

THE SPIRIT OF NIKON

by Sir Simon Marsden

ANGEL EYES XI

by Heather Angel

OWNER
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SIR SIMON MARSDEN:

THE DARK KNIGHT RISES

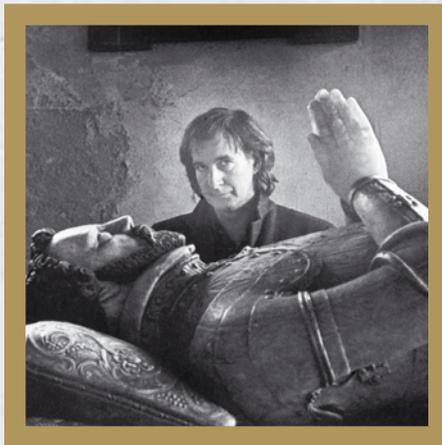
B Y G R A Y L E V E T T

The internationally acclaimed photographer Sir Simon Marsden died on 22nd January this year aged sixty-three.

Sir Simon Marsden was a photographer who was unequalled in capturing the mysterious spirit of ancient landscapes and romantic ruins. Simon Marsden's unique photographic work is magical, haunting and eloquent; it speaks of other, stranger worlds. A respected authority on the supernatural, he was also a consummate storyteller at once captivating in his artistry and delightful in his wit.

He spent his childhood in two famously haunted manor houses in the depths of the English countryside, with a library of occult books and a father who delighted in telling his children fireside ghost stories. His fascination with photography began when his father gave him a Leica camera for his 21st birthday, and the story goes that the first roll of film that he shot was of cardboard cut-outs of ghosts that he had arranged in a tableau in the garden.

He worked in London as an assistant to the Irish photographer Ruan O'Lochlainn, then travelled to



the United States where he was discovered by a New York gallery owner. From that time onwards he held many successful exhibitions all over the world, showing his images widely in galleries from Brussels to Tokyo. Sir Simon's work can now be found in a number of prestigious galleries and museums including the Getty Museum in California, the Victoria & Albert Museum in London and Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.

During his life, Sir Simon Marsden published twelve books on subjects ranging from US author Edgar Allan Poe to the ruined great houses of Ireland. They are the work of a true artist: *The Haunted Realm*, *In Ruins*, *Phantoms of the Isles*, *Visions of Poe*, *The Journal of a Ghosthunter*, *Beyond the Wall*, *Venice - City of Haunting Dreams*, *The Twilight Hour - Celtic Visions from the Past*, *This Spectred Isle*, *Ghosthunter: A Journey Through Haunted France*, *Memento Mori* and his most recent book *Vampires: The Twilight World*. His final book, *Russia: A World Apart* (with text by Duncan McLaren), is due to be published later this year.

◆ **RIGHT:** Whitby Abbey, Yorkshire, England







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- Michael Doven*

◇ **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Steps, Chateau Vieux, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, Paris

◇ **TOP:** Bamburgh Castle, Northumberland, England

◇ **LEFT:** Statue, Toddington Manor, Gloucestershire, England

He was frequently featured on television and radio and his award-winning documentary drama feature film *The Twilight Hour: Visions of Ireland's Haunted Past*, narrated by John Hurt and directed by Jason Figgis, was shown worldwide.

I first met Simon in 1992 when he called into Grays of Westminster. We sat down to talk and our conversation lasted through a long and fascinating afternoon and numerous cups of coffee. I was stunned when he told me he used a battery of Nikkormat FTn and FT2 cameras to create his extraordinary work. We stayed in touch and would meet up for lunch or dinner whenever he visited London. He wrote an article describing why he used Nikon cameras called *The Spirit of Nikon*, published in the *Grays of Westminster Gazette* in March 1997, which I thought you might like to read.

Later on we worked on two sold-out shows together, *An Evening with...Sir Simon Marsden* as well as the special showing of the documentary feature

film *The Twilight Hour: Visions of Ireland's Haunted Past* in the Castle at Saint Hill Manor, Sussex.

Some years ago I was at an art gallery showing of Simon's work and was entranced by his photograph of deserted sand dunes that drifted around clumps of grass and wind-swept trees. In the centre of the picture was an old wooden set of steps that seemed to disappear into a stunning skyline. It was limited to less than ten signed numbered pieces and priced accordingly. I told Simon how much I loved it and that I would make a point of treating myself one day. A week after we put on that first show together a large flat package arrived for me with the print enclosed along with thank you note from Simon! I was both taken aback and completely thrilled by his generosity.

