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Editorial Team: Maurice Townsend and Valerie Hope. Production: Hugh Pincott.
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Web site: www.assap.org

Phone enquiries: 01373-451777

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A Haunted Mansion?

by Wendy Milner

To the tourist Woodchester Mansion may look as though it is haunted, but is it? And is it even really a mansion?

If there is any house in the Cotswolds which looks as if it should be haunted, this is it. Woodchester Mansion is a large Gothic revivalist house built in 1858, although it was never completed and never properly lived in. The mystery surrounding this fact has given rise to speculation ever since. Is it haunted? Was there a murder or dreadful accident there? Why did workmen down their tools, never to come back and finish what they had started? These are questions most frequently asked by the visitor to this strange house, questions which seemingly cannot be answered. This report is an attempt to answer at least one of those questions: does it have ghosts?

Woodchester Mansion is sited in a largely untouched and hidden valley and the walk to it from the busy Stroud-to-Dursley road is a very pleasurable one. After passing through the tall Georgian gates off the main road, the track descends into the valley. The trees here become taller, forming a canopy above your head and bathing you in green shadows. As you descend further still, the trees begin to give way to open sky, and a sense of timelessness sweeps over you; if you are alone, here is where you start to feel it.

Further down, the trees thin on one side to reveal some fields to your right as the spectacle before you suddenly becomes apparent. Woodchester Mansion stands alone, looking deserted even when people are around. The dark, glassless windows reflect no light, lending an aspect of abandonment to its character even before you know its history. It is all at once intriguing, but with the faintly



[pic. Wendy Milner]

menacing gloom which tends to emanate from the Gothic structure. This place has been used variously as a film set, cattle shed, sanctuary to four species of bat including the rare and protected Greater Horseshoe Bat. American soldiers stored their ordnance in the cellars here in 1944, and it has even had a visit from a former emissary to the Pope, for which the drawing room was the only room to be finished in 1886. It is now the focus of a renovation programme which will attempt to take it back to the condition it was in when construction was

abandoned, but it will for all intents and purposes remain a Victorian building site.

A Brief History of the Park

Although the present structure is Victorian, it seems much older. The former house on this site was a Georgian Mansion known as Spring Park, built by the previous owner, Lord Ducie, in the 18th and early 19th centuries. It is rumoured that, upon succession to the title, the young Lord Ducie, described as a young rake, seated his young lady at the place of honour at the table. However, when he

went to take his own place, he found it occupied by the ghost of his dead father and consequently fled the estate (1). Whatever the reason for sale, the four thousand-acre estate was sold at auction on 29 June 1843. The existing house was eventually completely demolished to make way for the obsession of William Leigh, a wealthy merchant from Cheshire who planned a grand scheme after his conversion to Catholicism in 1844. The former house was said not to be to his taste, so he set about employing Augustus Pugin, known for his design of Westminster Palace, to draw up plans for his new residence. However, after disagreements with Pugin and his expensive plans, the house design was finalised by Benjamin Bucknall, a brilliant young local architect who was strongly influenced by Eugene Viollet-le-Duc. Viollet-le-Duc was responsible for the restoration of a number of cathedrals, most notably the Notre Dame de Paris. Bucknall sought his advice on glazing the Mansion chapel, and French glaziers were brought in for that purpose. It was not long afterwards that progress on the grand house slowed down considerably. Leigh himself lived at the Cottage, a large house in itself with sixteen bedrooms, which sits perched on the hill above the Mansion. This was enlarged by Bucknall many times during Leigh's residence there, so why did he need another, larger house down in the valley?

It is obvious to even the least informed that the Mansion was meant for a monastic lifestyle. The chapel itself is the tallest in any large house in Britain, and it was rumoured that Leigh meant the house to be a refuge for Pope Pius IX, at a time when the Vatican was under threat. Many people have questioned this, as the house would not have been large enough to cater for the Pope and his entourage. Leigh was not to realise his dream, however, and he died in 1873 at the Cottage, evidently on the verge of bankruptcy after having funded various other Bucknall-designed projects in the area. This, and the fact that the stonemasons were probably involved in

the aforementioned projects, is usually given as the reason behind the abandonment (2). It doesn't seem quite right, though, that the workers would just leave their hard-earned tools lying around if they were never coming back. The mystery of this fact may have given rise to the many local legends surrounding the Mansion and its wooded estate. (I was told recently of a phone call between a member of the Ghost Club and a psychic lady in Australia who had apparently no prior knowledge of Woodchester Mansion but who seemed to think that the workers abandoned the building because there were 7 deaths during construction, one of which was a murder. This information is available in a book about the house, however, and could well have been disseminated on the World Wide Web).

The gothic architecture with its beastly gargoyles and resident bats has also probably helped form any ghostly conjecture along the way. Most of these stories were not recorded in detail, but one has recently surfaced which has even captured the imagination of Hollywood, that of an angel which haunts the fifth lake. Some of the other documented hauntings include a Roman centurion who patrols the gate on the south road, a ragged dwarf, a headless horseman, a floating coffin, a Black Dog which was a death portent and, most frequently, a spectral figure which has come to be regarded by some as 'The man in his night-shirt', who was unfortunately savaged by his own dogs. It's possible that this and the 'angel' were one and the same. It is also worth mentioning that a large black cat has been sighted in the vicinity.

