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CONTENTS

The Cauld Lad

by Chris Huff

Though ASSAP covers a huge range of anomalous phenomena, ghosts always seem to be the most popular. The reason may be the possibility, if only an outside one, of actually seeing one. Most of the other phenomena we research seem to be one-off events. Here Chris Huff examines one of the most famous of northern England's ghosts to see whether there really is anything in the legend.

The castle at Hylton is currently situated on a fraction of its original lands, which have been used to site a large modern housing estate. Access to the interior of the castle, maintained by English Heritage, is denied by a stout door and huge padlock. This regrettable situation has been caused by the vandalism to which the monument has been subjected; but this is not a problem peculiar to modern times. Tegner *(1991.67),* while writing on the topic of North Country ghosts, noted a similar state at the castle in 1974 when he:

'Spent a pleasant morning in March this year [1974] inspecting Hylton Castle with John Green the Custodian. Hylton Castle is now in the keeping of the Department of the Environment. Mr Green's trouble was not ghosts but vandals. Only the previous night some oafs had tried to dig into the vaults. Previously a massive oak door had been smashed and wrenched off its hinges. Hylton and its purlieus today would appear to be more vandal terrain than ghost-country.'

The castle is properly described as a keep-gatehouse of the 15th century, being first mentioned in 1448 *(Pevsner)* and being called the Tower of Hylton by 1660. It is an extremely unusual building, having heraldry displayed on the building's front façade.

In the 17th century a wing was added to one side of the tower, and another, restoring symmetry, was constructed in the 18th century. Both of these additions were destroyed in the 19th century when the castle was somewhat restored to its original appearance. Linnahan *(1997)* reports that a geophysical survey traced the design of a formal 17th century garden around the present remains. Something of the formality of this garden has been recreated in the flowerbeds of the gardens that currently surround the remains of the castle.

The castle is reputedly haunted by a phantom commonly termed the Cauld Lad, the haunting proper taking place in one room of the castle to which guests would have no entry. Other areas supposedly haunted were the kitchens and, according to one author, the wings which were built onto the castle's gateway in 1735. These had been demolished in the last century, but it appears that the ghost is still rather attached to them for there have been more recent reports of his presence being felt there. In an interesting twist to the tale, a public house in close proximity to the ruin, The Cauld Lad *(Warren & Wells,1995)*, which was built in the 1960s, has developed an assortment of paranormal activities which, it is interesting to speculate, may be linked to the haunting of the castle.

The haunting of the castle presents an interesting conundrum of witnessed phenomena coupled with a local folklore tradition which has grown over the centuries. It is perhaps impossible to trace the exact origins of the haunting beyond a few tantalising clues, but it is an interesting case for both folklorists and ghost-chasing enthusiasts alike. Linnahan *(1997,259-60)* astutely observes:

'The combination of truth and legend surrounding the story of the Cauld Lad has rendered it a popular if confused tale, which doubtless tangles the threads of several different stories under the one heading.'

The purpose of this piece is an attempt to sort the truth from the exaggeration and to document what remains before the truth becomes lost to paranormal researchers forever.

The Folklore of the Cauld Lad

The first recorded observation about the Cauld Lad appears in a letter to Sir Walter Scott from Surtees (an antiquarian of County Durham). In this letter *(Longstaffe 1871)* the haunting is described as:

'Hilton Castle, the ancient baronial residence of that family, is haunted by a being called "the cold lad of Hilton", supposed to be the spectre of one of the family who killed himself. This being inhabits a small room under the staircase, where, I suppose, the deed was committed.'

The reference to a member of the family who killed himself is soon forgotten in the local folklore, as successive authors elaborate upon the tale. A selection of the most persistent local folklore is presented below, before this work moves on to consider the witnessed phenomena at the castle.

A popular, and much quoted, version of the tale by Taylor *(Longstaffe 1871, 19)* relates to the Cauld Lad being a mischievous sprite, a boggart or a brownie.

'He was seldom seen, but was heard nightly by the servants who slept in the great hall. If the kitchen had been left in perfect order, they heard him amusing himself by breaking plates and dishes, hurling the pewter in all directions, and throwing everything into confusion. If on the contrary, the apartment had been left in disarray (a practise which the servants found it most prudent to adopt), the indefatigable goblin arranged everything with the greatest precision.'

This brownie, seldom seen but heard at night, was at last banished from the castle by the gesture of leaving out a cloak and a hood, or some assert a blanket, and departed for good after chanting: 'Here's a cloak and here's a hood. The Cauld Lad o' Hylton will do no more good.'

The trouble with this charming story is that the paranormal occurrences at the castle continued after this supposed event.

Another account, slightly later and more embellished, was written by Sharp in *Richardson's Table Book (1841-6)*. This version informs the reader that the Cauld Lad, having received his green vestments, was heard to exclaim in the dead of night:

'Wae's me, wae's me,
The acorn is not yet
Fallen from the tree
That's to grow the wood
That's to make the cradle
That's to rock the bairn
That's to grow to a man
That's to lay me!'

The servants in the castle, according to local folklore, had the reputation of frequently deserting their jobs through fear of the apparition. One tale alleges that a serving girl, who was fond of sipping at the cream jug in the pantry, was reprimanded by the sprite. A discarnate voice was heard, speaking from her shoulder, to say: 'Ye taste, and ye taste and ye taste, but ye never give the Cowed Lad a taste.'

