

# ANOMALY

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*by Andrew Homer and Dennis Bache*

*We devote the whole of this issue to a remarkably well-reported and intriguing case of haunting. It is published virtually in its entirety for two reasons: to act as a model for future case reports and to give readers the facts in as much detail as possible. Too many cases are reported as 'snippets' in the popular press allowing no realistic assessment of their true merits. It is not the intention to report cases at such length regularly.*

# Shadows

by Andrew Homer and Dennis Bache

This is without doubt one of the best ASSAP cases (conducted in conjunction with Parasearch) of recent years. The report won its authors the Michael Bentine Memorial Shield for 1998. It concerns events at a Midlands retirement home. It is remarkable both because the investigators succeeded in witnessing most of the phenomena themselves and because of the excellent way it was reported. The following article comes almost word for word from the report. *Please note: All names (people and places) are pseudonyms with the exception of the investigators.*

This case originated when the Chairman of Parasearch, David Taylor, received a telephone call from the proprietor of the Hawthorn Retirement Home, Margaret Dawes. Margaret had initially contacted a radio station for help when staff and residents at the retirement home were regularly experiencing strange phenomena. They passed on the contact number for Parasearch without, as far as we are aware, broadcasting details of the case.

Residents and staff were reporting a variety of phenomena including music being heard, dark shadows and figures being seen and furniture moved. One member of staff was particularly susceptible to these experiences, and at one stage a vicar and a clairvoyant had been called in. At the time of our investigation the residential home had 18 aged and infirm residents looked after by 24 staff.

## The Site

The Hawthorn Retirement Home was converted from a large detached house. The property was built circa 1952 by the Harris

family who were local garage owners. It was built on former farm land immediately opposite St Luke's vicarage. Mark and Pauline Harris occupied the property until 1960. It was then the home of a Dr Peter Atkinson and family, who used it as a surgery until 1984. From February 1984 the property has been owned by Margaret and Harold Dawes. The retirement home officially opened in June 1984.

## **The Witnesses**

At our initial meeting with the main witnesses the following people were present:

Margaret and Harold Dawes: Husband and wife, owners of the retirement home. They had sadly lost their son about six years before and Margaret, in particular, felt there was a connection between their loss and the activity being experienced. Apart from telephone calls, the initial meeting was the only direct contact we had with Margaret and Harold. Our subsequent investigation involved only night-care staff employed at the home.

Val Smith: Val was a care assistant at the home until she left for another post during the course of our investigation. Val is diabetic. Prior to our first visit Val had worked at the home for approximately five years.

Anne Matthews: Anne was a care assistant at the home until she also left for another post during our investigation. Anne had also spent approximately five years working at the home.

On subsequent visits we were also able to meet and interview the following care staff: Carol Parsons, Marie Jones, Dorothy (Dot) Watkins.

Although other members of staff and residents were often referred to as experiencing the phenomena, we confined our investigation to the key members of staff involved. Also, because of the frail and infirm nature of the residents involved, we made no requests to interview any of them.

While the owners and staff gave us as much help as possible, we were always mindful that, for the most part, the main witnesses were employees at the home and as such we both felt it inappropriate to pursue personal information beyond that volunteered to us during the course of the investigation.

## **Incident Report**

The information reported below is taken directly from interviews with the main witnesses. Because of the diversity of the phenomena and the number of witnesses involved, the incidents are grouped under descriptive sub-headings.

The lounge and the dining room are swapped around depending on the time of year. All references to these rooms are as per the schematic diagram.

### *Auditory*

The activity started around bedroom 2 which had been occupied by one of the first residents, a woman in her 90s called Mrs Latimer. She had very long, thin, sparse hair which she used to do up in a knot with long open pins. For 3 to 4 years after this woman died the staff used to find the pins and joke that it was Mrs Latimer.

Around 1989 another female resident started saying that she heard lovely music but no one else could hear it. At times this woman would get quite agitated and upset and she would go to the back door and shout, 'I can't cope with it any more, I've told you to go away.' This woman would often say to Val, 'You can hear this music, can't you?' Val would say, 'No, I can't'. Eventually though, Val was able to hear the music. Val described it as a lovely ladies choir, 'Very nice, it's a very happy tune. It's not morbid at all.' The music appeared to come from the storeroom at the end of the same corridor as Room 2 where much of the activity seems to be centred.

Anne also now heard the choir and, in particular, a woman with a lovely voice. Marie also reported hearing a church choir on many occasions. Dot also heard it. Both Val and Anne said that, although the music was heard regularly by residents and staff, no one had been able to discover the source. Both agreed it was definitely not a resident playing a radio or a cassette. There is a vicarage opposite and Val thought at first the music might come from there, but again both claimed to have thoroughly checked when the music was playing. According to Margaret another member of staff, Lisa, had heard singing in the kitchen and staff member Sally had also heard music. At one stage the music changed to a very dark funereal-type sound which coincided with the arrival of a very dark apparition described below.

Val and Anne also reported hearing a flute or recorder playing for two nights shortly before Christmas 1995. Again, no source for the music could be found. When asked if they had ever tried to tape record the music, it turned out they had been asked by Margaret not to do anything else after the experiment which preceded the appearance of the apparition which they named 'Fred' (described below).