The Mansion itself had not, until recently, been considered to be haunted. Most of the sightings seem to be confined to the area around the lakes, of which there are five further down in the valley. They have been the sites of numerous tragedies, which are rumoured to have resulted in the loss of well over 20 lives over the

years. The principal stage for these dramas seems to be the fifth lake, called Middle Pond, which also happens to be the largest. All five lakes were created when the numerous springs in the valley, and the stream that flowed from them, were dammed and ultimately stocked with fish.

After a long period of time when the Mansion was uninhabited and left to the elements to wreak their havoc on the stonework, the property came into the care of one Reg Kelly, who had set up a Field Study Centre based at the Cottage, after having run a private school there. Here he and his wife welcomed students from schools in Leicestershire intent on the study of the Greater Horseshoe Bat and the natural history of the surrounding valley. Reg Kelly single-handedly cleared the guttering and protected the house from the weather as best he could, but it was ultimately to prove too much for him, and the house was eventually bought by Stroud District Council (SDC) in 1986 after various attempts at sale fell through. SDC now lease it to the Woodchester Mansion Trust which is intent on raising funds for the renovation and repair of the structure, although the plan is not to finish the house, but to restore it to the condition it was left in when the workers downed tools for the last time in 1886.

Angel

In February 2001, my attention was drawn to a letter in the local newspaper from a woman who had been walking in the park by the Middle Pond and had had an unnerving experience. She reported a strange glowing mist floating on the lake, moving quite slowly and taking the shape of a figure. She made no reference to the famous angel and she thought it might be a strange weather phenomenon. She felt frightened and looked about for company, and having none she left pretty sharpish. Unfortunately, the lady



[pic. Wendy Milner]

did not leave a contact number or address with the newspaper. Although it is the paper's policy not to print unaddressed letters, the Editor thought this story so interesting that she had to print it.

My suspicions were aroused

when only a week later, a story of the Angel of Woodchester hit the national presses. It emerged that there was a photograph of the alleged angel in the possession of a local writer and architect. He had found documents relating to Woodchester Park in August 1999 and had not realised their significance until much later, not least because he had written a book about Woodchester Mansion himself. (According to him, the mansion has been linked with strange Victorian cults, the Freemasons and satanic worshippers.) (3). There was interest in the story from a Hollywood producer who was interested enough to want to make a film of the life of one William Doidge, a man who was by all accounts obsessed with the Angel of Mons (4). The Woodchester Park Angel was said to have appeared the night before 20 American or Canadian troops died tragically on the lake in the same spot, after having sunk a pontoon bridge. The bridge was carrying a tank and heavy artillery when it sank, and although I have no documentary evidence that 20 soldiers died there in spring 1945, I have had reliable information from a diver who used the lake some years ago that there is indeed a tank and heavy artillery down at the bottom, covered in a thick layer of silt.

It was ironic that the timing of all this publicity coincided with the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in the UK, and the whole park, as with much of rural Britain, was off limits to all visitors.

On 7 September 2001, an American TV production company called Triage Entertainment Inc. of Los Angeles took over the Mansion for a month. As part of their research for a programme called *The Scariest Places on Earth*, an all night vigil and investigation was arranged, which included two members of the Ghost Club of Great Britain, a small production team and two staff members of the Woodchester Mansion Trust. Their interest was primarily in the house itself for filming purposes although I, at least, did not consider the house itself to be haunted, although they were witness to an extraordinary event that night.

Noisy Vigil

According to the reports of two members of that company, the noises began at around midnight with a soft tapping sound coming from the top of a 8m Victorian ladder which was left when builders abandoned the house. This was only the beginning of a whole barrage of noise, which centered on the inner wall of the south range corridor. At around 2.30am the group was in the drawing room when they noticed a tapping sound coming from the wall to the right of the fireplace. It was described as a basically metallic sound like a hammer hitting stone, which intensified in pitch and volume over around 15 minutes, until it became so loud that people had covered their ears with their hands! Upon investigation, the noise was assumed to be coming from the south range corridor on the first floor, but as 'AL' shone his torch from the top step of the Grand Stair around the corner, the noise stopped abruptly. By this time the beat of the hammering had quickened to the speed of a

pneumatic drill. Feeling rather shaken, the group descended the stairs to the drawing room to discuss what had happened.