The poor girl, in the best traditions of the ghost story, is supposed to have fled in terror and refused to ever enter the house again. But

once again this is probably only a local tale, no names are ever supplied nor is a witness's statement surviving to the present.

Of all the tales that are told about Hylton, one story stands out as being the most frequently offered as the true explanation for the haunting of the castle. This tale asserts that in 1609, Robert Hylton, the then master of the castle, called for his horse and, when it had not arrived after some time, he went in search of his stable boy, Roger Skelton. Finding the boy asleep in a room (in some versions the stable), he flew into a rage and threw a pitchfork at the boy who was killed. To cover his crime, Robert Hylton took the body of the boy that night down from the castle to a nearby pond and, with the body presumably well weighted down, threw it in.

It continues with true Victorian bleakness; the haunting of the room where the murder took place was characterised by a phenomenon whereby anyone who saw the Cauld Lad, who was always seen to be shivering, would forever more feel chilled. This undoubtedly was the origin for the article in the *Durham Chronicle* by W.P.Shield (1869) who credits the Cauld Lad as wailing 'I'm cauld, varra, varra, cauld, and ye'll be sune cauld tae'.

And it ends with a Christian redemption overtone: some time later the bones of a boy were discovered in the pond, taken out and given a proper burial, after which the Cauld Lad was seen no more.

Wonderful Gothic stuff, as though from the pen of Stoker or Poe. Unfortunately, it is probably a complete fabrication, for the facts do not fit the fiction.

Firstly, the Cauld Lad was still seen after the recovery of a skeleton from the pond. Secondly, the pitchfork and the calling for the horse are pure invention. Thirdly, the disposal of the corpse in the nearby pond, and its subsequent discovery, are details that this author has

been unable to substantiate with solid facts. Lastly, as Longstaffe eloquently relates, various Hyltons committed many murders during the history of the castle, so why should this event be fitted to the haunting in preference to others.

This diatribe on the subject of the family of Hylton and their violent behaviour towards their neighbours was written by Longstaffe in 1871; it included the following:

'It is sufficient in conclusion, to say that in 1609 Robert Hilton of Hilton, gent, in mowing hay, as money-less younger brethren thought it right to do, slew Roger Skelton with his scythe by accident; that Baron William received a general pardon for all sorts of murders, manslaughters, &c in 7 Fox (the seventh year of Bishop Fox of Durham); and, that in the reign of Edward III, 4 Hatfield (the fourth year of Bishop Hatfield of Durham), Alexander de Hilton had a pardon in the matter of the death of John de Farnacres, who was, I think, connected with Follonsby, an estate bordering the baron's estate of Usworth, and which eventually was acquired by the Hiltons.'

Tegner *(1991)* gives further details of this case and asserts that the Coroner's court convened on 3 July 1609, and that the pardon for the murder was given to Hylton on 6 September 1609.

Having dealt with the most common tale, a lesser yet still widespread version of the Cauld Lad mythology has the wandering spirit being that of a simpleton who would help in the kitchens, one who had the eccentric habit of taking off his clothes. For this he had his waistcoat buttoned up at the back. In this version, the cook, having tired of his pranks and foolery, is alleged to have hit him about the head with a ladle and thus killed the lad. This unnamed simpleton was supposed to have been alive in the time of the last

Baron of Hilton, the tale may thus be dated to the closing years of the 18th century or later.

The growing elaborations in the narrative for the Hylton story were added to by Howitt (1842) in one of his '*Visits*' series. In this version the Cauld Lad is the spirit of a very badly treated servant boy who died of neglect or brutality. Here it is also recorded that a local priest exorcised the Cauld Lad by hammering nails into a door, one for each year the spirit was to be held. By the mid 1830s a Mrs Fitzpatrick who was the keeper of the castle at the time, was 'collecting subscriptions' for the process to be repeated, as the last nail was about to drop out.

The woman who showed me the house, on arriving at a certain chamber, pointed to a cupboard over the door, and said. 'That is the place where they used to put the Cold Lad'. I replied 'To which he used to retreat you mean'. 'No, no,' reiterated she pertinaciously, 'where they used to put him'.

A description of the apparition?

The description of the Cauld Lad has changed with the passing of time, and successive authors have embellished to add spice to the tale. Longstaffe *(1871,22)* records an interesting account from an old woman of the area who possibly worked in the castle.

'...The spirit's approach on the landings and passages of the castle was known by a cold damp wind – a murky mist preceding before him. All was cold and blasty near him. His long fair hair hung down his shoulders, his face was cold and deathly white, and his eyes glistened unnaturally.'

This is possibly the only early, and potentially accurate, reference to the phantom of Hylton. Other authors have presented a variety of descriptions.

In 1831 a local printer, Ross, published an account of the Cauld Lad in verse accompanied by a very graphic woodcut. This image is of a man in trousers and shoes carrying his bloody head in his right hand. The headless ghost seems to have appealed as a concept, for in Howit's guide *(1842)* it is asserted that the wandering spirit had no head, based upon his communication with his female guide to the building during his visit. The 'headless ghost of Hylton' story was continued by White *(1967)*, when he describes the phantom as bearing his head in his hands.