Val and Anne have also heard whispered conversations and sometimes the words 'Come on, they're coming'. On occasions Val and Anne have also been called by name. The voices say, 'Hello, hello Anne' or 'Hello Val'. There are also reports of noises like a resident getting out of bed when no one is moving. Anne said, 'We can normally pick every noise up, but there are some noises that baffle us.'

Margaret pointed out that it is quite a nice building at night, not a frightening one, 'you get to know all the sounds'. Val said, 'You can go upstairs and check everybody, they're all asleep but you can still hear the banging as if someone is out of bed, but they're all in bed.'

### Visual

Shadows have been seen by various people, including the owner, all over the house. Particularly active areas include the lounge, dining room, storeroom, kitchen and hall.

Margaret reported having been in the kitchen on occasions during the day time and being aware of someone behind her. She had also seen a dark shadow pass the kitchen door.

Much activity centred around Room 2, which was Mrs Latimer's room. Another previous resident of Room 2 was Lily, who died around 1992. A couple of days before Lily died Anne was standing in the doorway to the room and Lily said, 'Tell him to go.' Irene said, 'No, it's only Anne', she said, 'no, not Anne, him stood next to Anne!'

According to Margaret, 'They all say that in there [Room 2]. Until we moved Peggy out of that bedroom she used to say about that man standing there.'

Two weeks before our second vigil (described below) a resident called Martha had gone hysterical in Room 1 opposite Room 2 because she had seen 'a fella' in her room. Marie, who we met on our third vigil, has seen the figures of a man and a woman in Room 2, sitting in the corner by the sink.

According to Val and Anne, the shadows appear and disappear, they do not fade in and out. Shadows vary in density from grey to very black. Sometimes whole figures are seen and sometimes incomplete figures. Val described the figures as seen from, 'the head down, sometimes just from the head to the knees, sometimes from the feet to the shoulders. Occasionally you can see the full shapes.' Before our first visit Val had said she had seen five figures on the previous Saturday, gathered together in the dining room near the window to the conservatory. According to Val they appear and disappear suddenly, 'They just reappear and disappear. Anne can say "by that door!", you turn around it's gone. You can look and they just disappear. They don't fade. They're like trying to tell you "I'm here".' According to Anne the shadows seem to dart, 'The way they appear, it's like they're darting. They want us to see them but when we've seen them they've gone.' Very often, both staff on duty at night will watch the shadows together. Val and Anne reported that the shadows were often seen reflected in the television. Dot also reported seeing similar figures in the television.

No features are seen, but the shadows are described as both males and females. Sometimes they see their arms and legs moving and can hear them arguing. It was felt that the figures arguing could

have been George and Ethel (both deceased) who used to sit and argue in the corner by the lift. The dark shadow that is reported to come before a death is described as a big male.

Four weeks before the second vigil Anne saw a figure with a walking frame reflected in the television: 'I saw her. We were sat having a cuppa in the lounge with the lights out and we thought it was Martha with the walking frame because being aluminium you know, you've heard the rattling. Val says, "Is that Martha?" and I looked in the telly and that hairdresser's chair (by the front window). She often gets up and sits in that chair and it went to the chair and turned round and I popped my head around the corner and there was nothing there and yet I saw it - everything they were doing in the telly. That was a woman, yes, because it had a dress and a cardie on.'

Val, Anne, Marie, Dot and others have been seen very dark and somewhat sinister figures. When the funeral music started they (Val and Anne) were in the laundry and saw a very dark figure come through the storeroom door. Dot has also seen a dark figure in this area. This figure is associated with a smell described by Val as being like rotting flesh. According to Anne he is always seen approximately 6 weeks before a death. However, everyone admits there are a lot of deaths, so the possibility of coincidence cannot be ruled out. This figure had last been seen outside Room 4 occupied by Ted Jenkins.

Dot also said she had seen a tall figure, described as not solid, pass through the closed door into the storeroom. A couple of minutes later this figure came back out and disappeared into the corridor. When working with Val, Dot had seen the reflection of a figure standing behind her in the glass door of the dryer (in the laundry). Dot felt a slap behind her ear and her hair flew up. Dot described

the figure as a tall man, dressed in a black suit, but he was not solid and had no discernible face.

Marie (who we met on the third vigil) has also seen this dark figure and described him as being a very big man, over six feet [2m] tall with black hair and wearing a two-piece black suit.

In November / December 1994 a figure known as 'Fred' appeared. He frightened Val and Anne who went to a Spiritualist church for help. Margaret called in the vicar, Jonathon Towers, who lives in the vicarage opposite and who said a prayer. Unfortunately this seemed to make no difference, so Margaret then called in a clairvoyant. She identified the figure as 'Fred' and said he was no good in this world and no good in the world of spirit! The clairvoyant said 'tell it to go away, and be firm'. Val told the figure to 'pee off!' and he disappeared in a mist. He has not been seen since!