At around 4am, the noise started again, so seven of the group made their way upstairs to the first-floor corridor. As they were ascending the Grand Stair, which was restored in 1999, an almighty crack sounded above the heads of the people who were leading, followed by rumbling sounds, which gave them the impression of falling masonry. This split the group in two as they leapt out of the way of whatever it was they thought was coming down on top of them. AL reported his conviction that he saw black shapes falling and a piece of yellow-white stone bounce near to his foot at the bottom of the stairs. After checking everyone was OK, they went to look at the fallen masonry, of which they could find no trace, but all were convinced that the vaulted ceiling had been falling down around them. As the tapping noise was continuing, the whole party decided to check out the corridor above where they were sure the noise was emanating from. Finally, while they were standing spread out along the walls of the corridor, a noise described variously as a jet engine or train seemed to move up between them, which was overtaken by a sound described as something very heavy being dragged along the floor towards the back of the house, where it stopped. While this was going on, the group all felt a vibration in the walls and floor of the building. These were the main events of the night, although the Ghost Club members had left 'trigger' objects in the form of 2p coins about the building, one of which was placed in the mansion kitchen under the old clock which is being restored at present. This was reported missing by 2am. However, it has since turned up in another part of the Mansion.

As a result of this experience there has been a revival of interest in the Mansion's paranormal activities and subsequently three more vigils have taken place to date. On the first of these, again with the

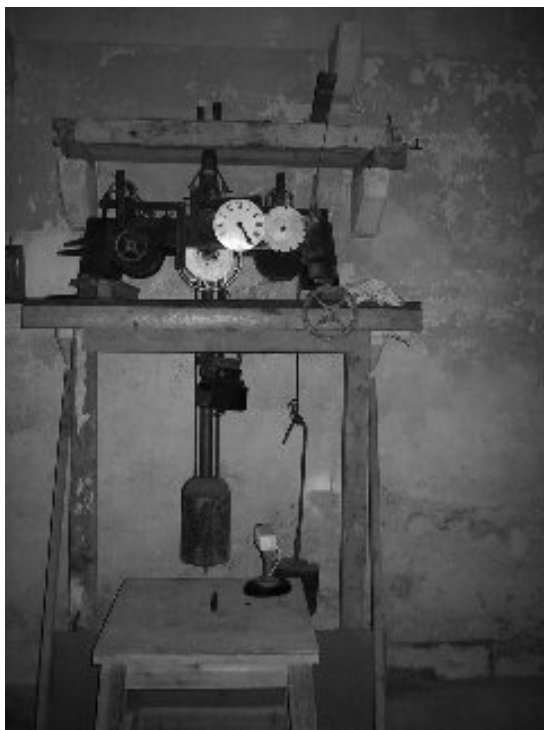
Ghost Club on 10 November 2001, there was no activity whatsoever, and the group left just after 2.30am. The caretaker was not present on this occasion, and no 'psychics' were present.

ASSAP Vigil

ASSAP's investigation took place on the night of 19 January 2002. Present were 16 members of ASSAP and Parasearch, including two guests from Cotswold Paranormal Investigations.

A camera was set up in the first floor south range corridor, which seemed to be the seat of all the noise on 7 September 2001. Later, while conducting a guided tour of the house, I noticed that the old

clock pendulum was swinging by at least five centimetres, whereas it was not before when observed two minutes earlier. It was decided that there should be someone present in the kitchen at all times during the vigil. The clock is currently being restored by a volunteer who is an horologist and it is generally not wound. The Triage production team had the clock rigged and various parts have since gone missing. It is entirely possible that a person who knows the house well could have done the same,



[pic. Wendy Milner]

for between the hours of 10.00pm and 1.00am the clock hands moved from their position of 10.10 to 12.10, and then finally 5.25, as shown in the photograph. They were never seen to move as it always occurred during a break in the vigil. We decided to set up a camera in the kitchen, which seemed to put a stop to it, although the tape shows the pendulum moving slightly. This could be due to the movement of air around the Mansion, or vibrations from underground.

At 12.04am the bell in the clock tower rang once, very clearly. This happened when the team had assembled in the drawing room for a break, as is usually the case! I was immediately suspicious as it happened during a time when people were making noise. There was a good search for the culprit but none could be found. There was an awful lot of noise at the time from the Park's cattle, which were obviously unnerved by something. In fact they were noisy for most of the night, as can be heard on the various recordings taken. At the point when the bell rang, they seemed very agitated. It was not discovered what had caused this agitation in the herd and it was even suggested that the black cat was abroad! The bell is static with an external sprung hammer so the wind or a large bird could not have moved it. According to the horologist, it could only have been rung by someone with some nerve and a hammer. (Or by paranormal means?) None of the members of the vigil had access to the clock tower. It is difficult to get to, having two large iron grilles to unlock, the keys to which are held by the 'bat man' - the Mansion's bat expert. A set of keys is given to the caretaker during the winter months when the bats hibernate at other locations. The grilles are there to keep people out and the bats protected. Were the grilles opened that night? They are heavy and move with a sliding mechanism, so any noise they made would have been recorded on the equipment. The record sheets suggest a loud bang and footsteps that could just feasibly account for someone entering by the grille

between 11.16 and 11.49pm. However, it has not been established who this might have been, although the caretaker had a friend to stay that night who left quite noisily in his car at about 1.00am. Another interesting occurrence was that three of the women involved in the vigil that night felt their hair being tugged, all in different areas of the house. All three had long dark hair and found it slightly unnerving.