Charles Harper *(1907, 127)* seems to be the first to describe the Cauld Lad as being naked: '... The Cauld Lad was more often heard than seen, but was generally understood to be a naked spirit.' Peter Underwood *(1992,221)* similarly describes: 'A naked ghost which was more heard than seen.'

Robson *(1992,156)* describes the apparition as being: 'about fourteen, wearing a green cloak and raggy shoes'; and John Mason *(1999,156)* describes an apparition which: 'has been seen, dripping wet and with teeth chattering'.

By 1838 the Cauld Lad had become so popular that, from the relatively ordinary tale of an apparition at Hylton Castle, he was to don wig and greasepaint and tread the boards in a play by Roxby in the local theatres. The accompanying advertising described the awful appearance of the cold lad of Hilton to whet the appetite.

The title of Cauld Lad (pronounced Caad) has been much commented upon, and has potentially interesting and diverse meanings. For example, if the title is a local rendition, Cauld (cold),

this could mean that the spirit was cold to be near or appearing cold. This certainly applies to the manifestation described by Longstaffe above. However, there are other interpretations of the title which may also be applied, the most apt perhaps being Cauld as in dead. The last version to be considered here as the origin is Cowed Lad, which means 'to have close cropped hair' or indeed 'to be headless', derived from the heraldic term 'couped'. With the various legends associated with the castle, all of these could be applied to the spirit.

Witnessed Phenomena

The phenomena that have been witnessed at the castle are, as is often the case, less well documented than the associated legends. It is thought that the ghost roamed the castle at night, but was far more active in a small third storey room that was only used for guests when the castle was otherwise full. Some tales exist of the Cauld Lad being seen by the fire in the kitchens in the early mornings by the serving staff, a position that he was wont to take up in life, but he would quickly disappear when noticed. White *(1967,98)* records that:

'A lady who lived in the castle when it was last inhabited in 1905, recently told the curator's wife how its noisy goings-on were often so distracting, that sleep was impossible in the room where the murder is said to have taken place.'

A visit to the castle by an unnamed local historian accompanied by a medium (RD) is recorded in Robson *(1992)*. RD is alleged to have had no prior knowledge concerning the paranormal events that have been reported at the castle. Upon entering her heightened state, she claimed that she could see the bodies of 'hundreds' of peasants who were supposed to have been murdered, all of whom were seen to be hanging from the wall. RD is also recorded as

'seeing' the ghost of a grey lady walking the battlements and mentioning that the sad spirit of a medieval knight who had been killed in battle by an arrow also walked the castle. While not wishing to be scathing, the report does seem a trifle fanciful, or as Robson writes *(1992,157)*:

'Not one shred of truth, not one fact that could be proven.'

Alan Robson, who is a well-known broadcaster in the north-east, has been interested in the paranormal for some considerable time and has conducted live 'on air' investigations at some of the north-east's prominent sites. On two occasions, in 1987 and 1988, he has placed volunteers at Hylton Castle in the hope of witnessing some phenomena there.

At the first event one young woman, described as being sceptical, was locked in the castle until being released by the caretaker at 2am. During the whole time she was linked to Alan Robson in the studio via a Walkie-Talkie device. Throughout her ordeal in the night she witnessed nothing out of the ordinary, except for an overwhelming feeling of sadness, which she ascribed to imagination. As she was waiting at the locked gate to be let out of the castle in the early hours, she distinctly felt both sides of her waist squeezed as though someone had crept up behind and 'tickled' her. As she jumped and screamed the gate opened and the young woman shot through. It was confirmed by the custodian that there was no one behind her or present in the castle at the time.

On the second occasion two young women were locked in the castle on All Hallows Eve 1988, again live on air and linked to the studio. As before, nothing had occurred in the early part of the night, but before they were due for release at 2am the two wandered apart to check on the place. At about 1.40am, when they were about 100 metres apart, they are reported to have both screamed

simultaneously and each reported that someone had been standing behind them and they had felt breath on their neck which was fetid and smelt of rotten cabbages.

Recent investigations at the castle are recorded by Liz Linahan *(1997)*, who includes the sighting of a dark figure in the evening or night-time nearby. Apparently this figure has called to and followed a local man as he made his way home. Various investigations at the castle have reported the phenomena of phantom music, the sound of weeping and misty ill-defined apparitions. On other occasions there has been the distinct impression of an unseen presence reported.

I am extremely grateful to fellow ASSAP member Andy Owens who wrote to me in 1999, kindly enclosing details of some hauntings in the north-east, in which he had been interested and into which he had conducted research; one of these sites was Hylton Castle. From Andy's letter I learned of an investigation, conducted by Matthew Hutton and three other students from Gateshead Technical College, which happened in October 1989. Apparently, they had persuaded a medium, TM, and a reporter from the *Sunderland Echo*, Chris Storey, to accompany them. The six were locked in the castle at 9pm by the custodian who, while doing so, recounted how previous ghost hunters couldn't cope with the phenomena that they had witnessed there.

TM, while in the room at the top of the tower, asserted that there was a spirit in the castle who was lonely and depressed. Later he was to announce that there were two spirits in the castle; the first was of a middle-aged man and the second of a pale teenager. The phantom of the man was reported by TM to have passed through him, while he saw the boy approach Matthew Hutton, who reported at the time that he felt sad and nauseous. A joining of

hands and meditation session is reported to have restored tranquillity to the party.