Val and Anne did an experiment to try and identify the apparitions. They wrote the question 'Are you ex-residents here?' together with a big YES and NO. They put a pen in the middle and left the room. The pen later moved and pointed to the YES. They thought this brought in the 'Fred' apparition and have not tried anything similar since!

Approximately two weeks before our initial visit Anne said she had seen a face: 'You know where we hang our coats, that door frame by the kitchen, I swear I saw the face of Mary Adams. Only for a few seconds, but I said to Val. We were in the kitchen doing the milk and the veggies. We were just talking normal, I was playing Val up probably! I turned around and I said to Val that I've just seen a face, which surprised me because I don't normally see the face. It was just like Mary Adams.'

Val had also seen a face but from inside the lift. The face (unidentified) was looking in at her from the dining room.

Marie and Dot had also seen a white figure of a woman sitting in the dining room near the door to the lounge. Marie said she recognised the figure as being Mary Adams.

In September 1995, at approximately 2 o'clock one morning, Val saw the figure of an old woman in a green striped dress come through the wall of the extension which used to be part of the garden. The figure, which looked solid, floated towards Val just off the floor and stroked her cheek before disappearing suddenly. Val described the woman as being about 80 years of age, under 5ft [1.5m] tall, with rounded unsmiling features, very pale skin and white hair. Val described the sensation of being stroked as being soft and 'normal'. The apparition then disappeared suddenly, 'out like a light' according to Val. No one else was present to witness the event, which took place in normal room lighting and lasted in Val's estimation for about a minute.

Val could not identify the figure at the time. However, around Christmas 1995 Val recognised the figure she had seen in a photo album of residents. It turned out to be a woman called Emily who had passed away before Val was employed at the home. Harold Dawes confirmed that when Emily was alive the extension had not yet been built and she would have been walking in a garden area at the rear of the building. While the figure in the photo was wearing a different dress, Margaret remembered that this particular woman's favourite and best dress was indeed green striped, which Val had reported seeing.

Val and Anne both stated that they are not worried by the apparitions, apart from 'Fred'. Indeed, in some instances, they

seemed to be warning of residents about to pass away. According to Anne, 'If we've got a resident who is passing away and we are in the laundry something will tell us to go straight back.'

Val provided an actual instance, 'I can remember one resident dying here not so long back. I was having my supper, I'm a diabetic. Something pulled at the back and I ignored it and it pulled again and said 'Ethel'. When I went up she was just taking her last breath.'

The cat also showed reactions sometimes. The cat's fur would stand up. It could be eating its food and all of a sudden it would look to the doorway and its fur would shoot up.

In the toilet under the stairs a light has been observed flickering through the door, as if someone were in there, by Val, Anne and Marie. Each time this has happened there has been no one in there. According to Anne, 'they're even using the toilet!'

During the second vigil at the home (described below) Val and Anne described the following incident which had occurred 2 weeks before. It was about 7.30 in the morning and Anne was carrying a tray of coffee for the morning girls. As she was coming round by the bottom of the stairs she saw a figure move around the door into the lounge. Initially she thought it was a resident, Mike, but he was in hospital at the time. When she got into the lounge there was no one there. The figure had dark trousers on and a light-coloured top but Anne could give no further details.

### Olfactory

At different times a number of smells have been reported at the home. Sometimes these smells were experienced by more than one person.

Anne and Val also described a horrible tobacco smell that often appeared on the stairs. In early May 1996 both Anne and Val saw smoke rising up the main stairs accompanying the smell. They could not find any explanation for this and none of the smoke alarms in the area went off. Due to the proliferation of smoke alarms the only place for smokers to go before the alterations was the laundry. Anywhere else would set off an alarm, and the rest of the home was very strictly non-smoking.

A more pleasant smell reported was sweet and flowery and was described by Val and Anne as seeming to follow people around. According to the staff this flowery smell could not be ascribed to anyone present at the time and was definitely not an air freshener of any kind. Dot also reported this flowery smell in the passage by the front door (see also vigil 2 below).

### Tactile

A male resident is reported to have said to a member of staff one evening 'You've got something here that shouldn't be here.' The member of staff said she pretended she did not know what he meant. He said, 'I don't mind, but I object when they try and push me out of bed.' His little dog was apparently in the chair looking scared!

Both Val and Anne (and at least two other women according to Margaret) have often had the experience of having their face or hair stroked. Val and Anne both said that the experience is a very gentle, nice feeling. It is often preceded by a feeling of freezing

cold even though the home is fully centrally heated and kept warm for the residents. On one occasion Anne was having her supper with Val and sitting with her back to the laundry door. Anne said, 'God, I wish they would leave my hair alone, I've just had it done!' Val was watching and said that Anne's hair was being lifted up vertically. In answer to questions put by us it did not seem that static electricity was involved in this, though we did take electromagnetic field readings as reported below. According to Margaret, during a week in February 1996 the dining room chairs had started being moved around when there was no one there. Apparently a (deceased) resident used to do this and also move the cutlery around. Pictures also occasionally came off the walls. Val and Anne related one instance of this when they had both just left the dining room and a picture over the settee came off the wall. However, no one has witnessed any chairs or pictures being moved.

