

A SCHOOL HAUNTING

by William J Eyre

Often investigators only experience anomalous phenomena 'second-hand' - through the testimony of witnesses. Even on vigils it is seldom that truly inexplicable events are experienced at first-hand. But in this case strange things started to happen even at the interview stage.

Stories of strange happenings stretch back a number of years at Penbury School, Donwick [pseudonym], but events came to a head during the first half of 1996 with a report coming to ASSAP's attention of regular haunting-type phenomena, some of them allegedly violent, occurring in the caretaker's flat, which is built into the school. The case proved to be particularly fruitful as phenomena occurred each time ASSAP investigators visited the school.

The Interview

On 7 June 1996, Elizabeth Elliott and I visited Penbury School in order to allow Mrs Powell [pseudonym], the caretaker's wife, and Graham Powell [pseudonym], the caretaker's 22-year old son, to describe what had been happening and to ask relevant questions to throw light on whether the goings-on were really of a paranormal nature.

Graham said that he sometimes saw images or shadows in their flat; once, while in the lounge, he had seen an apparition through the glass panel of the door leading to the hall. On another occasion he claimed to have seen the apparition of a woman and child in the school. He also saw images on a television screen, even though it was switched off. He had experienced the sensation of sudden unexpected temperature changes and of attempts by something to control the right-hand side of his body. His body built up a lot of static electricity; sometimes a blue spark appeared when he touched objects.

Graham explained that the most worrying phenomena occurred in bed. In January 1996 some furniture had been moved from one of the classrooms and stored in a corridor just outside Graham's bedroom. There was a fireplace on Graham's side of the wall adjoining the corridor. Since that time, on a number of occasions, something had either tried to pull Graham by the legs out of bed or pushed him and, on occasion, tried to strangle

him. Sometimes he sensed some sort of presence approaching him, coming from the direction of the fireplace. His most frightening experience had occurred about a week before the interview. On that occasion he had seen a haze with eyes in it approaching his bed and then had his legs pulled in an attempt to drag him out of bed. He was so alarmed that he ran next door into his parents' bedroom to wake his mother. Over the next few minutes, a red mark developed on his right knee, accompanied by a burning pain. Over the next few days the mark turned into a blister and this was shown to the investigators. Coincident with this attack on Graham, one of the family's dogs, a West Highland terrier, which had been lying at the foot of Graham's bed, spontaneously bled from a spot by its left ear.

Mrs Powell explained that she had, on occasion, seen a haze in her bedroom and had her ankles tugged while in bed. She could sometimes feel herself being sexually groped by someone other than her husband (who tended to sleep like a log during these occurrences). She claimed to have woken up with black eyes once after one such attack. While she was awake, but in the flat, it sometimes felt to her as if someone was moving their hand through her hair.

As a result of the frightening nature of the phenomena taking place in the bedrooms, the family had taken to sleeping together in the lounge. To some extent, the phenomena followed them there. For example, one night, while sleeping on the bed-settee, Graham was woken up by someone pressing down on his chest. He saw a child sitting on the back of the bed-settee, pressing her legs down on him. For a while, he felt paralysed. Then, when was able to, he got up and the child laughed at him. Other occasional minor psychokinetic effects were also reported. It was established that the family had no interest in, and no knowledge of, the paranormal.

During the interview, Elizabeth saw something dark near the floor close to where she was sitting, and at the same time Graham could see an image of a woman in the same corner of the room. Shortly after, an anomalous breeze was detected, being felt by Elizabeth, myself and Mrs Powell in that order as it moved around the room, starting at that corner. Mrs Powell and Graham experienced bodily temperature changes. Later in the interview, the dog stood in the middle of the room, staring at something invisible in the opposite corner of the room. Its hair stood on end and it started bleeding near its left ear for no apparent reason. When the blood had been wiped away, there appeared to be no sign of a cut.

Visits by Tim Grinold

As this case had come to ASSAP's attention via Tim Grinold, he also visited the school. Each time he did so, he experienced phenomena. While in the school nursery, he felt what seemed like a sharp pencil being stabbed into his forearm. While walking along the ground floor corridor of the school, he felt a child holding his hand. In the lounge of the flat he saw the apparition of a woman with long hair through the glass door leading into the hall.

The Vigil

The foregoing had led the investigators to the conclusion that paranormal phenomena were indeed happening, and so it was decided to hold a vigil in an attempt to throw further light on the matter. This was held on 15 June and the ASSAP investigators (Elizabeth, Tim and I) were joined by Colin Lowe and Vernon Myers of CPSG (Chesterfield Psychic Study Group). In order to simulate the conditions prevailing when the main phenomena took place as closely as possible, Graham joined the investigators for the vigil, which was timed to encompass the hours of 12 midnight to 4 am. The areas covered were the two bedrooms of the caretaker's flat. Some of the watches were held in relative or total darkness.

