

Sunday Mercury

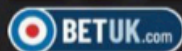
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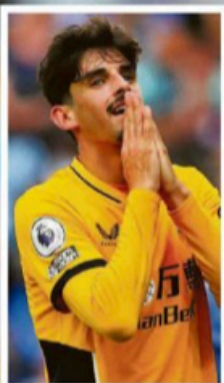
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Experts believe secret grave holds biblical treasure older than the Dead Sea Scrolls...

BURIED IN BURTON: THE LOST 11TH COMMANDMENT

EXCLUSIVE
BY MIKE
LOCKLEY
► PAGES 4-5



NEWS

SECRET GRAVE & THE LONG-LOST SHAPIRA SCROLL

EXCLUSIVE

MIKE LOCKLEY
Sunday Mercury Writer

WITH hands near shaking with excitement, the historian carefully pulled away the bracken and ivy that, for decades, had masked a weather-worn headstone.

A headstone, according to official documents, that did not exist.

The barely legible words on the memorial stunned respected anthropologist David Adkins: "Not Lost. Not Lost."

For him, it was the final missing piece of the complex jigsaw that has become the search for the world's oldest biblical manuscript, the Shapira Scroll.

That document contains the lost 11th commandment: "You shall not hate your brother in your heart."

The Sunday Mercury can now reveal the search for the scroll has brought a team of high-profile archaeologists, led by author Ross Nichols, to the brewery town of Burton on Trent, Staffordshire.

The reason? The manuscript - older than the Dead Sea Scrolls - was last in the possession of Burton doctor and historian Philip Brookes-Mason.

David, assisting the US team, has uncovered compelling evidence indicating the scroll was buried with Brookes-Mason, who died in 1903.

The cross-Atlantic investigation has been spawned by a Sunday Mercury exclusive that travelled the globe.

Last month we revealed an ancient manor house in Burton, Sinai House, was at the centre of a search for the lost treasures of the Knights Templar.

Those treasures include the Holy Grail itself. Clues could lie in the maze of tunnels and caves below the property.

The links were uncovered by David. His findings - and our story - made the front page of tabloids in Britain.

The story went worldwide, appearing in the New York Times as well as papers in Russia, France, Spain and Romania.

David's revelation drew the team of experts from New York and Louisiana to Sinai House, but they came not in search of the Holy Grail, but something of equally seismic religious importance.



They came in search of the lost 11th Commandment. To be precise, they came in search of the lost Shapira Scroll, which contains the Commandment.

The document, the world's oldest Biblical manuscript and the first Dead Sea Scroll discovered, was found by Bedouin nomads. It was last seen in Burton.

In 1883, it passed into the hands of Jerusalem antiques dealer Moses Shapira - hence the name.

David, aged 50, takes up the tragic tale: "It became an international story that ran for weeks in the world press. It seemed set to change the foundations of religious history and the British Museum famously offered £1million for the scroll - over £80million in today's money."



"Then everything collapsed when one expert decided that the scroll must be a fake. It was argued that a manuscript could never survive for over 2,000 years in a Dead Sea cave."

Then the real Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in the same location - and shocked experts realised they may have let a manuscript of huge significance to mankind slip through their fingers.

Discredited and vilified, Moses Shapira committed suicide in a hotel room.

The controversial document was sold for peanuts - just a few pounds - to Philip Brookes-Mason.

But the question that baffles David and the American archaeologists is: why did the GP want the manuscript?

After all, it had been deemed worthless and without historical significance. It was tainted.

They now have the answer. "During our meeting at Sinai House we were able to reveal the links between Sinai and the scroll," David told the Sunday Mercury. "In fact, it was only due to Sinai House - and local interest in the Biblical Mount Sinai - that the scroll had ended up in Burton at all."

"Generations of Burton people had known that Sinai House was an incredibly special and ancient place - although the true depths of its religious links had been lost in time."

"The Sunday Mercury's recent article highlighted the long-forgotten links with Sinai House, the Knights Templar and their own legendary links with the Ark of the Covenant and the Ten Commandments."

"These ancient links were ingrained in local people's minds - none more so than Brookes-Mason who became the president of the Burton on Trent Natural History and Archaeology Society."

NEWS



■ Anthropologist David Adkins at Sinai House alongside archaeologists from the US; opposite, Burton doctor Philip Brookes-Mason and his newly-discovered grave, and the Sunday Mercury front page story of the lost Templar Hoard

"It was this link between the Ark of the Covenant and the aptly named Sinai House that lighted Mason's interest to acquire the Shapira Scroll - which he did after the world had dismissed it as a fake."