The Ghost Club

A week later on 26 January 2002, the Ghost Club descended on the Mansion yet again with the largest group of volunteers they have ever seen, 32 people. The Parasearch team again set up an infrared camera at the top of the first-floor south range corridor and one also



[pic. Wendy Milner]

in the kitchen directed on the clock. After arriving at the house at 10pm, the teams were being organised. One had already taken their place in the upstairs corridor, the rest of the group awaiting instructions in the drawing room. It wasn't long before a loud bang was heard, which sounded as if it came from around the Grand Stair in the corridor outside the drawing room. I immediately went upstairs to ask the first team if they had made the noise, as I thought some equipment had fallen over, but they seemed to think it came from

downstairs. At this time nothing could be found which could have been responsible for the noise, and it was noted to have occurred at 10.57pm. The three team leaders, 'LR', 'BS' and 'RS' were with me in the drawing room by 11.18pm where we were discussing generally how to deal with such a large group, when there came from the room next door, the Library, a loud bang very similar to the one which had occurred almost 20 minutes before. Upon investigation, it was found that there was a piece of worked stone (approx. 10x5x5cm) on the floor in the south-west corner of the room. (See picture). After searching the wall above to ascertain where it had come from, another very similar piece was found in the putlog hole (a hole to take scaffolding which was never filled in) directly 2.5 metres above it. This piece fitted the fallen stone perfectly, it was a recent break and not worn, so it was assumed that it had fractured in half and fallen off, although there was no sign of lime putty or anything which could have been used to connect the two halves of stone. It wasn't until another piece was found in the corridor outside in exactly the same circumstances that we literally put two and two together and came up with ... something rather odd. How had two ashlar bricks got themselves up into put-log holes in the first place, only for them both to break and fall out within twenty minutes of each other? The stones were roughly the same size, both worked and of a type not used in the building apart from for training purposes. Assuming the second stone found in the corridor was the source of the first crashing noise, I think it wasn't noticed before due to the general amount of rubble strewn about the house anyway. Both stones fell onto wooden flooring, the second stone seeming not to have bounced, hence the loud bang being described by 'RL' as a door slamming. This effect could not be reproduced. The first stone, however, fell with a clatter and it could be seen that it fell on a corner where it was chipped and the floor slightly dented. An interview with the caretaker immediately afterwards revealed nothing. He seemed as perplexed as we were.

The possibility that someone could have pushed them out was disregarded, as they would certainly have been heard tiptoeing on the wooden floor when it was quiet. The whole event was so weird that some people had a problem believing that it had actually happened, and insisted that the noise they heard was a door slamming.

The guests of the Ghost Club who claim psychic abilities have sensed the spirits of various people throughout the Mansion, which they assume are attached to the former building, the Georgian Spring Park, or even further back. One is described as a distressed young blonde woman possibly called Elizabeth, purported to have been spotted in an upstairs window by two different people on arrival at the Mansion, although that particular window has no floor below it! Another is of a young child, but the details are less clear. One of the rumours that have arisen through the years on the subject of the Mansion's abandonment suggests that a stonemason may have been murdered there, but this did not seem to have been picked up. The story of the Mansion is readily available for study, so the results of this psychic survey seemed intriguing. The search for an Elizabeth connected to the Park's history has been unsuccessful so far. Two psychics unknown to each other have both sensed Roman soldiers marching through the grounds of the house. It is recorded that there was Roman occupation in the area, and indeed there was a report from long ago of the ghost of a Roman centurion who patrolled the road at the south end of the estate.

The caretaker recently had an experience he couldn't account for, when he was woken by his dog at around 2.30am on Tuesday 22 January 2002. On rising to check the house, he found that all the lights were on in the Mansion. Thinking that there may be an unwelcome intruder, of which there have been many in the past, he ran through the house to try and catch whoever it may be but all the

doors were securely locked. He went outside through his flat window so he could see inside easily and check the area, to no avail. This had never happened before in the six years he had been employed by the WMT as caretaker. It seems the dog had responded to the sound of the main relay switch in the north range corridor, which makes a 'clunk' sound when switched on. Also, in May this year, the 'bat man' tried to gain access to the bat loft through the hatch in the ceiling but had great difficulty getting in because the camera equipment was actually sitting on top of it. He was, to say the least, perplexed by this, and could find nobody responsible.

A recently unearthed news report from the Gloucestershire Echo dated 28 November 1998 states that a team of volunteers from The Prince's Trust endeavoured to spend a night in the Mansion for the CLIC charity. They reported to the Echo that a glass beaker had been removed from its original place in a room upstairs. The spokesperson had known that one of the upstairs rooms had a resident poltergeist, but this is the first time I had heard a reference of this sort. Certainly, the WMT volunteers have never reported anything anomalous over the years, and it seemed strange to me that the house should 'put on a show' when a team of investigators were there.

Conclusions?

