

The first edition of *Ghost Gleams* by W. J. Wintle

Not long ago an American gentleman came to visit. Before tea, I showed him around the house; as we passed through the hall he stopped by a bookcase on which I keep some of the family books, many of which were collected by my great-grandmother, Catherine Mortimer (1862-1946), who had a penchant for popular fiction.

“You’ve got a copy of *Ghost Gleams*,” he exclaimed.

It turned out that my guest was an aficionado of collectible ghost stories, and this, as he told me, is one of the most sought-after volumes of all. “Do check it out,” he urged me, “you’ve got something really special there.”

He was not wrong. There is a copy of a 1921 edition of *Ghost Gleams* on the market at the moment with an American specialist bookseller for about £900. That one has a blue cloth cover with black lettering. The same specialist bookseller has previously sold one with a dark-grey cloth cover, with orange lettering, like mine. What he has never sold – indeed, he has never heard of – is the dustjacket that still envelopes my copy.

You have to be a book enthusiast to understand how exciting this is. But I *am* a book enthusiast – my first proper job was as a second-hand bookseller in Charing Cross Road – and so I looked further. Copac, a bibliographic search engine that covers the catalogues of about ninety of the major UK and Irish academic, national and specialist research libraries, revealed seven copies in the UK. It turns out that the publishers Heath Cranton had duly deposited copies at the six copyright libraries (British Library; National Library of Wales; National Library of Scotland; Trinity College Dublin; the Bodleian Library, Oxford; and Cambridge University Library). Apart from those six, there is a copy in the Harry Price Library at the University of London Library. And that is it, as far as major UK libraries go.

The thing about research libraries is that they tended not to keep dustjackets. The above catalogues don’t say that they have dustjackets but nor do they say they do not have them. The British Library routinely removed dustjackets and threw them away; it kept a few from the 1920s but generally chucked them out until 1956, after which it kept them all.

Naturally, I did a google search to see if I could find another example. I could not. The only image that came up for *Ghost Gleams* was the cover of a new edition published in 1999. The artwork was completely different, modern. I looked at the introduction to the new edition: it stated that the original had had a dark-grey cloth binding with orange lettering and that it cost

7/6; the editor mentioned nothing about the original artwork. It seemed that he did not know it had ever existed. Another specialist researcher in the USA stated that he had been unable to borrow a first edition through the USA academic inter-library loan system. He too said nothing about a dustjacket.

So now I find myself wondering. I know this is a rare and collectable book. But it is just possible that my copy is the only one left with its original jacket and artwork. Perhaps someone else has another copy among the books inherited from his great-grandmother, where it is silently waiting, but there can't be many.

Ian Mortimer, 18 January 2016