In the courtyard of the castle some of the party claimed to have witnessed a vaporous mist, which appeared in a doorway, and then heard the sounds of music and children talking. The sounds were described as emanating from all around. Even the news reporter, Chris Storey, who remained sceptical throughout the episode, claimed to hear a voice emanating from above him.

At just after 3am, TM is reported to have sat bolt upright and told the others in the party that the spirit of the man was about to play some sort of joke upon them. Shortly after this the car alarms of the parked vehicles outside the castle sounded, causing the party to run down the stairs and open the doors to the castle. These were opened from the inside, even though they were supposed to have been padlocked on the outside. As the doors opened, the alarms ceased to sound and the vehicles were observed to be perfectly safe and apparently unmolested. Only then was it generally realised that the door was supposed to be locked and that there was no sign of the padlock.

A tape recorder had been used to record any anomalous phenomena encountered in the night. This was checked in the morning and found to have behaved oddly. The voices of the investigators had been clearly picked up until they had descended to the lower floor of the castle; at this point the tape had recorded their voices as though they were being recorded at a faster speed on the tape. They had changed from normal to a lower pitch and seemed more drawn out when pronouncing. The recorded voices became normal when the party returned to the upper floor.

Postscript

The castle today is in a sorry condition; the ground floor windows have been filled with concrete in the gaps where the glass lights once illuminated the interior rooms. To add Gothic insult to injury, these have been painted black. The door bears the marks of attempted forced entry, and traces of graffiti adorn the exterior. The small private chapel, a short distance away, is also ruinous and faring no better than the keep. The castle is permanently closed and locked with a massive padlock. Visitors to the site today may only wander the grounds and view this structure from the outside.

My visits to this haunted ruin have all occurred during the hours of daylight, when the park gates are open. I regret to report that, although the area was generally quiet, no paranormal phenomena of any type were observed. Nonetheless it remains probable that the haunting continues within the building's shell. From the evidence obtained by the investigations recorded above, a properly organised and supervised vigil at some point may prove very rewarding.

Chingle Hall

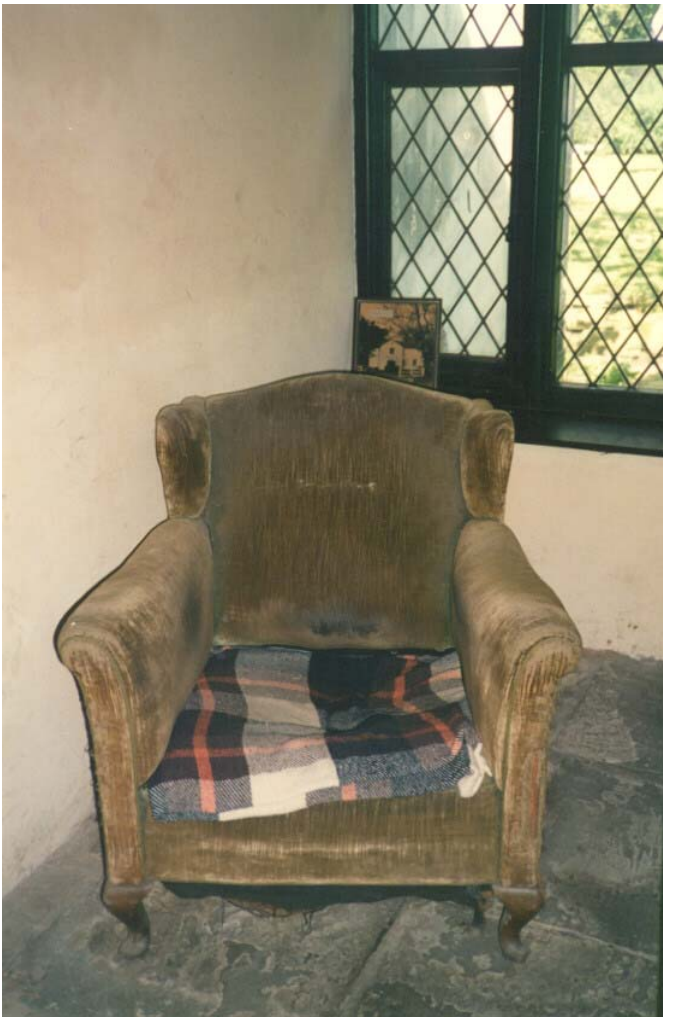
by Andy Owens

Chingle Hall has been claimed as the most haunted house in England. Andy Owens decided to see for himself.

8.30pm Friday 15th March 2001 : It couldn't have been spookier if Dracula had been welded to the windscreen. Bound for Chingle Hall, a large, white, detached house at the end of a long, leafy Lancashire lane, we arrived as the wind was howling and blustering through the trees.

Although I have been a member of ASSAP for two years - and written two books (on ghosts and Nessie) - I have not yet trained to be an ASSAP investigator or been on a vigil. So I thought it was high time I did and subsequently booked a date for me and a friend, Chris Ellis, to spend a night there, armed with two still cameras and a video camera. I booked the night in January, and the earliest date we could secure was 15th March. They are only open to the public on Friday and Saturday nights and many people want to stay there.