The first and most obvious conclusion was that the events of 7 September 2002 were a hoax put up by the production team of *Scariest Places* for the purpose of entertainment. However, none of the footage taken that night was used in the final production. Whether it was ever intended to be remains a mystery, and as yet I am still waiting to hear what happened to the footage from a contact in Los Angeles where the production company was based.

(The Disney Corporation has since bought them out.) The fact that the Mansion seemed suddenly haunted suited the purposes of those involved very well, although a few things cannot be properly explained. If they did it, how? There was no evidence of a local earthquake on the night in question, nor low-flying Hercules transport planes to or from nearby Fairford. On the other occasions, someone who knew the house well could possibly have rung the bell, but the bricks falling out of the wall...? I can't imagine how it happened. It has the air of mischief about it, which I find intriguing. If anyone can attempt to explain it scientifically I would love to hear from him or her. My thoughts are that a small team should visit for a follow up investigation in the near future without much prior notice, to try to eliminate any prank pulling, but this may prove difficult to do in terms of its location. On the whole, I would dearly like to believe that Woodchester Mansion is haunted, but I have yet to be convinced.

Woodchester Mansion is open to visitors for guided tours every weekend through the summer months. The National Trust owned park is open all year round.

More details can be found at www.woodchestermansion.org.uk

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Jay's Grave

by Lee Darwood

Many people will have heard of Jay's Grave on Dartmoor. But how many of us have tried to explain the origin of the 'always fresh' flowers laid there? Lee Darwood with Catherine Randle and Colin Randall went to do just that.

Three kilometres north of Widecombe in the Moor, in lonely countryside, is a roadside grave. Fresh flowers are said to have been put on the grave for the last one hundred years.

The grave is said to belong to a local peasant girl who became pregnant after an affair with the local landowner or his son. When she asked if he was going to marry her, he turned her down, so in shame she committed suicide by hanging herself. Consequently she was buried on unconsecrated ground. Eight years later a farmer at Edgebaston farm had the body exhumed as he did not believe the story, but on digging up the body and discovering it was that of a pregnant girl he put it back and built the grave up with local stone. From that day on fresh flowers are supposed to have appeared every day. According to legend, there has been only one sighting of the flower provider, and that was by a couple who were driving by in a car. What they saw was a crouched figure that straightened itself, and with a dark blanket over head and body with a white line going around its base. The blanket finished 30cm above the ground, and no face or body could be seen. Other locals have reported similar stories. It is widely believed to be the ghost of the guilt-ridden lover leaving these posies.

Catherine said that there was a letter on the Internet by someone confessing to have put flowers on the grave, but this letter is dated around the 1920s.

First Day of the Vigil

On arrival at 7pm we set up our tents. The weather was blustery and cold, with spits and spots of rain, as dusk approached. I took a number of photos of the wilted flowers there, which were as follows: Sweet Williams, Carnations, Chrysanthemums, Anemones. These were in a brass-striped urn, a jam jar and a small plastic vase. A silver Volvo drove past with some 'interesting looking' cyclamen in the back. We talked to the occupants and they expressed an interest in the grave and thought we were putting flowers there. They also drove past again twice that evening.

We all sat out until 11.30pm, but because three young people in a van were having a barbecue and watching the grave themselves we decided that only two people were needed, so Colin then retired to the tent. A number of cars went by during the night, some stopping to have their photograph taken, while some just went up and down. The silver Volvo appeared again. The night was clear, with many stars visible.

At around 2.30-3am Catherine and I noticed 2 points of red light in the sky moving at a steady speed but, every now and then, jarringly. On looking through a pair of borrowed night-sight binoculars I could just make out a third, dimmer light (see illustration). They were all moving together with unequal distances between them. We could not see any connection between the three lights, but they could have been a single object. The lights were moving together from south to north and passed directly overhead

before disappearing at the horizon. It, or they, was in our sight for ten minutes.

During the night we observed plenty of shooting stars, aeroplanes and satellites in the sky, but Catherine and I were unable to think of a mundane explanation for this one sighting. So, although we originally intended to look for a ghost, what we actually observed was some sort of UFO. We also noticed there was a night exercise by the army about lam.



The lights seen in the sky

Second Day of the Vigil

Yet again there was more traffic on the road, some stopping, some going past once or twice. We saw the same silver Volvo again, what must have been at least 5 times. A motorcyclist stopped and, when interviewed, told us a story about a bunch of girls, one of which

was a friend of his. These girls camped in the same field as us with the intention of seeing who put the flowers on the grave. At night they noticed an old woman and a thick-set man putting flowers on the grave and then disappearing. It frightened them so much they could not stay the rest of the night and went home.

None of the flowers changed overnight, but at 11.30am a blue Fiesta turned up. The occupants did not appear to see Colin or Catherine. A woman from the car put a posy of plastic flowers on the grave and then, noticing Colin and Catherine, she said 'hello', got into her car, and drove off. A number of people, with a guide, passed the grave, and the guide told them the story of Jay's grave and stated that if any person was brave enough to come at 6am there would be fresh flowers on the grave. A subsequent search of the area showed no sign of old flowers being dumped. It was decided at 1.30pm to pack up and go home.



