back-up in case the first had any problems. We tried to tell Gerard to stay outside, but I could see immediately that, short of tying him up, there was no way we were going to keep him out of there. Tying him up did feel like a step too far, so we settled for keeping a close eye on him as we went inside.

The passageway was cold, and the air thick with mildew, but the stone walls were in very good condition. Rachel said it looked to be from the mid-19th century, probably remains of the basement of the Carlton Club, which used to be located in what was now 100 Pall Mall. It was with a start that I realised that she was right, based on where the corridor was going, we must have been underneath the building. Almost exactly where Jurgen Leitner had wanted us to dig almost fifteen years ago.

We walked for some time, longer than I would have expected, given how big I remembered the building above us being. Alf kept asking Rachel if the corridor was getting narrower, and every time she would dutifully measure the width and inform him that, no, it was exactly five feet wide. I couldn't blame him, really, I've never had any sort of claustrophobia, but I was finding it hard at points to catch my breath, to dismiss the feeling that the walls were pressing on me. Gerard walked on ahead, seemingly unbothered by the place.

Spontaneous phobic manifestation?

We came to a crossroads. Or, more precisely, a star. The chamber was small, round and featureless, but there were doorways leading out in a circle. I counted thirteen, not including the one we had come in from. Looking down some of them made me feel oddly queasy. There was one that, for all the world, it felt like I was going to fall into it. Another was so dark that our torches didn't seem to reach more than a few feet inside. In the centre, there was a datestone. It read: "Robert Smirke, 1835. Balance and fear".

Hm. Must consult Tim about this.

I don't know how much you know about famous London architects, but Robert Smirke was one of the foremost proponents of the Gothic Revival in the early 19th century. His work was some of the first to use concrete and cast iron, and often described as 'theatrical', a description that makes a lot of sense when you look at the grand columns of the British Museum – his most famous building. Later, I would look up a list of his works and discover that he had indeed built the Carlton Club in that exact spot. It

had been destroyed in the Second World War, during the Blitz, and the club itself had moved premises, but it looked like the underground foundations, or whatever this place was, had not been damaged.

We stood there for some time as I explained this to the others. It took some time to do so as, with the exception of Gerard, I got the impression that none of us were in any hurry to go down the other tunnels. A deep apprehension seemed to have settled itself in the pit of my stomach; everyone else also seemed to feel it. Then, without warning, Gerard started running full pelt into one of the passages. I'm not sure which one it was of the thirteen. I called for him to come back but got no reply and Alf took off after him, running into the darkness and quickly turning a corner. Rachel and I looked at each other for a few seconds, but we both knew what we needed to be doing. I followed Alf into the passage, while she headed back down to the entrance to get help.

This tunnel wasn't as dark as some of the others, but it was damper, and the walls seemed oddly slimy. After a few yards, the stone became so slick that I found it hard to keep my footing and I fell. I put my hand onto the floor to push myself up, and it came away faintly tinged with red. I heard Alf cry out from further down the corridor. He sounded utterly terrified, and I started on towards him again. I saw lights from up ahead, and was about to call out when Gerard came running back out of the darkness.

Another Lerner book. Wonderful.

He was clutching a book in his hands, and clearly wasn't paying attention to where he was going. He barrelled right into me, knocking me to the floor again. He was only a skinny kid, but he was so strong, and kept his footing, disappearing back into the darkness, towards the entrance. As he passed, I heard a small clattering sound, as though something were falling behind him. I reached out slowly, to try and raise myself off the ground, and felt something small and oddly smooth lying there. I shined my light on it, and saw a small bone. From a bird, I think, or maybe a rat. I looked around and there were a few more scattered about the corridor.

I'd fallen harder this time, and managed to hurt my knee quite badly. I was just about able to limp to the end of the corridor, and there I found a small, round room. Against the walls were old bookshelves, decayed and empty, save for a few mouldering pages. They were stained and rotten, and one of them looked like it had a mummified hand laying on it. In front of that one, at almost the centre of the room, lay Alf. He was dead. I couldn't see any injuries on him. He didn't even seem hurt. But looking at how still he lay there, the terrified, awful expression frozen on his face, there was no chance that he was alive. On his motionless chest, and around the base of the bookshelf, I saw more of those tiny bones.

That's where my memory begins to blur. I know I made it back to the basement of the Reform Club, where Rachel was waiting with the police. But I think I got some of the wrong passageways first. I have the vaguest memories: flashes of a pile of paper, completely covered in cobweb; a figure stood in the darkness, a stranger I didn't know but was sure meant me harm; my skin burning, hot, choking on smoke down there in the dark. *Lot of imagery. Hard to draw any clear conclusions.*

When I was out, I was questioned by the police, who followed Rachel in to retrieve Alf's body and were successful, though they came back out pale and shaking. There was no sign of Gerard, nor had Rachel seen him. I was then questioned again by the staff of the Reform Club, who instructed us in no uncertain terms to rebuild the wall and finish our original job. We were given to understand that the police were handling the matter, and if we pursued it closer then we would not be getting any further work from members of the club. As this covers almost everybody who can afford our services, we complied. It makes me feel sick, though, like we're just abandoning Alf, dishonouring his memory. It's not even like he had any family to miss him, it just feels wrong. I guess, maybe, that's why I'm talking

to you. Do try to keep my name out of it if you follow it up though, okay?