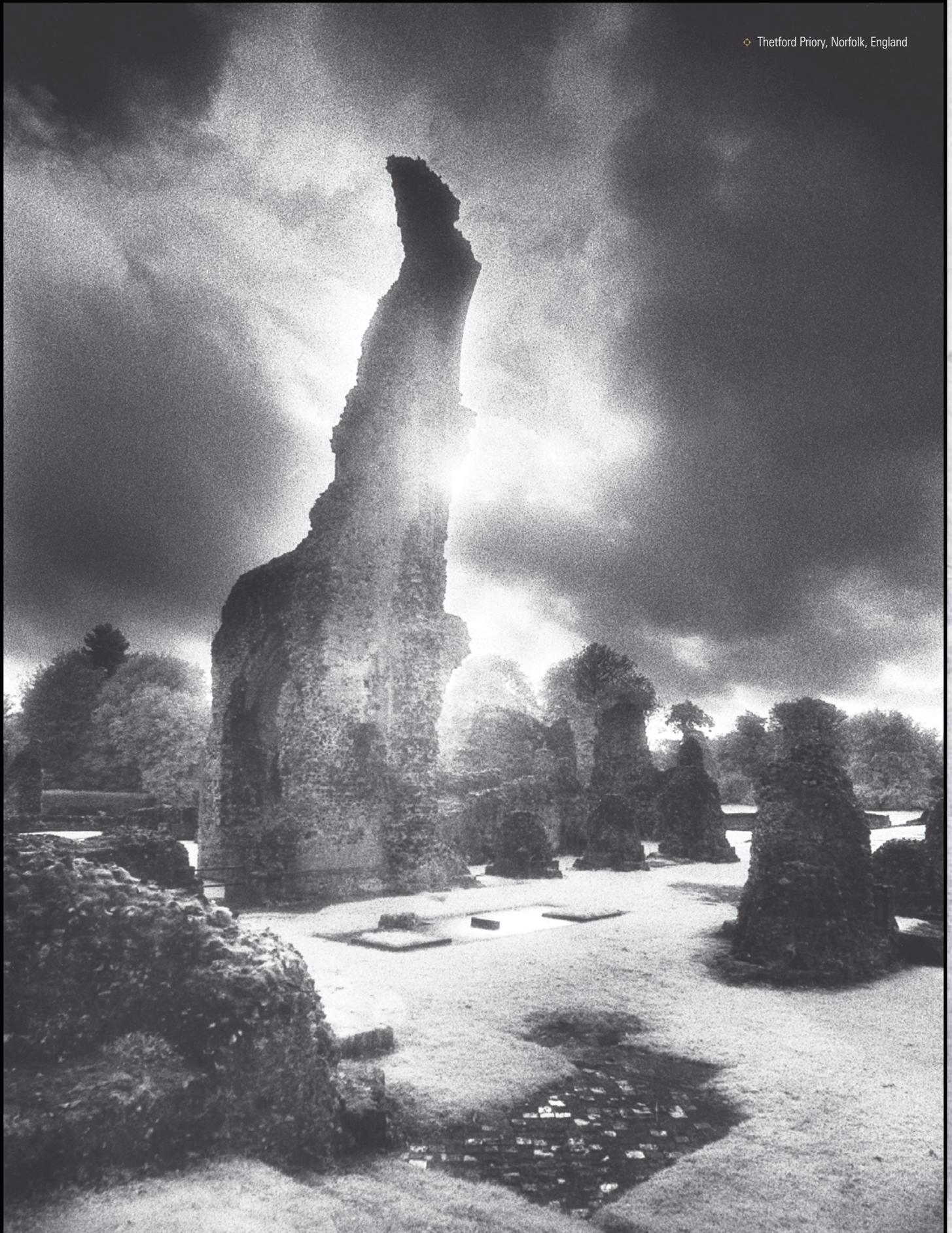
I now own a number of Simon's images that are framed and mounted on the walls of my office. I find them a constant source of inspiration and confirmation that an artist is capable

