

What The Ghost?! 3 - So You Want to Demon Proof your House

Content Warnings

- Mentions of: Satan
- SFX: High & low pitch tones, distorted voice, cartoon surprise, gunshot, fire

[Show Theme - Intro]

GEORGIE

Hello there, haunts fans! I'm Georgie Barker and this is What the Ghost?!, the podcast that uncovers the uncanny, peeks at the preternatural, and scrutinises the downright spooky.

This week's episode will be a particular treat for fans of haunted home improvements, as we take a look at the UK's long-lived, often ancient and always storied traditions of protecting your home from the devilish, the ghostly and the ghoulish. That's right, folks - this is your guide to home security, supernatural style.

[Jaunty ad jingle]

[GEORGIE puts on her strained, perky, ad voice] If there's one thing I love when I'm done with a hard day's spook-sleuthing, it's relaxing with a nice cup of tea

and the sounds of someone else's role-playing game. But there's just one problem - who can keep track of all those *people*? If you like the joys of collaborative storytelling, an ensemble cast and the camaraderie of a shared hobby, but hate the existence of groups, you'll love *Table for One*, the new actual play podcast with one GM and, well, that's it! It's just one GM.

[GEORGIE puts on an old wizard voice] "The wizard sits on an ice throne, his fur mantle draped over his shoulders and the Sceptre of Spellbindingness grasped firmly in his hand....He continues to sit there....He gets up and starts to make a sandwich."

[back to regular voice] Search your favourite podcatcher for Table for One - fun and games, for your ears only.

[Jaunty ad jingle ends]

So, You Want to Demon Proof Your House?

For aeons, people have hoped to protect themselves and their families from the dangers that lurk outside their homes. Whether through arcane apotropaic marks, sympathetic magic or the infamous witch bottles that were used as medicine, humanity has always sought wards and defences against evils unseen and unknowable. We might think that such behaviours are the feeble relics of a more superstitious age, but, behind closed doors and in the shadows, many of these traditions still live on. And while it's true that traditions are often hard to break, could it be that in this case, it's because there *is* something to ward against after all?

So, how's a modern, intelligent podcast listener with excellent taste supposed to protect their home against today's dynamic demons and go-getting ghosties? Well, it might be easier than you think! A quick apotropaic mark could be all you need to block that banshee from entering your abode through an unwatched window. 'Apotropaic' simply means "able to avert bad luck or evil influences." These symbols are powerful glyphs or pictograms that are believed to ward off any unwanted spirits that might try to enter a house.

[Jaunty ad jingle]

[GEORGIE puts on her ad voice] Is it possible for St Sebastian to be *too* sexy? Which loincloth drapes most miraculously? And who did the devil make a deal with to get those *abs*? Each week, the Hot Cross Chums delve deep into another piece of religious art through the ages, whether uncovering a statue, penetrating a painting or getting fresh with a fresco. Hot Cross Chums - the podcast where two non-believers review homoerotic catholic art, but they're looking respectfully.

[Jaunty ad jingle ends]

Let's start with the humble horseshoe. These traditional talismans are synonymous with good luck, but few people are aware of the murky origins of the fortunate ferrous flexure. It all started in the 11th century, when St Dunstan worked as a blacksmith before making the totally logical career leap to Archbishop of Canterbury. Legend has it that one day, while Dunstan was hammering away at his anvil and forge, the devil himself strode into the

workshop, requesting his horse be shod, like any other customer. As a pious man, we can assume Dunstan had at least an informal “No soul, no service” policy when it came to Satan but, rather than press the matter, he instead pretended not to recognise the behoofed fiend and set to work forging a shoe. But, once the iron had been hammered firmly into shape and the nails sharpened, he drove the shoe into the devil’s own foot. Hopping and howling in agony, the devil demanded that Dunstan remove the shoe, which he did - but not before securing a promise from Lucifer that he would never enter a household displaying a humble horseshoe on its door. Dunstan of course became a saint after his death, setting the shining example that it is A-OK to blackmail Beelzebub.