The vigil was divided up into five watches of 45 minutes each, separated by 20-minute rest periods. Team 1 consisted of Tim, Vernon and Graham. Team 2 consisted of Elizabeth, Colin and myself. The two teams alternately occupied the two bedrooms.

At 11.30 p.m., just as the first watch was about to begin, Mrs Powell called from the lounge, where she and Mr Powell were just about to go to sleep, to point out that the left ear of the dog, which was in the lounge, had spontaneously started bleeding again. The dog's hair was standing on end and the dog appeared distressed. Video footage of the bleeding was attempted but did not come out very well because of the dim lighting. The area of the bleeding seemed to be hot.

During the first watch Graham (in his own bedroom) felt a cold draught round his right-hand side and felt as if something were holding him around the neck. Tim saw two separate sets of dancing white lights near the ceiling. Then the right-hand side of Graham's neck went numb; it felt as if it were being pushed. He reported seeing a light repeatedly going around the room. Tim felt something that felt like icicles playing with the back of his neck. Then his legs went ice cold, while the rest of his body still

felt warm. The thermometer still registered 18°C. In Mr and Mrs Powell's bedroom Elizabeth also felt extremes of temperature.

During the second watch, in the parents' room, Graham saw a light along one of the walls. He reported seeing a cat jump onto the bed and run across it. Both Tim and Graham felt an 'unnatural coldness' coming on. Graham then felt something poke him in the right eye, causing it to become bloodshot.

Part way through the third watch, Graham (lying on the bed in his own room) saw it go hazy around the window. He felt a presence grab his ankles; it then moved onto his knees. The haziness moved from the window to behind him, at which point it pushed him most of the way off the bed. The experience frightened him and left him shaking. Coldness was experienced by both Tim and Graham but not by Vernon or the thermometer, which registered 19°C. Although Vernon had a camcorder, he was unable to film the proceedings because that particular watch was held in darkness.

To simulate the conditions of the phenomena occurring in Graham's bedroom during the third watch, Elizabeth lay on the bed in that room during the fourth watch. Again there was darkness. She felt extreme cold but no 'pushing' sensation. The other investigators and the thermometer were within a metre or so of the bed but they felt a normal temperature and the thermometer recorded 19°C again.

In the final watch Tim lay on the bed that seemed to be the focus of activity and, like Elizabeth during the previous watch, felt extremely cold but no 'pushing' sensation.

Mediumistic Intervention

Subsequent to the vigil, the phenomena became so violent that the Powells bought a small, second-hand caravan. They parked it in the schoolyard and took to sleeping in it, as they were too frightened to sleep in the flat at night. Although outside ASSAP's remit, the CPSG independently arranged for medium Peter Hawksworth to carry out a 'spirit rescue' because the phenomena were causing the Powells such a serious problem (see box).

Subsequently the violent phenomena ceased. With conditions returning to something approaching normality, the family resumed sleeping in the flat. About two months later the Powells reported a resumption of some night -

WHAT THE MEDIUM REPORTED

On 1 July, Peter Hawksworth (a medium and member of CPSG) visited the school accompanied by his wife Lynda and myself. Peter and Lynda spent a period of time in Graham's room. Peter mediumistically sensed the presence of a very tall man, not bad-looking but with a nasty and strict nature, who used to work in the building. He had carried out one or more thefts from the school and had been lingering around the school since his death. The man had a back problem. The description of this entity tallied with that of an apparition seen by Graham. Other entities were also sensed in the school and flat but, unlike the 'tall man', those were not thought to be of a malevolent nature. Lynda picked up a smell of cooking in Graham's room (other people had previously reported a smell of bacon and eggs cooking there).

On his second visit Peter sensed a different male presence. Peter felt this entity was unconnected with the building and thought Graham might perhaps be subconsciously attracting entities to himself.

time phenomena so a second 'spirit rescue' was carried out by Peter. Again, the phenomena largely died down.

The latest contact with the Powells was in January 1997, and the general picture was that things had largely quietened down, though Graham still sometimes had odd experiences.

Some Deductions

Sleep paralysis is an obvious explanation to consider in any case involving strange experiences happening in bed. However, it does not fit the bill in this particular case as the 'bed' phenomena were experienced by two different people. Also, the phenomena sometimes persisted after any paralysis had worn off and some phenomena were experienced by both subjects and investigators when everyone was wide awake.

It seems quite obvious that Mrs Powell and, to an even greater extent, Graham Powell are highly sensitive to the phenomena at the site (they experienced things that investigators present did not). Assuming that the paranormal history of the school is to be taken at face value, the two people may have interacted with something that was already in existence at the site. This might have caused a 'low level' haunting to flare up into something much more dramatic. If so, it might add an interesting clue to the fascinating question of how people and sites interact to produce anomalous phenomena.