Jay's Grave (pic Lee Darwood)

On the final day, objects on the grave were as follows: single plastic flower, Cornflower, small plastic red foot, small plastic heart, Foxglove wrapped in wild flowers, bunch of plastic flowers.

Conclusion

This grave has become very much the centre of local legend. It is even on the tour guide walks. Unfortunately it has also become a tradition for locals and tourists to place their own small offerings on the grave, so making it particularly difficult to confirm a haunting.

Poltergeist?

by William Eyre

In this intriguing case the main phenomena reported are items going missing. These, with other incidents, add up to produce the atmosphere of a poltergeist outbreak. But is it really a poltergeist case?

ASSAP member David Sankey and I were requested to look into a case of alleged poltergeist activity at a terraced house at Chesbrough (pseudonym), in which a number of apparently psychokinetic phenomena had taken place, in particular objects inexplicably disappearing.

Interview with Primary Witness

An arrangement was made for the two of us to visit the principal witness, a young lady by the name of Miss Emma Roberts (pseudonym), at her house, in March 2001. Emma's parents (who did not live at the house) were also present during the interview. Emma explained that she and a friend by the name of Miss Tamsin Bradford (pseudonym) shared the house on a rental basis.

She said that various objects belonging to her over a period of time had disappeared and then reappeared in another place. Examples included:

- her face compact disappearing from the dressing table and reappearing, when she came back from work, on the bed
- her eyeliner appearing under an envelope that she picked up, even though she had not placed it there
- one eyeliner disappearing and never reappearing

- a milk shake going missing from the fridge
- £200 cash going missing: sums adding up to this had disappeared from various hiding places, including a purse placed under the pillow that she was sleeping on
- cigarettes going missing.

The most recent incident had been a sum of £100 going missing in early February 2001. Although the other disappearances were thought by Emma to have a paranormal cause, this particular incident was being treated as a criminal incident and had been reported to the Police.

Other apparent psychokinetic phenomena reported included:

- the television and DVD player had switched themselves on
- in January 2001, the mirror had come off the wall, smashing the teapots and clock that had been on the mantelpiece
- a male friend (who was unaware of the phenomena) had witnessed a knife move by itself across a plate

Sometimes her cat used to play up at about 4 or 4.30 am and attack her. One night, about two weeks prior to the interview, she had been pinned to the bed by something invisible, ie. paralysed. She had felt pressure on the shoulders and legs and experienced a feeling as if the cat were walking up her leg, despite being able to tell as soon as the paralysis had worn off that the cat had not even been on the bed. At other times, she would feel as if something was coming for her, which she couldn't see.

Sometimes she felt as if Tamsin were there, when in fact she was not. Once, she opened the front door to come into the house and saw what she thought was Tamsin walking into the kitchen. However, upon inspection, she found that in fact Tamsin was not

in the house at the time. She sensed that someone was watching her and sometimes got strange feelings at work.

Once, she acquired a mark on her wrist that lasted some length of time: this was triggered by taking a bath.

The phenomena commenced as soon as Emma moved into the house, in September 2000. Although most of the phenomena seemed to affect Emma, Tamsin had claimed on two occasions that she had received a shove which had had the effect of pushing her downstairs, when she had been standing at the top of the stairs. She had also claimed to occasionally have objects mysteriously disappearing, eg. her underwear.

Prior to the interview, the young women had become so frightened by the phenomena that, despite each having her own bedroom, Tamsin had moved into Emma's bedroom.

Students had lived in the house before her. She suspected that they had taken drugs. Emma said that the house next door on one side felt 'creepy'. Someone was supposed to have lived there but it was always dark.

She said that the woman living next door on the other side had said that there had been an elderly couple living at the house under investigation some time previously. The man had had a stroke and then the wife had had one.

Emma said that people never seemed to stay long in the house, implying that they moved out quickly because of phenomena. The house, which had been built in the 1920s, once belonged to the grandfather of Mr Jones (pseudonym), the present landlady's husband. The Robertses knew of no deaths that had occurred in the house.

The Roberts family had approached the local church with a request for a blessing to be given to the house. Arrangements had been made for the Rev. Stuart (pseudonym) to visit the house for this purpose. However, on his first attempted visit, a Land Rover almost ran over the Rev. Stuart while he was on his way to the house. This shook him up so much that he was unable to make the visit. On his second visit, in early December 2000, he did carry out a blessing of the house, during which Tamsin felt 'freaked out'. Emma said that Mr Stuart felt something strange in the front bedroom. Subsequent to the blessing, phenomena occurred more regularly. Later on, the phenomena quietened down to some extent. Emma thought that some paranormal influence connected with the house was responsible for most of the incidents occurring in the house and that it may have been responsible for the Land Rover incident, trying to keep the clergyman away from the house.

