

## PARANORMAL

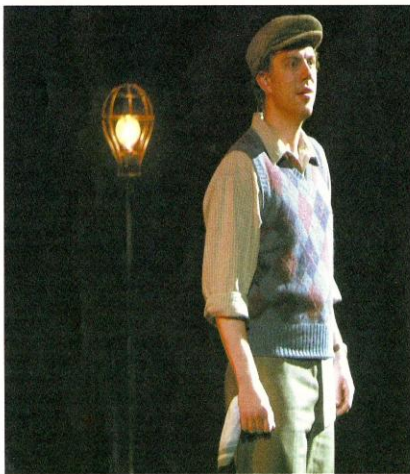


Photo by David Hou  
Jordan Bell as a boy in a scene from the Stratford Shakespeare Festival's production of 'Kiss Me, Kate.'

# ghost stories

Ronald Wolf  
FOR THE BEACON HERALD

The Stratford Shakespeare Festival is home to some of the great stage actors in Canada.

But, possibly, there are more than just actors who grace the stages here.

George the ghost is a familiar name to a lot of the staff, noted Jay Klassen, who was a head stage carpenter at the festival from 1988 to 2002.

"In the early days I was frequently there alone in the theatre late at night. I heard noises, inexplicable noises, and I could never find anybody — and that raised the hair at the back off my neck a little bit," said Klassen this spring.

When he had mentioned his experiences to another older employee he was told the strange tale of George, who many believe was Ambrose Small. Small, who owned a chain of Vaudeville theatres in the early 1900s, suddenly disappeared many years ago. Small, for some reason, was known to many as George.

The story goes that when the Avon Theatre was a cinema George was a

janitor who was down on his luck and managed to pull together a small apartment in the theatre.

However, the manager of the theatre was also using it as a place for a rendezvous with someone else's wife.

"George either stumbled across them or was aware of this going on. The story goes that the manager murdered George at the theatre and that's why his spirit was on the prowl," said Klassen.

A lot of people working by themselves have heard noises, he said.

After the 2000-01 renovation of the Avon Theatre the mysterious noises seemed to have gone silent.

"After the reconstruction was completed, I no longer heard the noises. If there were any truth to the story, I guess the resting place of the ghost was sufficiently disturbed by them."

Another element of the paranormal includes the theatre world's best-known curse. Around 1607, William Shakespeare wrote "Macbeth."

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There has always been a backdrop of misfortune with "the Scottish play." Because it has always been popular it was often staged by the theatres struggling to stay afloat. It is also often the last play staged at a theatre before it closes for good. That was usually just a tactic to put some cash in the till one last time but it also added to Macbeth's reputation as an unlucky plan.

Additionally, through the ages, "Macbeth" was also often a backup play for small theatre companies. If misfortune befell the original play, "Macbeth" was often mounted because actors know the play and it has a relatively small cast.

And then there are the witches.

The scene where the witches chant around the cauldron seemed so real that many people took them as real witches.

There is also a theory that somehow Shakespeare was duped at the time of writing "Macbeth" and the lines of the witches in the play are in fact a real curse.

All this happened at a time when people were tortured and executed as witches.

Also, because of the violent nature of the play,

the actors and even patrons would often get injured in rehearsal or during the presentation of the play itself.

One can say the play's name Macbeth only if one is in the play, so the legend goes. At Stratford the tradition is honoured and many simply refer to "Macbeth" as "the Scottish play."

And any article about theatre and the paranormal must include a reference to the Ghost Light.

*"The Ghost Light is just a bare light bulb with a cage on it that stands on something like a coat rack.... It's there so the ghosts are not in the dark."*

— Nora Polley, Stratford

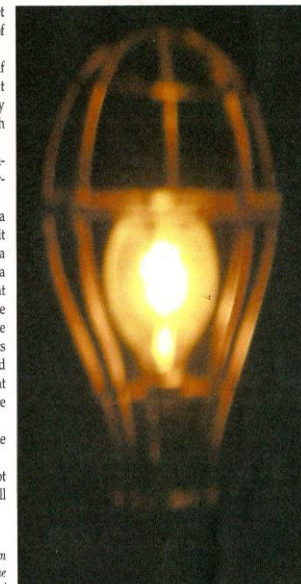
Shakespeare Festival archives assistant

"The Ghost Light is just a bare light bulb with a cage on it that stands on something like a coat rack. It has a base and a single pole. When you finish at night you bring it out onto the stage and leave it light until the next day. If's there so the ghosts are not in the dark," stated Nora Polley, archives assistant at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival.

Staff take the ghosts at the Festival very seriously.

In the question of to be or not to be, some souls continue to be or at least still want to be. That is their final answer.

Ronald Wolf is a graduate of the journalism program at Niagara College who writes about the paranormal. He produces a weekly column entitled *Things That Go Bump in a Canadian Night*.



The Ghost Light

Photo by David Hou