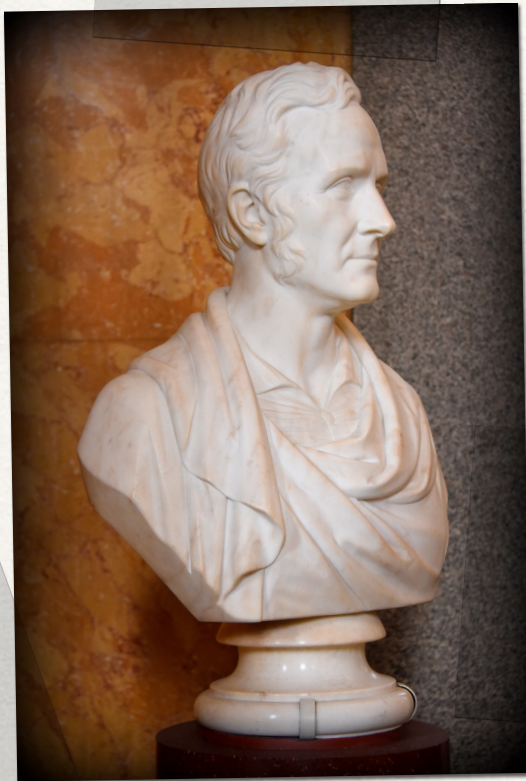
*Letting it languish in a disordered mess of documents for
fifteen years is almost the same as following it up, right?*

On the one hand, this statement represents a complete dead end, as no-one involved is both able and willing to talk to us. Over the last three months Sasha has attempted to contact Mr. Silvana, Rachel Turley, the management of the Reform Club and any of the police officers involved. All of them flatly deny any of this ever took place. Alfred Bartlett's death was listed as a heart attack suffered during routine maintenance work, and none of the coroner's reports provide any details out of the ordinary. The 'kid', who I think it is reasonable to assume is none other than Gerard Keay, remains just as impossible to contact as he ever was. From an evidence standpoint, this case is a complete bust.

However, too many of the names and features match with other statements for me to dismiss it, not to mention the fact that business records do list Jurgen Leitner as having hired out an office on the ground floor of 100 Pall Mall between 1985 and 1994. He was apparently one of the premier worldwide dealers in rare and antique books at the time, with items selling for the sort of sums where an office in Pall Mall doesn't raise any eyebrows. If this strange basement is really there, then perhaps his choice of location was not simply a display of status. Clearly some of his books were there, and I can't help but wonder whether that was where they were found, or just where they were stored.

The other major point of interest is the fact that this complex appears to have been designed by Robert Smirke. You should have seen Tim's face when I told him. Architecture is one of his specialist areas, and he has always talked of Smirke as one that fascinates him. How did he phrase it? 'A master of subtle stability'. From a professional standpoint, it also interests him that Smirke's buildings have higher percentages of reported paranormal sightings than any other architect of similar profile. He hasn't been able to find much out about the Carlton Club specifically, at least not anything relevant to this statement. In his later years, following Smirke's official retirement in 1845, there were all sorts of rumours about his interests and religious preferences. If there was a scandalous sect or bizarre cult, his name would always be seen mentioned among those meeting with them. He also started putting his name forward to design churches, despite his claimed retirement. He was never taken up on these offers. Interesting, but fundamentally not that useful for the case in hand, especially since we have

been unable to get permission to physically investigate whether this place even exists. It seems we've reached something of a dead end. No pun intended.



Sir Robert Smirke
(bust in British Museum)



Print showing Reform Club and corner of Smirke's Carlton Club

Notes

I was just finishing the statement when I noticed one of those cursed worms just inside my office. I swear it was looking at me. I called Martin, asking where he put the rest of the fire extinguishers. When he didn't reply, I went to look for one myself. He must have arrived in my office shortly afterwards, and was accosted by a couple of men. The recorder was still running, so I'll transcribe their rather strange conversation:

Martin: John, did you call for...

First Man: 'scuse us.

Second Man: Looking for the Archivist.

Martin: I'm sorry, are you two actually meant to...

First Man: Won't take up your time.

Second Man: Just got a delivery.

Martin: Look, you really can't actually...

First Man: Package for Jonathan Sims.

Second Man: Says right here.

Martin: Well, I don't really know where he...

Second Man: We'll just leave it with you.

First Man: Be sure he gets it.

Martin: Okay, I will, but you really do have to actually...

First man: 'course. Much obliged.

Second man: Stay safe.

Martin: ... I'll try?

First man: Your recorder's on, by the way.

Second man: Might want to change that.

Martin: Oh, um, so it is. Thanks.

First man: No problem.

Second man: At all.