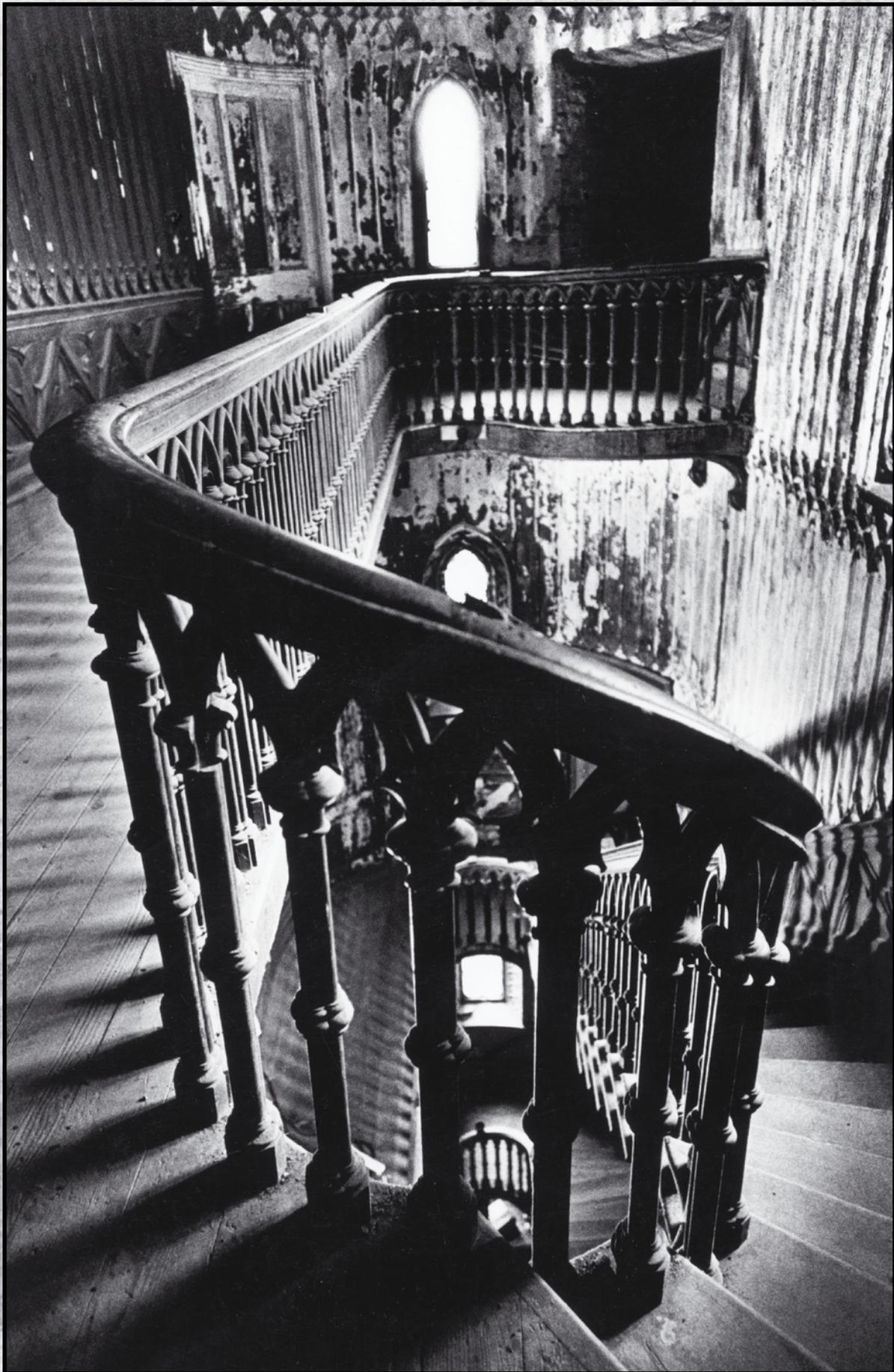
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◆ Julian's Bower, Lincolnshire, England



◆ Thetford Priory, Norfolk, England





◆ **LEFT:** Staircase, Charleville Forest, County Offaly, Ireland

◆ **TOP RIGHT:** Fountain, Witley Court, Worcestershire, England



of lifting the spirit to new heights with his creativity.

He inspired many other people too. While I was preparing for this article I contacted a number of individuals to enquire if they would like to share their thoughts. I present two of them here. The first is from the Los Angeles based photographer and film producer Michael Doven:

"Godspeed, Simon Marsden. Thank you for sharing your artistry, imagination and craft. I am in awe of the life you bring to stones, castles, statues and skies. You have found a way to grant them the power to glow, radiate and live in a manner that will be with me forever. I see, imagine and photograph in new ways because of you.

With admiration and respect."

The second is from film director Jason Figgis who writes:

"I had always been an admirer of Simon's beautifully evocative photographs and so one day decided to write to his agent requesting an introduction. It wasn't long before Simon contacted me and we struck up a friendship based on our mutual fascination for the paranormal and the myriad ruins that served as a romantic and atmospheric backdrop to this interest. I came to the table as a film director with a suggestion that he and I collaborate on a documentary feature film. He was warmly open to the idea. So, with the date looming for his photographic tour of Ireland to

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gather material for his latest book *The Twilight Hour: Celtic Visions of the Past* we – Simon, Ann (production manager and driver) and I – set off around Ireland on a tour of some wonderful locations including Charleville Forest in Co. Offaly and Castle Leslie in Co. Monaghan. Watching Simon work was as fascinating as the hours of conversation that we shared each afternoon for lunch and each evening over dinner... as stories of his adventures filled our senses. He was the most erudite and humorous company as we immersed ourselves in this photographic/film-making adventure and I cherish my memories of our friendship. The film,



www.marsdenarchive.com

which is called *The Twilight Hour: Visions of Ireland's Haunted Past* went on to be distributed to 100 countries in 2004 and to play on Discovery Channel - twice a day, twice a week for three years. We were thrilled that so many thousands (and possibly millions) of viewers got to share in that adventure that we three so warmly embraced"

"It is not my intention to try and convince you that ghosts exist," Simon Marsden said, "but rather to inspire you not to take everything around you at face value. I believe that another dimension, a spirit world, runs parallel to our own, and that sometimes, when the conditions are right, we can see into and become part of this supernatural domain. The mystical quality of my photographs reflects this ancient order and they attempt to reveal what is eternal."

In this memorial issue of *Nikon Owner* I give you some of the work of a grand master, part photographer, part writer and part guardian of the haunted realms – Simon Marsden. ■

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◆ The Callanish Stones, Isle of Lewis, Outer Hebrides, Scotland



◆ Gothic Window, Castle Bernard,
County Cork, Ireland