Carol reported an incident when she was working with another member of staff. One morning at 4 o'clock the radio in the dining room had turned on by itself at full volume. The kettle in the kitchen had also turned on by itself.

Marie also described a similar incident when she was working with Dot. Some time back (she could not remember exactly when) the microwave had come on and all the kitchen cupboard doors opened in the kitchen. This story was confirmed when we met Dot. Dot added the information that the fan had been turned on as well.

Dot described a further incident involving herself and Val. On one occasion Val was having a hypoglycaemia episode (a 'hypo' - she is diabetic). Dot went to get some milk and sugar for Val from the kitchen, which felt very cold, and she felt that 'something' was there. When she returned to the dining room to give Val the milk

and sugar, the knives and forks on the table started to move. The effect lasted a few seconds while Val was still recovering from the hypo.

Dot had also seen a white figure in the lounge come through the closed door of Room 11. When the figure turned around it had no face. It came half way across the room then turned around and disappeared through the wall to the left of the door. Anne, who was also present, did not see the figure.

## **Research Methods**

Because of the variety and frequency of the reported phenomena we decided that the best approach would be to spend some time at the home ourselves. We wanted to experience some of the activity for ourselves and hopefully find some possible explanations for the events occurring there. In consultation with the owners it was decided that overnight vigils would cause the least disruption to the smooth running of the home and, most importantly, would avoid the possibility of any of the residents being disturbed by our presence. For the same reasons we also decided to initially restrict the number of investigators involved in the vigils to two.

We were able to set up and monitor a range of equipment during the five overnight vigils we did at the home. This equipment included two video recorders, audio tape recorders, intercoms, electronic thermometers, electromagnetic and ultrasound detectors, still cameras and a device to emulate Val and Anne's experiment.

### *Vigil 1*

The first vigil started at 10.00pm on 26 February and ended at 5.30am the following morning. On arrival we found that all the residents had retired to bed apart from Ken, a new resident. We set up thermometers by the door between the lounge and the dining room, on the table in the lounge and in the hall. We also installed a camcorder in the launderette facing the storeroom door and an audio recorder in the dining room by the lift and one linked to the intercom system located on the upstairs landing and the kitchen.

The first notable event was a 3°C drop in temperature recorded on the thermometer in the doorway between the lounge and the dining room. This thermometer records minimum and maximum temperatures over a given period of time. The three degree drop occurred some time around midnight but the thermometer had returned to normal room temperature by the time it was checked again. This is the only time we recorded such a temperature drop but is nevertheless interesting. The area is nowhere near an outside door and all of our subsequent temperature readings on this and other nights confirmed that the central heating was keeping the temperature in this area at a fairly constant 21°C.

There were no further incidents during the first vigil until we were packing up the equipment just after 5.00am. The following report was written immediately after the event by Andrew Homer:

'The vigil with Dennis ended at approximately 5.00am. I collected the camcorder from the laundry and carried it along the connecting corridor to the dining room. As I passed the bedroom on the left a resident was complaining about her back. I was pre-occupied with thinking about the woman, deciding to tell Val and Anne about it, and at the same time negotiating the single step up to the dining room carrying the camera still attached to the extended tripod.

As I looked up towards the dining room and the open door to the hall I saw a solid looking figure wearing some sort of blue top disappear around the door on the right-hand side. I first assumed this was Dennis collecting the intercoms but soon realised that Dennis was winding cable in the dining room to my right. He had not seen anyone from where he was standing further down the dining room. I went immediately to the kitchen where Val and Anne were working. There was no sign of anyone in the hall, on the stairs or in the short corridor leading to the kitchen. Val and Anne had been in the kitchen for some minutes and were both dressed in white.

Apart from the elderly residents, Dennis, myself and the two care staff were the only people in the building. If the figure had been a resident the person would still have been in the vicinity when I went to look. Apart from this, the two carers always seemed to know if someone was up and about and they had not seen or heard anyone. Although I only saw the figure briefly, the sighting was long enough to discern what appeared to be a fairly young man wearing a blue top. He was moving quickly and gave the impression that he had just turned out of the dining room and into the hall, moving towards the kitchen. I only saw the rear half of the figure which was side on to me. There was no sound and I was not able to see a face due to the angle I was observing at. However, while the sighting was brief, the figure was directly in front of me at approximately six feet [2m] away. I estimated the time to be 5.13am. Unfortunately the camcorder I was carrying was turned off at the time!

The care staff and the owner expressed no surprise at the sighting, except that most figures are seen as shadows whereas this was definitely solid-looking though very briefly observed.

## Vigil 2

Naturally we were both keen to do a second vigil at the home and this was arranged for 13/14 May 1996. We arrived at the home at 10.30pm and stayed until 5.00am. For this vigil we set up a camcorder in the lounge by the lift looking out towards the hall where Andrew had seen the figure on the previous vigil.

