

The Turnkey's Cottage: A Captivating Portal into London's Victorian Past



The Turnkey of Highgate Cemetery by Lucy Rowland

★★★★☆ 4.7 out of 5

Language : English

File size : 1858 KB

Text-to-Speech : Enabled



Enhanced typesetting : Enabled
Word Wise : Enabled
Print length : 256 pages
Screen Reader : Supported



Nestled within the hallowed grounds of Highgate Cemetery in London, the Turnkey's Cottage stands as a captivating relic of Victorian history. Built in 1839 as a humble abode for the cemetery's gatekeeper, this quaint cottage has witnessed countless burials and secrets over the centuries, becoming an icon of both architectural beauty and literary lore.

Origins and Design: A Gothic Revival Masterpiece

The Turnkey's Cottage was designed by architect James Bunstone Bunning in the Gothic Revival style, popular in Victorian England. The cottage features a steeply pitched roof, pointed arched windows, and intricate stonework, creating an atmosphere of medieval enchantment. The building's small size and asymmetrical shape give it a cozy and almost fairy-tale-like appearance.



The Turnkey's Cottage originally served as the home of the cemetery's gatekeeper.

As its name suggests, the cottage was originally intended to house the gatekeeper of Highgate Cemetery. The gatekeeper's duty was to watch over the cemetery, ensuring its security and keeping it free from trespassers. The cottage provided a comfortable and convenient place for the gatekeeper to live and work, with ample space for a small family.

Literary Connections: A Haven for Writers

Over the years, the Turnkey's Cottage became a pilgrimage site for literary enthusiasts. It was here that the Pre-Raphaelite artist and poet Dante Gabriel Rossetti met his muse and wife, Elizabeth Siddal. The cottage became a frequent meeting place for the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, a circle of young artists who challenged the conventions of Victorian art.

The Turnkey's Cottage also appears in several novels by Charles Dickens. In his masterpiece "Bleak House," Dickens uses the cottage as the setting for a scene where the protagonist, Esther Summerson, visits the cemetery. The cottage's eerie atmosphere and connection to death and the afterlife inspired Dickens' vivid descriptions.

Symbolism and Preservation: A Victorian Time Capsule



The Turnkey's Cottage has become a symbol of Victorian culture and the Gothic Revival movement. Its unique architecture and literary associations have made it a popular tourist destination and a favorite subject for photographers and artists.

In the 20th century, the cottage fell into disrepair, but was meticulously restored in the 1970s by the Friends of Highgate Cemetery Trust. Today, the cottage is open to the public as a museum, offering visitors a chance to experience a slice of Victorian history firsthand.

Visiting the Turnkey's Cottage: A Haunting and Enchanting Journey

Visiting the Turnkey's Cottage is an unforgettable experience. The cottage's charming exterior and peaceful surroundings create an atmosphere of mystery and intrigue. Visitors can step inside to explore its small but well-preserved interior, which includes original fireplaces, wooden beams, and period furniture.



The Turnkey's Cottage offers stunning views of Highgate Cemetery's historic tombs and monuments.

From the cottage, visitors can stroll through the adjacent Highgate Cemetery, admiring the elaborate tombs and monuments that mark the resting places of famous Victorians, including Karl Marx, Douglas Adams, and George Eliot. The cemetery's serene beauty and rich history provide a haunting and evocative backdrop to the Turnkey's Cottage.

The Turnkey's Cottage in Highgate Cemetery is a captivating portal into London's Victorian past. Its origins as a humble gatekeeper's dwelling to its transformation into a literary landmark and symbol of architectural beauty tell a rich and fascinating story. Visitors to the cottage can experience firsthand the charm and intrigue of the Victorian era, while also admiring the enduring legacy of Gothic Revival architecture.

Whether you're a lover of history, literature, or simply appreciate the beauty of historic architecture, the Turnkey's Cottage is a must-visit destination in London. Its haunting beauty and enigmatic history will undoubtedly leave a lasting impression.



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