"There was no more fitting place in England for the scroll to be than Burton - near the aptly named Sinai House."

Brookes-Mason died in 1903 and the Shapira Scroll disappeared, seemingly lost forever. The world saw it as a fake and interest died. But in 1947 the Dead Sea Scrolls were found in the same location.

Suddenly the world had proof that a manuscript could indeed survive for over 2,000 years in a Dead Sea Cave. Had the Shapira Scroll been genuine after all?

A hunt began to find the yellowed document. That hunt has continued for decades.

The clues to the scroll's location can be found at Brookes-Mason's grave, David believes.

"Last year I visited the grave of Dr Philip Brookes-Mason and here the clues started to unfold," he said.

"I had to ask the staff at the Burton Cemetery office for the location of the grave, but they told me there was no stone listed in the records - and so nothing to see."

"Nonetheless, after searching through brambles and thorns I found the plot and pushing back the ivy found the inscription recording the death of Dr Philip Brookes-Mason on November 5, 1903."

"The verse was overgrown and I could not read it, but I was delighted to find a stone."

"The anomaly in the records was unusual and I returned to the cemetery office to inform them that there was indeed a stone there. They were surprised as their records are never wrong."

"I instantly considered the possibility that someone had tried to obscure the location of the grave in years gone by."

"If so, why? Had Mason, a genius of his day, known the scroll was genuine and did he think that one day people would come looking for it?"

"Having found the grave, I was able to find the funeral notice in the local paper of 1903. Interestingly - and by express permission - his widow placed a wreath with her husband, stating to be interred with him, during the funeral service."

"This was the only account of this happening that I had ever seen and it was unusual. Again was it possible the wreath concealed the scroll?"

If so, there is an even more earth-shattering conclusion. One of Christianity's most important texts is buried in the grave.

David said: "I took the American archaeologists to see the grave during their visit to Sinai House. On that day the

inscription was visible and contained a very cryptic and telling verse. The words 'Not Lost... Not Lost' were incorporated twice into the short, two-line verse."

"This was the final piece in the cryptic puzzle - and standing by the grave of the Shapira Scroll's last owner, we considered the likelihood that Mason himself had been buried with the scroll."

Strange as it sounds, could the oldest Biblical text in the world, the earliest book of Deuteronomy and the first Dead Sea Scroll ever to be found, be buried with its last known owner in Burton on Trent?

"When you look at the evidence, I think it is the most likely place for the scroll to be."

"That aside, it is a proven fact that the oldest Bible in the world was last seen here in the brewing town of Burton and without its last known owner's interest in Sinai House, it may never have found its way to the town."

3 stabbed in street battle

THREE men have been arrested over stabbings in Perry Barr on Friday night.

Victims, aged 19, 21 and 22, are being treated for stab wounds which are not believed to be life-threatening, police said.

The group allegedly attacked occupants of a car at the Woodall Road and Broadway junction at around 10pm.

A number of weapons have been recovered and detectives have launched an investigation into the incident.

A West Midlands Police spokesman told the Sunday Mercury: "A group of men are believed to have attacked the occupants of a car before they themselves were attacked by the people in the vehicle, just before 10pm at the junction of Woodall Road and Broadway."

"The victims, aged 19, 21 and 22, are being treated for stab wounds which are not believed to be life-threatening. They remain in hospital and have been arrested on suspicion of violent disorder."

"A number of weapons have been recovered and detectives are now trying to identify the occupants of the car."

Anyone with information is urged to call police on 101.

Red Bull thief avoids the can

A MAN has appeared in court after he stole 100 cans of Red Bull from a Black Country petrol station.

Elliot Mendresse, of Goode Avenue, Hockley, made off with £95 worth of energy drinks on two occasions when he targeted the BP service station in West Bromwich.

The 42-year-old stole 50 cans of Red Bull on both occasions when he raided the Birmingham Road shop on June 12 and June 15 this year.

Mendresse originally denied two counts of theft but changed his plea to guilty when he appeared at Birmingham Magistrates' Court on Wednesday, August 11. A separate charge of possession of cannabis was dismissed.

Magistrates said the offences were made more serious because the thefts were committed while he was on licence and due to his previous record and character.

They sentenced Mendresse to 12 weeks in prison, suspended for 18 months.

He must also undertake rehabilitation activities for up to 15 days and pay compensation of £95, plus £428 in costs.