Of course, as with so many stories of mediaeval saints, this one sits firmly in the ‘legend’ camp, clearly invented as a tale to explain a behaviour that was already happening - hanging a horseshoe as a way of warding against the unnatural and unwanted. But that still leaves us wondering...what exactly led us to cling to the horseshoe for protection for almost 1,000 years? And what has it been protecting us *from*?

[Jaunty ad jingle]

[GEORGIE puts on her ad voice] Here on the Good Ol’ Podcast Network, we love stories, and we don’t see why we should let a good thing end. Lucky for us, there’s one genre that just doesn’t know when to quit - so we’ve launched LaundryPod, our very own soap opera! Welcome to Comer Cross, a friendly neighbourhood with a revolving door of residents, a surprisingly high murder rate, and an ever-growing tangle of interconnected events with no end in sight!

[GEORGIE uses a different voice for each quote] “How could you have done it, Jackie? How could you have slept with my half-brother’s cousin’s uncle’s aunt?” “I’m not your daughter, mum. I’m your mum!” “But you can’t be the serial killer, you’re just a baby! Unless...*[BANG NOISE]*”

[back to regular voice] LaundryPod - best start now, or you’ll never catch up.

[Jaunty ad jingle ends]

Now, there’s *almost certainly* no harm in hanging a charm to protect against the general forces of evil and indeterminate bad luck. But what if you’re set on fortifying your home from the specifically demonic? For that, history has you (and your windowsills) covered, with the Seal of Solomon - a mysterious ancient symbol with mystical significance in upwards of two religious traditions. This sign - said to have adorned a ring that gave its wearer the power to control demons - dates back millenia, but a version of it can still be found in magic shops and cliched metal album covers today.

The mediaeval church - undeterred by a lack of primary sources to this effect - was pretty darn convinced that the sigil was a five-pointed star, otherwise known...as a pentagram. That’s right, what we 21st-century-ers know as a classic satanic symbol was in fact originally thought to *bind* demons. It wasn’t until the early 20th century that witchcraft’s chief dickhead, Aleister Crowley, claimed that you could invert the meaning of something by simply turning it upside down. Turn a five-pointed star on its head, put a ring on it and you have yourself an occult pentacle. So, when decorating your walls and sills with wards

and seals, make extra sure you place them the right way up. If you're not careful, you just might find yourself hanging a hotline to hell...

[Jaunty ad jingle]

[GEORGIE puts on her strained, perky, ad voice] If there's one thing we all need more of, it's podcasts where two friends give their opinions on well known pieces of pop culture. So thank goodness for Jane Austentations, the podcast where two friends watch and review every Jane Austen adaptation ever filmed! Are they experts on film? No! Are they experts on classic literature or history? Also no! But do they have a unique perspective? It's impossible to prove otherwise. Jane Austentations - there's 200 years of opinions on these stories, but these ones are *ours*.

[Jaunty ad jingle ends]

So, now you know *what* to display in your home, but *where* should it be? Legend has it that malevolent spirits can enter a home on the wind itself, wherever there's a draught - so scribble your sigils over windows, on door frames and in any suspiciously cool corners. Better yet, make sure you're also guarded from the elements, and the elementals, with draught-excluders, thick curtains, and plenty of blankets - staying safe might just mean staying cosy.

But there's one household feature that's so draughty, and so dangerous, it may require a little more supernatural security - the chimney. If you have one of these fearsome features in your home, don't panic - help is at hand. All you need is an old shoe.

It might sound strange but, if there's one tradition that's stood the test of time when it comes to anti-demon security systems, it's shoving a broken shoe up a chimney. As with the horseshoe, mythology tells that unofficial saint Sir John Thorne invented the world's first jack-in-the-box by capturing the devil in a boot after what must have been a particularly lively exorcism, which could be the origin of this strange custom.

[Jaunty ad jingle]

[GEORGIE puts on her ad voice] In a village with a small population and a high average life-span...on a high street that's just a post office, three charity shops and a Greggs...next door to each other, two rival morticians compete for business...and a parking spot. But when there aren't enough stiffes for the competition, it becomes a race to create more, by any means necessary. Now they're ready to bury the hatchet...but in whom?