Inspection of House

The investigators inspected the parts of the house where strange occurrences had allegedly happened. It was observed that there were Japanese symbols on Emma's bedroom door and also in the lounge. Emma had been told that they would keep evil spirits away. A search of items left in her bedroom threw up some Japanese art notes dated 1998, belonging to the previous tenant, who had lived there in 2000. The investigators examined the picture hook from which the lounge mirror had hung before falling and it seemed to be secure in the wall. It was noted that the basement had been painted completely black.

Contact with the Rev. Stuart

I telephoned the Rev. Stuart in order to obtain his experiences / feelings about this matter. He said that he had had a definite feeling that there was something out of the ordinary going on at the house. He suspected that some of the odd drawings on the fixtures and fittings in the house were drug related. While in Emma's bedroom, he had felt on a psychical level as if he was falling into something. He felt that redecorating the bedroom would lighten the atmosphere. He also felt that there was something 'not right' with the basement. When asked whether he considered himself to be psychic, he said that he had the 'gift of spiritual discernment'.

Research into Previous Occupancy

David carried out research to discover who the previous occupants of the house had been, mainly by using the Electoral Registers. The data uncovered related to the period from 1937 to the present day. Going back further in history was impractical as the house concerned was in a different ward until 1936. The table below shows the findings of this research.

YEAR(S)	OCCUPANTS	COMMENTS
2001	Emma Roberts and Tamsin Bradford	
2000	Miss 'A' and possibly her boyfriend	the art folder found containing her name was dated 1998
1998 to 1999	Mr 'B'	had a stroke
1997	Mr 'B' and Ms 'C'	Ms 'C' had a stroke
1994 to 1996	Ms 'C'	
1992 to 1993	Ms 'D', Mr 'E' and Mr 'F'	students
1991	Mr Peter Jenkinson, Keith Jenkinson and Ms 'G' (all pseudonyms)	alleged anomalous activity

1990	No one in residence or no one voted	
1989	Mr and Mrs 'H'	photography students who painted cellar black
1986 to 1988	No one in residence or no one voted	
1985	Ms 'I' and Mr 'J'	possibly relations of the landlady
1980 to 1984	Mrs 'K'	
1971 to 1979	Mrs 'K' and possibly a Mr 'L'	
1966 to 1970	Mrs 'K'	
1965	Record missing	Mr 'K' probably died then (in hospital)
1946 to 1964	Mr and Mrs 'K'	records missing for 1953 to 1954
1945	Mrs 'K'	Mr 'K' probably away in the Armed Forces
1940 to 1944	No records because of War restrictions	
1937 to 1939	Mr 'K' + 2 other members of the 'K' family	sitting tenants

Contact with Landlady

David visited the landlady, Mrs Beryl Jones (pseudonym), in order to carry out an interview to see whether she could provide any corroborative evidence in support of paranormal activity.

Mrs Jones did give credibility to Emma's account of seeing an apparition because in 1991 a Mr Peter Jenkinson (pseudonym), his son Keith Jenkinson and Mr Jenkinson's then girlfriend were tenants of the house. Mr Jenkinson had requested a possible move to another property owned by Mr and Mrs Jones. Although no reason was given for the request to move at the time, Mrs Jones

assumed that it was because the house had no central heating. Some time later, after the move was granted, Mr Jenkinson was working at Mrs Jones's private house, fitting carpets. In conversation, Mr Jenkinson had then told Mrs Jones the real reason that they had requested the move. According to Mrs Jones, Mr Jenkinson had witnessed an apparition while in the house. The figure had been witnessed in the back bedroom and along the corridor to the toilet.

As regards the cellar; Mrs Jones made no mention of anything strange happening there: on the contrary, she explained that the reason that it had been painted black was nothing more sinister than the fact that the tenants in 1989 (see table) had been photography students and they had wanted to use the room as a dark room.

Mrs Jones reliably informed David that she was unaware of any other allegations of strange phenomena apart from those reported by Emma and Mr Jenkinson.

As regards the incidents involving money going missing, she revealed that there may be some relevance to the fact that a certain previous tenant sometimes visited the house.

She said that the drawings in the bedroom were undoubtedly executed by the tenant who was there in 2000, who was an art student.

Attempted Contact with Mr Jenkinson

Mrs Jones did not have a forwarding address for Mr Jenkinson, but UK Info disc revealed that he was at that time married to the girlfriend with whom he had lived while at the house under investigation, at another address in Chesbrough, only a very short

distance away. David attempted to contact Mr Jenkinson at this new address, but unfortunately there was no response.

Analysis of Options

In some cases where poltergeist phenomena are reported, the incidents are made up by the resident of the house as a pretext for trying to be rehoused. This is most likely to occur in the case of a council house tenant. In this particular case, the house was privately rented and in any case, if Emma had preferred to be moved to a different house belonging to Mrs Jones, she could merely have asked her in a straightforward way to be moved to one of her other houses. Mrs Jones had been receptive to such a request from one of the previous tenants of the house, Mr Jenkinson. In fact, ironically in that case, the reverse had happened. Mr Jenkinson had kept quiet about any paranormal reason for wanting to move, even though there was such a reason. We therefore felt that Emma was being sincere in her tales of strange incidents and that she was not merely making them up.