### **Equipment Used on Vigils**

The electromagnetic field monitoring device started life as a fairly simple device for checking the electromagnetic field emissions of VDUs etc. It was then modified to cover a range of readings from approximately 2-24 milligauss. It was calibrated against a Perspective Scientific ELF (Extremely Low Frequency) monitor. It will reliably detect the level of electromagnetic field energy from electrical devices, mains wiring, and so on and will indicate such 'hot spots'. It does not, however, reliably detect or measure geomagnetic fields. The ultrasonic detector is tunable over an audio frequency range of 20-160khz. We used a range of thermometers, most being of the small digital type. However, the thermometer which recorded the temperature drop in the lounge was a larger and older mercury type with indicators to show maximum and minimum temperatures recorded over a given period of time.

Thermometers were deployed around the lounge and dining room areas and a tape recorder was placed in the launderette. A further camcorder was carried around with us during the night rather than being permanently sited.

The first event of the night occurred at approximately 11.15pm while Andrew was in the lounge: 'Val and Anne reported the floral perfume smell in the lounge. I went to the table where the girls were sitting but could smell nothing. I moved towards the mantelpiece by the clock and for a few seconds experienced a very strong smell of flowers or floral perfume. I could not identify the type of flowers. The smell lasted for about five seconds and then disappeared suddenly rather than fading away. No further trace of the smell could be found by any of us and we discounted all the obvious sources of the smell. I also realised that I had smelt this once before during the initial interview at the home.'

By 11.30pm we were sitting in the lounge area which is in the extension. The following incident was described by Dennis: 'Andrew and myself were sat down in the lounge and the girls (care staff) were in the kitchen making coffee for us. We had been sat for about ten minutes when suddenly I saw a dark shadow pass along the wall behind Andrew. We had no idea what had caused the shadow and we tried to reproduce it for quite some time but without much success.'

Andrew's description of the event is as follows: 'During a conversation in the lounge area Dennis said he saw a vertical looking shadow, similar to a door opening, move across the large picture on the right of the lounge looking from the dining room. I was in the wrong position to see it but was able to confirm that nothing moved in the room at the time. We at first thought that it might be Val or Anne moving about in the dining room, but a quick check proved this was not the case. Despite detailed and extensive analysis / experimentation the shadow could not be re-created except by direct movement within the room, which we know was not the case.'

At no time during the five overnight vigils that we did at the home did we hear or record the reported choir music. However, on the second vigil at 12.20am on 14 May a tape recorder situated in the launderette area of the home picked up a sound which is best described as a human, male groan. This sound was recorded when the launderette was empty of people and would have needed to be fairly close to the microphone (certainly within the same room) to reproduce the recorded volume. As far as we could ascertain there was no equipment in the launderette which could have been responsible and, despite repeated tests on subsequent vigils, no similar sound was ever recorded again.

The second vigil ended at 5.00am with no further incident. We discovered that Val had taken another job at a different retirement home and so this would be the last time we met. Val's reasons for leaving were purely personal and nothing to do with any of the phenomena she had experienced at the Hawthorn Retirement Home.

### Vigil 3

A third vigil took place on 28/29 July 1996. We arrived at the home at 10.30pm and stayed until 5.45am. This time the care staff on duty were Carol and Marie whom we had not met before. We set up a camcorder at the bottom of the corridor by the launderette, pointing towards the dining room and the stairs. An electronic thermometer was placed in the dining room by the lift with a second probe by the main staircase in the hall. Other thermometers were placed in the doorway between the lounge and the dining room and also on the table in the lounge. A tape recorder was set up by the fireplace in the dining room. A basic electronic device for measuring electromagnetic radiation was also placed by the patio doors and an experimental device to simulate Val and Anne's

experiment with the pen and YES/NO labels was placed in the lounge.

We took the opportunity to interview Carol and Marie after setting up the equipment, and their experiences are included in the incident report above.

This night was particularly quiet and nothing of any significance occurred. The experiment to emulate Val and Anne's experiment did not work for us! However, on checking the camcorder tape afterwards we discovered an unusual-sounding howl recorded at 4.30am. However, because the camcorder was not too far from bedrooms and an outside door, it would seem likely that the howl was of natural origins, either human or animal.

#### Vigil 4

The fourth vigil took place on 29/30 September 1996. We arrived at the home at 11.00pm and stayed until 6.30am. Carol and Dot were the two night care staff this time. We set up tape recorders in the launderette and the dining room by the entrance to the passage to the launderette. Thermometers were deployed around the dining room and lounge area. We had two camcorders and decided to place them facing each other at either end of the dining room. This was the first time we had used camcorders in this way, but it is a technique we have made use of a number of times since.

Everything was quiet during the night, so at about 4.00am we took a relaxation break in the conservatory at the front of the building. At 4.24am we were talking about railways(!) when suddenly we both clearly heard a two note whistle. It seemed to come from the area of the front door or hall behind us. We both immediately investigated inside and outside the house but could find no

possible source of the whistle. We had a good view outside and there was no one in the driveway to the home or on the adjacent road. The two care staff on duty had heard us open the front door and came to the top of the stairs to see what we were doing. They had also heard the whistle and had assumed it was one of us. We all agreed it was a loud human-sounding whistle.

This was not the end of the incident, however, as we decided to replay the whistle on the recorder situated in the dining room closest to the conservatory. To our surprise, although our voices could be clearly heard in the conservatory, the whistle had not been recorded! The tape was checked carefully to confirm the lack of a recorded whistle. The camcorder situated further down the lounge gave the same negative result. Subsequent tests to ascertain the source of the whistle were all clearly recorded on the equipment in the lounge.