Concrete Shoes - you can formalde-hide, but you can't formalde-run.

[Jaunty ad jingle ends]

A somewhat *grizzlier* explanation could be that a broken boot, as something that has figuratively *died*, was believed to be able to commune with the underworld on behalf of its former foot-haver. Unlike other, apparently less paranormal, clothes and accessories, a boot retains the shape of its wearer after being removed, as if it retains some memory of being worn. Were worn boots somehow being used to intercede between the living and the dead?

It's not as wild a theory as you might think. Shoes and stockings have a direct link to folklore - just think of their place at Christmas - but, as listeners of our holiday spin-off, *What the Ghost of Christmas Past*, will remember, even the popular tradition of hiding gifts in stockings has darker origins. The Yule Lads of Icelandic folklore are considered gift givers today, but revellers of the past knew to shut their doors tight when those troublesome trolls would stalk the nights before Christmas. Once considered thieves - with a bloodthirsty mother who was said to gorge on misbehaving children - Gully Gawker, Meat Hook and the rest of the lads now leave presents, as children across Iceland leave a shoe outside their window each night. Perhaps the shoes act as a talisman, placating the wandering Lads and protecting the sleepers indoors from the dangers they pose. So the next time you hang stockings on your chimney, ask yourself this: are you inviting St Nick? Or trying to appease him...?

[Jaunty ad jingle]

[GEORGIE put on her ad voice] They say there's a perfect spot for everyone and we - a mostly human exterior designer and an android with a heart of gold alloy - are here to help you find yours, wherever it might be, on Location, Location, Space Station. Each week, we help another lost soul find their ideal home, using our patented blend of statistical analysis and extremely confident guessing. Unlike other so-called 'location scouts', we won't discount *anywhere*, so be prepared to make some compromises! *(GEORGIE puts on her Meredith Voice)* "Look Barbara, you *said* you wanted plenty of space, and that's exactly what we gave you! If you wanted breathable air, you should have put it on the list!"

[GEORGIE switches to her ad voice] Location, Location, Space Station - home isn't where the heart is; statistically, home is in the void.

[Jaunty ad jingle ends]

Whether it's hanging horseshoes, sketching seals or burying boots, it's clear that people have been clinging to the promise of protection for time immemorial. Consider the case of Creswell Crag, where hundreds of apotropaic witch marks were recently uncovered. For millennia, people have been adorning the walls of these ancient caves, from prehistoric cave paintings to early modern townsfolk making their way to the underground network to carve their wards into the rock. We can only guess at the terrors they hoped to defend against, but whatever fear they felt led them to etch countless sacred symbols and mysterious markings to shield themselves against it. The practice of hiding broken footwear above a fireplace sounds like it belongs firmly in the past - in the age of superstition - but it still continues today.

Some of these customs may seem strange, but they've undeniably stood the test of time. Perhaps we should consider that they might just work? Then again, they might not...

[Spooky piano music plays and fades into a shortened MAGNUS ARCHIVES

Outro]

ALEX

This episode is distributed by Rusty Quill, and licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial Sharealike 4.0 International License.

For more information visit rustyquill.com. Tweet us @therustyquill, visit us on Facebook or email us at mail@rustyquill.com. Thanks for listening.

[OUTRO ENDS]

What the Ghost is written and performed by Sasha Sienna.

Vocal cut editing by Nico Vettese, Music and SFX editing by Lowri Ann Davies, additional SFX and mastering by Catherine Rinella.

SFX CC-0 - nic3-one, 13fpanska-kolar-jan, lamamakesmusic, nachtmahr tv, theojt, thefilmbakery, juskiddink, jcdecha, florianreichelt, kangaroovindaloo, magnesus, morganpurkis, soundslikewillem, tieswijenen and previously credited artists.

MUSIC "Frightmare" and "Devil's Organ" both by Jimena Contreras from the YouTube library.