The Hall is supposed to be 'the most haunted house in England' and has been considered so ever since Borley Rectory was destroyed by fire in 1939. Just who came up with the accolade of 'most haunted house', I don't know.



Inside Chingle Hall

Like ASSAP as a whole, I am neither believer nor sceptic, and in the absence of either personal experience or video footage, I shall remain neutral. Chris is much more sceptical - a view based purely on a lack of convincing evidence.

As we pulled into the gravelled car park, Trevor Kirkham, the owner, and his giant poodle came to greet us and, after we introduced ourselves and unloaded the cameras, he led us over the stone bridge which crosses the old moat and in through the porch.

The porch leads to a medium-sized room with a bay window and a huge fireplace, called the Great Hall. To the right is the chapel with a large wooden cross on the wall. Past the chapel is the kitchen

with all mod cons. Returning to the Great Hall, we turn left to climb the staircase which leads to a corridor, past private rooms, and to the two most haunted rooms. These, as far as my research had led me to believe, are called the Priest's Room, which is straight ahead, and turning along 'the haunted corridor' which leads to the last room, the John Wall Room.

Trevor led us along the 'haunted corridor' upstairs. The floorboards are so old that they creak and sink, quite alarmingly, when you tread on them. Through the gaping cracks in them you can clearly see the Great Hall and the ground floor below!

Other interesting features are evident, too; the priests' hide (where Catholics hid away safely during the Reformation); the cupboards in one room overlooking the moat, which used to contain the chain mechanism used to operate the old drawbridge; the 13th-century oak door in the porch with its rare sanctuary knocker; and the chair legs or bannister railings wedged into the ceiling of the chapel, presumably used as makeshift rafters.

Back in the Great Hall, we shared our bottle of wine with Trevor as he recounted the few things he and his wife Judy have experienced.

These included the sound of giggling coming from the staircase when there was no one else in the house; the sound of a phone ringing, also heard by neighbours, before the electricity was connected; the unmistakable sound of heavy footsteps pacing 'the haunted corridor'. We kept darting glances up through the cracked floorboards, in the hope of seeing something!

After Trevor had retired for the night, we organised the essentials: the video camera and tripod plus the tea and biscuits!

There are two display cabinets on the wall of the Great Hall featuring photos which previous guests have taken and sent in to the Kirkhams. Each shows a distinct cylindrical shape, with a sort of strange, internal spiralling effect, and probably quite difficult to fake. These did not appear to be faults on the exposures. These curious shapes were NOT seen at the time. The photographers took the photos after feeling a sudden and inexplicable chill, often reported in hauntings, and pointing the camera in that direction. Perhaps ASSAP members have photographed similar shapes *[see Spirals Again!]*?

Also available on site are two thick books full of visitors 'psychic' observations, ranging from the deadly serious to the downright ridiculous.

Ours was a long, uneventful night. The odd creak on the stair or the wind blowing a tree branch against the bay window, but that was all. At 4am we packed up our equipment, left our own comments in the visitors book and returned to our home town of Halifax.

Although we had seen nothing, we didn't regret our stay. It had still been an interesting and informative night, and in such a lovely old building.

Spirals Again!

ASSAP has had considerable experience of anomalous photographs with a curious 'spiral structure' inside. Many are thought to be the camera strap caught in the flash on compact cameras. However, the jury is still out on others (see Anomaly 18 & 19). Ed.

WHY GHOSTS?

Why is it that ghosts seem to be the subject of so many articles in Anomaly and ASSAP News? When ASSAP did a survey of members' interests in 1999, hauntings were the most popular subject (over 80% of members put it down).

So why are so many ASSAP members interested in ghosts? When talking to non-members, it is obvious that the general public are also more interested in the subject than most other anomalies.

There are a number of theories. An important point is that, unlike many other anomalies, there is an extensive literature, particularly fictional. How many novels do you know concerning alien big cats? But ghost stories represent a complete fiction genre.

Another point is the apparent connection between ghosts and the idea of life after death. Serious investigations into apparitions tend to question this link, but it is nevertheless there in people's minds. The question of survival is one of fundamental interest to just about everyone at some time or other.

It is also astonishing just how many people have seen a ghost or know someone else who has. Again, you could hardly say the same about UFOs, for instance. Among ASSAP members in particular there is yet another possibility. Unlike most phenomena, which are virtual 'one offs', there is always the slight chance of actually seeing one yourself. There are far more people who've seen ghosts on vigils than UFOs on skywatches.

Ed.

Strange Mitcham

by James Clark

ASSAP's Project Albion continues into the new millennium. James Clark has written about Mitcham in south-west London. It is an area that neatly bridges the gap between previous Albion projects, Strange Kingston and Strange Croydon.

ASSAP's Project Albion is, in effect, a Domesday Book of the paranormal. Authors select a geographical area and try to research the history of anomalies there. These include all the subjects ASSAP investigates, broadly divided between psychic phenomena, Forteana, UFOs and earth mysteries. A number of publications have already appeared in the Albion series, though sadly most are now out of print. They include Strange Wycombe, Sheffield, Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Thame. If you wish to see an existing Albion project there is one on the world wide web. It is Strange Croydon (http://dspace.dial.pipex.com/town/drive/yac63/). Below is an extract from the new work, Strange Mitcham. James does not yet have a publisher for the completed work. If you can help, please contact him via Anomaly.