The incident which occurred immediately afterwards is described by Dennis:

'After thoroughly investigating the incident (whistle) it was time to change tapes. Andrew went to change the one in the launderette while I changed the dining room one. While doing so I went to the window and leant on the sill while waiting for Andrew to return. I was looking through the inside window and beyond the conservatory at 4.55am. Suddenly I saw a male figure moving smartly and looking directly at me. For a second or so I thought it was someone outside but when it got to the reflection of the dining room wall it disappeared. At this point I realised that the figure itself was a reflection of a figure in the dining room behind me. The figure appeared to have a white face, with no discernible features and a grey top. No sound was heard. Although we had two camcorders in the dining room, one facing the window and one

facing the lounge, we unfortunately did not capture the figure. We estimated that the figure had passed behind the one camcorder and the other one had just run to the end of the tape and Andrew had come to change it!' There were no other incidents before the end of the vigil and unfortunately nothing was recorded on any of our video or audio tapes.

### Vigil 5

Following this vigil major alterations were made to the retirement home. The launderette area was extended, the kitchen was moved and extra bedrooms added. According to Margaret, things had quietened down considerably while the alterations were being done, and we arranged to do a further vigil after the alterations were completed. The fifth vigil took place on 29/30 September. This time the vigil team consisted of Andrew, Dennis and also Dave, the chairman of our group. The usual equipment was deployed. According to the care staff present everything had been quiet and we agreed that the home looked and felt quite different from our previous visits. Nothing was experienced or recorded on this visit and we agreed with the owner that she would contact us if things started up again. As yet we have not had any further contact so can only assume that all is still quiet.

### **Comments**

Initially, we had expected to be interviewing just one member of staff, Val, who had been experiencing strange phenomena at the home. In the event, it turned out that it was not just Val, virtually everyone we spoke to had had experiences of one kind or another.

All the witnesses we spoke to impressed us with the matter of fact way they described their experiences. Also, there were no discrepancies in the information given to us by different witnesses at different times. A good example of this was the figure seen by Val and later identified from a photo album. During the initial interview with the main witnesses Margaret at one point asked Anne and Val to confirm that everything they were saying was true. Both women answered in the affirmative without hesitation.

A surprising factor was the wide range of phenomena being reported at this location. All of the witnesses reported experiencing at least some of the phenomena, although Val seemed to have experienced the most. We felt that there was a genuine desire on Margaret's part to have the events independently investigated. This was echoed by all the staff we spoke to, who at all times were most co-operative and willing to take our investigations seriously.

Our own experiences while investigating the case were intriguing to say the least. Separately and together we had experiences which we were (and still are) unable to explain in terms of natural phenomena. We have both investigated a large number of cases, both together and with other members of Parasearch, and this has been the most active to date by far. Working together on a regular basis we both know we can trust each other's judgement and that neither of us is prone to jumping at shadows.

While we certainly experienced some quite surprising phenomena at the home there was some activity we were unable to see or hear. We could not, for example, despite extensive investigation see any of the moving shadows reflected in the TV, neither did either of us ever hear the choir music on the nights we stayed there. However, on occasions we both had the feeling that shadows were moving at the extremes of our peripheral vision. This was more of a feeling

than anything definitely observed and was described perfectly by Anne when she said that they seem to dart. The question of hoaxing does not really arise here. Firstly, there would be nothing to be gained from perpetrating such a hoax. There was absolutely no desire on the part of the owners to gain any kind of publicity. Indeed, we were asked to be discreet about the investigation so as not to disturb or upset any of the residents.

The phenomena did not seem to be associated with any particular witness. While Val had experienced the most, activity continued unabated after she had left the home. Also, the night care staff work in pairs but not always the same pairs. Therefore, over the nights we stayed we came across a good mix of witnesses, all of whom had experienced something. There was also no indication that the experiences were being led or influenced by a dominant personality. Indeed, all the witnesses we spoke to appeared genuinely interested and curious about what was going on.

### **Analysis of Options**

At various times during this case we took regular temperature measurements, basic electromagnetic field measurements and checks for the presence of ultrasound as well as audio and video recordings. Apart from one instance of a temperature drop and the occasional recorded anomaly nothing out of the ordinary was noted.

We were particularly careful to check for magnetic field and electrical anomalies given that Anne's hair at one point was standing on end. However, all the times we visited the home we were unable to measure anything out of the ordinary using an electromagnetic and electrical field monitor. Similarly, apart from isolated incidents of equipment such as the radio, kettle and the

microwave getting switched on, there were no reports of light bulbs not lasting as long as they should or repeated electrical failures which would point to some kind of electrical anomaly. However, one of the most interesting facets of the case which arose as part of the investigation, concerns the whistle heard simultaneously by both investigators but not recorded on any of the tapes. While we cannot even speculate as to the mechanics of such an event we are certain that we both heard it at the same time.