As regards the Japanese symbols on the bedroom door and in the lounge, two options presented themselves:

- they may have had some sinister meaning in relation to the activities of drug takers
- or
- they may have been examples of artwork produced by Miss A (the tenant of 2000) as a result of her studying Japanese art

The fact that a search of belongings left by Miss 'A', carried out by ourselves and Emma, revealed examples of Japanese art in her folder, strongly suggests the latter explanation.

As regards objects of Emma's going missing and usually being returned, the options were:

- Emma was forgetful
- or
- that the objects had disappeared and reappeared in some sort of paranormal way
- or
- that Tamsin had been using these objects herself without telling Emma

From speaking to Emma and her parents, there was no evidence of her being forgetful. Also, it was not just an isolated incident of something being misplaced but a number of such incidents.

The items that tended to go missing were items which could perhaps have been useful to Tamsin. For example:

- cigarettes sometimes went missing (Tamsin smoked)
- cosmetics, such as a face compact, sometimes went missing (such items would have been of use to other young women, and Tamsin is of the same age group as Emma)

There did not appear to be many of the other factors typically associated with poltergeist cases in this house (eg. objects being thrown, raps and other noises, apports, object arrangements, doors being opened and closed, cold breezes, apparent communications with 'entities', etc.) . In particular Emma, around whom most of the incidents occurred, had not been subject to any emotional problems, which are typical of a 'focus' in poltergeist cases.

As regards the occasional item of Tamsin's which had reportedly gone missing, Tamsin could, of course, have merely lost such items

or possibly even have invented such incidents if she had, in fact, been using Emma's various missing items herself.

As regards the incidents of 'being pinned down in bed', the most likely options were:-

- sleep paralysis
- or
- some kind of unknown or paranormal effect

Were there to have been other overtly paranormal phenomena taking place in the house, when everyone was wide awake, the second option would have been a serious contender. However, this was not the case, as the other incidents have probable normal explanations. Certainly, a feature of sleep paralysis, as its name implies, is that the subject is paralysed. Emma described a feeling on her leg as if the cat were moving along it, and I know from personal experience that one can experience a sensation of being touched or stroked by a sleep paralysis 'intruder'. However, the 'intruder' is merely a hypnopompic hallucination, ie. a superimposition by the subject's unconscious mind of a dream image on top of the physical reality being simultaneously perceived by the subject's conscious mind. If sleep paralysis were the explanation, then the incident would have only been subjective, whereas Tamsin claimed that she too could feel a non-present cat on her leg. However, for the reason given above, it is not impossible that Tamsin could possibly have been making up incidents occurring to her.

It was accepted that the switching on of the television and DVD could have been an isolated paranormal incident. It resembles a very similar incident in which I once connected a second-hand computer to a television in my house and, within an hour, the television was heard to come on at full volume. Upon inspection it

became clear that this would have entailed both the on-off switch being pressed and the volume slider switch being moved from the 'no volume' to the 'full volume' position, despite there being no one in the room at the time.

As regards the mirror incident, Mr and Mrs Roberts confirmed the after-effects of this, but vibrations from passing traffic or a localised underground earth tremor could conceivably have caused it to fall.

The 'knife moving' incident could not be substantiated, as the investigators did not have access to the actual witness.

Emma's sensing of a 'presence' near her could have had a parapsychological explanation, ie. it could have been occurring because she had some psychic sensitivity, or could have had a psychological explanation, ie. the anxiety of mentally stringing together the other strange incidents to come to a conclusion that there was a paranormal cause could have subconsciously induced this further experience.

It was difficult to account for Emma's thinking that she had seen Tamsin as she came in through the front door, when Tamsin had not been in the house unless Emma had in fact seen an apparition. This was quite possible, as it transpired that Mr Jenkinson's real reason for moving out of the house had been that he had seen an apparition in the house.

As regards Emma's assertion that people never seemed to stay long in the house, implying that they moved out quickly because of unexplained phenomena, David's research into the previous occupancy did not seem to bear this out, with the exception of Mr Jenkinson. Some residents had in fact lived for a number of years at the house and those residents who had not stayed long tended to

be students, who would be expected to move on once their course was finished anyway.

Conclusions

The following conclusions were drawn:

- that there was probably a normal (as opposed to paranormal) cause of the disappearance of Emma's personal items
- that the Japanese symbols and darkness of the cellar had no paranormal connotations
- that there was a normal cause of the incidents experienced by Emma while in bed, ie. sleep paralysis.

While there was insufficient evidence regarding the occasional occurrence of apparitions to draw a definite conclusion, the investigators feel that there was a probability that these incidents had a paranormal cause.

So, to summarise, it was felt that most of the reported incidents had a normal cause but that there were probably isolated paranormal incidents. Indeed, this was the second case of its type recently which I have looked into where the reporter of the phenomena has observed a number of apparently psychokinetic incidents occurring over a period of time, together with 'bed phenomena', and concluded that there must be a common paranormal cause. In both cases, upon examination, one has to conclude that a poltergeist is not really responsible.