Carew Manor

On the edge of Beddington Park, a short distance to the south of Mitcham Common, stands an imposing redbrick mansion. This is Carew Manor (known earlier as Beddington Park House), and it is a building with a long and interesting history.

In 1344 the manor of Beddington was purchased by Sir Richard and Elizabeth de Wylughby. The mid-14th century also saw the arrival in the area of Nicholas Carew, a descendant of the Carews of Carew Castle in Pembrokeshire. Nicholas rose to the office of keeper of the

Carew Manor

privy seal, and this important position earned him a considerable sum of money. He married the de Wylughbys' daughter and by his death in 1390 he had built up a large estate centred on Beddington. His family would dominate the area for centuries.

The manor has been graced by a number of royal visitors over the years, including Henry VIII and James I, but the best-known visit was one from Queen Elizabeth I. By this time, the estate had passed to Sir Francis Carew and the occasion is remembered chiefly because of Sir Francis' clever gift to England's Virgin Queen.

In that era of courtly intrigue, noblemen were constantly vying for power and a royal visit would encourage the host to outdo his rivals. Sir Francis knew that the cherry was a symbol of virginity and, being a keen gardener, he had the idea of covering a cherry tree with a tent to delay its flowering. Consequently, when Elizabeth visited him in August he was able to present her with out-of-season fruit, a novelty that delighted Her Majesty.

One of Sir Francis' sisters married a courtier named Nicholas Throckmorton, and this marriage produced a child, Bess. In around 1592, Bess secretly married Sir Walter Raleigh, and Raleigh's ghost is said to haunt both the churchyard next to Carew Manor and nearby Beddington Park.

By the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Carews' fortunes had started to decline. Gambling debts had taken their toll, as had the mistake of backing the Royalists during the Civil War. By 1709 the estate had become old-fashioned and run down and, although he lacked the wealth of his ancestors, the owner (another Nicholas) decided to have the house rebuilt. Two deep wings were added, flanking the Tudor great hall, but soon after the building work was complete the north wing was gutted by fire and the whole interior destroyed. This part of the house remained in ruins for many years and was still largely empty in 1859, when the Carew estate was sold.

The idea that Carew Manor is, or was, haunted was recorded in 1884 by E. Walford, who quoted a gentleman by the name of Unwin, author of a *Guide to Bromley and its Neighbourhood*.

'As we look towards the noble façade of the old mansion,' wrote Unwin, 'our gaze wanders to the northern wing, and we recall the story once current that this portion of the hall was haunted by beings who were not of this world.'

This tale was already over a century old when Unwin wrote about it, and it seems to have started during the years that the uninhabited north wing remained a burnt-out shell. A belief grew up that the wing had been abandoned due to the 'pranks of some mischievous spirits or goblins, who pulled up the boards of the floor as often as they were nailed down.' Could this be an early account of poltergeist activity?

Unwin saw the deserted wing at first hand, and wrote that the 'windows were bare of curtain and blind; no human being was ever seen at them; no light ever gleamed from them during the hours of darkness.'

Given such an evocative description it is easy to understand how superstitious minds might populate the wing with otherworldly creatures. The most likely explanation, of course, is that Nicholas never rebuilt the burnt-out wing because he'd simply run out of funds.

In 1762 Nicholas' son died without leaving any male heirs and the estate passed from one relative to another until, in 1828, it came into the possession of Charles Hallowell Carew, an Admiral who had served with Nelson during the Napoleonic Wars. Three decades later, Charles' grandson gambled himself into bankruptcy and, in 1859, the house was sold.

A few years later it underwent heavy alteration to convert it into an orphanage, which function it served from 1866 until 1939, becoming known as the Royal Female Orphanage Asylum. Today, Carew Manor is in use as a special needs school and there are no longer any reports of uncanny goings-on. Little of the original structure survives, although the Tudor great hall remains and is occasionally open for public viewing.

The manor may still have a few secrets, however, hidden below the ground. There are stories of a secret tunnel or tunnels connecting Carew Manor with such places as the Archbishop's Palace at Croydon, and Nonsuch Palace.

The Ghosts of Beddington Park

Earlier, it was mentioned how delighted Queen Elizabeth I was by Sir Francis Carew's clever gift. Indeed, the Virgin Queen must have had a very special place in her heart for Beddington, for she apparently still visits the place four centuries after her death. In fact, the whole area around Carew Manor and Beddington Park has acquired something of a reputation for the supernatural.

During the Tudor period, Beddington Park sprawled across an area now approximately bounded by Mitcham Common to the north, Croydon Road to the south, Beddington Lane to the east and London Road to the west. It was originally a deer-park attached to Carew Manor but, as the Carews' fortunes declined, much of the land to the north was converted into fields. Deer remained in the southern part of the park until 1859, when the estate was finally sold. The manor was converted into an orphanage and the park was purchased by a rich local rector, Canon Alexander Henry Bridges.

A few decades later, in his 1886 book, *The History of Streatham*, F Arnold recorded the tradition that Elizabeth I's ghost could be seen here. He wrote that, 'if we are to believe the gossip of the countryside, she [Elizabeth] still walks, at the proper conventional hour of midnight, by the stream which flows through Beddington Park.'