Prior to this event we would have assumed that if a witness (or investigator) heard something which should have been recorded but was not, then the person had had some kind of personal experience and that the sound was not objective in any conventional sense. However, we appear to have a situation here where a whistle is heard by two investigators and care staff in a different part of the building. This suggests that the sound was objective, but it was still not recorded on perfectly functioning equipment. None of the equipment exhibited any sign of malfunction and, especially as our attempts to emulate the whistle were all correctly recorded, the incident remains a complete mystery.

At the time of observation the figures observed by Andrew and Dennis on separate occasions defied rational explanation despite immediate and extensive investigations. In both cases we discounted the possibility that the figures could have been the night care staff, residents or intruders.

Firstly, in the case of the figure seen by Andrew, the locations of everyone present were known and then confirmed at the time of the sighting. Despite the fact that the figure appeared to be a young man moving quickly, if he had been a resident he would still have been in the corridor by the kitchen when we checked. Furthermore,

the figure would have had to pass the care staff working in the kitchen to get to another part of the home. On past experience the staff had an almost uncanny sense, born of experience, of knowing when any of the residents were moving about. The care staff had been working in the kitchen at the time but in any case they were dressed in white, while the figure seen by Andrew appeared to be a young man wearing a blue coloured top.

At the time of his sighting Andrew was pre-occupied with the distress of the woman in the nearby bedroom while simultaneously negotiating a step with the camera equipment. Whether this lack of concentration on things paranormal contributed to the conditions under which the sighting was made is interesting and potentially testable on future vigils. In other words, is looking and concentrating too hard actually counterproductive as far as the observation of certain types of paranormal phenomena is concerned? *[This has frequently been noted before in vigils - the best phenomena often occur during 'breaks'! Ed]*

When Dennis sighted the figure reflected in the dining room window, again the locations of everyone present was known. Dennis himself checked carefully to ensure that it was no one moving about on the outside. Extensive investigation proved the difficulty of determining exactly where in the dining room the figure was. However, it is possible that the figure passed through a now disused second door into the dining room. This door dates back to when the home was used as a doctor's surgery. The main door used now was once the entrance to the doctor's surgery and waiting room along a narrow corridor (now removed). The second, now unused, door led into the private part of the house. However, we cannot say with any certainty whether or not the figure passed through this closed door. According to Dennis's testimony the figure disappeared as it reached the left hand side of the room. In

any event, we are certain none of the staff or residents were present at the time and Andrew was in another part of the building.

The figure and the shadow reported by Dennis both have some similarities with the type of figure seen by Dot in the lounge. It seemed that despite the best efforts on our part to keep together at all times our two sightings of recognisable figures (as opposed to shadows) occurred when we were apart. In Andrew's case we were packing up at the time and as far as we were concerned the vigil had finished.

Dennis's sighting occurred immediately after the major incident with the unrecorded whistle. Because of this we were concerned to change our tapes at the appropriate times.

The other major event which occupied much of our time afterwards concerned the shadow which Dennis saw pass across the wall behind Andrew. On the face of it there should have been a fairly simple explanation but if there was we certainly could not find it! The area was well lit with a number of separate lighting fittings around the room. We experimented with every single light source in the lounge and the dining room to try and recreate the event. The only way we could do it was by passing a fairly substantial object in front of some of the lamps on the opposite side of the lounge. As Andrew could confirm that absolutely nothing moved in the lounge or the dining room during Dennis's sighting, this incident again remains a mystery.

With regard to the anecdotal information given to us by the principal witnesses we again found it difficult to come up with anything like a viable explanation. There seemed to us possibly to be a link with the vicarage opposite. However, the vicarage, though immediately opposite, is not particularly close.

The home itself is a large detached property with a driveway in front, then the road, and then the vicarage with its own drive opposite. It seems inconceivable that anyone in the vicarage would be playing choral music at all hours of the day and night at sufficient volume to be heard in the home. We certainly did not hear the choral music ourselves, but the witnesses that had heard it all gave similar descriptions.

Of the figures seen the dark figure seems to have similarities with the 'Grim Reaper', reputedly appearing six weeks before a resident passes away. However, it has to be said that many of the residents in this particular home are extremely old and infirm and people do pass away from time to time. Therefore, the perceived time scale may or may not have a significant bearing on the incidents. After the initial interview we heard that the dark figure had been seen outside the room of a man called Ted Jenkins. We never met him, but on each occasion we visited the home we asked after his welfare and must admit we were always relieved to hear he was still alright!

With so many witnesses reporting similar phenomena it would seem unlikely that events were being led by a strong personality. We have witnessed this phenomenon before on an unrelated case where one person (though not deliberately) was clearly influencing others into agreeing on what they thought they were looking at. However, in this case there was no single person present at all the events, which continued unabated even after Val, initially our principal witness, had left. This also led us to believe that the various phenomena were not associated with Val specifically, which prior to the initial interview had seemed possibly to be the case.

None of the people we spoke to was at all bothered by the majority of the phenomena. The entity known as 'Fred' was a notable exception but generally everything, including the dark figures, was treated in a very matter-of-fact and down-to-earth manner. It even transpired that this kind of phenomena was not at all unusual in retirement homes, but very rarely reported for fear of frightening residents and adversely affecting business. It occurs to us that a potential research project could involve the confidential canvassing of such homes to see if this is indeed the case.