More recently, a friend of mine told me how, as a boy growing up in Beddington in the 1970s, he'd heard that the park was haunted by another Elizabethan ghost, that of Sir Walter Raleigh.

Local resident, Sue, was able to tell me more about these apparitions. She explained how, throughout the mid-1960s and into the 1970s, 'The Grange and Beddington Park were our teenage haunts. Pardon the pun! As a group of young teenagers, we saw and heard quite a few strange things at night over there.'

The most haunted part of the area is supposed to be the narrow alley that leads from London Road to Croydon Road, running along the side of Wallington County Grammar School.

According to Sue: 'This is known as 'Bunkers Alley'. This is the point at which the ghosts of Sir Walter Raleigh and Queen Elizabeth were reported to have vanished. They would be seen riding from the gates of Carew Manor, him with his head under his arm, and she, headless on horseback, along the avenue of trees. Where the avenue of trees stops, and on the other side of 'Bunkers Alley', they would vanish.

'There is a small park here, to the right of The Grange, where there is a natural spring. We used to drink from this as teenagers! It is here that they would have watered their horses and continued on their journey. This part of the alley is supposed to be the most haunted part. On a dark and misty night, if you go up Bunkers Alley, you are supposed to see from your left [assuming that you enter the alley at London Road], the headless spectre on his horse with Queen Elizabeth following, jumping over the hedges of the alley, continuing their journey, onwards to Nonsuch Palace.'

Sue went on to relate an uncanny experience she once had there herself:

'One night, at Christmas, about 30 years ago [c.1970], my Dad, me, uncles, boyfriend etc., went for a 'spooky walk' up Bunkers Alley. We only got about 30 yards [27 metres] into the alley and our dog stopped dead. She was no way going any further and lay on her belly with her hackles raised and growling. The whole part of the alley that we were in was so cold! But beyond that point and before it, were quite normal temperatures!

'We tried to pull her on her lead and kick her up the bum! She was not moving! We had to go home. When we got out of the alley, she was fine again! We were all unnerved, adults too, and could not wait to get home.'

To use another quote from Sue: 'There were many times in the park that we had weird experiences and I would not like to go through there again late at night on my own!'

Beddington Parish Church and Churchyard

Immediately to the south-east of Beddington Park, beside Carew Manor, stands the parish church of St Mary the Virgin. A nearby notice board informs visitors that, although the present building dates mainly from the 15th century, Norman remains have been found within and there has probably been a church here since Saxon days.

The land may have been considered sacred even before that. In about 1670, a lead Roman coffin was discovered in Church Road, just outside the boundary of the present-day churchyard.

In *Strange Croydon,* Valerie Hope records that the church's late Norman font shows the marks left by ancient locks. She speculates that these locks were put in place to protect the holy water from witches, who were believed to steal it for use in magical rituals.

In the same work, Valerie mentions that this church has been alleged to stand at one corner of a triangular ley, connecting it with a second church dedicated to St Mary, in Addiscombe, and with Pollards Hill in Norbury. First identified by Arthur Watkins in *The Old Straight Track* (1925), leys are said to be straight lines that connect ancient, often sacred, sites. Watkins's ideas were later

Graveyard of St Mary's

enlarged upon by the New Age movement, which linked these leys with the concept of lines of energy running through the Earth.

Strange Croydon also mentions an unusual architectural feature of Beddington's parish church – that the chancel is slightly askew compared with the nave. Such a feature is known as a 'weeping chancel' and is generally thought to be a symbolic allusion to the way Christ's head lolled to one side as he hung upon the cross. An alternative interpretation is that certain churches are designed this way in order to align the structure with the sort of energy lines described above.

Even more interesting than the church itself, though, is the churchyard, which has several supernatural tales attached to it. The first of these concerns Sir Walter Raleigh, who once owned an estate

in Mitcham, around the area now occupied by Eagle House in London Road.

Raleigh was a particular favourite of Queen Elizabeth I, but in the early 1590s he made the terrible mistake of having an affair with Elizabeth's maid of honour, Bess Throckmorton. When Bess fell pregnant, Raleigh married her in secret; however, by May of 1592 news of their marriage had reached the Queen. The furious Elizabeth had Raleigh arrested and in August he and Bess were sent to the Tower of London. Although they were released before the year was out, Raleigh's courtly career was in ruins.

After his release, Raleigh made brave efforts to re-ascend through the ranks, but his ambitions were ultimately squashed in 1603 when the Queen died. She was succeeded by James I, and the new King had no faith in Raleigh at all. Convicted on a trumped-up charge of treason, the unfortunate Sir Walter was sent back to prison.

In 1617, he was released once more, on condition that he lead a gold-seeking expedition to the Orinoco basin. Once there, though, a clash with the Spaniards provoked a major international incident. Desperate to pacify the Spanish, the King revived the now 14-year-old charge of treason and ordered Raleigh's execution. He was eventually beheaded in Westminster's Old Palace Yard on 29 October 1618.

Since then, Sir Walter's ghost has apparently taken up residence in Beddington. In *A History of Beddington* (1923), the Rev. Thomas Bentham mentions the centuries-old tradition that Raleigh's ghost 'haunts the walk behind the old yew tree in the churchyard.'

Bentham also relates how a student of his, with an interest in psychical research, kept watch on that walk for one or two nights.

Although his student never saw an actual ghost, he apparently came away convinced of 'the presence of something uncanny' there.

While researching this area, I had a telephone call from Heidi who told me that she had heard about this haunting from a friend who grew up in Beddington. Heidi told me that Raleigh's ghost is supposed to appear to anyone who walks around a particular tree in the churchyard three times on Christmas Eve. Presumably, this is the yew tree mentioned above.

Why should the ghost of Sir Walter Raleigh be connected with this churchyard? The answer very likely lies in a letter written by Lady Raleigh to her brother, Sir Nicholas Carew, in which she begs permission to bury her husband in Beddington, where she herself eventually wished to be buried. Carew's response is not known, but it is a fact of history that Raleigh's headless corpse was actually buried in St Margaret's Church in Westminster, close to his place of execution.

Whether the body remains there is a different question. The Beddington Parish register contains no entry for Sir Walter Raleigh's burial, but local legend maintains that his body was quietly removed from Westminster and secretly re-buried here. The Rev. Bentham was of the opinion that this was correct and maintained that the ghost story helps to prove it, since it 'must have had its origin in the common knowledge or general belief of the people who lived in Beddington in 1618'.

Interestingly, Heidi told me that she'd heard Raleigh was buried under a tree in the churchyard. A variation on this belief is that Raleigh's body lies within the now sealed Carew family vault, the entrance to which is in the floor of the church's Carew Chapel.

If no one is quite sure as to the fate of Raleigh's body, the whereabouts of his head are even less clear. After it was severed by the executioner's axe, it was granted to his widow, who had it embalmed and carried the gruesome relic around with her in a red leather bag until she died. After her death, it is thought to have passed to her son, who was himself later buried in Sir Walter's grave in Westminster. What happened next is a mystery.

Christine Reynolds, Assistant Keeper of the Muniments at Westminster Abbey, told me it's rumoured that the head was taken to West Horsley church in Surrey, where the family owned property. On the other hand, she said, it might have been put into the grave when the son was buried, although Westminster Abbey has no record of it having been placed there. She added that it was also possible the head ended up in Beddington churchyard. Nobody knows for sure.

Another strange story to come out of this churchyard concerns a photograph of a grave. In *Around Haunted Croydon,* Frances D Stewart tells how a gentleman from South Croydon visited the churchyard while researching the history of Beddington and the Raleigh family. While there, he came across the mass grave of a group of young girls who had died in Carew Manor, during an epidemic, at a time when the manor was in use as an orphanage (between 1866 and 1939). For no reason other than apparent curiosity, this gentleman took a photograph of the grave. When he had the roll of film developed, one of the 36 exposures had a strange image on it. The single affected photograph was the one of the grave, which appeared to have a strange grey fog hovering above it – a fog that was not visible when the shot was made.

Sadly, when I attempted to trace the photographer, I learned that he'd died some years ago, and so I've been unable to find a copy of

this photograph. Should anybody have any further information regarding it, I would be delighted to hear from you.

As well as Raleigh's ghost and the grave mentioned above, the churchyard may be home to a phantom nun! The following account is of another of Sue's strange encounters:

'When we were teenagers, we used to be over "the park" every night. Once, we were all there as teenagers, minding our own business, as you do. And it was about midnight and out of the churchyard came this nun.

'We were all gob-smacked as no way was there going to be a nun, walking around the gravestones at midnight with no nunnery within 50 miles! But there she was …and she just walked up to us all, said a very godly and polite "good evening" and then…just went…gone...disappeared!

'We looked around and there was nowhere that she could have gone, but there she was……gone!'

It is, of course, quite possible that this was a perfectly human, flesh-and-blood nun, who simply walked off into the night, but as Sue explained: 'We all knew that there were spooky things going on all around that area and just put it down to experience.'

Under Beddington

A few minutes' walk to the south-east of Carew Manor, Croydon Road is met by Plough Lane. Nestled within a small triangular island created by the road system here stands an old inn named The Plough, where a sign hanging on the outside wall portrays the appropriate constellation of stars. But this design dates only from 1998. An older sign depicted a man who'd fallen into a cave while

ploughing a field, and referred to the legendary discovery of a network of caves and tunnels hidden beneath Beddington's streets.

One entrance to this underground system used to be visible just to the west of the inn where, wrote Walford in 1884, Beddington Cave stood exposed 'in the face of a high perpendicular bank, formed by cutting through the sandy slope when the lane was made'.

Walford stated that the cave's 'extent is unknown […] There is a gradual descent from the mouth, and water is said to exist in a remote part of the cave; but it is not on record that the subterranean pool has ever been seen, or that the extremity of the long passage has ever been reached.'

The system seems to be partly natural and partly man-made. When the London Speleological Society examined the tunnels in 1940, they concluded that they had probably been the result of sand mining. The group's investigations led them to the nearby Queen Elizabeth's Walk, where a manhole cover concealed an entrance to the caves, but they could not obtain permission to enter and explore more fully. The Chelsea Speleological Society also examined the system, but not until 1968, by which time little trace of the mines remained.

Until quite recently, access to the caves was possible, if you were small enough.