Similarly with the reported smells (both foul and floral), we could find no explanation. The home was kept impeccably clean and it seems inconceivable to us that anything rotting would not be quickly discovered and removed. As regards the floral smell, Andrew also experienced this and could find no source or trace during or after the short-lived event. It was not an air freshener, nor was it perfume or deodorant worn by someone. Furthermore, the smell was extremely strong and quite unmistakable while it lasted. It disappeared suddenly rather than fading and, like most of the other phenomena, resisted all attempts to come up with a rational explanation.

Of the sounds recorded, the groan in the laundry remains unexplained. Tests showed that the sound would have had to emanate from the room itself to be recorded at such a volume. The sound could not have come from Bedroom 1 or Bedroom 2, and we know that no one entered the laundry while the recording was being made. The howl, on the other hand, (recorded in the corridor outside the laundry) we think was probably due to either an animal outside the back door or one of the residents in Room 1 or Room 2 crying out in their sleep.

## **Conclusions**

This case is now concluded, assuming that no further phenomena are experienced at the home. Unfortunately, even though we experienced some of the phenomena ourselves, we are still no nearer to reaching viable explanations for the activity.

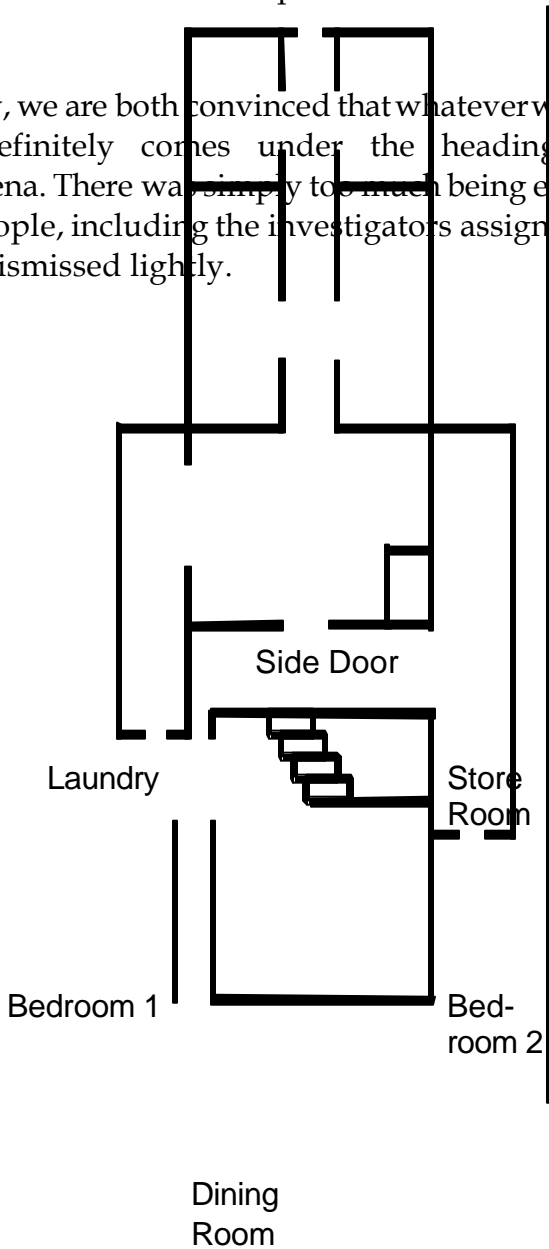
We feel there is further work to be done on some of the issues raised. It would, for example, be interesting to discreetly investigate the amount of phenomena being experienced in retirement homes to see whether we are dealing with isolated incidents or something which is much more widespread than we realise. Also, the possibility that distraction or pre-occupation of potential witnesses (including investigators on vigils) could be a contributing factor to experiencing certain types of phenomena is another area of potential further study.

Initially, when we started the investigation, Margaret Dawes had been quite adamant that she did not want anything done to interfere with the activity at the home. Indeed, we had to assure her that our investigations were purely objective and that we certainly would not do anything to stop the activity. Margaret herself was interested to know whether the activity was confined to the people attached to the home or whether 'outsiders' such as ourselves would also be subject to the experiences.

While we are unable to comment on whether or not the activity was due to 'spirits of the dead', we can nevertheless without hesitation state that phenomena for which we have no rational explanation at all were occurring during the time of our investigation. In many cases, so much rests on the credibility of witnesses conveying anecdotal information. While there was no shortage of such data in this case, the incidents reported by the two investigators involved add valuable support to the testimony of the principal witnesses.

Indeed, we were particularly impressed with the open and honest way the various witnesses reported their anecdotal experiences to us.

Certainly, we are both convinced that whatever was going on at the home definitely comes under the heading of anomalous phenomena. There was simply too much being experienced by too many people, including the investigators assigned to the case, for it to be dismissed lightly.



Lounge  
Extension

Lift

Conservatory

Hall & Stairs

Toilet

Front  
Door

Kitchen

ù

Astonbury Road

**Partial plan of ground floor**

**NOT TO SCALE**